May I

by Ingridarcher

Summary

"We're nothing alike, Shimada. You? You fell down from the sky. And me? I clawed my way up, outta the dirt."

Jesse was there. He was on the Blackwatch team that dragged Genji Shimada's body away and brought it back to the Overwatch medical facility. He saw what Genji's brother, Hanzo, did to him.

Now, Overwatch has been recalled, and when Genji comes back he brings along the last person McCree ever expected: his murdering brother. And while Hanzo seems oddly drawn to McCree, Jesse wants nothing to do with him.
I update on Thursdays, ~9pm EST, and stream Overwatch right after.

If you want to skip plot setup/enemies to friends stuff, and go right to the Big Romance, I recommend starting at Chapter 9.

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Notes

Hey guys, welcome to "May I."
This fic is a companion to another story of mine, Time Machine, though it's now been discontinued.
Both stories can be read individually and stand on their own, but you can read both if you want the full picture.

I update on Thursdays, ~9pm EST.

I also stream Overwatch on Thursdays after the chapter post.

Enjoy guys!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Hey guys, welcome to chapter one of my new McHanzo fic, "May I." I went a little nuts on this one, most of my updates will be about a quarter this length. This one is also pretty rough, since I was working on it up until the last minute. I will try to come in and make some changes here in the next few days.

This fic is a companion to another story I'm writing, "Time Machine," which can be found here: http://archiveofourown.org/works/7367560/chapters/16733899

Both stories can be read individually and should stand on their own, but you can read both if you want the full picture.

Enjoy guys!

Jesse got strapped up tight. Pa had to kneel down to snap the carabiner onto his belt. He tugged hard enough that Jesse near lost his footing. “All good,” he belched out, slapping Jesse’s shoulder without looking at him. He walked away. Jesse watched the winged skull embroidered on Pa’s leather vest.

The Santa Fe heat made him sweat, and the sweat made his shaggy, chestnut bangs stick to his forehead. Every angle around him was blue or red; the sky and the earth. It was always like that, except in the summers when, now and again, a big, black storm would rush in and block out the sky, grab the earth with lightning-bolt fingers, shake it hard. Mudslides and cool, electric wind. Scream and shout.

Nights like that, Jesse would sneak out of bed to sit outside under the shelter of the hideout’s second-floor walkway. The smell of the rain rushed into his nostrils then down through to his toes. He’d watch lightning like fireworks. That same old sidewinder of a road that snaked through the center of the Deadlock gang’s base, cracked up and dusty red, turned black. The cackle of carrion birds got replaced with the sound of rain. A hundred wet smacks, like the kisses Momma used to give him.

It wasn’t raining today, though. Today was blue and red, just like every other day, except that today, he got to go down to the stash. The stash was a ways off ’66, that rattlesnake stretch of road the Deadlock gang had claimed as its own. Wouldn’t do to keep too much locked down there, where everyone with half a mind knew they operated. The O-dub would come sniffing around if they thought they’d find anything worth finding at the High Side.

It was rockier than most of Santa Fe, out by the stash. All around, big fingers of red stone pointed up out of the earth, towards the clear sky, like a big hand was underneath, trying to reach up out of its grave. Farther off, mesas shouldered up, making a jagged line against the big, empty blue of the sky. Jesse turned and turned until the sky disappeared behind a big, nearby outcrop. Tucked amidst the rocks was the toothy black mouth that lead down to the stash. A few feet away from the outcrop, Pa and the other Deadlock brothers were gathered around in a circle, all in black leather even in this heat. They looked like vultures around roadkill. They always circled up like that. The thick rappelling rope drew a line between Jesse and his pa.

Jesse had a stone in his boot. He curled his toes, trying to move it out from under his arch to the
pointed tip of his cowboy boot. He didn’t have spurs for his boots and he wished he did. They were brown and red, tiny like toys stacked next to Pa’s big black motorcycle boots at the entrance of their perpetual room at the Cave Inn. Pa’s footfalls were heavy, ponderous; they crackled against the dry, rocky ground. Jesse’s footsteps would sound that intimidating, if he had spurs. Pa stood over him.

“Do I gotta tell you what to do when you’re down there?” Pa asked.

“Naw,” Jesse said to his own wiggling toes. “Tie up the boxes and send ‘em up. I done it plenty before, Pa.”

“And which boxes are ya sending up?”

“The LSATs, a 20mm ammo can, and the…” Jesse shut his eyes, thinking. “The XM25...Helix.”

“Say it again.”

“LSATs, 20mil can, XM25 Helix. I ain’t a dummy, I’ll remember.”

Pa grunted like he wasn’t so sure. He handed a flashlight to Jesse, who took it and stashed it in his pocket. Pa’s meaty hand flopped on Jesse’s shaggy hair and ruffled it. “Remember, you want the cans with the Hellfire fuses. Don’t take so damn long this time.” Pa moved his hand off Jesse’s head and waved at the Deadlock boys by the mouth to the stash. “We ready?”

They were. Jesse walked beside Pa over to the outcrop, the rope that connected them dragging in the dust behind them. A pulley wheel on a hinge was attached, with an eye bolt, to the rock just above where the mouth opened. Even up here, Jesse could feel the cool air breathing out of it. Pa looped the rope into the pulley. “What are we gonna do when the kid’s too big to fit down here?” It was one of the Deadlock boys, Travis. He was talking to Pa about Jesse.

“Well, we’ll need another kid, won’t we? I best get to fucking.” The gang laughed. In the sky, a black dot of a vulture cackled with them. Fucking. It was a word that would earn Jesse a smack upside the head if he said it. He knew pretty much what it meant and why Pa needed to do it when Jesse got too big to go down to the stash. He came from it in some way. It reminded him of the thin walls at the Cave Inn; not of Momma’s rainfall of kisses.

His belt tugged, and Jesse near tripped again. Pa, at the other end of the rope, had pulled it taut, a sign that it was time to go. Jesse walked up to the mouth, gaping in the outcrop. The rock in his boot stabbed into his foot. His steps sounded like tip-toes. Spurs, he wished, like in the movies. Jesse walked until there was no more ground to walk on, just the mouth. He turned around and looked at Pa, grabbed the rope attached to his belt with both hands, then leaned back.

There was always that moment where he thought he’d fall. His gut kicked around inside like an unbroke stallion and the mouth seemed like it would gobble him down. Pa’s gloved fist would go tight, the big muscles of his arm would bulge, and the rope would go taut. Everything stopped. Then, bit by bit, Pa would let the rope out, and Jesse would descend down into the mouth.

The first few times were scary, but after a while, Jesse came to like it down in the cave where the stash was hid. It was real different, down here. Not blue, not red. It was grey-green and cool, the rocks wet. Everything on the surface was caked with dust, Jesse included.

The throat of the mouth wasn’t quite straight down. The back of Jesse’s t-shirt, the pockets of his shorts, his bare knees, all rubbed against the walls of the cavern. As he descended, he whispered to himself: “LSATs, 20mil can, XM25 Helix. LSATs, 20mil cans, XM25 Helix.”

After maybe seven minutes and about forty feet, he was near to the bottom. Jesse stretched his legs...
down until they hit the slick, uneven rock. He slid, grabbed the rope, then steadied himself. He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled “Okay” up at the puddle of light high above. Strange how from the outside, everything was light and the mouth was black. Inside, it was the other way around. Jesse took off his boot, dumped the rock out of it, then put it back on. He took out his flashlight.

The beam pooled first over a wet wall of stone. Jesse flashed the light slow around the cave. The wall sheared off, and the light disappeared for a moment down a distant cavern, then picked back up at the pattern of stacked crates. LSATs, 20mil can, XM25 Helix. The sound his boots made on the stone echoed up through the shaft, sort of shaky and even. Jesse liked to imagine it sounded like spurs. While walking towards the big stack of crates, Jesse changed his gait to a wide stance with hard, ponderous steps. He made a crescent with his arms and shoulders, hands hovering at his hips. He whistled.

When he got to the crates, Jesse straightened up, but kept whistling. The flashlight beam was bright against the dark plastic of the crates. He flicked it from name to name printed on the side: MAUL, AN/M14, M20 Pulse, and finally XM25 Helix. Jesse unhooked the carabiner from his belt, then wrapped the rope twice around the crate, once longways and once shortways. Like a present. Jesse thought about how he’d wrapped more of these crates than presents in his nine years. LSATs. 20mil can. XM25 Helix.

Jesse hooked the carabiner to one of the loops, then tugged to test that it was secure. Satisfied, he hefted the crate to the center of the cave, right beneath the chute. A tug of the rope told the Deadlock boys up top to start pulling. It would take them time to pull it up, unwrap it, then send the line down again. Jesse brought up the flashlight.

Like a lighthouse, Jesse rotated the beam in a circle around him until it landed on the little alcove, lighting up its treasures. The stash. Jesse rushed over to it and dropped to his hands and knees, crawling inside.

The alcove was tall enough to sit inside, and he did, leaning back against the cool, wet wall. The musty air smelled good, not like dust and gasoline. Next to him was a small ammo can brim-full with found and saved items: indian arrowheads, army men, an armadillo skull, a GI Joe. Jesse dug past them and saw just a peek of it at the bottom, past the LEGOs and kids meal toys: the grip, reflecting the flashlight’s beam. The sound of the carabiner clattering down the shaft made him jump. He got up, grabbed the rope, tied another crate, sent it up. Immediately, he retreated back to the alcove and resumed digging through the ammo can.

After a great deal of excavation, Jesse fished it out by the handle. He’d found it where he’d found the badge and the photo, tucked away in a shoebox under Pa’s bed in their hotel room. He’d stolen them, smuggled them down into the cave one by one, where they would be safe.

For a moment, he cradled it in his hands, running his thumb over the engraved letters on the frame: RUGER NEW VAQUERO, 45 CAL. The name seemed ironic considering how old it was, oil and grime in every crevice, the barrel tip scorched black. He moved his thumb away, revealing the last word slow like a movie title. Vaquero. Jesse smiled and held the gun in his hand, pointing it at an imaginary foe, but it didn’t feel right. He tossed the gun down - it didn’t matter, it wasn’t loaded because he’d never found any bullets for it - then used his flashlight to scan the ground by the ammo can.

The old cowboy hat was a couple feet away, up against the wall. Jesse kneed over to it, grabbed it by the crown, put it on. The hat was too big for him, but not so much as it had been once. Jesse wondered if, like the cave, he would one day grow too big to fit it anymore. Fucking. What would he
do with the stash when he couldn’t get down to it? Would he leave it for his impending younger sibling? He gripped the stock of the gun tighter and pulled the hat down over his eyes. Not these, he wouldn’t. He’d find a way to smuggle them out, somehow. The hat, the gun, the photo, the badge. Little sib could have everything else, but those four things were his.

The rope was dropping down the shaft again, the throat of the mouth swallowing it down to the bottom. Jesse tucked the .45 in his pocket and crawled out from the alcove again. He scooped up the rope and trotted over to the ammo cans, his cowboy hat bouncing loose on his head. There were dozens of ammo cans in lots of different sizes. Jesse asked Pa once how much a millimeter was because the cans seemed too big for what he thought a millimeter was. He knew now it wasn’t the size of the can, but of the bullets inside, the caliber. Forty-five. He’d never found a .45 can before.

He looked through the stacks of 20mm cans for the label his father had told him about, Hellfire. It was two stacks in, a peeling white label with “Hellfire Fuze” written in sloppy, black marker. He moved a few cans out of the way, then huffed as he lifted it out from the stack and thunked it on the ground, thunking right along with it. For a moment, he stared at the can, nestled between his splayed knees.

Jesse had seen enough movies to know what a Hellfire was, and to know it was way bigger than would fit in a 20mil ammo can. He hesitated, then flipped the latch open and looked inside. There wasn’t a missile inside, nor a long, coiled snake of fat bullets, but a plastic cylinder in grey foam. The foam hugged the cylinder in a perfect hollow, made for it like a coin into a slot machine. Like Momma’s arms. Something dawned on Jesse.

The cans could hold anything. Like the stash, just because a caliber was sprayed on the side it didn’t mean that was what had to be put into it, the cans were just boxes. Suddenly, the stacks on stacks of green boxes were a world of possibilities opened before him. “Boy!” It was Pa’s voice, sharp but far away. “Hurry it up! Don’t make me tell you again.”

Jesse snapped the can closed then hefted it with two hands to the center of the cave, below the shaft. He wrapped it, hooked in the carabiner like a bow, then tugged on the rope to let Pa know they could pull it up. As soon as it was off the ground, Jesse ran back to the ammo cans. He popped open lid after lid. Some bullets he knew were too big, some of the cans had grenades or rockets. When he found clips, he checked the bullets inside: .357, 9mm, .38.

One of the boxes was just a big pile of bullets. Jesse eagerly sank his hand inside, feeling the smooth, cool metal of the bullets against his skin, the beady sound they made as they clinked together, like pearls. Jesse fished out a single bullet, tight between thumb and forefinger, his hand pulling out like a zombie movie in reverse. Going back in the grave. He turned the bullet, glinting in the flashlight beam, to look at the bottom. Wrapping around the flat, circle heel of the casing, like a crown: 45 AUTO.

His nose whistled as he took in quick, shallow breaths. Without taking his eyes off the bullet, he set his flashlight down at an angle in the can, then pawed in his pocket for his gun. He pulled it out, thumbed open the gate. It took a moment to slot the bullet into the cylinder because his hand was shaking, but it fit. It fit perfect, like the Hellfire fuze in the foam, like he did down the throat of the mouth to the stash, like he used to fit when Momma hugged him. He plucked out another bullet, slotted it in, then another, then another. He stopped at five. The gun held six, but you weren’t supposed to load more than 5 because there wasn’t a safety catch. He couldn’t remember where he’d learned that. A movie? The computer? Pa definitely hadn’t taught him.

Had Momma?

Jesse snapped the loading gate back into place, thumbed the hammer back, then twisted the cylinder
so a round was lined up with the barrel. His finger was pointed along the barrel, his thumb up near
the hammer, a childish mockery of what he was really holding in his hand. The gun was rattling.
Jesse stretched his thumb back to a pained angle.

If the gun went off, they’d hear it up top, and Pa would know he had a gun down here. He’d take it
away. Jesse didn’t want to lose it, but God in heaven, he wanted to shoot it so bad. He wanted to
squeeze the trigger and feel it kick through his body, smell the gunpowder, feel the smoke sting his
eyes. He wanted to hear the gunshot shatter against the wet walls of the cave. Down here, a sound
that loud would surround him, hug him. A perfect fit. By God, he wanted to shoot it so bad.

The rope dropped back down. Jesse shook, sighed, thumbed the gate back open and pushed the
bullets out of the gun one by one. Like bells, they fell on the ground. Jesse scooped them up, put his
flashlight between his teeth, then ran back to the alcove. He checked the revolver once more,
counted the bullets in his palm, then buried the gun at the bottom of the stack, like before. When the
revolver was covered back up, hidden, he dropped the bullets on top, shuffled in with the label-
stripped crayons and monopoly pieces and animal teeth.

“Jesse! What’d I tell you about takin’ too long?” Pa’s voice was sharp. Jesse took the flashlight out
of his mouth then rushed back over to the crates, grabbing the rope on the way. What was the last
thing Pa needed? The 20mil can with the Hellfire, the X-something Helix, and the… he couldn’t
remember. Jesse shot the flashlight frantically from crate to crate, eying the names to see if any were
familiar. It was all letters and numbers, mostly M’s, but he didn’t think the last one started with an
M. What was it? The beam landed on a long crate with black, sprayed lettering. “Lightweight Small
Arms Technology.” LSAT. Jesse sighed with relief.

“Boy!” Pa yelled.

“Almost done!” Jesse yelled back, wrapping the LSAT crate and tugging fast on the carabiner to
make sure it was in place. The crate was heavy. Jesse stumbled back, arms wrapped around, fingers
hooked underneath and strained. He and the crate both slammed it on the ground. The wood,
thankfully, didn’t break. Jesse pushed the crate along the ground until it was under the shaft, then
tugged the rope like tucker tugged on his horn.

Sitting back on his butt, leaning back on his hands, Jesse watched the crate weave and clunk up the
shaft and out of the cave mouth. He wanted to take the picture and the badge out, to look at them,
feel their textures under his thumb, but he didn’t think he had time. Besides, he was tired from
carrying the crates, and he just wanted to sit for a moment in the cool dark of the cave. He turned
his flashlight off, then stuffed it in his pocket. It wasn’t black, but it was close, just a pale spotlight
coming down from the cave mouth, like his flashlight beam. Quiet and dark, in close. It felt nice. He
wished he didn’t have to go back up.

Jesse scooted away when he heard the carabiner being dropped down again, not wanting to get hit
with the falling metal clasp. He saw it, vaguely, hit the floor. When his belt was hooked up proper
again, Jesse gave the rope a tug, and felt himself lift up off the stone floor of the cave. He clutched
the rope with both hands, watching as the alcove, the stash, angled out of view. The light got
brighter as he ascended. It felt wrong somehow, ascending. He wanted to stay down deep, at the
bottom, the floor under his feet, cool and dark. It felt safe and secret. Jesse turned his head down to
try and see the bottom, and his hat shifted forward on his head, covering his eyes.

His hat!

Jesse looked up in a panic. He was almost to the mouth, almost at the top. If Pa looked down in,
he’d see him wearing it. He had to hide it, stash it, but there wasn’t anywhere on his person to do so.
Jesse thought on how he’d gotten it down in the first place, sneaking out of the house and tossing it
into the mouth, like feeding a baby bird. He took one hand off the rope and pulled the hat off his head, holding it in front of him like a beggar, turned up and open. The light from the mouth illuminated the name written, in black marker, inside the brim: Paulina Alvarado.

Momma.

Jesse thought of the picture, the badge. Even if Pa had yelled at him, Jesse wished he’d looked at them, even just for a second. The glossy photo of her tucked under Pa’s meaty arm, long braid over her shoulder, snaking out of the hat he was holding in his hands right now. Watching John Wayne on the television in the hotel room in her lap, wearing her hat, back when it was really, really, too big for him. “Who’s that, Momma?”

“El Vaquero, m’ijo. A cowboy. He’s a good guy.”

“How do you know he’s good, Momma? All the TV people keep talkin’ like he’s bad.”

“Because, m’ijo, by the end, the cowboy is always the good guy.”

Momma. Where the hell you gone to?

Jesse rubbed the felt of the hat between his thumbs and forefingers, hesitated, then dropped the hat down. It descended like a bird, gliding, down until it disappeared in the cool dark.

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McCree’s comm buzzed like a bee in his pocket. With a grunt he sat up from the cool, ribbed surface of the tatami mat, half awake. Peacekeeper was heavy at his hip. For a second he forgot where he was. The room felt small, packed tight with a bed, a couch, a table, a tv stand - a whole house of furniture smashed into one room. Hotels. He’d been in better rooms than this. Been in worse, too.

Across the room, a tall and wide window gave a shit view of a little convenience store and motorcycle chop shop packed tight in next to one another. He might have had a nicer view of the little japanese hamlet, if he hadn’t asked for a room on the bottom floor.

He dug in his pocket until his fingers wrapped around the vibrating comm. Never did like any of those fancy pocket-computers. The comm was more his style, nice and simple, just press a button and you’re on the call.

“Howdy,” he said into the comm, holding it up to his ear. His tongue felt stuffy from sleep, like blankets packed in an attic.

“Jesse McCree?” The voice on the other line was harsh and staccato. Just his name. From that, McCree wasn’t sure if this fella spoke english, or if the translator hooked to his ear would have to digitally interpret.

“You know it.” His voice sounded rougher than usual, probably from falling asleep on the floor again.

“I am calling to give you the details.” An accent, his same voice, no crackle from the translator. This Yakuza spoke english. Classy.

“Slow down now,” McCree said, “You know my name but I never got yours.”
A pause. “Ueda,” he said.


“Right enough,” Ueda grunted, impatient. “The Otomo Clan has planned the burglary for tonight, eleven o’clock, Rikimaru Ramen shop.”

“That big place in the center of the block, right?”

“Yes,” Ueda confirmed curtly. “The owner and his family know. He will meet you in the lobby of your hotel and give you a key. They should all be out of the shop by the time the break-in starts.”

“Y’all seem real worried about a little old ramen shop.”

“Hanamura is under Shimada protection,” Ueda said, sharp and prim.

“I guess that’s what I mean,” McCree said, thumbing his hat up so it wasn’t sticking to his forehead, “Why call in an American to protect your turf?”

Ueda didn’t answer at first, and when he did, it was somehow harsher and meaner than he’d already been. “You would have to ask the kumichō.”

“Would I now?” McCree hummed. Ueda could have been holding information back from him on purpose, but that wasn’t the feel McCree got. It seemed like Ueda really didn’t know why Shimada-kai wasn’t stopping this burglary themselves. There was something about the way he said “kumichō,” sort of like you might say “shit” under your breath, made him think it wasn’t uncommon that Ueda didn’t understand why the big boss of the clan did things.

McCree decided to prod a little bit. “Never thought I’d be doin’ a job for the Shimada clan, I’ll tell you.”

“Yes. Well. The kumichō was adamant,” Ueda muttered. “Said you came highly recommended.”

“That so?” He said it like, hmm, now that’s interesting. There was only one Shimada that would recommend McCree for anything, and he and the family weren’t exactly on speaking terms. “Who have I got to thank for recommending me to him?”

“Her,” Ueda corrected, but he said it like a curse.”I could not tell you who has her ear. Certainly, it is not I.”

You are unwelcome here, is what this man was trying to say. McCree peered around the tiny hotel room. He looked at the sheets, worn and thin, and the cheap particle-board furniture covered to look like mahogany, and the window that only gave a view out to other buildings. McCree was getting a bad feeling about this job. “Put her on,” he said.

“What?”

“Your boss, put her on the phone.”

Ueda snorted into the receiver before answering. “The kumichō of the Shimada clan is not going to treat over the phone with a vagrant mercenary!”

That irked McCree, just a little. He’d been called better. Called worse. He cut back with “well, darn it, I guess I ain’t doin’ the job, then. Too bad, after coming so highly recommended and all.”
“I suppose you are not-” Ueda began, then McCree heard a shrill whine of a voice in the background. It was Japanese, too quiet for his translator to pick up and interpret, but it was clear whoever this person was, she and Ueda were arguing. The scuffle of the phone changing hands, then the woman’s voice yelling. It still wasn’t up to the receiver, but it was loud enough that the translator got the tail end.

“...shove this phone up your ass, what do you think he’d hear then? Go polish your bald fuckin’ head, Ueda. Hello?” She was talking to McCree now.

“Uh, howdy,” McCree said, unsure.

“How-dy,” the voice on the comm repeated in english, then cackled. McCree moved the comm away from his ear a second. “He said you were a cowboy, just like the movies. ‘How-dy.’ What an asshole, haha!” Unlike Ueda, she was speaking Japanese, the translated voice coming out with a little electric whine underneath. “So what did you want to talk about?”

McCree paused. No, it couldn’t be. “Who am I talkin’ to, Miss?”

“Miss! That’s shit. You should call me-” this again she said in English, with a weird composite of her natural Japanese accent and bad impersonation of John Wayne, “‘li’l lady’, cowboy. Now why won’t you do my ramen job? Is it because Ueda’s an asshole?”

McCree wasn’t sure he was interpreting this right. “ You’re the boss of the Shimada clan?”

“You’re fucking slow, cowboy,” the woman said. “If your gun’s as slow as your brain, maybe I don’t want to hire you.”

McCree had heard plenty of stories about the Shimada Clan from Genji, back in the O-dub days. All the people from his clan, the people that actually ran the business anyway, Genji had described as “serious.” His father and brother, the Shimada patriarchs, had been the most serious of all. This woman - and even these days it was odd for a woman to head a Yakuza family - had not been serious since she picked up the phone.

“I want to know who recommended me to you,” McCree said firmly.

The translator awkwardly emulated her hissing, drawling speech pattern. “It’s a surprise.”

McCree looked out the window, sniffed the hotel room’s stale air, put one hand on Peacemaker. “I don’t much like surprises.”

“Your life must be pretty boring then,” the kumichō said.

“I get mine.”

On the other end of the line, she purred, but not like a cat. More like tiger. “Oooh, I like that.”

McCree shifted on the floor, making the tatami skid and shift underneath him. He moved his feet and his spurs jingled. He took a breath and made his voice a little sharp. “Listen, I’m gonna need a few more details before I can take this on.”

“Psh.” It sounded like the kumichō had spat into the receiver. “Alright, here’s the deal, cowboy. The businesses in Hanamura don’t pay protection money anymore and now some other gangs know it. They’ve been inching in on our territory, testing us, y’know? Testing me. Fuck that.”

McCree waited for her to elaborate, then said, “I don’t see what that’s got to do with me.”
“Uhm, if we send out the clan in full force, zippers down, the other clans will think I’m doing it out of the goodness of my own little black heart. That I give a shit about protecting the businesses in Hanamura whether I get something out of it or not.”

McCree tilted his head, looking out the window at the sign for the motorcycle shop, the little illustration of a punker kid on a bike, blowing bubblegum. “Do you?”

“Is that something else you gotta know to do the job?”

“Naw,” McCree said. “Just curious.”

“I’ll tell you if you take a pay cut,” she dangled.

“No that curious,” McCree said, smiling. On the other line, the *kumichō* cackled.

“I don’t want other gangs in the ramen shop, on my turf, but I don’t want a rep for being cuddly either. Vigilante justice fixes my problem without making another one. Just promise me you’re not going to be soft on those Otomo hicks. Fill ‘em with holes. Get pictures if you can, I wanna project ‘em on my wall the next time I fuck someone.”

McCree laughed. “Jesus, lady.”

She laughed, too. “So you’ll do it? Don’t make me have to kill you, I already have one pain in my ass costing me too much in assassin money.”

McCree hummed. *I wonder who that could be?* He had a few guesses. “Don’t you worry, l’il lady, I’ll take your job.”

McCree had to move the comm away from his ear again. “You did the thing,” the *kumichō* cackled, “HAAA! Get to the shop by ten-thirty, cowboy. And one last thing: don’t let them go in the basement.” The comm hung up. McCree moved it off his ear and stared at it for a moment. He shook his head and chuckled to himself, then pocketed the comm and got, stiffly, to his feet. His spurs jangled.

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Ten-thirty, and McCree was perched on a stool in Rikimaru Ramen, holding his chopsticks sideways and slurping up noodles. It was a situation that, if someone had told him at 17 he’d be in, he’d have laughed them right off Route 66. Ramen? Chopsticks? Those were for city folks. And going to Japan? That was a place in movies on the TV, not somewhere a young punk like him would ever set his spurs to.

Yet here he was, pushing forty and sitting on a stool in a little ‘burb in Japan, slurping noodles at a counter, waiting for a bunch of yakuza to show up to try and rob the joint. Funny, how life sends you up.

Rikimaru Ramen had no doors to speak of, just some banners that had rustled against his hat when he came in. There were three exits: one down the stairs and two up here by his seat. There wasn’t a seat in the place that looked to a door, so he was always perring over his shoulder. It must look real suspicious, but looking suspicious was better than getting shot in the back.

McCree set his elbows on the counter and looked over his shoulder to the kitchen, which wasn’t really separate from the eating area. An old man was cleaning up and putting the last of the ramen into plastic containers. In the front a woman in a yukata, maybe a little younger than McCree, was shuffling the last of the patrons out the door.
“Hey, come on, Itsuko, we come here almost every night,” decried one of the patrons, a young man in a black suit and white dress shirt. The group with him were similarly dressed. “Why does the American get to stay after hours?” The woman, Itsuko, kept insisting that they go. When one of them lifted their hands above their head, McCree saw the hint of a tattoo on his arm.

So either the ramen shop serves rivals on the regular, or not even the Shimada’s people know what’s goin’ down tonight. That was interesting. Smart. What the kumichō’s people don’t know can’t come back to bite her. When the rest of the patrons finally left the shop, Itsuko flipped the sign to “closed” then walked, wary, over to McCree.

“You speak Japanese?” she asked in English.

“I got a translator,” he told her.

She looked at him, bewildered, shaking her head.

McCree tapped his ear and turned to show her the clear piece of plastic, lined with wires and tiny circuits.

She nodded in comprehension, then started speaking in Japanese. The translator crackled on. “My father and I are going,” she said.

McCree saw that this woman, Itsuko, didn’t have a translator of her own, so he just nodded.

She bowed to him. “Thank you. Thank you for doing this.” It was earnest, far as he could tell. He didn’t really want to accept the praise, wanted to tell her it was a job he was getting paid for and it was really the Shimada Clan she ought to be thanking, but that was a complicated idea to get across without language. Instead, McCree just smiled a slow, lopsided smile and tipped his hat at her. He thought he saw her bow her head to hide a simper, shrug her shoulders, ears pink for a moment. It was cute, but she didn’t have a translator, and even then, the translators had a hard time with idioms. Wrong tree, darlin’.

Itsuko took McCree’s bowls from the counter and washed them, all the while scolding her father for not being ready to go yet. He had a stack of plastic to-go tubs, filled with broth. “We’re never going to eat all that,” she said to her father, “dump it out. We need to go.”

“It’s for your daughter, she’s too small,” complained Itsuko’s father, stacking the tubs of broth up and lifting them in his arms.

“Girls are supposed to be small,” Itsuko retorted, making McCree raise a mental eyebrow. It really was the sticks out here.

“She’s for your daughter, she’s too small,” her father argued, carrying the broth past where McCree was seated and towards the front entrance.

“Girls are supposed to be small,” Itsuko retorted, making McCree raise a mental eyebrow. It really was the sticks out here.

“Says who?” her father argued, carrying the broth past where McCree was seated and towards the front entrance.

“Says the adverts,” Itsuko huffed as she finished washing McCree’s bowl. She stacked it up with the other clean dishes, walked around the shop turning off the stoves and lights, then followed her father outside. In the doorway she stopped, turned, then gave McCree another bow. She left. For a time, he could still hear the father and daughter’s muffled arguing drifting down the road.

It was weird, being alone in the ramen shop in the dark, no food or drink or chatter. It still smelled like food, and the room was still sweaty with steam from the broth despite the open layout. McCree wanted a smoke, but that would give him away. Instead, he pushed himself up from his stool, then clanked over to a dark shadow near the short stairway. The ramen shop was cloven in two by a wall that stopped at the edge of the steps, making a doorway. From here, he had a, not perfect, but decent
vantage of all three doors. One was at eleven o’clock, another at two, and the last doorway was on
his immediate right at three. The door jamb, the wall, was at high noon. He listened to the people
chittering outside, the wind, the distant bass of music from a nearby club. He waited.

It wasn’t long. Outside on the pavement, a low rustle of feet came closer. It was not like a person
walking or even rushing somewhere. It was almost practiced, uniform, tactical, like a march. That
was weird. How organized was this Otomo gang? McCree slipped the Peacekeeper out of her
holster. The hammer sounded like a nutcracker as he thumbed it back.

They came in from the three o’clock door. Of course, that was the one he had the worst view of. He
didn’t dare move, because he wasn’t so sneaky that they wouldn’t hear him. The muzzle of an
automatic rifle came into McCree’s view, flashlight on. The muzzle turned to the right first, then
starts to rotate lighthouse-like towards McCree. In the dark, McCree lifts his prosthetic arm up to
block. The barrel of the rifle clangs against the the arm’s metal skull.

McCree shot first, a methodical double tap, one in the guy’s chest, then between the eyes. So easy at
this range it almost made it harder. He felt the hard kick of the Peacekeeper rattle through him and it
was off to the races. Nothing got his blood going like shootin’ a god-damned gun.

The next guy ran in after, soon as the leader went down. McCree was already grabbing a flashbang
from his hip. It was blowing up in the guy’s face before he could even get his gun around. He
reached for his face, visored and hidden, and covered where his eyes ought to be, spraying the gun
wildly around the ramen shop. McCree wondered, belatedly, if not trashing the place was part of the
contract.

McCree put two more bullets in this guy, and another two in the woman that rushed in after. Empty.
He rolled oVee the short stairwell, down and across so the wall that cut the ramen shop in half was
between him and the doorway. The empty shells were already rolling on the floor next to him.
He slotted the last 45-cal bullet into the Peacekeeper’s chamber. A perfect fit. McCree had ejected
the spent rounds and reloaded his gun in the space of the roll. Reyes had told him it was a stupid
thing to learn - “This ain’t the movies, Vaquero,” as he always used to say - but it came in handy
now and again.

Whoever came in after the girl tripped over the bodies, then hailed gunfire into the stairway and
against the wall. Bullets pinged off the giant broth pots, the counters, the stools. They shook the wall
McCree was leaning against, like so many rapid-fire punches. He aimed his gun, careful and steady,
at the stairs, knowing that any second now they’d point the muzzle of their rifle down there and
McCree would have to pull his trigger faster than they could pull theirs.

There was a lot of muffled, buzzing chatter - radios, it sounded like - and footsteps, but no one came
down the steps. In fact, the sound of their feet seemed to rush away. Did they abort the mission? Too
much heat, didn’t expect resistance? And what the hell kind of yakuza come in with tactical rifles
and radios and visors? Certainly never the Shimada clan, back when the O-dub were gunning for
their weapons sales. He waited. A warm summer breeze rushed in from the open doorway behind
him, rustling his serape around his body.

McCree took a careful step towards the stairs, spurs jangling like a tambourine in a real, real slow
song. A work song. It made him want to hum, to whistle. The footsteps. He could still hear them, but
they were far away and… were they coming closer, or going farther away? No… they were
rounding, coming at him from another angle.

Like a gasp, McCree spun on his spurs from noon to six, aiming at the open doorway and fanning
the hammer, firing six wild shots in a crooked line up. Sloppy, imprecise, just enough to get the job
done. Reyes would approve. Most of the bullets landed, but he heard at least one ping of something
metal and fly off somewhere. When McCree stopped and focused, when the instinct died down, he saw the fella at the door was all shot up, and had the blade of a sword sticking out of his belly.

Smooth as a sip of bourbon, the blade slide back into its own wound and out from his back. The guy, all in black tactical gear, leaned on his dead legs and toppled over like a puppet with cut strings. Once he’d fallen out of the doorway, the swordsman was revealed, standing shoulders back, all in armor, blood dripping from the short-sword in his hand. McCree had three bullets loaded before he realized who it was.

The swordsman nodded his helmet at the dead body on the ground. “I think we got him,” Genji said.

McCree laughed with relief and joy and adrenaline, casually loading two more bullets, After a pause, he loaded the sixth. He carefully thumbed the hammer back into place, then tipped his hat up with the barrel. “Well I’ll be God-damned,” Jesse said, strutting towards Genji, his spurs making a cheerful rhythm. He stopped when Genji flicked his wrist, rolling three shuriken along the back of his robotic hand and between his mechanical fingers. As soon as they were in his hand, Genji threw them.

If McCree was even a few inches to his right, the shurikens would have lodged in his skull. Instead, the flew past his cheek, over his shoulder, and into someone at his back. McCree could tell because of the wet “gack” sound he heard behind him. McCree turned to look, casual, raising both bushy eyebrows at the woman falling down to his feet.

Movement, in the corner of his eye, just under the brim of his hat. McCree levelled his pistol in an instant, fanning the hammer again, like a bucking stallion, all wild and wayward. He felt it in his good arm, and that’s how it felt, good. That pressed-down feeling in his bones, the scent of gunsmoke, the sound of the body hitting the ground. The guy had tried to come in the third door, but he’d been too slow. McCree took a step back, and his foot sank down a bit. The floor had moved under his weight. He heard a creak and a clank, metal on metal. Now, what’s this?

Genji walked up beside him and peered around his shoulder, looking at the dead body. “Damn! Hope there’s more, I have to catch up to you, McCree.” They both went quiet, listening for more feet. There was just the rush of wind sweeping through the streets and open doors, and the distant thump of bass from the club.

McCree chuckled. “I’d say I never expected to see your face again, but I ain’t never seen it in the first place.”

Genji rolled his head back, laughed, then grabbed McCree in a tight hug. It had been so long since anybody had hugged him, McCree forgot how it worked for a second. Finally, though, he put his arms around his old friend and clutched him against his chest armor.

Genji leaned back first and instantly grabbed McCree by his prosthetic. For a minute, he felt a little self-conscious as Genji examined it, then realized who it was doing it. “When did this happen?” Genji’s voice was light. Compared to him, it probably didn’t seem like that big of a deal.

McCree pulled his arm casually out of Genji’s hands. “Ah, well, your were just so damn cool, I had to get one of my own.”

Genji laughed at that. “This one is more your style, I think.”

McCree grinned. A quiet stretched between them, and now McCree could hear the distant sound of sirens. There had been enough gunfire that someone had called the police, even here, in a neighborhood run by a crime family.
“We should get out of here,” Genji said, snapping the blood off his wakizashi with a flick of his wrist, then sheathing it.

“One minute,” McCree said, moving his foot off the loose wood and squinting down in the dark. It was a trap door with a lock on it. He could see the neon-orange edge of a ripped-off price sticker still on the metal. A new lock.

Don’t let them go in the basement, she’d said. The kumichō. McCree slid a single bullet into the cylinder and spun it into place. He aimed it at the lock.

“McCree! What are you doing? Police are coming.” Genji took a few steps backwards, waiting in the doorway for McCree to follow him. “This kind of stuff isn’t exactly sanctioned anymore, remember? I don’t want to cut up any cops.”

McCree turned to look at Genji, opened his mouth to tell him about what the kumichō had said, then a shiver snaked up his spine like a sidewinder. A billow of smoke was rising up from Genji’s feet, black as black could be, like a squid inking in the water. As McCree’s eyes followed it up, it started to take shape, solidify. A pale, ghastly face started coming into focus over Genji’s shoulder. From there, a shoulder, an elbow, a clawed hand, a massive shotgun, pointed up at Genji’s chin. McCree only had one bullet in his gun.

“Genji!” he roared, raising the Peacekeeper up at the face - no, not a face, a mask. It was pale as bone and looked like a skull. No, not a skull, more like bird; an owl. The smoke billowed up behind this man, whoever or whatever he was. It spread out behind him like black wings. Genji was unsheathing his sword, McCree was pulling the trigger, but both were too late. The shotgun was going to go off, and a shotgun that big, at this range, was going to blow Genji’s head clean off. The thing, the man, the bird, was laughing. The laugh sounded like someone had tossed a bone into a meatgrinder.

Then, with a whistle, it cut off, and the creature snarled, the shotgun snapping forward and going off inches from Jesse’s feet. Something long and thin had gone through the monster’s wrist. Smooth, clean, a perfect cylinder making a perfect wound, fletching at one end, and a bloody prong at the other.

An arrow?

Soon as McCree thought it, another whistled in and went through the creature’s shoulder. It slipped in clean, tucked in the wound, hugged by the monster’s black, smoky flesh. Perfect. The sound of Genji’s sword unsheathing snapped McCree out of it. He blinked, grimaced, shot his single bullet into the cheek of the owl mask, just underneath the hollow eye socket. Genji was ducking out of its grasp, pulling out his wakizashi and slashing it across the thing’s belly. Instead of blood, smoke billowed out from its torso.

The shape dissipated. Thick, acrid smoke filled the room, then swirled out the open door and into the night. McCree growled and chased it outside, reloading the Peacekeeper. The sirens were louder now, a few blocks away he guessed. He scanned the empty street, nine to three o’clock. Movement at eleven, something in the shadowy alleyway across the street. No, not something, someone. The glint of gold, that’s what he saw first. The wind-whipped splash of molten color reflecting Hanamura’s street lamps. Then, the shadowed expanse of bare skin, the arm going down to the bow, an arrow already nocked. The shoulder going up to the sunken eyes and sharp cheekbones, enhanced by the overhead light. His eyes glinted. He was looking at McCree. He could see McCree looking at him. With a single, measured step backwards, the man melted back into the shadows. Gone.
McCree felt someone at his back and he spun, lifting the Peacekeeper. Genji put his mechanical hands up. McCree sighed and holstered the gun.

“We have to go,” Genji said.

McCree nodded. “Back to my hotel. Come on, this way.”

Genji fell into step beside him. Each of them always rested their hands right at their hips. Just like old times. “What hotel are you in?” Genji asked.

“The Niwa,” McCree told him. Genji didn’t exactly make a face, but he cocked his head back like he’d smelled something foul.

“The Niwa?” Genji’s tone was puzzled, bordering on offended. “That hotel is shit.”

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, just continue on to the next chapter (:)

I went a little nuts on the flashback/prologue. Baby McCree is just so fun to write :\:; If you find any errors, please let me know in the comments. Also, I'm looking for beta-readers! Particularly someone strict about grammar, since I'm, haha, really bad at it.

twitter

tumblr
Hey guys, welcome back!
Firstly, thank you so much for all the kudos and comments. I'm glad people are liking the story even if it's just started.
Also big thanks to my beta readers, Jae, milfordb and lepetitselkie! Thanks for the help, guys ^_^
I realized on the first chapter I didn't explain the update structure I use. From here on out, "May I" will update every two Thursdays at around 9PM EST. On the Thursdays "May I" doesn't update, "Time Machine" will. In other words, the series updates every week. Hope that makes sense!

Also I know you guys got a pretty meaty chapter one, but this is much more on-par with my usual chapter length. I know, it's short, sorry!

I also stream Overwatch every Thursday, right after the update, for around 2 hours. Come by and say hello! https://www.twitch.tv/ingridarcher

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sirens were slow here. They keened up in pitch, then crooned down low like someone taking deep breaths, in and out. Meditative. If the wind was harder, McCree might think a tornado was coming. Instead, there was only a soft, cool breeze made stronger by the tunnel of the dark alleyway, kicking up pieces of litter past his and Genji's feet. It stunk like hot garbage back here, but the cops were out on the main roads. They had to get to McCree's shit motel before they were seen.

McCree's feet were walking, but his mind was cutting dirt. No way that was a common gang robbery. The guys they'd fought in the ramen shop - a gotdamn ramen shop - had been decked out in tactical gear with training to match. "Those weren't yakuza," he said.

Genji was walking shoulder-to-shoulder with him. "No."

Yakuza knew their business, but they didn't work like these guys had. Leading with the muzzle of an automatic, covering the entrances, adapting when things went wrong. McCree would think it was Blackwatch, if Blackwatch was still around. That only left one other option. "Talon?" McCree offered.

"I believe so." They turned left down another alley, almost in step. Genji lead with practiced instinct, like a migrating bird.

McCree followed him in almost the same way, lost in trying to unravel the night's events. Did the kumichō know it was Talon that was going to show up? Maybe Talon was after him, or maybe they really were after whatever was in the ramen shop's basement. "You the guy that rec'd me to the Shimada's head honcho?" McCree was pretty sure he knew the answer, but he asked anyway.
“Yes.”

Another turn, a dash up some stairs.

The security of the hard cement chunked away with every step. The wood slats of the stairs felt rickety, bowing under McCree’s weight. He missed the ground. His hand went unconsciously to Peacekeeper, thumbing the familiar curve of the back strap, fingering the hammer, feather-light, knowing the exact tension it would need to go off. This wasn’t the way he’d taken to get to the ramen shop from his hotel.

Maybe Overwatch regrets bringing me in with the recall, he thought. Didn’t expect me to answer.

Genji knew this neighborhood the way McCree knew his gun. He could be leading him anywhere.

They got to the top of the stairs and crossed a wooden walkway toward another close pocket of buildings.

Maybe that’s why they sent Genji in - I’m a liability. McCree shook that thought off. There were plenty of people from the old guard that would be happy to take him out, but Genji wasn’t one. He was an assassin and would have chosen the first kill opportunity if that was Overwatch’s angle. Taking both him and McCree out, though? That could be a certain loudmouthed someone’s angle. “Think the Shimadas set us up?”

Genji, in front of him, paused his quick navigation. His mechanical back looked like the scorpions back on Route 66, insectoid, sectioned off like a plated carapace. The katana strapped to his back sheathed, shoulders shrugged, tail lowered, barb tucked in. It seemed almost sulky. Then, another quick turn around another corner and they were stopped by a solid door with a single, buzzing lamp overhead.

“Need your pass to get in,” Genji said.

It almost startled him. McCree looked up at the sign above the door. It was in Kanji, but underneath that, in tiny roman lettering it read “Niwa Hotel.” A back door.

Genji knows this town, alright. McCree reached into his back pocket, fingers folding around his wallet. He pulled it out and flipped it open, peeling back gas station receipts and single-punched customer loyalty cards until he liberated the room key.

“You didn’t answer my question,” McCree said, swiping the card through. He got a flashing, red light.


It wasn’t a good sign. Back in the Blackwatch days, the Shimada clan was a big enough pain to take down even with all of Genji’s insider knowledge. The syndicate running with Talon? That was a nightmare.

A nightmare. The corona of moths flapping around the overhead lamp sent out weird, moving shadows that made McCree look behind him more than once. A laugh like out of a storybook. Not the sugary kind with singing princesses and talking cartoon animals - the mean kind, where old women get ripped to pieces and little kids get et. McCree swiped the card again, faster this time.

Red.

“Who was that fella in the mask?” McCree was talking to himself, mostly, so he was surprised when
Genji answered.

“I don’t know.” Genji took the card from McCree’s hand and slid it down in a smooth, fluid motion. The light flashed green and McCree heard the lock click. Genji held the door open for him.

McCree smirked at the cyborg and tipped his hat as he walked inside the dingy, narrow hallway, lit with jaundiced overhead lamps. The carpet was the red of dried blood, and the hall was lined on either side with doors. He half-expected to see a pair of little girls down at the end. On the door to his left, the room number was 235. They had to go down a floor. McCree lead the way now, thinking about the man in the mask.

Surely, McCree didn’t know that monster either, but something about the encounter had felt familiar. A scent, a sound? The rhythm of his feet? Maybe just the feel of him in the room, the way it made McCree’s hair stand up, a blade of grass touching an electric fence.

The gun. That was it. McCree knew guns like a birdwatcher knew birds - by sight and sound, every stock and barrel like plumage. Something about that big, mean shotgun was familiar. McCree followed the pictographs of men walking down stairs to a door at the end of the hall. He opened it. The stairwell was, at first, less inviting than the hallway had been. Something about the lighting. But, as McCree took more and more steps down, it got to feeling a little more comfortable. Closed in, no windows, descending - like being tucked in. “And the other guy?” McCree asked as he got to the landing, halfway down.

Genji was still behind him. He hummed as if distracted.

“The other guy, the one from the alley,” McCree specified over his shoulder, spurs jingling on each stair step, “with the arrows.”

Genji didn’t answer until they got to the bottom of the stairs. “Hanzo,” he said.

McCree stopped in his tracks, the door to the first floor of the hotel half-opened. “Hanzo,” he repeated. “As in, your brother Hanzo?”

“Yes.”

“The brother that tried to murder yer ass,” McCree growled, turning to face Genji, leaning his back again the open door, “that Hanzo?”

Genji looked him in the eyes a moment, or at least it seemed that way. Hard to tell with the visor on. Easy to see when he looked away, though, turning and passing by him out into the first-floor hallway. “Yes, that Hanzo,” he said.

“Was he aimin’ for you?” McCree asked to the back of Genji’s head; to the stained, torn, grey-green cloth with a faded seigaiha pattern.

Genji started down the hall, quick, moving away from him. “What’s your room number?”

McCree adjusted his hat on his head and walked down the hall after him. “105. Answer the question, Genji.”

Genji kept walking, then stopped at door near the elevator, about where McCree remembered his room being. “I don’t know,” Genji said. “I do not think so.” The lock clicked and the door buzzed open. McCree realized Genji still had his room key. Genji held the door open for him again.

“You’ll excuse me for askin’ but,” McCree began, passing Genji chest-to-chest because the doorway
was too narrow to clear his shoulders, “why not?”

“Because that would mean he missed,” Genji said, following McCree inside. “Hanzo does not miss.”

The door shut. McCree felt a shiver go up his spine as he stood in the middle of the tiny hotel room, looking out his dingy window to the darkened street.

*He surely don’t.* It was near ten years ago when he and Reyes and the good doctor all huddled up to grab intel on the Shimada Clan’s plans after old Sojiro bit it. Reyes had fought tooth-and-nail against bringing Mercy along on a Blackwatch op, but with the whole mess of B-dub injuries on his watch the past months, Jackie-boy put his foot down. McCree turned to look and Genji and thought, *Thank the Lord he did, or else this boy wouldn’t be standin' here right now.*

McCree had listened to the argument over the enhanced, blown-out microphone; seen it up close on a tiny, grainy screen, via a zoomed-in spycam. But he hadn’t needed the cam to see how the fight ended, hadn’t needed a mic to hear Hanzo howl that ancient summoning cry. They’d lit up the night, those dragons, big and butane blue, like fireworks on the fourth of July. Cracks like whips, like electricity, like broken bones. They roared down from Hanzo Shimada’s single, precise slash, a writhing waterfall of energy, carrying Genji off the balcony and down, down, down. What sort of man could do that to someone he loved?

“Last I saw him, Hanzo used a sword,” McCree said.

“Keiko told me he has not used katana since…” A pause. “Since.” Genji leaned his back against the yellowed wall and crossed his arms. “Out of guilt, I guess.”

McCree curled his lip up over a canine. “Feelin’ bad about it don’t erase what he done.”

Genji tilted his head, and it looked odd the way it had always looked odd, like a puppet might tilt its head, or rather, have its head tilted. It was sort of nostalgic. “What about tonight? He saved my life back there.”

“I woulda put half-a-dozen holes in that masked bastard ‘fore he got that shotgun off,” McCree lied, digging in a pocket for matches and a cigar. “What’s gotten into you? Seems like, last I saw you, you were on the warpath, amigo.”

Genji looked back down at the floor, shoulders hunched, looking like a scolded child. “I saw Hanzo at Shimada Castle. Spoke with him, a few days ago.”

Between two fingers, McCree slid out a cigar. “Then how is it he’s still breathing?” He popped a match. A wasp of a flame buzzed to life. He put the cigar to his lips.

“I… forgave him,” Genji said.

McCree didn’t notice the match burning down until it was white-hot on his fingertips. He hissed and dropped it on the grey, stained carpet, then took the unlit cigar out of his mouth. “You *what*?”

Genji looked up at him. “I forgave my brother, McCree.”

“You *left* Overwatch so you could find Hanzo and kill him.” McCree was indignant. Nobody left Overwatch, not *nobody.*

“I know,” Genji said. It sounded earnest, that fluorescent voice filtered through the synthetic voice box *and* the translator. How could McCree know if that’s how it sounded before it got run through all that static?
McCree rounded Genji, stood across so they were face-to-face. Like a duel. One hand clutched the unlit cigar. The other sat on Peacekeeper’s stock, not like a threat, but like balancing. Two feet on solid ground. “He tried to kill you. If it weren’t for the good doctor, he damn well woulda.”

“I know.”

“He was your kin, and he tried to kill you.”

“I know!” Genji yelled, throwing those marionette hands of his up in the air. “And I wanted to, you know? Seeing him again, being in the castle again. I thought I had let go of my anger, found peace, but hearing his voice-.” Whatever Genji felt didn’t have words, just a puffed-out growl of frustration. He took a step forward, closer, one robotic hand at his hip; on his wakizashi. Both of them with hands on their weapons, both of them knowing the other well enough to know it wasn’t because they planned to draw them. “I fought him. I beat him. I had the blade to his throat, and then-”

Genji stopped, took a breath, backed off, the air going out of his sails. He turned, taking the two short steps to the bed then sinking down onto it. It creaked. “He said something.” Genji wasn’t looking at him now. He’d taken his wakizashi out of its saya - so smooth and slow McCree hadn’t immediately noticed - and was holding it on his lap. “Not really what he said, but how he said it. I think he… needs me.”

It made a singing sound, when Genji ran his metal finger across the blade, like playing the rim of a glass. McCree noticed it wasn’t the same short-sword Genji’d had when he left Overwatch. “There’s a lot of space between not killin’ someone and forgiving ‘em.”

Genji lifted his finger from the blade. “Is there?” He looked up. “If I do not take revenge, what does it mean except that I forgive what he’s done?”

“Just means you ain’t a brother-killer like he is,” McCree growled.

Genji sheathed his wakizashi. “I know how I have spoken of him to you, but he was different when we were children. Our mother left us, our father was cruel. Hanzo was always there to take care of me.”

“Oh, he took care of you alright.” McCree shoved his thumbs in his belt and cocked his head to the side. “I’d of thought you couldn’t get more self-destructive than when you left Overwatch, but here we are.”

Genji sighed and stood. “I do not ask for your approval, McCree,” he said, “but I do ask that you respect my decision.”

Now, the wind was out of McCree’s sails. For a moment, he’d been the Genji he remembered: the plain-speaking, lost and pissed-off kid in a big puppet body. Now he was all serenity and poise, with an attitude to match that cold visor of a face. We have to go instead of what the hell was that? I ask that you respect my decision instead of piss off, I’m doing it my way! I forgave him instead of I cut his ass up like a pork loin.

“Yeah, alright.” McCree drew Peacekeeper absentmindedly and tipped the brim of his hat with her barrel, then sat down on the floor, hanging his arms over his knees “Well, hell. ‘How ya been’ seems too small. It’s been a good few years.”

Genji sat down, legs crossed, in front of him. A gesture; balancing the power. “I’ve seen on the news that you are an outlaw, robbing and murdering your way across America.”

There was a smile in his voice. McCree smiled back. “You better believe it.”
“Not for a moment,” Genji laughed.

“What about you?”

“I have been in Nepal, among the Shambali.”

McCree cocked his head. “The Sham… what?”

There was no smile in Genji’s voice when he asked “have you heard of Tekhartha Mondotta?”

“That omnic fella what got shot?” McCree’s fingers closed around the slick cardboard of his matchbook, making another attempt at lighting his cigar, hoping all the jaw-dropping revelations were behind them.

“Yes,” Genji said. “He was our leader.”

The match snapped to life. McCree lifted the flame to the end of his cigar, then sucked his breath in. Embers bloomed where the flame touched the end of the cigar. McCree huffed smoke into his mouth, but not his lungs. “…our?” He flicked his wrist to snuff out the match.

“My master, Zenyatta, is… was one of his disciples. He helped me with… this.” Genji gestured to himself.

The warm, familiar scent of his cigar was filling the room. Genji never used to mind, but he might now. Plenty had changed already. McCree plucked the cigar from his mouth and rolled it between thumb and forefinger. The Second Omnic Crisis, they were already calling it. McCree had learned firsthand the news wasn’t always as true as if it came straight from the spring, but Winston had painted a pretty bleak picture of Siberia when they’d talked over comm. If Genji was palling around with that Mondotta and his ilk… “Where’d you land on that?”

Genji stood up, stepping over McCree to stare out the first-floor window. “We should contact Overwatch about the attack. If Talon is here, they’ll want to know.”

“They?” McCree pushed himself up and looked over Genji’s shoulder at their reflections in the window. “Ain’t you joined up yet?”

A pause. “No.”

McCree looked at himself and Genji in the reflection, standing almost posed, like the big Overwatch group photos they used to take for press kits. He and Reyes and the other Blackwatch members had never been in those photos. “You gonna?”

Genji inclined his head down. “I do not know.”

The only sound, for those few seconds, was McCree sucking the smoke out of his cigar, then breathing it out, low and slow, like the police sirens. He thought of, almost felt, the name in black marker around the brim of his hat. If the ink were fresh, it would print backwards across his forehead, as unreadable as the kanji on the signs here. In the reflection, though, her name would be written clear as crystal, marking him for anyone to see. McCree looked at Genji’s reflection in the window. *Where the hell you gone to?*

“Call them,” Genji said.

Chapter End Notes
For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, the next chapter is Time Machine, Chapter Eleven: Miss Oxton.

No Hanzo in this chapter, though he's discussed at length. Don't worry, we see a lot of him next chapter (:
Looks like the cowboy has a ways to go before he can forgive Hanzo like Genji has...

twitter
tumblr
Hey guys! Sorry This chapter is an hour late, underestimated how long it would take to edit. I basically wrote it twice.
But hurray Hanzo!

Streaming as usual. https://twitch.tv/ingridarcher

twitter
tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3 Hanzo

The bowstring was pulled so tight, Hanzo thought his fingers might snap off.

The target was on the opposite side of the zen garden, directly ahead of him. The groundskeeper, Nagano, had already been here. The pale gravel of the rock garden raked into clean, simple patterns. Now, Hanzo knew, Nagano would be answering calls in the residences and the castle, touching up the painted wood, and making notes for which buildings needed renovation.

Hanzo could not remember a time Shimada Castle wasn’t under renovation. The steady hammering, the low buzz of saws, and the roaring engines of construction vehicles seemed as much a part of the Castle as its traditional Japanese architecture and the scent of cherry blossoms.

Breath in. Hold. Breath out. Hanzo was trying to concentrate, but he was too-aware of his mother at his shoulder. The roughspun sleeve of her kyudogi irritated the bare skin of his arm.

“You’re slouching,” she said, and grasped his shoulders, bending them back until his spine made a straight line. Though her fingers were cold, and stabbed into him, Hanzo enjoyed the brief, rare contact. Too soon, her hands moved away, and he did his best to maintain the stance. His arm shook, waiting for her signal. Only moving his eyes, he tried to catch a glimpse of her, but could only see her shoulder and the tip of her pointed chin. Beyond that it was blurry and hurt his eyes to focus on.

“Release!” The command, though he knew it was coming, surprised him, and his body started as he loosed the arrow. It veered left and bounced off the edge of the target. Hanzo looked up at his mother. All it took was a furrow of her brow for him to feel chastised.

“Pay attention, Hanzo,” his mother said, biting off her words. “If you choose to train, do it correctly, not halfway. Archery should be meditative - just you and your target. It is not complicated - it's simple.” Hanzo dipped his head, shamed and sulky.

Mother huffed. “Again,” she said, and Hanzo dutifully drew another arrow and reset his position. He closed his eyes and took a slow breath, clearing his mind before drawing the arrow back to his cheek. Now, his form was perfect. His spine was straight, his feet were the correct length apart, the arrow made a perfect, straight line. He would be ready for her signal this time.
But it didn’t come. Hanzo lowered his bow and looked over his shoulder, to see if Mother was watching, but she was instead staring off near the main gate. Hanzo followed her gaze.

It was one of the syndicate’s sisters and her young son. The boy was six or seven, around Hanzo’s own age, dressed in a crisp school uniform. He had unkempt black hair and chewed on his lip as the sister fawned over him. She was wearing a sun-dress printed with colorful flowers. The material looked soft. Her hair was tinted a pleasant, chestnut color, and went down to the small of her back. She hugged her boy tight, petal-pink lips spread in an enthusiastic smile.

Hanzo looked from the doting sister to his own mother. Her long, black hair was pulled back into a sleek, unadorned tail. She wore no makeup. Her nails were kept pristine but short. She watched with cold, intense focus as the sister kissed her boy’s cheek, handed him his lunch, then waved as he rushed off for school.

Mother must have felt Hanzo’s eyes on her, because she turned, almost startled - as much as she ever look startled. Mother was always cool and distant; his aunt Kanata sometimes said she was like a doll - small and expressionless. Hanzo was looking up at her with what he supposed was expectancy, and they stared at each other for a long moment. She parted her lips. In the corner of his vision, he saw her hand twitch, lift up to his back, to his shoulders. The touch was not hard and economical. It felt almost like affection.

“You’re slouching,” she said, and stabbed the tips of her fingers between his shoulderblades. Hanzo straightened and drew his bow back again, focusing on the target. She called for him to shoot. The arrow landed squarely in the center.

“Good,” Mother said.

Hanzo smiled up at her.

She did not smile back. “Again,” she said.

The American had arrived a week ago.

McCree, his name was. He was down below on the walkway, leaned up against the pale, stone wall, smoking a cigar and chatting jovially with two enforcers, exchanging filthy jokes and stories. Hanzo was only just close enough to hear, tucked in a high alcove cut into the south wall of Shimada Castle. It was not the first time Hanzo, from his lofty perch, had watched the man carefully. Now and then, he caught himself focusing too closely on McCree’s smooth, leathery voice or the lilt of his laugh. The American adjusted his cowboy hat, which he wore everywhere, and for a moment Hanzo caught a glimpse of his face. The shape of his jaw, the edge of his wide smile, the tip of his nose and his unkempt beard.

Because of that ridiculous, wide-brimmed hat, a glimpse was the most Hanzo had ever seen. Unlike Genji - he called the half-man “Genji” out of necessity, only, for he’d given no other name to use - and McCree, Hanzo had not been welcomed back with open arms by the current kumichō. Considering their history, Hanzo didn’t expect such an invitation from Keiko any time soon. For this reason, Hanzo kept to the castle’s walls and roofs, looking down on Genji from afar.

Genji. The sight of him when he’d removed his mask was still haunting, a machine with half his brother’s face, twisted by the dragon scars. The smart thing for Hanzo to do would have been to abscond from Japan the night of their duel, and never look back. Yet instead, Hanzo had procured a room at an unassuming inn, far enough away from the clan’s territory to not rouse suspicion, and
kept it for ten nights. He went there to shower and sometimes for scarce hours of sleep, but for the most part, he stalked the Shimada grounds; stalked this automaton that called him “brother.”

The American laughed again, and Hanzo looked down at the top his hat. At first, Hanzo thought McCree had merely been a hired gun; a scapegoat for whatever was happening at Rikimaru. Quickly, though, Hanzo deduced that he must have been a long-time friend of Genji’s. Since his arrival, the pair had spent a great deal of time together. Hanzo had watched from afar. Once or twice, it seemed that Genji, at least, had noticed him; even tried to get his attention. Each time, Hanzo felt a tug of longing to join them, and each time he pushed it down and moved away, somewhere separate and out of sight.

Hanzo leaned back against the wall, knees tucked to his chest, toes peeking off the lip of the tiny ledge. The drone of an airplane, flying low, passed overhead. It was summer, and the warm, wet air intensified every smell in the air. Hanzo picked out the heady scent of McCree’s cigar amidst the constant, stinging cloud of cigarette smoke.

Shimada Castle was different in small and strange ways. The layout was the same: a zen garden, just inside the main gate, enclosed by a shrine, three court houses and an inner gateway. Past the inner gate, a yard with a gazebo, a two-story walkway, the main court, and the castle itself. It was still the same ancient architecture, seemingly plucked out of the past and set on a motte in the middle of a thriving metropolis. It was no longer, however, perfectly preserved as it had been in his youth. The zen garden was raked carelessly. Moss crept over the rocks. Weeds sprouted up through the carelessly-raked gravel. The wooden beams were beginning to decay. Paint chipped, holes in the shoji went unrepaired. It smelled now of cigarettes instead of flowers. The night was quiet, save the inane chatter of the syndicate’s brothers and sisters.

All the people were unfamiliar. Most were young, twenties perhaps, and there were far more sisters on the grounds than had been when Hanzo was young. Omnics, fashioned with the visages of oni, walked among them too, guarding doors and running jobs like anyone else. They all dressed in gaudy, ill-fitting suits, like caricatures. The Shimada Clan had once been a global force in the arms trade. Now, it had become a loose association of thugs, trying to hold on to a tiny neighborhood and an ancient, decaying castle. There was no question in his mind who was responsible for that.

A familiar cackle cut through the air, as if Hanzo had summoned the insufferable woman with his thoughts.

**Keiko Shimada. The Viper.**

Genji was with her, and they passed through the inner gate to the walkway that framed the zen garden. Keiko’s laugh was as Hanzo remembered it: grating, and loud enough to carry across the whole castle. She was rail-thin and a full head taller than Genji, her posture loose and languid. She peeled off her jacket and slung it over her shoulder, then rolled up the sleeves of her pink, silk shirt to her elbows. She wore a gun harness, with an Uzi holstered under her armpit. A sheathed nagamaki was slung on her back. She was smoking, because she was always smoking. Genji was at her shoulder, as he always had been back before…

Before.

Genji and Keiko approached McCree and joined the conversation easily. When she had first invited Genji into the castle, the syndicate’s brothers and sisters had been wary of him. With time and some “encouragement” from the kumichō, however, most everyone in the castle had accepted his presence.

One of the enforcers looked around. “Shouldn’t you have bodyguards with you, Kumichō?” It felt
strange every time, hearing the brothers call Keiko that.

Keiko scoffed. “Ugh. I told ‘em to fuck off for a while. I get so sick of them following me around everywhere. Their heads are so far up my vagina it feels like I’m giving birth.”

Hanzo made a face. Keiko was, as always, disgusting. Still, he listened to their easy conversation with something like envy. A part of him yearned to climb down from his perch and join them. Looking at the half-man, with metal body and expressionless visor, felt like looking at a stranger. Now and then, though, there was a laugh, a gesture, a commonly-used phrase that hammered nostalgia into him.

Genji and McCree, in tandem, were telling some, apparently amusing story about a day McCree made dinner for the members of something called Overwatch. From eavesdropped conversations, Hanzo had deduced this was where Genji and McCree knew each other from.

“So this thing looks like hell,” McCree said, “I mean-”

“It looked like we had just spooned shit onto their plates,” Genji cut in, laughing.

“You’d think it smelled like it too, from the face Reyes was making. No one’d touch it. They start to talkin’ about ordering out, y’know, and I was a kid with shit for a sense o’ humor, so I start shufflin’ my feet and clearin’ everyone’s plates…”

“And Reyes - “

McCree chuckled, pulling the cigar from his lips and settling it between his fingers. “You gotta understand, Reyes was tough. Big guy. Had the meanest voice you ever heard, but normally he was real quiet-like.”

“But when he got loud it was scary,” Genji said. “So McCree starts picking up the dishes to throw it away, and Reyes gets up and pounds his fist on the table and yells ‘Put those back down, vaquero. You’re all going to eat this and like it!’” Genji had done an over-the-top impersonation of this person, Reyes. The group all laughed. “So we did, because no one was about to argue with Reyes when he got like that.”

“It was pretty good, if I remember.”

“You just think that because you made it,” Genji jabbed.

“Naw! It looked like shit, but it tasted alright.”

“It was totally burnt!” Genji laughed.

There it was again - the sound was so familiar that it sent electric nostalgia through Hanzo’s body. It was Genji’s laugh. Could his brother, truly, have come back from the dead?

No, he thought firmly. The Genji Hanzo knew would have cut his throat and laughed while doing it. In many ways, Hanzo wished for that. It would have, at least, had a kind of providence; of symmetry. The correct path. Elegant. Simple.

Something mechanical chirped in Keiko’s pocket. She pulled out a phone and looked at the screen. “Your Overwatch buddies are at the airfield, cousin.” There was that word again: Overwatch. Keiko swiped with her thumb. “Said it was a rough landing.”

Hanzo saw Genji’s posture straighten. “Did they say why?”
Keiko shrugged.

“I will comm in, see what happened.”

Genji didn’t pull out a phone or lift a comm to his mouth - only stared blankly at nothing, then started speaking as if some unseen person was there with him. A brief, perfunctory exchange followed, which Hanzo only heard one side of. Then, the person on the other line must have said something shocking.

“What?” Genji exclaimed, then took a few steps away from the group, distancing himself from prying ears. Hanzo only heard the end of the exchange, when Genji’s voice rose.

“She what?” A pause. “Where is she?” From the tone of voice, Hanzo did not envy whoever the “she” was. Genji came storming back to the group and announced, “Talon attempted to shoot the plane down. Widowmaker is here.”

McCree’s posture straightened. “Am?”

“Whatever she calls herself now.” Genji bit off the words. Hanzo had rarely seen him this angry. “I will be sure to ask her so we know what to put on her headstone. I have the coordinates, it is close. Come on.”

Everyone drew their weapons. The enforcers pulled out their pistols. Keiko grinned, eagerly tugging her nagamaki from its saya. McCree brandished his huge revolver. Genji, wakazashi in hand, lead them out the front gate. Hanzo scaled over the top of the wall and followed them.

Genji had been right; it was only a block away. They got to the location, but found nothing. Hanzo listened to their conversation from the rooftop. They agreed to split up and search the neighborhood. Genji went to scout the alleyways, and Keiko insisted on going with him, despite protests from the enforcers. “We should be protecting you,” they insisted, “You’re the boss.”

“That’s right, I’m the fuckin’ boss, and that means you do two tiny penises do what I tell you, got it? Now go patrol the main streets.” Sulky, the two enforcers skulked off. McCree, unfamiliar with the area, stayed put for when the other “Overwatch” members arrived. From his high perch, Hanzo could keep an eye on all of them.

It was quiet for a while, just the distant sound of cars and the bass coming from Club Cerisier nearby. Hanzo nocked an arrow absent. When Keiko and Genji moved out of his eyeline, he stood and moved to keep his vantage. That’s when he heard the click of a hammer being pulled back.

Drawing the arrow happened almost subconsciously, feet in position, the fletching tickling the shell of his ear. He had aimed at the source of the sound before he’d even really seen it.

The American tilted his head up slow. More and more of his face peered up at Hanzo from underneath the brim of his hat. For the first time, he saw his eyes. They were hooded, dark, squinting up at him through the lamplight. Hanzo failed to see the gun at first. McCree held it low down at his hip, half-hidden under his brick-red serape. Once he did see it, however, Hanzo could tell it was aimed up at him. McCree smiled.

**Breath in. Hold. Breath out.** For a moment, the world faded away, and Hanzo forgot everything but himself and the target. He could only see the tanned skin, smell the heady scent of his cigar, imagine the texture of his rough, untrimmed beard. Rugged, unkempt, languid. Smiling with an arrow aimed at him. **Breath in. Breath out.** Hanzo had to remind himself.

“Welcome to Hanamura, boys!” Keiko’s abrasive voice broke through Hanzo’s meditation, then the
sound of gunfire shattered it. He and McCree both startled out of their aim at once. Hanzo didn’t know why, but he was sure they were having the same thought in that moment.

_Hanzo._

Hanzo spun on his heels then bolted, rushing towards the sound. As he crossed the roof, he saw Genji and Keiko locked in a battle with maybe a dozen men. Not another gang - they were in black tactical gear and helmets, the same outfit from the ramen heist. *Talon.* A criminal enterprise not even Hanzo’s father had gotten involved with. He drew an arrow and searched for a target.

One man in front, big-bellied and broad-shouldered, held a riot shield. Ever reckless, Keiko rushed him, shouldered the shield aside, and stabbed him into the wall with her nagamaki. When the other Talon agents tried to close in on her, she pulled out her uzi and shot at them wildly. It gave Genji the opportunity to come up behind them.

They fought well together. Hanzo had never thought of Keiko as skilled at _anything_ , but her wild, brazen style complimented Genji’s close, careful combat. Still, it was a dozen against two. Hanzo loosed an arrow, catching one woman in the shoulder when she had turned her rifle in Genji’s direction. It startled the half-man, and for a moment he looked up at him, the green of his visor blooming brighter. Not the time for quarrels - Hanzo nocked another arrow and gave Genji a curt nod. A pause, then Genji returned it, and went back to the battle.

As he drew the next arrow back to his cheek, Hanzo felt a familiar burn on his tattoo. The Dragon was stirring. Tactically, it made sense. A long, narrow alley, no place for the Talon members to duck away to. The Dragon would make a meal of them all.

A memory flashed behind Hanzo’s eyes. Genji removing the mask. Half his brother’s face. Worming scars on his skin. *Dragon burns.* Hanzo pushed back the sting of his tattoo and took another shot. Another Talon agent fell, arrow protruding from her throat.

“Focus fire on the woman,” a commanding voice called out, and eight gun barrels spun towards Keiko in unison. She was against the wall, nowhere to go. Let them kill her, Hanzo thought with some satisfaction. But then, Genji rushed forward, putting himself bodily between Keiko and the gunfire, deflecting it with his wakizashi. If he kept it up too long, the blade would break. Hanzo took another shot. A man in the back went down. The dragon burned his arm, clawing to get out. A distant sound of an engine, getting closer. Where was the American? Hanzo shot again and actually missed .

The Dragon clawed to get out. It would not harm his allies, but that was what Hanzo had thought when…

When.

A vehicle, something domed the size of a truck, whirred around the corner and into the alley behind the Talon agents. The engine roared and the hover wheels bloomed, the vehicle’s systems working to keep the huge thing from rolling. The slotted door of the vehicle opened out. Hanzo wasn’t sure who or what he’d expected to come out of the vehicle, but this was not it.

A massive gorilla, wearing armor, wielding some sort of weapon, leapt out of the vehicle and landed on top of the squad of Talon agents. They all turned their weapons on the ape as he threw something down at Genji and Keiko’s feet. From it bloomed a huge energy shield; a dome that surrounded the pair of them. Meanwhile, the gorilla soaked up the Talon squad’s bullets. They punched dozens of holes in his armor. He dropped to his knees. Hanzo shot again, trying to thin Talon’s numbers before they took down the ape and turned their attention back to Genji.
A tangled, watery thread of gold suddenly snapped to the gorilla’s chest. Steadily, he got up, and adjusted… was that a pair of glasses on his face? The longer the golden thread was connected him, the more energized the gorilla seemed, as if his wounds were nothing. Hanzo traced the path of the thread to a woman in white. Blades of golden light were arrayed in a pattern behind her, looking like wings.

“Thank you, Dr. Zeigler!”

Hanzo wasn’t sure who the baritone voice had come from at first. Only through process of elimination did his mind deduce that it must have come from the massive ape. And here, Hanzo had thought their foul-mouthed cousin and an American dressed as a cowboy were strange company to keep...

“Lena and Jesse have Widowmaker on the roof,” the woman said in English. She had an accent Hanzo couldn’t place… something European. “I’m going to help them.”

Lightning scattered out of the gorilla’s peculiar gun, stunning one of the few remaining Talon agents. Genji was using shurikens to pick off the retreating few. Keiko grabbed one by the collar and unloaded a clip from her Uzi into his face. The battle was over. He should make himself scarce.

Hanzo wasn’t sure why he retreated back to the castle instead of returning to his hotel. Instinct, perhaps, or even the Dragon itself. They were, in essence, the same thing. He scaled the wall from a back alley, then dropped down to a secluded stone pathway on the edge of the castle’s grounds. On his right was one of the court houses that used to be for the groundskeeper, back when the castle kept a groundskeeper.

He saw it in his periphery, heard the zipped-up sound of the rappelling rope at his right ear. He turned to look. A woman, tall, thin but shapely, gingerly hopped onto the second-floor walkway attached to the groundskeeper’s house. She ducked inside, and Hanzo imagined she intended to escape out the house’s back door. He had no idea who she was, but he had a sneaking suspicion it was this the woman Genji was hunting, Widowmaker. Besides, after that battle, he wasn’t sure he liked a stranger skulking around the castle. For a moment, Genji’s voice talked in his imagination.

“That’s your job, brother.” Hanzo smirked, then rounded the building to head her off at the back door.

So predictable, he thought as he heard heels clipping against the wood inside the building. He raised his bow, keeping his aim focused at the doorless frame. The woman saw him the moment she appeared in the doorway, looking with wide, doe-eyes from his face, then down to his arrow. Hanzo closed in, forcing her to walk backwards into the building again. Her expression smoothed out. Hanzo did not like it.

“Shimada Hanzo, no?” Her voice was like silk, and she was certainly beautiful, but Hanzo didn’t trust anyone who simpered at him. He kept his arrow trained on her, forcing her back out of the building and onto the walkway once more.

At first, Hanzo had thought it merely part of her suit, but when she moved into the light, he realized her skin was a pale lavender. This woman was, in one way or another, not human, but oddly enough, not the strangest thing he’d seen today. “And you are the one they are searching for,” he said. “Widowmaker. You are with Talon.”

“C’est vrai.” Widowmaker pouted her lips. It was almost condescending. “We have similar avocations, I believe, Monsieur Shimada.” She nodded to his bow, then her unnatural, amber eyes crawled up him to his face. It made Hanzo uncomfortable, like insects on his bare skin. “We do not have to be enemies, you, and I,” she said. “What you desire, Talon ‘as the power to give you.” She
took a cautious step forward. “Think of it. Your family’s power, restored, with you at its head.”

For a moment, Hanzo took his eyes off her. Instead, he looked at this empty room, looked out of the building’s front door at the weedy zen garden and decaying wood. He sniffed and smelled cigarettes. He didn’t know much about Talon, but he knew enough to know this woman wasn’t bluffing. With their resources and political influence, they would have the power to reverse all of it. Genji was alive. It could all be undone, rewound, put back in the bottle. It would be easy - elegant, even. Simple.

Pulsefire crashed him out of his thought process, and the simpering woman in front of him turned her attention to the bigger threat, ducking to dodge the shots. She lifted her own rifle - some boxy, two-handed automatic - and returned fire. Hanzo ducked back into the building’s shadow, bow still raised.

A second woman joined Widowmaker on the walkway. She had windblown brown hair and a slender, boyish frame, with some sort of glowing device strapped to her chest. She wielded a pair of automatic pulse pistols, something Hanzo hadn’t known had even been developed yet. The two women reloaded their clips at the same time, then trained them on one another. He still had his bow trained on Widowmaker. He was the tiebreaker.

From his vantage, it would be difficult to shoot past Widowmaker to the girl with the hair, but it could be done. It would certainly cement his standing with Talon, if that’s what he wished for.

Footsteps, climbing the nearby stairs, told him he was taking too long to decide. Two more people were approaching the fight. Hanzo heard the familiar click of a hammer being pulled back; the familiar slow, leathery voice of Genji’s friend, McCree. It was, however, a little more winded than it had been earlier.

“Now just… hold right there, darlin’. Quit hopping around. I ain’t climbin’ no more stairs.” The American’s voice was interrupted intermittently by gulped breaths. It was ridiculous, to the point of being… oddly charming. Hanzo leaned, just a little, out of the doorway, trying to get a glimpse of him.

Genji’s friend. These were Genji’s friends, and this simpering woman, Widowmaker, was the one he’d been so furious at over the comm. She was their enemy.

It was childish to believe, even for a moment, that what he’d done to Genji had been, could be undone. Whatever the half-man was, he was not the Genji from their childhood. Nothing could fix what he had done to his brother - not Talon, not some Overwatch doctor, and certainly not Hanzo himself. He full-drew his arrow, and fired.

Widowmaker must have forgotten him, because she didn’t even flinch until the fletching was all that stuck out from her back. His mother’s word, brushing the back of his memory. Attack from behind when you can, Hanzo. No one wants to see death come for them.

Widowmaker’s legs gave out, and she folded onto the walkway. The woman with the windblown hair gaped at him, mouth making an “o”. She was spattered with Widowmaker’s blood. For a sharp moment, no one moved or spoke. Get away, the Dragon snarled, making his tattoo burn. Get back, get away, safe and high. Get away.

Like a lightning bolt, a glittering thread of golden light appeared, a line connecting Widowmaker to a woman who floated into Hanzo’s view.

It was the woman with the wings from earlier, holding her staff aloft, aiming the light at Widowmaker. The ape had called her a doctor. Hanzo got a good look at her now, pale-blonde hair
and angelic features. She looked barely over twenty, but she tugged the arrow out of Widowmaker’s chest with the practiced, unflappable hands of a surgeon.

As soon as it was free of Widowmaker’s chest, the wound it had left began to close before Hanzo’s eyes. She was… healing her. That was what the staff did, it’s how the ape had rallied after his battle with the squad of Talon agents. He’d thought Widowmaker was the one Genji had been after. Had he made a mistake?

“What are you doing?” It was the girl with the hair, tugging her goggles up to her forehead. She had a british accent, and sounded almost as angry as Genji had earlier.

“We could bring her back,” the doctor said. “Capture, not kill. Imagine what she could tell us about Talon.”

Hanzo leaned back, looking away, feeling outside of this heated interaction, whatever it was. Under the sound of them arguing, he heard something tinkling, like bells or stones clicking together. It sounded familiar, but he couldn’t place it. He looked up and out, scanning the Shimada grounds for its source, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. He heard it again, above him, coming from the roof…

The roof. It was the sound of the tiles. Of footsteps on the tiles. He did a frenzied scan of every roof, but saw no one at first. He looked more carefully. The sound again, and finally, he caught it. Atop the temple, the clay shingles were bending under the weight of…

Nothing. The shingles moved, but there was no one there. He squinted his eyes. Something about the air in that spot rippled, like a mirage. His eyes went wide.

Cloaking.

As Hanzo drew back his arrow, something small and mechanical clattered down at their feet. He forced himself to tune it out. Just you and the target. His mother’s voice, whispering in his mind again. You’re slouching. He straightened, almost like he could feel her fingers between his shoulderblades, then released his bowstring.

The shimmering effect intensified as the arrow whipped by it. Whoever, or whatever it was, it was on the move. He drew again, leading the shot this time. It got closer this time, and heard a faint voice gasp as the arrow flew by. The tiles were cracking and slipping now with each hastened footstep. Hanzo snarled, and pulled another arrow from his quiver.

“No!” The voice was behind him. He tried to tune out the rage and panic, ignore whatever was happening beside him. Just you and the target. The shimmering mirage was moving to the back of the shrine now, trying to drop down and escape into the city below the motte. Once that happened, it would be gone for good. Hanzo breathed in, held it, breathed out. He planted his feet, squared his shoulders, gauged the angle, then shot.

The arrow whistled over the zen garden in a clean arc. It felt slow, too slow, like it took the arrow minutes to sail over the yard to the shrine’s roof. The mirage got to the edge and jumped, just as the arrow smashed down, shattering roof tile. Hie eyes searched, frantically, for the telltale shimmer of the cloaking, but it was no use. Whhatever it was, it was gone.

Hanzo finally turned and looked again at Widowmaker, or rather, where Widowmaker should have been. All he saw was a brief, warped, faded image of the lavender-skinned woman. Low, distant, Hanzo heard her voice whisper “Adieu.” Then she was gone.

An argument broke out, between the doctor and the girl with the pulse pistols. He felt distinctly
Those dark, hooded eyes again, squinting at him. McCree walked towards him with a steady, chaingang pace, spurs jingling. Hanzo could have gotten away, easily, before McCree got to him, but it felt like the American’s look had somehow pinned him in place. *Just you and the target.*

He was handsome up close. The thought invaded his mind before Hanzo could block it out. The scruffy beard and his wild, dark hair suited his sunken eyes and appraising expression. McCree stopped a few feet in front of him, staring him down. Hanzo got the distinct impression he didn’t like what he saw. McCree knelt down, then came back up with something in his hand. It was a tiny mechanical device, surely the one that had fallen down at their feet moments earlier. It glowed electric blue, and was decorated with a stylized, boxy skull.

“Portable teleporter,” McCree thrummed to no one in particular. “Fancy. Ever seen it’s like, Ms. Tracer? Teleportin’ seems like your area.”

The girl with the windblown hair turned away from her argument with the doctor. “Not how it works, luv.” She looked down at the device in McCree’s hand. “Nah, never seen anything like this. Winston might know.” The girl, Ms. Tracer, apparently, looked up at Hanzo. “Who’s this?” It was clipped, sharp, still angry about Widowmaker getting away. He looked past McCree and Tracer at the doctor. She was wiping the blood off her hands and staring daggers at him. He had no idea why.

McCree sighed, adjusted the brim of his hat, looked down at the tops of his shoes. “Well, it’s been a good few years, and we were never introduced proper, but... my money’s on Hanzo Shimada.”

It was a curious statement. Hanzo was very sure he had never met this American before, had never *seen* him before he arrived in Hanamura a week ago. They certainly had *not* been introduced, because if they had, this American would have pronounced his name properly, not with a long “a” like “Hayanzo”.

At the mention of his name the girl, Ms. Tracer, leaned back on her heels like she’d been struck by lightning. “You’re not dead!” She said it with surprise, as if he should have been. She laughed, the edges of her mouth curving up. “He didn’t do it...” Another puzzle. What had he not done?

He should have seen it coming when Ms. Tracer’s face twisted from amused awe to a scowl of anger; when the light of the device strapped to her chest bloomed with blue light and hummed to a higher pitch; when her hand closed into a fist. In the blink of an eye, she went from a few feet to a few inches in front of him. He saw the closed fist an instant before it connected with his jaw. He never would have guessed, from those skinny arms of hers, that this girl could hit so hard.

“Your own brother? What the hell’s wrong with you? Arsehole! Bloody tosser!”

McCree pulled the angry girl off him, holding back her flailing limbs as she continued to spout barbs at him. “Don’t mess up his face too bad, there, Ms. Tracer,” McCree said, “It’s about all he’s got left goin’ for him.” It was not kindly said, not a friendly jest. It was dry, biting, meant to be cruel. As Hanzo worked his jaw, he looked at each of their faces. Tracer was furious, McCree was disdainful, and the doctor was smirking at his injury with satisfaction.

*Genji’s friends.*

The Dragon had been right; he should have left before any of them realized he was gone, disappeared as Widowmaker had. He was just as much their enemy. Like a fool, he’d spent a week ogling this American from afar, never imagining what McCree might think of the man that tried to
murder his friend. Ashamed and in pain, Hanzo turned back into the groundskeeper’s house and walked swiftly away, hoping none of them shot him in the back.

Hanzo escaped out the back door. He’d climbed up to the roof of the building when he spied McCree following after him. “Hey now, hold on there.” The American lifted the brim of his hat, looking up at him.

“What?” Hanzo bit off the word. “Come to mock me again?”

McCree sighed and tucked his thumbs into his belt, looking almost sheepish. “Look. Genji’s not a moron and I ain’t neither. We know you been sneakin’ around here, past few days.”

Hanzo stiffened. “And?”

“And, while I could go a month o’ Sundays before seeing that mean face of yours again, Genji’s lookin’ to keep you around. He forgave ya’, for Christ’s sake, the least you could do is talk to him.”

Hanzo pursed his lips. “A month of Sundays is just a month.”

McCree’s brows came together. “Not, it’s… It’s like, thirty sundays. It’s a bunch of Sundays.”

“A month would be four Sundays.”

“No, it’s… Sundays are a long day, it’s… Nevermind.” McCree sighed. “Me and Genji and Angie and Miss Tracer and all are goin’ to some club tomorrow night with your cousin.”

“Keiko?” Hanzo laughed her name like the joke she was.

McCree scowled at him. “Yeah, her, the girl who’s doin’ your job now.”

Another barb. Hanzo bristled. “Poorly,” he said.

“Well, compared to kicking your brother off a balcony then skippin’ town, I’d say she’s doing pretty well.”

Hanzo looked away. “You know nothing.”

“Boy, I know everything. I was there. Me, Angie, and Reyes. Blackwatch had lines on you and your daddy for years. After he bit it, we showed up to do surveillance on the changeover of authority. Just in time to watch you cut Genji up like a Christmas ham. Hell, how did you think he ended up in Overwatch anyway? How’d you think he lived through it?”

Normally, Hanzo had control over most of his emotions. Fear, sadness, even joy… But he did not have a tight grip on his anger, and certainly not when discussing his relationship with Genji. “If you can call what he is now a life,” he spat.

For a moment, McCree didn’t say anything, just stared up at him with a slack jaw and furrowed brow. “Yer a real piece of work, you know that? Fine. Show up or don’t, I don’t give a damn.” McCree turned from him, and for the first time, Hanzo saw him take his hat off. Underneath, his dark hair was an unkempt mess. Inside the hat, around the brim, Hanzo saw something written in black. It looked like a name. Hanzo couldn’t quite read it from here, but it definitely wasn’t “Jesse McCree.”

“Sundays are twenty-four hours long,” Hanzo said.

“What?”
“Sundays. They are no longer or shorter than any other day in a week.”

McCree turned around and pointed his hat up at Hanzo. “You—” His face scrunched up with frustration. “Never give me a reason to shoot you.” McCree replaced his hat, and left, back through the doorway.

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, the next chapter is Time Machine, Chapter Thirteen: Vanity.

Hanzo, you cheeky fucker.

One last thing, guys. I've been streaming right after the chapter is posted, but it occurred to me that people might rather just, y'know, read it first. So I was thinking of either delaying the stream or maybe even doing a picarto stream after where I read it aloud, then hopped onto Overwatch for a game. I'm not an amazing reader, but it might be fun! What do you guys think? Let me know in the comments!!

twitter
tumblr
The next night, Hanzo checked out of his hotel.

His limited belongings sat beside him on the roof of Rikimaru Ramen, wrapped up in his spare kyudo-gi. Storm Bow felt light laid across his lap. The steady bass from Club Cerisier thumped up from across the street. Keiko, Genji, and the three Overwatch agents were already inside.

One brief appearance, for Genji’s sake, he willed, then I will disappear. Hanzo peered down at the cracked street, and an image of his skull dashed against the hard pavement invaded his mind. It was unbidden, but thoughts like this had become so common over the years that they no longer bothered him. They were a dull image amidst an already constant, dull ache.
“Ueda!”

The voice came from below, a conspiratorial stage whisper. Hanzo peered over the edge. A balding man looked left and right, then moved back into an alleyway next to the club. A stocky guy in an ugly shirt waited for him there.

The bald man answered in curt, breathy Japanese. “What do you want, Funaki?”

“Listen, Ueda—” the stocky guy, Funaki, looked around, “—how much longer do I need to keep those things at the club?”

_Ueda-san!_ Between the distance and the bald head, Hanzo hadn’t recognized him. He’d been one of his accountants.

“That’s not for you to know,” Ueda said.

“It’s bringing heat down on the whole block. Everyone knows about what happened at Rikimaru. A lot of weird people have been coming around since then.”

“If you heard about Rikimaru, then you know Shimada-kai protected it.”

“The place nearly got destroyed in the process! I don’t want some weird guy in a mask shooting up my club.”

Guy in a mask. The man in black that had tried to kill Genji.

“He won’t. The Shimada clan will make sure of that. For free, need I remind you. Or if you prefer, we could just let an enemy family have you. You want to start paying protection again?”

“No…” Funaki said, defeated.

Since when did any business in Hanamura not pay protection to the Shimadas? Was Keiko so lazy that she couldn’t even get a few thugs together once a month to collect? And what “thing” was she forcing the club owner to hold on to? Did it have anything to do with Talon, or Overwatch?

*It is not your business anymore,* he told himself. But what if Keiko got Genji involved, as she always had?

Hanzo hummed, watching Ueda go back to stand by the door. Hanzo found a spot on the roof to hide Storm Bow and his belongings, then ledge by ledge, made his way down to the street. He took a breath, then marched with purpose towards the door of the club, letting Ueda see him. The man raised his chin in recognition.

“Master Shimada,” he said in his thin, familiar voice.

“I am no one’s master,” Hanzo mumbled.

“A shame,” Ueda murmured. They made eye contact and for a few moments, held it.

Hanzo took a single step forward. “What is the club owner hiding for Keiko?”

Ueda now looked anywhere but at him. “That’s Shimada Clan business,” he said.

“And?”

“And if you were still a member of the clan, I might tell you,” Ueda said. “Perhaps, if you were
running the clan again, I would tell you.”

Hanzo grunted. “Keiko would not simply bow her power to me.”

“Not simply, no,” Ueda said. “Doesn’t mean it couldn’t be done.”

Neither of them looked at one another. In Hanzo’s memory, Keiko’s voice taunted him. *Go ahead, Dragon Boy.* He left Ueda’s side in silence - not a yes, but not a no, either. At the door, the bouncer gave him a bland once-over, then waved him inside.

The club was two stories of poor taste. Wood panelling framed the deep, rectangular room. Hanzo wondered if it was stained dark to seem classier, or in the hopes that in the dim light no one would see it. The flare of the pink, spinning spotlights hurt his eyes. The bar was reflective glass, lit with neon lights. It reminded Hanzo of candy in cellophane wrappers - perhaps suggestive of the syrupy, alcoholic concoctions likely doled out there.

The dance floor swarmed with bodies twitching to the choking beat coming from the club’s many speakers. The DJ was raised above them on a dais, encased in glass, like an idol. The smell was hideous: the medicinal scent of spirits, a heavy cloud of cigarettes, sweat. It was so thick he could almost feel it on his bare skin.

“Well, fuck me in half!”

The clarion cry rang out even over the club’s deafening music. Hanzo only knew one person with such a shrill voice. He wrinkled his nose as he spied her, tall and grinning, peeling people out of her way as she walked towards him.

*You’re slouching.* His shoulders were curled forward, like a cat preparing to strike. Taking in a breath, he straightened his back and lifted his chin, facing her. He wasn’t a cat - he was a dragon.

Before she got to him, two syndicate enforcers elbowed in front of her, hands at their hips or in their jackets. The Viper pushed through them like double-doors.

“Don’t bother,” Keiko said, “he’d just kill you anyway.”

She was a full head taller than he was, and rail-thin in her overlarge, crumpled suit. The sleeves and jacket were both rolled to her elbows, showing off an intricate, writhing serpent tattoo on each forearm. Her pupils were two drops of ink in the sunken, wild whites of her eyes. A reptilian smile reached almost full around her face. With a wave of her hand, the enforcers moved back to her sides. It was so strange, seeing members of the family follow her orders. *It’s only Keiko.* He gave her a curt, nigh-imperceptible bow.

“*Kumichō-sama.*”

Keiko laughed, that acerbic cackle. If it had been grating from a distance, it was ear-splitting this close. “It must taste like shit on your tongue to call me that, Dragon Boy,” she said, shoving one hand in the pocket of her high-waisted trousers. “You ever been here before?”

“A few times,” Hanzo said.

Keiko peered at him under her brows, tiny pupils almost disappearing. “But just to collect Funaki’s protection money, right?”

Something in it was accusatory, and Hanzo bristled. “It was for family business, yes.”
More of that abrasive laugh. “Right, ‘Family’. There’s a word you don’t know the meaning of,” she said.

Enough. He would learn nothing trying to interrogate her alone, and even these few minutes with her was enough to chew through his nerves. “Where is Genji?”

“See what I mean? Not even a hug and a kiss for your dear cousin.” A trail of smoke traced the path of Keiko’s cigarette as she pointed vaguely at the club’s open second floor at the top of a spiral staircase. “He's upstairs in VIP.” Hanzo nodded to her and pushed past, watching the enforcers warily.

“Still say he shoulda killed your ass,” Keiko hissed when he was at her shoulder. “Or cut you up as bad as you did him. The Shimada Brothers Freak Show. I could sell tickets.” The acrid smoke from her cigarette hit him in the face. Hanzo turned to glare up at her.

Go ahead, Dragon Boy, her grin said, and oh, how he wanted to. Unbidden came an image of an arrow slotting into her throat, choking off that laugh of hers. He indulged in it as he fanned the cigarette smoke away with one hand.

“A disgusting habit,” he grunted. The superior grin on her ugly face cracked. Hanzo turned from her and went to the stairs before she could think of a comeback.

Genji was standing at the top of the stairs, waiting for him. It was odd to see him clothed - Hanzo had only seen him in his armored suit, sauntering around the castle or meditating in the shrine. This shirt and tie looked foolish with his expressionless helmet.

Genji’s three companions were seated behind him at a garish, pink vinyl booth. The American sat facing the opposite direction. When Tracer and the doctor looked Hanzo’s way, McCree smoothed his bare, furry arm over the back of the booth and peered at him askance. His shaggy, chestnut hair fell over his hooded eyes. Handsome by accident, a contrast to his own careful preening. Hanzo didn’t miss the bottle on the table beside him, either.

Movement in the corner of his vision - it was Genji, walking closer. “Thank you for coming, brother.”

Brother. The name should have made him elated, or made his skin crawl, but when Genji said it, Hanzo didn’t feel anything. He followed Genji to the table, hesitating before slipping in beside the American.

After a few minutes of long silences, cool greetings, and awkward introductions, McCree invited the two women to dance. Offering them an escape, Hanzo knew. It was as clear as the blue bruise on his jaw that Genji’s companions did not wish to be near him. He eyed the bottle again.

Hanzo got up to let them shuffle out. The American sauntered to the steps, body no longer hidden beneath the red serape and odd chestplate. His was well-built, filled out with age, sturdy, fat over muscle. Strong. McCree disappeared on the stairs, but Hanzo looked over the balcony and found him again, re-convening with Keiko on the dance floor. There were six Shimada bodyguards in a formation nearby, all guarding her.

“I cannot believe they made the Viper the head of the family,” Hanzo huffed.

The half-man chuckled. “She did not let it change her a bit.”

Down below, the four had split into partners, McCree and the british girl - Tracer, McCree had called her, though Genji had introduced her as Lena Oxton - bumping hips together and laughing. Keiko
was dancing with the doctor, though keeping a distance more polite than Hanzo thought her capable of.

“You do not engage in such frivolities?” Hanzo asked. He hoped Genji would take the first drink, or offer him one, but he did neither.

“I used to, believe me.” A smile was in Genji’s voice. “I would be out there with them if not for…”

*If not for me.* Hanzo paused, then said, “You should.” He was watching McCree again, who clumsily tried to keep up with Tracer’s perfectly-timed steps.

“Yeah?”

“Mm.” Down below, Genji’s four friends laughed and danced, carefree. That was who his real brother had been, not this peaceful, pieced-together creature before him now. As much as Hanzo had wanted Genji to be serious when they were young, now more than anything, he wanted him to be a young fool again. *You belong with them, not with me.*

“Why did you come?” The half-man’s voice was colder now.

Hanzo looked up. When met with the visored face again, he lowered his gaze to the Japanese whisky on the table. Tired of waiting, he stretched his arm out and pulled it close. “You requested I be here.”

“A request means you can refuse,” Genji said.

Hanzo’s hands closed around the bottle. He could smell the alcohol in the air, almost taste it. He poured himself a drink.

“You do not want to talk to me.” The half-man knew it the way Genji used to know what he was thinking. It conflicted with the visored face, the tinny voice. Hanzo shut his eyes and focused on simple things - the comforting weight of the glass, the astringent taste on his tongue, the heat of it in the back of his throat.

Genji stood up, his mechanical hands splayed on the table. “I am going to go *engage in frivolities*. Unless you plan to kick me off a balcony for it again.”

Hanzo looked at him at last. This half-man barbed him enough by merely existing. Hanzo would not suffer him salting the wound. “Genji, do not-”

“Come on, there is one right here. It would be easy. Take out Keiko while you are at it.” Hanzo’s fingers pinched the thick glass, thinking of Ueda’s subtle offer outside the club. “And Lena, and McCree and Dr. Ziegler. Hell, why don’t you call up the dragons, just to see how many people in here are your enemies.”

Now it was Hanzo’s turn to stand. “They all are.” Did Genji not know Keiko at all? Hadn’t he seen the way they all looked at him?

“No, they’re not.” Genji reached forward and gripped Hanzo’s shoulders. His hands were cold and stiff. “Why do you do this? Why do you get on your knees for the bad guys, then *step on* everyone that actually gives a shit about you?”

A foolish statement. Hanzo laughed. “Who does? Keiko? She would kill me as soon as breath, if she *could.*” Her empty challenge, all those years ago. “And those… friends of yours. They look at me as if I am the dirt beneath their shoes.” His chin ached. *It’s all he’s got left going for him.*
Genji’s grip on his shoulders tightened. “Can you not understand why?”

He could not stand this any longer, his temper getting the better of him as it hadn’t in years. He shrugged Genji’s cold hands off. “I understand more than you could ever know. I gave up everything I worked for. My life, my home, my legacy - as if it could undo what I had done.”

“I am here, Hanzo.” Genji sank into his shoulders, as he always used to. He spread his mechanical fingers, looking down at them. “I know I am not… not the same as you remember, but it’s me.”

“No. It is not.” I wish it was. I wish I could take it all back, go back to the way things were. Please, do not do this to me. I cannot take it. Exhausted, Hanzo sank into the booth and reached for his whisky. It was all too tangled. Genji’s face sewn onto a different man. Himself, forgiven yet reviled. Two brothers, not dragons and not men; neither dead nor alive. Hanzo knocked back the rest of his drink, hungry to return to his normal, dull, unfeeling haze. Simple. The alcohol burned down his throat. Sterilizing, cauterizing… harsh, then clean.

The half-man slumped forward at his shoulder in defeat. This fight brought nothing but pain to both of them. The one kindness Hanzo could afford him was to disappear.

“Go, Genji,” Hanzo said, staring down at Genji’s friends on the dance floor. “Be… frivolous.”

Genji put a cold, dead hand on his shoulder. “Come down with me.”

He slouched forward over his glass, and could almost feel his mother’s hand stabbing him between his shoulderblades. “No.”

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It took the rest of the bottle to drown out he and Genji’s fight. The taste was kinder to him than the cheap sake he usually carried around, but in the end, they both got him drunk the same way. The whisky remaining in the bottle acted like a timer - counting down to when he would leave Hanamura for another year. Once gone, he would never see the half-man again. He only hoped, in his current state, that he could still get up to the roof to get his bow.

Down on the dance floor, some song had come on that Hanzo vaguely recognized. There was a time where Genji and Keiko had played it on repeat, thumping through the walls of his brother’s room, cut off halfway through and repeated; paused and rewound.

Keiko spread her arms, elbowing back other dancers until a space was cleared around her on the floor. After a great deal of coercion, Genji moved in step with her, and they performed a practiced, energetic dance. Tracer and the doctor were shoulder to shoulder, watching and giggling. Frivolous. Hanzo sucked down his drink, then reached to pour himself the last of the whisky.

“Whoa, there. Save some for the rest of us.”

Hanzo turned. It was the American, McCree, walking towards him from the top of the stairs. His spurs sounded intimidating as they got closer, and Hanzo forced himself not to quail when McCree stopped and stood over him.

“What do you want,” Hanzo asked.

McCree reached forward and pulled the bottle out of Hanzo’s hand. “This,” he said. For a moment, their fingers touched, hot and calloused. He reached across Hanzo for the glass at his old seat, and for a moment they were facing one another, close after having watched him so long from a distance. Hanzo could smell the cigar smoke on his plaid shirt, overpowering the rich musk beneath.
Masculine. Hanzo was glad he was already flushed from the alcohol. Too soon, McCree leaned back and sank into the seat across from him.

“Didn’t peg you for a drinker,” McCree said, pouring himself the last of the whisky. “But here you are, up here hoggin’ a whole bottle by your lonesome.”

Hanzo grunted, looking at the now-empty bottle of Yamazaki, and McCree’s thick digits wrapped around the neck. Hanzo’s eyelids fluttered, then he pushed himself to his feet. “I am finished.”

“Hey, where you goin’?”

“Away.” As Hanzo turned to leave, McCree got up and gripped him by the arm. Part of him bristled that anyone would dare to grab him like that - and part of him was thrilled to be touched.

He scowled at McCree. “Release me.”

“What about Genji?”

“You can have him!” Slurred, it came out sulky and childish. He wished he’d snuck out of the club before McCree had seen him this way.

McCree glared, the hand on Hanzo’s bicep tightening, then releasing him entirely. “You’re trashed. Sit down, I’ll get you some water. Genji’ll come back up here soon enough.”

“All the more reason to be gone now,” Hanzo said. “I am not wanted.”

McCree paused. “Funny enough,” he said, scratching his unkempt beard, “you’re right about that, amigo. Let me show you something.” He thumbed around on his phone, then turned it to show Hanzo the screen. It was a website with a chunky, law-and-order style logo that read “A Moment in Crime”. The page had a list of names with photos and prices beside them, all in American dollars, and all in the millions. Hanzo only recognized the top name and photo on the list: Jesse McCree. The picture of him was old - McCree looked scrappier; wiry and smug.

“You know what this is?” McCree asked.

“No.”

“It’s the top ten bounties in world. Price-wise.”

Hanzo weaved his finger until it landed on the top of the screen. “Your name is here.”

“You. I’m a wanted man, darlin’.” The American said ‘wanted’ with a rakish smile and bedroom eyes. Was he… flirting?

Hanzo swayed on his feet. “Who wants you dead this badly?”

McCree shrugged, as if there wasn’t sixty-million dollars on his head. “Not sure. Maybe Talon, maybe the UN, hell, maybe the good ol’ US-of-A. I’ve climbed up that list over the years, but until a day or so ago, I’ve never been number one. There was always one guy ahead of me in line. Know who it was?”

Hanzo tried, for two seconds, to piece together the point of this conversation, then his drunk brain gave up. “No,” he spat.

“You,” McCree said.

Realization flooded him. “That explains the assassins.”
McCree raised his messy eyebrows. “Hm?”

“Since I left the Shimada Clan, I have been pursued by assassins,” Hanzo said, leaning back against the table, speaking mostly to himself. “Of course, when the clan ran out of formidable fighters, they would hire elsewhere.” He looked from the ugly, green carpet back to McCree’s scruffy face. “Why do you show me this? To brag that you have outstripped me in worth?”

“I didn’t outstrip you, Shimada,” McCree said. “You got took off the list.”

“Told off?”

“Yup. Near a decade of bein’ top dog and then, poof.” McCree pulled a matchbook and cigar out from his breast pocket. Hanzo’s eyes lingered on the way McCree’s shirt hugged his chest, on his fingers lifting the cigar just shy of his lips. “Bounty like that only disappears for two reasons: the guy’s dead, or—” the American snapped a match to life and puffed until the end of his cigar lit, “—the guy frontin’ the money doesn’t want him dead anymore.”

I am not dead, Hanzo lamented. He looked down at the floor at Genji, then to his tall, grinning cousin beside him. “Keiko,” he said. “She was the one who hired the assassins. Of course she was.” Hanzo felt foolish for not realizing it sooner. “She has always wanted me dead.”

“Not anymore, she don’t,” McCree flicked his wrist, snuffing the match out and leaving it on the table. “Or, at least, she ain’t tryin’ so hard.”

“She would never forgive me for Genji’s death. She told me so herself.”

“Genji’s not dead.”

Down below, the song ended. Keiko and Genji put arms around each other’s shoulders and laughed. Tracer rushed up to them and gushed with excitement. The doctor approached, giving them a little clap. Theatrically, Genji bowed.

McCree moved to stand next to him. “Who do you think got her to take you off the list?”

Hanzo said nothing, and for a time, the two of them stood in silence, watching the four below laugh and dance.

“You had a lot of assassins come for you?” McCree asked.

Hanzo hesitated. “Yes.”

“What about the Moonless Night?”

“The what?”

“The Moonless Night,” McCree repeated. “They’re an assassin. Known for takin’ out the top guys on the list.”

Hanzo pushed his brows together. “How would I recognize them?”

McCree shrugged. “Always kills during the new moon, and always cuts the bounty’s throat. Then, they leave a sword stabbed in the chest. Overkill, if y’ask me.”

“This does not help me identify them,” Hanzo said.
“Anyone ever tried to kill you on the new moon?”

Hanzo searched his memory, but the alcohol made it fuzzy. “I do not believe so.”

McCree hummed. “Anyone that tried to kill you ever get out of the bargain alive?”

Keiko, Hanzo thought, but he said, “No.”

McCree looked at the list on his screen for a silent moment before thumbing his phone off and stuffing it in the pocket of his jeans. “Well then. Guess I got nothin’ to worry about.”

Hanzo heard an odd hum, then in a flash of blue, Tracer appeared at the top of the stairs. She froze there a moment, then approached the table warily. Keiko, Genji, and Dr. Ziegler climbed the stairs behind her, all chatting amongst themselves.

“You’re still here?” Keiko scoffed and slid in like oil beside him.

Hanzo huffed. “I was about to leave.”

“Leave?” It was the british girl, Tracer. She sounded almost disappointed.

“Yes,” Hanzo said, a bit looser than he intended.

“Brother… are you drunk?”

“No,” Hanzo protested, too loud.

“Liar,” McCree said. “He polished off the whisky.”

“What?” Tracer picked up the empty bottle, then deflated into the booth.

“We’ll get another one,” Keiko assured, putting an unwelcome arm around Hanzo’s shoulder. “Helpin’ me drink away the Shimada fortune tonight, eh Dragon Boy?”

Hanzo clumsily shrugged her off, thinking again of Ueda, and of the removed bounty. “How does the family make money now, anyway?”

Keiko laughed. “It doesn’t.”

A lie, Hanzo thought. He hid it poorly, his scowl deepening.

“If you don’t like it you shouldn’t have left, Shimada,” Keiko said. “I’m the boss bitch now. I’m gonna take this shit family down one bottle at a time. Naito! Baby, come here, we need more booze!”

---

“Genji, Genji, Genji!” Keiko veered into the half-man’s shoulder, then clutched him under her arm. “I ain’t ready to go home yet. We need one of your famous last call ideas.”

No longer drunk, but not yet sober, Hanzo managed to walk across the pavement without stumbling. Streetlights buzzed overhead, illuminating the abandoned Hanamura street that lead from Club Cerisier to Shimada Castle. Up ahead, Tracer was blinking back and forth and singing loudly, and badly. Hanzo stood in the back, Keiko’s bodyguards keeping a watchful eye a good distance beyond that.
“Ah, shit,” Genji murmured. “Um… damn, I need to be drunk to think of that kind of stuff, Keiko.”

“You can’t get drunk, thanks to this bitch!” Keiko pointed at Dr. Ziegler, who Hanzo had learned over the course of the night was named “Angela” and sometimes called “Mercy”. Hanzo wondered why the doctor forbade his brother from drinking, but didn’t have the will to chew on the thought much, especially with McCree keeping step with him a few feet away.

Like Genji, Mercy was sober and it showed. She seemed as tired of Keiko as Hanzo was. “Do not call me that word,” she said calmly.

“Ooo, that was hot,” Keiko hissed. “How about when we get back to the castle you put me in my place, Mommy?”

Mercy examined her nails. “There’s not enough alcohol in this world for that, Ms. Shimada.”

“Hey! Quit callin’ me that.”

Mercy only smirked.

“What-ev-er happened to the heroes? What-ev-er happened to the heroes?” Tracer’s squeaky singing voice, bouncing off the buildings, changed weirdly as she teleported mid-verse.

McCree was mostly quiet, chewing his cigar and walking with his hat tipped down. The only sign that he had kept up with them was his slow, weaving steps. He tripped, then swerved into Hanzo’s side, nearly bowling him over. Unconsciously, Hanzo reached up to catch him, clutching the American’s big torso between both hands. Through the fabric, his body felt warm and solid, and it was a few long, drunken seconds before Hanzo realized McCree had already regained his balance. His arm was around Hanzo’s shoulder, hard and metal against his back.

“No more heroes an-y-more,” Tracer sang, “No more heroes an-y-more!”

Hanzo looked up and caught McCree’s eye for a moment before the American chuckled and split off, going back to staring at his feet. Hanzo stopped in the street, next to Rikimaru. His bow, his things were on the roof. He was supposed to leave tonight. He didn’t have a hotel room.

“Keep up, Shimada,” McCree thrummed, stuffing his hands in his pockets and waiting for him.

“Yeah! Keep up Shimada!” It was Tracer, far ahead, and then just as soon next to McCree, swinging off his elbow like a kid. McCree nearly fell over.

“I need to leave,” Hanzo said.

“Leave?” Tracer sounded doubly insulted this time.

“Yes,” Hanzo said. “I do not have a place to stay. I must go. I meant to leave earlier.”

By now, Mercy, Genji and Keiko had walked back as well.

“Just stay at the damn castle, Hanzo,” Keiko said. “You’re there sneaking around all the time anyway.”

“Yes, you should stay at the castle with us.” It was Genji.

“One night,” McCree put in, smooth as the whisky they’d been drinking. “Then you can leave in the mornin’, when you’re up to it.”
Hanzo hesitated. The whole group was looking at him, expectant. He peered up at the roof. “Storm bow is there…” he said, weakly.

“I’ll get it!” Genji rushed by him, enthusiastic. He started to scale the side of the building with practiced ease. “Go on ahead,” he called from above, “I’ll bring it back to the castle.”

Keiko waved them on. They got to the end of the street, and for the first time in ten years, Hanzo didn’t slink inside like a cockroach - he walked through the front gates of Shimada Castle.

Once inside, the bodyguards slunk off, leaving the five of them to walk the castle. They stumbled beyond the shrine and zen garden, Tracer singing, Keiko whistling, Mercy’s heels and McCree’s spurs clicking against the wood. Hanzo walked next to McCree until he realized he was there amidst them without Genji - then, he slowed down and followed a few feet behind. They walked past the second gate, through the courtyard and the gazebo, and finally into the main house.

The great hall looked much as it had days ago when he’d come here to honor Genji. Some of his arrows were even still lodged in the wooden supports and tatami. Hanzo’s eyes traced up the tall banner hanging in the center. *Dragon’s Head, Snake’s Tail.* As Tracer skipped around the big, open room, with Mercy and McCree following and having a quiet conversation, Keiko moved up beside him.

“All these years, you’ve been comin’ here, and I never got to ask what you think of my new decorations, Dragon Boy.” She elbowed him.

“You put that scroll up,” Hanzo realized, then sighed. “Of course you did.” He could see her grinning in his periphery.

“Hilarious, right? The big, bad Dragon of the big, bad Shimada Clan. You were supposed to be the best Daddy the family’s ever had, and I was supposed to fuck off and die in a ditch somewhere. Now, you’re banished in disgrace, and I’m runnin’ the whole operation. Funny how things work out.”

“What did you do with the original scroll?” he asked.

“The one with the old motto?” Keiko was grinning again, he could almost feel it, like bugs crawling on his skin. “I burned it.” She said it with such satisfied conviction.

Hanzo’s chest tightened. “That scroll had been in our family for centuries, Keiko,” he said.

“And now it’s ash,” she hissed.

Keiko clapped him on the shoulder like she’d done him a favor before following the others back into the residence. Hanzo was alone in the great hall.

He read the banner again and again. He thought about the chipping paint, the moss on the rocks, the abandoned houses and broken beams. Their once great house, rotting away.

*Dragon’s Head, Snake’s Tail.*

Hanzo thought of Ueda’s offer - of Widowmaker’s. They thought Hanzo could come back and rule the family again. They were both wrong, but so was Keiko. The Shimada clan was not ash. It was twisted, perverted, but not gone. Not yet.

Hanzo walked forward and knelt before his dusty, unused sword; beneath the blasphemous joke Keiko had the gall to hang in *his* castle. “Father,” Hanzo whispered, then, quieter, “Mother. If our
clan must die, it will not do so in quiet shame. It will die with honor.”

And so will I.

When he killed Keiko and destroyed the castle, the guards would come for him. He would die fighting, an honorable death, the one the Shimada elders, Keiko’s assassins, not even his own brother, had had the mercy to give him. A decade of emptiness, at long last over. Hanzo and the Shimada Clan would die, but they would die like dragons.

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, the next chapter is Time Machine, Chapter Fifteen: Here and Now.
dun dun DUN!
This chapter was intense, but really enjoyable to write. Shimada Angst is my favorite thing to write >:33 I hope you guys enjoyed it!
Remember to join us for the stream https://www.twitch.tv/ingridarcher 9PM EST - ?? on 10/20 and if you'd like to see a different stream format, let me know in the comments ^_^

Follow me:

twitter
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Welcome back to May I!
First things first, **content warning: there is referenced physical abuse in this chapter.** It's not described, just mentioned.

Early chapter this week since Thursday I'll be at BLIZZCON!! If you'll be there too, and want to say "hi" dm me

**twitter**
**tumblr**

Thanks to everyone still reading! I'm trying to improve my chapter structure and ramp tension correctly so it's more "fun" to read, but I'm still learning, so thank you to everyone who's bearing with me so far <3

Also big thanks to my beta-readers milfordb, Jae, Doc, and Chiptooth! You guys are the best ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*The box smelled like BO. Santa Fe heat'll do that; a big, blue sky peeling its lips back for a hot, sunny grin. It's enough to make any man sweat.*

*McCree leaned back so his chair teetered on its back legs. His black cowboy boots were up on the aluminum table, crossed at the ankles. He’d folded his hands over his belly. Under his hat, he whistled some ancient tune, listening to the argument through the door.*

*“The spec ops guys, the freedom fighters, okay, but this kid’s a criminal. There’s no grey area here, Gabe.” Airy and crisp, this guy sounded like an action-movie hero. The voice that answered sounded more like the trailer’s voiceover.*

*“No grey area? Did you see him when they marched him in? He’s a child .”*

*“He’s old enough to know the difference between right and wrong.”*

*“Old enough to be charged as an adult and sent to max, is what he is. Jesus, I thought you had a soul.”*

*“You can’t save everyone, Gabriel.”*

*“We saved the whole fuckin’ world, Jack. Don’t tell me what I can’t do.”*

*The door opened, then slammed shut, and six feet of big and mean marched into the tiny, concrete room and slapped a file folder on the table.*

*“You two have a fight?” McCree prodded.*

*“Shut up.” The hairs on the back of McCree’s neck prickled. This guy’s voice was like a motorcycle accident - leather and skin scraping against gravel; chrome and a roaring engine. Filtered through*
the closed door didn’t do it justice. The guy’s face was almost as mean as his voice - a downturned mouth and thick, angry eyebrows, pale hacksaw scars criss-crossing every feature. Not an ugly face, but not a nice one. McCree had time to look him over while they stared each other down.

“What’s with the hat?” the guy said at last.

McCree shrugged. “Lawyer,” he said.

“We’re way past that, kid.” The guy bit down every word, like cracking teeth. He had fists for punching.

“I got rights-“

“We have body cameras, and you shot three of my squadron and a federal marshal. We’ve got enough angles I could cut the jury a feature-fuckin’-film, kid. You know what kind of heat killing cops gets? You shot up members of Overwatch. I could testify how each and every one of the people you murdered helped save the fuckin’ world. The jury’d be wiping their tears with your guilty verdict.”

McCree leaned the chair forward onto four legs.

“You’d be in for good. No parole, no time off for good behavior. Federal prison from today until your last day.”

McCree swallowed. “Or?”

A slow smile, more like a smirk, pushed out more wrinkles across the guy’s cheek. “Or you come with me.”

McCree perked up. “To Overwatch?” Disbelief. Maybe a little awe that he hoped this guy didn’t notice.

“Not exactly. You’re not gonna get a blue coat or anything. No press conferences, no medals, no sunshine up your ass. Just an opportunity to do some good.”

McCree chuckled, pulling his hat down over his eyes. Him, a little weed of a bastard grown up through the cracked, sunbleached, forgotten pavement of Route 66, doing good in the world? Yeah, right. “You’re a shit salesman. Should learn to read a room.”

The guy pulled the file open, slapped a pen down on it, and slid it across the table to McCree, presentation-wise. “I’m hoping I read it already.” Not bit off, not chewed up. Smooth, almost plaintive. Eyes hooded, firm but gentle. He somehow looked twenty years older this way.

McCree looked down at the open file. It was a pale white sheet and a lot of legal jargon written to be incomprehensible. There was a symbol at the top, red, black and grey. A reversed Overwatch sigil, a dagger, a bleached cow skull - a jet racing downward towards the empty line labelled “signature.”

Just an opportunity to do some good.

McCree pushed up the brim of his hat. The name written across his forehead whispered, By the end, the cowboy is always the good guy.

McCree stared at the block of text on the page. “Fuck it,” he said, and grabbed the pen.
The guy’s name, it turned out, was Gabriel Reyes, and the organization McCree had joined was something call “Blackwatch.” McCree didn’t have much in the way of belongings, so with the promise of a couple new shirts, he went with Reyes straight to the hypertrain station. Overwatch must have been some puppeteers, because they pulled enough strings for he and Reyes to get a private cabin. With his criminal record, McCree shouldn’t have been able to get a ticket. The guys who worked the train were all kinds of polite, not something he got a lot of out on Route 66. He could get used to this Overwatch thing.

Reyes got three calls during the trip, all of them about McCree’s recruitment. In one, he stayed stone-faced, placating the person on the other end of line with facts and figures, bragging about McCree’s ability with a gun. Another, he was firm, a commanding officer stating he didn’t have to explain himself. The last turned into a growling, roaring argument and ended with him hanging up the phone.

They hit the end of the line in Philly, where two plane tickets were waiting for them. McCree was sort of excited for the flight at first. By the time they deplaned in Madrid, however, the ground never felt so good.

McCree’ slammed his feet against the tiled floor, felt it radiate up his limbs, hard and satisfying, like pulling a trigger. McCree had never been on a plane before that day, and once they’d landed, he swore he’d never get in one again.

That vow lasted about ten minutes. He followed Reyes through an unmarked door, then out to the tarmac. There was a jet in the shape of the Blackwatch symbol, waiting there to take them to Geneva. Reyes had to drag him onboard by the knot of his kerchief, a hissing, spitting kitten grabbed by the scruff of the neck by its momma, pissed but placated. Reyes chatted with the pilot as they boarded. She kept looking at McCree like he was a fresh stain on her favorite shirt.

Reyes strapped him in like a baby to a booster seat, then the ground dropped out from under him. McCree stared out the window, transfixed, sweating and gripping the arms of the seat, unable to look away. He kicked his spurs at the thin carpet, thinking about the acres of air between him and the ground. He felt like he was falling upside-down. Why had he signed that damn paper?

The trip was blissfully faster than the previous one, and soon they swooped down onto Watchpoint Geneva’s landing strip.

Watchpoint: Geneva didn’t look like any base of operations McCree had ever been to. It looked like a fairy tail castle, a cathedral, all steel and glass that shone in the evening sun.

Some toehead with a comic-book jaw and a blue coat came out of the building’s double-doors to meet them.

“Gabriel,” he said. McCree recognized his voice from the box in Santa Fe.

“Jack.” Lips peeled back, upturned, teeth pressed into one another. McCree couldn’t tell if Reyes liked this guy or fucking hated him.

“How was the trip?” Tired, perfunctory - Jack didn’t really care.

“Fine, fine. Kid here gets squirrelly on planes.” Reyes hooked an arm around his neck, tugging him down. Rough in a paternal way. “I’ll knock that out of you soon enough.”

Jack’s eyes flicked in McCree’s direction, then past. “Go inside and get him in Athena’s database,” he sighed, then walked on, like McCree was an item to be inventoried, not a new recruit.
They walked into the palatial bay doors, through a glittering lobby and into a rec room. An enormous man was seated on one of the couches, and a tiny girl with a bob haircut sat cross-legged on the floor in front of him. She watched as he gesticulated with his meaty hand, telling a tale of a knight saving a princess. From the little girl’s reactions, McCree was pretty sure the princess wasn’t the character she empathized with. McCree guessed she was twelve or thirteen - not that much younger than he was, but still, why was there a kid at the O-dub HQ?

A stout, tiny man stood over a low table, schematics rolled out and held open with what looked like spare car parts. A blonde gal - she looked his own age, though that couldn’t be right - was knelt at the table beside him, smiling and talking with him in some slavic language McCree didn’t recognize.

Were these his new teammates? McCree imagined himself fighting beside them, wondering what each of their specialties were. Reyes leaned in. “You’ll get a translator with your comm,” he said. At the sound of his voice, the four people in the room looked up, then stared. The opposite of action-hero Jack, they gaped at him like a freak show. McCree swallowed and tipped his hat at the room.

“Howdy,” he said, making his voice as bright and charming as possible.

They all looked back down - everyone but the little girl. “Hey Reinhardt, who is that?” She was asking the big man.

The guy, Reinhardt, laughed nervously. “Ah, he’s a new recruit, Fareeha.”

Her eyes got big, and she open-mouth smiled at him. “He’s in Overwatch?” McCree puffed up a little, smiling back at her.

Reinhardt shot him a withering look. “Not exactly,” he said.

The little girl scrunched up her nose and, fearless, marched up to McCree and folded her arms, staring up at him. “What’s your name?”

“Jesse,” McCree said.

“Jesse what?” she demanded.

Reyes nodded at Fareeha when Jesse looked to him for guidance, like this was a totally normal introduction to the Overwatch team. “Jesse McCree,” he said, tipping his hat. “Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Miss-”

“Fareeha,” she said, snappy, jutting her chin out. “Fareeha Amari. Nice to meet you.”

“You seem pretty young to be in Overwatch, l’il lady.”

She glared at him. “So do you,” she said.

“She’s got you there,” Reyes said with a proud smile.

“Can I see your hat?” Fareeha asked.

McCree hesitated, then removed the hat and handed it over bottom-up, like a beggar. “Here ya’ go, but you gotta promise you’ll give it back.”

Fareeha nodded and took it by the brim with two hands, studying it. “Whose name is this?”

McCree balked. He looked to his side and saw Reyes peering with interest down at the felt-tip name written on the inside brim.
“I can read the roman alphabet,” Fareeha said. “This hat doesn’t say ‘Jesse McCree.’ Did you steal it?”

With her little steely eyes on him, McCree felt like he was in the box in Santa Fe again. He looked up and saw the room was gawking at him again. The little guy was glaring, like he thought he really had stolen it. “Naw, it,” McCree began, halting, shy of the strangers listening, “was my momma’s.”

Fareeha glared like she didn’t believe him. “Why do you have your mom’s hat? Where is she?”

Reyes’ eyes were boring a hole in the side of Jesse’s head. “I don’t rightly know,” he said earnestly.

Fareeha looked down at the name again. “Puh,” she started. “Pah-oole-eye-na.”

“Paulina,” McCree said.

“Pah-ooleeena,” she repeated back. “Pa-oolina Al... Al-vuh-ray-doo”

“Alvarado,” Reyes corrected.

“Al-va-ra-do,” Fareeha said. Reyes smiled that proud smile again.

She shrugged and put the oversized hat on her head. “Hey, Gabriel, what are those special police in America that wear hats like this?”

Reyes furrowed his brow. “U.S. Marshals?” It was a guess.

“Yeah! I’m a U.S. Marshal!” She pointed a finger-gun at McCree. “You’re under arrest, hat thief!”

McCree put up his hands, laughing. “Whoa, ya got me!”

“What are you up to, Fareeha?” The voice was warm and liquid, like scratching an itch. McCree turned, and gaped.

McCree had seen pretty girls before. Lovely or sexy or cute or sweet. Steel-eyed gals like little Fareeha would likely grow into. Fresh-faced girls like the blonde at the table who was staring at him like she was trying to dry-swallow a pill. But he’d never, ever, seen a woman like this.

Tall, with legs that seemed to grow up out of the ground and a laid back, top-of-the-food-chain stance. Her long hair that looked like it’d been painted with an ink brush; so did the sweeping tattoo under her left eye. In the blue coat, she was a cut and polished sapphire. She looked at Fareeha with a purse-lipped, affectionate smile and laser-sight eyes. A ferocious protector. She scared the shit out of him.

“Gabriel,” she said.

“Ana,” he answered. Short nods, clipped tones. They were fighting.

“Mom, look, I’m a U.S. Marshal!” Fareeha tilted the hat up and looked at the woman, Ana. Her mother. McCree saw the resemblance now.

“Where did you get that?” Ana’s laugh was scratchy and staccato. It reminded McCree of blown-out gunshots over TV-set speakers. Pa-oolina Al-vuh-raydo.

“It’s his,” Fareeha said, pointing at him.

Ana leaned around Gabriel and looked at McCree for the first time. She spied the torn leather vest,
the dusty kerchief, the Deadlock tattoo on his shoulder. Her smile dissolved. “Really, Gabriel? You brought him in here?” She said it like he was a stray dog. Like he was going to shit on her carpet. She snatched the hat off Fareeha’s head and shoved it into McCree’s chest. She leaned in to Gabriel and snarled at him in a whisper. McCree didn’t think anyone could manage to look scary next to Reyes, but this woman was terrifying.

“Look, you do what you want in your own little black-ops sandbox, Gabriel. I get it, and that’s fine. But if you insist on recruiting criminals, keep them away from my daughter.”

Ana Amari spared McCree one last, hard look before vice-grabbing Fareeha’s hand and dragging her out of the rec room. Reyes gripped him by the shoulder, a firm and comforting pressure, and marched him towards another door in the back. McCree’s spurs rattled in a chain-gang rhythm. He looked at the others - the big guy, the little guy, the pretty blonde. They were all looking at him the same way, faces like Ana’s tone of voice had been. Silently agreeing: keep that criminal away from us. He put his hat back on his head, and the name in the band burned into his forehead like a brand.

By the end, the cowboy is always the good guy. But McCree wasn’t a cowboy, riding into town on a high horse. He was just a black hat, a low-down desperado, a punk kid - a weed that managed to grow up through the cracks. He sighed as Reyes pushed through the door into a long hallway.

Why had he signed that damn paper?

“I didn’t want things to start off that way,” Reyes told him when the door to the rec room closed. “But, maybe it’s better you know right away - that’s just how it is. The members of Overwatch look down on us because we do what’s got to be done, and sometimes that means we get our hands dirty.”

“I thought we were all on the same team?” McCree said sullenly.

“Same side,” Reyes said. “Not the same team.”

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It was an agonizing five-floor walk up to the top of Shimada Castle. McCree was huffing and puffing by the third, and bent over his knees gasping by the fifth. He could almost hear Mercy clucking her tongue at him. That’s what you get for smoking cigars all day, Jesse. He pushed himself upright.

It was small compared to the palatial first floor of the castle with its high ceilings. It felt almost homely, just an open walkway with four sets of sliding doors. Seemed awful domestic to be something labelled “off-limits” by the otherwise laid-back kumichō. McCree sauntered to a door and put two fingers to the handle, putting some pressure to slide the door back.

The room was big and empty. No folks, no furniture- just dust. McCree wandered inside. Morning light splashed in through the big, curtainless window. It had a broad sill meant for sitting, and the window looked down on the courtyard, the gazebo, the cherry trees. McCree spied something carved in the wood there, pale slashes of kanji, unhealed scars. MCCree squinted at them, took out his phone and took a picture. He thumbed to his translation app, loaded up the picture, then waited for it to translate.

“What are you doing in here?”

McCree jumped and looked up, thumbing his phone off then dumping it in his pocket.
“Could ask you the same,” he said to Hanzo. The man was framed in the door he’d left open, glaring in at him.

Hanzo was short but by no stretch small. He had a big, muscled chest and trim legs, fine and precise, but not delicate. He pressed his broad shoulders back, extending his spine and puffing out his chest, chin high. Even though McCree had a good five inches on him, he always felt like Hanzo was looking down on him. It pissed him off.

You ain’t better’n me, Shimada.

“This was once my home. I go where I please.” Proud, snobbish. The guy could drown in a rainstorm.

“Well, why don’t we go talk to Keiko about that? I’m sure she’d have a few choice words to say.” McCree laid the southern charm on thick - it always made threats sound a little better.

Hanzo’s scowl deepened. The bruise Tracer had given him was almost faded now - just a bit of awkward shading on his chin. He looked McCree up and down. “When you smile, you look like a frog.”

McCree’s good-ol’-boy grin dissolved. “No, I don’t,” he insisted.

Hanzo raised an eyebrow.

McCree huffed and shifted on his feet, spurs jangling. He pulled a cigar out, grumbling half-hearted comebacks and trying to make his mouth small.

“Do not smoke in here,” Hanzo commanded. McCree glared over his knuckles, then removed the cigar from his lips and stuffed it back into an inside pocket. He walked to the door.

Hanzo blocked his path. “Where are you going?”

“Check out the rest of the rooms.”

“The kumichō has forbade it.”

“You takin’ orders from her, now?” McCree shouldered past Hanzo and strutted to the next room. The door was open - it hadn’t been a minute ago. He hadn’t heard Hanzo come up the stairs either, which meant he’d been in there when McCree got to the top of the stairs. He looked inside.

Compared to the previous room, he was almost assaulted by how much was in here. Posters on the walls; a huge vanity covered in makeup, simple jewelry, hats, ties, and other accessories; a big bed; an open closet full of clothes; photos all over the place. McCree was still digesting it when he felt Hanzo at his back, close and warm.

“Stay out of there!” Goddamn, the guy sounded petulant; still a little yakuza prince. McCree’s lip curled, then his eyes landed on a quilted corkboard covered in printed photos. Most were of a young man with a hawkish nose and hair in a variety of colors; selfies with a variety of people.

His most common companion was a tall, sharp-featured woman that McCree didn’t immediately recognize as Keiko. She must have been even more rough-and-tumble when she was younger. She sported bruises in almost half the photos, and there was one with her sitting up in a hospital bed, head and chest bandaged, flipping off the camera with a wide grin. Probably a result of one of Genji’s drunken, late-night pranks gone wrong.
McCree took a second look at the guy in the photos again and swallowed. “This is Genji’s room,” he realized out loud.

Hanzo was close enough at his back that McCree felt the archer’s body stiffen up. The closeness made his back tingle, and he shrugged it off, walking away from Hanzo and into the room.

There were photos everywhere, not just on the board - stuck in the frame of the mirror, taped to the walls. Frames covered every flat surface. Almost every photo featured Genji himself aside a friend or family member. McCree even found one of him and a young, sharp-eyed Hanzo. That was how McCree remembered him from back in the Blackwatch days: clean-shaven, inky hair, almost innocent-looking. Not how he was now - everything boyish had been wrung out of him.

It was strangest of all to see Genji, though. When Blackwatch was keeping tabs on the Shimadas, they hadn’t expended much effort on the younger Shimada son since he had almost nothing to do with the business. They’d focused on old Sojiro; his sister and right hand, Kanata; the accountant; and next-in-line Hanzo. McCree could hardly believe the smiling, handsome kid in these photos was his long-time friend. It didn’t help that Genji never took his visor off around other people - not never.

McCree studied the room. It looked frozen as the photographs; a hundred smiling faces waiting for Genji to come home. “Weird as hell to me that Genji wants back in this family when none of y’all even believe he’s really still alive,” McCree said.

Hanzo stared at a photo on top of Genji’s desk, sliding shut an open drawer. “Keiko has certainly welcomed him with open arms.”

“No she ain’t.”

Hanzo turned to look at him. “Explain.”

“You ever watch her when she’s with Genji? Like at the club, those couple nights ago? ‘Get me my regular; do that dance we used t’do; remember that time we did this’ and Genji comes back that it’s a thing they never done.”

Realization spread across Hanzo’s face. “She is testing him.”

McCree nodded. “Can’t blame her, I guess. Fella’ shows up in a mask and says ‘I’m yer dead cousin.’ I’d mark it a play too.”

“So why let him and all the Overwatch agents in the castle? Why… toy with him that way?” For a moment, a righteous anger slipped into Hanzo’s tone. Someone might even mistake it for caring.

McCree was surprised, but he recovered quick. “Keiko thinks Overwatch is dealin’ her a hand. I’m still figurin’ her out, but she don’t strike me as the kinda person that walks away from the table easy. She wants to know what Genji’s after.”

“Then she is even more heartless than I thought.” Hanzo shook his head. “Well? What does Overwatch want?”

McCree shrugged. “Not a damn thing, except t’know why Talon’s here. Winston’s itchin’ to get back to Russia and get more data outta the omniums there. Don’t think we’ll be here long. With all this Omnic business goin’ on, pokin’ around a dying yakuza family seems pointless.”

Hanzo leveled his gaze at McCree, those archer’s eyes cool and appraising. Hanzo’s face was sharp and severe, pretty in a masculine sort of way. McCree might like it plenty, if it belonged to a different
man. “But you feel otherwise,” Hanzo said.

*More intuitive than I thought.*

No use denying it - he didn’t like the fella, but it took two seconds in a room with them to see Hanzo and Keiko *hated* each other. The enemy of my enemy… “I think the Viper’s got chips down. The ramen heist, Talon bein’ here, lettin’ the lot of us into the house when she don’t believe Genji’s really Genji. She’s up to something, and she wants to suss out what we know about it.”

“What is she up to?”

“Don’t know yet. She’s hard to get a read on.”

“Hah! Keiko? She is simple to read - she will always do whatever is most foolish.”

“You think so?” McCree raised his eyebrows. “Seems like a hard thing to predict.”

Hanzo looked away, guilty, thoughtful.

“Somethin’ you’re not saying?”

Hanzo’s eyes flitted around McCree’s body like a bird. His feet, his knees, his arms, his chest, his shoulder. Like a tailor pinning needles where the seams belong. “Last night, at the club, I overheard something-”

Hanzo stopped, then McCree heard it: creaking stairs, muffled laughter, two sets of footfalls coming this way.

“Why’s that door open?” McCree heard one voice say. No time to sneak out. He shoved his hands in his pockets as Hanzo spun, hunched forward, feet splayed, ready to dart away. Not the shoulders-back, chest-puffed dragon - more like a spooked alley-cat. The footsteps walked into the doorway.

Speak of the Devil.

Keiko’s serpentine grin split her face. “Uoh. Look who it is. Funny, I could have sworn I told you bastards to keep outta here.”

Hanzo dragoned up: set his back straight as an arrow, closed his hands into fists, jutted his bearded chin out. A proud prince again, readying for a verbal throw-down with his foul-mouthed cousin. The second person poking their head in stopped the fight before it started.


They were silent as Genji took a slow walk around the room, staring at every photo. His handsome, younger self smiled back. McCree had never seen Genji take his mask off, but he remembered how he’d looked after the duel with Hanzo - broken, burnt up, crackling with the remnants of Hanzo’s dragons. Mercy was a talented gal, but McCree expected Genji would never look like he did in these pictures again.

Genji turned. “Why-” his voice cracked, and he started again. “Why didn’t you ever clear it out?”

Keiko looked to the side. “Never got around to it, I guess.”

“Is that so?” Hanzo, picking a fight, ready to tell her and Genji what McCree had told him. Showing his hand - pride was Hanzo’s tell.
“Well, I’m just so irresponsible.” Keiko rolled her eyes.

“So much so that you cannot even scrape together a few men to collect protection in your own neighborhood,” Hanzo snarled.

“I don’t collect protection because I actually give a shit about the people in our neighborhood, unlike you, Dragon Boy!”

“As if you have ever given a shit about anything,” Hanzo shot back.

“Stop!” Genji put himself between them. “Please. I do not ask you to be friends, but for my sake, do not fight.”

McCree watched as Hanzo and Keiko glared at one another, both of them tight, like hammer’s pulled back, ready to shoot one another.

“Surely you can do that, Keiko,” Hanzo made his voice low, “for Genji’s sake.”

Keiko squinted at him. If the meaning in Hanzo’s voice was lost on Genji, McCree didn’t think it was lost on Keiko. She didn’t answer him.

After an extended silence, Genji looked around the room, then moved to pick up a picture frame from the desk. “Hey, I remember this—”

“Don’t—touch that.” Keiko’s voice started sharp, then trailed off.

Puzzled, Genji gently put the framed photo he’d picked up back on the desk. “Sorry. But Aniki, do you remember this one?” Genji pointed at the photo of him and Hanzo. “I have a copy at home in Nepal.”

Hanzo looked askance at Keiko, who was still leaning against the doorframe. “Yes,” he said. “Kanata took that photo.”

Kanata. Yeah, McCree remembered her. The Yamata no Orochi, they called her; six feet of big and mean; fists for punching; a tatted-up, ruthless drunk of a yakuza. Her, old man Sojiro, and Hanzo had all been attached at the hip. The mention of her name sucked the air out of the room.

McCree shifted, searched, found a picture unlike the others. It was two adults and two children, standing portrait style and looking at the camera. One of the adults looked familiar. “Genji, is this you?” McCree’d have never pegged Genji as the type to grow his hair out.

Genji crossed the room to him and looked at the photo. “No. I think… that’s me.” Genji pointed to a wobbly toddler getting hugged from behind by a smiling little boy with long, black hair. “I don’t remember putting this picture in here.”

Keiko shifted off the doorframe and walked towards them.

“I put it here,” Hanzo said, moving to Genji’s shoulder, watching Keiko like any moment she’d turn into a snake and bite him. No… not him, Genji. He’d put himself between the two of them, shut Keiko out of the huddle. Keep that criminal away from us.

“That’s Hanzo,” Genji said, pointing to the kid with long hair.

Keiko smirked. “Hey, we finally found a picture of you smiling, Dragon Boy.”

Hanzo scowled at her. McCree could tell he was still hot from their argument, but he was kind of
proving her point.

“That’s Dad.” Genji pointed to the tall, bearded man in the photo, and looking again, it was old Sojiro, not so grizzled around the edges as McCree remembered him. He cut a pretty fine figure in his sharp suit, one hand on Hanzo’s shoulder, the other disappearing behind the other figure - the one that looked like Genji.

“That must be Mom, then, huh, Hanzo?”

Hanzo, who had been hunched over Genji’s shoulder, straightened up. “Yes, that’s her.”

McCree squinted down. It did look like a gal, now that he really gave it a gander. Her long hair was pulled back in a fuzzy tail, and she wasn’t wearing any makeup, but she had an attractive bone structure. She wore a black yukata that hid her figure, and a white glove covered one of her hands. Maybe it was the hard way she glared at the camera that had made her look masculine.

“Damn, Genji, you look like your momma.”

Genji looked at the photo. “Huh, yeah, I guess I do. I don’t really remember her, to be honest.”

McCree took his eyes off the photo and read the room. Hanzo’s eyes were transfixed, staring at the woman in the photo with a soft sadness. Keiko was staring a hole into the back of Genji’s mechanical head. Her brain was chewing gristle. He caught her staring at him like that sometimes, when Genji wasn’t looking. Get me my regular. Do our dance. Are you Genji or aren’t you?

She saw McCree looking at her, and her face smoothed out to a grin. “So how’s your investigation going? Find any more of those Talon shitheads in my territory?” Playing her hand. Call or fold, cowboy, that grin said.

McCree was sizing her up when Genji spoke. “Winston found out the Eda-gumi had a shipment get hit a few weeks ago,” he said. “It was near here. He thinks it might have been Talon.” The flop. McCree groaned internally. Don’t tell her that, Genji.


“Not in your territory, just close. Outside Shizuoka.”

“Eda-gumi does arms trade now?” Hanzo asked.

Keiko shrugged at him. “After you fucked off, they snapped up all the weapon contracts they could.”

Hanzo sniffed, folded his arms across his broad chest, frowned hard. Dragoned up again. He didn’t say anything, but he sure looked like he wanted to.

“What kind of arms do they move?” McCree asked. Keiko eyed him, appraising. Trying to hide her tell. Your turn, lady. Call or fold.

“Whatever they can get their grubby hands on, I assume,” she said.

“You do not know?” Hanzo huffed.

“Why should I? Shimada-kai doesn’t run guns anymore - with all the restrictions, it’s not worth it. As long as Eda stays off my turf, I don’t care what they do.” Check. She was playing off Hanzo’s expectation that she was a layabout. A bluff? McCree couldn’t be sure. He knew what Hanzo’s tell was, but Keiko, he hadn’t figured out yet.
Genji picked up another picture frame.

“H-hey, come on,” Keiko protested again, halting, knowing she shouldn’t but unable to help herself. Maybe that was her weak point - Genji’s memory. What would she do if she realized this was really him?

“I didn’t leave this picture here,” Genji said. “I would not have.”

Keiko shouldered through the Shimada brothers and took the picture out of Genji’s hands. It was of a tall, stout woman, grinning, sleeves rolled up to her elbows, showing off an intricate tattoo. She was younger, but McCree recognized her instantly as Sojiro’s sister and right hand, Shimada Kanata. She was surrounded by three young children that had to be Genji, Hanzo, and Keiko, who in this photo looked oddly shy.

“I set it out,” Hanzo said, like a kid caught in trouble. “I found it in a drawer earlier.”

Keiko glared down at the photo and spoke in a whisper. “Ah, and you thought you’d come in here and do a little redecorating, right?” Keiko’s voice was unsteady - furious.

The turn.

“Keiko,” Hanzo ventured, “She was your-”

Keiko slammed the picture frame against the edge of the dresser, sending glass scattering. She dug her hand into the frame, no heed for the shards stabbing into her wiry fingers. She pulled the picture out with one hand while the other fished her lighter from her pocket. Keiko tried to thumb the flame into being, but her hands were shaking.

“Keiko, stop!” A command from Hanzo, unheeded.

The lighter finally snapped to life. The flame reflected in Keiko’s wild eyes. McCree stayed out of it, observing. Genji was looking between them and one of the photos of Keiko on his dresser - the one of her in the hospital.

Hanzo clutched her shoulder. “There isn’t another copy of that photo, Cousin!”

“Good,” Keiko snarled, and held the flame to the photo.

Hanzo tried to grab the lighter from her hand. He caught Keiko’s wiry elbow in his solar-plexus. As he doubled-over, Keiko lit up the photo and hungrily watching the fire take.

McCree hadn’t known Keiko long, but he’d never seen her so unhinged. Keiko’s tell, her weakness, was her mother Kanata. But why?

He looked around again at the dozens of photos of her scattered around Genji’s room. The black eyes, the bruised jaws, the panoply of casts. He looked over Keiko’s shoulder at the bubbling image of Kanata getting swallowed up by fire. She was a big gal, tall, with rings on every meaty finger. Even in the photo, the little girl shied away from her clutching arm.

Six feet of big and mean. Fists for punching.

Hanzo looked openly mournful as he, too, watched Kanata’s image burn away.

When the photo was nothing more than a flaming corner, Keiko tossed it out the open window, then spun on Genji. “In a drawer?” More an accusation than a question. Anger and hurt. *Et tu, brute?*
Genji shook his head, putting a gentle hand on Keiko’s arm. “Ko… I’m sorry.”

She stared into Genji’s visored face, then laughed, putting her forehead in her hand. She shrugged his hand off, and folded. “Do me a favor, Dragon Boy,” she said, looking at Hanzo. “Don’t do any more redecorating.” She turned and marched through the broken glass to leave the room. Genji chased after her.

Hanzo knelt down and started plucking the glass off the ground. “Insufferable woman,” he muttered in Japanese, the translated voice through his earpiece tinnier than Hanzo’s normal, full-throated English.

McCree shrugged. “Ah, she’s alright.”

Hanzo glared up at him, a little pile of glass in the flap of his kyodo-gi. Back to English, he said, “She is nothing but a lowlife.”

“Hey, it’s tough bein’ a lowlife,” McCree knelt down and helped him pick up the glass. “No one thinks you’re worth a damn. Some times, seems easier just to be who they expect you t’be.”

“Hah! Yes, living like a foolish child, free of responsibility and consequence seems very difficult.” Hanzo huffed. Then, in Japanese, almost inaudible, “What I would have given to have no one care what I did.”

McCree clenched his jaw so hard he thought his teeth might crack. In the back of his mind, he heard an old name bit down by an old voice.

*Jack.*

“Yeah,” McCree grunted. “Bein’ a spoiled yakuza brat must’ve been real taxing. Did you know? About Kanata smackin’ her around.”

Hanzo didn’t look up, still picking up glass. “Everyone knew.”

“But no one did a damn thing.”

“Keiko brought it on herself,” Hanzo muttered.

McCree’s jaw hung open like a fish. *A real piece of work.* “Nobody asks to get beat up, Shimada. Not nobody.”

Hanzo glared at him. “*She* did.” He stood up, cradling the pile of broken glass in his gi. “Ask her. She will tell you the same.”

“Not nobody, Shimada,” McCree said - an old, mangy bark in his voice. *Who let that dog in here?* He dusted little shards of glass off his hands. As Hanzo walked away to deposit the glass in a trash can, McCree stood up.

“Where are you going?” Hanzo again, demanding like he was in a position to demand things; like he could tell McCree a *damn* thing.

“I’m goin’ to find out what Keiko’s up to, so I can beat feet outta this ‘burg soon as I’m able,” McCree said over his shoulder.

Hanzo hesitated, but when McCree started walking out the door, he spoke. “A few nights ago, at the club, I overheard something—*”
“Save it, Shimada,” McCree growled. “I don’t need your help.” He shoved his hands in his pockets and left Hanzo to Genji’s shrine of a room and the broken glass. He felt his phone in his pocket and pulled it out as he started down the stairs. The translation app was still open, showing the rendered roman letters for the kanji that had been carved into the windowsill. They weren’t words, they were a name. McCree peered at the picture of the Kanji and realized, now, that there was something clumsy about the way it was carved. A child’s writing. McCree looked between the doors to the two rooms, both still left open. The bright, full room had been Genji’s.

The empty one had belonged to the name carved in the sill: Hanzo Shimada.

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, just continue on to the next chapter (:  
Thanks for reading guys!  
I know Hanzo comes off like a big abuser-apologist dickhole here at the end, but we go into what he means later. He’s wrong, of course, but there are reasons why he thinks of it this way.  
To people who don't like Keiko, I hear ya. She's very important here in the first act, but after that you will see a lot less of her.  
Love to all my readers and everyone who leaves comments, y'all are wonderful and keep me going <3

twitter

tumblr
Hey guys! Sorry for the (very) late chapter. The holidays snuck up on me!
I will do a short late-night stream, but I figure most of you are snuggled in bed by now (: 

Not a lot of energy for an intro, just want to say much love to my beta-readers and everyone who still comments, leaves kudos, and follows the story <3 I know I've been bad about replying to comments lately, I will try harder to catch up you all you wonderful people.

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As it turned out, Keiko didn’t even know how to play poker.

“I do not think that’s what they are called,” Genji said, peering at his cards.

“Hey! Who’s teachin’ who?” McCree argued.

“Alright, but shovels? That doesn’t sound right.”

“Maybe if you’d remembered the rules, you’d remember whether they’re called shovels or not. Here’s the turn - ace o’ puppy-toes.”

Genji huffed. “Now you are just making fun of me.”

“What? Looks like a puppy’s toes, don’t it?” McCree held up the card for Genji to examine. He pushed McCree’s hand back down to the table.

“So you are saying, in all your badass american movies, the cowboys are talking about puppy-toes?”

Genji tilted his head. McCree could almost see that green-haired, smiling face from the photos pursing his lips at him. He may have been wearing that visor, but Genji’s voice and manner made for a terrible poker face. McCree grinned at him around his cigar.

“You ain’t seen a damn cowboy movie in your life, Genji.”

“I saw that one.”

“What, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly’?”

“Yes, the one you made me watch.”

“You fell asleep halfway through, compadre.”

“It was boring.”

“Hey!” McCree pointed a metal finger at his cyborg companion. “Don’t talk shit about that flick in
Genji scoffed. “Okay, puppy-toes,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah. It’s to you, Ma’am,” McCree said, nodding to Keiko, who was stroking the furrow of her brow with two cigarette-holding fingers. She was holding her cards up in front of her face like she was trying to burn a hole through them with her eyes.

“You don’t really hold ‘em up like that,” McCree told her.

“Then why is it called ‘Texas Hold ‘Em’?” Genji asked rhetorically. McCree could almost see him smirking.

“What are the hands again?” Keiko looked between the table and her hand twice in a row.

“Show me your hand and I will tell you what you have,” Genji teased.

“Eat shit,” Keiko snarled, breasting her cards, then looking at them again like she’d already forgotten what she had.

“You want ‘em to match in some way,” McCree told her. “All the same number, all the same suit, countin’ up in a sequence, like that.”

“What’s a full house?”

“Three of a kind and two of a kind.”

“Of a kind?”

“Of the same number.”

“So five of the same number?”

“Naw.” McCree laughed, “Say, three aces and two fours, or three kings and two jacks. Like that.”

“There’s only four of every number in the deck,” Genji added.

“Wha- Ugh! Forget it. I have to bet to stay in, right?”

“Yeah,” Genji said. “Put in the money or admit defeat, Cousin.”

“Tch!” Keiko peered at the chips Genji had added, then searched her own for the corresponding colors and matched his bet.

“Alright,” McCree drawled. “Now the river.”

“Hold on.” Genji’s chin was raised like he was looking up at something. An old, familiar gesture. “Gettin’ a call?”

“Mm, from Lena.”

“Oh, it’s Lena now, is it?” McCree said, smirking and tapping the ash from his cigar.

“Do not start,” Genji laughed, already standing. “I will return shortly.” Genji stepped away from the table to keep his conversation private.

For a time, McCree and Keiko sat at the table in silence.
“Psst. Cowboy,” she finally hissed at him.

“Hmm?”

“Is this any good?” Keiko turned her hand to show him an ace of hearts and a queen of spades. “I can’t tell.”

McCree looked down at the table. “Yeah, it’s alright. You got two pair, see?” He pointed to the ace of clubs and queen of diamonds he’d dealt out.

“We should look at Genji’s hand to make sure,” she said with a grin.

“Naw!” McCree laughed at her.

“Come on! He left the table, it’s his own fault.”

“You wouldn’t know what he had even if you did look at his cards,” McCree said.

Keiko shrugged. “Yeah, you’re right. Y’know, when we were kids, I used to give Genji cards under the table so he’d have better hands. Then, Hanzo would catch us and tell Sojiro, and he’d just laugh and tell Hanzo to lighten up, heh.” As she laid her two cards down on the table, she looked across the room at Genji. “Wonder if he remembers that.”

Keiko folded her hands over her cards, turned away from him. For not the first time, McCree studied the stubbed pinky on her right hand. It terminated at the first knuckle, and was wrapped by a mossy, serpentine tattoo. “How’d that happen?”

“Yubitsume.” The translator didn’t interpret the Japanese word, meaning there was no English equivalent. “I tried to kill Hanzo after he tried to kill Genji.” She looked back across the room at Genji. “Guess I’m lucky I only lost a finger.”

“Hell. Why?”

“Yes. Why?” The translator didn’t interpret the Japanese word, meaning there was no English equivalent. “I tried to kill Hanzo after he tried to kill Genji.” She looked back across the room at Genji. “Guess I’m lucky I only lost a finger.”

“He made you cut off your finger for that? I woulda thought he’d just kill you.”

“So did I. Maybe he thinks so too, since he’s back to finish the job.”

“That so? Hanzo’s out to getcha’?”

“Only since he was born. But this time, I got footage. Hanzo was a purist when it came to the castle’s architecture. I’m not. I had security cameras installed.” She grinned around her cigarette. “He swore it to his parents and everything. It’s not really surprising Hanzo’s out to kill another family member.”

“Naw?” McCree didn’t disagree, but Keiko was in a talkative mood, and he hoped to skim as much information as he could from this conversation.

Keiko shrugged. “We’re Shimada. It’s what we do.”

“You’d think with all them enforcers around you wouldn’t be so hard to kill.”

“Look, Hanzo’s an asshole, but he’s one of the best killers in the world. He’d turn my young guys into pincushions, and the old guys’d jump to his side the second he took out his bow.”
“You ain’t their top choice, huh?”

Keiko laughed. “I’m the last bitch on earth they want heading this family, but without Genji or Hanzo they don’t have any choice. Gotta keep the blood at the top.”

“Tryin’ to keep those dragons going. Surprised they ain’t shakin turkey basters at ya’ by now.”

“Hah! They’ve tried. Didn’t take em long to figure out that I don’t intend this shit family to last another generation. They can resent me, but they can’t stop me.”

“If they’re so against you, I’m surprised you keep ‘em around.”

“This family’s always been a snake’s nest. Everyone hates everyone, you’re born into it, it’s normal. Like I said. We’re Shimada. It’s what we do.”

“Do you know when Hanzo plans to dole out this fancy death sentence of his?”

“No. I’m surprised he hasn’t tried already.”

McCree looked across the room at Genji. “When it happens, what do you think he’ll do?”

Keiko puffed her cigarette. “You tell me, cowboy.”

There was a challenge in that statement. He’s your guy, not mine. She may not have believed Genji was who he said he was, but McCree knew better. Back in the old O-dub days, Genji had told him dozens of stories about Keiko and their wild antics together. She had been his best friend. In those same old days, McCree could have told her exactly what Genji would do: he’d defend Keiko to the last, and if she tried to kill Hanzo, Genji would tell her to get in line.

But now? Who knew. If faced with the choice between her and Hanzo, would Genji truly let his cousin die to protect the brother that had tried to kill him?

Or would be a willing martyr this time around?

McCree looked over at his old friend and worried. If Hanzo’s plan was kill Keiko, McCree had to make sure Genji wasn’t here when it happened. He looked again at Keiko’s stubbed finger as she took a drag from her cigarette.

“But why the pinky finger?” he asked.

“Something about holding a sword? I dunno, that’s just what it is. You do it as penance for a failure, then you give the finger to the kumichō. It’s supposed to show loyalty or something. S’family thing.”

“You cut off your finger to apologize to Hanzo for trying to kill him?”

“Hell no. This is the only finger that bastard got from me.” She flipped McCree the bird. “Hanzo asked for the Yubitsume. I told him to piss off. I left the family that night, until they tracked me down again.”

“So why cut it off at all?”

“To see the look on Hanzo’s face,” she said, amused.

“Naw.”

“Naw’?” Keiko imitated his drawl in english, then grinned.
“Naw, I don’t buy that. You’d like me to *think* you’re that much of a wild card, but you ain’t. What’s the real reason? Who did you fail?”

Keiko’s smile twitched at the edges. “Wouldn’t you like to know, cowboy?” The phrase was cheeky, but it wasn’t said that way. She spoke like the breath had been sucked out of her; her eyes lidded, and she turned away from McCree and looked down the hall to Genji. McCree, puzzled, studied the stubbed finger again. This time his eye caught something he hadn’t noticed before: the reptilian head of her tattoo. From her other tats he had assumed the legless, scaled body was a snake, but it wasn’t.

It was a green dragon.

“You’d slip him cards?” McCree asked at last.

“Yeah. He was little. Seven, or eight maybe? Hanzo and I were older. Wanted to give the kid a fighting chance, y’know?”

“Awful charitable of you.”

“Yeah, yeah. Don’t go spreading it around,” Keiko said sardonically. “So what about you, cowboy? How’d you lose your arm?”

McCree clutched the base of his robotic prosthetic, barely feeling it. “An ornery crocodile down in Tallahassee. Snapped it right off my elbow.”

“That’s a fuckin’ lie. Come on, cowboy. I showed you my hand, you show me yours.”

McCree reached up with his mechanical fingers and adjusted the brim of his hat; pushed the band, the name, off his forehead. “S’family thing,” he said.

Genji returned, posture a little subdued. He sank down in his chair and checked his cards again. “Where were we?”

“The lake, or whatever,” Keiko said.

“The River,” McCree corrected, then dealt the last card. “Queen o’ Farts,” he said, raising an eyebrow at Keiko. He waited for Genji to complain about his new foolish name for the suit, but Genji didn’t even seem to notice he’d dealt a card.

McCree chewed on his cigar. “Everything alright?”

“Hm? Ah, yes,” Genji said, then, “It is only… After I hung up with Lena, I attempted to contact Zenyatta again.”

Keiko looked up. “That robot guy?”

“My master, yes.”

“And I reckon he still ain’t answered?”

“No.”

“You still can’t get a hold of him?” Keiko almost seemed worried herself.

“The call pings - I know he’s online and that my calls are connecting. He just won’t answer. He began performing the funereal rites for Mondatta a few weeks ago. Perhaps the data-transfer ritual
takes more time and focus than I anticipated.”

“Don’t seem a good time for him to go dark,” McCree said. “What with all those omnic attacks happenin’ in Russia.”

“Wasn’t a good time for that Mondatta guy to get shot, either,” Keiko said, turning to Genji. “You were telling me things were getting bad between the Omnics and humans almost as soon as you got here. Then, a week later,” Keiko made a gun of her hand with her thumb and forefinger, then shot it, “boom.”

McCree’s brow furrowed. “Weren’t you in New York for that, Genji?”

“Before that, I was here. I had arrived, perhaps a month ago to meet with Keiko at my master’s suggestion. She was the one who told me about Hanzo’s yearly visits to the castle. I was planning to remain and wait for him, but after Mondatta was killed, I wanted to be by my master’s side. I joined him in New York, when he went to address the UN on the Shambali’s behalf.”

“Guy must be big time with those ‘bots on the mountain,” Keiko said.

“Yes. The ritual is a way to pass Mondatta’s wisdom down to another. That Zenyatta was chosen to perform this rite, and to represent them at the UN, leads me to believe he will be Mondatta’s successor. He told me to return to Japan, but I can’t shake the feeling that I should be with him in Nepal. I know he is enduring a great deal. If I could just speak with him; know he is unharmed.”

McCree put a hand on Genji’s shoulder. “You’ll hear from him soon, I’m sure.”

“I must hope.” Genji nodded, but his posture was still stooped. “Last betting round, yes?” He raised again, and Keiko followed him exactly. Genji revealed his hand.

“I am afraid I took advantage of your ignorance, Cousin. I have a flush in ‘puppy’s toes’.” Genji showed off the two clubs in his hand, matching the ace, three, and eight on the table.

“Hm. That’s cute. Too bad I got this.” Keiko flipped over her queen and ace. “What’s this called again, cowboy?” When she asked, it was coy. She already knew what it was called - maybe she’d known the whole time.

McCree indulged her. “A full house.”

“A full house,” she repeated, then threw her cards on the table and clawed the chips over to her side. Genji clutched his heart like he’d just been shot, and they all laughed.

After a few more hands, where Keiko showed herself to be just as much a card shark as a viper, McCree excused himself to go do a bit of Overwatch business. He planned to go canvas the neighborhood businesses again, but he’d been putting it off; he hadn’t had much luck the first time he’d done it. An American walking around a little rural village in Japan raised eyebrows. An American asking questions in shops controlled by the Japanese mafia buttoned lips.

“You’re going to get those Talon fucks out of my neighborhood at some point, right, cowboy?” she asked him as he got up from the table.

“Only ‘cause you asked me so nicely, Ma’am,” McCree said, tipping his hat.

As an answer, Keiko stuck out her freakishly-long tongue.

McCree left them to their cards. At first, he headed towards the exit, then stopped at the gazebo, fired
up another cigar, and shoved his hands in his pockets. It felt pointless, and after what Keiko had told him, he didn’t have time to do busywork. The Shimadas were a powderkeg, ready to blow at any moment. There had to be a better way to get the dirt on Keiko that he needed. McCree scratched his chin in thought.

He would bring Genji with him, but he wasn’t exactly crowing the fact that he was the reconstructed youngest son of old Sojiro. Bringing Keiko was out of the question - he wouldn’t get any useful info without tipping her off.

That left one Shimada he could take along as an icebreaker. One who was just as invested in sussing Keiko’s plans out. One that McCree wanted to keep an eye on after learning he had a plot to kill the kumichō, lest Genji put himself between them. The idea had merit, and McCree didn’t like it one bit. Reluctantly, he hoofed his way through the castle to the guest rooms, sliding doors open in search of Hanzo Shimada.

He found him in one of the rooms - really, it was hardly bigger than a closet - sleeping, of all things. McCree checked the time on his phone. It was two-thirty in the afternoon.

Almost the instant McCree slid the door open, Hanzo was up and reaching for his bow. A light sleeper. All those assassins out for the bounty, McCree supposed. He could relate. McCree put his hands up to show he meant no harm.

Hanzo didn’t immediately lower the bow. “What do you want?”

“Got a question for ya’,” McCree said, blowing smoke into the room.

Hanzo wrinkled his nose and set his weapon down. “Do not smoke in here.”

“S’free country.”

“You are not in America.”

“Japan ain’t a free country?”

Hanzo narrowed his eyes. “Ask your question.”

“You sleep in pretty late, Shimada. Figured you’d be up with the sun and the birds.”

“Is that what you barged into my quarters to ask?”

“Naw,” McCree said. “Yesterday, you tried to tell me something.”

“You did not wish to hear it.”

“Yeah, because you were bein’ an asshole.”

“I thought you were going to learn what Keiko was up to all on your own.”

“Well, the deadline’s getting tighter by the minute.” Dead being the operative word, thanks to you. Fuckin’ assassins. “Tell me what you know.”

“Why should I?”

“Because the sooner you do, the sooner O-dub gets gone.”

Hanzo sat seiza-style on his thin bedding, head bowed in what McCree assumed was thought. His
hair wasn’t pulled back into the neat tail like usual - it was a porcupine’s back of dry, static hair fluffed around his head. He looked sort of comical, with that perpetually stern face, brow wrinkled in thought. It was almost cute.

The thought hit him like electric shock, and McCree swallowed it down like a pill, looking decidedly away from the Hanzo’s face and hair.

“I overheard Ueda talking to Funaki, the owner of Club Cerisier.” Hanzo spoke the name of the club like French was in his lexicon. “Funaki is hiding something for Keiko in his club.”

“Hidin’ what?”

“I do not know. From what I overheard, I am not certain Funaki knows either.”

“So it’s somethin’ that ain’t immediately recognizable.” McCree scratched his beard in thought.

“Mm.” Hanzo nodded.

` McCree considered for a moment if he was actually going to ask this, and he could feel Hanzo’s steely eyes on him as he did. “I’m goin’ around the neighborhood today, asking if they know anything about it.”

Hanzo stood, a loose yukata hanging off his broad shoulders. He turned his back to McCree. “So?”

“I’ve tried it before, and ain’t got much of anywhere. None of the shopkeeps are aimin’ to talk to me.”

“And what makes you believe it will be different this time?” Hanzo got up and started cleaning the room, stacking cups that had been left on the ground near the bed and tossing trash that hadn’t quite made it to trash can. And here he’d figured Hanzo for the fastidious type.

McCree leaned against the doorframe. “I thought you could come with me.”

Hanzo paused cleaning.

“Look, I don’t much like it either, but-”

“Fine,” Hanzo said.

McCree raised his brows. “Fine?”

“Fine, I will accompany you.”

McCree furrowed his brow. That was easy. A little too easy for his taste. McCree was an observant guy, and the few appreciative looks and lingering touches thrown his way hadn’t gone unnoticed, but that was before their kerfuffle in Genji’s old room. Since then, they’d barely seen each other, aside from brief glances around the house. Was Hanzo a little sweet on him, or did he have some sinister motive?

Hanzo took near an hour to get ready. Most of that time was spent in the bathroom down the hall. McCree tried talking to him through the door, but either Hanzo couldn’t hear, or was ignoring him.

The archer emerged coiffed - hair back in its clean tail, patchy stubble shaved into the crisp lines of a goatee, dressed in his kyudo-gi. He was the haughty dragon prince again. McCree almost preferred him rough and half-awake in a messy room.
They walked their way to the castle’s exit, then out into Hanamura’s streets, in silence. It took two stops to find out that Hanzo wasn’t quite the asset McCree had hoped for. Most of the shopkeepers were either wary of the former Shimada patriarch or downright hostile towards him. One woman, who owned a little motorcycle garage, chased him out the second he walked in the shop.

“Don’t much like you around here,” McCree commented.

Hanzo grunted. “I spent my time in the castle, running the business,” he said. “Genji spent his throwing the family’s money all around the neighborhood. It ingratiated him to the businesses, if not the family.”

“Seems so,” McCree said, stretching. “Well, this was a waste o’ my time. I’m headin’ back to the castle.”

“Wait,” Hanzo said quickly. He grabbed McCree’s shoulder. “There may be one more place we can go for information.”

McCree eyed Hanzo’s outstretched hand until it returned to the archer’s side. “I’m listenin’.”

“Perhaps I should go alone,” Hanzo said.

“Hell naw, you ain’t getting off that easy. Wherever you’re going, I’m comin’ along.”

Another long, steely gaze that McCree met stubbornly. “Very well,” Hanzo said, “but I think you will regret it. But first, I must buy some sake.”

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After a brief stop at a corner store, Hanzo lead him through back-alleys and (much the McCree’s chagrin)over fences until they were stuffed in a small slip of a space between two ancient buildings. Maybe it was the roofs blocking the sun, but it seemed almost darker here. There were no back doors, no windows looking down at them, nothing but him and Hanzo sandwiched between two ancient buildings. The air was electric, like a storm was coming.

McCree’s hand reached back and rested on Peacekeeper. “If you’re lookin’ to kill me, Shimada, you like as much had better opportunities.”

“Hush,” Hanzo said. “We are here.”

And there it was, settled at the end of the alley, illuminated by a sharp blade of light slicing through the dark: a door that felt like it should not have been there. McCree would have sworn only moments ago that it wasn’t there, but he knew he was just being irrational. He’d just missed it when he’d scanned the alleyway, is all.

“Where are we?” he asked.

Hanzo didn’t answer, only took the bottom-shelf bottle of sake out of McCree’s hands, took a pull, then poured the rest into the gourd on his belt. Pressing the nearly-empty bottle back at McCree, Hanzo left his side and walked to the door.

A visible shudder ran through the archer when his hand reached to touch the knob with his bare arm. Hanzo took a breath, then ran his gloved hand down the length of his tattooed arm, the way someone might pet a frightened animal. He flexed, then grabbed the doorknob and opened it.

McCree shuffled forward and peered over Hanzo’s shoulder. It was just a dark stairwell of cement
steps, leading down. “I ain’t goin’ down there.”

“There is nothing to fear.”

“My gut says otherwise.”

“Your ‘gut’ is wise, but I am with you. You will be safe.” Hanzo looked over his shoulder and held out a hand to him.

McCree adjusted his belt, sucked in a breath, then pushed Hanzo’s proffered hand away, cowboy-marching through the doorway and down the stairs.

It felt like they descended forever. Too soon, the light from the entrance was gone, and McCree took slow, careful, guessing steps. Hanzo, who kept a more confident pace, ran into his back a dozen times, and McCree felt his half-bare chest press against him, hands grab his arm or hip for stability, then move away just a moment too slowly. McCree huffed and shrugged off the contact, complaining the whole way down.

“I don’t like this, Shimada. Not an inch. We better go back up. To hell with this, I’m turnin’ around, right now.”

“You are welcome to climb the stairs back up,” Hanzo said.

McCree huffed, shifted, looked around the pitch blackness. “We’ve been walkin’ down steps forever. You taking me straight down to Hell?” It was a bad joke that got worse when Hanzo didn’t answer, only pushed past him.

“We are here.”

McCree braced himself by putting both hands on either wall, feeling the cool concrete through his gloves. “How the hell can to tell in this ink-”

There was the creak of a door, then assaulting light ahead. Hanzo’s silhouette walked into the lit room. McCree pulled down the brim of his hat to shield his eyes until they adjusted, then followed.

It was a little windowless, concrete room lit by a single overhead lamp that cast Hanzo in a harsh and eerie light. He stood a few feet ahead at an abandoned counter that blocked the way to a dark, ominous hallway. Young voices chattered from some room deeper inside.

“I heard the door.”

“I’m telling you, there’s no one up here.”

“Well, look again!”

“What, do you think a customer is hiding?”

“Do… do you think it was the back door?”

“The back door? But Sakae-sama doesn’t have any appointments today.”

“Well, go check anyway.”

“Why do I have to?”

“Just go!”
A long silence, then approaching footsteps. A shadowy figure walked down the hall, and McCree’s hand clutched Peacekeeper, thumb on the hammer. When she walked into the light of the lamp, however, it was relatively normal-looking young girl. She had big eyes, pink hair, and a round face covered in piercings and worry.

“Uhm, c-can I help you?”

“I wish to speak to Sakae-sama,” Hanzo said.

“U-uhm, I don’t…” The girl’s eyes snapped towards the door behind them. Hanzo turned and looked as well. “You need an appointment to see Sakae-sama, sir.”

Hanzo walked past McCree and shut the door to the stairwell carefully. They shared a brief look before he turned back to the girl behind the counter. “I do not desire her services. I only wish to speak with her.”

“I’m not… sure that we can, sir-”

“I came in through the back door,” Hanzo insisted.

“Yes, sir?”

Hanzo stood a little taller and frowned a little harder. He tapped the dragon on his bare arm. “Do you know what this is?”

The girl looked from Hanzo’s arm to his face. “Uh… a tattoo, sir?” she said, obviously lost.

The heavy pounding of Hanzo’s fist on the counter made McCree jump. “I will see her, now.”

McCree made a face. This fella had no damn finesse with people. He walked up to the counter and good-copped the girl. “You’ll have to excuse the man. Rich folk ain’t got a lick of manners, do they? Look, if you could just check, we’d both be real grateful.”

Her throat bobbed when she swallowed. “Please, one moment, sir.” She turned her back to them and yelled into the dark of the hallway. “Hey, Iwata-san? These… guys wants to see Sakae-sama.”

“Well tell them they need an appointment!” a voice called from another room.

“I did, but they said they just want to talk to her.”

Another person emerged from the back hallway, a wiry man with gauged ears, wiping his hands with a cloth that was stained by a rainbow of colors. “I don’t think Sakae-sama sees people without appointments, no matter wh-ha-holy shit, you’re Hanzo Shimada.” The man gawked, wide-eyed, at Hanzo’s glaring face.

“Yes,” Hanzo said.

“Ho, damn. Look, I would love to let you see her, but the thing is, without an appointment, I don’t even know how to-”

The creak of the door almost made McCree jump out of his skin. Behind them, the door they’d just come out of had cracked open, seemingly on its own. The wind. Had to be the wind, McCree told himself. The round girl and the wiry boy looked at each other.

“Looks like she’ll see you,” the girl said.
Hanzo nodded to the girl, then walked back and grabbed the door by the handle.

Baffled, McCree got out of his way. “After all that, you’re leavin’?”

“No yet.” Hanzo’s stern placidity that would have been annoying if McCree wasn’t wired as a Christmas tree. He opened the door the rest of the way and walked through, and seeing past him, the room on the other side was bright and splashed with color - decidedly not the black stairwell they’d come from.

“What in the...” McCree looked back to the two kids at the counter. They were huddled up to each other, looking about as scared as he felt.

“If you are afraid, American,” called Hanzo’s voice from inside the room, “stay outside, and I will ask the questions.”

No damn finesse with people. McCree couldn’t sit this one out, not after all this. More than that, it was a challenge, and he’d be damned if he let Shimada get the best of him. God damn, but Hanzo got on his nerves. McCree hitched up his belt and followed.

It was a small, comfortable room that smelled like incense and rubbing alcohol. On one side was a table the length of a body. It gave McCree unwelcome images of a slab. On the other was an egg-shaped pile of fabric and cushions. The fabrics were a rainbow of brilliant jewel-tones, and looked comfortable, if a bit ragged. They all folded unnaturally in towards a single hooded slit in the center.

*Where in hell did you bring me, Shimada?*

“I knew you were coming,” the pile of fabric said. McCree started, falling back against the door, making it shut noisily. The voice was hollow like the wind, yet crackled like a fire; like electricity.

Hanzo bowed deeply and spoke in Japanese. “Yes, Sakae-sama.”

“I wasn’t talking to you,” the voice from the fabric - Sakae, apparently - said wistfully. It was nothing but a gut feeling, but McCree didn’t think she was talking to him either. Around his broad back, McCree spied Hanzo’s fingers stroking the dragon tattoo again.

“He is restless,” Sakae said. “Alone for too long. Feral. Being among the others again makes him territorial.”

“Yes,” Hanzo said.

“You don’t have an appointment, South Wind. Two heads, the helix. This was your destiny. I cannot bring to the skin what is not within already.”

The back wall was shoji, painted with ukiyo-e murals of beautiful women and mythical beasts. Light, shadow, and voices flickered indistinctly from the other side. The table was padded, and beside it was an unremarkable stool, and another rag smudged with color. Suddenly it wasn’t reminiscent of corpses anymore, but a smokey, buzz-saw afternoon and a pricking, flying skull on his back. This wasn’t a morgue - it was a *tattoo parlor*.

“I am not here for a tattoo, Sakae-sama,” Hanzo said. “I desire information, if you please.”

“I may,” Sakae crooned, words flowing together. “Who is this?” The hood of the fabric turned and aimed at him. He clutched his hat to his head to keep his hair from standing on end.

Hanzo hesitated, looking at him over his shoulder. “An ally,” he said.
With a long breath and a shuffle of his feet to gird him, McCree tipped his hat to her. “Ma’am.”

The woman threw back her hooded head and laughed, and when she did, the whole windowless room shook like an earthquake. “I like this ally of yours,” she said, and McCree found himself wearing a little crooked smile. “So, South Wind. What information do you seek?”

“It is about Keiko,” Hanzo said.

“Ahhhhhh, the Viper.” Her voice creaked like wood. “What do you want to know?”

“I have been hearing whispers that she is giving the other shopkeepers something to hide in their stores, but I do not know what.”

“So ask them.”

“Well, we would, Ma’am,” McCree put in, “but y’see, all the shop owners ‘round here hate Hanzo’s guts.”

Hanzo glared at him over his bare shoulder. Was McCree just skiddish, or did the scales on the tattoo just reflect the light?

Sakae hummed. “I see. Did you bring a drink?”

Hanzo hesitated, clutching his tattooed arm. “Yes.”

A thin, withered arm extended from the folds of the blankets. The hand, with long, sharp, unkept nails, looked like sticks with joints. “Give it to me,” Sakae demanded.

The cold metal of the doorknob was already in McCree’s hand at the sight of that, but when he turned, it refused to open. His heart felt like it was trying to sprint out of his chest as hard as he was ready to sprint out of this room.

**What the fuck is that?** Whatever it was, it wasn’t human.

Hanzo stayed planted in place, unmoving, but not puffed-up and proud like usual. He was a little smaller, a little hunched. *A frightened animal.* “I do not have an appointment.” He said it like an argument.

“Even so.” Sakae beckoned with an inhuman claw.

A long, deep breath from Hanzo, who was now clutching his arm like a handhold. Then, he squared his shoulders, straightened his legs - dragoned up. He approached the bundle, unhooked the gourd from his belt, and placed it in the gnarled hand. Sakae thumbed the lid off and held the opening up to the small, dark hood in the fabric.

“Cheap. Smells bad. Almost as horrible as Habushu.”

“Habushu?” At his side, Hanzo’s hand made a fist. “The only person who would bring Habushu to an appointment would be-”

“My appointments are no longer your concern, South Wind. You are master of the Shimada no longer.” The stick-hand shook the gourd. “This is the swill you’ve been drinking?”

His strong stance cracked, just an inch or so. “Among other things,” he whispered.

“Whatever you can get your hands on?”
Hanzo bowed his head. “Yes.”

The cups in the room. The whisky at the club. She wasn’t wrong, but how did she know? A voice in the back of his mind hissed that it was premonition, fantasy, a thought that railed against the part of him trying to rationalize this bizarre encounter.

“Mm,” Sakae said. “The helix takes much and more, and when there is little to give, well… it makes the Dragon thirsty.” The woman’s voice went quick from sagely and soothing to sharp and monstrous. “Let’s quench it, shall we?”

Quick as a snake, another stick of an arm shot out from the folds of the fabric and grabbed Hanzo by his tattooed wrist. She jerked him closer and poured the alcohol over his dragon.

The tattoo exploded with light. Hanzo’s pained howl was drowned out by a monstrous, animal roar. Blazing arcs wisped off his arm like licking flame, twisting and coiling out from his arm. As it did, the figure in the piled fabric started to rise, and rise, and rise.

The sturdy door pressed hard against McCree’s back, the doorknob in his tight fist, chattering with desperate turns of his mechanical wrist. In his other hand, Peacekeeper, her wobbling barrel aimed at the steadily-growing thing. He squeezed the trigger in terror, but it clicked, empty. He shot again, and nothing. McCree could see the bullets in a cylinder, but each trigger pull did nothing. The shadows behind the shoji got darker, and the indistinct voices got louder. “Hell,” McCree breathed. “Aw, hell!”

The fabric unfurled around Sakae into a long, flowing kimono. She hunched forward just before her head hit the ceiling, hovering over Hanzo until at last her face escaped the wrinkles of fabric. It was smooth and flawless like a mask, a doll, eyes and lips painted on. Then her eyelids flared and she grinned. When she did, none of the skin on her face moved. She might have been beautiful, if not for her freakishly-long arms, legs, neck, and fingers. Her nails were strange too; they looked like brushes, with bristles made of needles. Each one was spattered with a different deep, rich color. When Sakae put her hands on Hanzo’s shoulders, McCree noticed her thumb was the exact azure of Hanzo’s tattoo.

Two dragon heads screamed up out of Hanzo’s arm, then swirled around Sakae, making her kimono flutter. One rested its torso-sized head into the crook of her sticklike arm. She scratched the top of its head like someone might do with a favored pet. Hanzo fell down to his knees.

“What the hell are you, lady?” McCree cried.

Petal-pink lips peeled back to show perfect teeth. She laughed again, and dust dropped down from the ceiling as the room shook. “This man, an ally? Should we test that theory, South Wind?” When she asked, Sakae looked not at Hanzo, but at the Dragon head in her arm.

“No!” Hanzo howled, like a drowning man crying for help.

“It is a rare thing, Shimada Hanzo, for me to touch a Dragon God a second time. They bring with them a great sorrow.”

“Yes,” Hanzo answered, still loud and shaky.

Sakae hummed, nuzzling the Dragon’s enormous forehead. It growled like no creature should, like lava bubbling from a volcano. “I will tell you what I can. The Viper has long ingratiated herself among the people of Hanamura in a way you have not. But of late, she has been using this gratitude for her own ends. It has bred some animosity.”
No answer from Hanzo, who was still sitting with his hands on his knees, gasping like a fish on shore. As afraid as McCree felt, Hanzo looked worse - hollowed out, almost. With a long breath, McCree steadied himself as best he could, holstered Peacekeeper, and took a step forward. “Who do we gotta’ talk to?”

Sakae turned her shining, doll’s eyes on McCree, and he froze in the spot, feet nailed to the ground. “I understand you have some charm, foreigner. You would do well to use it.”

McCree swallowed a lump in his throat. Was this nightmare creature insulted by his manners? “Uh, b-beggin’ your pardon, Ma’am, I-”

“No on me,” Sakae said, tilting her head. “On a more pliant victim.”

McCree frowned and narrowed his eyes. She was getting at something that McCree couldn’t quite grasp. Who was pliant to his charms?

Hanzo, breath labored, looked up from the floor like there was a weight tied to his forehead. His voice was tight and breathless. “Do any of the shop owners seem-” Hanzo looked away again, catching his breath, “-affectionate towards you?”

McCree combed his mind. “The girl at the ramen shop, maybe? She was real grateful to me for doin’ the ramen job, even seemed a little, y’know, sweet on me.” He looked up at Hanzo. “They’re hidin’ something there too - Keiko told me to keep Talon out of the basement. They got a padlock on the door and everything.”

Sakae sighed. “Well, that took a while,” she said to the second head.

Hanzo cut in. “Do you know what she’s hiding, Saka-sama?”

Sakae looked up and pursed her lips, and when she spoke, her words echoed in small room. “The Dragon of the North Wind returned with a soul of the world. It is split down the middle.”

Hanzo sat up for the first time since she’d summoned the Dragon, lifting his head to face her. McCree furrowed his brow. Split down the middle? If Hanzo was the South Wind, then was the North Wind had to be…

“Did you know?” Hanzo breathed.

“Know what?”

“That he survived.” Hanzo’s voice caught a razor’s edge of anger.

Sakae shrugged her bony shoulders. “I think even you are not yet sure of this, Shimada Hanzo.”

“But you could tell me,” Hanzo insisted, desperate. “You do know, don’t you, Saka-sama?” From the moment Sakae had drawn out the dragons, he seemed raw, nothing like the proud, stern prince McCree was used to. Asleep at two-thirty in a messy room. A window cut in Hanzo’s walls, a peek inside.

Sakae shook her head. “No one can tell you who your brother is but you. You must decide, and soon, for something is coming. The other Dragons prepare in their own ways. So must you. Two wars await you.” Sakae looked away from him, to the faces of the Dragons, mournful. “I fear for them. Your Dragon will not survive if you do not face these wars with…” Sakae turned her eyes from the Dragon’s heads to McCree, “…allies.”
Don’t like the sound of that. It reminded him of Genji’s words in his hotel room at the Niwa: I think he… needs me. If McCree had his way, this weird gal was going to be disappointed on two fronts. He looked up at the two snarling, blue dragons cuddled up to that creature of a woman and wondered how his mind and stomach weren’t doing backflips. It was all wrong. So what if they didn’t survive? They should never have been in the world in the first place.

With the memory of those big, butane jaws chewing through Genji’s falling body, McCree thought, Let ‘em fight that war alone. Let ‘em die.

Hunched over, shaking and gasping for breath, Hanzo said nothing.

Sakae sighed. “You have all you need, and all I can give you.” She scratched the dragon’s heads with each hand. “I suppose I should return your soul to you before you perish.” She sighed the words out, begrudging, and extended her long-fingered hand to Hanzo. After a few breaths, he took it. With another shattering roar, the two heads swam back through the air and into Hanzo’s arm. As the Dragon left Sakae’s side, she began to shrink, and when the last blue light had faded, she was again just a small, hunched thing, submerged in fabric.

Hanzo sucked in a breath and stood up. He looked steadier, stronger, himself again. He bowed deeply to the huddled bundle of fabric. “Thank you, Sake-sama.” He turned, his gold scarf glittering behind him as he marched towards McCree

“That’s it? All that crazy shit so she could say ‘go ask at the ramen shop’?”

“Yes,” Hanzo said. “Step back from the door.”

“Shimada, that door is locked.”

The handle turned in Hanzo’s hand, and opened easily to concrete, underground room. McCree could see the two kids with the piercings still staring at them from the counter. Hanzo walked out of the room.


“The Dragon of the South Wind consumed him,” the pile of fabric said.

“And you ain’t got… got a problem with that?”

“The Dragons do as they will. They are fierce, proud, and territorial. When two such forces meet, sometimes they clash, like the winds make a storm. They are born to be killers.”

McCree shook his head. “Naw.”

“Naw?” Sakae repeated.

“Naw, I don’t buy it.”

The fabric shifted as Sakae hunkered down further into her nest. “I am not selling it. It is, and has always been. Now go, foreigner. I am tired.”

The hood dipped down, and a few nasally snores started whistling from the pile of fabric. McCree spared the already dozing Sakae one last glance, then followed Hanzo back through the door, shutting it behind him.
McCree wagged a finger at the waiting Hanzo. “You’re a son of a bitch, you know that?”

“I tried to warn you,” Hanzo said.

“You surely didn’t. Not for… that!” McCree waved his hand at the closed door. “You said we were goin’ to a shop.”

“This is a shop,” Hanzo said, then turned and marched past the two pierced kids and into the darkened hallway. McCree bit his tongue to keep from shooting him in the back. He grunted at the two twenty-somethings, then shuffled past them after Hanzo.

They came out into a, by comparison, normal storefront. There were curtains over the windows, metal music playing over the speakers, a variety of rings and barbells in the display cases and photos of intricate tattoos on the walls, but that was miles more normal than a giant stick-bug lady with a porcelain face and tattoo-guns for fingers.

McCree was incredulous and more than a little relieved. “What the hell is this?”

“The front door,” Hanzo said, and as he did he was already exiting through the storefront’s door, making a little bell jangle. When he went out after him, McCree noticed there wasn’t even a sign advertising she shop’s presence.

“We couldn’t have gone in this way?”

“If you wish to see Sakae-sama, you must enter through the back door,” Hanzo said.

“You plan to explain what the fuck that just was?”

“Something no one will believe if you tell them.”

McCree paused in place a moment, because that answer skipped past a few of the further questions he’d had lined up. “I could bring someone down there and they could see for themselves.”

Hanzo kept walking. “There are a dozen reasons that is not so, and I would tire to tell you them all. Suffice to say, I would not have brought you there if I thought you were any danger to her, and if she thought you so, you would not have left alive.”

McCree swallowed, shaking. “I seen some messed-up shit in my time, Shimada, but I ain’t never-”

“I know.” Hanzo turned to face him, and his voice took on a shade of sympathy, as did his normally severe face.

It made McCree think of the archer on his knees, gasping out words in her presence; of him waking at two-thirty and awkwardly cleaning the tiny room Keiko had put him in. He swallowed those thoughts like a pill. “I ain’t your ally,” he said.

The sympathy drained out. Hanzo dragoned up, turning and marching into McCree’s personal space, drawing his bow. “Shall we put that to the test?” Something in Hanzo’s eyes glittered with the challenge. He wanted McCree to say yes - to fight him.

He was almost ready to oblige. “Can’t kill me yet, Shimada. I’d be jumpin’ the line.”

Hanzo narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean?”

“I know you got a plan to kill Keiko.”
The look of surprise was satisfying. How nice his eyes looked when they got that big was decidedly not. As soon as it appeared, the face was replaced with a scowl. “What do you care?”

“If you start shit with her, Genji’s goin’ to end up in the middle. He’s been through enough hell at the hands of you two.”

Hanzo turned from him. “I know.”

“But you don’t give a damn.”

“If I wished to kill Keiko while Genji was here, I would have done so by now.”

“Where you think he plans on going?”

“With you, and Overwatch. When you leave.”

“Last I heard, he’s tryin’ to mend the fence with you. How do you know he’ll leave with us?”

“He must.” Hanzo made a fist. “As you say… he has suffered enough at my hand, and Keiko’s. He must go, and forget that name, and this place.”

No one can tell you who your brother is but you, Sakae had said. Hanzo had been mean as a junkyard dog to Genji since they’d got here, and only now was McCree actually wondering the why of it. “Do you really believe it ain’t him?”

A pause. Hanzo returned his bow to his shoulder. “He is not the brother I knew.”

“Folks change,” McCree said, but he couldn’t help but see what Hanzo meant. Genji wasn’t the same person now that McCree had known in the old days. There were hints, shades, but whatever happened up on that mountain had changed him.

Hanzo laughed without humor. “No,” he said. “They do not. Come. We will go to the ramen shop.”

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, the next chapter is Time Machine, Chapter Sixteen: Open Road.

I had wanted, for a long time, to write something about the tattoo artist who created the Shimada’s tattoos. I’ve thought of them a dozen different ways, and finally decided to use the concept to amp this chapter up a bit.

Love you guys. See you on the stream~

twitter
tumblr
“She’s not coming,” the brother said, then he left.

Hanzo watched his back, stormcloud grey with a pale peek of collar at the nape of his neck. The brother went inside. Hanzo was alone in the courtyard, fist around the grip of his bow.

The air had the fresh, raw scent of rain just come and gone. Leaves were glued with wet to the sides of Shimada Castle’s stone-and-mortar buildings. A sparrow flitted past the sky, then came to perch on a nest of cheeping chicks.

His mother never missed training; was never late. Six AM, sharp, she always said. Do not be late, Hanzo, she said. If you choose to train, do it correctly, not halfway. Do it with your whole self, she always said. To attempt and not succeed is to choose failure. It is not complicated - it's simple.

Hanzo did his drills. Bow and arrow first, as always, the fresh air cool like mint in his lungs as he breathed in and out, aiming for the target. His first few shots missed. You’re slouching, Mother would always say. Stand up straight, shoulders back.

He did, and hit the target.

After his hour of kyudo was an hour of throwing, then kendo, then agility training. Every drill felt awkward and pointless without her there to point out mistakes. His improvement felt sluggish -
delayed, somehow.

She’s not coming. Why not?

The lines between agility training and the end of his morning practice blurred. Hanzo moved from climbing the stone facades of the Shimada castle’s buildings to climbing one of the courtyard’s cherry trees. It was easier, a cool-down after the morning exercise, lifting himself up branch by branch. It felt good to climb, to pull himself up and away from the ground. As he reached the top, even his light weight made the branches bow.

From up here, he could see everything, the whole of Shimada Castle stretched out beneath him, in vignettes between the leaves. But Hanzo, in the boughs, was hidden away. A specter, a spectator. Above and apart.

Footsteps came from the entryway to the main hall. Hanzo peered through the leaves. It was his father, Sojiro, and Aunt Kanata. Father always felt huge and imposing to Hanzo, but from up here, and especially next to Aunt Kana, he seemed small.

“So no sightings, no activity on her credit card, nothing?” Kana asked.

“No,” his father answered. “She took cash from the safe. Not much. Not enough to live on.”

“She’s got skills to live on, Jiro. Let me see the letter again.”

Hanzo’s father pulled an opened envelope from the breast pocket of his cream suit jacket and handed it to Kana, then sank down on a bench in the gazebo. The angle through the pillars and roof was awkward. Hanzo could see Sojiro’s hands folded on his lap, his legs squared. Aunt Kana sank down to the ground beside him, pulling a tri-folded piece of paper out of the envelope.

For a while they were silent, then Kana said, “Tch! Coward.” She folded the letter and handed it back to Father. “You want me to say I told you so?”

“Perhaps,” his father sighed.

“Where are my cigs?” Kana pawed around her pockets. “And no one saw her? Tch, what am I talking about, of course no one saw her.”

“No. She didn’t even say goodbye to the children. Takagawa said Hanzo was out here for training this morning, waiting for her.”

“Well, let’s be honest, Brother, she never exactly liked them. I think if it weren’t for practice every day she’d forget they existed. Shit, do they know yet?”

“No,” he said. “I’ll tell them tonight. Genji probably won’t remember her.”

“So you plan to kill her?”

“I doubt it will come to that. I am not fool enough to think I could find her if she does not wish to be found.”

“That’s what you get for marrying a ninja.”

“You have no idea.”

“Well, fuck her! You’re never too old to marry again, not when you’re rich. Find some hot young thing, take her on the town, and make sure it’s splashed all over the internet.”
Father said nothing.

“Yeah, I know,” Aunt Kana said. “Want me to say I told you so?”

“Perhaps.”

“Marrying for love is for morons, brother.”

“I should never have pushed her into it.”

“Ah, people like her love to get pushed. She knew offspring were part of the deal when she married into the family. It’s her duty as a Shimada woman. Shit, where are my cigs?” Kana re-checked each pocket again.

“Is that why you had a child?”

“I had a kid because Haru knocked me up. Look how well that worked out.”

They both laughed.

“She got along well with Hanzo.”

“Keiko?”

“Mitsuru.”

“Ah, well, yeah - he’s a little version of her.”

“I just thought…” His father sighed. “I thought if we could get here, she would learn to be happy. To love them as she loved me.”

“She’s not the nurturing type, Jiro, and you knew that. You coulda married plenty of women who were happy to play house with a rich, dangerous guy, but you picked Mitsuru. Shit, did you really think she was going to put on an apron and become a perfect little wifey and like it? I mean, shit, Brother, do I have to say it?”

A pause, then his father sighed. “No, you don’t,” Sojiro said, and stood. “I should check on the new shipment today. Everyone will know by now, but I should try to at least pretend things are continuing on as normal.”

Aunt Kana stood with him. “Yeah, yeah, I’ll go do the collections. I gotta go out to corner store anyway and buy another pack of cigarettes. Damn! And I know I had one this morning…”

“I wish you would quit anyway. It’s a disgusting habit.”

Father and Aunt Kana disappeared out the second gate, into the garden. Hanzo clutched the branch hard as he could. The brother had been right - Mother wasn’t coming, not today or ever again. Hanzo curled up in the crook of the branches, covering his mouth with both hands to keep from crying.

“It’s because of you, y’know.” The voice came from the left, from one of the buildings. Hanzo spun, making the leaves of the tree rustle.

She was maybe five feet beneath him, on the open porch, leaning forward over the bannister, grinning. One of her arms was in a cast.
His cousin Keiko was eight years old, only a few months younger than he was, but they did not spend much time together. Hanzo enjoyed training, diligence, discipline, and his cousin Keiko, it seemed, enjoyed none of these. There was a reason that, when his aunt and his father spoke of her, they laughed.

“What?” Hanzo asked, scowling down at her from his perch in the tree.

“You!” Keiko said, pointing up at him with her cast-hand. “That’s what my mom said. That your mom left because of you and your stupid little brother.”

Hanzo bristled. “She did not!”

Keiko laughed. “Did too! My mom said she was a killer, and killers can’t grow things. That’s why she left. Your mom hated you.”

“Shut up, no she didn’t!”

“Yeah? Did she hug you or tuck you in or make you dinner or do any mom stuff for you? No! She just made you shoot arrows and do kendo.”

Hanzo gripped the branches of the tree, thinking about one of the myriad mornings of training, stretching the string of his bow back. Her hand stabbing between his shoulderblades. You’re slouching.

Keiko unsheathed her teeth. “No answer, see? You know I’m right.”

Hanzo glared at her and asked “How did you break your arm?” He knew the answer.

Keiko’s smile faltered, but didn’t disappear. “My mom hugged me too hard,” she joked. “If your dad or the family find her, they’re going to kill her, y’know.”

“Father would never let that happen,” Hanzo snarled stubbornly.

“Ha! You don’t know your dad, then. He’s a killer too. What’s that say about you?”

Hanzo glared at her. “Should we test that theory?”

Keiko rolled her eyes at the threat. “Yeah, sure. Come on, who cares anyway? She didn’t like you. She left. She’s a bitch. Forget her.” Keiko reached into the pocket of her shorts and pulled out a white box, half-wrapped in cellophane. “Hey, do you want to try a cigarette? I stole them out of my Mom’s coat.”

Hanzo looked down at Keiko’s arm in the cast. “Do you really wish to anger her further?”

“If I don’t give her a reason, she’ll find one,” Keiko scoffed, pulling a thin, pale cigarette from the pack and looking at both ends. “So do you want one or not, Cousin? Come on, it’ll be fun.”

Hanzo scoffed. “No. It is a disgusting habit,” he said, and leapt down from the top of the tree. The ground rushed up at him, reaching for him, punching through his body from the pads of his feet up. Keiko leaned over the railing.

“Well shit on you, then!” Keiko yelled from her perch. Her middle finger jutted out from the hard, purple carapace of the cast. Hanzo glared up at her, then left.
There wasn’t a clock in the room.

The shades were drawn and made the small space feel like it bottled-up the heat until it was thick as sap. An electric fan hummed from the corner of the room, shaking its head. The fan’s artificial breeze passed his gilded scarf and it danced for a moment, then went still again.

Hanzo had been fading in and out of consciousness all night. It held none of the satisfaction of sleep. Hour after hour, he had rolled back and forth, clutching the bed and bargaining for rest. Last night, like many other nights, he’d gotten a raw deal. Hopeless as it was, he still clung to it, thinking how foolish he was for doing so; for thinking more could come of this wasted effort.

Sweat glued the sheets to his skin, and when he rolled over they peeled off of him. Spring was rapidly turning to summer. He hated summer.

A few cups and piled clothes were scattered around the room and next to the bed. It looked unorderly, a mess, but when Hanzo thought about the effort involved in cleaning the room top to bottom, he shut his eyes and tried again for sleep.

*Do it right, or not at all,* his mother used to say. What she would think if she saw him like this.

For a few moments, it felt as if sleep would take him at last, until a loud crack outside his window jolted him awake again. Five more followed. With a groan, Hanzo pulled a pillow around his ears but it seemed, for now, the shots were finished. He sighed with relief.

A few feet away, an abrasive bell clanged from an electronic speaker, making him jump. It was the phone Genji had given him, he realized. A single sound meant he’d gotten a message of some kind. The shooting outside resumed.

Rubbing his face, Hanzo kicked the sheets off him, then crawled to his kyudo-gi, which was crumpled up on the floor. He dug in the folds until he felt the hard plastic of the case in his hand. He turned it so the black screen was in his face, then prodded around until he found the button to turn the screen on. It was too bright, and he squinted until his eyes adjusted.

There were two texts on his lock screen - one from Genji about an hour past, and one sent moments ago from a number not in his contacts. Hanzo unlocked the phone and checked the one from Genji first.

**Genji**

5/17/76 08:58 Genji sent:

McCree and I are doing target practice in the courtyard this morning at ten. You should join us! There is betting involved. You would give McCree a run for his money.
Hanzo read the text three times over, then checked the current time: ten-sixteen AM. More shots rang outside. Hanzo stood up and walked to the window, pushing back the curtains and looking out down into the yard.

They were there, McCree and the half-man, aiming at one of the Shimada targets they must have dug out of a storage shed somewhere, taking turns on it. Genji was taking his now, throwing shurikens. To the side, McCree was fanning himself with his hat and thumbing around on his phone. His ever-present serape was laid out on a bench.

Hanzo’s phone dinged again, making him jump. He looked at the most recent message. Oddly enough, it was from McCree. Hanzo dropped the curtain like a hot iron and leaned away from the window, checking it.

From the odd syntax, Hanzo was sure it hadn’t been sent in Japanese, but instead translated by the phone’s systems. Annoyed, he fiddled with the settings, trying to figure out how to shut that off. Every moment was more frustrating than the last.

Genji had given him the phone only three days ago and he already despised it. It hadn’t come with a manual - Genji had even laughed at him when he’d asked. Hanzo sank down onto the window seat and mocked his brother’s voice. “‘Phone’s are easy enough to use without a manual, Brother.’ Hm! Perhaps for you, half-man.” Machines of all kinds never failed to confound him. Technology was never satisfied, always changing, and he hadn’t owned a cell phone since…

Since.

He suppressed the nagging thought at the back of his mind: Just like Genji, to tease me for being a luddite. But the half-man wasn’t Genji. Genji was dead.

After about ten minutes of searching, Hanzo found the translation settings, switched it off, and then went back to the message.

McCree

5/17/76 10:17 McCree sent:

What do you know about the Eda syndicate?

He felt a wave of relief that it wasn’t about him watching them from the window. Still, it was a curious question. Keiko had told them both that the Eda had taken over the arms trade after Overwatch dismantled the Shimada Clan. He went to reply, then saw the keyboard was still in Japanese. It took another ten minutes to set it to English.
What do you know about the Eda syndicate?

Little. They were not major players when I was head of the clan. That seems to have changed.

Hanzo set the phone down, then dared to pull the curtain back again and peer down at the yard. It was Genji’s turn again. Hanzo watched him land six shuriken in the center circle - not a difficult task from his distance, at an unmoving target. When he was younger, Kanata had made him shoot birds. Little sparrows - small, fast targets. It had improved his aim immensely, but he had hated it.

His phone clanged again.

You ever do deals with a fella named Neil Waldrum?

Neil Waldrum. The name sounded familiar. Hanzo searched his memory. He’d seen the name before, on sheets of paper, or heard it from his father’s lips. Hanzo tapped out a response with his index finger.
Waldrum was a wholesale dealer, I believe. We may have gotten some product through him in the old days. Why are you asking?

Turning off the screen, Hanzo moved the curtain back again and peered down. They had given up shooting the target now, and Genji was pointing at different spots around the yard: the branch of a tree, the top of the gazebo, the *shishi odoshi*. McCree was barely paying attention, too busy thumbing around on his phone.

Hanzo watched him finger the top button on his sky-blue shirt, then unfasten it. He suddenly felt much more scandalized for watching McCree this way, but didn’t drop the curtain or look away.

The ding of the phone startled him, and Hanzo spun on the seat so his back was to the window. He checked his messages. Another from McCree.

He was a wholesale dealer, I believe. We may have gotten some product through him in the old days. Why are you asking?

No reason.

Hanzo glared at the text. Certainly there was a reason, and the American was choosing to keep it from him. Perhaps he had misjudged his shaky alliance with McCree. Annoyed, Hanzo wrote back.
Hanzo sternly sat in the window seat, determined not to spy anymore on Genji and McCree’s practice. But when, after a minute or so, he got no response and heard no gunshots, he pulled back the curtain to see what was taking the American so long.

McCree was holding his revolver up to his ear, scanning the courtyard. Then, he shot three times, quick in succession, and broad. Hanzo squinted, and saw from the motion and damage that McCree had hit three targets: the branch of a tree, the top of the gazebo, and the *shishi odoshi*.

Hanzo swallowed. He knew the American could shoot, but this was beyond what he’d anticipated. It had been so fast, hardly a second to aim or recover from the kickback. *You would give McCree a run for his money.* Only now did Hanzo see the depth of the compliment. Below, Genji clapped his mechanical hands as McCree looked half smug, half sheepish at the praise. He pointed out some targets for Genji to hit, then went back to his phone. This time, Hanzo watched him and waited for the phone to chime.

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**McCree**

5/17/76 10:42 You sent:

Have you made any progress with Itsuko?

5/17/76 10:47 McCree sent:

She’s still thinkin on it.

5/17/76 10:49 You sent:

We should go again tonight and force her to open the basement for us. I do not
understand why we are waiting.

5/17/76 10:53 McCree sent:

That there’s the surest way to send her runnin into Keiko’s arms. Just relax, give it time. Ya get more bees with honey.

The edge of Hanzo’s mouth twitched.

McCree

5/17/76 10:54 You sent:

Bees make honey.

5/17/76 10:55 McCree sent:

It’s an expression

5/17/76 10:56 You sent:

If you wish to attract bees, you should plant flowers.

5/17/76 10:59 McCree sent:

Is this a joke?

Out in the courtyard, McCree had turned towards the window, but was still staring down at his phone screen with frown and furrowed brow. Hanzo’s smirk widened to a smile.
McCree

5/17/76 11:01 You sent:

I do not joke. I am always serious.

Three dots pulsed in a grey bubble next to McCree’s name. That, at least, hadn’t changed since the last time he used a phone - it meant that McCree was typing. Out in the courtyard, Hanzo could see McCree furiously tapping the screen, pausing, scratching his forehead, pacing. This went on for several minutes before the reply came through.

McCree

5/17/76 11:08 McCree sent:

I aint sure what to say to that

Hanzo chuckled at the phone screen, watching as Genji hit his targets, accurate but not quite so fast. McCree tugged on his collar, then reached both arms behind him and tugged his shirt over his head.

If Hanzo had felt scandalized before, it was nothing to now. McCree’s pale undershirt did little to hide his barrel chest or the dark hair covering the tops of his muscled arms and chest. Hanzo had been right in his earlier assessment at the club - McCree was powerfully built, healthy, fat over muscle. When he reached his arm up to place his hat back on his head, the shirt lifted and offered a peek at his soft, fuzzy stomach, just above his glinting belt buckle. McCree turned, began to look up, and in a flash of embarrassment, Hanzo let the curtain fall and turned his back to the window.

Foolish. He was acting like a schoolboy - or a perverted old man. Self-conscious, his fingers went to the grey fans of hair at his temple; his eyes went to his mess of a room. Hanzo shut his eyes. Yes, foolish.

He stared back down at the log of messages again, and saw again the one he’d received from an unknown number. He tapped it.
5/17/76 10:16 090-1790-1357 sent:

It’s Keiko. Let’s talk, tonight, 8.

A puzzle from every angle. What did Keiko have to speak with him about? Reluctant, but out of some compulsion, Hanzo added her number to the phone’s contacts before replying.

Keiko

5/17/76 10:16 Keiko sent:

It’s Keiko. Let’s talk, tonight, 8, shrine balcony.

5/17/76 11:11 You sent:

Won’t you and Genji be out drinking at Club Cerisier like teenagers?

5/17/76 11:20 Keiko sent:

Nah. At 8 Genji’s going to the airstrip to visit the monkey.

Hmm. The Shimada airstrip was twenty-five kilometers at least from the castle itself. Even if she had improved since the last time they dueled, which Hanzo doubted, battling Keiko wouldn’t take more than a few minutes. Even if they called Genji the moment the duel began, he wouldn’t be back until the whole thing was already over. Hanzo peered out the window again, then switched to he and McCree’s conversation.
5/17/76 11:25 You sent:
Is Overwatch keeping tabs on the Shimada Clan again?

5/17/76 11:28 McCree sent:
Aint got quite enough eyes for that right now

5/17/76 11:29 You sent:
I could take care of the problem.

5/17/76 11:34 McCree sent:
That so

5/17/76 11:35 You sent:
If I remove Keiko, will Overwatch interfere?

5/17/76 11:37 McCree sent:
Thought you wanted to wait until Genji wasn’t around

5/17/76 11:38 You sent:
Sometimes opportunities arise.

5/17/76 11:40 McCree sent:
Never pegged you as the crime-of-opportunity type

5/17/76 11:40 You sent:
5/17/76 11:42 McCree sent:

Cant see why we’d have a reason to stop ya, cept she put us up in the castle and aint done nothin to us. And I know one fella that wouldnt be real happy with ya if you did

5/17/76 11:43 You sent:

I do not care what that half-man thinks of me.

5/17/76 11:48 McCree sent:

Might be a good time to remind you that half man got Keiko to take yer bounty off the list. Which is another point, I might add. She aint out to kill you no more. Might be courteous of ya to return the favor

His fingers started typing the message before he even thought of it, sharp and angry: “That was no favor.” For a time, he stared at the cursor, read the message over and over, sitting in the dark, hot room. Finally, he deleted the message then closed the chat log, and found himself staring at the home screen.

On a whim, he navigated to the browser and searched for the website McCree had shown him a few days ago at the club: “A Moment in Crime.” It was an English pun so terrible he found it amusing. A quick search of the ridiculous name and “top bounties” brought up the familiar website McCree had shown him. Hanzo’s name was still missing from the list. Oddly enough, McCree was no longer top dog either. He’d taken second place to another name, one he’d curiously been asked about only an hour earlier.

Neil Waldrum.

Hanzo stood on the balcony of Shimada Castle’s shrine, looking down over the zen garden. Inside, there were the distant murmurs of the commune of elders, a weekly meeting where the kumichō discussed affairs of the clan and received guidance. Hanzo remembered them fondly, the long debates and conversation stretching out until nine or ten PM.

Now, though, he yearned for the commune to end quickly. His bow was strapped to his back, and he felt a roiling urgency for Keiko to arrive. Only her impending demise could make him eager to see his cousin. The dragon knew what was coming.

Then he heard it: Keiko’s loud cackle drifted out onto the balcony from inside the residence, getting closer.
The Viper. They should have called her the Hyena, for all the full-throated cackling she did. Still, thirsty as Hanzo was for his cousin’s blood, the commune should not be close to over yet. He heard her sock-footed steps at his back, then felt her beside him. He turned to see her fire up a cigarette.

“Disgusting habit,” Hanzo said.

Keiko blew smoke from the side of her mouth in his direction.

Hanzo leaned away from it and grunted. “The commune with the elders, over so soon?”

“I did the important stuff. The rest, they’ll figure out,” she said.

Hanzo grunted. “They spend money the family does not have. Nagano always-”

“Nagano’s dead.”

He paused. “Well, Takagawa will-”

“Takagawa got shot up in the Overwatch raid.”

“...Aizawa?”

Keiko took a deep drag from her cigarette. “Lung cancer,” she said into the smoke.

The name he didn’t want to ask about burned at the back of his eyes. Keiko’s profile held a likeness in the shape of the nose, the slope of her brow, and the far-off, bitter expression. Hanzo swallowed, and willed himself to ask, “Kanata?”

Keiko grinned that wide, serpentine grin of hers as she turned around to lean her elbows on the balustrade. “Genji killed her in Siberia.”

It numbed him like ice. His aunt, once a pillar of his life, murdered in a cold and distant land by the cybernetic shade of his brother. He could almost feel her big, warm hand on his shoulder; almost hear her in Keiko’s voice. That Genji killed her only surprised him for how much like Genji it sounded. Killing Kanata was not an act of the warm, serene half-man who yearned to reconnect with him; if the Genji Hanzo remembered had survived, reckless and passionate vengeance was definitely his brother’s style.

Hanzo looked at his hands. “Are you sure?”

“Genji told me himself.”

The next question, he knew the answer to, but asked anyway. “Why was Kana in Siberia?”

“She was looking for you,” Keiko said.

Of course she was. He squeezed his eyes shut and took in deep the scent of Keiko’s cigarette. It reminded him of her. “Why was Genji in Siberia?”

“He was lookin’ for you, too.”

“If he had been seeking reconciliation, murdering Kanata was a foolish decision.”

“That wasn’t why he was looking for you, Dragon Boy.”

The statement took him a moment to puzzle out. “He wanted to kill me back then?”
“Cousin, he wanted to kill you when he showed up in Hanamura a month and a half ago. Why’d you think I let him in the castle in the first place?”

“I could not say, considering you do not believe him to be who he says he is.”

Keiko only shrugged, apparently unaffected by the revelation. “I’ve been dumping money into assassins for years. Some omnic showed up and said he’ll kill you for free if I just told him the when and where. Seemed worth a shot.”

Playing the hand she was dealt. It was a skill Keiko was particularly good at. “So you told him about my annual visit. You did not mind that ‘some omnic’ was pretending to be your fallen cousin?”

“We’re both pretending. I don’t mind a joke, so long as it’s not on me.”

“Even after he decided to let me live? And brought Overwatch into the neighborhood?”

Keiko shrugged. “You don’t believe it’s him either, and you’re still here.”

“But why take down the bounty on the advice of a stranger?”

Keiko cast him a sidelong glance, then looked away.


Keiko chuckled. “Why?”

Another strange answer. How could Genji stand this woman? Nothing about her made sense. “She was your—”

“-if you call that bitch a ‘mother’ then it’ll be a curse against every mom from here to Sapporo.”

Keiko glowered at him the same way Kana used to.

“She was not so bad as you painted her.”

“Easy to say when she didn’t paint you black and blue.”

“You baited her constantly.”

Angry, Keiko shot back “Damn right I did.”

“Why? Why not appease her, if it stopped you getting hurt?”

Keiko laughed a short, bitter laugh. “You think I never tried? Being good didn’t help; not once. No matter what I did or how small I made myself, she’d get drunk and find a reason.” She took a drag from her cigarette. “I learned early on no matter how good a daughter I was, I’d never be good enough for her to be a good mom.”

She was right, he realized. When they were very young, before his mother left, he barely saw or heard from Keiko at all. He’d forgotten it - he only really remembered her from adolescence on, when she became the family’s notorious wild child.

Never good enough for her to be a good mom. A ghost of pressure stabbed between his shoulderblades, and Hanzo straightened up to his full height, shoulders back, staring down at the zen garden where he and his mother used to practice archery.

“So you stopped trying to be good and chose to defy her.”
Keiko nodded. “Hell, at least then I knew it was coming. It was something I did instead of something that happened to me.”

“She never… With me, she was never like that,” Hanzo said.

“Because you were going to be kumichō one day, and would be in a position to punish her for it.”

“Not true. She was hard on me, pushed me, asked things of me…” Hanzo went silent.

“Asked you to kill Genji.”

“No-”

“In so many words, maybe, but I knew she did. She wanted Genji and me out of the picture. She never owned us like she owned you.”

Hanzo bristled. “Kanata did not own me.”

Smoke puffs burst out from between Keiko’s teeth as she laughed. “Cousin, you’ve belonged to other people your whole fuckin’ life.”

* Cousin . She only ever called Genji that. Hanzo damned her in his head a dozen times, tired of this confounding conversation. “Why did you ask me here?” As soon as she satisfied his curiosity, he would fill her with arrows and be done with it.

Keiko grinned ear-to-ear and pulled her phone from her breast pocket. “I have this funny video I want to show you.”

It floored him. He couldn’t think of anything more foolish if he tried. “I do not have time for this,” he snarled, and almost left her on the balcony before he remembered what he’d come here to do.

Keiko navigated her phone with her thumb. “Ah, here it is. Check this out, Dragon Boy, it might even make you laugh.” She turned the screen to face him.

It was through an odd lens - fisheye, perhaps, making a wide angle of the Shimada main hall. There were two figures, tiny from the camera’s height, in the center, beneath the scroll and beside the shrine Hanzo had left for Genji all those years ago.

His own voice came out muffled through the phone’s speaker. “What did you do with the original scroll?”

“The one with the old motto? I burned it.”

“That scroll had been in our family for centuries, Keiko,” he said.

“And now it’s ash .”

It was a security video, a recording from a few nights ago. Hanzo gulped, and it felt like trying to swallow a cork. He looked up from the phone screen. “Since when did the castle have cameras?”

Keiko’s grin, impossibly, got wider. “Keep watching. This is my favorite part.”

But he didn’t watch. He knew what would be on that video next. Instead, he locked eyes with his cousin as his voice, harsh and low, made an oath over the phone’s speaker.

“Father. Mother. If our clan must die, it will not do so in quiet shame. It will die with honor.”
The voice on the video had barely finished the vow before Hanzo had his bow drawn. Keiko was just as quick, brandishing her nagamaki and pointing it at his chest, the phone dropped to the floorboards and forgotten. She had known ahead of time how this would end. Perhaps it was why she invited him here in the first place. They stood, weapons pointed at one another, waiting for a flinch, a jump, an impatient strike. Distantly, the bamboo of a *shishi odoshi* clunked and reset.

Keiko broke the silence. “You wanna know why I burned the scroll, Hanzo?”

Hanzo took in one long breath, then let it out. “Yes,” he admitted.

“Because that motto was *bullshit*.”

Hanzo furrowed his brow. “‘Let the Dragon consume our foes’? It has been our family credo for centuries.”

“Yeah, and it sucks. Because those ‘foes’ were never out there.” She nodded towards the open front gate. “They were always in here. It happens over and over again. Sojiro killed our grandmother, Kanata killed Sojiro-”

“She didn’t-” Hanzo gasped.

“Like *hell* she didn’t. She waited until she had her hand so far up your ass she could control you like a puppet, then she *killed* your father, and got *you* to kill Genji.”

“No!” Hanzo drew the bow back farther, far as he could, shaking from the taut tension. His arm burned. Inside, his bitter rage, his soul, burned to come out. *Let the Dragon consume our foes.*

Keiko went on. “That’s what we do, Hanzo. That’s the Shimada legacy - not a dragon, or a scroll or a castle or a photograph.” She prodded her nagamaki forward so the tip cut a sliver in the breast of his kyudo-gi. “It’s holding our own family at the end of our sword.” Keiko took one hand - her bad hand, the one tattooed and missing the pinky - off her tsuka and stabbed her index finger up at the carved *uroboros*; the dragon sigil that was etched in every corner of the castle. “Eating our own tail. You wanna know how Genji convinced me to take down the bounty?”

In two long, deep breaths, Keiko closed her eyes and lowered her sword.

It was a trick, it *had* to be. Hanzo kept his bow drawn. *Shoot her now,* his instincts screamed. What was stopping him? Honor? Curiosity? His arm felt like it might break. He could hear his mother’s voice chiding him.

Keiko, staring his arrow in the face, a starved and tired ghost of her mother, told him what the ghost of his brother had told her. “He said if I really wanted to give this shit family the royal kick in the gonads it so richly deserved… I had to let you live. I had to put that sword down.”

Keiko laughed a joyless laugh and turned from him, looking out over the rock garden and decaying castle grounds. “‘Let it end,’ he told me. ‘Let it end with me.’”

Hanzo had the clearest shot he would ever get. Point blank, right through the brain, and Keiko would barely see it coming. She wasn’t looking at him. Genji was still away at the airstrip, and the elders were a room away, perfect for calling an alarm. He could do it, *should* do it; this was his moment, and his arm yearned for him to let the arrow fly. Still, he held on until Keiko turned to face him, spreading her arms in challenge.

“So if you want it all back, go ahead. I know the old guard would jump behind you. They’ve been cursing at my back since I got here. You can have it. The name, the title, the castle, everything. All
you have to do is kill me. Do what our family’s always done.”

Hanzo stared at her face, that starved version of her mother, mournful and defiant. Not yearning to die, but not afraid of it. It felt too familiar, a recording playing on Keiko’s phone of their duel ten years ago, where she’d knelt bloodied before him and said “Go ahead, Dragon Boy. Kill me. I’d die just to curse your ass twice over.” He looked from her face to her outstretched arm - to the green dragon tattoo wrapped around her stubbed pinky finger.

*Let it end. Let it end with me.*

Hanzo swallowed, shut his eyes, and lowered his bow. “May I have a cigarette.”

Keiko quirked her head at him, then laughed, shaking her head and dropping her hands. “I thought it was a disgusting habit,” she teased, taking the crumpled pack out from her jacket pocket. With a clever snap of her wrist, a single cigarette slid out towards him.

Hanzo plucked it from the pack like a flower. Keiko leaned over him and thumbed the lighter to life. It took a while to get it lit - both their hands were shaking. Once that was done, Keiko whipped the lighter shut and dropped it in her pocket.

Hanzo took a long drag, then blew the smoke out through his nostrils. For a while, they stood on the balcony together and said nothing. Keiko looked down at the tiny butt of her cigarette, pinched between her fingers. “Y’know, when we were kids… I wanted to be friends with you so bad,” she said, then laughed. “Pretty stupid, right?” Sighing, she took one last drag, then threw the butt down into the zen garden.

“Anyway... I have to go get trashed and officiate a race,” she said, grinning. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Cousin.” She put her hand on Hanzo’s shoulder, and for a moment, it was big and warm the way Kanata’s used to be. Keiko spun on her heels, shoved her hands into her pockets, then whistled as she walked back into the house.

Hanzo smoked the cigarette, feeling hollow. He’d sworn an oath to his father and mother. He promised to end the Shimada Clan with glory, just as he’d promised to uphold as such when he’d succeeded his father. He’d failed at both.

In a trance, he walked back from the balcony to the main hall. He stared numbly up at the scroll that now hung there, above the shrine he’d left for Genji. *Dragon’s head, Snake’s Tail.* Keiko’s joke. An anticlimax, a disappointment - an accusation. The four characters glared at him like a disapproving parent. Perhaps he’d hadn’t made the vow for his parents or the family; perhaps, he’d only made it for himself.

Sadness boiled up in him, clogged his throat. Rain waiting in the dark depths of a stormcloud, pushing at the edges, threatening to downpour. He covered his mouth with both hands, as if it might hold it in. He stood hunched forward in the center of the room, unsure of where to go. He didn’t want to go back to that small room with the cups by the bed, the clothes and trash crumpled on the floor, the unbearably heavy heat.

*A good fight,* he thought, eyes hot. *That was all I wanted. To die by the hand of someone worthy,* for something worthy. *Keiko stripped me of both.* Insufferable woman, his cockroach of a cousin, who somehow survived when life had done nothing but punch down at her. He hated her. He *wanted* to hate her.

More than anything, he wanted his brother back. Genji, who knew what was wrong with a look; who teased him, who got his jokes, who got angry with him, who did whatever he pleased, who
never pitied him. But the Genji that had come back was not that man. The Genji he’d known, his brother, was gone.

A sound, like bells, rang behind him. Hanzo drew his bow without a thought, spinning around and searching for the target. On the bridge that lead into the hall, McCree put his hands up.

“Whoa there. Relax, Shimada, it’s just me.”

Hanzo started to put down his bow, then stopped himself. He stared down to McCree’s hip, at his six-shooter.

A good fight.

It was so elegant; so simple. Hanzo looked up at McCree with steel, and loosed an arrow.

McCree ducked it, grabbing his hat. “Whoa! I said, it’s me!”

Another arrow. This time, McCree rolled out of the way.

“What the hell’s got into you?” McCree demanded.

“Fight back,” Hanzo commanded, third arrow already drawn. He burned when he saw the American’s hand go to his hip.

“You done lost your damn mind!”

Hanzo released the bowstring.

Another quick duck. This time, the arrow lodged itself in the gunslinger’s hat. McCree took a few steps back, then carefully took the hat off his head. He removed the arrow, then stared down at the inside of the old, dusty hat. McCree shoved his mechanical pinky-finger through one of the twin holes the arrow had left in it, then glared up at Hanzo. He put the hat back on his head and unholstering his gun.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” he snarled.

It was like moving your hand from a hot stove. Before he even knew it, his body was running from the McCree’s whip-crack shots. He dodged behind a support, just as a bullet splintered the dry wood. Hanzo drew another arrow, then ducked out of cover to fire.

A fast spray of bullets made the angle of Hanzo’s shot go wide. He ducked behind the pillar before he could see what came of the shot. He was breathing hard. The tinkling rain of shells into the tatami confirmed what Hanzo had suspected: he’d missed. The chain-gang footsteps told him something else: McCree was coming closer. He had to move.

Hanzo darted from the cover of the pillar towards the staircase. Another six bullets exploded after him. A bullet grazed Hanzo’s ankle as he got to the stairs, and he stifled a cry. Hanzo barely got a look at McCree’s position through the gunsmoke. In the haze, he looked like a ghoul. His steady, heavy footsteps made him sound like one. The American was tall, walked slow, shot quick. You can tell who a person is by the way they fight, his mother used to say.

Hanzo limped halfway up the steps, then reached over his shoulder and felt the fletching of the arrows. His fingers closed over the soft feathers of a seeker arrow. He drew, aimed, and fired it at the base of the stairs, and it pinged out McCree’s heat signature. He was doing that slow walk towards the doorway.
Hanzo dropped onto his good foot and aimed, waiting for McCree to walk into view. Instead, he stopped at the edge of the doorframe, just out of his line of sight. From the downward angle on the brim of his hat, Hanzo realized McCree was looking down at the seeker arrow.

“Those are some fancy arrows, but I ain’t about to make it that easy on you,” McCree drawled from around the corner.

Damn! Hanzo inched to the side, hugging the wall, trying to get a line on the American.

“I knew you were a son of a bitch, Shimada, but I would have never guessed you were crazy to boot.”

That made him angry. He thought of the afternoon McCree had come into his room unannounced - found him asleep at two-thirty in the afternoon, inside a mess. Shame flooded him. “I am not crazy,” he yelled back.

“Says the fella who just started shooting at me for no gotdamn reason.”

Blood streamed out from Hanzo’s foot. Slow, quiet, and with pain, he sank down one step, seeing just the edge of McCree’s red serape. Taking a few long, deep breaths, Hanzo reached over his shoulder and felt for the prickly fletching of a scatter arrow.

“I may not like it, Shimada, but right now we’re supposed to be on the same side.”

Hanzo bit down and swallowed a cry as he slunk down another step, hitting his foot on the wood. He drew the arrow back, aiming for the visible toe of McCree’s booted foot.

“How about you put yer bow down and tell me what this is ab-”

Hanzo loosed the arrow, and saw the fragments spray out like fireworks when they hit the floor. McCree dropped out of view, cursing Hanzo’s name. At that moment, the seeker arrow ran out of power. Hanzo sat on the steps, gasping and bleeding and listening for any sound from around the corner. Was McCree dead? Had Hanzo, for none but selfish reasons, killed him?

Hanzo hardly noticed the gunbarrel peek around the corner before the muzzle started to flash; six clean, even strobes. Hanzo tried to dart up the stairs, out of the way, but though McCree couldn’t see the shots, it was a narrow stairwell. Four of the bullets lodged themselves in the wood. Two, lodged themselves in Hanzo.

His arm was bad. He felt the dragon stir as blood poured out from its indigo scaled. Hanzo flopped up the stairs like a fish. He heard McCree reloading, saw him coming around the corner.

This is it. This is it. A part of him felt a primeval fear as he watched McCree climb the steps towards him, mechanical hand clutching his bleeding side, the shaft of the scatter arrow sticking out of his shoulder. Another part of him rejoiced at the slow, chain-gang rhythm of the spurs on each step, coming closer.

You can tell who a person is by the way they fight. McCree had fought clean, facing him. He was a killer, but not an assassin. He’d let Hanzo shoot at him, a few times, trying to put an end to it, giving Hanzo an out. He realized, in that moment, that McCree was more than skilled and charming and analytical; he was a good man. Someone who knew right from wrong - a skill Hanzo had never been gifted.

Cousin, you’ve belonged to other people your whole fuckin’ life. He’d handed his life off to worse people in the past. This good man, at least, would give him a good death.
McCree stopped and stood over him, each booted foot on either side of Hanzo’s knees. The barrel of the gun was in his face.

“A son of a bitch. A real piece o’ work,” McCree mumbled, thumbing the hammer back. Unbidden, Hanzo had the thought that he looked handsome this way, glaring down, mouth drawn. He laughed at himself, haggard and wheezing.

No one would blame McCree for this. No one in Overwatch would investigate Hanzo’s demise, much less shed tears for him. Keiko would gleefully watch the security tape every night. Only the half-man, perhaps, would mourn him. That was the better way.

*Leave here, and forget you ever knew the name Shimada.*

Hanzo closed his eyes.

*Let it end. Let it end with me.*

At first, Hanzo thought the click was of the gun firing an empty chamber. McCree, playing Russian Roulette with him. But when he opened his eyes, he wasn’t staring down a barrel anymore. McCree had thumbed the hammer forward again, and moved the gun away.

“You’re bleedin’ all to hell,” he said. “Let’s get you to Angie.”

“W-what?”

“Angie. She’s a doctor, she’ll patch you up, She won’t like it none, but for Genji. She’ll do it.”

“I do not understand.”

“Well, don’t get fuzzy about it, Shimada. I’m doin’ it for Genji, not for you.”

It spilled out of him like vomit. “He’s not Genji!”

McCree holstered his gun, glaring down at him. “Maybe he’s not Genji to you,” he said, wrapping an arm around Hanzo’s torso and, with a grunt, lifting him to his feet, “But he’s Genji to me. Come on. Angie’s room is this way.”

Chapter End Notes

For people reading the full Omnic Crisis story chronologically, the next chapter is *Time Machine, Chapter Seventeen: Codo con Codo*

SHIMADA ANGST!! The boys had a fight!! I’m a such a sucker for lover duels ;-; I could have sexed it up a bit more, but it didn’t feel right considering why Hanzo started the duel. Either way, I hope it was exciting - I knew they’d have a duel at some point, and this chapter ended up long because I decided last-minute that this was the chapter to do it 8D;;

Thanks again to all my readers! I love you guys! Thanks for suffering through all the angst ;-;

*I will be streaming tonight, 12/8 at 9PM EST!!*

*twitter*
*tumblr*
Welcome back to May I!
Content Warnings: there's some slightly-icky surgeryish stuff mentioned at one point (Mercy getting shrapnel out of McCree), but overall this chapter should be pretty tame aside from the usual Sadman Hanzo and some high-octane Shimada Angst.

I know this one is a smidge short, but I have good news for May I fans. I want to wrap up Act 1 on this story before kicking past the midpoint in Time Machine, and there's a lot to do, so y'all are going to get a new chapter every Thursday for at least the next two, maybe even three weeks.
To Time Machine fans, I'm very sorry for my poor planning. I promise, we'll get back to our favorite cheerful flankers soon!

Streaming tonight, 12/15, 9PM EST!

Thanks to my beta-readers milfordb, Doc, Chip, and Jae, and to everyone who reads and leaves comments ^^ I'm very excited for the next few chapters and beyond as we see more of McCree and Hanzo getting to know each other (:)

If you wanna chat about the story or just say hi:

twitter

tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was strange how injury impeded simple things.

Climbing was something Hanzo had grown up doing and well, and now it took ten minutes of limping up stairs to get to the open landing that overlooked the castle's courtyard. Sitting was even a challenge with the bandaged foot and his primary arm in a sling. Slow and steady, he lowered himself to the floorboards, then sighed in relief.

For a time, he enjoyed the silence of the afternoon, feeling the heat of the sun against his bare shoulder, the misty breeze. Even the scent of the castle’s rotting wood was somehow appealing. Seeing the castle in disarray didn’t bother him quite as much as it had when he’d first arrived - it seemed, in its own way, a natural thing. The image of the castle alone in the wilderness, free from the city, overgrown and coming apart, seemed peaceful.

If there was one thing he had gotten enjoyment from in these long years, it was the solitary, distant reaches of nature. There was something pleasant about being the only human for miles, walking a trail with so few footprints. A survivalists life was challenging in the cleanest way; food, water, shelter; no right or wrong, just kill or be killed. Simple. It made him feel small in a comforting way;
an inconsequential part of a large and indifferent world.

Down below, in the courtyard, shuffling footsteps in the grass approached like a beast. Hanzo stayed very still, as if a bear or wolf might actually be stalking the Shimada grounds. The accompanying metallic rhythm gave it away as no such creature. It was only McCree, rounding a corner, his usual chain-gang gait a little off-kilter - the wounds left by Hanzo’s scatter arrow.

Last night, Hanzo had forced himself to stay in the room and watch as Mercy stabbed tweezers into the tiny, bloody holes in McCree’s flesh to pull the shrapnel out. McCree had hissed through his teeth, screwed his eyes shut, pounded the table, demanded more anesthesia.

McCree was not a bear, yet Hanzo remained still and silent, watching him with keen and wary eyes as if he was being hunted. He was half-tempted to draw his bow on the American, until he remembered he had left it in his room. Not that he could have drawn it anyway, with his injured arm. Besides, McCree didn’t deserve that again, even as a joke. When Hanzo had come at him with a killer's intent, McCree had given him a dozen outs. He had the shot and didn’t take it; instead, he took Hanzo to his friend, a doctor. McCree wasn’t some predatory beast; he was a good man.

“Oh. Didn’t see ya up there.”

In replaying the memory of the night previous, Hanzo had taken his eyes and attention away from McCree. Now, he found he was being stared at.

McCree was down below, standing beside the gazebo. “What’s the damage?” He nodded to his slinged arm.

Hanzo looked too. “Your doctor has instructed me not to use this arm for a week, to be careful with my foot, and I must report to her for three times a day for… treatments.”

*Treatments* involved getting shot with that odd staff of hers. Some kind of modern tech; Hanzo did not like it, but he couldn't argue with the results. His injuries would have left him bedridden for weeks if she’d used normal medical treatment. Instead, his ankle was barely more than painful, and the two bullet wounds in his arm only put him out of commission for a few days.

Hanzo peered down, looking for any signs of McCree’s injuries aside from his off-kilter gait. “And you?”

“Arm’s shot to shit.” McCree adjusted it, fingering his revolver. “I can pull a trigger, but nothin’ more fancy than that.”

Hanzo hummed. “You made no excuse to her for our injuries.”

“Doctor-patient privilege. Besides, if she asked, what d’you propose I tell her?”

Hanzo said nothing.

McCree grunted. “Figures.” He leaned back against the gazebo and peered up at Hanzo from under the brim of his hat, as if the archer was a puzzle he was trying to work out. The brim of his hat cast a dark, banded shadow over McCree’s glinting eyes, like a bandit’s mask. “Look, I don’t give a damn what’s going on with you, Shimada, but you can’t go off the rails like that again. If I catch you aimin’ an arrow at Angie, or Genji-”

“I cannot,” Hanzo said sharply, adjusting his tattooed arm in its sling. Then, quieter, looking away, “I… would not.”
Silence, then the pop of a match being lit. Smoke, and the spicy scent of McCree’s cigars, drifted up to him. Hanzo looked down again. With pursed lips and lidded eyes, McCree blew cigar smoke out, long and slow. Hanzo realized he was staring, and looked away.

“A disgusting habit,” Hanzo said.

“I can think o’ worse ones,” McCree said, bowing his head, a picture of the American cowboy. Hanzo spied a divot in the crown of his hat, the spot where the arrow had stabbed through it. McCree had already done a patchy repair job. Curious.

Hanzo pried. “Why did you fight back?”

“Well,” McCree said, with brows raised, “ya’ shot at me.”

A wry joke, the kind Hanzo liked, though his face showed no sign of it. “Yes, but you did not get angry until I hit that hat of yours.”

McCree clicked his teeth and adjusted the hat on his head. “So?”

“So, why?”

McCree pulled the hat lower, so the brim hid his eyes. “That ain’t your business.”

Back at their first meeting, Hanzo remembered a detail he’d noticed when McCree had removed his hat. “Does it have to do with that black writing on the inside band?”

A cigar-chewing pause. “Let’s make a bargain,” McCree snapped, biting off each word. “I’ll tell you all about it, if you tell me why you started that fight with me last night in the first damn place.”

Hanzo looked away, and said nothing.

“That’s what I thought.” McCree said. “Maybe I got one you will answer - when I shot you all up on that stairwell, why didn’t you send those fancy dragons my way? I was about to shoot you, after all.”

It was a fair question and, unbeknownst to McCree, the true answer would be the same as the one to his previous question. That was an answer Hanzo did not want to give. “I did not think of it.” Not quite a lie - not quite the truth, either. “Besides, arrows do harm without prejudice. With the Dragon, it is not so.”

“How’s that?”

Hanzo paused, then said, “If the Dragon encounters an enemy, the enemy is consumed. An ally, however, can pass through the Dragon’s form unharmed.”

“So the dragons tell you who the bad guys are?”

Hanzo knew exactly what McCree was thinking. A dark desire inside urged him to say yes, and make his sin of killing Genji perhaps forgivable in McCree’s eyes. That, however, was too much a lie. “Not exactly. The Dragon-” Hanzo emphasized the correction, “-is an extension of the self. It destroys those its host perceives as enemies. The Dragon reveals your own true thoughts and feelings - not those of your enemy.”

McCree’s surprised look melted into a glare. Hanzo knew what he was thinking now as well. You didn’t just kill Genji - you thought of him as an enemy.

Hanzo looked away, and said nothing.
After a silence, McCree grumbled to himself and started back towards the house. It felt a little hollow watching him go, and Hanzo wasn’t sure why. *He thinks ill of me, this good man.* Hanzo had not fought many good men in his life; not met many.

A muffled, jangly tune soang from McCree’s pants pocket. He stopped in place and pulled out his phone. “Hello?”

After listening to the person on the phone for a beat, McCree spun around and grinned up at Hanzo. “Oh, *Miss Itsuko,*” he said pointedly. “*Real* good to hear from you.”

Hanzo craned his neck and caught McCree’s self-satisfied gaze. “Your phone’s got a call translator, I see. What can I do you for?”

In the quiet of the courtyard, Hanzo could hear Itsuko’s muffled voice on the other end of the line.

When it stopped, McCree answered. “Tomorrow night? Well, sure, that sounds *fine.* We sure do appreciate it, Miss Itsuko, you’re a real peach.” All the while, McCree was speaking into the phone, but grinning up at Hanzo. It felt as if he was being spoken to, not Itsuko on the phone. *A real peach.* It was hard to imagine McCree ever calling him *that.*

“Yup. Mm-hmm. You bet.” McCree gave a jaunty little cock of his head; a smug, roguish smile, and though he was still talking to Itsuko, Hanzo was sure now the words were meant for him. “Thanks, _honey._”

McCree triumphantly hung up the phone. “Ha! Miss Itsuko wants us to come over tomorrow night and check out her basement. Looks like old McCree planted himself a garden.”

Hanzo turned his head away and huffed. “A weedy garden.”

“Aw, you’re just sore ‘cause I was right.” McCree did a celebratory little two-step.

Hanzo gave an incredulous snort. “You are a ridiculous man,” he said, fighting a smile. When was the last time he had to put effort into not smiling?

McCree continued, if not intensified the dance, tucking his thumbs at either side of a belt buckle Hanzo only hoped he wore ironically. “You just don’t know how to have a good time, Shimada. Gotta celebrate the little victories. Like me being right, and you being wr-uh!” McCree sputtered and grabbed his side, flinching.

Hanzo perked. “What is the matter?”

McCree grinned through his obvious pain. “Ah, nothing. Fella’ just shot me with an arrow is all.”

“I will get Dr. Ziegler.” Hanzo stood up, too fast, and hissed when he realized he’d put weight on his injured foot. Grimacing, he sank down to the wood again. Down below, McCree started to laugh.

“Look at us. A couple of damn idiots.”

Hanzo was only marginally successful in swallowing a chuckle. Odd. It wasn’t all _that_ funny, but something about McCree’s laughter was infectious. “Yes,” Hanzo responded, warmer than usual. It felt like an exchange between old friends. He dared a look down at McCree, soft and hesitant, even hopeful. *There* was a word Hanzo had never used to describe himself. He was quickly reminded why.

The look banished the smile from McCree’s face. He turned his face down, hiding again beneath his
hat. It felt like those first few days after McCree had arrived - unmet, watching him from far away, a mystery. Though for different reasons, Hanzo was reminded why both of them were intent on keeping a distance from one another.

A disturbance in the Shimada house was a welcome distraction. Four Shimada enforcers spilled out of the main entrance, lead by Keiko’s right-hand man Ueda. They were escorting a vehemently-arguing Mercy out of the building. Ueda had her by the arm in a very unfriendly way.

Hanzo didn’t even see McCree’s hand go to the grip of his gun; only saw that now it was there as he walked towards the brothers with patient intent.

“You want to let go of her arm, and right now,” McCree snarled at them. Ueda sized McCree up, hesitated, then roughly released his grip on Mercy. She tugged away from him, straightened her doctor’s coat, snorted, then walked towards McCree, clutching her medical bag.

“What’s goin’ on?” he asked.

“That’s what I would like to know!” Mercy smoothed back an errant pale hair. “They came in and said the kumichō had ordered every member of Overwatch out of the castle. No explanation, just started throwing all my things into a suitcase. Delicate, state-of-the-art equipment, that may now need to be replaced!” She raised her voice, clearly speaking to Ueda and the enforcers and not McCree.

Slower and with more care for his bandaged foot this time, Hanzo stood up. The quartet of yakuza, who were dumping suitcases out on the front steps, much to Mercy’s chagrin. Among them were his belongings as well - though not a member of Overwatch, it had apparently been decided he was to be among those exiled from the castle. McCree called out to Ueda. “Why’s Keiko kickin’ Overwatch out of the castle?”

“It is my fault,” said a voice behind them. All present turned to look.

It was Genji, jogging up behind Mercy and McCree. Though his face was, as always, hidden beneath his visor, Hanzo could tell from his tightness of posture and voice that something was very wrong.

As soon as Genji approached, the Shimada enforcers barked out at him, hands on their weapons. Hanzo froze - he could see his bow on the front steps among Overwatch’s baggage. It was too far to retrieve, but even if he could, his injured arm wouldn’t get off more than a few clumsy shots.

“You are all banished,” Ueda said, projecting his breathy voice, “by the kumichō’s order. We’re to take you to the Shimada airstrip - come quietly, and no one will get hurt.”

McCree, Mercy, and Genji all looked at one another.

“We will go, and not cause trouble,” Genji said, stepping forward. Ueda nodded and yelled out an order to. His fellow clansmen grabbed the bags up from the steps and escorted the group out of the castle.

They were forced into separate cars. Ueda and a bubblegum-popping, long-haired sister shoved Hanzo in the back seat of a sedan beside Genji. The sister hopped into the driver’s seat, and Ueda settled in beside her. He wondered if Keiko would have McCree and Mercy driven to the airport, and have him and Genji taken to a back alley and shot. But despite their sudden ejection from the castle, Keiko wouldn’t harm Genji… would she?

“What is happening?” Hanzo asked Genji under his breath.
Genji looked down at his hands, posture tucked in, breathing uneven. “Keiko and I had a fight. She told me something very troubling.” He looked up. “Hanzo, I… I have to go to Nepal.”

Hanzo cocked his head at the half-man. “What is in Nepal?”


Hanzo looked away, out the tinted window at the walls of Shimada castle, steadily disappearing behind Hanamura’s buildings. “I see.”

“I think my friends there may be in trouble,” Genji pressed. Then, “And, I… want you to come with me.”

Hanzo swallowed, and kept his gaze at the village’s buildings as they zoomed by. “Is Overwatch going with you?”

“You’re avoiding my question.”

“I do not believe you asked me a question,” Hanzo said.

“Do not be an asshole, Hanzo.” It was another of those odd moments where he really did sound like Genji. Inside, the Dragon writhed, uncomfortable with confused familiarity. This thing beside him was host to its brother, but it was also once its meal. Neither dead nor alive, to the Dragon, Genji was a possessed automaton; a thing that should not be.

Hanzo grunted, and just as Genji would know, the half-man knew it was a dismissal of the subject. Out the window, the buildings of Hanamura peeled back to open space. They were close to the airport now. “What did Keiko say?”

“What?” Genji sounded confused.

“You said that Keiko told you something troubling. What was it?”

Hanzo turned to look when Genji didn’t answer immediately. His mechanical hands were folded in his lap.

“She told me… to kiss my friends on the mountain goodbye.”

The brothers drove them right onto the tarmac, parking next to the Overwatch hoverjet, which was sitting idle on the empty Hanamura tarmac. The British girl, Tracer, was there, along with the bespectacled gorilla Winston, who gave them a nervous wave.

McCree and Mercy emerged from their car, annoyed but unharmed. The brothers dumped their luggage on the runway, then jumped back into the cars. “We have lines to the air-traffic controllers here,” Ueda told them, standing with one hand on the open car door. “Do not overstay your welcome.”

Once the enforcers were gone, the entire group turned to Genji.

Genji’s explanation was not much more detailed than the one he’d given Hanzo - he did not elaborate on what he and Keiko had fought about, only told them the worrisome warning she’d given regarding the Shambali’s mountain temple. “I have been trying to contact Master Zenyatta for weeks with no success,” Genji said. “Then this morning, I called every member of the Shambali I knew. No one answered.”
“After Mondotta’s assassination, and the reactivated Omniums, an attack on the Shambali temple could start an all-out war between Omnis and humans,” Winston said. “We have to go to Nepal and make sure they’re safeguarded - if they haven’t already been attacked.”

Hanzo grunted. Over-explaining his decision like a leader unaccustomed to leading, he thought. It was a habit he broke long before he took over as head of the Shimada Clan.

“Well, then - let’s get to it already,” Tracer said, enthusiastic and unphased. She grabbed her bags and started back towards the jet. “You’re coming too, aren’t you, Hanzo?”

The friendly way she addressed him made Hanzo uncomfortable. Genji looked to him, stretching out to a hopeful posture. The rest eyed him askance. McCree shrugged, tired and begrudging. Winston seemed wary. Mercy shook her head. For them, it was not an invitation, but a concession.

“No,” he told her finally.

Tracer’s mouth made an o. Genji sagged. The rest looked relieved, and began schlepping the luggage and gear into the jet.

“I’ll grab your bags, luv,” Tracer told Genji and whisper, giving his arm an affectionate rub.

Genji reached out and stopped her. “I am not going.”

Every face turned to stare at him.

“But Genji,” Winston protested. “You know the Shambali. You’re our contact with the organization. I-I don’t know that they’ll even sanction us in their airspace without your help.”

“And they’re your friends,” Tracer added.

Genji looked at Hanzo with his visored face. “I must stay with my brother.”

Hanzo’s eyelids flared. “No, Genji. You belong with Overwatch.”

Genji marched forward, leaned in, spoke to him in a whisper. The mechanical hand that grasped his arm sent a crackling sensation, like electricity, across his tattoo. “And where do you belong, Brother?”

Even as Hanzo’s lips were forming the word, Genji was saying it in unison with him: “Nowhere.”

Hanzo straightened.

“I know that feeling, Hanzo,” Genji said. “I felt it for many years. I only survived it because I let people help me. Let me help you.”

Hanzo peered over Genji’s shoulders at the eyes watching them, and didn’t answer.

“And you are so stubborn!” Genji snarled. His mechanical hand squeezed harder, and the Dragon on Hanzo’s arm exploded with burning sensation. What is he, it roared.

Something unspoken passed between the brothers, like it always used to when they were young and close. A fight fought with such practice it didn’t need words. Genji sagged, and bowed his head. “I must take my bags to the ship,” he said, leaving Hanzo’s side, defeated. Tracer frowned at Hanzo, then disappeared inside the hoverjet. A few minutes later, the engines hummed to life.

It was simpler this way, Hanzo told himself.
Mercy brandished her staff and carried her medical bag over to Hanzo. “You will not heal as quickly as I had hoped,” she huffed, taking his arm out of the sling as if his body belonged to her. He forced himself not to shrink from her delicate fingers as she examined him. Once the standard checkup procedures were finished, she thumbed a switch on her caduceus staff.

An arc of golden light snapped to him, traveling across his body like a tesla coil. He sighed in at the feeling. It was warm like an embrace, and made his head feel like television static. The pain in his ankle and arm dissipated, and he even felt a calm - not dull and complacent like he usually was, but a true and rare contentedness. For a moment, he was convinced he should get on the jet; that Tracer’s cheerful assumption had been an invitation; that maybe that half-man was his brother after all.

Then Mercy thumbed the staff off and it all went grey again. The pain was better, but still a distant sting, and his brief foolishness was forgotten. As Mercy checked him over again for improvement, he peered across the tarmac at Genji.

*I know that feeling, Hanzo. I felt it for many years.*

It was hard to imagine either iteration of Genji - his irreverent brother or the cheerful half-man - so hollowed out as this. Another of the many burdens Hanzo did not wish for him.

McCree sauntered up behind Mercy. “Mind if I get a shot of that too, Angie?”

Clipped, Mercy indelicately put Hanzo’s arm back in the sling. “I can do your treatment on the ride to Nepal, Jesse.”

“Well, actually,” McCree said. “If it’s alright with Winston, I thought I might stick around.”

They all looked up.

“I don’t think the kumichō has left us that option” Winston said.

“The kumichō don’t need to know,” McCree crooned in a way Hanzo found he liked. “From what I’ve found out so far, and what Keiko said to Genji, I smell somethin’ nasty going on here.” He shrugged her serape on his shoulders. “Besides, Nepal’s a little cold for my tastes. Y’all can save the Shambali without me.”

“You are staying?” Genji asked.

McCree looked to Winston, who shifted on his knuckles. “Uh, well, that’s… your area of expertise,” Winston grinned like he’d just realized that wasn’t quite a compliment. “Sure, I meant to say, that is, yes. You can stay. I… authorize you to stay and complete your mission.” Winston nodded.

*Ah, yes… the new Overwatch is off to an intimidating start,* Hanzo thought.

Genji looked to Hanzo, then marched up and pulled McCree aside. Hanzo leaned in, listening.

“Keep an eye on my brother.” More plea than command, Genji’s request made Hanzo bristle. He liked McCree well enough, but he did not like the idea that he had to be looked after.

McCree grimaced, running his hand up his face and removing his hat to scratch his hair. “Hell, Genji-”

“Please.” Genji wrung his puppet hands. “Just as long as you are here. That is all I ask.”

Anger filled his chest. What right did this abomination of technology have to patronize him this way?
Hanzo ground his teeth, stood up straight, marched over and interrupted their hushed conversation. “I am not a child that must be chaperoned, not by this puffed-up American, and least of all by you, Half-man.”

The clicking of heels heralded Mercy’s entry to the conversation, the rhythm of her gait predicting her righteous anger. “What did you just call him?” There was a razor edge to her voice, a fire in her blue eyes. For the first time, she seemed intimidating. “How dare you. Has it never crossed your wicked mind that you are the reason?”

Hanzo’s throat got tight. That was all he thought about.

“Dr. Ziegler-” Genji began.

“Do you know what I would do, to have any metric fraction of my family back?” For a moment, her voice hollowed out into air, then she steeled herself. “How are you so blind that you do not realize what you have been given? What in God’s name is wrong with you?”

“Angela,” Genji said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

Mercy shook her head, hugged herself, turned and leaned over her medical bag. She pawed around inside, muttering, then fished out a fat stack of golden, glowing patches, and pressed them into McCree’s hands. “Three times a day, each of you, on the site of injury.” She walked past them all then, sparing a glance at Genji. “Please. Let us board the hoverjet and put our backs to this place.”

“I know what I did,” Hanzo called to Mercy. His voice startled him. He’d thought it, of course, but wasn’t sure why he’d bothered to say it. Mercy stopped and looked at him over her shoulder - her, Genji, Winston and McCree. He felt suddenly shy, four sets of eyes on him. He swallowed, wanting to shrink away, but soldiering on. “I know, that is why, he must go with you, and I must stay.”

Mercy softened only an inch. She turned to face him fully, standing straight and splendorous, even without her golden wings. “Genji believes you are a good man. I don’t know if that’s true, but I can tell you, when a good man is given a gift like the one you have been given, he does not say ‘no, I do not deserve it.’ He says, ‘thank you.’”

Mercy disappeared into the hoverjet, and Winston knuckled after her. Genji, after a moment of hesitation, opened his arms for a hug. Hanzo shied from the gesture and dug in his pocket, producing the confounding phone Genji had given him. “This is yours.”

Genji pushed it away. “Keep it. That way I can check in on you, sometimes.” A note of hope was in his voice. Hanzo looked down at the phone’s screen and expected himself to deflect the idea, to think I will not answer. Instead, unbidden, he thought, that could be nice. Hanzo nodded, and returned the phone to his pocket. Genji’s posture perked up a bit, and in his mind’s eye Hanzo imagined him smiling just as he used to.

“Good luck, with your... friends, in the Shambali. I hope you are wrong and all is well.”

The rubber in Genji’s throat bobbed. “Thank you, Brother.”

“I’ll get a motel outside of town,” McCree told Genji. “Should be on a plane to Gibraltar late tomorrow night.” He leaned his arm on Hanzo’s shoulder - the injured one. Hanzo grimaced, unsure if the gesture was oblivious geniality or intentional cruelty. McCree turned to look at him. “You’ll join me, won’t you, honey?” He raised his eyebrows at Hanzo, significantly.

The contact was likely not affectionate, and the pet name only a hint at their meeting with Itsuko
tomorrow night. Still, the closeness made Hanzo warm. He felt uncomfortable in more ways than just his injured arm, yet didn’t want it to end. Looking away, he said, “I suppose.”

Genji gave McCree a thankful bow, and McCree returned it with a tip of his hat. When he removed his elbow, the pain dissipated, but Hanzo felt oddly cold. The friends exchanged warm goodbyes, then Genji turned to him.

When he touched Hanzo’s bare shoulder, he felt again that lightning-strike connection. The Dragon did not speak with words - it was more a feeling or instinct. Run, shoot, touch - speak or be silent. The feeling he had now: I sense my brother in this thing. How can that be?

In that moment, he actually wanted to satisfy the Dragon’s cosmic curiosity. I will go. The words pushed against his lips, ready to be spoken. If you ask me, just once more, I will go with you.

Genji took his hand away. “Farewell, Brother.” He climbed up the walkway. The doors closed behind him, and the burning in Hanzo’s tattoo subsided. The ship lifted out of Hanamura, and away.

Chapter End Notes

Bye Genji ;^; I imagine most people have deduced by now that this story is almost as much about familial relationships as it is about the romantic relationship between the two main characters. I know Hanzo can get pretty mean in this fic, but I really wanted to explore the tumultuous relationship between him and Genji that we see evidence of in the game and how, over time, it could be mended.

As a counter to all this angst, look forward to some goofy fluff next chapter Streaming tonight, 12/15, 9PM EST!

If you wanna chat about the story or just say hi: twitter tumblr
The hotel McCree chose wasn't very nice. Hanzo peered around the lobby with a critical eye. The windows, big open panes of glass installed to make the lobby sunny, were fogged with grime. The furniture in the lobby, built to appear antique, now looked ready for a university student’s apartment. The carpet had been a bright if tacky geometric pattern once, but now stains and frayed holes ruined the symmetry. Patrons’ feet had flattened it; the sun from those windows had turned the cheerful colors dull; echoes of what they’d been, once.

McCree sauntered from Hanzo’s side, up to the hotel’s front desk to procure them a room. There was a mirrored wall behind the woman running the counter. It had been fashionable in architecture perhaps a decade ago. Now rust and water spots crept in from the edges, framing Hanzo’s reflection. The glass was hazy. Hanzo’s fingers touched the greying fans of hair at his temples and yearned for countryside - the forests and fields that had lived for centuries, untouched by time. In those places, the passing of a decade was not so stark and complicated - it was simple.

“How many for tonight?” The woman behind the counter didn't look up from her computer screen when she asked.

“Just me and the fella’ here,” McCree crooned, drumming his hands against the surface of the counter.

“Alright. I have a room with a king available for you,” she sang to her screen in a service-industry voice. A tiny thrill bloomed out from the base of Hanzo’s spine. He stared in the mirror at the reflection of him and McCree standing beside one another.

“A-ho ho, no, Darling. Separate beds’ll do us just fine.”
McCree’s laugh was more than a little insulting. Was Hanzo so hideous that even the appearance that they were together was a joke to him? He glared at the American’s amused expression in the mirror.

The woman swallowed and, at last, looked up from her computer screen. “I’m sorry, sir, I meant that we only have king rooms available.”

McCree hung his head. “Course you do.”

“Do not concern yourself,” Hanzo spat at McCree’s broad back, “I will sleep on the floor.” In the mirror, McCree caught Hanzo’s eye and must have noticed his ire. He grimaced, looked away, tongued his yellowed canine. To the girl behind the counter, he said, “You got anything on the first floor?”

They got their card keys and followed the woman’s directions to their room. Hanzo stewed on McCree’s rudeness the entire way there. The gall of this American, to laugh at even the appearance of being there at the hotel with Hanzo. He knew McCree did not care for his personality, but Hanzo was not so humble that he thought himself unattractive. A bit hard-looking, perhaps - with a sharp face, visible tattoo, and broad shoulders, Hanzo was not approachable-looking like men on television.

Still, he had been called handsome by those with nothing to gain from doing so. If anyone should be insulted by the suggestion, it ought to be himself, that she would think he was here to share a hotel room with this unkempt caricature of an American.

They got to the room, and McCree worked at the door card entry for a solid minute before Hanzo, annoyed, pulled the card from his hand and got the green light lit in one swipe. He went directly into the bathroom, muttering that he needed a shower.

The bathroom door had a device to smooth its closing, and so did not slam in a satisfying way - nor did the lock clunk hard when he turned it. A patient thud, a soft click - the sounds were not a proper expression of his anger. Hanzo huffed and wrenched the shower’s faucet on.

He took his arm from the sling, pulled his hair loose and stripped down, stepping into the near-scalding spray. He lifted his cold fingers like he was receiving an offering, then splashed water across his face and down his neck. A few minutes under the hot water calmed his anger to annoyance. Hanzo’s face matched his personality, he supposed - sharp features to match his sharp tone, a hard expression spreading from the inside and out. He was not an easy man to like; perhaps that reflected on his physical features in some way. McCree was unkempt, but his face was young and approachable, with squinting eyes and a broad smile like frog. The face of a good man. Hanzo touched the healing bullet-wounds in his arm.

Under the spray of the water, he could hear McCree talking to someone. If it was someone who’d dropped by the room, Hanzo had no desire to show himself and be forced into inane conversation. Whoever McCree had engaged, they talked for a long time. The bathroom steamed up. The pads of
his fingers turned to raisins. Hanzo got curious. He finished cleaning himself, shut the water off, and listened.

“Don't beat yourself up, Genji,” McCree said, voice muffled through the door. “Keiko didn't give you much choice, and Hanzo didn't neither. He's a grown man, you can't be responsible for him.”

A call, then, to Genji in the hoverjet. Hanzo tugged a stiff towel from the rack.

“He is my brother. If what happened with Keiko proved anything, it proved I need to stay by his side.” The half-man was still intent on treating Hanzo as some helpless child, it seemed.

“All that proved was your family’s a damn mess.”

“They are still my family. I should not have abandoned them.”

Dry, Hanzo stepped out of the shower, wiping the condensation from the mirror and staring at his reflection. He fingered the wet ends of his shoulder-length hair.

“The Shambali are important to you, too. They're goin’ through plenty worse right now. Hanzo and Keiko’ll take care of themselves.”

“That is what I am afraid of.”

In the mirror, Hanzo grimaced at himself. Genji’s concern was both too late and unfounded. He and Keiko had walked away from one another - he’d let her live and gone after McCree instead. Thinking of it now, it seemed so foolish. Was it only that he knew McCree had the skill to kill him and Keiko didn’t?

He remembered her warm hand on his tattooed shoulder and how, with a few wrinkles and grey hairs, Keiko looked so much more now like her mother. Staring in the mirror, touching the hair at his temples, Hanzo realized he looked like his father.

Picking up the sling Mercy had given him, Hanze peered at the dragon’s head roaring at his wrist. He lifted his hand up to his tattooed pectoral - the dragon eating its tail. Why hadn’t he killed Keiko? Was it truly so simple a thing as he knew she couldn’t have bested him? He scoffed at his reflection then tugged his kyudo-gi back on. Why must Keiko complicate everything?

“Y’all be safe now,” he heard McCree say through the door.

“You as well, McCree,” Genji said through the comm speaker. “I mean it. Keiko is more dangerous than she seems. Hanzo will underestimate her. Please, keep them both safe if you can.”
Underestimate Keiko? Hanzo was sure that he gave that foolish woman the deserved amount of esteem. The half-man’s criticism irked him. You’re slouching, he imagined Genji saying, in that hoarse whisper their mother used to speak in. He hadn't realized until McCree had pointed it out how like her Genji had looked. Hanzo, Sojiro. Keiko, Kanata. Genji, Mitsuru. In the end, perhaps it was as Keiko said: they were all just actors reprising their parents’ roles.

When he opened the bathroom door, it released a hot burst of steam into the hotel room. McCree peered over, but he was still holding up his phone. On the screen, Hanzo spied Genji’s visored face. “I surely will, Genji,” McCree said. “Bye.” McCree thumbed off the video call, and Genji disappeared.

“Are you certain that call cannot be traced?” Hanzo straightened his back and lifted his chin, determined not to live up to the title of he-who-underestimates-his-foolish-cousin.

“Not calls to the hoverjet,” McCree said. “Athena takes care o’ that.”

Hanzo grunted and sat down on the overlarge bed, then got up again, looking around the room. He had the foreign urge to do something - clean, or practice, or read, or exercise. He knew there was nothing to do, but the feeling was so unusual it felt wasteful to ignore it.

“Can I help you?” McCree asked, brows raised.

It startled him. Hanzo folded his arms and tried to think of some excuse for his fidgeting. Under his hand, he felt the phone tucked in his gi and remembered the website he'd looked up a day earlier. “Why did you ask me about Neil Waldrum? What does he have to do with any of this?”

McCree shrugged.

Hanzo huffed and sank back down on the bed again. “Of course. Foolish of me to expect an answer from the babysitter.”

A pause, and then: “He’s been Eda’s main line for their supply. I was hopin’ you knew what kind of product he sells.”

Surprising, that McCree gave up the information. Give and take, perhaps. In appreciation, he offered something as well. “He was… is, your average Australian junker, a low-end dealer. Most of his product was stripped from the old omnium or abandoned military bases in the outback. Tools and weapons leftover from the Omnic crisis.”

McCree squinted. Hanzo imagined gears turning behind his eyes; adding that piece to a complex puzzle in his mind. “Hm.”

“Does that tell you anything?”

McCree shrugged. “If it does, I ain’t put it together yet. How much did he move?”
A lie, perhaps. McCree could be holding it close to his chest, or, he could still be truly working out what it all meant. Hanzo went out on a limb, “To my memory, he was an opportunist. It was either feast or famine when it came to his supply. Even when he had goods, they were often not useful.”

A click of his teeth, then “That plays.”

Hanzo raised his eyebrows.

McCree looked a little sheepish. “Probably shouldn’t tell you this, but uh, that shipment of Eda’s that got knocked over, the one Keiko mentioned? Well, turns out not too long before that, one of their warehouses got robbed.”

“What was taken?”

“Don’t know. Athena accessed some communications from the Eda syndicate. From context, it seems like Waldrum sold ‘em whatever was delivered to that warehouse, but you know how these fellas are. Keep the language cryptic so it won’t hold up in court if warrants go out.”

Hanzo hummed. He did know. They used to do it all the time when he was still with family - it was something Kanata had taught him. McCree did not elaborate further.

Give and take, Hanzo thought. “Eda would not want it publicized that they could not protect their product, either. Do you think Talon is responsible for robbing the warehouse as well as the shipment they were planning to sell?”

McCree looked to his phone as if asking the ‘call ended’ screen for permission. He scratched his beard. “Well... see, there’s the rub. That shipment? We knew Eda was the seller, but based on those communications Athena accessed, we think Talon might have been the buyer.”

Hanzo straightened. “Why would Talon attack their own exchange?”

McCree shrugged. “Deal coulda gone south, or Talon decided why pay for something when you could kill a few yakuza and get it for free. Or...” McCree growled and lifted his hat, scratching his hair.

“Or?”

McCree grimaced. “Or... we’re wrong, and Talon weren’t the ones who knocked over the shipment.”
Hanzo’s eyes got wide. “You think Keiko did it.”

“I ain’t sure of that yet.” McCree looked at his face, then away.

“That’s what you think she’s hiding in the club and Rikimaru’s basement. She robbed Eda’s warehouse and stopped the deal with Talon. You think she’s trading weapons again.”

“It’s just a hunch I’m workin’ on, that’s all,” McCree said. “But with everything goin’ on, and after what she said to Genji, hopin’ he said goodbye to his friends in the Shambali? I don’t know what else it could be.”

Hanzo frowned. “But she has been kumichō for years. Why now?”

“That’s the one I’ve been chewin’ on. Maybe the family really is runnin’ outta money and she ain’t as keen on being poor as she thought. Could be the reason she took down your bounty, too.”

Hanzo looked away. “No,” he said. “I do not think so.” That reminded him: “The bounty! Have you seen that website since that night at the club?”

McCree furrowed his brow. “Naw.”

Hanzo pulled out Genji’s phone and opened the browser to the last page he’d been on. He held the screen up to McCree. “You see the first name?”

McCree squinted at it, then his mouth dropped open. “Well I’ll be damned… Neil fuckin’ Waldrum. You said he was small-time, old junked weaponry.”

“So I thought as well. Do you think it has anything to do with what he sold to Eda?”

“Hell, maybe.” McCree shook his head, sank into a faded chair, spoke to himself. “Damn, Keiko. What’d you get yerself into?”

Hanzo smoothed back his hair and didn’t know what to say. It seemed entirely out of character for his cousin, who yearned so much to destroy the family. Why would she rekindle its legacy?

McCree peered out the window at the half-moon. “Hell, at least it ain’t me at the top of that list no more. Say, why’d you put that same robe on again? You goin’ somewhere?”

Hanzo frowned. “It is a uniform, for archery,” he corrected. Then, “And… I only own this one, and one other.”
McCree tilted his head. “You ain’t got no PJ’s?”

It took a moment for Hanzo to parse the colloquialism. “No pajamas, no.”

“So, what, you sleep nekkid or something?”

Hanzo swallowed a laugh. “No. I sleep in this. When you live meanly, you do not need special, separate sleeping clothes.”

“Yeah, but just two sets of clothes?” McCree peered at Hanzo’s meager bundle of belongings. “When I was on the road, I traveled light but I at least had a change of shirts and undies and some damn PJ’s.”

“I keep my clothing washed and mended,” Hanzo said defensively.

“I ain’t sayin’ you’re not clean, just, seems like it ain’t much to live on.” McCree kicked his boots off onto the floor. “You spend a lot of time on the road?”

“Yes,” Hanzo said. “I left the Shimada Clan many years ago. I have wandered ever since.”

McCree hummed, nudging the boots towards the doorway and sinking lower in the chair. “How’d you like it?”

It seemed a bit too friendly to Hanzo. “Why do you ask?”

“No reason. Just, Keiko told me a little about her time out in the wild, said she liked it. Living place to place, easy to skip town when things got hairy, no responsibilities - even had a girl of her own for a while. Was wondering if it was the same for you.”

Hanzo cocked his head to the side. “You were wondering if, while I was away, I had a girl?” Hanzo well knew that was not what he’d been wondering, but it amused him to ask.

Perhaps McCree recognized it as a joke, because he laughed and said, “Naw, I meant, did you like it? Bein’ away from Hanamura.”

“It was sometimes pleasant. I traveled in unpopulated areas. I enjoy nature. Out there my life is… was, simple. Every day was different, in some ways - the same in others.”

“Hm. Alright.” McCree smirked like he was hiding something.
“What?” Hanzo was partly annoyed and partly amused.

“Nothing! Just the first time I heard you say you enjoyed something.”

A jest, teasing him, but for once Hanzo didn’t feel it was done to be cruel. Only when McCree cleared his throat did Hanzo realize that he’d forced back his own smile.

“Nah, but I know that feeling,” McCree said. “Eventually, the inside of hotel rooms all look the same no matter where you go. Still, I like rambling. Drove across the country once, the old Southwest highways, when I was on the run myself. I liked it - seein’ the sights, meeting all kinds of folks. Being on the road is like a trust exercise with the world. You find it’s full of good people - generous, kind. Don’t get me wrong, I slept in my share of train cars and haystacks, but for the most part, people are happy to help a fella out.”

A charming fellow, perhaps, Hanzo thought. One with a friendly face. Smart and handsome. A good man. That is the kind of person the world is happy to help. He said, “I did not see many people in the places I went.”

“Well, you should change things up,” McCree suggested. “Go to some cities, or if that ain’t your style, some little towns. Might reverse that sour face of yours.” More friendly teasing. For Genji, Hanzo reminded himself, he is only staying here with me, for Genji. He and McCree both broke eye contact at the same time, looking pointedly away from one another.

“Well,” McCree huffed and got up, taking a crooked saunter over to his suitcase. He bent forward to unzip it. “You can borrow my PJ’s if you want. No use sleepin’ in your clothes.” He pulled out a wrinkled pair of grey sweatpants. Hanzo had half expected something printed with cowboys and indians. “I like sleepin’ in my undies anyway, when the weather’s hot like this.”

Hanzo scrunched up his nose and grimaced.

“Oh, well so-rry, yer majesty,” McCree complained. “I ain’t fancy like you, sleepin’ in my clothes.”

“They do not say something foolish across the ass, do they?” Hanzo asked.

“They surely do!” McCree turned them around and showed off the four printed block letters: B-A-M-F. “Got ‘em as a present, a good few years back.” He grinned, all goofy pride. It was almost... cute.

“Ugh.” Hanzo rolled his eyes.

“Well, fine, I’ll just put ‘em back then,” McCree said, folding them theatrically. From the wrinkles, he clearly hadn’t folded them when he’d put them in the bag in the first place.
Hanzo got to his feet, mindful of his ankle, and snatched them out of McCree’s hands. “Hush,” he snarled, and disappeared into the bathroom with an (attempted) slam of the door.

“Ah, so the big bad Hayan-zo Shimada is a modest man,” McCree said through the door.

“Han-zo,” Hanzo corrected, untying his obi.

“Talkin’ to yourself in there?”

Hanzo grunted. A stupid joke that he’d walked right into. He swallowed another smile. “Be silent,” he said.

“So, Han-zo.” This time, McCree said the name at least somewhat correctly. “Like Han Solo.”

McCree’s a big nerd, Genji had told Hanzo once. He decided he’d been on the receiving end of McCree’s teasing long enough. “Like a what?” he asked, smirking.

“What? You don’t know who Han Solo is?”
“This is a person, then?” Hanzo asked dryly, folding his kyudo-gi.

“Is that a—” McCree sounded more frustrated than Hanzo had ever heard him. “You’re telling me you don’t know who Han-fucking-Solo is?”

Hanzo smirked. He’d found something that confounded the gunslinger even more than asking him to explain idioms. “Is he famous for something?”

“Only for doin’ the kessil run in under twelve parsecs, marryin’ a badass princess, and savin’ the whole gotdamn galaxy,” McCree huffed.

Hanzo had to cover his mouth to smother a laugh. Genji was right - he was a nerd. Hanzo regained his composure, sighing out his amusement. “So this is a fictional person, then,” he commented flatly, pulling the sweatpants on.

“A pause. “You’re makin’ a joke outta me, ain’t you?”

Hanzo, bare-chested, opened the door and looked up at him. “I do not joke,” he said with a stern and straight face. “I am always serious.” McCree watched him as he walked past. Hanzo thumbed the waistband of the sweatpants. “These are too big.”

“Well, fuck you, then, give ‘em back!”
“No,” Hanzo said, kneeling down to the floor beside the bed, then laying his kyudo-gi neatly on the ground. Behind him, he heard McCree grumbling, a whispered “je-sus” amidst the sound of clothing being removed. Hanzo laid his head on his folded gi, pointedly facing away from McCree. There was the zipper sound of the sheets being pulled back, then the squeal of mattress coils.

“Gonna turn off the light,” McCree said.

Hanzo adjusted himself on hard floor. He could already tell his neck would hurt in the morning. “Fine.”

More shuffling of the sheets behind him. “Sure is nice to have this big old bed all to myself,” McCree said with dramatic satisfaction. “Feels like I’m swimmin’ in it.”

Hanzo looked at last. McCree was sprawled out in the overlarge bed, arms under his head, grinning at him like the cat that had caught the canary. The sheets were, thankfully, pulled up to his armpits, but it didn’t keep Hanzo’s eyes and mind from briefly… wandering.

Hanzo glowered to hide his gawking. “Move over.”

“Oh, I dunno about that, I’m just so comfy,” Mccree crooned, but shifted over anyway.

Hanzo snorted in response, slipping under the sheets as he tried not to eye the part of Mccree’s bare, furry chest that was peeking out over the covers. He could see, too, the bandages wrapped around his midsection. Hanzo shifted until he was laid with his back to the American, tucked so far at the edge of the bed he was nearly falling off.

“Well… Goodnight,” McCree said.

“Goodnight,” Hanzo huffed. The weight on the bed shifted, then with a click of a lamp, the lights in the room turned off.

In the dark, Hanzo was too-aware of McCree’s weight and warmth at his back. Charming, analytical, a movie nerd with a silly sense of humor and a friendly face - a good man. When Hanzo heard McCree hiss in pain behind him, his mind was flooded with the memory of the scatter arrow he’d shot at the man’s feet; the long moment when he thought, perhaps, that he’d killed him.

How selfish he had been, to pull this good man into his own indulgent sorrow. What a terrible waste it would have been for the world to lose him. It was odd to find that while, yes, Hanzo was very disappointed in himself, he was also grateful McCree had come out of the encounter alive.

Hanzo closed his eyes, and just before he drifted off to sleep, Hanzo soundlessly mouthed out: thank
It was strange to wake with the weight of someone beside him. Hanzo found that he had shifted himself a little closer into the bed in his sleep, and behind him, he could feel McCree moving.

It was not an unpleasant feeling at first. The heat from his body radiated outward; his hair-covered arm brushed against Hanzo’s back; the spicy, smoky scent of him overpowered everything else in the room. For a time Hanzo stayed still, allowing himself to indulge in it. The faint cries and gasps from McCree finally snapped him out of his indulgence.

Hanzo peeled back his eyes and found the room was still dark - only the light of the half-moon shone in. He sat up and looked down. McCree was shaking his head, tossing and turning. His face was screwed up, eyes shut tight. Dreaming? Hanzo looked at McCree’s face and decided: no. He was having a nightmare.

So suddenly it frightened him, McCree began to gasp in air - short, hiccuping breaths like a fish on the shore. His chest spasmed. It was like he was choking. Hanzo grabbed McCree by his bare shoulder and shook him. “McCree. Wake up. McCree!”

With a yell, McCree shot up in the bed and grabbed Hanzo by the wrist. The look of horror on his usually cool face made Hanzo’s eyes go wide. McCree stared at him for a few long seconds, then jerkily patted his own chest, as if feeling for something there. Then his hand went to his throat, running his callous fingers across its breadth. At last, McCree’s body relaxed.

“Hell’s bells,” McCree gasped.

“Are you alright?” Hanzo asked.

McCree, face in his hands, nodded. “Bad dream,” he said, voice muffled by his palms. “Just a bad dream.” He rubbed his hands down his scruffy face, then leaned forward and looked around Hanzo at the open window.

“What time is it?” McCree asked, voice strained and scratchy.

“I do not know,” Hanzo said. “Are you sure you are well?”

McCree was still staring out the window, leaning far forward and craning his neck up, as if looking for something in the sky. “Yeah,” he said, absentmindedly. “Yeah, I’m good. Don’t you worry yourself about it. I’m just gonna get a glass of water and sit up for a while.”

Once McCree retreated to the restroom with a cup, Hanzo sat up and looked out the window himself,
trying to spy what McCree had been looking for. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Puzzled and awake, he thumbed on the screen of the phone Genji had given him, intending to check the time. It unlocked immediately, and opened to the last thing he’d looked at: the list of bounties. Hanzo squinted at McCree’s name in second place, then with realization he looked back out at the sky. There it was, staring at him like a pale, lidded eye.

McCree had been checking the sky to ensure it was not a moonless night.


They arrived at Rikimaru just past 12:30AM the next night, when Hanamura’s streets were mostly deserted. Hanzo felt a serene apathy about the whole affair. He’d returned to his usual somnolent self, stern and unaffected. Itsuko let them inside, smiling morosely. McCree, as advertised, was sweet as honey to her.

“I know ya don’t feel right about it, Miss,” he said. “Keiko grew up ‘round here, and you don’t feel right bringin’ us in behind her back, but believe you me, you don’t want the heat this thing’ll bring down on the shop. There’s already been one gunfight in here. If we didn’t help you out, there’d well be more.”

Itsuko only looked at him, puzzled. Hanzo realized she had no earpiece translator like Keiko and the members of Overwatch, and cut in to give her a gruff translation in Japanese. She nodded with understanding, but didn’t seem at all comforted, still wearing that guilty expression.

Itsuko brushed past them and produced a key from her jeans pocket, leading them to the cellar door. She knelt. Her hands shook as she tuck the key in the padlock, turned, then took it back out and tried again. After three attempts it clicked open, and she tugged the lock away, standing and opening the cellar door with one fluid motion. Itsuko stared at her feet and nodded to the steep, dark stairs. McCree tipped his hat to her and said, with a horrible accent, “Arigatou.”

Hanzo snorted and followed McCree in his ponderous descent. At the bottom step he stopped, pawing at the wall with his gloved hand. “There a light down here?” McCree called up, but a moment later he found the switch and turned it on.

Rikimaru’s cellar was very small, hardly room for more than a few people amidst the shelves and storage bins. Around McCree’s broad shoulders, Hanzo spied something that took up half the space - oblong, like a glossy white pill.

McCree sighed into his fist. “Yup. That’s a bomb.”

Pushing McCree forward, Hanzo squeezed through the lateral space and darted out from behind him. He circled the object, the bomb, studying its various labels and markings. “This is Eda’s stamp,” he said, finger touching the spray-painted sigil. “You were right.”

“Wish I weren’t.” McCree cursed under his breath. “We’re goin’ to have to do something about this.
We can’t let her keep a gotdamn bomb, who knows who she’d sell it to?”

Hanzo looked to McCree over his shoulder. “So that is what you think her aim is? To sell it?”

“Can’t imagine Keiko havin’ stake enough in world politics to do anything else with it.”

McCree walked up to the smooth, white enamel and brushed his prosthetic hand along it. It sang gently under his metal fingers.

“Do you think there are more bombs at Club Cerisier?” Hanzo asked.

The sharp hiss from between McCree’s teeth was almost startling. “Hold on…” He leaned forward and squinted at a few lines of small print on one end of the bomb. “This is an e-bomb.” McCree took off his hat and put a hand to his forehead. “Aw, hell, I missed it.”

Hanzo peered back down at the object. “An EMP?” He scoffed. To think for a moment He expected something impressive from Keiko. “EMP’s only take out electrical systems. Fodder for fringe anti-omnic terrorists, not real businesses. They are hardly worth the money to ship.”

“When you were runnin’ guns, sure,” McCree said. “But my old CO, Reyes, fought in the Omnic Crisis. Back then? An EMP could clear a billion, easy. Big ones like this could take out an entire omnium, and not do any structural damage.”

Beneath McCree’s voice, Hanzo heard the creak of floorboards above them. Likely just Itsuko walking around. He was surprised she had no curiosity about what Keiko was hiding in her basement, especially if she was willing to betray her to help him and McCree. Perhaps the object frightened her.

“Knock out the electronics, sure, but if you’ve got an omnium in an urban area and it’s between losin’ the electricity and losin’ the city? You’d drop an e-bomb in a heartbeat.”

Hanzo turned and looked behind him at the cellar entryway. Were those whispers? Who would Itsuko be talking to? And where had she gone? She was waiting for them at the cellar door a moment ago. Hanzo strained his ears to hear, but McCree kept blathering on.

“It’d all make sense if she stole ‘em after the omniums reactivated, but she didn’t. The warehouses got knocked over weeks earlier. Hell, it was even before that omnic fella got shot.”

Now, Hanzo was sure something was very wrong. He heard footsteps above, lots of them. More than one person was upstairs. He grabbed McCree by the shirt, cursed at him, but he was too lost in his own deduction to notice.
“Hell. ‘Kiss your friends on the mountain goodbye.’ It was right in front o’ me, and I fuckin’ missed it.”

The swift and sudden march of dozens of feet finally got Mccree’s attention. A swarm of yakuza flooded into the tiny cellar, brandishing swords, baseball bats, chains and brass knuckles. Every weapon was trained at McCree and Hanzo. There were more at the top of the stairs, peering down through the open door - it had to be half the clan, and there Hanzo was with a hurt ankle and a shot-up, worthless arm. The yakuza cleared the stairs, then waited in silence.

At last, Keiko descended the steps in a crisp, snowy, spotless suit and a petal-pink dress shirt. Behind her was Ueda, cool and nonplussed, and Itsuko, who peered around Keiko’s shoulder with that same morose, apologetic frown. Keiko trained her beady-eyed gaze at Hanzo and grinned around her cigarette.

“Hello, Cousin.”

Chapter End Notes

Uh-oh!! As one of my beta-readers said: it's a trap! Very excited for a big act 1 close (and a Mccree chapter!) next week - I just hope it's not so long I have to split it in two ;-;

twitter
tumblr
It was his turn to pick the tunes, and thank God. Sometimes when that death metal roared out from the speakers of Reyes’ immaculate old Ford, McCree wished he had chosen to go to super max. At least in jail people might appreciate Johnny Cash.

“Big River” twanged out - the ancient recording sounding all the more hollow and lo-fi on the specially-installed, modern stereo - as McCree bounced in the passenger seat to the lap-slapping, toe-tapping guitar pattern. The oiled leather felt soft against his calloused hands.

With a scoff, Reyes said, “This redneck music again?”

“Cash is a classic, Boss,” McCree said into the air-conditioner vent, spurred heels tapping like tamborines. “Better’n that your screamo shit.”

“Metal’s one of the most complex musical genres in existence. You’ve got no taste, Vaquero.”

“All sounds like a rusty hacksaw to me. Anyway, what are we goin’ into town for?”

The Ford’s front windshield was spotless and clear as always. Reyes looked through it at the tail lights ahead and said, “It’s my birthday.”


“I’ve got to get myself a present.”
"Yourself?" McCree peered over at Reyes' scarred, glowering face. It put him in mind of the bluffs out by Route 66, all cracked and craggy. "I ain't sure that's how birthdays work, Boss."

"It's a tradition. I got it from my mom. She used to always get herself something nice on her birthday. You let yourself splurge, she'd say, you always get what you want." Reyes stopped at a light and leaned his head back against the headrest. "You take care of yourself."

The question came to his mind right away, but McCree paused before saying it, taking the final guitar strum of "Big River" to build up the guts to ask. "Do Jack or Ana get you gifts?"

Reyes shrugged. The light turned green.

For a while they sat, both quiet, just the Man in Black crooning out from the stereo.

Well look way down the river.

What do you think I see?

I see a band of angels and they're,

Comin' after me.

The song’s volume rose when Reyes twisted the knob up just a few ticks, brow furrowed. "This isn't a country song. It's an old church song."

"Yeah," McCree said. "It's a cover. They released it after he died."

Reyes hmphed like that was funny. "Slow."

"Yeah. Cash plays it slow."

"Makes it a little creepy."

McCree hesitated. "Yeah."

They turned off the crowded main street and into a lot just outside of an electronics store. Reyes parked, but didn't turn the truck off right away.

"Do you know about the kid that wrote this?" Reyes said, raising his dark eyebrows to different elevations and peering askance at McCree with those tired eyes of his. "He was twelve and sick with tuberculosis. Thought he was going to die. This song just..." He raised both hands and waved them like double-doors. "...came out. Twelve years old." Reyes laughed, grim and humorless. "Amazing what a person does when they think they don't have a tomorrow." He looked at the roof of the truck. "Makes you wonder what the fuck you're doing."

Well, look down yonder, Gabriel,

Put your feet on the land and sea,

But Gabriel don't you blow your trumpet,

'til you hear from me.
“Fareeha keeps tryin’ to talk to me,” McCree said. “She likes to play cops and robbers. I’d say she’s a little old for it, ‘cept she always asks me if she’s got the miranda reading just right.”

That earned him one of Reyes’ throaty, V8-engine laughs. “Guess she figures you’d know,” he said. “Ana must be pissed.”

Out the window, McCree focused on the way the heat from the Ford’s hover-tire warped the faded blacktop in the empty parking space next to them. He pretended he was saying the words to the cracks in the asphalt. “Ana ain’t so bad.”

Reyes and his eyebrows sat up. “That right?” A scolding; the two tooth-cracking words said like a hand raised up, waiting to see if it had to be brought down.

Through the window, McCree’s eyes grasped at anything to avoid the reflection of Reyes’ face in the glass. “It ain’t nothing. Just, I was at the range and she gave me a couple pointers is all.” He minimized it like he shrank himself, curling up in the passenger seat, head sinking into his shoulders. Unsaid: she weren’t so mean to me as before. She laughed at my jokes. Teased me. Felt nice. Felt like I could be part of the team.

“You can’t go down that road, kid,” Reyes said. “Believe me. Jack and the rest - they can make you feel like they’re on your side when they need you, then, boom-” Reyes slammed his heavy fist on the dash. It made McCree jump. “-you're blindsided. Always remember, it's them and us. Wanting doesn't make it any other way. You'll only end up disappointed.”

Well, meet me mother and father

Meet me down the river road
And momma you know that I'll be there
When I check in my load
Ain't no grave can hold my body down.
There ain't no grave can hold my body down.

Reyes hummed along with the song, with that bloody-gravel-road voice. In the passenger seat, McCree hugged himself, the air-conditioning suddenly too high, making him too cold. “Best get to store, get yerself your present,” he muttered.

“Grow some patience, Vaquero,” Reyes said, twisting the volume knob up. “I think you might have actually found a country song I like.”

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It had gotten real crowded down in the cellar of Rikimaru Ramen. McCree was surrounded on all
sides by mean-looking yakuza with weapons to match: big, heavy chains; brass knuckles; dented aluminum baseball bats. It couldn't be the whole clan, because McCree didn't see a gal among them, but it had to be at least half of them.

On the other side of the bomb, Hanzo shrank from the clansmen and their weapons. He seemed more uncomfortable than afraid, like he had in Sakae-sama’s basement. Instead of looking at Keiko or her men, he kept eying the low ceiling and the open cellar door. Maybe it was the small space that made him nervous.

It was pretty tight down there. There was only a few feet of air left open in the cellar; a triangle of space between Keiko on the stairs, and McCree and Hanzo on either side of the e-bomb. Peacekeeper was at his hip, but with his busted shoulder and bandaged torso, he’d only get about three thugs down before he got overrun.

With that bit of empty space between them, though, one of those bullets could be for Keiko. A clear shot, he thought. Perfect. McCree could muss up that pretty white suit of hers but good; get some brain out to match her pink shirt. He didn't want to kill her, not really, but he would if it came down to it. He looked over at Itsuko.

Damn, she looked miserable. As it turned out, that guilty expression of hers had been for betraying him and Hanzo, not Keiko. McCree might feel sorry for her if she hadn't just tricked him and Hanzo into this shitstorm of a situation.

Hanzo dragoned-up, tall and offended. “What are you doing with this EMP, Keiko?”

By contrast, Keiko was lean and loose, completely at ease. “Whatever I want,” she said.

“Running guns again? I thought you wished to destroy the family,” Hanzo said. He was the picture of the crime boss McCree had seen from afar back in the Blackwatch days. There was something commanding about him. Hanzo seemed to slide into kumicho-mode as easy as a bullet into the chamber. Perfect. It reminded McCree of Reyes - stern and sullen, a born leader.

“Jealous that I might actually make some cash off this deal, Cousin?” Keiko rolled up her sleeves, descended the last of the steps, pulled her nagamaki from its sheath, and pointed it at Hanzo’s chest. “If you want, I could give you a-” she pressed the blade’s tip against his skin, “-cut.”

Hanzo didn’t budge. “Are you going to kill us?”

“Oh, yeah,” Keiko said.

It was odd, the look Hanzo gave him - like an apology. “What about what Genji told you,” Hanzo said, resigned, “about letting it end?”

Keiko’s amused expression faltered, and she looked down at the tsuka of her sword; at the green dragon wrapped around her stubbed pinky finger. “Yeah, well... as it turns out, Genji’s an asshole just like the rest of us.” When she looked up again the wistful sadness was gone, and she was the irreverent fool again. “For years I’ve been dumping all the money this shit family had into trying to get you professionally murdered. You killed every assassin the family had, and every one we hired after that. I spent millions in downpayments and got nothing back except heads in boxes. I made your bounty the highest in the world, top of the list - but not even the Moonless Night would fuck with you.”

The yakuza watched the exchange like patrons in a theater, silent and with varying levels of interest. Ueda observed the exchange intermittently as he texted on his phone. Keiko took a single step closer,
so her sword was braced at her shoulder, ready for a mean thrust. “And now I've got you trapped like a rat and your bow arm is fucked. I get to kill you myself, for free. Genji’s advice was shit - the world wrapped my revenge up for me like a birthday present.”

*One you bought for yerself*, McCree thought, but he said, “Never took you for someone who believed in providence, Keiko.”

Eyes locked with Hanzo’s, Keiko barely acknowledged McCree. “I do when it means I get to run this bastard through with my own sword,” she snarled. “I had one friend in this shit world, Hanzo. One. And you *killed* him.”

“Genji is not dead,” Hanzo said. They were the last words McCree expected to hear out of his mouth. Maybe he was only saying it to bargain for his life.

“Yeah, maybe not,” Keiko said. “But the Genji I remember wasn't some omnic rights freak. He’s changed. Guess getting murdered by your own brother does that to a guy.”

The two Shimadas exchanged glares like a silver-screen standoff. Ueda checked his phone again, yawning into his knuckles.

“What will you do with McCree?” Hanzo, surprising him again. Since when did he give a damn?

“That one’s a real shame.” At last, Keiko acknowledged that McCree was in the room. “I liked you, Cowboy. You should be on that ship with Genji and that cute doctor and the Brit and the monkey. But instead you decided to come down here and stick your dick where it didn't belong.”

With narrowed eyes and a tip of his hat, McCree said, “Happy to disappoint you, Ma'am.”

Keiko laughed. ‘That's shit. You're supposed to call me ‘li'l lady’ remember?’ She cocked her head. “I wonder how much Overwatch would give me for you.”

*Not much*, he thought. *Might be glad to be rid of me*. Reyes’ little Blackwatch bastard, the criminal. They probably never wanted him back in the first place. And what would Keiko do when she found out Overwatch wouldn't pay a dime for him, but a different interested party would fork over a solid 60bil bounty, dead or alive? A voice, like a cold wind, a shiver, echoed in the back of McCree’s mind, making him feel like his throat was closing up. Take care not to rise too high, or I shall come for you. Compared with that nightmare, McCree would take Keiko any day.

“Kanata,” Hanzo whispered.

Keiko poked her sword at Hanzo’s chest. “Eh?”

“You. Running the clan, blackmailing, selling weapons and people. You're acting just like Kanata.”

It was exactly the wrong button to press. Keiko got red as a volcano blowing its top. “You take that back.”

“You think I wouldn't recognize it? I spent every day of my life with her haunting over my shoulder.” Hanzo kept it up, thumbing that button hard as he could. “You have turned out just like your mother.”

Every bit of Keiko’s cavalier indifference was gone now. “I'm going to kill you. I'm going to *kill* you!” The pressure from her blade finally broke the skin, a teardrop of blood rolling down Hanzo’s chest. He didn’t flinch.
“You really believe Kanata killed my father?” Hanzo whispered. “Fine. Then let us reprise their roles.”

Keiko took a few deep breaths and slumped. *Just the wrong button*, McCree thought, *or maybe just the right one*. Slow and in pieces, Keiko relaxed, her tight grip on her sword loosening.

“I hate you,” Keiko said. Behind her, Ueda opened his jacket and slipped his phone into an inside pocket. When his hand came back out, he was gripping a tanto.

Hanzo cocked his head the way he had in the hotel room when he’d told McCree he was always serious. Stoic, maybe even a little smug, he said, “I hate you too, Cousin.”

The flash of the blade made McCree’s heart jumped to his throat. “Keiko, look out!”

She started to spin. The blade stabbed forward. McCree heard her cry out over the slice of fabric. Ueda’s tanto caught her under her armpit. Keiko lost her footing, dropped her sword, and rolled down the stairs, landing with a hard clang against the EMP. She was right at McCree’s feet, blood blossoming out on her cocaine-white suit.

“What the hell?” Keiko reached under her jacket and clutched her wound. “You stabbed me in the tit, you bald penis!”

“Cousin!” Hanzo tried to move to her side, but two clansmen jumped into the space between them, weapons drawn, blocking Hanzo’s way.

“Not him, you cretins!” Keiko cried at them. “Kill *Ueda*!”

Not one of the yakuza budged.

Keiko slumped back against the EMP. “Ah, shit.”

“If this is a play to convince me to take over the clan once more,” Hanzo told Ueda, “it will not work.” He wasn’t standing up straight anymore. Hanzo was hunched forward, back arched, ready to fight from a corner. Not dragoned-up, but wolfed-down; feral, hackles raised, the animal that stalked the wilderness alone for a decade.

“No,” Ueda drawled, pulling out a black handkerchief from a pocket. “At first, perhaps, I thought you would be an improvement on this cunt.” Ueda jerked his chin at Keiko without looking at her, hooded eyes focused on his bloody tanto, which he proceeded to clean with the kerchief. “But after observing you for days, seeing your sloth and erratic behavior on the security footage, I realized it’s not just her. The Shimada dragons have lost their teeth.

“Like that freak cyborg, you two are shadows of what the bloodline used to be. Keiko is a shameful, drunken, foolish disappointment. And you, Hanzo,” Ueda, at last, looked up. “You abandoned your position and responsibilities in the clan for your own pathetic grief. You are a *coward*. Keiko’s only interest is in surviving, and your only interest is in *not surviving*.”

Hanzo shrank from the words - bent forward, gaze lowered, like he was offering Ueda his neck.

*Your only interest is in not surviving.*

Did that mean what McCree thought it meant? Hanzo’s messy room, sleeping into the afternoon, refusing to see Genji as anything but dead.

*The duel.*
That mournful look in Hanzo’s eyes when McCree had come for him on the stairs had been haunting. It wasn’t just resignation, then - Hanzo had looked up at him, and his eyes had been crying at last! At last.

But last night, Hanzo had been… happy was the wrong word, but willing to talk, even if he was an asshole about it. He might have even been joking around, though McCree had a hard time telling. And now, just now, McCree was very sure Hanzo had tried to talk Keiko out of killing him.

Ueda was wrong, he had to be wrong. Hanzo was the Yakuza prince, the brother-killer, the guy that had hurt Genji so bad he’d turned him into something not quite human. He’d refused Genji existence, nevermind his help. He was a master assassin that had defeated everyone who’d come to kill him.

*All those inferior assassins still managed to find him, though. A guy good enough to kill them would know how to hide from them, wouldn’t he?*

Across the room, Hanzo was shrunken, feral, tail tucked. The instant Hanzo caught his eye, though, he stood up straight and looked away. *He don’t like you knowing,* McCree realized. Nothing convinced him more that it was true.

Up above, over Keiko’s labored breathing, McCree could hear heavy footsteps. Not the light, tacky march of the yakuza’s patent-leather shoes - big, ponderous combat-boot steps that sent puffs of dust down on their heads.

“So what now, Ueda?” Keiko sounded bad already. She was hunched forward, hand clutching her armpit, trying to hold the blood in. It wasn’t working - the whole side of her white suit was dyed red down to her socks. “You going to be your own boss?”

Ueda finished cleaning his tanto and slid it back into its sheath under his lapel. “Not exactly,” he said.

A shadow darkened the cellar doorway. Ueda took Itsuko by the back of her collar and dragged her with him down and off the stairs, tucking in behind Hanzo. They were all packed in Rikimaru’s basement like sardines, and now the only clear path was the couple feet between the stairs and the EMP. At first, the shadow moved in silently, like a cloud of smoke. Soon, though - like a drumbeat fading in - big, heavy footsteps started thudding on the steps one at a time, and the shadow began to take a shape.

He was just as big and mean as McCree remembered. A big slab of muscle all in black, descending the stairs the way McCree imagined the Grim Reaper walked towards you when your time was coming. He had a long coat with a hood, tactical body armor, and a mask like a sun-bleached skull.

*Always seem to run into this creep at the ramen shop,* McCree thought. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end as the Grim Reaper ignored them all and walked to the EMP. From one of his many tactical pouches, he produced a small device with a camera, and scanned it across the e-bomb. A single, steel-clawed finger reached up and touched a comm device in his ear.

He spoke in snarling Spanish. “Sending the readings.” The Reaper was checking the reading himself, on the little device… not paying attention. Three targets - that’s how many McCree reckoned he could take out before he got shot down. Keiko was bleeding to death at his feet, so she’d fallen pretty far down on the priority list. This mask creep had jumped to first, then Ueda, and after that it was catch as catch can. Not perfect, way less than perfect, but if McCree had to go out here, he didn’t plan on waiting around.

Slow and steady, surreptitiously, McCree’s hand moved to his gun.
The moment his fingers brushed Peacekeeper’s back strap, the barrel of a shotgun got shoved in his face. “Don't even think about it, Vaquero.”

Slow, like a doll in a horror movie, the Reaper turned his mask to look at McCree. The nickname sent a shock through him. Reyes used to call him that. And that shotgun… it looked familiar, but where had he seen it before?

“Is this what you need, Sombra?” The Reaper, without looking away from him, said the word shadow like a name - Sombra. “Sombra’s” voice crackled out, loud over Reaper’s earpiece.

“Ugh, its huge! I'll need a more compact design. I can't be lugging that stupid thing around, but I guess that’s the Talon engineers’ problem, huh?”

Down at his feet, McCree felt Keiko stir. She was squinting up at the Reaper’s mask.

“If you wanted to see the specs so badly, why didn’t you come yourself?” The Reaper bit down on each word like a jawbreaker.

The voice on the other end - Sombra - replied, “I just like it when you run errands for me, G. Anyway, I guess this’ll do. Man, why'd Amelie have to shoot that omnic guy? This would have been so much easier to get before that.”

Reaper looked at Keiko. “We tried,” he growled.

Amelie. Sombra meant the Widowmaker - Amelie LaCroix, brainwashed to kill for Talon. Tracer had identified her as Mondatta’s assassin. Hearing the girl describe her former friend had been scary - whatever Widowmaker was now, she wasn’t Amelie anymore.

With a crooked grin, Keiko asked, “Who’s that you're on the phone with, you skull-faced chuunibyo?”

Her question got dismissed with a grunt. Reaper went back to bickering with the girl on the comm, then barked at the yakuza in the cellar to move the EMP to the truck upstairs. The whole room started to shift around. Keiko was still leaning against the e-bomb, now almost as pale as the still-clean half of her suit. The brother’s yanked her away from the EMP and dumped her on the floor, stepping over her to help with the lifting.

Hanzo, on the other side of the Reaper, tried again to cross the room to his cousin. Again, Ueda’s brothers stopped him. He actually seemed worried about her. The glancing cut she’d left on his chest had already started clotting. McCree nodded to him, a silent “I got it,” and knelt down at Keiko’s side. He reached into his pocket until he felt those little packs of sunshine Mercy had given him, warm and plastic. From under his serape, he snuck one into Keiko’s hand as the brothers focused on lifting the EMP.

Looking up at him, incredulous, Keiko whispered, “What the hell is this?”

“Bandaid. Slap it over that boo-boo Ueda gave ya.”

“Boo-boo? Pfbt, you talk like a baby, Cowboy.” Keiko looked out at the crowd of yakuza, then shifted to hide the movement of placing the pad under her arm. “U-ah, that feels better than fucking right now. Not that I'm complaining, but what reason have you got to help me? I was about to kill your boyfriend over there.”

McCree reeled back like he’d been struck. “He ain’t-!” He only realized how full-throated his protest was when the entire room of sardines turned to look at him. He grunted and pulled his hat down over
his eyes. They went back to moving the e-bomb.

“He ain’t my boyfriend,” he whispered to Keiko. “Come on, I got better taste than that.”

“Sure, Boo-boo.” Keiko grinned, but it wasn’t the sharp razor it usually was. It was loose, drunken-fading. Mercy’s little healing pad might have been too late already.

“He near killed Genji,” McCree went on. “I hate his guts - just ain’t fixin’ to see him dead is all. I thought you of all people would get it.”

“I do, trust me.” Keiko looked out at the group hefting the giant EMP up the stairs. She was glaring in a circle, and McCree was certain she was concentrating. Down, in her hand, he spied her typing a message on her phone, leaving bloody thumbprints. He war surprised the arm even worked.

“What’re you doin’?”

“Memorizing their faces,” Keiko said.

“Never pegged you as the hopeful type, li’l lady.”

“Yeah, you and Hanzo have me all figured out, don't you?” Keiko tapped send, then slipped the phone into her pocket.

The e-bomb was mostly up the stairs now, along with a good number of Ueda’s brothers. Reaper marched up to Keiko and lifted her by her good arm, his metal claws biting into her violet, serpentine tattoo. She strained to keep her hand tucked against her armpit and grimaced with the pain of standing. She probably wouldn’t be upright at all without Reaper there to hold her. “Alright. Move out.”

The Reaper turned to McCree.

“I should have killed you first, Ingrate,” he growled. “But if you keep your hand off your gun and don’t give me any trouble while they load this thing on the truck-” Reaper nodded at the EMP, “-I'll save you for last.”

McCree swallowed, staring at the implacable mask. Through the holes of the eyes, he thought he could see something like a shadowed face. Who the hell was this guy? A voice, like bloody gravel, hummed in the back of his mind.

“Ain’t no grave can hold my body down.

McCree put the thought out of his mind. Reyes was dead. Dead and gone. “I’ll keep it holstered if Hanzo and Keiko get to leave with me,” McCree said.

“You’re not in a place to make demands,” Reaper said. He nodded to the yakuza, and they roughly grabbed Hanzo by each arm. “They’re part of the deal.”

Sombra’s voice wavered over the comm. “What? What do you mean part of the deal?”

“The Talon scientists want to study the genealogy of the Dragons,” Reaper said.

Over the comm, Sombra protested. “Since when was that part of the deal? What are they going to do to them?” Was it just him, or did this Sombra girl actually sound worried?

Reaper’s growl turned into a roar. “Do you want your EMP or not?”
Sombra didn’t answer. *Heartless after all.* So what did that make him, about the leave Hanzo and Keiko to be turned into science projects? But no other option made sense. He could go down shooting like a big damn hero, but in the end he’d go down and the Shimadas would get hauled off to Talon’s lab anyway. His brow tickled, and McCree swore he could almost feel the felt-tipped name across his forehead. *Grow some patience, Vaquero. By the end, the cowboy is always the good guy.*

“I’ll get you out,” McCree told Hanzo. Then, to Keiko, “I’ll get you both out.”

“Sure, Cowboy,” Keiko said. McCree could tell she didn’t believe him.

They moved out. Reaper shoved Keiko up the stairs in front of him, and McCree followed directly behind. There was something weirdly familiar about walking at the Reaper’s back. The height, his heavy gait, the way McCree caught himself looking up at that mask. It made him feel like a kid.

Up at the top of the stairs, Keiko wailed, sending out a string of creative curses and struggling against Reaper’s grasp. McCree got to top and peered around Reaper’s black shoulder. Itsuko was limp on the floor in a pool of blood, eyes open and lifeless.

Ueda was cleaning his tanto again. “You have been too soft on the neighborhood for too long, Keiko,” he said. “They need to understand who runs Hanamura now.”

Keiko’s voice was harsh as a death rattle. “If you put your filthy hands on anyone else, I’ll-”

“You will what?” Ueda looked over his shoulder at her.

Keiko bit down on her own teeth, and said nothing.

Voices outside caused Ueda to look up, and he snapped an order for a few brothers to escort him. Out in the hot Hanamura street, there was what had to be the rest of the Shimada clan. These were the ones McCree had seen more of - ferocious girls and lanky boys in fashionable clothes or slovenly suits. He realized now, Ueda’s defectors made up far more than half the clan. Compared with Ueda’s tightly-ranked thugs, these kids looked more like a piddly gang of street punks.

Ueda gave a sharp order and his men ranked up behind him, brandishing their mean weapons. “What are you doing here?”

“I texted ‘em,” Keiko said. “Let go of my arm, *chuunibyo-yarou*. You got a dozen guys out here, where do you think I’m gonna go?”

With a growl, Reaper released her. She spit a curse at him, then tucked her hand under her armpit again. “Alright, babes. We’ve got a mutiny on our hands. This bald prick shacked up with Talon then put a dagger in me. And now he’s going to tell you to turn your coat or die. I know some of you might be tempted to get all soft on me and go down with the captain.” She scanned every young, worried face, looking drawn, tired - half-dead. “Well, don't. That's not what I want.”

The huddle of punk looked at one another, frozen in place, holding their makeshift weapons up in puzzlement.

“*Now*, morons!” Keiko barked. “That's an order.”

One by one, eyes downcast, the punks shuffled into Ueda’s ranks. Ueda looked to Keiko, and she glared back. “It’s not for you, *bouzu-yarou*,” she said. She peered over her shoulder, back at the inside of the shop where Itsuko’s body still laid, bleeding. “It’s just that I don’t want anyone else to die for my skinny ass.”
Ueda’s brothers loaded the EMP onto the Talon truck. Reaper snatched Keiko by the arm again when she started to keel over. Even with the healing pad McCree had given her, she couldn’t even stay on her feet. If they didn’t get her to a hospital, she wasn’t going to make it back to Talon’s lab alive.

Hanzo would though. McCree thought of Amelie LaCroix and shuddered. If Hanzo came out the other side of Talon’s experiments, he wouldn’t be the same man.

*Maybe that’s how they think of Genji.*

Reaper was speaking with Ueda. “Deal’s done. You ever come across any more besides this one,” Reaper nodded at the EMP, “make Talon your first call.”

That was odd. What about the warehouse Shimada had knocked over? One look at Hanzo’s face told McCree he was wondering the same thing.

“Uoh, Ueda,” Keiko drawled, black eyes sparkling. “What about the others?”

Ueda sucked air through his nose and looked between the two brothers on either side of him.

Reaper cocked his head, spoke through his teeth. “*What* others?”

“The other EMPs hidden around Hanamura,” Keiko said. “After we fucked your exchange with Eda in the ass, we went back to their warehouse and went on a shopping spree.” She turned her gaze on her former second-in-command and said sarcastically, “I can’t *believe* Ueda didn’t tell you.”

“Lying,” Ueda said. “She will say anything to save her own skin.”

“Hanzo knows,” Keiko said. “So does the cowboy. Say where on three.”

Hanzo and McCree looked at one another. What the hell was she doing?

Keiko raised her brows at them. “One,” she counted. Were their sorry skins worth giving Talon more e-bombs? “Two…”

Was she making this up as she went along, or did she have a plan? Even if she did, could they trust her?

On three, in perfect sync, Hanzo and McCree both said “The club.”

Reaper tilted his head and turned toward Ueda.

“There are three more hidden around the neighborhood,” Keiko announced. “Seems Ueda tried to play you; keep a little war profiteering on the side for himself.” She smirked. “Not a great way to cement your new alliance, *dickhead*.”

“A liar!” Ueda sounded frantic now. “She is a *liar*!”

“Have your agents check the club,” Keiko chirped. “They keep it under the DJ booth with the sound equipment.”

Reaper growled like an engine and got on his comm. “Sombra, come in. Need you to check out *Club Cerisier*, under the DJ booth.”

“You got it, G,” Sombra sang from the comm in Reaper’s ear. A span of silence as Ueda spoke in fast whispers with one of his men. Then, “I’m here, they’re opening it up for me. What am I supposed
to be looking... Holy shit! There's another EMP in here! Just like the one in the cellar you sent over!”
Her reaction sounded performed.

Reaper grunted, cracked his neck, raised his shotgun and blew Ueda’s head off. What was left of his skull landed first with a splat, then Ueda’s thin body followed, toppling into gore. The whole clan froze. Hanging from Reaper’s grip, Keiko cackled like a drunk that just heard the funniest joke of their life.

A purr of satisfaction ran through the Reaper, and for just a moment, McCree thought he saw a red swirl of smoke move from Ueda’s dead body, into the Reaper. He tossed the shotgun to the ground, and it dissipated in a puff of smoke.

“Al right then,” Keiko rasped, “let’s make a deal. Let me go, and I’ll tell you where the other three e-bombs are hidden.”

Reaper peered over at Hanzo.

“Keep him.” Keiko dismissed Hanzo with a wave of her red arm.

McCree straightened. So, couldn’t be trusted after all. He was starting to see why Hanzo found her so infuriating. “No way. Keiko, you got to take Hanzo with you.”

With venom, Keiko snapped back, “Shut up, Cowboy. You’ve got your out.” She turned a manic, teeth-grinding grin back at Reaper. “Come on, mask man. Hanzo’s worth more to you anyway. I never learned how to use the damn Dragons. Not enough focus and discipline and shit.”

Never learned? McCree didn’t know a lot about how the Shimada dragons worked, but from what he’d seen in that creepy basement, learning wasn’t a part of it. And hadn’t Sakae-sama said she’d had someone bring Habushu to an appointment? McCree had only see Keiko drink that rotten shit.

“You still get to research the real Shimada heir,” Keiko wheedled, “and three more e-bombs in your pocket. What are they worth right now, a few mil?”

“More like a few bil, with a B,” McCree said. “Gotdamn, lady, you were fixing to sell the things and you don’t even know what they’re worth?” His frustration came out in his voice. He should feel better that two people were going to make it out of this instead of one, but he didn’t. It didn’t feel right, sending Hanzo off to the horrible lab all alone.

“Fine,” Reaper said. “Tell me the locations and I’ll let you go.”

“Oh, please. I’m not a moron,” Keiko wheezed. “I'll get out of town and I can text you the locations from the plane.”

Reaper answered with a spectral growl.

“Ugh, touchy. Then at least let me get out of gun range. I got stabbed tonight, I’m not looking to get shot too.”

“Done.” Reaper released Keiko’s arm, and she nearly keeled over.

“Great,” Keiko cried, voice wavering. “Come on, Cowboy, lend me your arm.” As she stumbled towards McCree, she spat on Ueda’s headless body. She fell against McCree’s shoulder, and had to steady herself to kick at his murderous tanto. It skidded across the cement and thudded against Hanzo’s foot.
Hanzo hardly noticed. He had that horrible look on his face again, like the one when McCree had come up the stairs for him at the end of their duel. He was resigned, dull, relieved. In the back of McCree’s mind, he could hear Hanzo’s voice, like a storm wind, saying At last! At last.

Stumbling like a drunkard, Keiko leaned on McCree as they walked away from her young yakuza, her cousin, her home. She looked like a corpse, and still clutched her armpit where Ueda had stabbed her.

“Keiko, we can't leave Hanzo like that,” McCree whispered to her, not sure why he suddenly cared so damn much. “I know what he did to Genji, believe me, but-”

“We have to,” she said, practically dragging him along as she leaned into each step forward. “In this shit world, you take what you can get, and this is what we can get.” She reached across her body with her red arm and rolled her opposite sleeve up even farther, maybe just out of habit. She was shaking.


Maybe Reaper only let her go because he knew she wouldn't survive the trip. The wound must have been bad for Mercy’s patch to have done so little to heal it. “Some deals ain't worth making,” McCree said. She had to know she was going to die. Why give Talon the e-bombs?

“You heard what Ueda said,” Keiko argued back, holding McCree’s gaze as they walked. “This way, I get what I want… and Hanzo-” Keiko looked back, just this once, “-gets what he wants.” She kept fidgeting, still clutching her bleeding armpit with one hand and rolling up her sleeve with the other. With those black, nail-gun eyes of hers, she arrested his gaze and said, “Trust me.”

That pissed him off. Of all things in the world for her to ask. He opened his mouth to yell at her, then Keiko elbowed him hard. She raised her brows to her hairline like she thought he was an idiot. He looked down.

Normally, Keiko rolled her sleeves up to her forearm. This time, though, she’d folded the clean, white sleeve of her suit up past her bicep.

The body was long, scaly, and legless. The tail wrapped around her forearm, but the head was closer to her shoulder. Like the one on her pinky, McCree had seen this tattoo writhing on Keiko’s forearm dozens of times. And like the other tattoo, now that he saw the face of the creature, he realized that it wasn’t a snake.

It was a violet dragon.

Keiko wasn't leaning on him anymore. She was standing up straight, eyes clear and sparkling. With a flick of her wrist, she peeled back the bloody lapel of her suit and showed him the cut Ueda had given her, already scabbed over from Mercy’s patch; showed him the holster strapping her uzi to her armpit.

Snake’s tail, Dragon’s head.

“That's far enough,” Reaper yelled from back at Rikimaru’s entrance. “Where are the other EMPs are hidden?”

Keiko grinned up at the night sky. “Heh. Sure.” She thumbed the snap off her uzi, eased it out of the holster, then raised her voice. “They're up my ass!” She tugged the uzi out of its holster and spun, aiming it for the Shimada Clan, all grouped-up outside Rikimaru’s entrance. The scales on her tattoo start to glitter.

“KUSOYAROUDOMO, RYUUNO CHIKARA WO KURAE!!”
Violet light peeled off her skin and writhed around her body; the Dragon’s head roared up, wide-mouthed and beady-eyed, over her bloody shoulder. Bright bullets of neon light sprayed from the uzi’s barrel, blanketing the mass of yakuza. They all ducked, covered their heads, tried to get out of the way, including...

McCree cried out. “You're gonna hit Hanzo!” But it was too late. The summoning cry was completed, and Keiko’s clip was empty. In her righteous vengeance, she’d lit up the whole damn clan. A pool of sickly-purple light glowed beneath their feet.

Moans of pain rose up over the sound of hissing steam as clan members writhed, their clothes burning and their skin sloughing off bone and muscle. They dropped to their knees or ran out of the pool of venom, covering their face. A part of McCree didn’t want to see it, but with a sick foreboding weight in his stomach, McCree looked to Hanzo.

*If the Dragon encounters an enemy, the enemy is consumed.*

Hanzo uncovered his head, looked around at the melting men around him, wiped off his arms as if something was there, but it wasn’t.

He was fine.

*An ally, however, can pass through the Dragon’s form unharmed.*

Hanzo looked at his own hands, sharing in McCree’s shock and puzzlement. Hanzo wasn’t the only one. A smattering of others amidst the crowd were looking themselves over and finding the pool of neon acid didn’t affect them.

The ones not melting were young, ferocious girls and lanky boys - the punks Keiko had texted to show up when she’d looked around the cellar and told McCree she was memorizing faces.

*The Dragon is an extension of the self. It destroys those its host perceives as enemies.*

Hanzo knelt down to something at his feet, cocking his head to the side. He rose with Ueda’s tanto in his hand. He looked from it, to his unharmed body, then finally, to his cousin across the street. His eyes were big with the same realization McCree had come to seconds earlier.

*The Dragon reveals your own true thoughts and feelings - not those of your enemy.*

For all the bounties, the swords drawn, the times she spat at Hanzo how she hated him, Keiko’s dragon had revealed that she thought of Hanzo as an *ally*. Beside McCree, she brought her uzi next to ear and looked more wary than he’d ever seen her.

*She don’t like him knowing,* McCree realized. Nothing convinced him more that he was right. Keiko was a liar, but the Dragon told the truth. Interesting that out of this entire fucked situation, *that* unnerved her.

“What are you cretins waiting for?” she yelled across at the crowd of her young yakuza, still standing stunned amidst the half-burned, frantic remnants of Ueda’s men. “Tear those traitors apart!”

Chapter End Notes

YEEHAW
Been waiting a long while for this one. Very excited to see it published (: Yet again, I had to break it into two pieces. More McCree next week, the close of this arc, and the beginning of a new one. Told you it would be lots of plot! (: See you next week!

I am streaming tonight, 12/29! Join me at https://www.twitch.tv/ingridarcher

twitter
tumblr
Tear those traitors apart!

The order snapped McCree into action. The pain of too much movement made him realize he’d drawn Peacekeeper and aimed it across the street. The barrel followed a black cloud as it spirited, unscathed, from the battle at Rikimaru’s storefront.

Reaper. He reformed beside the truck, idling kitty-corner from McCree’s position across from the ramen shop. Reaper roared into his comm. “We’ve been compromised. Call in backup, now.” His voice was forceful, but not panicked - the tone of a seasoned military man.

The street echoed with clashing metal and screams. Focused on Reaper, the battle between Keiko’s punk kids and Ueda’s men happened in McCree’s periphery. Jerky movements edged his vision, tempting his eyes.

“Hanzo!” Keiko’s shriek finally pulled McCree’s gaze towards the bloodbath. Hanzo stood a few feet away, tanto at the ready. He was wolfed-down, hunched forward, but not attacking.

By contrast, Keiko was unloading her uzi on any enemy she could get her hands on, sparing glances for her unmoving cousin. She cried again, “Hanzo!”

Hanzo looked up.

“It’s not a sword, and-” Keiko paused, “-Genji’s not dead.”

A boil-faced yakuza pawed at her like a zombie. She cracked his skull with the butt of her gun, reloaded, then turned back to Hanzo.

“He showed me his face,” she croaked. “He had dragon burns. It’s Genji. I didn’t want to believe it, that he’d been alive all this time and never came back, but he is and he did. Genji is still alive.” Her sad, crooked smile turned vicious. “So get over it, and stab some of these pricks.”

Reaper. He had to focus. McCree ignored the flash of a blade in his periphery and leveled
Peacekeeper towards the truck.

A satisfying pain shattered through his shoulder when McCree pulled the trigger. It was like breaking a window; the wicked pleasure of destruction. Three rushed and fruitless shots chased Reaper.

Reyes’ eight-cylinder voice growled in McCree’s memory. Grow some patience, Vaquero. Or was it Reaper’s voice? Why did McCree have a horrible, sinking feeling that there wasn’t a difference?

Ain’t possible. Reyes is dead. Dead, dead, dead.

The next shot got closer, whisking over Reaper’s shoulder. McCree took a step forward. His fifth shot tore the edge of Reaper’s raven coat. The last hit him in the face.

That skull mask cracked like lightning. A bone wedge over Reaper’s right eye shed off. Smoke surged from the opening, not quite obscuring the shade of a face. Pale scars, the edge of a hairline, one shut eye. Something was… wrong about it.

The eye opened, bulbous, candy red and too large to be human. It bulged out from the inky smoke. Then, beside it, another, smaller eye blinked open, then another and another, until there wasn’t a face showing through that gap in the mask, just smoke and eyes.

McCree shuddered, and reloaded.

The bullets sang into the chamber as McCree crossed the intersection towards the truck. Perfect. Perfect, too, was his gloved hand around Peacekeeper’s grip; her weight; the way his finger tucked under the trigger guard and fired.

But Reaper wasn’t there. The hazy shape where his body used to be dissipated the moment McCree saw it. Standing in the middle of an intersection, ten feet from a gang war, McCree suddenly felt like a five-year-old tucked in bed.

There’s a monster under my bed, Momma.

He’s in my closet.

Momma, he’s right behind me.

McCree spun and Reaper was there. That cherry eye bulged from the crack in the mask. The pupil sloshed to look at McCree, the half-dozen other eyes darting after it. McCree was so transfixed with horror, he almost missed Reaper’s arm raising the shotgun. With a gasp, he rolled backwards. Pain surged him, both from the strenuous action ripping open his scabby wounds, and the buckshot now in his leg. He tried and failed to stand, then raised his gun.

Implacable, Reaper walked towards him, shotgun aimed. In a billow of smoke, the mask reformed, pristine again. “I thought I told you to keep that thing holstered,” Reaper growled.

Peacekeeper clattered in his shaking hand. He pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit Reaper’s body armor. With a grunt, he shrugged it off and kept walking. The second shot had the same result, and the third and fourth. Each bullet wound spat out a puff of black smoke instead of blood.

Only two rounds left. Line it up, get him between the eyes or that shotgun’s gonna blow a hole right through you. Take your time. Grow some patience, Vaquero.
But instead of his gun, McCree’s mouth did the talking. “Who are you? What are you?”

Reaper was close now. No more battle in McCree’s periphery. The only thing he could see was the black barrel of the shotgun. “Death,” Reaper said.

A blade punctured deep, through fabric, skin, muscle, and bone - if Reaper had such things. A gargled scream ripped from Reaper’s throat as he twisted his head away from the tanto Hanzo Shimada had stabbed into his shoulder from behind. Smoke belched out of the wound like an old combustion exhaust. He brought the shotgun around, but Hanzo ducked and stabbed again, this time into Reaper’s side.

Where Reaper thrashed dramatically, throwing out angry shots, Hanzo was all economy. He dodged, waited for openings, glaring and focused, covered in blood. Hanzo wasn’t hurt, and Reaper bled smoke, so it must have come from Ueda’s men. “McCree,” he commanded, “Shoot!”

It jolted McCree from his dazed staring. He grabbed his wrist to steady his hand. Reaper was hunched on his knees, spewing smoke that made the air thick and hazy. As McCree at last lined up his shot, Reaper stood with a flourish, arms spreading out - one, two, three of them. Four, then five, all with shotguns, all aimed outwards, like a squid in a cloud of black ink.

Behind Reaper, McCree spied the glinting tanto in Hanzo’s hand, raised up over his head. Hanzo brought the blade down as McCree shot Reaper in the head. Totally in sync. Perfect.

The grotesque body dropped in writhing mass of smoke and arms, puffed into a puddle of black smoke on the ground, then dissipated, leaving only an eye-stinging haze in the air. Everything smelled like gasoline and cigarettes. Hanzo and McCree stared at one another, gasping for breath.

Hanzo’s half-bare chest heaved, wet with sweat and blood. His eyes were stern and focused, lips parted. A great deal of wholly unchristian thoughts went through McCree’s mind as Hanzo looked at him like that, and he did not like it.

Just the fight, McCree told himself. Blood pumping, adrenaline, that’s all. You’d get that way about any fella that good-lookin’ who stared at you like he could rip you in half with his bare hands. Jesus.

“Is it dead?” Hanzo asked.

“Huh?”

“Is that thing dead?” Hanzo repeated, firm and annoyed.

“Hell if I know - augh!” McCree cried out when he again tried and failed to stand.

It spooked him when Hanzo got in close. McCree feared him in a very different way from how he feared Reaper. When Hanzo held out his hand, he only stared at it.

“Are you alright? Can you walk?” Hanzo’s voice took on some warmth, like a gentle breeze on a hot day.

“Leg’s shot up,” he said to Hanzo’s open hand without taking it.

“I will help you stand.” Hanzo ducked down, slipping his arm under McCree’s and hugging him against his body. It felt like getting lifted by a rock; Hanzo’s body was all hard muscle. He slotted so neatly against McCree’s side. The word came into his mind before he could shut it out: Perfect.
As McCree did his best to shove away every feeling running through him - the pain in his leg as he limped, the terrible suspicion he had about Reaper, and the feel of Hanzo’s body - he peered down the street and saw the battle was over. Through the lifting haze, he saw that almost all of Keiko’s punk kids had lived, winning on the back of Keiko’s dragon.

Keiko grinned at them as they limped up. She adjusted the bloody lapel of her jacket and said, “Hurt yourself, Cowboy? You should be more careful.” Her smile dissipated as she turned to two of her punks - a girl with a frizzy ponytail, and a short, skinny kid with a lip piercing. “Go get Itsuko. I’m not leaving her there bleeding on the floor. As for the rest of you-” she turned to the other punks - “Let’s get this bomb into the castle.”

Just then, the truck’s engine hummed on, hover tires lifting it up off the ground. There, half materialized in the front seat, was Reaper. Engines roared overhead. Three helicopters and a transport plane, all painted black, flew over Hanamura’s rooftops.

Reaper’s backup. “Aw, shit,” McCree said.

“Stop that prick!” Keiko yelled. Her punks took up their pipes, chains and bats, and booked it for the truck.

The engine revved along with Reaper’s voice. “Fan out,” he yelled over the comm. “There are three more e-bombs in the neighborhood. Break down every shop in the village until you find them.”

“No,” Keiko gasped. Then, louder, “No!”

The truck pulled away. Keiko’s punks wouldn’t catch it. Keiko sprayed bullets at the bed, but her uzi didn’t have the range or accuracy to hit Reaper. McCree looked down at Peacekeeper.

One bullet left.

He leveled his gun at the cab at Reaper’s black cowl in the driver’s seat. The truck was coming up on a turn. Steady, steady. Patience. McCree fired.

The bullet crashed into the truck’s back window, turning it into a spiderweb that obscured his view. The inside was black. No blood, but then, Reaper didn’t bleed.

The truck fishtailed around the corner and out of sight, still being driven. Reaper had escaped with the bomb.

“Shit,” Keiko snarled. “Shit, shit!”

The kids jogged back up. A chubby girl with blue hair and a studded leather vest got to Keiko’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, Boss. We’ll steal some trucks from the street and go get the rest. If we’re lucky we can get the three other EMPs loaded and into the castle before Talon finds them.”

Keiko looked down at the remains of Ueda and his men sprawled out in front of Rikimaru. The storefront was covered in blood and bullet holes from her own uzi. Her two punks came out of the front door, carrying Itsuko’s body. She shut her eyes and clutched her own hand, fingers wrapped around her tattooed pinky.

“Fuck the bombs,” Keiko said. She turned to her gang. “I want you all to get to the stores, anyone who has an apartment in or above their shop, and get them inside the castle walls. We can hold against Talon from in there. Shimizu, Iwata, go to Yashiro’s, he’ll hear you coming. Goto, Watanabe, to karaoke bar. Their daughter sleeps like a log, so you’re going to have to go in there and shake her.” Keiko doled out the rest of the orders, knowing each shopkeeper and every member of
their family by name.

Two by two, Keiko’s gang ran off to rescue Hanamura’s inhabitants. As they did, Hanzo set McCree down and helped him get one of Mercy’s health packs onto his leg. It wasn’t good as new, but he could could at least limp along without being carried. He was thankful for that, since being hugged up beside Hanzo made him feel…

Well. He didn’t know what word to assign that feeling. Or, maybe he did, and just didn’t like it.

The kids, all except the two carrying Itsuko’s body, were all gone now. Keiko took off her white jacket and laid it gently over Itsuko’s body. “Shoulder to shoulder, no matter what, huh? Guess we both broke that promise,” she whispered, so quiet and sullen McCree was sure he wasn’t meant to hear it. “I’m sorry, Genji. I’ll make it up to you, if I can.” She turned, at last, to Hanzo and McCree. “Cousin, I need you to do me favor.”

Glaring and stoic, covered in blood, Hanzo dragooned up, looking like an ancient warlord in his dated garb. “Why should I?”

As if to answer, Keiko opened her mouth, then faltered. “I can’t think of a single reason.”

Talon’s helicopters sputtered in the distance. At last, Hanzo said, “What would you have me do?”

Woth a sagging grin, Keiko put her hand on Hanzo’s shoulder. “There’s one last shop, the motorcycle shop, with an EMP hidden there. The owner, Sato, has a truck she uses to move her bikes. Go there, get Sato out, and if you can, get the e-bomb on the truck and tell her to drive it to Shimada castle. Can either of you ride a motorcycle?”

McCree and Hanzo looked at one another. “Used to be in a motorcycle gang back in Santa Fe,” McCree said. “But, my leg got real chewed up in the battle.”

Keiko turned to Hanzo.

“Genji showed me perhaps once,” Hanzo said, “but that was many years ago.”

“Between the two of us we’ll figure it out,” McCree assured. “What do you need?”

“Alright, Boo-boo.” Keiko shot him a knowing smirk that he didn’t much like. “Once Sato is safely in the castle gates, you two take a bike to the airstrip. Talk to a pilot named Asami, she’ll fly the Shimada jet anywhere you want to go.”

“And leave you here to defend against Talon with a dozen kids and a bunch of scared villagers?” McCree shook his head. “Naw. You’ll get slaughtered. Hanzo can go if he wants, but I’m staying.”

With a grunt and a shared look, Hanzo turned from McCree to Keiko and said “I will stay as well.”

“Between the two of us we’ll figure it out,” McCree assured. “What do you need?”

“Alright, Boo-boo.” Keiko shot him a knowing smirk that he didn’t much like. “Once Sato is safely in the castle gates, you two take a bike to the airstrip. Talk to a pilot named Asami, she’ll fly the Shimada jet anywhere you want to go.”

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With a grunt and a shared look, Hanzo turned from McCree to Keiko and said “I will stay as well.”

“You guys are too fucked up to help me do much of anything,” she said, looking from Hanzo’s slinged arm to McCree’s shot-up leg. “You want to help? Get on the plane, get as far from here as possible, and tell Overwatch Talon’s got e-bombs. Stop them before they do something horrible.”

It was odd - since when did Keiko care about what Talon might do with the EMPs? “We can call Overwatch to come here to defend the castle,” McCree said. “We ain’t many yet but they’re the best of the damn best.”

“No,” Keiko said, too loud and too quickly. “No. Look, Cowboy, I’m just a drunk, skinny bitch and my people are a bunch of punks in an old house. Overwatch has the world to worry about. Now go,
we don’t have time to argue.”

“If not to retrieve the EMP from the motorcycle shop, where do you plan to go, Cousin?”

With a clack, Keiko snapped another clip into her uzi. “To the club. I’ve got a feeling that’s where the action is.”

The motorcycle shop was dark and the door was locked. With a strategic metal fist through a window, McCree got them inside. Somewhere on an upper floor, a dog started barking. The shop was lined with dark rows of motorcycles and shelves of gear, with a single door straight ahead in the back of the shop. The owner, Sato, was nowhere to be found.

“Should we go upstairs?” Hanzo rolled his injured shoulder, holding one of Mercy’s patches under his sling.

McCree was less subtle. “Hello? Sato? Keiko sent us.”

A pause, then a raspy, sardonic voice yelled from the opposite side of the door in the back. “I’m not here.”

McCree and Hanzo looked at one another, then bolted to the back of the shop.

The “back room” was a grease-stained, junk-littered garage, full with motorcycles all at different levels of assembled. Across from McCree and Hanzo in the doorway, near an open garage door, two woman stood next to another big, white pill of an EMP. One had bleach-orange hair and a black t-shirt with a faded motorcycle logo. The other sported a purple side-shave, some gnarly cybernetic enhancements, and a gun.

Peacekeeper was out of McCree’s holster and aimed at the girl with the side-shave before she could even rotate her sights. She frowned, thought about it for a moment, then shrugged and put her gun down and her hands up.

“Alright, alright, jeeze. It’s not that serious,” the girl with the side-shave said. The voice was definitely the one from Reaper’s comm.

With a smooth drawl, McCree said, “Sombra, right?”

A smile melted across her purple lips. “Sure, I’ve been called that before,” she chirped. “So you’re here to run an errand for Keiko, huh?” Leaning against the e-bomb, she cocked her head. “A little weird that she has the EMPs at all though, isn’t it? Totally bizarre, you know, with a B.” She smirked. She’d been listening to Reaper’s comm when McCree had corrected Keiko’s appraisal of the e-bombs, then.

Hanzo, it seemed, had no patience for her games and implications. “Speak plainly,” he demanded.

“Man, she wasn’t kidding - you really are no fun,” Sombra said. “Come on, take the journey with me. Don’t you think it’s odd that a mob boss put resources into stealing four EMPs right before their value shot up, and didn’t even know what the value was? It’s almost like she never planned to sell them at all.”

“You don’t know anything if you think Keiko gives a damn about world politics,” McCree said.

That earned him sarcasm from Sombra. “Aw, you’re right, I don’t know what I’m talking about.
Keiko Shimada definitely wouldn’t have any personal reason to be interested in anti-omnic weapons. Pff! I can’t believe Gabe said you were smart.”

Her words impaled him. “What the hell did you just say?”

“Oh, nothing important.” Sombra falsified a visage of innocence. “I don’t know anything, remember?”

“We do not have time for this foolishness,” Hanzo said.

“You said Gabe,” McCree breathed. “You mean Gabriel Reyes, don’t you?”

Sombra dismissed the idea with a wave of her long-nailed hand. “Oh, come on. Gabriel Reyes died in the Overwatch coup in Geneva. Everyone knows that - even people who jumped ship before it happened.” She smiled like a liar.

There’s no way, he told himself. Reyes was dead, dead. But then, why did her smile give him this sinking feeling in his gut?

“If I were you, I wouldn’t be worrying about a dead guy,” Sombra said. “Reaper may have moved you to last on his stupid list, but you’re still second from the top on another killer’s agenda.”

The saliva in McCree’s throat suddenly felt thick. He tried to swallow it, but it was gummed up. It made it hard to breath. His chest felt caved in.

“You’ve met them before, haven’t you?” Sombra’s lips peeled back to reveal a manic grin. “Maybe on a moonless night?”

Now, McCree felt sure that the viscosity in his throat was blood. Each breath was sticky. The sound of his staccato, hiccuping breaths made it all more real.

“McCree.”

But it’s not real, he told himself. It’s not real.

“McCree!”

Someone was trying to wake him up. But he was dead, wasn’t he? That’s what they said. Once the Moonless Night marked you, you were already dead. He wasn’t on his feet in a garage, but bleeding out on a hotel bed, trying to breath through his opened throat. Take care not to rise too high.

A laugh, his whole body shaking. Was he the one laughing? No, it was a woman’s voice. Sombra, a few feet ahead of him, next to the EMP, in front of the open garage door. “Shoulder to shoulder, no matter what,” she said as she faded from sight, her body disappearing in a sheen of purple holo-tech. Sato gasped, falling back against the EMP. Hanzo took two steps to chase after Sombra, but she was gone.

“Damn!” Hanzo’s hands made fists and he turned back to McCree, demanding “What was that?”

The garage. He was in a garage in Hanamura, Japan, next to Hanzo Shimada, Genji’s murdering brother. The woman across from him was Sato, the owner of this shop, and Genji’s cousin Keiko had asked him to get her out safe, and if they could, keep the last e-bomb out of Talon’s hands.

“We got to,” he breathed, pushing off Hanzo’s question, “get that EMP on the truck, before more Talon agents get here.”
With the help of a winch, a jack, and the ramp on Sato’s truck, they got the EMP loaded and ready. She pulled it into the back alley and left it idling. A few feet away, Hanzo awkwardly straddled one of her motorcycles.

Circling the bike, McCree went over the basic controls. There were no questions - Hanzo only hummed and nodded. It was a bad sign. McCree looked over at Sato. She had one bare, wiry arm leaning out of the open window, watching. McCree asked, “You sure I can’t ride with you?”

“If Shimada’s half as bad with motorcycles as his brother was, then he’s not going to get out of first gear without your help,” Sato said in her low, raspy voice. “Besides, this is Shiro’s seat.”

A smiling mutt poked his head out of the window and barked cheerfully. Sato smirked, scratching Shiro between his pale, foxy ears. Resigned, McCree hefted himself up on the bike behind Hanzo, leaving a deliberate inch of space between them. He wasn’t looking to get tucked up against Hanzo again - he had enough unwelcome thoughts right now.

“That's the throttle.” McCree nodded to the handle beneath Hanzo’s right hand. The arm was still stiff, but free of its sling for now. “Don't grab it too tight when you get goin’ or you'll just accelerate and crash.”

“That seems like a design flaw,” Hanzo said.

“Don't sass me. This is the clutch, and that thing your foot is on is the gear shifter. You gotta use ‘em both when you change gears.”

Another hum and nod. Bad sign.

“Try it out,” McCree said.

Hanzo opened his palm completely, and the clutch snapped out.

“Naw,” McCree said, and without thinking scooted forward so his chest was flush with Hanzo’s back. He slotted in nicely, legs aligned with one another, Hanzo’s ass shoved against his crotch. McCree made a face.

Perfect.

It was hard to ignore how good it felt to have a body up against his own. When he’d been on the run, riding the rails with nothing but transient company, it had been easy to designate desire as a simple sort of need, like hunger. Being tucked up against a warm body like this, though, brought a deeper sort of longing roaring back.

It reminded McCree of those rare storms that would rush into Santa Fe, when the rain painted everything he knew a different color. Hanzo’s black cloud of hair tickled against his cheek. Like that thunderstruck air, his bare neck smelled wet and electric, coppery with blood. McCree put his hand over Hanzo’s on the clutch, fingers not quite twining together.

“Alright, pull up the gear shifter with your foot, and let out the clutch, like this.” Slow, he opened both their fingers, lips were close to the shell of Hanzo’s ear. In a confounding gesture, Hanzo tilted his chin - maybe to lean away from him, or maybe to offer up his neck. McCree wasn’t sure which of those options he hated more.

“Then, if you're slowing down, you step down.” McCree was whispering - why was he whispering?
“Remember, left sides the gears and the rights the gas and breaks, alright?”

“Alright,” Hanzo said.

“You got it?”

“Yes.”

“Yes?”

Irritably, “Yes.”

“Alright. Kick the starter.”

Hanzo did, harder than necessary, due either to inexperience or frustration. The motorcycle’s engines roared alive. It felt good - Hanzo’s firm body in front of him, the rumbling engine beneath him.

Shifting, McCree chided himself.

Like a damn teenager, he thought.

Hanzo walked the bike forward as instructed, then toed it out of neutral. The bike jerked forward, and McCree wrapped his arm around Hanzo's waist to steady himself. The ride smoothed out, but he didn’t lean back. After Sombra frayed his nerves back at the garage, it was comforting to clutch against Hanzo’s solid body. McCree decided he'd allow himself that, just for tonight.

Amidst Hanzo’s convulsive gear shifts and whiskey throttles, they followed Sato’s truck in the direction of Club Cerisier. McCree was leaned up against Hanzo, their shoulders brushing. It put him in mind of Keiko’s hushed apology.

“Funny,” McCree muttered.

“What?” Hanzo asked

“Something Keiko said earlier. Shoulder to shoulder, no matter what. Can’t make sense of it.”

Like a question, Hanzo spoke in Japanese, and the translator spat out the exact phrase.

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“It is something she and Genji used to say,” Hanzo said. He returned to Japanese, the translation a tinny approximation of his baritone voice. “You and me, shoulder to shoulder, burning this whole shit world down, no matter what.”

Sato’s truck slowed to a stop on the narrow street right outside Club Cerisier. With a few awkward jerks, Hanzo got the motorcycle parked a few feet behind her. Keiko was there, splitting time between giving orders to her gang and talking with a guy in a jazzy, red-and-gold shirt. “The girl, the girl that was here earlier,” Keiko said. “She went under the DJ booth. Where did she go?”

The guy in the shirt turned from her loud voice and breath. “Until Talon came in, I didn't see anyone out of the ordinary come in or out, Boss Shimada.”

“Of course you didn't,” Keiko huffed. Her pink shirt was soaked with blood, sleeves rucked up to her elbows like always, tall and lanky as a scarecrow. She caught sight of the truck down the street and jogged to Sato, leaning in the window and checking if she was alright. After that, she eyed up the EMP with some satisfaction. “You got it! Took you long enough.”
“You’re welcome,” McCree said. “The other EMPs?”

“Talon got em.” Keiko frowned.

“Overwatch knows they’re out there,” McCree said. “We’ll take care of ‘em.”

It was obvious Keiko wasn’t very assured, which made sense considering she was a few billion (with a B) poorer than she was earlier in the evening. “You know the way to the airport?”

Hanzo nodded.

“Good,” she said. She looked back at the shop owners and punk kids, up at Hanamura’s buildings, then back at Hanzo. “See you, Cousin.”

Hesitating, Hanzo nodded. Keiko waited there for a moment, like she was expecting something. Finally she nodded and ran back to truck a few feet down the street, then hopped into the bed alongside the bomb. “Alright, you little hellions! Get on, we’re going home to have ourselves an old-fashioned siege!”

Looking away from her, Hanzo revved the motorcycle, but didn’t drive off.

Sato’s truck sat, engine idling, as the Hanamura punks and shopkeepers piled in. From her perch beside the bomb, Keiko yelled, “Hanzo!”

Hanzo looked up.

For the second time that night, Keiko looked uncharacteristically unnerved. “Look, I know we never got along,” she said. “You lived to be everything they wanted you to be, and I lived to piss them off. Genji was the only thing I ever stuck around for. But you… you lived and breathed the family. I know you don’t give a shit about my opinion, but…”

The shopkeeps huddled together on the truck, still in their pajamas. Gunfire clattered in the distance. A final few stragglers, unable to find room in the truck’s bed, were climbing up on the fenders and doors, clutching the side. The whole of Keiko’s defenses were clinging to Sato’s little commercial truck.

“What I’m trying to say is,” Keiko stumbled on, “Ueda was wrong. You leaving the clan, it wasn’t cowardly. I think… I think it might have been the bravest thing you ever did.”

Up against his chest, McCree felt Hanzo straighten up. At an awkward angle, too close, he saw that naked, big-eyed look of shock. McCree had seen it once before. It got to him just the same this time around.

Down the road, leaning off the back of Sato’s idled truck, Keiko grimaced. “You’re still an uptight asshole.”

That made Hanzo laugh, another rare, disarming expression. “And you are still a foolish, disappointing cockroach,” Hanzo told her with warmth.

Keiko smiled at him - not a grin or a smirk, not a cocky laugh, but real and earnest. She lifted her tattooed arm and punched the air. Hanzo nodded, and mirrored the gesture.

“Alright, fuckboys,” Keiko announced. “Let’s move this thing out!” When the truck lurched into gear, its inhabitants waved with the motion like grass in the wind. It pulled away, and Hanzo watched his cousin disappear around a corner.
“She’ll be alright,” McCree said.

“Liar.”

“I dunno. She got us out of that scrape in the cellar.”

Hanzo hummed. “I have always thought her lazy and foolish, but tonight she acted… as a leader should.”

“Mmm. Real kumichō material. All she needs is one tit out.”

With something between a grunt and laugh, Hanzo grabbed McCree’s arm and pulled it so it was wrapped around his waist. Jolting into gear, he turned the motorcycle towards the airstrip.

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Putting Hanamura hundreds of miles behind them would have made McCree relax, if the thing that was taking them from it wasn’t a goddamn airplane. He white-knuckled through the takeoff like always, and only cooled down a little when the plane hit steady at ten-thousand feet. Hanzo was no help, silent and mild in the seat next to him. A dozen big, comfy seats on the Shimada’s private plane and Hanzo had to pick the one right beside him.

He felt something warm against his shoulder. When McCree turned to look, Hanzo was leaned up against him, dozing. McCree almost pulled away, pushed him off, crawled over him to find another seat.

But as exhausted as McCree felt, he remembered that on top of everything, all this had happened to Hanzo’s home. For him, it wasn’t just a mystery, a conflict to resolve. It was his family, and that made it a hell of a lot more complicated. McCree touched his prosthetic arm. Staring down at Hanzo’s lashed, lidded eyes; his parted lips; his slumped, relaxed body; McCree decided he’d allow it. Just for tonight.

Tired as he was, the anxiousness of flying kept McCree’s brain working overtime, unable to rest. Of all the mysteries swimming in his mind, the one that nagged him most was this: why had Keiko stolen the EMPs? Sombra seemed to think it was not for profit, but if not, then what reason did she have?

McCree felt something buzzing at his side. When his own pocket came up empty, he realized it was Hanzo’s phone. Careful not to rustle him too bad, he searched the archer’s pockets until he located the phone. The name was written in Japanese, but McCree recognized the visored face on the screen. He nudged Hanzo with the aim of waking him.

“Hey, Shimada. It’s Genji.”

Hanzo sniffed, adjusted, hummed. Let me sleep. McCree could almost hear the words in Hanzo’s arrogant baritone.

“Hey!” McCree barked. “You hear me? I said, it’s-”

McCree froze, Hanzo forgotten. He looked down again at the metal face on the phone. When Keiko had decided to abandon the e-bombs to Talon, she had apologized to Genji.

Genji, whose master was an Omnic. Genji, who abandoned the brother he’d sworn to help so he could return to Nepal and help the Omnic’s spiritual leadership, the principle of which had just been assassinated. That assassination had launched the reactivation of the omniums, which Overwatch had
reformed to stop.

Genji had been working with Overwatch in Hanamura and requested their aid with the Shambali, but back at the shit hotel room at the Niwa, Genji said he hadn't yet joined Overwatch and didn't know if he was going to.

Then, when McCree had offered Keiko Overwatch’s help defending Shimada Castle and her EMP, she had refused. Keiko, the survivor, had eschewed help in a battle she wasn’t going to win otherwise. She must have thought that if Overwatch came to help defend the castle, they would take the e-bomb and use it against the Omnis. McCree couldn’t say she was wrong.

*Omnic-rights freak.* That’s what Keiko had called him. The half-man, McCree’s old friend that had become so *changed* by the years among the Shambali. Keiko had no stake in keeping an anti-omnic weapon off the market, but *Genji* did.

The cousins’ old credo: *shoulder to shoulder, no matter what.*

“It's Genji,” McCree gasped. Keiko must have realized early on that if the Second Omnic Crisis really was happening, Genji wouldn’t fight against the Omnis - he’d fight *with* them. “Aw, *shit.*”

Chapter End Notes

*Stream tonight, starts in a few minutes!*
*Edit: a few people were confused by the final scene, so I've reworked it a little. Hopefully that clears things up.*

[@mingridsmarcher](http://mingridsmarcher.tumblr.com/)
Welcome back to May I!

Content Warnings: Manipulation/emotional abuse. Depression stuff.

We had an exciting few chapters the past few weeks, so I hope you guys don't mind a bit of a cool down this week. Don't worry - things will ramp back up again (: I'm trying to be a bit more concise, straightforward, and pack more progress into fewer chapters. Though it might affect the pacing, the next sections will hopefully be breezier and easier to follow.

Thanks al always to my beta-readers milfordb, Doc, Chip, and Jae! Love you guys, your feedback is so important! Thanks also to my readers, commentors, and the people who join m in the stream. It's so fun to see you guys there and socialize (:.

Stream starts soon! Hope to see you guys there!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Hanzo got older, they moved the archery range to a secluded inlet just outside Shimada Castle’s main hall. On one side of that narrow patch of grass and stone, the ledge sheared off to the modern city below the castle’s motte. The inlet was framed on the opposite side by a covered walkway. Genji leaned over the balustrade there, watching from above as Hanzo practiced archery. It was a misty, slate grey evening, clouds covering the setting sun.

“Why do you do these drills, Aniki?” Genji’s face followed Hanzo’s arrow as it flew to its target.
“You going to shake down debtors with a bow and arrow?”

“A warrior should be skilled in all forms of weaponry.” Hanzo parroted their mother’s words.

“In the fourteenth century, maybe.” Genji rolled his lined eyes.

“You study ninjitsu, and kendo. Are these modern skills?”

“I do that to appease Father.”

“It is, perhaps, the only thing you do to appease him.”

“I’ve got to keep him off my back somehow.” Genji laughed.

“You should have more respect.” Hanzo shot again. “You and Keiko drag our family name through the mud.”

“Because you’re exactly what Dad always wanted, right?”
He knows me too well, Hanzo thought. The next arrow landed a few inches from center.

“He doesn’t tell you to practice archery, though,” Genji said.

You’re slouching. Hanzo straightened up, pushing his shoulders back and drawing again. This time, the arrow hit the mark.

“So why do it? You barely have any time to yourself. Why not use it to relax, play some games, or go out with me and Keiko. Y’know, people your own age?”

“I prefer to keep myself busy with useful occupations.”

“Yeah, but why archery in particular? It’s a fine hobby, but it’s not useful. Come on, Hanzo, it’s me. You can be honest.”

Hanzo took his eyes off the target at the other end of the yard and looked around. No brothers nearby - he and Genji were alone. “Mother used to teach me archery. It-” Hanzo paused, “-makes me feel close to her, I suppose.”

Genji went quiet. “Oh.”

A ghost of fingers stabbed Hanzo between his shoulderblades. He shot another arrow, and again hit the center.

“What was she like?”

“Mother?”

“Yeah.”

Hanzo drew another arrow. How could he describe Mitsuru? “She was very capable.”

“She was a crazy bitch,” came a voice from overhead.

Hanzo lowered his bow and looked up. Keiko was up on the covered walkway. She walked to Genji’s side, hands stuffed in her pockets. Where youth made Genji slim and well-proportioned, Keiko was gangly with hard features and a big mouth. She had not a single attractive feature. Hanzo couldn’t fathom why Genji so enjoyed her company.

“She talked super weird, remember? Like bad poetry. Totally creepy,” Keiko went on. “My mom said Mitsuru used to test the gun shipments - she knew how to use anything, it was freaky. And she made Hanzo train all the time. Honestly, Cousin, be glad you never knew her.”

Cousin. She only ever called Genji that. “Do not speak of her this way,” Hanzo said.

“Why not? That deadbeat left you guys. Anyway, you coming, Cousin?”

“Yeah.” Genji straightened up off the balustrade. “Hey, Aniki, we’re going to the arcade. You want to come? They have an archery game there.”

Hanzo glared at Keiko, then nocked another arrow, drew, and loosed. Left of the target. You’re slouching. Hanzo straightened up. “No.”

Genji frowned. He and Keiko went away.

Sometimes, being alone felt comfortable. Hanzo enjoyed time away from the expectations of others.
Usually the solitude of practice was satisfying, but Genji’s absence made him lonely.

Another arrow hit center. Good, he thought. Again. In this quiet time between day and night, practicing archery, Hanzo wondered if it was really Genji’s company he missed.

“ Well. If it isn’t my favorite nephew.”

Behind him. Hanzo turned. His aunt, Kanata, filled a doorway cut into the base of the elevated walkway. She smiled.

Unlike her daughter Keiko, Kanata was angular but filled out, leaving an overall more pleasing appearance. Hanzo’s cousin dressed like a bruise - blacks, blues, pinks and purples. Aunt Kana, however, clothed herself in fire, all reds and golds. Her short sleeves revealed her traditional, full-body tattoo featuring the Yamata no Orochi, the eight-headed beast of legend.

Bowing in greeting, Hanzo said, “Aunt Kanata.”

“Kana is fine, my boy,” Kanata said. “Archery, huh?”

Hanzo unstrung his bow. “Is there something that needs my attention?”

“Ha! You’re a good kid, but no. Have you seen my useless daughter around?”

“She left with Genji a few minutes ago, for the arcade.”

“Ugh! Of course.”

“I could retrieve her, if you wish it.”

“Oh, no. It’s only Keiko. Nothing important, ha!” Kanata grinned full and warm, all lifted cheeks and smile lines. “Still, keep an eye on your brother, Hanzo. If you aren’t careful, Keiko could lead him down the same disreputable path. I don’t want your dad to feel the same humiliation I do.”

“Yes, Aunt Kana.”

“Anyway. Let’s have a look here.” Kanata walked down to the end of the archery range to Hanzo’s target. “Hm. Good shots.” Kanata wrapped her thick hand around an arrow and tore it out of the target. “Mitsuru taught you to shoot, didn’t she?” She wrenched out another.

After pausing, Hanzo said “Yes.”

“Hm.” The last arrow. Kanata might have broken it with as hard as she yanked it out. “She taught you well.” Kanata bundled the arrows in a large fist and sauntered back towards Hanzo. She was tall, with broad shoulders and good posture. A presence that demanded respect.

Jaw tight, Hanzo’s teeth hurt. “Did you know her well?” he asked.

“Mitsuru? Well,” Kanata drawled the word, each second filling it with more meaning. “I don’t think anyone knew her well except your dad. She left you that bow, did you know?” She handed Hanzo the bundle of arrows.

“Yes, I knew.” The texture of Storm Bow’s grip scrubbed the flesh of his palm in a comforting way.

“Do you think your father would like you using it, hm?”

“I suppose not.”
“Yeah, you see? How about this, I'll commission a new bow for you. Something worthy of the Shimada heir, not this boring thing.”

“That is kind of you, Aunt Kana,”

“Yeah. I’m allowed to spoil my favorite nephew, aren’t I?” Kanata snapped open Storm Bow’s black, plastic case.

After resting the bow in its foam cutout, Hanzo slid his arrows carefully back into the quiver. Worry and curiosity made him brave. “What did you think of my mother, Aunt Kana?”

Storm Bow’s case clattered shut when Kanata dropped the lid. “Hm. How to put it? She was a warrior, in many ways. But she had a rebellious streak. Eventually, she put her own personal feelings over the good of the family, and left her own husband and children alone. I wonder, sometimes, if Genji would have turned out better if she’d been around. Still, she was masterful with weaponry and tactics. You remind me of her, in a lot of ways.”

Fast, Hanzo knelt and snapped the fasteners of the case, shutting the bow tightly away. “I should go review the daily income with the accountant.”

“Good kid. I’ll come with you.” Kanata put her arm around Hanzo’s shoulders. It was warm and heavy, how Hanzo always imagined a maternal embrace. She smelled of cigarettes. Hanzo let himself to be lead away from the archery range and into the house.

--

Hanzo took the call with Genji in a communications room at the back of the plane.

“It turns out something in my contact connection is malfunctioning,” Genji said. “That’s why I couldn’t contact Master Zenyatta or the other members of the Shambali.”

*Humans don't malfunction*, Hanzo thought, but he said “Are you alright?”

“Yeah. Dr. Ziegler is looking into it. Anyway, what about you? Are you going to jetset around the world on the Shimada plane? I bet that would be fun.”

“The pilot said she was to take us to our desired location, then remain there until instructed otherwise by Boss Shimada,” Hanzo said.

“Oh. What if Keiko-” Genji stopped. “If she never gets orders?”

“I do not know.”

A moment of silence.

“What will you do when you get to Gibraltar?” Genji asked.

“Leave. McCree said there are woods near the watchpoint. I can eke out an existence there.”

“Living in the woods like a hermit? Come on, Brother. Have you considered joining Overwatch?”

“Have you?”

Genji said nothing.

Hanzo dropped it. “When do you return from Nepal?”
“I am not sure. Winston and Dr. Ziegler are speaking with members of the Shambali about the omniums and Mondotta’s assassination.”

“Do you believe the Shambali reactivated the omniums in retaliation?”

“If they did, I wouldn’t blame them.”

Stunned. “Genji! The Omnics killed millions of humans.”

“Yeah? And humans have killed millions of Omnics as well. People break or kill them for fun, keep them in shops and homes as slaves.” His brother’s voice was full of passion.

“Omnics were created for the purpose of serving humans, Genji.”

“You believe that ‘built to serve’ trash? Omnics are intelligent beings capable of free will. Once something has consciousness, it should not be kept under the yolk of its creator. I was saved by Overwatch to fight for them. Would you have me follow them blindly, even if their actions went against my own conscience?”

“That’s completely different! Your procedure was medical. You are human, Genji.”

“Do you really believe that?”

Hanzo said nothing.

_Malfunctioning._ No, humans and Omnics were not the same. To fix Genji, they would just replace the piece in him that was broken. Hanzo’s hand went to the gourd at his hip, woefully empty. People were not so simply repaired.

“Sorry to interrupt.”

Behind him, Hanzo turned. McCree was in the comm room’s open doorway, looking dispirited. “I just got off the phone with Winston. He got a call from Hanamura’s police.”

In unison, the brothers held their breath.

McCree looked at neither of them. “Talon took Shimada Castle.”

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Watchpoint: Gibraltar wasn’t unpleasant on its own. The sea air felt good in his lungs, the cliffs were beautiful, the winds high. If he had been left to follow the cliffs north as he’d insisted, it would have been pleasant. However, it seemed the decision was not up to him.

“Live in the woods?” Lúcio Correia dos Santos, Overwatch’s newest addition, scratched his dyed dreadlocks in puzzlement. “So are you a survivalist? I read this book about ‘em once - no way, I couldn’t do it. I bet you could pull off that lumberjack look, though. Hey, Reinhardt! Let’s get this guy some flannel.”

Across the room, Reinhardt Willhelm, the biggest man Hanzo had ever seen shot them the biggest smile he’d ever seen. “Ha! We’ll have to get him some camping equipment as well. And stores, and a vehicle to carry it all on…”

“That will not be necessary,” Hanzo said.

“Don’t forget some tools for building your log cabin,” Lúcio joked, putting his arm around Hanzo’s
shoulder. At five-foot-four, Lúcio was a contrast to the massive Reinhardt, but he made up for his
short stature with a larger-than-life personality.

“Really, with all you’d need to go out there, you might as well stay here,” Reinhardt said with an
obvious wink. “We have plenty of room in the Overwatch dormitories, ha.”

Lúcio chimed in. “Yeah, come on, Hanzo-san - is that right? - you’ve got to stay with us!”

Before he knew it, Hanzo was being shuffled through the Watchpoint halls, bowled over by the
affable pair’s enthusiasm. On the way to the dorms, Reinhardt and Lúcio chatted to the Watchpoint
AI, Athena, as if she were a person.

“There are three rooms available in the A-wing,” Athena replied, terse and polite. “Wings B, C, D,
and E are unoccupied.”

“You’ve got to be in A with us, obviously ,” Lúcio said, arm still firmly around Hanzo’s shoulder.
He didn’t dislike Lúcio, but the physical contact with a stranger made him uncomfortable.

“Just for now, until recruitment picks up,” Reinhardt said.

“Hey, speaking of recruitment,” Lúcio started, grinning ear-to-ear. “Tracer told me we might get the
D.Va at the Watchpoint. Can you imagine?”

“Who is... D.Va?” Reinhardt frowned from under his pale beard.

“Only Korea’s Starcraft world champion turned war hero . How many pro gamers do you know that
would give up all that glamor to protect their country? She had all the resources to hunker down in
some high-security mansion away from the fighting. But did she? No way . She jumped in a MEKA,
and got on the front line . Now that’s real hero-material.”

“She sounds like she would fit right in here,” Reinhardt said. “Eugh... now, what is ‘star-craft’?”

As they entered the Overwatch dormitories, Lúcio gave Reinhardt a detailed and verbose history of
e-sports, recommending two books on the subject. Hanzo walked a few steps behind them, forgotten
until they came upon room 24A.

“Ha! This one will work just fine, I think,” Reinhardt said. The pat on the back he gave Hanzo
nearly toppled him over. “Athena! Mark 24A as ‘occupied’.” He smiled at Hanzo like a welcome.

Hanzo did not smile back. He swept into the small room. Across from the entryway was the only
window. The wide shades were drawn. To the left, a fold-down desktop and an open door to a
bathroom. To the right, a bed with a thin mattress, and a cheap dresser. Hanzo swept in and placed
his bundle of belongings on the windowsill.

On his light-blades, Lúcio glided in behind him. “They’re all the same.” Lucio stuck out his tongue
and gave a thumbs down. “Reinhardt said we’re not allowed to paint the walls either. I put some
posters up in my room, though, and got new sheets for the bed. I could help you level up your room
too, Hanzo-san. We could put up some deer antlers here, and a bearskin rug over there-”

“Let him alone, Lúcio.”

Hanzo looked up. It was McCree, smiling, leaning on the doorframe.

“I’m just welcoming him into Overwatch,” Lúcio said.
“He ain’t in Overwatch,” McCree said. Hanzo felt relieved, but insulted by McCree’s tone. “Step off.”

Reinhardt and Lúcio exchanged glances.

“All right, well, if you need anything, I’m right next door in 22A. It was really cool to meet you, Hanzo-san.” Lúcio had a strong handshake. He skated past McCree to Reinhardt, who was waiting in the hall. They waved, then left.

McCree watched their backs as they went, then turned to leave himself.

Halting at first, Hanzo said, “Ah- McCree?”

“Hm?”

“...Thank you.”

“For what?”

Unsure at first, Hanzo settled on, “Giving me some time to myself.”

“Han Solo, huh?”


“Best leave you to it, then.”

Fast, to catch him, Hanzo asked, “How is your leg?”

McCree shifted awkwardly, and Hanzo could tell it was still stiff. “Lúcio’s been workin’ on it.”

“He is a doctor, then”

“More of a medic, really. He told me he took care of a lot of folks during the Vishkar stuff down in Rio. He’s famous, did you know?”

“Genji told me something like that.”

“Yeah. He plays it down, but the kid’s a national icon in Brazil. Major. A polymath, too. Between music, medicine, tech, touring, and freedom-fighting, I don’t know how he finds the time to read as much as he does.”

Polymath, Hanzo thought. Like the Korean girl Lúcio spoke of earlier. There was a time in his life Hanzo himself could have been described this way as well. That had died with Genji. “What of your… other injuries?”

A pause and a glare from McCree. “They’re fine.”

Apologetic, his conscience urged. The words pushed against his lips, but he couldn’t speak them.

“How long you plan on stayin’?”

“Until I can use my bow again, or, until Genji returns.”

McCree hummed. “You talked to Genji recently?”
“Not since the plane.”

“What about Keiko?”

Hanzo hung his head. “No.”

“That pilot of hers is still parked on the airstrip waitin’ for orders.”

“She believes Keiko made it out, I suppose.”

“What do you think?”

_I think my home is lost and what remained of my clan is destroyed. In her long-standing bid for survival, would Keiko submit herself to Talon’s experimentation, or go down with Shimada Castle? “I do not know,” Hanzo said._

Looking at his boots, McCree changed the subject. “Reinhardt’s makin’ dinner in the mess around six,” he said, then left.

Now alone, Hanzo shut his door, then fastidiously unpacked his things. His spare kyudo-gi looked silly all alone in the particle-board dresser-drawer. Hanzo owned little, so unpacking took almost no time. The thought of running into Reinhardt or Lúcio again, or of exercising out of doors, or of even leaving the room, felt exhausting.

It was hot with the afternoon summer sun bleeding through the blinds. Hanzo pulled his hair loose and laid down on top of the bunk’s scratchy blanket, drifting in and out of consciousness. As a sheen of sweat started to coat his skin, Hanzo’s mind wandered to McCree pressed up behind him on the motorcycle. McCree’s gloved hands over his, the whispered breath on his ear, the scent of bourbon. He clung to the memory, as he did with the memory of their night in the hotel, and most of all the one of McCree chasing after Keiko, insisting they couldn’t leave Hanzo behind.

A good man. Maybe a good man wouldn’t feel right leaving anyone behind like that, but then again, maybe it had sprouted from something akin to affection. It had been a long time since Hanzo had allowed himself to sink into feelings for another person - a long time since he’d spent enough time with another person to develop such feelings. As many times as he tried to convince himself that McCree hated him, he couldn’t snuff out the small flame of hope in his chest.

_Reinhardt’s makin’ dinner in the mess around six. Was it an invitation, or a warning? Join us, or stay away?_

Time, hot and hazy, passed in waves. Hanzo checked Genji’s phone now and then. 3:13PM. 4:45PM. 5:37PM. 6:03PM. 6:15PM. 6:29PM. 6:50PM. His stomach grumbled, feeling empty. The pain was worse than normal, for some reason. Still, Hanzo ignored it, and drifted back to sleep.

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Hanzo took his spare kyudo-gi out of the dresser-drawer and laid it open on his bed. It surprised him how much he had unpacked in the past weeks here. His needle and thread were on the desk, tangled with a borrowed pair of headphones. There, too, was Lúcio’s album - a bluetooth chip that had transferred the audio files to Hanzo’s phone. By the door, his comb sat amidst his piled gold scarf. He’d stolen a thick stack of Mercy’s healing patches from the medbay and hid them in a drawer. Storm Bow was leaning in a corner.

Aside from a few unwelcome visits from Reinhardt and Lúcio, and the rare but much-anticipated appearances by McCree, Hanzo had mostly kept to himself during his weeks at the Watchpoint. A
man named Torbjörn returned from Russia. Winston and Tracer after got back from Nepal - without Genji. Lúcio told him that Genji had gone to London with Mercy to see some sort of specialist for his malfunctioning communication system.

There was some kind of bond between them - the Overwatch members - that made Hanzo feel unwelcome. They all met in the mess for communal meals; Hanzo snuck out of his room late at night, stealing food and alcohol from the Watchpoint’s kitchen. Days were spent in training simulations, missions, and team check-ins; Hanzo hid in his room, half-drunk, blocking the sun out with the plastic shades and clutching to the scattered, unfulfilling hours of sleep he could scrape together. He was not a member of Overwatch, and therefore had no reason to attend meetings, join them for practice, or go on assignments - no reason to do anything but lay in bed. With the easy domesticity of the Watchpoint, Hanzo felt that too-familiar torpor returning.

He couldn’t stay here.

Hanzo untangled the needle and thread, filled his sake gourd, combed and tied up his hair. He fished Mercy’s healing patches from their hiding place, and tucked them in his spare gi aside his toiletries and survival items. He stared at the cell phone Genji had given him, then left it on the made bed.

Hoping to avoid any questions, Hanzo snuck out of his room late at night. Things would be simpler that way. He waved through the Watchpoint’s dark halls until he arrived outside the rec room. He could exit out a back door from there then get to the forest by way of the cliffs.

Blue light and muffled dialogue were coming from the open doorway. Curious, Hanzo peered inside and saw an old western playing on the big screen. McCree’s tousled hair was peeking up over the back of the couch. Hanzo turned to leave and find another exit.

“Hope you packed some PJ’s,” McCree called over his shoulder.

Hanzo froze. “You are awake.”

“Couldn’t sleep. I was goin’ to have myself a nightcap, but I got to the kitchen and found someone had drank all my bourbon.”

Hanzo looked at his feet.

“You sure do drink a lot for someone who spends all his time alone, Han Solo.”

That nickname again. The little fire flared up until Hanzo reminded himself what McCree was saying, and didn’t answer.

“Tell me something,” McCree said. “You drink so you can feel somethin’ or to feel nothing?”

*I don’t know anymore,* Hanzo thought, but he didn’t say anything.

“How you going to get booze if you go live out in the middle of nowhere?”

Why did he insist on asking about this? Was he trying to shame him on purpose? “I will be unable to,” Hanzo grumbled.

McCree hummed. “You gonna leave without saying goodbye to Genji?”

“He is not here to say goodbye to.”

“Kind of my point.” McCree was turned to face him now, leaning over the back of the couch. The
light from the TV behind McCree obscured his face, and Hanzo couldn’t read his expression. “You joining up with him somewhere else?”

An odd question. “Why would I meet him anywhere except here?”

McCree shrugged. Something about it made Hanzo uneasy.

“You have asked me many questions about Genji recently,” Hanzo said, taking a few steps into the room. “Why?”

“No reason.”

A troublesome lie. “I am not a fool-” The western went black, save for the pulsing blue logo for the base’s AI.

“Agent McCree,” Athena said officially from the overhead speakers. “The Watchpoint is receiving a call. You are the highest-ranking member of Overwatch currently awake.”

“A call?” McCree stood up, a silhouette in front of the screen. “Not an Overwatch member?”


McCree adjusted. “Arlington? How’d they get our contact info?”

“I have no data on that, Agent McCree.”

“Shit. Put ‘em through. And get Winston in on the call if you can, I got a feeling he’ll want to see what this is about.”

“Very well,” Athena said.

The screen changed from the blue “A” to a video feed of a dark man with small eyes set in a large face. His pleasant, relaxed smile widened when he looked up at the screen. “Jesse McCree,” he said. “Now isn’t that the last man on earth I expected to take my call.”

“Deputy Marshal Cooper.” McCree straightened, grabbing his hat from the couch cushion and putting it on his head. “Awful rude to call a fella’ in the middle of the night.”

“That so?” Deputy Cooper raised his grey eyebrows. “It’s not so late over here.”

“You want to tell me how you got the specs for this channel?”

Cooper made a show of considering it. “Well, I could ask you what a wanted criminal is doing at a ‘decommissioned’ OW Watchpoint, but how about for now we let sleeping dogs lie?”

“I ain’t an Overwatch agent,” McCree lied.

Cooper’s overlarge face was imposing on the huge TV screen. He turned his shrewd eyes to Hanzo. “Who’s your friend? Another non-agent?”

McCree put himself between Hanzo and the camera. “What d’ya want, Cooper?”

“You seen the bounty list lately? You’re back to second-place.”

“So I’ve heard.”
“We’re lookin’ for one Neil Waldrum, and from what I hear, you’re looking for him too.”

“And where’d you hear that?”

“Same place I got the specs for this channel. Same place I heard it was for selling e-bombs on the black market. Heard he might have unloaded a few more than just the four in Japan, if you’re interested.”

Without missing a beat, McCree asked, “What’s it going to cost us?”

“Just want a little help bringin’ him in, is all. Like you did back in Boston.”

McCree didn’t answer right away. Instead, he looked out the bay window of the rec room - up at the crescent moon in the sky.

“Y’know, I got a buddy at the UN,” Cooper said, “and he’s had some real trouble getting a hold of a few former Overwatch members concerning some recent illicit activity in Russia. I could direct him towards this channel if you like, as a favor, since we're old friends and all.”

“It ain’t my call, Cooper. Athena, you get a hold of Winston yet?”

“He has been on the line for the past three minutes and twenty-one seconds. Would you like me to create a three-way call?”

“Naw. Hold your horses, Coop. Gonna discuss this with the big man. I’ll get back to you, so don’t go doin’ me any favors until then. Athena, put Coop on hold and connect me with Winston.”

“Very well.”

Cooper disappeared from the screen, and it switched to Winston, poking at a tablet off-screen.

“Good morning, McCree.” Winston looked up. “Oh! Hanzo. Uh, thank you for, uh, for joining us.”

“How much of that did you hear?” McCree ignored Hanzo.

“Enough,” Winson said. “I think we should do it.”

“Alright then. Who you want me to wake up?”

Winston smiled nervously. “Uhm, well, see, what I really meant was…”

“You think I should do it,” McCree finished. “Winston, Coop ain’t a bad guy but we got history.”

“Oh?”

“He’s on my case.”

“How so?”

“I mean my case with the law. He chased my ass halfway across the Southwest.”

“Oh! Oh, I see.” Winston pursed his lips. “But he said he’d worked with you before. And, he knew about the EMPs! Talon already has three in their possession.”

“Four,” Hanzo corrected, thinking of Keiko and his now overtaken home.

“Right. Right. Four. Uh, sorry, Hanzo. I just mean that, we know from Tracer that Talon was behind
Mondotta’s assassination. They might have reactivated the Omniums too, for all we know. It couldn’t hurt for Overwatch to have a few e-bombs of our own, things going as they are.”

It still annoyed Hanzo that this was the leader of Overwatch. Even Keiko doled out orders without explaining her decisions to her subordinates as Winston did. “Do you think it may be a ruse so he can arrest McCree?” Hanzo asked.

“Would that be so terrible,” Winston said, “for Jesse to answer for the crimes he’s wanted for?”

McCree gaped. “Yeah, for me, Winston, it’d be real bad.”

Winston reached up and took off his glasses, looking into the camera - looking McCree sternly in the eye.

The look made McCree sputter. He took off his hat. “I ain’t… I ain’t done all those things they said I done. Or, at least, not like they said I done ‘em.”

“That’s what juries are for, right?” Winston put his glasses back on. “If you’re innocent, they’ll absolve you.”

“You got an awful sunny view of the American justice system.”

Much as Hanzo felt Winston should not allow himself to be argued with, he did not like where this was going for McCree. He tried to sound reasonable. “With as few agents as you have, allowing one to be arrested and go through a lengthy court process would be counter-productive.”

Looking at him from beneath his prominent brow, Winston’s gaze made Hanzo feel unduly scrutinized. “Would you feel better if we had someone to watch your back, Jesse?”

“A might better, I suppose,” McCree said.

“Great!” Winston flashed Hanzo his animal teeth. “Hanzo - I know you're not, uh, officially on Overwatch’s payroll, but would you want to join Agent McCree on this mission?”

“What? Naw!”

A mission alone with McCree. There would be no other strangers to interact with. He could protect McCree from this man Cooper, a worthy pursuit instead of being stuffed up in a Watchpoint dormitory. “I will do it,” Hanzo said.

Another protest from McCree. “I thought you were leaving to go live in the damn woods!”

“Then it’s settled,” Winston said.

“Don't I get no say in how this goes down?”

“I'll talk to Cooper and, uhm, encourage him to, uh, not arrest you,” Winston said. “Thank you, Agent McCree. Hanzo”

“Now wait just a damn-”

The call ended.

The exchange left Hanzo with the feeling that he’d willfully allowed himself be manipulated. Though Winston had not handled it the way Hanzo might have, he’d acted shrewdly nonetheless. Perhaps he wasn’t as hopeless a leader as Hanzo thought. “You should prepare for the mission. I am
already packed - unless you insist I bring a pair of...” Hanzo put emphasis on the last word, teasing. “...PJ’s.”

Spinning, McCree shoved his metal finger in Hanzo’s face. “You! What are you up to?” Hanzo could see his face now - he was red with anger.

The little fire of hope diminished when he saw that expression. Hanzo raised his brows.

“I can't figure you out. Hide in your room, an inch from disappearing, now you're going on missions? Are you trying to get away from Genji or protect him?”

Speechless. I don't know anymore.

Their faces were inches apart now. Hanzo could feel McCree’s breath as he snarled, “You tryin’ to fuck me or get rid of me?”

Hanzo took a step back.

“You think I ain't noticed? Reyes taught me to read folks. I knew in five minutes. Let's get one thing straight - it's never gonna happen. You're the last person I want watching my back, in every sense you've been imagining. So don't go thinkin you got me out on some romantic getaway.”

As McCree walked past him, he slammed his shoulder into Hanzo’s. The pain felt bruising, and his flame of hope burned down to embers.

“I do not want that,” Hanzo lied obstinately to McCree’s back.

McCree paused in the doorway, halfway to the hall. He met Hanzo’s steely eyes. “Yeh, well…” Unsure. “…Good.” He turned, and left.

Chapter End Notes

Oh no! That darn McCree... just when we thought he might be warming up to our favorite sadman :) Don't worry - the bold reaction comes from a bit of denial ;)
Stream starts soon! Hope to see you guys there!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!

As always, thanks to my beta-readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chip, and to everyone who reads, comments, and comes to hang out in the stream ^_^ You guys are the best!

I will be streaming tonight, 1/19 at 9PM EST!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The cell doors of the Cedar Junction Correctional Institute passed by as McCree followed Reyes down the long corridor. Through the bars of each door was a tiny box with a man inside. A hall of mirrors. “You could have ended up in a place like this,” Reyes said.

The unspoken postscript: If I hadn’t saved you.

Reyes and McCree had come to Boston to catch a guy named Vladimir Romanov, a mob boss not-so-affectionately called Dracula. It wasn’t the usual Blackwatch job, serving a warrant, but they’d been Jack’s good soldiers like always. Thanks to them, Vlad was in lockup, and they just had to worry about making the charges stick.

They followed the meaty corrections officer down the hall to interrogation. He lead them to a dark, tiny room with two-way glass, where Cooper was waiting for them.

Cooper was a Deputy US Marshal and dressed the part - jeans, a cowboy hat, a t-shirt with the star printed on the breast. His accent and speech pattern were odd, slow and deliberate, with missing r’s and t’s. It made it hard to pinpoint his background. Louisiana? Utah? An army brat, maybe, from that regulation haircut. He had shrewd eyes, hard like obsidian, that scrutinized McCree almost every time he turned his back.

He knows. McCree thought. He knows I don’t belong with Overwatch. He knows I’m just a criminal.

Their witness, James Harris, was on the wrong side of the two-way glass. His celly was one of Vlad’s guys, and Cooper hoped he might have seen some things that could put the final nails in the prosecutor’s case. It still all seemed off - this was small-time, more policework than military, not Blackwatch’s usual MO. Reyes and Cooper talked over the case. McCree stood, arms folded, staring through the glass at Harris. He was leaning on the back two legs of his chair.

“You talk to him,” Reyes said, handing McCree Harris’ file.
It was surprising. Reyes usually took lead on this kind of thing. Still, McCree knew better than to ask any questions in front of Cooper. He left the viewing room and did a u-turn, facing the door that lead into the windowless interrogation room.

It was hot in there, dry. Harris was a ginger, head-to-toe orange in his prison jumpsuit, wiry like a stray dog. He looked bored. McCree sat down across the table from him, tossing the case file down.

“Glass o’ water?”

“No thanks, ya’ hick,” Harris said - a gruff Southie greeting. He was feeling McCree out.

McCree laughed. “What’re you in for?”

“Drugs,” Harris said, matter-of-fact. “Then I killed some cops when they cornered me in my apartment.”

“How old are ya’?”

“Twenty-six.”

A year younger than me. “How long you been in?”

“Nine years.”

Jesus. “You got tried as an adult?”

“Sure. Didn’t have some rich family to buy me a nice lawyer in a fancy suit. Just had to take what I was given, yeah?”

At the edge of his vision, McCree could see own reflection was in the two way glass. He forced himself not to look in that direction. Reyes was on the other side, watching. “You know the name Vlad Romanov?”

“Maybe I’ve heard that name, around here.”

“Maybe it could shave some years off your sentence.”

“How many?”

“Depends on what ya’ know.”

Harris knew enough. McCree took his statement, then Cooper called the prosecutor in and closed the deal. Harris got flagged for witness protection. It all wrapped up real neat and tidy.

Reyes went out in the hall talking with Harris and the prosecutor, leaving McCree and Cooper in the observation room. Cooper had some case file in a manila folder he was looking over.

“It’s too bad about Harris, locked up at seventeen,” McCree said.

“Why so? He killed some men,” Cooper said. “And now, out early, because of who he shared a cell with.”

“So he don't deserve something for testifying?”

“Didn’t say that, now. He did wrong and he paid for it. Now he does right, and the pay goes the other way. That's how justice should work.”
“Yeah, but even if he gets out tomorrow, that's nine of his best years gone.”

“There are more ways than one to lose those best years of your life. Cages come in many different makes and models.”

“All I'm sayin' is, he was just a kid.”

“Kids, in my experience, know right from wrong better than anyone,” Cooper said. “Things only get muddy when adults try to tell them different.” He looked up from his paperwork to McCree, then past him when Reyes came back in the room.

Cooper folded shut in the file he’d been working on and stood, picking it up. “You two can transfer Harris to the safe house tomorrow?”

It was a ridiculous demand. Reyes just showed his teeth and nodded. Cooper handed Reyes the folder, and they left the prison.

McCree knew enough to wait and mouth off about it when he and Reyes were alone in their cheap Blackwatch per diem hotel room.

“Why are we even on this job, boss? It don't smell right. And I don't like that fella', Cooper. He's got it out for me.”

“I owe Cooper a favor.”

This was news. “What favor?”

Reyes turned on the TV. He still had the file Cooper had given him tucked under his arm.

Their phones chimed at the same time. They both pulled them out. A text from Jack.

Morrison

[20:45]
Your guy just shot to the top of the bounty list. Romanov must have heard about his testimony.

There was a link attached from the domain amomentincrime.com. McCree tapped it.

It was true. There, at the top, Harris. No wonder the Marshals didn't want to transport him themselves.

“We better go get him now,” Reyes said. “If we leave him at Cedar Junction he’ll be dead by morning. Top of the list... Dracula must really want to stay out of jail if he plans to employ the Moonless Night.”

“The what?”

“Best assassin in the world. They don't take normal contracts, just kill whoever’s at the top of the bounty list. That’s the only reason someone would come out of the gate with a number like this. They want Harris dead.”
“What’s with the name? Kind of a mouthful.”

“They only kill on moonless nights.” Reyes looked out the window at the black sky. “Which means we’ve only got a day.”

“With such short notice, you think the assassin’ll wait another month?”

“No. Their best opportunity is while Harris is being transported,” Reyes said. “We have to be careful the next few days, got it?”

Afraid wasn’t the word for it - Gabriel Reyes didn’t get scared or even shaken, but McCree would say his CO was acting more worried than usual. That wasn’t good. He looked back down at Harris’ name on the bounty list, and spied another familiar name there: Hanzo Shimada.

Blackwatch had been on assignment in Japan when the yakuza prince had tried to kill his young brother, Genji. Thanks to Mercy and Liao, Genji had lived, and was part of Overwatch now. Genji didn’t care about McCree’s criminal past, and they got along well, but it was clear the event and its consequences had messed Genji up but good.

Hanzo’s name was second on the bounty list. Far as McCree was concerned, it couldn’t jump to number one fast enough.

--

The wall outside 24A felt cool on McCree’s back. He was trying to drum up the nerve to knock, knowing that he’d have to stare down one sulky, pissed-off archer.

Since their altercation four nights prior, he’d seen plenty of Hanzo. They shared mission briefings and practice sims in preparation for their assignment with Cooper in Austin. The only times Hanzo spoke to McCree, however, were to call out targets, or complain when McCree didn’t follow up on them. He hadn’t realized there had been warmth in Hanzo until it was gone.

The dorm hallway had never made him nervous before, but since they’d agreed on this mission with Deputy Marshal Cooper, McCree’s brain had got locked up in a jail cell and he couldn’t get it out. Instead of the friendly, domestic Overwatch home base, McCree looked down the hall and saw Cedar Junction’s long corridor of cells.

With a frustrated growl, he knocked on the door.

Shuffling. Breathing. A quiet moan that shot warmth through McCree’s body. He pushed it down. The door cracked, and he saw a slice of Hanzo’s familiar glare. What do you want? the glare said. That thin crack in the portal to Hanzo’s room showed the archer’s sinewy throat, his muscled torso, his bare hip.

McCree forced himself to look away. “Get dressed,” he told Hanzo. “We’re goin’ out.”

“For what?” A demand.

“Gotta replace my bourbon.” An accusation. “And, you need new clothes for the mission.”

“What is wrong with my gi?”

McCree raised his eyebrows. “You’re supposed to be watchin’ my back on this mission. You think Coop ain’t gonna make a guy with a bow who looks like he walked out of a Kurosawa film?”
Glare deepening, Hanzo said, “Your apparel too is outdated, and far more foolish.”

“We’re goin’ to Texas, Shimada. I’m gonna fit right in. Go on, get ready. I’ll wait.”

They got into town, and now McCree was waiting outside a door again, knowing Hanzo was some level of naked on the other side. The shop was a hedge maze of clothing racks under a high ceiling of fluorescent lights. The changing rooms, where Hanzo was trying on some new duds, were just a row of stalls set into one wall. He was reminded again of the Boston cell block.

McCree shifted. What was taking Hanzo so damn long? Maybe he should have walked around with him and helped him pick something out, to trim down on iterations. If those two archery uniforms were any indication, the guy was pretty hopeless as far as fashion was concerned. Never mind that the only person in Overwatch who hadn’t critiqued McCree’s own getup was Torbjorn.

“This fabric is poor quality,” Hanzo said through the door.

“It’s a resale shop, what do you expect? O-dub ain’t going to take you to some fancy clothier like your daddy used to.”

“Am I to come off as a vagabond, then?”

“If you weren’t crashing at the Watchpoint you’d be living in the woods. You are a vagabond.”

A pause, then, “Refrain from speaking of my father.”

“Yeah, yeah,” McCree grumbled.

A few minutes of silence passed, then the dressing room door opened. McCree pushed off the wall and took a few steps back, prepping for disappointment.

Back in Santa Fe, near every day the sky was cheerful blue and overwhelmingly open. Now and then, though, pale clouds would knuckle in like a haymaker. *Something’s coming*, those clouds said. Big and telegraphed, a punch of a thunderstorm that would roll across the sky and knock the dry desert on its ass. When McCree was young, he’d look up at those clouds and shiver with anticipation, just like he was now.

*Son of a bitch. Who knew Hanzo would look so damn good in white?*

Fidgeting, Hanzo adjusted the hoodie’s cuffs; straightened the stiff, tight pants; cracked his neck so his cheek brushed the pale collar and its lightning-yellow seams. “Is it, perhaps, too ostentatious?”

It kicked McCree out of his staring. Without thinking, he laughed. “That a pun, Shimada?”

“A ghost of a smile on Hanzo’s face, aimed his way for only for a moment before it was gone. Hanzo looked away. “I do not joke. I am always serious.”

McCree realized right then that when Hanzo had said it before he had been joking, because this time it held some new, subtle sorrow. “Naw. Austin’s a real college town. That *Austin-tatious* getup’ll fit right in with the hipster crowd. It’s—” McCree stopped himself, finished in a whisper, “—perfect.”

Clouds. That’s what Hanzo looked like, big and light as air and far away. Heralding a storm. He wanted to hate him, to ward him away, but he couldn’t stop it rolling into him anymore than he could stop the weather.
When McCree looked at Hanzo, he didn’t think *I hate you or get outta my sight.* He thought, *C’mere.*

He thought, *Something’s coming.*

---

Looking at the forecast made McCree laugh. Texas was another clear-sky and always dry state, but the next couple days had little cartoon stormclouds in the forecast. *Son of a bitch.*

The laugh got no reaction from Hanzo, who only stared out the window of their cab, watching the nighttime lights of Austin fly by from their vantage on Mopac.

“We meet Cooper tomorrow night,” McCree said.

“Hm.” Another non-reaction from Hanzo.

“He wants us to meet up at the bat bridge. Can’t tell if that’s a good spot. Lots of folks there around that time. Not a great place for a shootout.”

“Hm.”

“Best if we ain’t seen together, in case Coop starts sniffin’ around. You check into your room first at the hotel. I’ll come in after.”

“Hm.”

McCree gave up on conversation. The cab arrived at the hotel, and Hanzo took both their bags and went inside. McCree loitered out front for a few minutes before sending Hanzo a text.

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**Hanzo**

[24:21]

What's your room number?

[24:23]

Does it matter?

[24:23]

I gotta get my bag

[24:23]

547
Top floor. McCree left the lobby to find the elevator, but was faced with an “Out of Order” sign. Perfect, he thought, and wandered off to find the stairs.

By the time he got up to floor five, he was huffing and puffing. He exited the stairwell into another hall of doors, all the hotel rooms. He followed the signs to five-forty-seven, trying not to think of the halls as a cell block. He found Hanzo’s room and knocked. After a delay the door opened, and Hanzo handed McCree his bag without preamble.

“You hungry?” McCree asked before Hanzo could close the door. It earned him a suspicious glare.

“It is past midnight.”

“So? Come on.”

Wary, Hanzo emerged from the dark hotel room. He followed McCree without a word, and they went downstairs to call a cab.

--

For a thursday night at 1AM, the diner was alive. Dozens of college kids piled into the booths, talking too loud or leaning on their friends, half-asleep. Haggard waitstaff buzzed like bees from table to table with trays and notepads, calling orders to the open kitchen right behind Hanzo’s head.

“But that is not the name of the street this restaurant is on,” Hanzo said.

“The original ‘Kerbey Lane’ is on Kerbey Lane. They added a few more locations after that one did well. Don’t make much sense to put ‘em all on the same road.”

Their waiter, some college kid with an undercut, came by to drop off their drinks and ask for their orders. McCree caught Hanzo peering at the kid for a little longer than necessary and felt a pang of… something. Jealousy? Regret? The waiter smiled and went away.

Without thinking, McCree joked, “So that how you like ‘em? Young?”

“Excuse me?” Hanzo looked offended, eyes wide in that way McCree liked.

McCree nodded to their waiter, who was across the restaurant now taking another order.

“No!”

“You were staring.”

“I was not.”

“I got eyes, Shimada.”

After a pause, Hanzo said, “I was observing his hair-style.”

“Yeah. Sure.”

Hanzo glared. “Why am I here?”

Still sullen. McCree had admittedly blown up at him when Winston had put them on a mission together, but he’d never imagined the rejection would actually hurt Hanzo’s feelings. McCree had viewed him as a villain for so long that he’d read something predatory in Hanzo’s interested looks and familiarity. But Hanzo acted jilted - sulky and embarrassed, attempting to put his own feelings to
rest and assure McCree with his actions that he would no longer pursue the interest. McCree should have been glad for it, but he missed Hanzo’s dry conversation.

Just then, the waiter returned, putting down the appetizer McCree had ordered. “One Kerbey Queso. Your food will be out from the kitchen soon.” He smiled, and left for another table.

McCree waited until the waiter was out of earshot. “Look, we’re stuck on this mission together. We can be civil, can’t we?”

“I suppose,” Hanzo conceded.

“Well, alright. Eat something. You gotta be hungry, you ain’t et since breakfast.”

Hanzo peered down at the queso warily. “What is it?”

“Cheese and guac, pretty much. It’s good.”

Hanzo ventured the tip of a tortilla chip in.

“Naw,” McCree complained. “You gotta get in there, like this.” He stabbed a chip inside and scooped out a healthy amount of the white-and-green goop. Hanzo watched him stuff it in his mouth with amused disgust.

“See?” McCree slurred, mouth full. “Like that.”

Hanzo scooped up a conservative amount and took a neat bite. He considered it like a wine tasting.

McCree rolled his eyes. “Good?”

“Junk food.”

“Uh, yeah. We’re at a diner at one in the morning. I promise you, most of the kids in here are drunk.” McCree spun his finger in a circle.

“I noticed.”

“Jealous?” The rib was out of his mouth before he thought of it.

Hanzo glared at him.

Wincing, McCree said, “Sorry.”

“But you meant it.”

“Well—…” McCree frowned.

“Save your pretense. Shimada say the Dragon hungers for flesh but thirsts for sake. If I am honest, I think it is merely a way of saying alcoholism runs in our family.”

“I think it runs in most families,” McCree grumbled.

Hesitant, Hanzo asked, “In yours?”

McCree shrugged. “Well. We got our share of vices. Booze is one on a long list I inherited from my pa.”

“Was your father a good man?”
Thumbing the metal of his prosthetic, McCree laughed. “Hell no.”

“Mm.”

“Yours?”

That earned him a furrowed brow. “He-” Hanzo stopped. “I do not think it was a question he ever asked himself.”

Unfathomable. “Did you ever ask yourself that?”

“No.” Hanzo looked away. “I asked other people.”

It reminded McCree of something Cooper had said. Kids, in my experience, know right from wrong better than anyone. Things only get muddy when adults try to tell them different.

“Genji always knew himself.” Hanzo went on. “He made trouble with a confidence I couldn’t match. I always thought it was youth, short-sightedness, but looking back now, I wonder…” He looked up. “What was he like, when he was in Overwatch? Was he as he is now?”

“Hell no,” McCree laughed. “He wasn’t anything like you say, either, though. He was wild, sure, and he was never much for takin’ orders, but confident? Naw. He was quick and lost. Angry all the time. Sometimes you could get him to joke around and relax, but the minute anything reminded him of what he was, it was all doom and gloom again. He lived to kill you.”

Hanzo straightened up. This was apparently news.

“Aw, yeah. He woke up with a list and your name at the top in big red letters. I used to think it was for obvious reasons, but as time rolled on… I realized he didn’t consider himself a person anymore. He thought he was a tool built for the purpose of killin’ you.”

Hanzo’s hands tightened around his chipped mug of tea. “So he was not always so-”

“-zen? Nope. He was messed up. I still can’t wrap my head around what happened between then and now that he’d forgive you.”

Hanzo’s head was bowed, staring into his cup.

“That came out wrong-”

“No,” Hanzo insisted. “I cannot ‘wrap my head around it’ either.”

The waiter returned wielding their food. As soon as he approached the table, Hanzo turned his face away. The waiter cheerfully deposited a plate of pancakes in front of McCree and some egg whites and dry toast for Hanzo.

McCree thanked the kid with a smile, and he left for his other tables. Hanzo still pretended to study the specials card.

“Did you know Genji left Overwatch to go and find you?” McCree wasn’t sure now how much Genji had told him. “Back then nobody left Overwatch, not nobody. You know what they say about revenge - dig two graves. When he left, none of us thought we’d see him again.”

Silence, then Hanzo’s soft whisper, “What is to be done with a tool when it no longer has a purpose?” McCree followed his gaze to the dragon’s maw roaring at his wrist.
They finished their food in relative silence after that. Hanzo ate hardly more than a few bites, while McCree shoveled pancakes and queso in his mouth at a rate Hanzo seemed to find alarming. They got the check, paid, then went outside. McCree called a cab, and they waited out on the curb, the restaurant bright and busy behind them.

“Hey, uh… Look,” McCree said. “I’m sorry about blowin’ up on you the other night. I was just mad about bein’ jerked around by Coop and Winston.”

Hanzo didn’t look at him. “Do you believe Deputy Marshal Cooper plans to arrest you?”

“Hell, I don’t know. Cooper’s a good guy, maybe a little too good. Like Winston, but not naive like that. Believes in a right way of doin’ things.”

“You do not believe in a right way of doing things?”

“I think you can’t depend on other folks to tell you what’s right and wrong. Years in Blackwatch taught me that.” McCree’s thoughts drifted to Reaper. “It was a hard lesson.”

After a beat, Hanzo turned to face him and bowed. “I apologize as well.”

McCree blinked. “Uh… for what?”

“For starting the duel with you in Hanamura.”

“Oh, that…” It was old news. Was he only sorry for it just now?

“It was selfish.”

“Well, yeah.”

“I…” Hanzo scoffed and didn’t continue on.

McCree thought about what Ueda had said in the basement of Rikimaru. “Genji told me when he first came back to see you, y’all fought. He told me he beat you.”

“Yes.”

“But he didn’t kill you. Do you wish he had?”

Hanzo looked out at the cars in the street just in front of him. “It would have been just,” he said. “Elegant.”

“Simple?”

Frowning, Hanzo looked back at him. “Yes.”

“Simpler than having to deal with your half-omnic brother back from the dead.”

“You know nothing.”

“From the sound of it you don’t know a whole hell of a lot either, Shimada.”

It seemed like Hanzo was about to answer, but just then the cab arrived. Whatever Hanzo had planned on saying, McCree wouldn’t know. Hanzo didn’t say anything the entire ride back to the hotel.
The meet was at twilight, so McCree knew Coop wanted civilians around. Summer was just the season for spectators - momma bats with their broods, huddling in the girders, waiting for the sun to go down. Babes growing up in the dark.

McCree leaned back against the guardrail of the Congress Street bridge, traffic rolling by in front of him. A few excited spectators chatted nearby. Below, tourists and denizens alike were crowded on a grassy mound beside the bank of the Colorado River. It felt like every one of them were looking up at him.

“What’s your position?” McCree asked over the comm.

“Hotel roof,” came Hanzo’s voice in his ear. “Four o’clock.”

McCree turned and saw a spec of a figure standing to show himself from behind the hotel’s parapet. “You can shoot from there?”

“Not easily. The wind is a problem. But there are too many people to position any closer. I will also have difficulty discerning who his agents on the scene are. I imagine that was Deputy Marshal Cooper’s intention.”

“Yep, most like.” McCree looked from the roof to the assembled crowd on the bridge’s walkway. That’s when he spotted him.

Cooper had this slow way of walking that McCree could spot from a mile away. It had gotten him out of a few close calls, and now, watching him approach, he felt a rising urge to flee again. “He’s here.”

“Where?”

“Three-o’clock. Five meters away.”

“I have him. I take the shot on your word.”

“Not if you’re gonna hit civilians,” McCree said.

“I won’t.”

Looking at the tiny spec on the distant hotel roof, McCree put that line down to bravado. Cooper was close enough now that he waved. “Don’t shoot unless I give the signal,” McCree said into his comm, then he turned to Cooper and waved back.

“Well, well. I have not seen ya’ this up close in a good and long while, Jesse McCree,” Cooper said with a broad smile. “You got old.”

“Look who’s talking.” McCree shot back, shaking the hand Cooper had offered. He had a big, warm grip. He was a hard guy to dislike, and McCree had to keep that tiny jail cell in mind.

“When’d you get in,” Cooper asked.

“Late last night. Who else you got with you?”

Cooper laughed, low and slow. “Straight to business.”

“Well, considering your business.”
“My business right now is Neil Waldrum,” Cooper said.

“Let’s get to it, then.”

“Very well. We got a tip that Mr. Waldrum will be meeting some colleagues on sixth street tomorrow night, ’round midnight. They’re on the bounty list too, if we can manage a hat trick.”

“Tomorrow night’s a friday,” McCree said.

“Surely it is.”

“Friday night on Sixth Street? That’s gonna be a mob, Coop.”

“It’s the lead we’ve got,” Cooper said. “You can see why we wanted backup.”

“If he runs, a lot of civilians could get hurt in a chase.”

Cooper cocked his head to the side. “And?”

That gave him pause. This wasn’t the guy McCree had known back in Boston, or when he was on the run. “And, I ain’t about to shoot innocent folk to catch this creep.”

“A lot more innocent people may die to the Omnics if you do not.”

“Don’t give me that line, Coop. You ain’t the first fella’ to try it. I don’t do right the wrong way no more. There’s things I won’t do.”

The sun was setting now, and McCree started spying movement in his periphery, hearing the chirps and seeing dark streaks at the edge of his vision.

“Well, perhaps then you’re worth more to me as a bounty than a hired gun,” Cooper said.

The signal word waited in McCree’s throat. If he called the shot and Hanzo hit someone else on accident, would it be any different from what he was refusing to do now? Even if Hanzo landed the shot, would avoiding the law be worth Cooper’s life? “Fine, then. Arrest me. Warrant or not, I’m not gettin’ in a gunfight down there.”

Cooper smiled, looking surprised. “We’re in agreement, then. I had to check. We don’t want you going cowboy on us, if you’ll forgive the pun.”

McCree made a face. “A test?”

“Most definitely.”

There now, that was the Cooper he remembered. McCree relaxed. “Then you ain’t going to arrest me?”

“No, Jesse, I’m not going to arrest you. At least not until the end of our accord here,” Cooper said, all soft t’s and r’s. “I promised your man Winston that, and I’m a man that keeps his promises.”

For a moment, McCree thought to shoot a jab Cooper’s way. Forgive me if I don’t take ya’ on your word and all that. Most folks’ word he wouldn’t trust, but Cooper wasn’t most folks. When he said he kept his promises, he meant it.

That’s when they came in force, not just one by one, but en masse, streaking up into the evening sky all around him.
The bats.

McCree had to yell over their chorus of chirping. “If you’re a man who keeps his promises, how do I know you ain’t promised anyone else that you’d bring me in?”

“Point of fact, I did promise a real certain someone,” Cooper said. “But she’s waited a good long while. She can wait a bit longer.”

“Who?”

“That’ll hold until we have Mr. Waldrum in lockup.”

Just as fast as they’d appeared around them, the bats were gone, lifting up into a dark cloud against the grey, evening sky. They came here for brooding season, and by now the babies were old enough to fly along with their mothers in the nightly hunt. They swept past the hotel roof where Hanzo was waiting for McCree’s signal.

As they flew by, McCree could see Hanzo’s silhouette, but just past him, he thought he spied another dark figure standing on the roof. But by the time the cloud of bats passed, it was gone, and McCree wondered if it had even been there to begin with. He looked up. There, pale and faint in the evening sky, was a hangnail of a moon. In a day or two, it would wane away completely. A moonless night.

McCree turned to Cooper and said, “So how d’you want to do this?”

Chapter End Notes

Get ready y’all, the next three chapters or so are going to be my little love letter to Austin~
Speaking of Austin, I’m going to be in Austin next week! Briefly, then down to San Antonio for PAX South (: So there may or may not be a chapter week. If not, don’t fret! We’ll be back on schedule after that ^^
I hope you guys are enjoying these cool-down chapters, though things seem to be finally heating up a little between our two protagonists (: Get ready for some more action next chapter, though!

I will be streaming tonight, 1/19 at 9PM EST!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Despite the rain, it was a hopping Friday night on Sixth Street.

Bat Bar was just one of a dozen multi-level clubs that lined the few blocks of downtown Austin, where University of Texas students went bar-crawling on the weekends. McCree was the main floor. He stood at a wobbly bar table, facing the entrance. Scantily-clad men and women danced in Bat Bar’s front windows to attract patrons. Nearby was the dance floor, full of writhing, inebriated students. The bar’s only illumination were colored lights. Video of sexy, dancing silhouettes were projected high up on the wall, opposite the second-level balcony.

McCree spied Hanzo up there, huddled against the railing, looking with disdain at anyone who walked near him. He was wearing the white sweater they’d bought in Gibraltar, and still looked great in it. It was clear Hanzo did not find the students’ drunken youthfulness endearing the way McCree did. The archer might not have the same attitude about collateral damage that McCree and Cooper had. If things got hairy, McCree wasn’t sure what lengths Hanzo would go to in order to complete the mission.

“You alright up there?” McCree said into his comm.

“I feel foolish,” Hanzo answered. “No adult comes to a place like this.”

“Shimada, I think they got a guy at the door to make sure only adults come to a place like this,” McCree said, looking up at the gyrating silhouettes projected on the wall across from Hanzo.

“Teenagers and university students, drunk on cheap liquor and hormones,” Hanzo scoffed.

“Ain’t nothin wrong with a few hormones, Darling.” The nickname was out of his mouth before he thought of it.

“Do not do that,” Hanzo whispered after a pause.

McCree winced. It wasn’t a haughty rejection, but the growl of a kicked dog. “Sorry, D-er,
Cooper’s voice came in via the separate channel, breaking the uncomfortable moment. “Anything yet? I'm wet as a dog out here.”

They had set up the comm channels for Hanzo so he could hear Cooper, but not the other way around.

“Sorry, Coop,” McCree said. “I ain't seen anyone fittin’ old Niel’s description yet.”

Hanzo cut in on the other channel. “Neil is Australian, correct? Someone just walked by with such an accent.”

“Where’s he headed?”

“The bar on this level. I do not believe it is Neil. If it is, he is certainly worse off than the last time I saw him.”

“Bein’ a junker in the Outback can do that to you. I'm coming.”

McCree did his best to seem casual as he weaved through the dancing, flirting college kids to get to the stairs. He stuffed his way past a group of laughing girls until he reached the second-level balcony and looked around. Hanzo was watching the bar down at the opposite end. McCree got up next to him and leaned in close so as to be heard over the music, but not overheard by anyone nearby. Still, McCree knew he didn't need to have his lips so close to Hanzo’s ear. “Where is he?”

Hanzo shifted, but didn't move away. “There, the skinny one in the red shirt. I think he is with that big man.”

Following Hanzo’s eagle gaze, McCree saw a mismatched pair of men leaning over the bar. Both were tall, but one was rail-thin and therefore looked much smaller. He had blonde hair with singed-black tips. He was missing a few limbs. They had not been replaced with proper prosthetics, but rather a chop-shop arm and cobbled-together peg leg.

The big man, and this guy could give Reinhardt a run for his money, had white hair and dark skin. Thick, muscled arms and a huge beer belly poked out from under his tank top, and his pants hung a bit South of proper. As if feeling McCree's silent judgement, he reached back and tugged them up. His back was to them, but even at this angle McCree could tell the guy had on some kind of mask.

“Oi, Roadie,” the skinny one said. “When the hell did Waldrum say he was gettin' here, anyway?”

“Twelve.”

“Ohhh, a midnight rendezvous, ahehehoo!”

“Shut up.”

McCree was listening to the two junkers’ imbalanced conversation when he felt Hanzo's sharp elbow in his side.

“That's him.” Hanzo nodded towards a stocky man with a shaved head and an action-movie handsome face.

Waldrum.

Busy scanning the crowd suspiciously, Waldrum bumped into a young girl with an afro, spilling her
drink. He shot a string of creative, Australian curses her way before joining the other two junkers at the bar.

“Coo. I've got Waldrum on the second floor. Got two mean-lookin' fellas with him.”

“Those will be his associates,” Cooper said. “They're on the wanted list too, but Waldrum is the priority.”

Waldrum only half listened to his two cohorts, too busy constantly looking over the shoulder of his leather jacket. When he looked their way, Hanzo ducked behind McCree.

“He may recognize me,” Hanzo said. “We met a few times, when I was in the family.”

“You don't think it's a little suspect to hide when he looks your way? Come on.” McCree grabbed Hanzo by the wrists.

“What are you doing?”

Putting his body between Hanzo and Neil’s line of sight, McCree wrapped Hanzo's arms around him so the archer was hugging him from behind. “We’re at a dance club, ain't we? Let's dance.”

“I do not like this.”

“You got a better idea?”

Hanzo grumbled but put his hands awkwardly on McCree’s waist, still keeping some distance from his body.

“See now, no one’s gonna buy that. Ya’ gotta get in there.” McCree moved Hanzo's hands so they wrapped around him tighter; pressed his back against Hanzo's chest. It was sturdy. He could feel the strength in his breathing.

This ain't right, he told himself. He was sure at this point he was teasing Hanzo on purpose. Why? The last thing he should want to do was encourage him in any way that his feelings might be reciprocated.

But gotdamn, his hands were strong. Archer’s hands, all callouses and sinew. He could feel Hanzo’s breath on his back, feel the muscle of his arms. All tucked against him like this, he thought wistfully, Perfect.

“What is he doing?” Hanzo's voice buzzed through McCree’s jacket.

“Huh?”

“Waldrum and the junkers.” Annoyed. “What are they doing?”

“Oh, uh,” McCree tried to focus on the Australian trio at the bar instead of the firm body behind him. “Just talking.”

“Hm.” Hanzo's arm twitched against him. He cracked his knuckles and rolled the roaring dragon at his wrist.

“You alright?”

“Yes,” Hanzo said. It was stubborn enough that there had to be more to it.
“What's the matter?”

A pause. “The Dragon hungers.”

“That sure is a forebodin’ thing to say.”

“There is no less foreboding way to describe it.”

McCree looked down at the indigo dragon on the arm wrapped around him. “What's it, uh, eat?”

“It feeds on death and destruction.”

“That's sunny.”

“It is what is,” Hanzo said. His grip loosened, still hesitant. McCree shifted Hanzo’s hands down from his waist to his hips.

“You keep bein’ awkward like that and it's gonna attract attention. Come on now, channel some of those hormones.” Telling himself it was for the mission and not his own, personal enjoyment, he shoved his ass back against Hanzo’s hips.

That was apparently the limit of the archer’s patience. He pushed McCree off entirely, shooting him a glare. “I will not be made a fool of,” he snarled.

“I ain’t-” Just as McCree opened his mouth to argue, Hanzo hushed him, pulling him back. They were face to face now but just as close.

Hanzo was peering past McCree. “Waldrum.”

McCree looked over his shoulder and spied Waldrum walking by them, leaving the junkers at the bar and heading for the stairs. McCree and Hanzo wordlessly started to follow.

“Waldrum’s on the move,” McCree reported to Cooper. “Split off from the other two, going to the stairs. We might have been made.”

“We've got the doors,” Cooper said. “Take him.”

McCree moved a little faster, reaching into his coat for Peacekeeper and keeping it low and hidden. He caught up with Waldrum at the bottom of the stairs, and shoved Peacekeeper’s barrel against his kidney. “Don't make a fuss.”

“Ye fucking cunt,” Waldrum said between his teeth.

“Now that's one I ain't never been called before,” McCree said cheerfully. “Come on, now.” He directed Waldrum towards the front door. Cooper was waiting for him outside. It wasn't until McCree was clear of the crowd, pushing Waldrum past the bouncer and outside, that he noticed Hanzo wasn’t with them.

It was raining like hell outside. Sixth Street was blocked off at night so the students could bar crawl freely, but considering the weather, most were huddled under awnings or racing to the next club to avoid getting soaked. Lamps and neon signs left dripping light spattered across the street, like melting stars.

A few feet from Bat Bar’s facade, Cooper was waiting, drenched, pissed, and conspicuous. He glared at McCree as he marched up and slipped handcuffs from his belt. “Neil Waldrum,” he said. “You’re under arrest.” As Cooper read Waldrum his Miranda Rights, it reminded McCree of when
Fareeha was little and they played cops and robbers. They should get her in on this whole Overwatch thing. She'd love that. Ana, not so much, but then - Ana wasn't around anymore. McCree dipped his head.

Hanzo over the comm: “The junkers are missing.”

McCree spoke into the comm without thinking. “Eh?”

“I didn't say anything,” Cooper replied.

“The two men that were with Waldrum,” Hanzo said in his ear. “They are gone.”

That wasn’t good. “Hey Coop,” McCree said. “Who were those two clowns Waldrum met up with here? The ones on the wanted list.”


The block shook, McCree’s ears rang, and a fireball blossomed up from the roof of Bat Bar. Over the din, he heard a familiar cackle. Amidst the black smoke left by the explosion, McCree saw two figures on the roof: one rail thin with singed hair, the other massive and round wearing a piglike rubber mask.

“Yoo-hoo, buckeroo,” cackled the one Cooper had called Junkrat. He was waving a detonator in his hand. “How about you unhand our, ahoohoo, associate there. Elsewise, you're in for an explosive surprise, hehehoohooohoooo!”

McCree snapped Peacekeeper from her holster and shot the detonator out of Junkrat hand. It spun in the air and landed somewhere behind the junkers.

“You're gonna do what now?” McCree crooned, grinning.

Junkrat made an “o” with his mouth, staring at his now empty hand, then looking around for where the detonator had got off to.

With a grunt and a clank, the big guy, Roadhog, spun what looked like a butcher’s hook on a chain. Like a whip, it flew towards them. McCree rolled out of the way, just in time to realize he wasn't the target.

The hook caught Waldrum and pulled him out of Coopers grasp. Waldrum flew up to the top of the building, stumbling as he landed on the roof between the junkers. With a giggle and a wave from Junkrat, the three turned and ran, jumping across roofs until they got to the corner of San Jacinto and Sixth. The junkers dropped down into the intersection, about thirty meters away.

McCree gave chase first, dashing off after them as he got on the comm. “Hanzo,” he said, boots splashing into puddles in the road. “They're on the move, down Sixth heading towards Trinity.”

He didn't get an answer.

Cooper was behind him, and right behind him - the old guy was big but he could run. It didn't help that McCree felt like he was treading water before they reached the end of the block. Cardio was not his strong suit.

“Cut them off at Trinity!” Cooper howled into his walkie talkie. As the three junkers reached the end of the block, three U.S. Marshals and two mounted Austin police appeared from around the corner.
ahead of them.

The junkers veered away, and now McCree saw where they were headed. Kitty-corner from where the Marshals had entered the scene was a white panel van covered in rusty spikes and airbrushed pachimari. The three junkers nearly bowed into it.

Junkrat stabbed the key in the door and threw it open. Waldrum ran up on the sidewalk to jump in the passenger seat, and Roadhog hefted himself into the back. The marshals and the mounted police closed in, aiming their weapons at Junkrat in the driver’s-side window. McCree and Cooper were behind the van, covering the back.

“The moment they get that van started, they’re going to tear ass down the street,” McCree told Cooper as he tried to get a line on the passenger door. “It’s the only way we don’t got blocked.”

“We’ve got a problem, sir,” came a voice over Cooper’s walkie. McCree saw it as he rounded the van: a group of frightened college boys huddled smack dab in the middle of the junkers’ only escape route. McCree cursed. “Y’all,” he howled at them. “Get outta the way!”

The boys looked back and forth between McCree, the marshals, and the rusty van now revving it’s engine. One took the lead, and the rest followed, racing around the van towards McCree - right in his line of sight to the driver’s seat. The van roared past the marshals and into street. As it did, McCree thought he saw Junkrat throw something out of his window and onto the road.

“Damn,” Cooper hummed. “Head ‘em off at the next block.”

“Hold your horses, there, Coop,” McCree said. “I got ‘em.” He took a knee to get a better perspective on the van’s undercarriage.

It took a moment to aim. McCree let out a long, slow breath, his eye twitching as he squinted hard, then unloaded six precise shots on six imperative pieces of the vans machinery. It veered in the road and started to slow, belching smoke.

Junkrat’s frustrated cry squealed from the driver’s seat as the van sputtered to a stop in the middle of Sixth. Junkrat and Waldrum popped out from each of the car doors. McCree, Cooper, and the marshals closed in on the van as a crowd of drunk spectators started forming behind them.

“Since you didn’t seem to get it the first time,” Cooper said as he walked towards the junkers, flanked by McCree and his marshals. “You’re under arrest.”

“Not so fast, copper,” Junkrat said, raising his fist.

“Another detonator,” Cooper called out. McCree started to raise his revolver, but Junkrat snapped the detonator at him.

“Ah ah ah! I'm not fallin’ for that one again, mate. You lot lower your guns now, or else this is goin’ to end up the corner of ‘Smither’ and ‘Eens.’ Roadie!”

The back doors of the van slammed open, and Roadhog pushed out the gnarliest bomb McCree had ever seen. Patchy wiring, half a dozen different kinds of explosives - it looked like something out of a cartoon. It was big - big enough to take out not just them, but the giant crowd of college kids behind them along with the rest of the block.

“Call an evacuation,” Cooper said into his walkie talkie.

“Oh, no,” Junkrat cut in. “If i see so much as a hair move on anyone's head, I'll blast 'em. That
includes the nippers back there, eh? Nobody goes nowhere until me, Roadie, and Waldrum are long gone, heehoo.”

With a growl, Cooper got on the walkie talkie. “Stand down.” All this, and now Waldrum was getting away.

Junkrat laughed a long, manic laugh and started to back away, detonator presented up in his hand. Roadhog and Waldrum followed after him. Every step they took pissed McCree off more, standing there getting soaked through by the pouring rain, watching his quarry escape.

Then, from the corner of his eye, McCree saw a brief flash of yellow, like a bolt of lightning. He looked up, and spied a dark shape leaping across the rooftops. A long, golden scarf trailed behind him.

**Hanzo.** He was chasing the junkers, trying to get behind them. McCree wanted to cry out, to warn him about Junkrat’s threat, but Hanzo was already lapping them, leaping down onto an SUV parked behind them. For a moment, McCree stared at Hanzo’s pale figure, a specter in the thundering rain. He peeled off the white sweater, exposing his bare chest - exposing his *tattoo*.

“Hanzo, no!” McCree cried, but already the summoning words roared from Hanzo's chest like thunder, his bow raising up to his hip. Butane-blue energy snaked off Hanzo's bare arm. Two massive dragon heads roared out from Hanzo's indigo tattoo, spiraling around the arrow he fired toward Junkrat, Roadhog, Waldrum, the marshals, Cooper, McCree, and the whole crowd of Sixth Street.

*Oh no.*

McCree watched just long enough to see the three junkers dive under the Dragon’s blue bodies, the electric energy barely missing them as it swam over their heads. The two spectral heads swirled overtop them and towards McCree. He tried to roll out of striking distance, but it wasn't far enough. A great, blue maw filled his vision, ready to swallow him whole.

Energy ripped through him. It felt like the Dragon crawled under his skin, through his bones, between every atom. It felt hot and cold at once, a sparking burn. Was this what Genji felt when Hanzo tried to kill him?

*If the Dragon encounters an enemy, the enemy is consumed.*

No - Genji had said that it hurt, but this didn’t hurt. It felt almost refreshing, like an infusion to his muscles, soothing aches and energizing him.

*An ally, however, can pass through the Dragon's form unharmed.*

But he was blind - the light surrounded every corner of his vision until the two serpentine tails swished past him. As his eyes adjusted, McCree remembered how Genji had looked when they’d found him after his and Hanzo’s duel - those hideous burns that had covered him head-to-toe. McCree ripped off his glove. But it was the same calloused palm, the same ruddy knuckles, the same dark hair. He was fine.

Hanzo had the shot. He could have done more than killed McCree, he could have *obliterated* him, like he’d done to his own brother all those years ago. But he didn’t, and not out of will but via something akin to his conscience. Regardless of circumstance, McCree now knew something for certain: Hanzo was not his enemy.

But what about the others - Cooper and the marshals and the crowd of students? McCree spun
The Dragon’s heads were gone, buried in Sixth Street’s asphalt, the blue bodies following after like running rapids until the tails too disappeared into the road. The Dragon left behind it a broad, helix-shaped crack in the street; an exploding Lichtenburg figure, splayed and spidery, molten blue flowing into each crevice before dissipating. The mark ended just in front of the assembled crowd of UT students. The Dragon had barely missed them.

McCree turned again. Cooper was hunched over his knees, looking like he might be sick. Rushing to his side, McCree asked, “Y’alright, Coop?”

“What the hell was that?” Cooper huffed. “Damn thing took it outta me.”

Odd. McCree didn’t feel exhausted, but *invigorated*, as if Hanzo’s Dragons had lent him their energy. Yet Cooper looked wan and tired, drained by them. Sirens were sounding in the distance. Looking up, he searched the street for Hanzo.

He was a ways down the street, still perched atop the SUV. Barechested and slick with rain, Hanzo looked like a statue, every bit the warrior in modern clothes as he had been in his gi - stern, stoic, implacable.

Perfect.

“Now you’ve done it!” Junkrat’s shrill voice broke the electric quiet left by the Dragon. He and Roadhog were on one side of Hanzo’s perch on the SUV, while Waldrum huddled on the other side, trying to slink away. Junkrat was out in the open though, raising his fist.

No - raising the *detonator*.

“Get down!” McCree called. Junkrat’s thumb emphatically smashed the button.

Nothing happened.

Junkrat blinked and pressed it again, and then again, but still got no result. He looked as puzzled as McCree felt. They both turned their attention to the junkers’ giant ACME bomb.

The whole thing had been destroyed. Not blown up, but warped and dismantled, melted together until it looked like modern art. Hanzo’s Dragon had rendered it useless.

Junkrat screeched in frustration and threw the detonator on the ground. The marshals and the mounted police had recovered and were approaching with weapons drawn. McCree realized with a start that they were aiming their weapons at Hanzo as well.

McCree started running towards them, to explain that Hanzo wasn’t a hostile, then tripped on something and howled in pain. He looked down and his foot was caught in a bear trap - *gotdamn bear trap*. “I just keeps gettin’ better, don’t it?” he said, wincing.

Roadhog put himself bodily between Junkrat and the armed police as the two junkers started backing away. But even Roadhog’s huge bulk could only block from one angle - Hanzo was to their side. McCree saw him quickfire a shot at Junkrat.

Roadhog’s massive arm shot out, and instead of pinning Junkrat through the head, the arrow went through Roadhog’s meaty hand. With a grunt, he made a fist, and broke the arrow to pieces.

“Sorry, Waldrum,” Junkrat said. “We gotta blow this popsicle stand, hehehoo!” He pulled what
looked like a land mine out from the pocket of his cargo shorts and tossed it towards Hanzo. While it was midair, he detonated it.

Hanzo was blown back off the SUV, landing with a hard roll onto the pavement. When the smoke cleared, Junkrat and Roadhog were gone.

Cooper came to rescue McCree from the bear trap. As they tried to pry it open, the marshals turned their attention to Waldrum, who was trying to slink away into an alley. Once he had guns aimed his way he surrendered, and the marshals put him in cuffs. Cooper finally pried the beartrap open, at which point it fell apart entirely.

Hanzo was on the ground, still recovering from the mine Junkrat had thrown in his face. It didn’t help that the two cops had jumped off their horses and were now holding him at gunpoint. Even injured and shirtless, Hanzo was shooting them his signature glare. That didn’t help either.

“Hey!” McCree called to them. “Hey, he's with me!” McCree limped towards the police and tried to wave them off. “Put your damn guns away!”

After a nod from Cooper, the cops holstered their pistols, and McCree got down to help Hanzo to his feet. “You good?” They stood up together. McCree’s thumb brushed the edge of Hanzo’s tattoo and felt his skin light up, the same feeling as when the Dragon had passed through him earlier.

Hanzo looked like he’d come from a fashion shoot and not a battle. His bare chest glistened from the rain, his tattoo goosefleshed. The explosion must have done some damage, because a splash of red tinged his lips. He looked up at McCree with his usual stern, intense expression. “Yes… I am fine,” he said.

They locked eyes for a second longer than necessary. McCree realized he had a strong urge to kiss him. He wanted that wet, bare chest pressed against his, feel Hanzo's body in his arms, his name on his lips. Not McCree - he wanted Hanzo to call him Jesse, and Jesse wanted to call him Honey, Darling, Sweet Man of Mine. McCree looked away from Hanzo and laughed at himself.

"Never gonna happen, huh?"

When McCree looked away, Hanzo hunched forward, wolfed down, folded in on himself. Quiet, he asked, “And, are you alright?”

“Yeah,” McCree said.

“The Dragon did not harm you?”

“Did you think it would?”

A pause. “What about Deputy Marshal Cooper? Is he unwell?”

Cooper, hearing his name, turned from the other Marshals and faced McCree and Hanzo. “I have felt better,” he snapped. “Who is this? What was that? This is not what I hoped from you, Jesse McCree. I’m a doormouse’s fart away from arresting this fellow here.”

McCree put himself between Hanzo and Cooper. “He’s my partner,” McCree said. “Winston sent him to watch my back, seein’ as you might have mixed feelings on putting me in bracelets. It's a damn good thing he was here too. He saved our asses.”

“Saved our asses? He got the drop on them and two perps still walked away.”

“We got Waldrum and stopped the bomb, Coop. It's a win today, and it's thanks to Hanzo.”
“Hanzo, is it?” Cooper looked the archer over, still suspicious. “What in hell’s bells was that… creature?”

Hanzo looked to McCree and didn’t answer.

“He’s Overwatch, Coop,” McCree said, shrugging. “Plenty of stuff in that group don’t make a lick o’ sense. You seen the holovids. Tracer, Winston - is it that hard to believe we can’t cook up something like that?”

Cooper eyed them both.

“No bystanders got hurt,” McCree reminded him.

“Shouldn’t have kept it from me,” Cooper said.

“Kinda defeats the purpose of havin’ a guy to protect me from you, don’t it?”

Cooper grunted, a reluctant surrender. He walked away from them to organize the other marshals as a few Austin police cars arrived on scene. Beyond that, McCree saw the crowd of students watching it all go down, a few walking up to observe the swirling crater that had been left by Hanzo’s dragon.

Hanzo had his arms folded across his chest, looking sullen as always. Their shoulders were touching. McCree forced back the urge to put an arm around him. “You didn’t hit the college kids,” he said. “That an accident?”

Hanzo scoffed.

“So you purposely shot that arrow at just the right angle so the dragons would hit the bomb but cut off right before the crowd of bystanders?”

Hanzo turned his face away, looking out towards the warped, destroyed bomb and the cracked pavement. “Simple geometry,” he said.

McCree laughed. “Sure, Shimada,” he said. He clapped a hand on Hanzo’s bare shoulder and said, “We gotta’ go book this guy. Put a damn shirt on.”

Chapter End Notes

I will be streaming tonight, 2/2 at 9PM EST!

Thank you for hanging in there with me last week - sadly I caught a bad cold at PAX, plus I'm writing a little platonic short for Deja-Ryu week, so this chapter didn't get as much love as I'd hoped, but I still think it's a fun chase scene. Hope everyone liked Junkrat and Roadhog's cameo ^_^

I am going to be participating in OCwatch week a couple weeks down the road, featuring some backstory on a certain foul-mouthed Shimada cousin. Hoping to get an entire short story out over the course of those seven days, which means I may have to
put May I on pause until the 23rd. If I'm a total badass I'll get a chapter out next thursday and only miss the thursday during that week, but we'll see how it goes. Thanks so much guys! Hope to see you on stream!

@mingridsmarcher
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Welcome back to May I!

Thank you everyone for hanging in there before, during, and after OCWatch Week. I know it seemed like I'm slacking, but in fact, I wrote a 40k-word story in two weeks!!

I know it's been a while, but I think the next few chapters will be worth the wait (: Big thanks to all my readers who stuck around or just started the story recently and have commented! I know I haven't replied but I've read them all and they're wonderful!

Also, as always, big shoutout to my beta-readers Doc, milfordb, Chiptooth and Jae! You guys are the best!

I will be streaming tonight from 9-11:30PM EST!

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Presidential suites nowadays were all about the view. No shades for the floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall windows. This high up, no one could see what you were doing.

Moscow at night was laid out beneath Hanzo like a lover - legs splayed, flushed with glittering lights. The Moskva cut through like scar tissue, glistening and pulled taut.

Like he was.

Hanzo hated the man they were going to meet and the type of “merchandise” he brought them, but trafficking people in for the water trade was one of the Shimada Clan’s healthiest businesses. His father always compared the different aspects of their economy like parts of a body - real estate was the bones, guns were the muscle, assassination was the nerves, drugs were the blood in the veins. Human trafficking was, of course, the skin.

“I’m surprised she turned down an opportunity to come to a casino with Genji,” Kanata quipped from behind Hanzo. He turned from the window.

Hanzo’s father, Sojiro, and aunt, Kanata, were seated around an oblong coffee-table in the suite’s plush, plum-colored armchairs. Kanata was leaned back, smoking a cigarette. Sojiro hunched forward, elbows on his knees, fingers steepled at his chin.

“I think it is some form of moral objection,” Sojiro scoffed.

“Ha!” Smoke puffed out of Kanata’s thin lips as they peeled back to show her graveyard teeth. “Since when did my trashy daughter have a moral compass? Little cunt. If I’d known that, I would have set her high-and-mighty ass straight.” Kanata took the cigarette from her mouth, holding it
between two thick fingers. Just beneath her gaudy, masculine rings, her knuckles were raw and bruised.

“Do not worry yourself, Kana. It’s only Keiko.”

A favorite phrase in the family, especially among the three of them. It was no secret that Kanata’s daughter, Keiko, was a worthless and disrespectful girl. Sometimes, though, he spied a look on his aunt’s face like the one she had now - eyes downcast, an only slight tightening of posture.

“I am going to wash up before Volkov gets here,” Sojiro crooned, standing up and straightening his khaki suit before crossing the room to the lavatory.

With a sigh, Hanzo turned back around to face the window. Depending on how he focused his eyes, he could see either the city, or his own reflection looking back at him - a glossy film negative in the glass. Even his shameless cousin had refused to be a part of this deal. Was it a simple shirking of her responsibilities, as always, or was there more to it? If Keiko, of all people, refused to work directly with Volkov, what did that say about himself?

Shuffling. Socked feet on carpet. The blooming warmth of someone right behind him, and his aunt’s reflection in the window at his shoulder.

“It’s a nice city, hm? Hard to believe anyone is hard-up enough to leave,” Kanata said.

“They likely would not, if they knew what waited for them in Japan.”

“Are you so sure they don’t know, deep down, hm? Not everyone’s got it good like us, Hanzo. Some people have to take what they can get.”

Like if they get an insolent daughter. Hanzo looked away from his reflection. “Aunt Kana,” he began. “Does it bother you when Father and I say that? ‘It’s only Keiko?’”

“Ha! You’re a good kid.” Kanata’s grin faded as she looked down at the river, blowing cigarette smoke into her reflection’s face. “But no, it’s not that. What bothers me is that I mothered a daughter who earned that reputation. I wish I had paid attention to the signs. Seen it coming. Now, it feels like no matter what I do, she won’t straighten up.”

“Why not remove her from the business, then?” Hanzo wondered it any time Keiko came up. “Her actions could threaten the family.”

“Well. If it were up to me, she’d have been on the streets short a finger years ago, but your dad’s not so cuddly. Once you’re in, you’re in for keeps, according to Jiro, and if you’re Shimada, you’re in the moment your life begins. I guess I don’t have to tell you, then, the only way a Shimada gets out.”

That jerked Hanzo into attention. At last he looked up at Kanata. “Does Father have designs to kill Keiko?”

It shouldn’t have been so shocking. Objectively, it even seemed like a wise decision. But it would destroy Genji. And, oddly enough, Hanzo felt something at the idea of her dying by her uncle’s hand. Guilt? Mournfulness? He couldn’t place the right word for the feeling.

“Made a joke of it a few too many times to still be joking,” Kanata said. Quiet. Resigned. Reflected in the window, Kanata looked funereal - expression dark, face pallid. “But that’s what makes him Boss material, hm? Make the tough decisions. Do what’s right for the family, no matter what. That’s what a real Clan Father does. I just hope it doesn’t come to that. With Keiko or Genji.”
Hanzo leaned back as if struck. “Genji?” If a scheme to kill Keiko was shocking, the idea that His father would consider executing Genji was unthinkable.

Unlike him, Kanata was still and solid - grim but unshaken. “You don’t see it? Well, I suppose I didn’t either, as my own daughter became a shameful delinquent. He’s following her down that road. Refusing jobs, clubbing all night. I worry for him.” Kanata laughed without humor. “Well, but then, we have you. If anyone can bring Genji back before it’s too late, you can, Hanzo.”

Sojiro emerged from the bathroom, chin high and shoulders back. Hanzo saw him in a new light. Lofty, stern, untouchable - a real Clan Father, able to do what’s right for the family, no matter what. “Do you know if your brother is coming,” he asked Hanzo.

“I will call him,” Hanzo said. He left Kanata’s side and ducked into one of the suite’s bedrooms, already bringing Genji’s number up on his phone.

The room was dark. Walking inside was like sinking into a pool of indigo ink - submerged; sensory deprivation; far from Kanata and Sojiro on the other side of the door. Sitting down on the bed, Hanzo lifted his phone to his ear. The tinny ringing was loud in the dark.

It rang - once, twice, thrice. Not going to pick up, Hanzo thought, and then the line clicked and his brother answered, mid-laugh. “Hey, Aniki,” he slurred. “You have to come down here, the tables are hot. I just won, uh, four-hundred thousand rubles. I do not actually know how much that is, haha, but it sounds like a lot.”

Foolish. “Perhaps you forgot why we’re in Moscow in the first place, brother,” Hanzo snapped.

“I wish I could,” Genji snapped. It was rare for his brother to do anything but laugh off Hanzo’s scoldings.

“This is an important negotiation for the family’s business,” Hanzo said.

“Yeah. The skin, right? Do you ever stop and think about what you are doing?” This was different from Genji’s usual, layabout attitude, and somehow more infuriating.

“Do you,” Hanzo snarled. “You deign to lecture me about responsibility? If you cared at all about what is happening, you would be here.”

“You are right, Hanzo. If I cared the right amount, the human amount, I would show up and sink your deal with Volkov.”

Hanzo froze. “You would not.”

A pause. In the background, the peal of slot machines and clipped speech patterns of card dealers. “Doesn’t it bother you? I can hardly stand to know it’s happening and do nothing. How can you be a part of it?”

In the dark of the room, Hanzo saw only a faint contrast between the pale skin of his hand and the inky dragon’s maw swallowing his wrist. The skin. Submerged in the dark. In over his head. I need you here, Brother. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to be here alone.

“We are Shimada,” Hanzo said, without emotion. “This is what we were born to do.”

“Then why does it feel like shit?”

Through the lightning-bolt of golden light gleaming from the cracked door, Hanzo heard Volkov’s
Do not come,” Hanzo whispered to Genji on the phone. “Just... stay there, and enjoy yourself.”

“Hanzo? Are you alright?” Genji knew right away something was wrong. He always did. “You do not have to do this, Aniki.”

Boss material. Do what’s right for the family, no matter what. “Yes, Genji. I do.” He took the phone from his ear, hesitated, then hung up and dumped it in the pocket of his suit jacket. For a time, he sat at the edge of the bed with his face in his hands. Sensory deprivation. Pushing away Genji, and Kanata, and his Father and Volkov laughing on the other side of the door. The skin. Deep in the back of his mind, his mother’s wispy voice whispered, You’re slouching.

After a few deep breaths, Hanzo stood and straightened his suit. His face twisted until his expression was lofty and stern. Untouchable. He raised his chin, pushed back his shoulders, and pulled the door open. He was assaulted with light and voices and new bodies in the room.


Volkov, all skin and bones and grizzled hair, strolled up to him and smiled, holding a drink in one hand and offering the other to shake. It was calloused, all fat joints on thin fingers. Hanzo looked over Volkov’s shoulder at the three “samples” he’d brought - two women and a man. All three were starved and lovely, makeup overdone, like a mask to hide how frightened they were. Instead of touching Volkov’s hand, Hanzo bowed to him.

“Ah, I am sorry, Volkov. My son’s so traditional!” Sojiro laughed. “Well, what’s the news, son? Is your brother joining us?”

Hanzo looked down at Volkov’s shoes on the hotel suite’s plush carpeting. “No, I am afraid not.”

Without looking up, Hanzo could almost hear his father’s expression souring in the silence. A few moments later, Kanata came up behind him and clapped Hanzo on the shoulder.

“Well, after all, who cares, hm?” When Hanzo looked up, Kanata wasn’t looking at him, but at Sojiro, a harsh and clever glare. “It’s only Genji.”

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It was a busy, cracked parking lot set in a jagged frame of haphazard shops and restaurants, all beige siding and fogged glass. The sky was steely, bringing with it a faint drizzle of rain. Hanzo was leaned against a wall beside McCree, under the cover of the shopping center’s blue awning. The ramen shop’s sign - black noren screenprinted with the shops’ stylized, white logo - hung fluttering from the awning, contrasting its commercial blue plastic and scalloped border.

“Won’t seat us until Coop’s here,” McCree explained. “Don’t want us hogging a table, I guess.”

Hanzo hummed. He hadn’t asked.

“You like ramen?”

“I suppose.”

“I remember Genji couldn’t get enough of the stuff,” McCree said, wistful.
“It suited his lifestyle. Late night junk food or a hangover cure.”

“But not yours?”

“Not often, no.”

“So you ate, what? Brown rice and chicken breast?”

A joke, delivered with a smile. *Teasing me.* Two could play at that. “I had a balanced diet that took my level of activity into consideration.”

McCree groaned. “I’ll be. How’d you come up with an answer even more boring than mine?”

Hanzo smirked. “Practice.”

“Oh, I get it.” McCree leaned an arm on the wall above Hanzo’s head, studying him. “You were makin’ a joke.”

Something about that was immensely satisfying - that McCree could now recognize his jokes. Hanzo forced himself to stop smiling.

“Why do you do that?”

“Hm?”

“Every time I think you’re about to laugh you pull that real serious face.”

“Do I?”

“Yup. You get to smilin’ then right away you do one of these.” McCree’s eyes crossed and he frowned like a mask, exaggerated and silly.

A single laugh, like a cough, escaped through Hanzo’s nose before he schooled his expression.

“Y’see? Just like that.”

“Should I throw my head back and belly-laugh, as you do?”

“Hah! Now I’d pay to see that!”

“I would pay to see you be quiet for once.”

“Oh, that so?”

When he felt the warmth of McCree’s chest touch his shoulder, Hanzo looked back up. McCree was close now, almost over him, hat tilted up so his shaggy bangs hung down over his forehead.

Hanzo caught himself staring up into McCree’s dark eyes, lidded now instead of squinting. He felt flush from the closeness. But McCree had made it clear, hadn’t he? It was never going to happen. Yet, since that late night in the Gibraltar common room Hanzo had gotten a thousand not-so-subtle hints that countered that statement entirely. Was McCree making fun of him? Or did he have a change of heart?

“If only there were some way to better occupy that flapping tongue of yours,” Hanzo purred up at him. Beneath his flirtatious expression, his heart was racing. The last thing he wanted to do was force his affections on someone who did not wish them, or to be mocked for the foolish crush he’d
developed for this American.

But McCree didn’t laugh, or reel back in disgust. He raised his eyebrows, curious, and said, “I can think of a few options.” It was deep and slow, quiet as a whisper.

Hanzo’s eyes lidded. He lifted his chin and parted his lips. Too big a risk, too far of a reach - yet in his blurry, half-hooded vision, he saw McCree start to lean down towards him as well.

Splashing footsteps, definitively coming towards them. They both jerked back from one another, looking up, on alert. The man coming towards them was Cooper, huddled under an umbrella, looking down at his feet, dodging puddles as he walked towards them.

McCree slid away, putting a good foot and a half between them.

Once under the awning, Cooper closed his umbrella and shook it out, giving them both a gruff greeting. “I’m sorry to be so late, boys. I had Arlington on the phone and the chief would not shut his God-forsaken mouth. Have you been waiting too terrible long?”

“Naw,” McCree said with a cough.

“Ah. Good.” Cooper turned his attention to Hanzo, looking him over. “Mr. Shimada.”

“Mr. Cooper.”

Hanzo and Cooper stared one another down. He still didn’t trust this man - even this social get-together, to celebrate the arrest, made Hanzo suspicious.

“You like ramen,” Cooper asked.

Hanzo exchanged a look with McCree.

“You been away from home for a time,” Cooper went on. “That’s what Jesse McCree here told me.”

“I have.”

“I remember my wife and I went to Europe for our honeymoon. Great food in Europe, I still dream about it, but after a while I got the itch for something familiar. Figured it might be the same for you.”

When Cooper looked to him for a reaction, Hanzo shrugged.

“Okay, then,” Cooper said, and sauntered inside.

The shop’s decor was curiously fashionable. Bare plywood, red and black and white, all sharp edges. It was far from the unassuming Rikimaru, who had put all its decorative budget into the massive murloc perched above its entrance. It wasn’t until McCree shuffled past him to grab a menu that Hanzo realized he’d been standing in the entrance, gawking like a tourist. Cooper passed them each the restaurant’s one-page, laminated menu.

They lined up at the counter and ordered. Hanzo was at the end, still frowning at the menu when his turn was up.

“Are you ready, sir?”

“Mm. Tonkotsu. Curry rice bowl. Hot sake.” Hanzo said, then finally looked up from the menu to pay.
The woman behind the counter had fluffy, blue hair, sleeves of tattoos, and a piercing on the bridge of her nose.

Touching his own nose at the location of her piercing, Hanzo asked, “What is this called?”

“It’s a bridge piercing,” the woman said casually.

Hanzo squinted at her. “How old are you?”

“O-kay,” McCree crowed from behind Hanzo, putting an arm around his shoulders. “Sorry ‘bout him. He was born in a castle.” McCree took Hanzo’s card and receipt, then pulled him over to their table.

“Everyone in this town dresses like teenagers from Harajuku. It’s odd.”

McCree snorted, clutching Hanzo to his side and leading him to a table, which Cooper had already claimed for them. “It’s a college town, Shimada. It’s normal for folk to look hip.”

“Is it?” Hanzo considered that for a moment. Certainly, the woman had not looked bad. It suited her.

“Yeah. So relax. You sound like an old man.”

*I feel like one*, Hanzo thought. “And you sound like Genji.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” McCree grinned wide, spilling into the red chair across from Cooper.

After a moment’s hesitation, Hanzo sat down beside him, reaching across for a pair of chopsticks. “When you smile you look like a frog,” he muttered.

McCree hissed through his teeth and looked across at Cooper, who was nursing a beer. Hanzo sipped his sake. He realized then McCree had gotten some as well.

“Well,” Cooper said, raising his beer. “To a successful arrest.”

“Damn right,” McCree answered, lifting his cup of sake.

Hanzo wordlessly followed suit, and they clinked their drinks together.

“Cheers,” Cooper said.

“Kampai,” Hanzo followed.

They each took a swig.

“Hot,” McCree complained after taking his sip. He set the ceramic cup down. “Just promise me one thing, Coop. Keep an eye on him tonight.”

“We’ve got him in a holding cell, Jesse McCree. I don’t think he’ll be going anywhere.”

“Still. Just for tonight, keep a few extra folks on him.”

“You havin’ flashbacks to that op in Boston?”

“I guess.”

“What op,” Hanzo asked.
“Ah, just a Blackwatch gig that went south,” McCree said. “Years ago. Not the first or last. Ancient history.”

“It’s how Jesse McCree and myself met,” Cooper said. “Do you think I’m a jinx?”

McCree laughed. “Not you, Coop. Just that spot at the top of the bounty list.”

“Mmm. That much money is like to curse any man,” Cooper said. “Did you do a lot of operations with Gabriel Reyes?”

“Fifteen years of ‘em.”

“Kill many people?”

Beside him, Hanzo felt McCree tense up. Just then, the waiter arrived with their orders, depositing the bowls of steaming hot soup in the table in front of them.

When the waiter was gone, McCree grabbed a pair of chopsticks and cracked them apart, still glaring at Cooper.

“Relax yourself, Jesse McCree,” Cooper said. “You and I both know I can’t arrest you for what happened in Blackwatch.”

“Yeah? Tell that to the sixty-billion presidents after my ass.”

“Answer the question.”

“I did what I was ordered to.”

“Did you ever ask yourself if you should?”

“Just the once,” McCree said. “Reyes called those shots and I trusted him more than Jack or Ana or anyone. He always did right by me.”

“Until he didn’t.”

Hanzo lifted the ramen to his lips and slurped the noodles up quickly. The sound brought the conversation to an abrupt halt.

Cooper and McCree both looked at him, puzzled.

“What?”

“That’s the most noise I think I ever heard you make,” McCree laughed.

“You should be as well, instead of flapping your jaw,” Hanzo said sourly. “Have some respect for the chef.”

“Respect?”

“The noodles will become too soggy if you don’t eat them immediately.”

“They’re too hot to eat right out the gate,” McCree protested.

“So lift them out of the bowl and blow on them. So long as you eat them quickly.”

“Man. Alright, I’ll try,” McCree said.
Cooper snapped his own chopsticks and dug in, sucking them up so loud Hanzo thought he might be making fun of him. “Mm. When you’re right, you’re right, Mr. Shimada.”

McCree shrugged, and took his own turn, picking up a thick lump of noodles and eating them. He chewed fast, swallowed, then opened his mouth and fanned his tongue. “Still too hot,” he complained.

“Like a child,” Hanzo said. “Good food is wasted on you.” He lifted more noodles to his mouth.

They all focused on eating before continuing their conversation. The topic of Gabriel Reyes was much debated.

“You don’t really get it, Coop. Reyes had my back until the end. I was the one who didn’t have his.”

“He attacked Overwatch’s headquarters.”

“I ain’t sayin’ I didn’t have a reason to leave, but I came up believin’ it was O-dub versus B-dub - us against them. When I got older, I realized things weren’t so simple. Doesn’t mean Reyes wasn’t on my side.”

“Did you know what he was planning?”

McCree looked down into his bowl.

“You didn’t warn them?”

“What would they have done to Reyes if I had? Put him in a cage the rest of his life, that's what. I couldn’t do that to him.”

“If someone perpetrates a crime, they ought to pay for it, Jesse McCree.”

“Right. ‘Cause everyone who’s ever gone to prison deserved it, and everyone who got acquitted was innocent. Look, Reyes always knew more than he told. That was half the point of Blackwatch - knowin’ the whole picture. When he briefed us about this op against the Swiss HQ, I thought… I hoped, that there was just something he was keepin’ close to the vest. Gabe wouldn’t do something like that without a reason.”

Hanzo leaned forward. “So why did you not join him?”

Thumbing the rim of his ceramic cup, McCree sighed. “Just couldn’t. Crackin’ that shiny HQ like a fabergé egg, sure. But shootin’ my gun off at Genji or Angie? I couldn’t do it. I wouldn’t.”

Beneath the table, Hanzo pushed up the sleeve of his sweater and ran his fingers over the open mouth of his indigo dragon. In over his head. “Did it ever occur to you that he might be manipulating you for his own gain,” he asked.

McCree didn’t answer right away. “Hell. Might as well ask me to know if a compass is working. It points and you just gotta assume it’s north. What else can you do?”


“Ha! That’s a laugh. Pa was a card-carryin’ member of a gun-running motorcycle club, and Momma was only around ‘til I was eight or so. Who was I goin’ to get?”

Eight. That was how old Hanzo had been as well, when Mitsuru left. “So you lost your mother,
then.”

“Lost and found, you could say.”

“Do you not speak with her?”

McCree looked across the table at Cooper. “Sure. Every now and then, when I’m in the neighborhood, I stop by Savannah and chat her up.”

Cooper’s brow furrowed. “Savannah?”

“Yeah. Savannah.”

“Reyes helped you find her?”

“You know damn well he did.”

“And he took you to Savannah.”

“Yeah.”

For a time they sat in silence. McCree seemed sullen, but Hanzo couldn’t place Cooper’s expression. Something was happening behind his eyes, but what it was, Hanzo couldn’t say. At last, Cooper said, “Listen, Jesse McCree. I gave Overwatch my word I wouldn’t arrest you, and I won’t. But I want you to think about it. A lot of good faith in turning yourself in, and with me and Overwatch in your corner, you’d be given a lot of leeway.”

“I wish I trusted the justice system like you do, Coop,” McCree said. “But if I’m goin’ to turn myself in, I’d prefer it be for something I did.”

“That so? You weren’t the man, then, who killed Vernon Jowell?”

McCree looked away from Cooper, thumbed at the wrist of his prosthetic arm, and didn’t answer.

“Anyway,” Cooper said, getting to his feet. “I should get back.”

They left their empty bowls and drinks and went outside. The sky was a darker grey now, still a damp drizzle. “I’ll see you boys tomorrow morning for the final paperwork before we transport Waldrum,” Cooper said. Then, he opened his umbrella and bid them farewell, walking out into the rain.

Hanzo looked at McCree, thinking about what he’d said about his time in Blackwatch and his relationship with Gabriel Reyes. Curious, and familiar. He wanted to know more, hear more, spend more time with him.

It’s never going to happen. McCree’s angry words thundered in his head like a gong. “Shall we return to the hotel, then,” Hanzo suggested.

McCree hummed, making a show of considering it. “Hell, the night’s still young. I’m a little wound up, and one drink don’t quite satisfy. There’s a bar over there, across the parking lot. What do you say, D—.. Aha, Shimada?”

Darling. That was what McCree had been about to say, Hanzo knew. He’d stopped himself from using the term of endearment many times since the first, when Hanzo had chided him. Yet, he still kept having to cut the word off.
“That would be suitable,” Hanzo said, thinking of their close encounter before Cooper showed up. McCree smiled that wide, froglike smile at him, then they darted out into the drizzling rain, crossing the parking lot towards the bar.

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The bar did not have the same trendy flair as the ramen shop. The yellowed walls were covered in signs and knick knacks - chairs with torn upholstery, worn bar tables, and holovids of sporting events. Napkins, menus, and condiments lived at their table with them.

After his third whiskey and water, Hanzo felt satisfactorily warm. He was leaned back in a booth across from McCree, who had just brought him his fourth whiskey and water from the bar.

“You know, that sake’s not half bad,” McCree said, lifting his own whiskey to his lips and taking a sip. “But I prefer a little bite to my liquor.”

Hanzo scoffed. “How predictable! Such an unsophisticated taste.”

“Says the fella’ who ruins a perfectly good bourbon with water.”

That got a smile. Hanzo started to push it down at first, then forced himself to show his teeth. “Do you always take it straight, then?”

“Yup.” McCree swirled the alcohol in his glass, smiling somehow wider than usual. “The duality of man, eh?” He shot Hanzo a sultry look over the lip of his glass as he took another drink.

Hanzo straightened in his seat. Was McCree flirting with him? Surely, this was some attempt to catch him off-guard, or make a jest of the attraction McCree had already observed and rebuffed. Yet, many incidents caused Hanzo to doubt. The day at the clothing store. The night in the club. And now, here they were, drinking together for no other reason than to enjoy one another’s company.

“So how rich were y’all, back in the Shimada’s heyday? I know the figures, but what kind of crazy shit do people get up to when money is no object?”

“I did not live an extravagant lifestyle. You would have to speak with Genji about that.”

“Oh, I have. Heard plenty of stories. Wanted to hear your side of it.”

Hanzo frowned. “I was gifted things, I suppose. Private school, private lessons. My aunt once had a custom bow made for me. I learned later it cost nearly a million yen.”

“That a lot?”

“The most expensive mass-produced bows now rarely break a hundred-thousand. It was hand-made by the best bowyer in Japan. Many custom details.”

“Damn. Surprised you carry it around everywhere.”

“Storm Bow is not the bow I described. It was left to me, by my mother.”

“Oh. She dead, then?”

“Most likely. She left us when I was young. It is not something taken lightly by the family.”

“Harsh. Guess it's not easy to be married to a yakuza.”
“Perhaps. Father always told me she left because she could not take life in the family. But, from what I knew of her, I wonder if he meant the criminal element or the duties of being a wife and mother.”

McCree furrowed his brow, but didn’t press. “Well. Here’s to bein’ motherless criminals, then.” McCree raised his glass. Hanzo mirrored him, and they drank. When Hanzo set his glass down, his hand slipped, and he stumbled to catch the drink before it spilled.

“Ho, ho. You tippled from four drinks, Hanzo?”

The use of his first name was not lost on him. Hanzo straightened the glass. “I am fine. My hand slipped.”

“Oh, you say that, but you’re lookin’ a little red in face from here.”

“It is warm in here.”

“Hey, no need to get defensive. It’s a good look on you.”

One glimpse at McCree’s satisfied grin made Hanzo look away. Was he being teased again - toyed with? Or was such flirtation earnest? Hanzo feared that if either he or McCree had any more to drink, he’d be inspired to find out. “We should return to the hotel,” Hanzo said, looking down into the dregs of his drink.

“Ah, lightweight,” McCree goaded, but drained his bourbon and got up to settle the tab. Hanzo knocked back the last sip of his own and got up, then went outside to wait.

The drizzle had become a downpour, roaring from the heavens. Hanzo huddled under the bar’s overhang, looking across the cracked asphalt of the parking lot, then beyond to a split highway. Another road ran right above it, elevated by massive, concrete supports.

The door opened behind him, and Hanzo turned to find McCree moving up beside him - close beside him, shoulders together. He looked out at the rain, smiling that broad smile. “Cats n’ dogs out there, eh?”

“Mm,” Hanzo said. He should move away from McCree, but didn’t. “You should see that the car picks us up here and not on the road.”

“What, and miss this? You might not know this, Hanzo, but it don’t rain in the southwest very often. Be a shame not to enjoy it, don’t you reckon?”

Hanzo peered at him askance. “What is there to enjoy in a downpour?”

“Plenty! Puddles and leanin’ your head back and opening your mouth, hollerin’ out loud.”

Hanzo smirked. “You sound like a child.”

“You don’t want to?”

“I have no desire to get soaked.”

“Ah, that’s the fun of it.”

“Easy to say when you are the one with a wide-brimmed hat.”

McCree looked down at his boots for a moment. “Well. Alright, then.” He took his hat off, and placed it drunkenly onto Hanzo’s head. Before Hanzo could respond, McCree grabbed him by the
arm and dragged him out in the ran.

Hanzo had no choice but to keep up with McCree’s running pace. He was soaked instantly. At last, in the middle of the parking lot, McCree released him to jump in a massive puddle. Hanzo rolled his eyes, then realized he was smiling, and hadn’t forced it back. “You truly are a child.”

“Come on, Hanzo!” McCree kicked a torrent of water at him.

Hanzo stepped back. “Stop,” he laughed. “It’s freezing.”

“Pff!” Shaking his head, McCree unwrapped his serape from his shoulders and tossed it, heavy with water, to Hanzo. “There ya go. A wet blanket for a wet blanket. Hah!”

Hanzo caught it. He thumbed the wet wool, then wrapped the serape around his shoulders, having no idea how to fold it properly, as McCree did.

Slow, McCree sauntered up to him, his chestnut hair soaked and sticking to his forehead and about his eyes. “Warm enough for ya?” He moved in closer than necessary. What was he after? He took Hanzo’s arm and pulled him along again, gentle this time. Hanzo followed without protest.

They stopped at the edge of the road. When the coast was clear, McCree darted across the two busy lanes. Hanzo followed after him, weighed down by the wet cloth. They stopped in the shelter of the highway overpass, muddying the dry dirt with their wet shoes.

McCree’s breathing was labored from running around, and it made his chest rise and fall under his soaked-through shirt. Hanzo realized he was staring, and stopped. Still, McCree must have spotted it.

“Who you think would win in a wet t-shirt contest, you or me?”

Face in hand, Hanzo leaned back against one of the highway’s cement supports. “That is a terrible joke.”

“Oh, you got a better one, sourpus?”

“I do not joke,” Hanzo said, barely schooling his expression. “I am always serious.”

McCree threw his head back and laughed. “You’re a real piece o’ work, you know that?”

This time, try as he might, Hanzo couldn’t stop himself from smiling. “I have been told that, yes.”

“Shit, now I’m cold,” McCree said, putting a shiver in his voice. He moved in close. “Let me in on that action.” He grabbed the end of the serape from Hanzo’s shoulder and wrapped it around his own. They ended up wrapped together, tucked under the heavy, wet wool.

“This ain’t no better,” McCree complained. “Still cold.”

“Indeed,” Hanzo grunted.

Warm, Hanzo felt McCree’s arm slip around his waist. “Ah, you’re just wearin’ it cause it’s mine, ain’t ya?” Teasing. Mocking. Like a schoolyard child. You like-like me, don’t you?

“Do not make fun of me,” Hanzo said, sulking. Just as childish.

A pause, then in a whisper, almost inaudible over the roaring rain, McCree said, “I ain’t.”

Hanzo looked up at him, but McCree could only shoot him sidelong glances in return. Shy. Bashful
to be wrong, Hanzo thought.

Enough.

Hanzo twisted out of McCree’s grasp, then with one hand, pushed the gunslinger’s shoulder back against the concrete support. One step, then two, and they were pressed together, rain-soaked, tipsy, and flush. His hand moved to McCree’s hip. He had to stand on his toes for their lips to meet, but for a moment, they pressed together, electric as a bolt of lightning, and over just as quickly when McCree leaned away from it.

“Hanzo,” McCree began, his voice quavering. “Look, uh…”

A rejection was waiting in McCree’s throat, Hanzo knew it from the look on his face and the sound of his voice. He stepped back like McCree had burned him.

Again. This American had made a fool of him again. Fury boiled up in him.

“What is wrong with you,” Hanzo demanded, stripping off the serape and hat, and shoving them into McCree’s chest. “You say I am the puzzling one? You told me in certain terms I was to stay away from you, yet since we left on this mission you cannot keep your eyes, or your hands from me. You call me your partner. Is this all some joke to you? Do you want me here or not? Are you trying to fuck me—” Hanzo punctuated the curse with a push, “—or get rid of me?”

No answer. Frustrated, hurt, mortified, Hanzo turned from McCree and walked away.

“He’s my best friend, Hanzo,” McCree said behind him. “He weren’t always like he is now. He was tore up top to bottom when I knew ‘im, even after Angie fixed him up. All ‘cause of you. How the hell am I supposed to square with that?”

Hanzo spun on him. “Your friend? He was my brother. Do you think it was only Genji who was torn apart that day? I have lived my life in that moment for a decade.”

McCree replaced his hat on his head, squinting, sizing him up. “Then why’d you do it?”

“The same reason you killed men in Blackwatch. Because people I trusted told me to.”

“I didn’t know any of the folk I shot down. You said it yourself - he was your brother.”

A dozen easy comebacks flashed through Hanzo’s mind. The men you killed had brothers. Other people in the Family might have died from Genji’s actions. But in the end, Hanzo could only say, “You are right. I know it now. I wish I had known then. Is it not the same for you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You followed Reyes blindly. You were loyal to him. Don’t you wish you had known what he was?”

“Don’t do that,” McCree whispered. “You don’t know a damn thing about him.”

“I know what he is. He told you you were special, chosen, but only if you were everything he told you to be. He twisted you against the only people who might defy him, or reveal to you his true nature. How many died in Geneva because you told no one what Reyes was planning?”

“I ain’t puttin’ up with this from you, of all people,” McCree snarled.

“I am the only one you can hear it from, Jesse.” Hanzo took McCree by his shoulders. “Do you not
see? We are the same. Motherless children, raised by puppeteers, running from the fate that was prophesied for us.”

It spilled out of Hanzo like a broken dam, white-water feelings he hadn’t realized ran so deep. Deep, and complicated - his least favorite kind. He didn’t think about whether it was the right or wrong thing to say, but it must have been wrong, because McCree’s face twisted into a hideous mask of anger.

“The same? Is that what you think?” McCree got in his face. ‘While you were gettin’ private shooting lessons in your castle, I was a scrawny scrap of forgotten in the desert clutchin’ on a six-shooter ‘cause I didn’t have shit else. We’re nothing alike, Shimada. You? You fell down from the sky. And me? I clawed my way up, outta’ the dirt.” For emphasis, McCree kicked a cloud of dust toward him, then shrugged off Hanzo’s grip and walked to the side of the road. Hanzo saw him take out his phone. They waited in silence for the car to arrive and take them back to their hotel.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, isn't that the line from the description? (: 

Look for things to get even more exciting next chapter ;)

I will be streaming tonight from 9-11:30PM EST!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Hey everyone and welcome back to May I!

**Content Warning: Sexual content in this chapter** c: Just a reminder, this fic is meant for people 18 years and older!

Special thanks to my beta readers Jae, milfordb, Doc & Chiptooth! And as always, thanks to everyone who's reading and made it this far. I love writing this angsty ex-crime boys and I'm so grateful to everyone's who's come along this far with me <3

Streaming tonight! probably ~9:15PM EST. I'd love to see you guys there

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wet, pissed off, guilty, and hot under the collar, McCree piled into the back seat of the rideshare car beside Hanzo.

“Oh my,” sang the driver in a southern hospitality voice. “You boys get caught in the rain?”

“Yeah,” McCree said, making sure to add, *we ain't in the talking mood, lady,* into his tone of voice.

After that, the ride was uncomfortable for about a dozen reasons. His clothes were soaking wet, and now he'd pissed off every person in the car with him. Hanzo stared out the window in silence. The empty space between them seemed to only yawn wider as the ride went on. Hanzo’s sulking always made McCree feel like he'd kicked a dog.

Not to mention that kiss was on his mind. A short burst, fireworks and electric shock. It had been like pulling a trigger, and now McCree’s finger itched something fierce. He wanted to pull it over and over until the clip was spent. More than one part of him was kicking himself for leaning out of the kiss instead of into it. How much different would this night have gone? There wouldn’t be this big empty space between them in the back seat, that’s for sure. If the driver thought she was uncomfortable now, she should count her lucky stars McCree decided to run off at the mouth instead of kissing Hanzo back like his heart had been screaming at him to do.

The reflection of Hanzo’s face in the window was sullen in a beautiful sort of way. Damn, he was a good-looking man. McCree used to tease him about having his chest out in a fight, but in the past days, Hanzo had been wearing his under-cover clothes, and now it sent McCree’s imagination going. What did he look like all stripped down? Like a statue, probably - carved, perfect muscle. Pale except for that indigo tattoo. McCree imagined the feeling of scales under his fingers - warm skin and the rush of excitement from when Hanzo’s spectral dragons roared through him the night before.

Don’t, McCree told himself. *You did the right thing for once in your life. Hanzo don’t deserve to get messed around no more, and besides, what kind of guy fucks his best friend’s killer?* Back when they were in Overwatch together, McCree knew exactly how Genji would take that news - bad.
Now, though, he had no earthly idea. Genji wanted to be Hanzo’s brother again. He’d encouraged McCree to look out for him, but this couldn’t have been what he meant.

McCree pulled out his phone. A few headlines were listed on the lock screen: another attack in Russia; news about Overwatch’s illegal activities; some ex-Omnic engineer named Lovings talking like Omnics were trying to exterminate mankind; the Shambali and Omnic Rights Activists stating asking for more investigation on how and why the omniums reactivated. In short? A big-ass mess.

Overwatch had been reinstated to clean up that mess, but like the omniums reactivating, the how and why of how Winston and the gang planned to do that was still a mystery.

Look for word from Genji. McCree reminded himself why he’d gotten his phone out in the first place, and tabbed to his texts. Nothing new - no word on whether the specialist from London had repaired Genji’s comm system. No confirmation on when, or if, he was coming to Overwatch.

It was all tangled up. Genji and the Shambali. Keiko, Talon, and the EMPs. Reaper, and Sombra’s smug warning. Hanzo and Overwatch. Maybe it was just like Hanzo and Cooper said - maybe McCree’s loyalty was misplaced. But who in this knotted mess should he be loyal to?

Gabe. Something akin to instinct brought the name up from his subconscious. But Reyes was dead. He had to make his own mind up now.

McCree went back on his phone screen and spied a symbol stickered on the thumbnail for his calendar. It was a black dot.

The moon phase.

Outside the car window, the sky was black with clouds. Not just moonless, but starless too. Maybe Cooper would be lucky - the Moonless Night hadn’t killed in years. Could be they had been one of the myriad of assassins that had died pursuing Hanzo, or maybe they had finally retired with their fat stacks of bounty cash. If not, Neil Waldrum had better hope the Marshals had him locked up real tight. McCree shut his screen off and pocketed the phone. The car pulled up to the hotel.

The driver braved a genial sendoff. McCree thanked her graciously, and left a fat tip and positive rating for her on the rideshare app. Weren’t her fault he and Hanzo were quarrelling. They entered the lobby, went to the elevators, and rode them up to the top floor in silence.

When they got their rooms - across the hall from one another - McCree finally built up the nerve to talk. “Hey Shimada. You heard from Genji lately?”

Hanzo’s cardkey was in his hand, poised above the reader. Ready to make a quick exit. “Some. Why?”

“No reason.”

There it was - that pissed-off look Hanzo always got when he knew McCree was lying to him. “You suspect Genji of something,” Hanzo stated. “You have since we left Japan. What is it?”

Classic Hanzo, not beating around the bush. McCree paused. What if my trust is misplaced? He looked down both sides of the hallways, making sure they were alone. “Did you ever think,” he began, “it was odd that Keiko stole those EMPs? It’s risky as hell, and the only way she coulda known they’d be worth so much is if she knew the Omnics were going to start some shit.” Shouldn’t be telling him this. No idea whose side he’s on. “Keiko’s sharp, but she ain’t exactly got her finger on the pulse of Omnic Rights policy. But Genji does. And you know better than anyone how close they are.”
That got a different reaction - that naked, wide-eyed shock, all big eyes and opened mouth. Normally Hanzo was a mean-looking son of bitch, but when he did that it was a little cute. Keep it in your pants, Jesse, he told himself. This here’s a serious conversation.

“You think Genji knew the omnium was going to reactivate,” Hanzo asked.

“I think he at least knew shit was stirring between robots and humans. Would make sense that he wanted any and all weapons that could be used against ‘em tucked away. Who better to entrust ‘em to than his own cousin?”

That was when Hanzo caught on. “Or his own brother.”

Nothing to say to that. And here, McCree had meant to get around to apologizing and he’d just pissed Hanzo off more.

“Incredible,” Hanzo scoffed. “You will find any reason to mistrust me, whether for Genji’s sake or against it.”

“It’s just that he’s been chummier with you than me lately.”

“I know nothing about this EMP scheme, but you forget that it does not matter now,” Hanzo spat. “The e-bomb is in Talon’s hands, and at best my cousin is dead instead of being experimented on.”

That was a harsh reminder. Reyes had been better at this stuff - seeing the forest instead of worrying about hurting the trees’ feelings. “I know,” McCree said. “Look, Hanzo, I ain’t trying to get in the way of you and Genji reconciling or what have you. I think, gettin’ to know you, I finally see why he wants you around again. But with all that’s going on in the world right now, it makes me wonder where you stand. He’s your brother after all.”

For a time, Hanzo didn’t answer. Instead, he stared down at the floor. His damp hair hung down over his face in a way that made McCree want to brush it back - to lean in and kiss him. Keep it together, Vaquero. At some point along the way, having Hanzo around had gone from an annoyance to a distraction.

“Different as he had become, Genji was my brother once,” Hanzo said at last. “I have accepted that. However… what happened between Genji and I began because someone I trusted demanded my loyalty to the family. Kanata taught me to believe that Genji and Keiko were enemies to the clan. It was them against us. I trusted her without question, and it caused the defining misdeed of my life. I care about Genji, but I do not wish to blindly follow anyone ever again, no matter who. When it comes to this business with Omnics and humans, I plan to make up my own mind.”

Them against us. Sounded mighty familiar. Hanzo’s words rang in McCree’s brain.

We are the same.

At last, McCree stopped dancing around what he meant to say. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“All of it. What I said, how I treated you. It’s just... Lot of folk who don’t know shit about Reyes love to talk like they got him pinned down, and it gets me steamed. I know he was no saint, but he weren’t the black hat everyone paints him to be. He did a lot of good for me and plenty others. He was a complicated guy, but he wasn’t a monster.”

Hanzo’s eyes were still on the floor, hair still hiding his face. That kicked-dog sullenness.
“But then, I went and thought the same of you,” Mcree said. “Years of stories about the Big Bad Brother. I judged you long before I knew you. Weren’t right of me. So, I’m sorry.”

There it was again - that naked look of shock that was always so charming. Hanzo’s lips parted like a gate opening up. Damn, but McCree wanted in. “It is fine,” Hanzo said. “I... was acting foolishly.”

*No you weren’t.*

“You stated clearly that you had no interest. I should have respected that.” Hanzo looked down. Ashamed when he shouldn’t be. “Goodnight,” he said, and turned his back to McCree. They lock on Hanzo’s hotel room flashed green and he opened the door.

“Hey, Hanzo?”

Stopping in the doorway, Hanzo turned, looking at him expectantly.

*Ask me in. Ask me and I’ll come runnin’. No more fakeouts, no more fighting. I’m all yours. All you gotta’ do is ask.*

But McCree didn’t get that invitation - just a long, puzzled stare. Finally, feeling like an idiot who let a damn fine chance at something good pass him by, McCree laughed and adjusted his hat on his head. “Forget it. Goodnight, Hanzo.”

That brought on Hanzo’s familiar, stern annoyance. He knew McCree was lying.

*Call me out. Come on. You know there’s more to it, don’t you? It’s all over my face, ain’t it? I’m dyin’ for you. I’m all shook up. Thunder and lightning. Scream and shout.*

“Goodnight, Jesse,” Hanzo said, and went inside. The door closed in McCree’s face.

The breath he’d been holding left him, and McCree leaned forward, taking his hat off and running his palm down his face. Suddenly, he was aware of how uncomfortable his wet clothes were. In his mind, he imagined Hanzo’s voice saying, *Let us get you out of them.*

Undressing was on his mind as he went into his hotel room. McCree peeled off his soaked shirt, then dug through his bag for his dry sweatpants. Even those weren’t safe - they were the ones Hanzo had worn when they’d shared a bed in Hanamura. McCree stood still for a moment, recalling the shirtless muscle, that perfect body packed up tight.

It was enough to get a man hard just thinking about it. Broad shoulders, parted lips, that mean expression and voice, like a low wind.

*He could be yours. You could be his.*

For a long time, miles separated the two of them - an open highway of family drama, preconceived notions, and a sense of loyalty. But right now, it felt like the only thing between them was two doors and three feet of tacky hotel carpet. McCree paced the room, running his fingers through his damp hair and huffing. His wet jeans felt heavy and stifling. Then, out loud, McCree said the thing he always said before making a really terrible decision.

“Fuck it.”

There was a mirror on the hotel room door, and McCree spied his reflection as he reached for the handle. Standing up straight, he examined himself. “Shirt off,” he said aloud. He nodded at his reflection, tucking his thumbs in his belt, posing like a silver-screen desperado. But with his broad, soft stomach, the fat bulging up from the waistband of his jeans, and all that hair, he felt more like a past-his-prime co-star in a gay porno.
“Okay, shirt on,” McCree concluded, walking back to his bag. Shaky hands pulled out a dry button-up, then shrugged it on. His jeans were still wet, but they were all he’d brought, so there wasn’t anything to be done about that.

Back at the mirror, McCree adjusted his damp hair - pushing it back, parting it, pushing it back again, shaking it out. No matter what he did, it still looked a damn mess.

Shit. McCree had always considered himself a good-looking man. No reason to be so nervous. He stuffed his keycard in his pocket and opened the door.

Then, it was four minutes of deep breaths and pacing, his fist raised over Hanzo’s door to knock then going back down into his pocket again. Just play it cool, Jesse. You know he likes you. Ain’t a big deal. Just play it cool. Finally, he shut his eyes, lifted his fist, and knocked.

Nothing.

Was Hanzo ignoring him? Still pissed at him? Had he somehow saw this coming? McCree pressed his ear to the door.

The shower was running.

Made sense, after their run in the rain. Thinkin’ about Hanzo naked under the showerhead did wonders for McCree’s resolve. He knocked again, louder and harder. He heard the shower shut off.

This is it. Ear to the door, McCree heard shuffling inside. He took a breath and adjusted himself, rolling his shoulders and leaning one arm on the doorframe. A cavalier cowboy making his entrance. Totally irresistible, right?

The door opened.

Hanzo was in a bathrobe, hair down and wet, clinging to his shoulders. He looked good as hell, and for a second McCree gawked.

“McCree?”

Dumbass! Play it cool. McCree cleared his throat and flashed Hanzo a roguish grin. “Hello, Darlin’,” he crooned in a voice meant to melt Hanzo like butter.

It didn’t. Hanzo’s face screwed up, puzzled and annoyed. “Why do you look like that?”

“Like what, Honeybee?”

“You are making a strange face at me. Are you still drunk?”

“Naw. But we could fix that.” McCree raised his eyebrows in a way he hoped was flirtatious.

“There is a minibar in your room.”

“One in yours, too.”

“Uh. Yes.” Hanzo looked more perplexed than charmed. “Is there a reason you knocked on my door?”


“What is it,” Hanzo asked earnestly.
“Not really something to be discussed out here in the hall. How about I come in and tell you all about it?”

“Of course,” Hanzo said, standing aside to let McCree in.

_Gotch’a_, he thought as he walked into the room and kicked his boots off. It was about the same as his own - window opposite the door, bathroom on the left and a big, inviting bed on the right. To say McCree had charmed his way into Hanzo’s room, however, was not quite accurate. Hanzo wasn’t flirting back - at all. It felt like the thicker McCree laid it on, the more oblivious Hanzo was. Better to be direct, then. Take a note from the archer’s own playbook.

Hanzo closed the door behind them. “What is the prob-”

Before Hanzo could finish his sentence, McCree pressed his back to the door and kissed him hard, full-mouthed and way longer than the little peck he’d leaned out of earlier. For a moment, it seemed that was the ticket, because Hanzo melted into it with a low, quiet noise that made McCree’s blood hot. Their bodies were all tucked together, legs twined, chests flush. The satisfaction was immeasurable - it felt more than good, it felt _right_.

Perfect.

Then, just as fast, Hanzo pushed McCree away. Son of a bitch was strong - McCree stumbled back and almost fell over.

“What are you doing,” Hanzo demanded.

Not quite the reaction McCree had hoped for. He flashed the grin again. “Why, I’m makin’ all your dreams come true, Sugar-Pie.” He moved in to kiss him again, but Hanzo put his hand up and looked at McCree like he’d grown a second head.

_Shit._

The act fell away, and McCree spread his hands. “Come on, Sweetheart. You gotta give me somethin’ or I’m gonna lose my nerve.”

“What is going on?”

“I’m… I mean, y’know.”

“You have come here to fuck me.” Hanzo, direct as always.

“Er, well…”

“You said you had a big prob- Oh.” Hanzo groaned in disappointment. “_Oh_. That is a horrible-Forget it.” Hanzo pushed past him and walked towards the window. “Leave, now,” he commanded. Shifting to face McCree, Hanzo was proud and stern, shoulders back and chest puffed out. “I will not be made a fool of.”

“I’m not… Come on, I thought this is what you wanted?”

“To be fed pet names and double-entendres, and treated as if I am a dog being thrown a bone? To have some frivolous fling in a hotel room and forgotten about the next day? No, it is certainly _not_ what I want.” Hanzo turned from him. A silent dismissal.

“Hell,” McCree said. “I wish it was that simple.”
A pause, then Hanzo turned back around.

“I’ve been an ass the past few days. You were right. I can’t keep my eyes off you. It eats me up. I think about you all the time. I wanna be by you when you ain’t here and when you are I wanna be closer. For years I saw you as this… big, spiky monster. But now I keep seeing past all those sharp edges, and I want all the way in. You got me knotted up inside, Han. I came over here because I can’t take it no more.”

Cautious. “I do not want something temporary,” Hanzo said. “It is… more than that, to me.”

“I know.”

“Then why come to me acting like a pickup artist? I will not have my feelings turned into a joke.”

“Heh. Hell, Hanzo. You’re the one who made a joke out of me. I went on that big, bad tirade about how I want nothin’ to do with you, but I think I knew even then I wanted everything to do with you. That’s what’s got me so messed up. Every time I get my arms around you, when we talk, even when we’re fightin’, it feels like we… fit together, somehow. Like a bullet in a chamber. Like how the sky always fits up against the horizon.”

For a time, Hanzo stared at him, lips parted again in that way that seemed so inviting. But he was still over there, on the far end of the room, probably kicked down by the too-intense confession. “Shit, I don’t know what I’m sayin’,” McCree mumbled, taking off his hat and putting his forehead in his hand. “Forget it. It was a dumbass idea.”

McCree made for the door. This must be how Hanzo felt earlier tonight. If McCree’d had a lick of sense, he would leaned into that kiss and never let go. Serves me right, I guess.

Fast footsteps, then a grip like iron on his wrist. The world spun all around. By the time McCree’s eyes steadied, Hanzo’s fingers were grasping his collar, and tugging him down.

McCree could kiss pretty good. He’d gotten compliments. He liked that molasses sort of kiss, takin’ his sweet time until his partner was breathless and hurting for something more.

Hanzo did not kiss like that.

It was hard and mean, hungry, all-consuming. It felt like being taken over, the passenger seat of a racecar. McCree didn’t have a lick of control over what was happening, but god damn, what a ride. When Hanzo backed him up it should have felt clumsy, but it didn’t - it was like floating, head in the clouds, dizzy because all he could feel were Hanzo’s lips on his - Hanzo’s tongue hot in his mouth. It didn’t end until McCree’s back thudded against the wall. He realized he was gasping for breath.

Damn, Hanzo was a sight. That wet hair, hanging down to frame his perfect face and steely expression. “You could make a man hard just lookin’ at you,” McCree breathed. When Hanzo leaned in again, he didn’t kiss him. Instead, he latched onto McCree’s neck right at his jawline. An animal, all lips, tongue and teeth. McCree thought the wild man might tear his throat out. He had to bite back a moan. Lean, strong fingers grabbed the collar of his shirt and tore it open, sending buttons flying.

“Hey now-” McCree protested.


“You’re a mean son of a bitch.”
“Does that surprise you,” Hanzo asked, calm and cool. One hand slipped under McCree’s placket, pinched his nipple, then twisted. The sound he caught himself making was wholly undignified. Seconds later, Hanzo’s hand moved. Now, it was massaging the steadily-growing bulge in his now way too tight jeans.

This was in no way going like he’d planned. McCree had imagined Hanzo melting into his arms with a sigh. Instead, the archer was going straight for the throat. “Now, wait just a second, Honey…”

“Haven’t we waited long enough?” Hanzo’s voice was all animal, an impatient snarl. Still, he leaned back and moved his hand from McCree’s groin to his hip. “Do you wish me to stop?”

The second the hand and lips were gone, McCree realized he wanted them back, and bad. “Hell no,” he whined.

Hanzo grinned a grin then that stole the breath out of McCree’s lungs. It was wide and cruel, a hunter’s smile, all hunched forward. Not a dragon - a wolf. Hanzo touched him again, firm and direct. McCree stomped, cursed, and keened.

“This belt buckle is ridiculous,” Hanzo said in McCree’s ear, fingers ghosting across the metal clasp. A second later, it was undone.

“Closer,” McCree whispered.

“Hm?” Hanzo thumbed open the button of McCree’s jeans.

“Come closer, Honey,” McCree gasped. He wrapped his arms around Hanzo’s broad back and tugged him in close, so their chests pressed together. Hanzo had to move his hand, lest it be crushed, and now McCree could feel that Hanzo was as affected by this as he was. He moaned again, pulling Hanzo’s hips in, searching for friction, wanting more. “Kiss me,” he breathed.

Hanzo obliged him.

It started off the same as the first - surgical, aggressive, emphatic. But over time, McCree coaxed out something gentler. Like good whisky - smooth, with a bite. It warmed him. McCree started to squirm under Hanzo’s mouth, against his body, frustrated but not wanting to separate. Hanzo had no such reservations. He broke the kiss with a sharp bite to McCree’s lower lip, then pushed back from him. He unzipped McCree’s jeans.

Hanzo had archer’s hands - firm, skillful, precise. The feel of those fingers wrapped around him was shocking. McCree bucked his hips out and rolled his head back, stomping and squirming. Every word a breathless curse, every noise a moan. When he opened his eyes, he realized Hanzo was watching his face. McCree looked away, tucking his chin against his shrugged shoulder.

But while McCree wasn’t looking, Hanzo grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around so he was facing the wall. Manhandled by those muscled arms, McCree felt the heel of Hanzo’s hand between his shoulderblades, shoving him down so he was bent forward. Not treatment he was used to. Something about being pushed around riled McCree up even more. Hanzo’s hips pressed up against his ass, and McCree groaned.

“Sweetheart, I ain’t-” McCree breathed, using both hands to brace himself against the wall, “-exactly come supplied for this.”

“I imagined so,” Hanzo said smoothly. His calloused palm moved around McCree’s side, then gripped him again. He leaned forward to whisper in McCree’s ear, chest against his back, making long, precise strokes. “But I want it to be what you are thinking of as I do this.”
That did it. McCree came apart at the seams after that, just a few more of those expert strokes and he was bucking and twitching, gasping for breath. Bent over. Spent fast. Just once around the track. Not how he expected it to go at all.

Behind him, Hanzo hummed and moved back, the warmth and strength of his body abruptly absent. McCree caught a glimpse of Hanzo’s hand as he moved it away - it had gotten real messy. So had the carpeting. Huffing, McCree pushed himself up and looked over his shoulder. Hanzo walked calmly away from him, holding his hand out like it was diseased.

McCree tucked himself back in, then chased after Hanzo. “Where you think you’re going?”

Hanzo stopped and turned. “To wash,” he said, and rubbed his fingers together.

“Naw,” McCree breathed, reaching his hand out and touching the belt of Hanzo’s robe as soon as it was in reach. He fingered the knot, looking down into Hanzo’s eyes. There was a quizzical glint to them, hazy and hungry to be challenged. Show me what you have, they said. McCree smiled, untied the knot, and pushed the robe open.

When McCree finally could manage words again, they were “God in heaven.” Up close, Hanzo’s body wasn’t that perfect sculpture he’d pictured, made of smooth and featureless marble. His skin had texture. There were scars, moles, hair - all the little details McCree didn’t have the imagination to dream up. This wasn’t one of McCree’s late-night, guilty fantasies. Hanzo was really here, and all his.

“Hell. How’d I say no to this for so fuckin’ long,” McCree said, then dipped his head to take Hanzo’s nipple in his mouth. Unable to help himself, he rested his cheek against the hard pectoral muscles. It reminded him of his joke earlier about the wet t-shirt competition. Hanzo would win hands-down, he decided - it was really no contest.

“Jesse,” Hanzo breathed. “You do not have to.” His voice was tight, hitching, holding back.

“Oh, Honey, believe me, I do.” McCree sank to his knees.

Every inch of Hanzo’s body was like a masterpiece, full of little details for him to find. As McCree’s hands and lips explored, he couldn’t stop swearing under his breath.

“Ah! Y-your tongue...” Hanzo’s eyes were screwed shut.

Sliding said tongue back into his mouth so he could answer, McCree said, “What about it, Darlin’?”

“You are... better with it than your kissing lead me to believe.”

“Heh! You didn’t really let me do a whole lot in that department.”

“You should have wrested dominance from me, then.” Hanzo looked down at him with that predatory smirk again.

Rubbing his cheek along Hanzo’s length, he said, “It ain’t a contest.”

“That is good.” Hanzo was trying to act superior, but his chest was heaving.

“Because if it were, I would be the clear victor.”

“You think so, Shimada?”

“I know so.”
I’ll take that bet. Taking a breath, McCree took Hanzo in his mouth far as it would go, until his nose was stuffed in the clean nest of dark pubic hair. Hanzo stopped bragging after that, too busy trying to hold back a low, shaky moan.

That was about as loud as Hanzo got, though. His face said more than his voice - all screwed up, mouth open, eyes cracking to sneak a peek now and then. His body, too, showed that he was enjoying the attention plenty. Hanzo hunched forward, over him, barrel chest heaving. It was satisfying to watch.

For a time, Hanzo gave over his control to McCree, surrendering to feeling. Soon enough, though, the aggression returned. Hanzo grabbed McCree by the hair, and he realized a few seconds later it wasn’t with the clean hand.

It got him going more than he thought it would. Debasing in a way he didn’t realize he’d like. Knelt on the floor as Hanzo started to eagerly thrust into his mouth, McCree felt an itch being scratched that most of his former lovers couldn’t reach. Not what he’d expected at all. It was hot as hell.

The grip on his hair tightened, and Hanzo groaned out the standard warning. McCree had been bracing with his hand, but feeling a need to show off a little, he moved it away and took Hanzo deep again.

That did the trick. The archer bucked his hips forward and held there as he came undone. Not that he hadn’t planned to anyway, but it left McCree with no choice but to swallow. Through the choked gulps, his bleary eyes, he watched Hanzo’s face as he rode out the orgasm.

A thousand curses came to mind. Hanzo in the throes of ecstasy was another one of those things that his imagination could have never conjured correctly. Chin tucked against his chest, eyes screwed shut. Red-faced, opened mouthed. Soundless except for a final, tight-throated moan. After that, it was just chest-heaving, gulping gasps of air. Hell. If looks could kill, McCree would be dead on his knees right now.

Once he made sure Hanzo was well and taken care of, McCree stood up. Hanzo fell forward against him, gasping like a fish on land. Hazy with afterglow, Hanzo was pretty pliable. McCree pushed the robe off his shoulders, then led him to the bed.

“What,” Hanzo mumbled. “Do you wish to go again?”

McCree chuckled, throat raw. “I’m a little old to jump back so quick, Han,” he rasped, laying Hanzo down on the bed. “But if you’re hankerin’ for another round, you know where to find me.” He zipped up and tightened his belt back into place.

Hanzo sat up. “Are you leaving?”

It was surprising. After all that hard-edged aggression, Hanzo sounded almost forlorn. Yet, it shouldn’t have been surprising at all, he realized.

It is more than that, to me, is what Hanzo had said. McCree had gotten so used to brief romance, skipping from town to town, that leaving this way was more habit than intention. “I’m pleased to stick around if you want me to stay.”

Hanzo reached out an open hand. When McCree took it, Hanzo pulled him in, pushing back McCree’s unbuttoned shirt to kiss his stomach. “I want you to stay,” Hanzo said.

That made him smile. McCree shrugged off his shirt, then pulled off those damned jeans at last. As he laid down, he caught Hanzo studying his naked body. Next to Hanzo’s taut muscle, it was hard to
not feel a little inadequate. He needed a change of subject to distract from his hairy, chubby stomach. “So,” McCree began. “You’re a top, huh?”

“Usually. Not always.” Forgoing his scrutinization, Hanzo laid his damp head on McCree’s shoulder, tucked up against him like the sky to the horizon. Perfect.

“Me too,” McCree said, wrapping an arm around Hanzo’s shoulder. “So. That’ll be fun to figure out.”

There it was again - that wolfish grin that made McCree feel like prey. Hanzo sat up, then crawled over him. His muscled arms closed McCree in like a jail cell. “Indeed, it will be.”

If looks could kill. “Careful, Sugar, or I really am goin’ to want to go again.”

Hanzo’s smirk didn’t falter until he threaded his fingers in McCree’s hair. “You should take a shower,” he said.

“Oh. Right.” McCree groaned and, with some reluctance, got out of the bed. Stretching and scratching his side, he sauntered over to the bathroom door. There, he paused and looked over his shoulder at Hanzo, naked and laid out on the bed like a god from a painting.

“Damn, you’re a good-lookin’ man. Don’t suppose you’d like to join me?”

A look of appraisal from Hanzo ran from McCree’s bare feet, up to his face. Another predatory smirk. “Yes. I would.”

Chapter End Notes

;)  
Streaming tonight! probably ~9:15PM EST. I'd love to see you guys there

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Welcome back to May I!

Probably no stream tonight - I will be at a friend's place eating yummy steak tacos. That's why you get the chapter early tonight (: 

As always, thanks to all my readers and commentors. It was extra-fun to read your comments on last chapter ^_^ 
And now, after all that work to get together, the rest of the story will be happy fluff, right? 
Er... about that...

@mingridsmarcher 
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

“Handcuff him to the bed,” Reyes told McCree.

Ridgeland was like any other town they had passed on their long trek down the east coast, but then, most small towns were from the vantage of a shitty hotel room you check into at one in the morning. The holes in the bedspreads are different, the placement of the water stains in the bathroom or the gouges in the cheap furniture, the stock photograph printed on canvas is always in a variable cheap frame. Reyes never chose a room based on a star rating. This place had thin walls and a busy, well-lit street right outside. It was hard to sneak into.

“Whoa, a-hey, man,” Harris laughed in response, that clipped Southie cadence. “Am I going to need a, you know, different sort of witness protection?” He shot them a freckly, lopsided smile.

“Don't get cute,” Reyes said, depositing his duffel bag on the bed nearest the hotel’s wide window. “It's so you don't run off.”

The drive had left McCree sore and half-conscious. One straight shot from Boston to the southern tip of the Carolinas. It had been McCree’s idea, driving. Keeps you under the radar. Something you learn in a motorcycle gang. It hadn’t been the longest road trip of Jesse’s life, but he was still glad to be somewhere he could rest his head.

“Where am I gonna sleep,” McCree asked as he slapped the cuff on Harris’ wrist.

“You sleep next to him,” Reyes said. “You’ll wake up if he tries to escape.”

McCree and Harris exchanged a look. “Boss, it's a twin bed-”

“This isn't a vacation, Vaquero.” Reyes turned, peering through the window up at the sky. “It's a new moon tonight. I want you close to Harris as possible.”

“New moon? What’s that mean?” Harris tried to walk towards Reyes, but McCree had snapped the other cuff around the headboard.
“Don’t worry yourself none about it,” McCree sighed. “Sounds like we’re cuddlin’ up tonight, Harris.” Good thing the guy was a twig.

They settled in. Harris was out like a light straight off, tucked up against McCree and snoring away. Sharing the tiny bed with Harris was uncomfortable as all get-out, but McCree was too tired for it to keep him awake for too long.

Reyes, on the other hand, sat on his bed perusing the file Cooper had given him. It was thick, and apparently a page-turner. McCree watched sleepily as Reyes flipped through sheet after sheet, barely more than a few seconds on each, until he got to the end. That last page gave him pause. He furrowed his brow, parted his lips. McCree couldn’t place the expression, but it was foreign on Reyes’ face.

“Everything okay, boss?” McCree asked through a yawn.

“Yeah.” Reyes breathed in noisily, and for a moment, McCree thought he saw a glint in his eye. He pulled a sheet out from the back of the file and folded it before sticking it in his bag. Then, he set the folder on his nightstand. “Go to sleep,” he said, then shut off the light.

--

McCree woke up and couldn’t breath. There was a weight on his chest and a cloth covering his mouth. Every gasp tasted like chemicals. He blinked his eyes open.

Someone was over him.

They were in black from the crown of their head to the tips of their fingers and toes. In the dark of the room, even this close, it was hard to make out any details - the body was vaguely humanoid, unshapely and lean, and they wore a tactical vest. It was littered with blades. They had no face, just a round lens in the center of the matte-black forehead that glowed white.

Like the moon in the night sky.

Their knees stabbed into his shoulders. McCree struggled against their grasp but he could barely move, much less buck them off. They were wiry but strong as hell - a robot, maybe. Being the best in the world at killing people was definitely an Omnic’s style. McCree yelled against the cloth, trying to wake Reyes.

“Keep quiet,” The Moonless Night said in a slow, electronic whisper. That voice was like a cold wind - like stories told in the dark. “He is sleeping.”

McCree’s voice petered into a whimper.

Clutching the cloth to McCree’s mouth, The Moonless Night forced his head to turn to the side. Now, he was staring Harris in the face- close, nose-to-nose, like standing close to a mirror. Harris was still fast asleep. So was Reyes in the bed across from them. Out the wide-open window, the town’s main street was as empty as the dark sky.

There was a sword in The Moonless Night’s free hand. While the arm holding McCree down was as thick as his own, the one holding the dagger was unnaturally thin - almost skeletal. They held the sword in a clawlike grip. A flat, round gem was inlaid in the pommel. It was black or white depending on the angle the eye looked at it from.

“You think you two are the same.” The Moonless Night cocked their masked, unearthly head. It made that one, overlarge white eye reflect weirdly. “But you are not. This one only clasps for
escape. But you look to the sky and dream of being more.”

The Moonless Night put the blade up to Harris’ throat and held it there, millimeters from skin. Harris wet his mouth and went on sleeping. The harder McCree breathed, the weaker and drowsier he felt. Whatever the cloth was soaked in, he was sucking in the fumes. It was hard to stay conscious.

“Bastard son of heroes, made in love but born into hate,” The Moonless Night said. “If I cut you, would you bleed in black and white, or grey?” In a single swift motion, The Moonless Night ran the blade across Harris’ throat. His eyes shot open as blood poured down the front of his shirt. He tried to gasp, but the blood caught in his open throat, and his breaths came out instead as staggered, staccato hiccups.

Against the cloth, McCree whimpered and tried to turn his face away.

The Moonless Night wrenched it back. “No,” they said, leaning down to whisper in his ear. “Look.”

Blood pumped from Harris’ wound in time with his short, gasping breaths. McCree could hear the viscous liquid gurgling in his throat.

“Like your Jacob, you stare at the sky and dream of climbing to heaven,” The Moonless Night said. “But your friend Reyes knows that men with money do not suffer bastard heroes in their sky. Take care not to rise too high, or I shall come for you.”

The Moonless Night raised their blade, glittering with ruby-red blood, then stabbed it down hard into Harris’ chest. His stuttered breathing ceased, then he let out one last gasp. As the chemical finally started to crash McCree unwilling into unconsciousness, he watched Harris die.

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McCree started awake with gasps that just kept coming. Sharp, staccato hiccups of breath that didn’t bring enough air into his lungs. It wasn’t until his half-awakened brain started to clear that he forced himself to calm. The golden sunlight pouring in from the open windows warmed him – helped remind him that this wasn’t that hotel room. He touched his throat. No blood. No knife in his chest.

You’re on assignment. You got sent here by Winston. You’re in a hotel room in Austin Texas. It’s not your room. You came here last night to see...

Across the room at the desk, he saw a holovid screen dissipate, revealing Hanzo’s face, glowing in the morning light despite being wrought with worry. In an instant, he was up and rushing to sit on the bed. The strong grip of Hanzo’s hand taking his own was grounding.

“What’s wrong,” Hanzo asked.

“Nothin’, Honeybee.”

Hanzo looked unconvinced. “This is not the first time.”

“Huh?”

“When we were in the hotel room in Hanamura, you awoke in the night the same way.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

McCree looked out the window, comforted by the sunlight streaming inside. “It’s just a bad dream.”
A bad memory.

“You are lying,” Hanzo asserted. “Why?”

“Because I ain’t keen to talk about it.”

That earned him one of Hanzo’s icy glares.

“I’ll tell ya’ about it another time, Han. Just let me settle my nerves for now.”

Hanzo hummed, dissatisfied.

“C’mere,” McCree said.

After a moment’s hesitation, Hanzo leaned in and laid his head down on McCree’s bare chest. With an arm around him, their bodies fit together like the sky and the horizon.

Perfect.

“Who were you chattin’ with,” McCree asked.

“Genji.”

“Oh?” That made him a little nervous. “You, uh… tell him about this?”

Hanzo looked up, a few wild, prickly hairs hanging over his perfect, pissed-off face. “Should I not have?”

“Naw, it’s not that, only…”

“You wish I would not.”

“Well, it’s, a… delicate situation.”

“I did not inform him,” Hanzo said. “And I will not, if it is your desire to tell him yourself.”

“That might be better. If I can get a hold of him at all. He say anything about when he’s comin’ back?”

“He believes the repairs to his communications systems will be completed soon,” Hanzo said, laying his head back into curve of McCree’s shoulder. “Though I do not like the sound of this engineer they have working on him. He treats Genji like a science project.”

“Sometimes that’s the angle you need to come from to fix weird stuff. Genji’s a pretty particular case.”

“Mm.”

“You worried about your little brother, Han?”

A pause. “Perhaps,” Hanzo said.

It was odd to think how far Hanzo had come. It was always Genji now, not “half-man.” Having a call with him to catch up, too, was a marked improvement. It had taken time, and would take more, but the Shimada brothers might truly reconcile after all. Genji had known what McCree had been too blind to see until now: under that hard glare and standoffish attitude, Hanzo had it in him to care
deeply for people.

It made McCree smile and curse himself for an idiot all at once. “What time is it,” he asked.

“Seven-o-five. You had a phone call earlier, but I did not wish to wake you.”

Said phone was charging on the nightstand. McCree reached for it. “How long you been up?”

“Not long.”

McCree thumbed on his phone screen and saw the missed call notification. It was from Cooper, and there wasn’t just one, but three. McCree furrowed his brow. “Lemme call him back, real quick, Darling.”

Getting out of bed, McCree walked up to the hotel window and put the phone to his ear. It rang until it hit voicemail. McCree hung up without leaving a message. “Huh.”

Hanzo rose from the bed like a fluffy cloud in that white robe, then floated up next to him by the window. “Try him again?”

Looking down at the way Hanzo’s dark briar of hair framed his fine, sharp-featured face, McCree put the phone down on the windowsill. “He can call me back if it’s that important,” he crooned, wrapping an arm around Hanzo’s waist and pulling him in. “Take that robe off.”

Hanzo’s eyes lidded, and he leaned up into McCree’s waiting lips, kissing him with only slightly less ferocity than he had the night previous. It was too short-lived for McCree’s taste. Coy, Hanzo said, “I have not tired you out yet?”

“I could never get tired of you,” McCree said. He leaned down and pressed his lips to Hanzo’s corded neck, a free hand pushing the collar of the robe back to expose his muscled chest and shoulders.

“You wish to do this right here in front of the window,” Hanzo asked, more in challenge than bashfulness.

“You’re the one who picked the top floor. Might as well take advantage.”

“I did not pick the top floor. It was assigned to us.”

“You can ask em not to do that, y’know. I always try for the first floor.”

“Why?”

McCree looked over his shoulder at the distance between them and the ground. His stomach tied into a knot. “I don’t much like heights.”

“Let us move away from the window and head to the bed then,” Hanzo purred, already dragging him back. McCree let himself be lead, then thrown onto the bed. Hanzo, at last, followed his instructions and removed the robe. He straddled McCree.

“Damn, Han,” McCree gasped, feeling that he was already aroused. “You look so fine. Lay another kiss on me, will ya?”

As Hanzo leaned down to do so, McCree’s phone jangled from where he’d left it on the windowsill. Hanzo looked up.
“Forget it,” McCree whispered.

“It might be Cooper,” Hanzo said.

“So what?”

“So, we are here on assignment. That takes priority over recreational activities.”

“Only you would call mornin’ fucking ‘recreational activities’,” McCree teased.

Hanzo shot him one of those predatory smirks again, then got off him. McCree whined in defeat as Hanzo walked to the window, picking up the phone and looking at the screen. “It is Cooper,” he said, then brought the phone over.

Reluctantly, McCree took the phone, then thumbed the green call-answer button. “Yello?”

“Jesse McCree,” Cooper said. His voice was shaky.

McCree swallowed down the fear that jumped up in his throat, trying to sound casual. “You know it. What’s up, Coop?”

“Yeah. Something’s happened. I need you and your associate here at the Marshal’s office, immediately.”

Then, Cooper hung up.

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When they got to the doors of the Marshal’s office, they were locked. McCree and Hanzo were stuck twiddling their thumbs on the top step, trying to look like they belonged there with the official placards and city-planner landscaping. The sun was still cheerfully beaming down at them, all signs of the storm from last night long gone. McCree checked the hours. They should have been open by eight, and it was eight-fourteen now.

_They just forgot to open the doors, that’s all_, McCree told himself. _Nothin’ bad._ He called Cooper.

“Jesse McCree,” Cooper said.

“We’re here, Coop, but we can’t get in.”

“On it,” Cooper said, and hung up. McCree moved the phone from his ear and looked at it, puzzled.

“Cooper is acting strangely,” Hanzo pointed out.

“How do y’figure?” McCree didn’t want to acknowledge that it was true.

“He is being very short with you. His calls end abruptly.”

“Coop’s just busy, I bet. Nothing to worry on.” _I hope._

A young gal in a uniform appeared at the door, unlocking it from the inside. “Apologies,” she said. “Deputy Marshal Cooper informed me he called you in.” She ushered them inside, then locked the door behind them again.

“You’re supposed to be open by now, ain’t ya,” McCree asked as he tried to keep up with the girl’s brisk pace.
“Not right now,” the gal said, turning around a corner and stopping at the door to what looked like the Austin Marshal’s bullpen. “We don’t want any civilians coming in and contaminating the scene.”

McCree and Hanzo looked at one another.

“Cooper is in here,” the gal said. “I have to get back to the security desk.”

Through the doorway, McCree could see the bullpen was full of activity. A dozen deputies were buzzing around the office - talking on phones, going through files, searching their computers or talking to one another with drawn faces. In the center of it all: the Marshal’s holding cell, covered up with pale sheet plastic. McCree could see the flash of photos being taken inside.

Every breath McCree tried to take caught in his throat. Choking on blood. The sharp and shallow gasps repeated over and over, unbidden and uncontrollable. Hanzo’s strong hand grasped his and squeezed. Grounded. It felt like putting his boots on solid ground. McCree’s breathing, steadily, went back to normal.

“Do you have any idea what happened,” Hanzo asked.

“Got an idea,” McCree murmured. “But I hope to hell I’m wrong.” He looked down at Hanzo beside him and nodded. After one last squeeze, they released each other’s hands and went inside.

Cooper was standing beside the covered-up cell, speaking with a forensics tech. When McCree approached, Cooper looked up with the face of an insomniac - run raw but wide awake. “We had three overnight guards in the room and another four in the building,” he said. “It’s more than twice the manpower we usually keep.”

“What happened, Coop,” McCree asked, already knowing.

“The three in here got knocked out. The two other guys in the tank, too. Still doing a tox screen, but we think it was chloroform.”

McCree’s throat felt tight. Closed and open. A cloth over his mouth. Remembering that chemical scent filling his nose and mouth. That hazy terror. Going unwilling into unconsciousness.

“The other four never even saw the guy.”

“Cameras?”

“Two shot out. We’re going through the footage on the rest. Nothing yet.”

Beside him, he stared down at Hanzo’s austere face. Unbidden, a thought jammed its way in his brain. You gonna come to my funeral, Han?

“Did you know this would happen,” Cooper asked.

McCree looked up. “Know what would happen?”

“Don’t be funny with me, Jesse McCree. Last night, you warned me to put manpower on Waldrum.”

“Surely did.”

“This was not a half-cocked bounty hunter from the television. This was military-grade surgical. In and out in an hour, probably less. Four of my best didn’t even notice someone was here. You told me to put on extra security. You never said anything about something like this.”
It wasn’t until he felt Hanzo holding his shoulder that McCree realized he was shaking. “I didn’t know,” McCree said. “It’s been years. I hoped… I wanted to believe they were gone for good.”

“Is this what went down with the guy from Boston?” Cooper had this look to him, like Reyes used to get - like a dad yelling at his kid who just tried to run into traffic. “Harris?”

“What is going on?” Hanzo cut in, his lack of information clearly frustrating him.

Cooper looked between them, then pulled the plastic sheet aside to reveal the inside of the cell.

The marshal’s holding cell was crawling with gownned-up forensic techs taking samples and snapping photos. They made a halo around a dead body, laid out on the cold concrete.

Neil Waldrum.

His face was pale and twisted with a too-familiar terror. His throat was carved wide open as a canyon, and there was a sword stabbed into the center of his chest. The stone in the pommel changed depending on the angle you looked - it waxed or waned black or white.

The way the moon did.

McCree couldn’t breath. A dark haze went into his vision and he reached for his throat, hiccupping in air. He was swallowing blood, he knew he was, hot and viscous, pouring in and out of his esophagus. No matter how he gasped, he couldn’t fill his lungs. He tried to shut his eyes, but that horror-story voice commanded them to stay open.

No. Look.

Everything was dark. McCree was in that hotel room, the weight on his chest, the strong arm holding him down. Cloth over his mouth, handcuffed to the bed, the blade sliding across his throat. Staring into the mirror - staring at himself trying to breath through the flooding, steel-grey blood. That blade was raised up, and in a month’s time, it would come down into the center of McCree’s own chest.

When Hanzo and Cooper finally managed to pull him out of the waking nightmare, McCree realized he was on the floor. He realized he was speaking. “Too high. Too high.”

“Jesse,” Hanzo said, shaking him by the shoulders.

“Rich men don’t suffer bastard heroes in their sky,” McCree said, hardly realizing his own words.

“What?” Hanzo looked at him, panicked.

“Too high,” McCree said. “I went too high followin’ you around, Gabe. You shoulda left me in down in the dust. Now they’re coming for me.”

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A glass of water and a shot of bourbon finally brought him back down to earth. Hanzo and Cooper had carried him into the Chief Deputy’s office and shut the door. McCree was glad for the moment of quiet. Besides, he was pretty sure he just scared the hell out of everyone on the floor.

The bourbon was welcome too. Cooper had found it in the Chief’s desk drawer, assuring McCree he wouldn’t miss it. McCree was still shaky, but he knew now he wasn’t in that dark, little hotel room.

I’m sittin’ in a big, leather office chair. I’m in an office. The office is in the federal Marshal’s building in Austin, Texas. Deputy Marshal Cooper is here with me. So’s Hanzo.
That strong, archer’s hand on his shoulder squeezed hard. McCree, sat down in the chair, looked up at Hanzo. Worry was written all over that grim, exquisite face. How had he denied himself this for so long? They had just gotten started, and now...

*You’ll come to my funeral, won’t you? I know I treated you bad, Darlin’, but say you’ll come and give me a goodbye. You can wear black, or white - just say you’ll be even a little sad when they shrug those six feet of dirt onto my shoulders. When they plant me back where I always belonged.*

“Made a damn fool of myself out there, didn’t I,” McCree said.

“What happened?” Hanzo’s grip on his shoulder tightened.

“Ah, I just got told I have a month left to live, that’s all,” McCree said shakily.

“Harris,” Cooper said. “The job in Boston. You’re saying, you think the Moonless Night is back in play.”

“Got to be. The sword in Waldrum’s chest is just like the one I saw them kill Harris with.”

“An you never got a good look at the guy?”

“I got an eyeful, but they were in this suit. All black, navy-seal style, mask over the face, I think. Something like a lamp on their head - maybe some kind of night vision, or hell, maybe optics. That thing could have been an omnic for all I know. It had one of those synthetic voices - like Genji does now, you know? Hell. Sure seemed the farthest thing from human to me.” McCree shuddered at the memory.

“You have met this assassin before,” Hanzo deduced. “That is what that woman in the motorcycle shop - Sombra - was talking about. She was attempting to frighten you.”

“No attempt needed,” McCree said. “If the Moonless Night did this, it was because Neil was number one on the bounty list. And now that he’s down…”

“…Next on the list is you,” Hanzo finished.

McCree nodded. He’d long gone from panicked to numbly accepting of his fate.

“This is a sign, Jesse McCree,” Cooper put in.


“Turn yourself in,” Cooper said. “We’ll put you in max. Safest place in the world. No one will touch you in there.”

“Yeah, a cell seemed real safe for old Neil out there,” McCree barked. “You don’t get it, do you? This ain’t some backlot kid with a glock and some kevlar he bought at the flea market. This is the *best* assassin in the world. Once you’re in their sights, it don’t matter who you are or where you hide, you got until the next new moon. That’s all there is to it.”

Hanzo took out his phone, stabbing his thumb on the screen.

“What’re you up to?”

“I am calling Winston,” Hanzo snarled.

“Why?”
“He need to be informed of this,” Hanzo said. “We have a month to prepare the Watchpoint.”

“Prepare the Watchpoint?” McCree was angry and didn’t know why. “For what, my going-away party?”

“To turn it to a fortress,” Hanzo said with authority. “You need somewhere safer than a prison to hide? We will make it so.”

“There’s no fixin’ this, Hanzo.”

Hanzo looked up from his phone, furious. For a moment, he was silent, then he said, “Deputy Marshal Cooper. May I have a moment alone with Agent McCree, please?”

Cooper looked between the two of them, his mouth a flat line of disapproval. Then, he tipped his stetson hat, and left.

As soon as the door shut behind Cooper, Hanzo rounded on McCree, furious. “You are a member of Overwatch. You share that title with the world’s mightiest defenders. What is one assassin against them?”

“We’re not talkin’ about a firefight, Hanzo. This guy, or omnic, or whatever they are, they killed Harris right under Reyes’ nose. Reyes - the best of the best. Didn’t even wake up. I’ll be dead before anyone at the Watchpoint even realizes The Moonless Night was there.”

“But we know the night they will come,” Hanzo insisted. “We have seen from this infiltration how they work. They are not a sniper - they must get close. They use a gun to shoot out the cameras, so we bullet-proof the cameras. Winston is an accomplished scientist, and Torbjörn a brilliant engineer. Motion-sensors, floodlights, defensive turrets - in a month, Watchpoint: Gibraltar could be made into an impenetrable stronghold. And we can assure that every Overwatch agent on the globe is there to protect you.”

Over all the fear, the novacaine depression of knowing he was going to die, something warm bubbled up. “What’s all this ‘we’ stuff, Hanzo?”

Hanzo looked to the ground. “I…”

“Don’t tell me you’re goin’ to join up with Overwatch official-like, before even Genji does?”

“If that is what it takes,” Hanzo said, looking up, resolute. “I will be there with you a month from now, no matter what. I…” Hanzo hesitated, then took a step forward. He stood over McCree, reaching up and combing his fingers in his scruffy beard. “I have only just found you,” he said. “No one, not even the greatest assassin in the world, will take you from me so soon. Not without a fight.”

McCree was a charming guy. He could sweet-talk pretty much anyone. But he was sure right then he’d never said anything that had melted anyone the way Hanzo’s words got to him now. He wrapped his arms around the archer’s waist and pulled him in, burying his face in his shirt. “I’m scared, Han,” he said.

“I know,” Hanzo said. “But you are not alone. Not anymore.”
Watch out McCree!! DDD:

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Hey guys!
I gotta rush off, but thanks to my readers! Been seeing a lot of comments of people catching up on this in a NIGHT and that's CRAZY you guys are amazing!! I hope you like this chapter! I may still stream tonight but it will be later. Love you guys!! (: enjoy!

edit: I AM streaming tonight! 11PM EST-?? Come hang out!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

Dawn was cloudy white and slate grey over Watchpoint: Gibraltar’s practice range. The pale shadow of last night’s full moon hung low and watchful, peering over a slash of cloud. The quiet enhanced the satisfying creak of Hanzo’s bowstring; the whistle of his arrows cutting through the misty air; the crisp crack of McCree’s gunshots.

They were an hour deep in their two-hour morning drills. McCree shot his target lazily, either bored or still groggy. Getting the gunslinger out of bed at six AM each day for the past two weeks had been the hardest part of the Watchpoint’s preparations.

Torbjörn’s voice crackled over the comm in Hanzo’s ear. The Swede had a habit of using the universal comm channel to relay fortification updates to Winston. McCree took his earpiece out half the time, but Hanzo wanted to hear every detail.

“The damn turrets again,” Torbjörn complained. “They’re suckin’ up too much juice! I’m going to have to re-route them to pull from the backup generator’s power source. A hack job, I tell you, not my best. But oh, we’re on a time limit, eh? Aren’t we?” Spoken as if McCree had specifically chosen to give himself only a month to live, for no other reason than to get on Torbjörn’s nerves.

“Yes, Torbjörn,” Mercy sang over the comm, the only one besides Winston who entertained Torbjörn’s constant chattering. “A very important time limit! A teammate’s life is at stake. Thank you for working so diligently.”

Through the speaker in Hanzo’s ear, Torbjörn muttered alongside the clanking of tools. Hanzo turned his attention to McCree’s target. Six haphazard body shots. Poor work.

Turning his face from McCree, Hanzo let out a breath and concentrated on his own aim. He drew, exhaled, and shot. The arrow landed a full inch and half from center. Mitsuru’s voice whispered in the back of his mind: You’re slouching.

Hanzo straightened up and shot again. A half-inch from the center now. Better, but not good. He’d spent all his arrows now, but with McCree shooting like her was, Hanzo wasn’t about to walk out into the range to retrieve them until McCree had emptied his revolver.

It didn’t take long. McCree took six more wild shots. Hanzo could tell he wasn’t even aiming. “What
is the point of practicing if you do not try,” he complained.

“I know how to shoot, Hanzo,” McCree said. “We’ve been doin’ this every morning since we got back to the Watchpoint. I don’t see the reason.”

“Ah, bits,” Torbjörn barked over the comm. “Overloaded the circuit again. These blasted machines. Winston? Where are we on the other security measures?”

Hanzo walked out from his station and down the track to his pincushioned target. “The reason is that there’s only two more weeks left until the best assassin in the world makes an attempt on your life,” he said, trying to tune out the chatter. “We must be sharp, vigilant. There is no room for mistakes.”

“I ain’t goin’ to be a better shot than I already am in two more weeks even if I practice from dawn to dusk, Han.”

Hanzo went silent. Over the comm, Winston report back to Torbjörn that movement-tracking floodlights were buggy, the bulletproof camera lenses were on backorder, and the Watchpoint’s out-of-date power grid wasn’t set up to support this kind of energy output anywhere except Winston’s lab.

“Genji gets back in today,” McCree said.

Hanzo hummed in response, studying the arrows in his target. None of them were quite center.

“You excited? Nervous?”

“I…” Hanzo felt neither of those things, only a gnawing in his gut that something was wrong. It felt like swimming with weights tied to him - a gloomy and unshakable mood weighing him down. “It is nothing.”

“Yeah?”

The prompt irked him, because he had been trying to puzzle out the reason for his ill mood for days, even weeks. Anxiety at seeing his brother again, or joy, or excitement - these were rational responses. This emotion was not rational, and though it waxed and waned, Hanzo wasn’t able to ever fully will it away.

Frustrated, Hanzo tugged the arrows hard from the target and carried them back to his station.

“Again,” he said.

“Naw.” McCree’s voice had traces of Hanzo’s bad mood. “I’m done. Goin’ to eat breakfast with the kids.”

“There is still half our drills-” Hanzo began.

“I ain’t spendin’ my last month on this earth doin’ drills, Hanzo,” McCree growled.

“This is not your last month on earth, Jesse,” Hanzo roared, as if commanding it would make it so. “Not if we prepare for this properly.”

McCree’s expression softened. “Han, come to breakfast with me.”

“No,” Hanzo said, stubborn.

“Come to my room tonight, then,” McCree whispered, smooth as bourbon.

That one was harder to say no to. “I… promised to aid Reinhardt with the fortifications for your safe
room this evening. It is not anywhere near complete yet.”

“Then come after. Or get someone else to do it. I wanna see you somewhere that ain’t the practice yard.”

Hanzo looked at his feet and didn’t answer.

McCree sighed, adjusting his hat with the barrel of his gun. “Can I ask you a weird question?”

“I suppose,” Hanzo said.

“When you went to your Pa’s funeral… did you wear black or white?”

“What sort of question is that?”

“I don’t know. You’re right. Forget it.” McCree turned to leave.

“White,” Hanzo said to McCree’s back. He stopped.

With a half-turn, McCree looked up at the bouquet of pale clouds in the sky. “Of course,” he said.

“What about you,” Hanzo asked. “What did you wear, to your father’s funeral?”

McCree smirked, shuffling his spurs in the dirt. He took off his hat with his prosthetic arm, and looked down at the inside - at, Hanzo was sure, whatever was written in the band in felt-tip marker. “Black,” McCree said. He replaced his hat on his head, then left.

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It was a few hours later when Winston announced over the comm that Genji had arrived the Watchpoint via hoverjet. Hanzo was on the opposite end of the base, helping Mercy(despite her protests) put together some biotic emitters in Overwatch’s medbay. I should go to him immediately, Hanzo thought, but instead he remained seated, sliding another of the metal canisters into its casing. Some of the dandelion-yellow liquid tipped out from the canister’s lip, and Hanzo rubbed it between his fingers. A comforting warmth spread to his knuckles, then up his arm. He resisted the sudden, violent urge to pour the canister’s whole contents into his hands, watching and feeling the liquid seep down through his fingers.

Mercy said nothing, still icy and silent as ever with him.

It was odd to see the caduceus staff taken apart. The haft was removed, leaving only the flower-bud nozzle mounted upside-down. The usual gauzy ribbon of golden light was concentrated to a thin liquid, draining into another empty cannister, just like the one Hanzo was holding. He screwed the cap over his own cannister, then set the biotic emitter on the table with the others. He waited patiently for the next canister to fill, hands on his knees.

For a time, there was no sound in the lab save the disassembled staff’s biotic hum, and Torbjörn on the comm griping about the fidelity of the safe room’s armor plating. Hanzo spoke. “Was Genji repaired when you left him in London?”

“According to Dr. Lovings, yes,” Mercy said sharply. Whether her tart tone was directed at him or came from the mention of Lovings, Hanzo couldn’t say.

“From what Genji has told me, I am surprised you trusted him to tinker in Genji’s inner workings.”

“I wish I could have chosen someone else,” Mercy sighed. “But the original cyberneticist that
designed Genji’s mechanics sadly passed away a few years ago. Lovings is one of the few people in the world that can reverse-engineer Genji’s systems.”

“I thought he was merely a university professor and television personality.”

“Now, yes. But before the Omnic Crisis, Lovings was one of the lead engineers at Omnica. He helped design the Omnic AI, their processing functions, and their communication systems. Considering Genji’s comm system is connected to what’s left of his organic brain, I cannot allow anyone but an expert to put their hands on those systems.”

Hanzo’s gut twisted. “Part of Genji’s brain is cybernetic?”

The icy, withering glare Mercy gave him was more frightening than Hanzo would have given her angelic countenance credit for. “Yes. After the damage you caused in your duel, we had to add some cybernetics or he would have suffered permanent brain damage. He still retains his personality and memories thanks to those enhancements.”

Of everyone in the Watchpoint, Mercy remained the staunchest holdout in disliking Hanzo. Perhaps it was because she had interacted so intimately with Genji’s injuries, or perhaps being a doctor made her naturally protective of her patients. But if this was so, it didn’t explain why she would allow a man she didn’t trust to tinker in the inner-workings of that same patient’s brain.

“How do you know he did not make any unwelcome modifications,” Hanzo demanded.

“I was there the entire time,” Mercy protested. “I oversaw the procedure. I ran diagnostics on him before and after.”

“But how could you be sure what he was doing during such a procedure,” Hanzo asked.

Mercy jammed off the switch on the caduceus staff and dragged the cannister of golden liquid aside. “I am not some child fresh from medical school, Mr. Shimada. Not that you care, but as my patient, your brother is receiving some of the best medical care in the world.”

Hanzo got to his feet then, without a thought. “I do care,” he snarled.

“Then why is it, when we got news of his arrival, you remained here instead of going to the hoverpad to meet him? I saw him four days ago - you, on the other hand, have not seen him since you refused to leave Hanamura with us.”

The weight in Hanzo’s chest dragged him lower. First Do No Harm clearly only applied to physical wounds as far as Mercy was concerned. With a wordless scoff, Hanzo turned from her and left the medbay, marching with purpose towards the hoverpad.

When he finally trekked his way there, however, Genji was gone. A brief conversation with Winston informed him that he’d run off to have lunch with “the kids.”

The “kids” were the younger members of Overwatch - Lucio, Tracer, and their newest recruit, the gamer-turned-soldier Hana Song. McCree seemed particularly fond of them. Hanzo found them strangely intimidating. Tracer was an accomplished fighter and one of the RAF’s youngest fighter-pilots. Lucio had, in the same breath, lead a revolution and become an international pop-star. Hana Song, also known as “D.Va,” had risen to stardom as a gaming idol, only to set aside the fame and fortune to become an accomplished soldier in the Korean military. None of them were even approaching thirty, and Hana was just nineteen.

Hanzo, on the other hand, had been groomed from birth to be master of the Shimada Clan and still
failed at it spectacularly. He was pushing forty, and all he had to show for it were some rusty CQC skills, a mastery of the sword which he’d vowed never to pick up again, and being good with a bow. Though, after today’s practice session, even that could be called into question.

“Genji? Uhm, that cowboy guy came to get him,” D.Va said, lounging in the rec-room’s couch. The TV was playing what looked to be a recording of her flying around the watchpoint. She watched the screen intensely as they spoke, making down items on a datapad using a stylus.

“McCree? Do you know where the two of them went?”

“No,” she said, eyes affixed to the screen as she tapped her datapad. “Genji followed him out to the hall. Didn’t see them after that.”

Hanzo frowned. Had he been his usual, measured self, he would have said nothing and left. But that dark mood pushed against the surface, and he snapped, “You could stand to look at me when I speak to you.”

D.Va blinked up from her video, almost startled. “Right. Sorry, Mr. Shimada.” She paused the video and turned in her seat to face him. He spied the information taken down on her datapad - it was a screenshot from her video, with drawn notations of the area’s possible entries and exits.

Immediately, Hanzo regretted his sharpness. “No. It is fine. You are studying the Watchpoint?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I just got here and I’m still learning all the ins and outs. I want to know WP:G like the back of my hand when that assassin shows up. There’s no way they’re going to get through me!” She grinned up at Hanzo with teeth, making a one-two punch motion.

D.Va’s youthful enthusiasm almost made Hanzo smile. He should smile to her, he thought, to show her he was not angry, but he couldn’t manage it. His dark mood weighed him down. Instead, he extended a different peace offering. “I could take you around the base, if you wished. I have seen much of it from a high vantage, and I must now search the Watchpoint for Genji in any case.”

D.Va’s face lit up. “That would be so awesome. Thanks!” That “thanks” had a practiced bubblegum sweetness to it which reminded Hanzo that she was - on top of being a professional gamer and MEKA pilot - a charismatic celebrity. She stood up, cradling the data pad in one arm and Shouldering a pink purse with the other. She followed him outside to the hoverpad.

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The Watchpoint tour with D.Va was both productive and fruitless. The young MEKA pilot did a great deal of notation on her tablet, yet seemed to notice every entry and exit point the moment Hanzo pointed them out. He wondered if he had been needed at all. Torbjörn called in on the comm no less than seven times - complaining about the communications antenna, the security video stream, the power grid. Nothing was anywhere close to ready. An, on top of all that, Genji was still nowhere to be found.

At last, D.Va left to join the others for dinner, while Hanzo remained perched on the comm tower roof, staring at the sunset. The sky was a hot iron, with a roof of black clouds. A storm was coming.

Being up high and hidden away was always comforting - the breeze, the vantage, the privacy all suited Hanzo. He thought on his conversation with McCree that morning, and Mercy later on, and even his sharp comment towards D.Va. Even when he was trying to help them fortify the base, Hanzo had ended up fighting with everyone he’d come across. It was this foul, unshakable mood - it had to be. Why did it gnaw at him so? Was it Genji’s arrival, or the threat to McCree’s life?
Torbjörn griped over the comm from time to time, about any and everything, from the number of security cameras that still had to be installed to the fidelity of the wifi signal. Hanzo sighed. With all of these problems, there was no way they would have it all ready in time.

Beneath Torbjörn’s grumbling, Hanzo heard an aberrant, soft sound. He turned off his comm and listened hard until he was sure: it was footsteps. His hand went to Storm Bow. The steps were quiet, too quiet for most people to notice. He focused his hearing on them, pulling his bowstring taut.

“I still cannot surprise you.”

Hanzo lowered his bow. He turned and saw, as the voice suggested, Genji standing there behind him, a bag looking foreign slung over his armored shoulder. With an annoyed grunt, he switched the comm back on. *I have been searching all day, and now he shows up*, Hanzo thought. “Where have you been?”

“From what I have been told, I think you know every place I have been to today,” Genji said. He was in a good humor - not his new and even temper, but the puckish attitude Hanzo remembered from their youth. Genji set his satchel down, then sank down beside Hanzo, looking out at the sun over the ocean.

“I meant before today.”

“I was with Dr. Ziegler in London.”

“Dr. Ziegler returned four days ago,” Hanzo observed. “From the way she talked about him, I refuse to believe she would leave you alone with that engineer, Lovings.”

“Hmm. Well...” Genji leaned back on his hands, visor facing the darkening sky. “You know, earlier I had the most amusing conversation-”

“Do not change the subject-”

“-with McCree.”

Hanzo paused, then swallowed. That playful, knowing tone. Hanzo could almost see his brother’s face beneath the mask, smirking at him. “What was so amusing about it?”

“He asked me...” Genji began to laugh. “He asked... how to get into your pants.”

For as warm as he suddenly felt, Hanzo knew he must have gone red from toe to tip. “He did what?”

Genji fell back in mirth. “Right? Why would I know? But he said you have been really edgy lately. He said you two have something going on but he can not get you to spend time with him, and you are acting like you need to get laid. I told him you always act like that, but he said this was definitely different.” Genji snorted out one last bout of laughter.

“I am glad you find it to be so amusing,” Hanzo spat. “It has not been so for me.”

“You like him too, right? That is how McCree made it sound.”

Hanzo wasn’t sure what to say to that. “I suppose I do.”

“Did you two confess your feelings for each other like an anime,” Genji joked. “How long has this been going on?”
Hanzo had no desire to tell Genji that he’d had something of a crush on McCree for months, nor tell him the emotional tug-of-war between the two of them in Austin. The culmination would be enough. “Do you remember when you called me in my hotel room? It was two weeks ago, I believe.”

“Sure. You seemed pretty relaxed for once. U-oh! Do not tell me-”

“He was there,” Hanzo said, suppressing a smile.

“Aniki! You sneak! Why didn’t you tell me?”

Hanzo couldn’t suppress the smile then. Aniki. When Genji first returned from the dead, it had felt horribly strange to be called that. Now, something in it was comforting.

In Hanamura, Hanzo had hated those odd moments where this serene stranger showed some visceral sign of his brother. A gesture, a turn of phrase, a laugh. Somewhere along the way, this had changed. Hanzo wanted to grasp those rare moments with both hands. His brother was there underneath this man, somewhere, and at last, Hanzo yearned to find him.

“Genji,” Hanzo said. “Would you take your mask off?”

Genji hesitated. “Why?”

Because that mask is not my brother’s face. Even scarred and torn apart, when you take that mask off, you do not look like a stranger. “Nevermind,” Hanzo said.

Genji paused, then reached behind where his ears should be. With a hiss, the mask split apart, and Genji took off the jaw of the mask.

The starkest part of Genji’s appearance was the black-rubber jaw, contrasting against his pale, scarred skin. Dragon burns - those spidery, red marks that crawled across his skin, in a pattern unique to the Shimada’s spectral guardians. He felt the Dragon stir within him at the sight of those scars, remembering Genji as both a kindred soul and a meal. In Hanzo’s mind, those two things were at odds, but the Dragon held all the feral indifference of nature.

Now that he looked, Hanzo could see the places on Genji’s skull where the cybernetics must have been inserted in his brain. They were bare plastic or naked circuit-boards wrapping around the lower half of his skull. Crowned above that, however, was something Hanzo did not expect.

“Your hair.”

Genji chuckled, running his fingers through the grassy color, looking sheepish. “Yes. Ms. Oxton helped me with it. I cannot tell if it suits me anymore.”

“It does,” Hanzo said, pushing back another smile. That weight inside pressed against his eyes, threatening tears. From nowhere! What was going on with him lately?

“Aniki, are you alright?”

“Fine,” Hanzo said dismissively, turning his head so Genji wouldn’t see.

“You always said dying my hair looked ugly,” Genji said. “You think it looks cool now or something? You want to go green too?”

Hanzo laughed. “No.” For a moment he thought of the waiter in Austin and his half-shaved head, but pushed the idea down. “It is only… that you look like yourself.”
When Hanzo looked up, he saw Genji smiling - and yes, it was that same smile from when they were young. More scars and wrinkles; that strange, black jaw; but it was definitely Genji’s smile he was looking at.

*How are you so blind that you do not realize what you have been given?*

Hanzo looked away again. “McCree and I… does it bother you, Genji?”

“It bothers me that you two are sleeping together and you still call him ‘McCree’,” Genji joked.

“I did not say we were sleeping together.”

“He was in your hotel room at seven in the morning.”

Genji had him there. “Ok,” Hanzo conceded. “We are sleeping together.”

“Ha!”

“I do not call him McCree. Not… when we are alone.”

“Gross,” Genji whined.

“I just wanted to be sure. He is your friend.”

“Well, I now wonder about his *taste*.” Genji smirked and elbowed Hanzo. “But I am happy to see you with someone I respect. You seem changed since I last saw you, and for the better. I must imagine McCree has something to do with that.”

“He has done his best not to,” Hanzo said, suppressing a smile.

“That sounds like him. McCree is a good man, but he will try his best to convince you otherwise. Do not allow it.”

Hanzo smiled at that. McCree had certainly tested his patience these past months. But perhaps Hanzo was being no better now. In a way, Hanzo was dedicating every moment he had to McCree, and at the same time, none at all. For all the aid Hanzo had given preparing the Watchpoint for the Moonless Night, he’d spent almost no time *just being* with McCree. There would be time for it later, Hanzo convinced himself - if they prepared enough, McCree would not die. He *could* not.

“I forgot. I wanted to give you something.” Genji pulled something flat from the satchel he’d brought. He handed it to Hanzo.

It was the photo of them from Genji’s old room - that untouched shrine on the second-highest floor of Shimada Castle. In the photo, Hanzo was a smiling child, holding a toddler Genji in a protective hug. Behind them loomed their stern-faced parents, Sojiro and Mitsuru. Odd how joyless they seemed in the photo - the way Hanzo had felt not so long ago. When had it changed? When Genji returned? When he’d come to the Watchpoint? When he and McCree had at last come together? It was not as if that melancholy was not gone - it even felt stronger, but that was nothing like the dull, hard expressions of the two adults in this photograph.

“When did you retrieve this,” Hanzo asked.

“Before Keiko kicked us out,” Genji answered without looking at him.

Hanzo searched his mind, replaying the events of that day - Keiko’s enforcers collecting their things and escorting them off the property. When would Genji have had a chance to steal it?
“She and I reconciled at the end, I think,” Hanzo said. “She said something very kind to me.”

“Keiko can be surprisingly sentimental at times,” Genji said.

“Do you think she is dead?”

Genji didn’t answer right away, looking from the photo out to the sunset. “Could be. But Keiko always had a talent for survival. Then again, maybe that is just wishful thinking on my part.” Genji looked back at Hanzo. “She always cared about you, y’know. She got on your case because she did not like seeing you under Father and Kanata’s thumbs. I did not either.”

For a time, Hanzo said nothing, only stared down at the photo of their broken family. Mitsuru’s sharp eyes glared back at him, all disappointment and accusation. The feel of sharp fingers stabbing between his shoulders was in that gaze. As if she knew that Hanzo had tacitly allowed the downfall of their family - that he had not become the man she wished him to be.

“Sometimes I wonder,” Hanzo began, thumbing the glass over the photo, “how different our lives might have gone if Mother had never left. Perhaps she could have protected us.”

“She left,” Genji said. “I do not think she would have been the staunch ally you imagine.”

“You did not know her,” Hanzo said.

“And you did?”

Hanzo didn’t know what to say to that. His memories of their mother were all from so long ago. Years had run them through post - made them brighter, or warmer, or harsher. Turned up the contrast so certain pieces stuck out. It was the same way that, as he became more cognisant of Genji as actually being Genji, his memories of Kanata had reformed with more clarity as well. The times he thought her kind, or wise, or sad - now, he was beginning to see them for what they were: calculating.

_You’re slouching_, Mitsuru would have warned. Standing at his shoulder any time Kanata tried to tell him what to do or who to be, Hanzo knew his mother would have stabbed her fingers between his shoulderblades and reminded him to be vigilant, wary, wise, strong. To stand up straight and be his own man, instead of leaning always on others. And in his own way, Genji had been saying the same thing all along, too. _Take care around Father and Kanata. Stand on your own two feet. Do what you know is right._ But Genji was his younger brother, not his parent; he had been young and foolish, the little Sparrow. And so, Hanzo had not listened.

“McCree was right. You do look like her,” Hanzo said.

Genji hummed, looking over Hanzo’s shoulder at the photo. “I guess so.”

“Perhaps that is why Father spoiled you so. I think… I think, he must have killed her.”

Genji straightened. “You really think so?”

“Yes. He would have seemed weak not to. Even if he wanted to let her go, he could not. When she left, I overheard Father and Aunt Kana talking about her. He said he pushed her into things. He believed that is why she left. So I think that is why he did not force you into anything you did not wish to do - because he did so with Mitsuru, then murdered her when she left him for it. I think he looked into your eyes and begged our mother’s forgiveness.”

Genji looked at his hands. “I should feel some kind of way about that, shouldn’t I,” he said. “But I
“Don’t.”

“You did not know her,” Hanzo repeated.

Genji put his hand on Hanzo’s shoulder. Hanzo expected it to be soft flesh, but instead, it was smooth metal. He shrugged it off, and for a time, they sat beside one another and said nothing. In the silence, Torbjörn’s voice came in over the comm again, griping about re-routing the Watchpoint’s archaic wiring.

“Hey!” Genji thrust his chin down at the ground below. “Look who it is.”

Hanzo followed Genji’s gaze and spied a splash of red cloth; heard the clank of spurs on the cement. Before Hanzo could stop him, Genji called down to McCree, waving.

McCree looked up, and even from this distance, Hanzo could tell McCree was staring at him. Genji clapped a hand on Hanzo’s shoulder, more casual and masculine this time. “I will see you later, Aniki,” he said, replacing his visor. Hanzo caught the trail of his scarf as he leapt from the comm tower roof, and was gone.

Hanzo was perched at the very top of the flat-roofed comm tower, on the upper roof. A few floors below him was a second, lower roof, like a huge stair-step the lead down to the ground, where McCree was craning his neck to look up at him. “Hey Han. Been lookin’ all over for you.”

“You have found me,” Hanzo called down brusquely. He was still irked at their argument this morning, and about the “amusing” conversation he’d had with Genji.

“I’d like to talk with you. Why don’t you come on down here?”

Hanzo said nothing.

McCree grunted. “Alright, fine. I’ll come up there, then.”

That was surprising. McCree didn’t like heights, nor was he the best climber. He walked up to the side of the building, circling it until he found a ladder up to the lower roof. It wasn’t long before Hanzo could hear him huffing. He swallowed a laugh. “You are hopeless,” he said, leaping down from his perch onto the lower roof. He walked to the top of the ladder and helped pull McCree up.

“Perhaps we should go running in the morning instead of shooting,” Hanzo said dryly.

“Hell, ain’t you punished me enough, Honeybee?”

Hanzo smiled.

“Oh, I get it. Yer yankin’ my chain.”

“Mm. What did you wish to speak about?”

“What’s been goin’ on with you,” McCree asked through gulps of air. “Since we got back, I barely see you. You’re buzzin’ all around the Watchpoint, every moment of the day took up by this or that. I know you want everything to be ready, but you’re goin’ to run yourself ragged if you keep that up.”

Hanzo looked out at the setting sun, sunk deeper now than last he looked. He squinted at it, but no matter how long he stared, he couldn’t see it actually moving. “I have been in a foul mood lately.”

“Don’t I know it. What I’m asking is, why?”
“I do not know,” Hanzo answered honestly. When McCree didn’t inquire further, Hanzo went on. “Jesse… How I felt… how I feel for you may seem commonplace, but is riotous for me. I was out of the world for a long time. I thought myself unable to feel this way ever again. I fear your death with a horrible, new intensity that I cannot control. Dread was once something flat and grey, coating the back of my mind like static. Now, I feel as if I will drown in it. It makes me miserable.

“It feels good, sometimes, to be empty,” Hanzo went on. “It’s elegant and controlled - simple. Floating through days as slowly as clouds in the sky. But happy as I am to be with you, this change is violent. I fear I am becoming a different person - a madman you could never come to love. But if I stay as I am, with every part of me gutted out, there is nothing there to love to begin with.”

At first, McCree said nothing, only stared out at darkening sky, a great ceiling of blackness steadily choking out the flame of the sinking sun. “Storm’s comin’,” he said, pulling a half-burned cigar and book of matches from his pocket. “A few years back, after Reyes knocked O-dub out of the picture and my name showed up on the most wanted list, I had to make due runnin’ around the Southwest playin’ keepaway with Coop and his marshals.”

The match lit slow, like stepping in sand, and McCree took his time puffing the cigar to life before he went on. “I bought this shitty old pickup and sidewindered through backroads and old highways trying to stay outta sight. After days of driving in the desert, the blue skies and red rocks and motels and side-of-the-road diners all blended together. I grew up in the Southwest. It was safe, and easy. It felt like home in all the right and wrong ways.

“Then, one afternoon, I was speeding down route 66 and this big, black cloud came rollin’ in, right from the direction I was headed. It was like a hand reaching for me.” McCree didn’t look at Hanzo as he spoke - he told the story to the sky like a man on a stage. “The air comin’ through the pickup’s rolled-down windows tasted like a battery, blood and electricity. The storm blotted out the sun, turned day into night. I could see the sheets of rain ahead.”

The cherry of the cigar flared as McCree took a long drag. When he blew out the smoke, the wind took it fast. Then, he spoke in a harsh whisper - all hot ember and grey ash. “I remember seeing it and pressing my foot the gas. A hundred miles an hour into the thunder.”

Now, McCree’s hand moved from his side to Hanzo’s waist, slipping smoothly across the base of his back and around his hip. “It was like driving into another world,” McCree said. “My heart was goin’ crazy. I almost crashed the damn truck, hell, maybe five times. The road was flooded and the brakes didn’t work proper to begin with. Everything around me was different. The dust turned into mud, the stones and sky were dark. It scared the hell outta me.

“But y’know… after endless days of drivin’ those same old dry, cracked roads; passing the same fill stations and rock formations; seeing the same old blue sky overhead-” McCree looked away from the darkening horizon and down into Hanzo’s eyes. “-That big, mean storm was the prettiest damn thing I’d ever seen.”

Word’s caught in Hanzo’s throat. Dark clouds blew in overhead.

“It’s alright to be scared, even if it feels like you’re goin’ out your damn mind,” McCree said. “I am too. Hell, even with every bit and bob added to the Watchpoint security, I might only have until the next new moon. But I don’t plan to spend that time shootin’ a fake target. If I only have two weeks left with you, Hanzo, I’m gonna race into ‘em at a hundred miles an hour.”

The sky was dark, and empty on words, Hanzo wrapped his arms around McCree’s neck and kissed him as hard as he could. It was in no way masterful or elegant. Hanzo fell into it, hands grasping, body pushing against McCree without thought or strategy. Their lips slipped clumsily against one
another; their mouths opened and shut out of sync until they finally clasped together. Love without a plan - a hundred miles an hour, fishtailing on the slick pavement. Brakes that wouldn’t break in time. It was terrifying. What if McCree did die? What if Hanzo couldn’t protect him? What if they both crashed?

Nothing about how he loved McCree had ever been simple. It had always been messy, inelegant, and complicated. But despite all of that, Hanzo did love him. It was uncomfortable, even frightening. But, in a place Hanzo thought he’d long ago buried, he felt exhilarated.

For all that the clouds had foretold its coming, the rain surprised him. It arrived like a wave - an instant downpour, and they were both soaked before their lips separated from the shock. McCree looked up at the dark sky, then over at the horizon, where the last bit of sunset light was all but gone. He grinned down at Hanzo and took off his hat. Beneath the torrent, they kissed again, and this time they came together easily. It would take more than a little rain to keep them apart.

Now, Hanzo caught himself being impatient. He took McCree by the hand and lead him to the door to the roof-access stairwell.

“Where we goin’, Honeybee,” he asked, putting his hat back on.

“To your room,” Hanzo said simply.

“I like the sound of that,” McCree crooned as Hanzo dragged him down the stairs into the Watchpoint hallway. McCree stopped him as they began to turn a corner, pulling Hanzo in at one of the windows as the storm raged outside. They kissed again, forgetting time and place, listening only to the sound of the rain and distant thunder… and of… roller skates?

Hanzo leaned back fast, taking four steps to another window partway around the corner, just as Lucio came skating up from down the hall.

“Whoa! Floor’s wet. You guys get caught in the rain?”

“Oh yeah,” McCree said, shooting Hanzo a lascivious smile. Hanzo forced himself not to smile back.

Lucio looked between them with a hint of suspicion. “Well, you guys shouldn’t stay in those wet clothes for long. Bad for your health, y’know?”

“I couldn’t agree more,” McCree crooned, tipping his hat.

Either Lucio didn’t understand the jibe, or he understood all too well, because he adjusted his uncomfortable posture and said, “Well. Alright. Later.” He moved carefully past the puddles on the floor McCree and Hanzo’s wet clothing had left, then skated away down the opposite corner. Hanzo leaned against the windowsill, watching as Lucio shrank down the hall.

“You are going to get us in trouble,” Hanzo told him.

“Trouble what? No one cares about a bit ‘o boot knocking. Even if they did, I wouldn’t give a damn. Let ‘em try and stop me.” McCree laughed, leaning with his back to the open window, looking more carefree than he had in days.

“You seem very confident that they would be unable to,” Hanzo joked.

Over the comm in Hanzo’s ear, Torbjörn was making some gripe about the backup generator malfunctioning again after just having fixed it. It must have annoyed McCree, because he removed his comm from his ear and put it in his pocket.
“Ah, well, bein’ with you makes me feel invincible,” McCree said. “You’re right after all, Han. This Moonless Night ain’t got shit on us. We’re gonna get the Watchpoint all gussied up for their night on the town. Hell. It’s pretty damn stupid when you think of it. Why always on a moonless night? What kind of sneak tells a man the day they’re comin’ for him?”

On the comm, Mercy scolded Torbjörn for going out in the rain to check the generator, urging him to wait until the storm had passed. Torbjörn only griped back at her, muffled by the roar of the rain.

Hanzo smirked. “You are not completely wrong. The only reason I can think of to forecast your intentions is to defy them, but we know this assassin keeps to their titular credo. Perhaps it is overconfidence. The reasons for choosing moonless nights, however, are sound.”

“That so? Like what?”

“The state of the location, time of day, and weather all have an effect on how easy it is to move undetected. If stealth is your aim, having no light overhead is helpful if you have to move outdoors. Attacking on a new moon creates better cover for moving undetected. It is similar to attacking in a location with lots of ambient sound.”

Hanzo felt suddenly on edge and wasn’t sure why. He turned away from McCree and looked out the window. Floodlights illuminated the Watchpoint’s empty yard below. They covered the entire open area evenly, save one spot of darkness where one of the lights looked to have gone out.

Over the comm, Torbjörn crowed that he found the problem - something was sticking out of the generator’s capacitor. He was going in to see what it was.

“Ambient sound?” McCree’s voice was light and curious. “What’s that about?”

Something felt wrong - that sinking feeling in his gut, refusing to let him go. A voice over his shoulder - You’re slouching. He was missing something.

“If you attack somewhere with a lot of ambient sound,” Hanzo said, distracted, “it can mask your footsteps. Things like club music, machinery or…”

Rainfall.

Torbjörn’s voice over the comm again. “What the hell is this? Genji, is this another one of your pranks? This equipment’s delicate stuff. You can’t be just stickin’ sword into it. The whole backup generator grid is down because of this!”

The sky lit up with a flash of lightning, and the lights in the yard flickered as thunder crackled across the Watchpoint. For a moment, the yard had been pitch black - no light at all. Hanzo stuck his head out of the window, searching the sky for the full moon, but it was nowhere to be seen, covered up by clouds.

Thanks to the storm, tonight was a moonless night.

Hanzo’s pulse thundered in his ears. They had to get McCree to safety, and now. He spun on his heels, but as he opened his mouth to warn him, Hanzo saw the glittering-wet metal of a blade slide out from the inky dark of the open window at McCree’s back. There was a gem inlaid in the pommel, and when the blade turned to lift up to McCree’s throat, the gem waned from white to black.

Chapter End Notes
u no he ded

I AM streaming tonight! 11PM EST-?? Come hang out!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Reyes came out of the shop with a pack of smokes and a dozen white roses. From the passenger seat of the immaculate Ford, McCree watched him cross the overcast parking-lot intersection and round the truck. Reyes slid into the driver’s seat, cigarette still lit.

“Since when were we allowed to smoke in the truck,” McCree asked.

“It’s my truck, Vaquero,” Reyes snarled around the cigarette. “I’ll smoke if I want.”

“Yeah but-”

“Be quiet,” Reyes snapped. The roses were laid neatly across his lap. McCree noticed something else on his lap too, underneath the bouquet’s watery cellophane - it was the file Cooper had given him. With the mood Reyes was in, McCree knew better than to ask about it. They were both still on edge after Harris’ murder the night previous.

Moonless Night or not, McCree had failed his mission to protect Harris. He had expected a long lecture, but even though Reyes was obviously agitated, it hadn’t come. Cooper had flown in and taken their statements. They’d waited around until forensics cleared the scene, then got the go ahead to be done with the whole thing. Really, they should never have been doing this piddly job in the first place.

They sat in silence for a few minutes as the truck idled. At last, McCree said, “So on back to the Watchpoint, then?”

Reyes hung his arm out of the truck’s open window, cigarette smoke reaching up for the grey sky. “One more stop,” he said.

They drove maybe an hour, the latter part spent wrestling with traffic on Savannah’s small, ancient streets. It was a pretty place, Savannah - a different sort of South from the one McCree had grown
up in. It was all Spanish moss and ornate townhouses and paved-over cobblestone. The smell of flowers and a wet heat that got into McCree’s pores. An old place, blithely stuck in the past.

With a few turns and a lot of cursing, Reyes parallel-parked the truck at a curb. He rolled the window down and fired up another cigarette, and for a little while, they sat again in silence.

“Boss,” McCree finally ventured. “Why are we here?”

Reyes stared at the truck’s rearview mirror, then flicked the cigarette into the street. He opened the car door and said “Come on.” The flowers were one hand, and the file-folder in the other. Frowning, McCree opened the passenger door and followed him.

When they passed through the gate, McCree realized what the flowers were for. He’d thought this was a park at first glance, with its green grass and tall trees, but now that he looked again, he saw the flat markers and crumbling headstones. Farther in, there were ornate monuments and a mausoleum. Reyes didn’t seem to know with certainty where they were going, following a chicken-scratch map pressed to the top of the file folder. There was a name scrawled there - in Cooper’s bold handwriting - that McCree didn’t recognize: Josie Carter.

They trudged across the spongy grass. Reyes sewed his way through the cemetery, eying each marker with intensity. At last, they came upon a pristine headstone that well-enough matched the name on his badly-drawn map - Josephine Carter.

Reyes tucked the file under his arm, then pulled out a cigarette.

“You’re really chainsmokin’ ‘em there, Boss,” McCree commented. “Not like I care, but it ain’t usually your style.”

Reyes stared, sullen, at Josie Carter’s headstone for a few blank moments. “You’re right. Here.” Reyes plucked the cigarette from his lips and handed it to McCree, along with his lighter and the rest of the pack. Hesitating, McCree took them but didn’t light up.

“So,” McCree ventured after another long silence. “Josie Carter. That who the flowers are for?”

Another pause from Reyes, then he reached under his arm and handed the file over to McCree. “Read the first page.”

McCree’s brow furrowed, putting his fingers around the manilla folder and thumbing it open. It was a Marshal’s file - a witness protection dossier, like the paperwork they’d done for Harris. He spotted the name on the headstone, Josephine Carter, written down as the identity the Marshal’s had doctored for this particular witness. Below that was the witness’ real name, printed out across the pale paper in black ink.

It was the same as the one written in the band of his hat.

A slow, noisy breath got squeezed out of him, feeling every typewriter letter stab across his forehead one by one; hearing little Fareeha sound the name out syllable-by-syllable in his mind. Pa-o-o-li-na Al-vuh-ray-doo.

A crinkling of cellophane reminded McCree that Reyes was there. He reached into the top of the bouquet and pulled out a single pale rose, then tossed it on the ground before the headstone, his own private offering to Josie Carter; AKA Paulina Alvarado; AKA “Momma.” Then, Reyes handed the bouquet to McCree.

“Boss… This job,” McCree muttered. “We did this job for the Marshals so you could get this file,
didn’t we?”

For a time, Reyes only looked at him with those sad, sunken eyes, made greyer by the overcast sky. The hero of the Omnic Crisis, the guy that had saved the world, had done this shit Marshal’s job as a favor for a scrawny, trashy desert punk who happened to be good with a six-shooter.

“Gabe…” McCree’s voice cracked when he looked at him.

Reyes looked away. “I’ll give you some privacy while you go through the file,” he said, then turned and left.

McCree watched him go, then looked back down at the file in his hands, tucking the bouquet of white roses in the crook of his arm. He flipped through the pages of information he already knew - his mother had worked as muscle for a bail bondsman in Santa Fe before meeting his Pa. They were an on-and-off thing, but she stuck around after McCree was born.

Then there was the stuff he hadn’t known. The feds had tagged her as a crucial witness in a case against the Deadlock Gang, and came to take her into witness protection in ’46, when McCree was eight years old.

That’s where she went, McCree realized.

Something had gone wrong with the exchange - his mother couldn’t make the meetup, so the deputy assigned to her case had gone, half-cocked, straight into Deadlock territory to get her. Another new development - the document stated that McCree was supposed to have gone with her.

The kicker? That half-cocked deputy, the guy assigned to his momma’s case, was none other than Deputy Marshal Cooper.

“Son of a bitch,” McCree gasped through his tight throat. He paged through the next few documents - the trial that failed to put Pa in jail, her getting set up here in Savannah with a new job and a new name. Her house had been on Fox Street. She’d had a dog named “Brick.”

Next, McCree came across dozens of pages of the same document over and over, filled out religiously every three months for years on years.

Custody documents. For him - for Jesse.

Every request had gotten denied with the same bullshit reason: Josie Carter had no legal right to guardianship; only Paulina Alvarado did. If she couldn’t use her real name and face his Pa in court, they couldn’t fulfill the custody request. But if she did that, they’d know her location, her address, her new name - her whole witness protection went out the window.

After four years of denied requests, McCree came across a note in Cooper’s bold, all-caps handwriting stating that whatever this document was, that he “strongly advised the witness against this action.” McCree looked it over. It was another custody form, but this time, it had her real name: Paulina Alvarado. His mother. Her address on Fox Street here in Savannah, sent right to Pa’s mailbox.

McCree knew what happened next, but he turned the page anyway. A Marshal’s report, a coroner’s report, and an FBI dossier on the Deadlock hatchet-man that had driven out to his mother’s little bungalow on Fox Street and shot her in the face. It had been a real messy business according to the reports. He’d even killed the dog. There were pictures, but McCree couldn’t look at them. He snapped the file shut and fell to his knees.
Momma had wanted him back. She had never, ever meant to leave without him. A thousand afternoons of watching old westerns on the TV had been waiting for him in that little house on Fox Street. A yard and dog and a mother who loved him, instead of a childhood of red dust and brass bullet-casings. She’d tried everything she could to get him back, and in the end, it was what had gotten her killed.

McCree knew then why Reyes had chosen to let him read this alone. The cellophane from the bouquet crinkled underneath his folded body, his cheek next to the single, white rose Reyes had put on her grave. After hours of grey skies, it finally started to rain just as McCree began to cry. He buried his face in Savannah’s green grass, and wailed.

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“Jesse!” Hanzo’s voice was loud, sharp - his eyes big with surprise in that way McCree always found cute. He felt something at his neck like an insect, that creepy crawly feeling, and when he looked down, he saw the black-clothed forearm and the glimmer of the dagger.

“WHAOA!” McCree’s hands shot up and grabbed the forearm hard. Head leaned back, he could barely see the blade an inch from his throat; the arm shaking with the force of trying to close that small distance. It took both McCree’s hands to keep the dagger from slicing his throat open. He could feel the Moonless Night’s body pressed to his back now. The weight on his chest. Was he standing up or laying down? Was it dark or light? And what was that weird noise?

Right. It was McCree’s own, choked, hiccupping breaths.

There, in the corner of McCree’s eye. A second arm raised up over his opposite shoulder. A sword flashed in a clawlike grip. McCree couldn’t let go of this arm or it would cut his throat.

The arrow caught the hilt of the sword. It went clattering away. Hanzo drew his bow back again. McCree’s arms shook, pulling the Moonless Night’s forearm back with all his strength.

The tension shifted. Instead of pressing in towards his neck, the arm pulled away. Going with McCree’s force instead of against it, the Moonless Night wrenched out of his grip easily. The warmth of the body behind him dissipated. McCree didn’t even hear the footsteps leaving, but they must have, because when he turned to look, no one was there.

Hanzo cursed and pushed past McCree, rushing to the window to give chase.

“Hanzo,” McCree choked out after him, but the archer had already vaulted over the sill. McCree shoved his head out the window. A flash of lightning illuminated Hanzo scaling the side of the building. Then, with a peal of thunder, Hanzo pulled himself up onto the roof. The tails of his golden scarf were the last thing McCree saw before Hanzo disappeared from view. “Shit,” McCree gasped, then looked back and forth in the hallway. Down at the end, a door. The stairwell he and Hanzo had come down here from. McCree rushed towards it, slamming the door open and starting to climb.

He got to stairway’s landing before the choking breaths and hallucination dragged him down to the floor. He wasn’t in a Watchpoint: Gibraltar stairwell anymore. He was in that hotel room, on the bed, the weight on his chest, Harris staring back at him like a mirror. Another thunderclap roared, louder now. Each hiccupped breath tasted like chemicals. McCree looked down and swore there was blood pouring down his front from an opened throat. It’s just your serape, he told himself, but the fabric clutched in his shaking fist felt viscous. Whether his eyes were open or shut, he could see that pale circle - that faceless eye, staring down at him. He covered his ears but the deep, electronic whisper roared in his head: I will come for you.
It’s not real, McCree told himself. It’s not real.

But it was real. McCree had risen too high, and now the Moonless Night was here for him. His worst nightmare had come to life. Every time he tried to orient himself, it poured into him - this was really happening. No safe room, no defenses, no super-max prison walls. Nothing between him and a ruthless, master assassin except…

The sound was quiet, muffled, distant. He could barely hear it beneath his cut-off, insubstantial breaths. McCree covered his mouth, forcing himself to breathe through his nose. It was a voice, yelling far away, coming from his pocket.

My comm.

When McCree pulled out the tiny earpiece, the voices got louder, and when he put it to his ear, they screamed.

“On the roof near the comm tower!”

“Turrets’ll be online in a jiff, just need to reroute the power.”

“MEKA online, I’m on my way!”

“Same here, luv! We’ll be there in a tick!”

“Where is Jesse?”

“I… I left him to pursue the target.”

“Agent McCree, report on your location!”

“He took his comm out.”

“I just saw you guys in the hall. I’ll find him, don’t worry, Hanzo.”

“I will meet you there, my friend! If this cowardly assassin tries to get near Jesse again, they will get a taste of my hammer.”

Choking. Hot and wet, tears pricked at McCree’s eyes, then squeezed their way out.

Maybe it was the stress. Maybe it was the panic of a dozen voices screaming in his ear. Maybe it was the fact that these people - the people Reyes had spent years warning him not to trust; the them in “us and them;” the people McCree abandoned when he knew Reyes planned to attack the Swiss HQ - were all banding together to save him. Not just them - D.Va, Lúcio, and…

Hanzo. McCree had collapsed, but Hanzo had run straight at the Moonless Night with the tenacity of a wolf. Mi cieito, my ferocious wild man, my sad and beautiful monster. Kissing him clumsily in the rain, coming back to life in McCree’s arms.

He had to get to him.

Lightning crashed as McCree stood up, looking around, forcing himself to calm. I’m in a stairwell in Watchpoint: Gibraltar. I’m thirty-eight. It’s raining outside. My fella’s on the roof. He’s chasing the assassin here to kill me. The members of Overwatch are helping him. Overwatch… I’m a member of Overwatch.

“God damn right, I am.” McCree took in a long, deep, steady breath, and ascended the next set of
stairs to get to Hanzo.

“Target is climbing the comm antennae,” came Hanzo’s voice in his ear. “In pursuit.”

“Ya silly man, get down from there,” growled Torbjörn. “That comm tower is practically a lightning rod.”

“They are kicking down one of the satellite dishes… Augh!” Hanzo’s voice was cut off by the sound of crashing metal.

“Hanzo,” McCree yelled into the comm.

“Jesse?” It was Winston’s voice, marred with static. “What’s your location-”

“Hanzo,” McCree repeated.

“I am alright,” Hanzo reported, his voice cutting in and out. “They are higher up. Losing visual. I think they are dismantling another dish.”

The comm went dead.

“Shit,” McCree hissed under his breath. He stormed up to the next floor, taking the stairs two steps at a time. Pushing out of the door, he found himself in another hallway. He went to the first open window he could find, craning his neck, trying to get a visual on the comm tower and Hanzo’s location. Just then, a mighty flash of lightning illuminated the entire Watchpoint yard, followed instantly by an earsplitting boom of thunder that shook the whole building.

The lights went out.

The hallway, the yard, every one of the Watchpoint’s buildings had gone dark. All McCree could see at any angle was blackness. A faint, blue glow pooled on his body from his chestpiece and flashbangs. It wasn’t near enough illumination to see. Distantly, voices around the Watchpoint were calling out, but they were too far away to understand or locate.

McCree shuddered. His throat was sticking again. He forced himself to take deep breaths, but standing alone in this fresh, inky darkness, he was hanging on by a thread. He had to get away from the windows, out of this hallway, somewhere he could hunker down and steady himself. Grow some patience, Vaquero.

Keeping one hand on the wall to use as a guide, and the other firmly on Peacekeeper, McCree followed the length of the hall. But how the hell was he going to shoot in the dark? Thunder pealed again, farther now. Shouldn’t the backup generator have kicked in by now?

The brim of McCree’s hat bumped into the door in front of him. It was so dark he hadn’t even seen it. When he pawed at the door for the knob, it swung open, so he pushed his way inside. From the acoustics, the tile beneath his feet, and the blue lights reflecting back at him from a darkened mirror, he guessed he was in one of the Watchpoint bathrooms.

McCree walked towards the mirror and grunted when his stomach ran into the sinks. He pawed around until he located a tap, then screwed the water on. Cupping his shaking hands under the faucet, he let them fill up. The shock of cold water felt good on his hot face, and his breathing finally began to relax.

Get a damn grip, McCree told himself. The Moonless Night might kill others in order to get to him. With the Watchpoint security measures still unfinished, he had to pull his weight here. Directly or
indirectly, he wouldn’t be responsible for any Overwatch agent deaths - not again.

And Hanzo… McCree refused to leave him alone. Like Genji said, he was going through some shit, and McCree refused to add to the pile. He felt a familiar weight lifting from him. “I ain’t about to send you to my funeral, Han,” he said aloud to his reflection. “Next time you wear white, we’re goin’ to wear it together, and we’ll have the rest of our lives ahead of us.” Something in the air froze. It was barely noticeable, like a cloud stopping in the sky. It wasn’t clear to McCree what it was - a feeling like physics. A familiar weight lifting from him - not in his chest, but at his hip.

*My gun. Someone’s liftin’ my gun out the holster.*

Around his shoulder, he saw the faintest edge of a lit, white circle - like a waning moon. It was them - the one that had haunted his nightmares for over a decade. The Moonless Night was right behind him.

McCree gasped aloud and rolled as the Moonless Night tugged Peacekeeper out from the holster and took four quick shots, shattering the bathroom mirror with a concussion of sound.

Barrelling past the assassin, McCree ran blindly for the exit. Another shot crashed into the tile at his heels. He shouldered open the swinging bathroom door.

Like a cannonball, McCree exploded out into the hallway, racing for the stairwell he knew to be down at the opposite end. *Have to get to Hanzo.* Another shot went off behind him, then pain erupted in his back, sending him careening forward onto the floor. He looked over his shoulder just in time for another bright flash of lightning. It illuminated the Moonless Night tossing his now-empty six-shooter out an open window. He heard the razor sound of blades being brandished.

“Shit. *Shit,*” McCree cried. That faceless assassin’s single, pale eye stared at him through the blackness with complete indifference. His breathing started to hitch, that hiccupped panting, a reflection of Harris’ last, bloody gasps of life when this very assassin killed him.

The crackle in his ear made him start. Torbjörn’s familiar Swedish burr: “Did it work? Is this thing on?”

The comm exploded with voices all at once, and McCree heard his name a dozen times. Layers and layers of panicked cries, all for him, and overtop them all, Hanzo’s voice - angry, ragged, desperately calling “Jesse!”

“There, then! Now, we should be getting the generator back in just a-”

The lights flickered back on. The Moonless Night paused in the hallway, wincing. They reached up to adjust that round, pale lamp in the center of their forehead. It clicked like a dial, and the white light got duller. *Night vision,* McCree realized. They were adjusting it because the generator had come back on.

“*Jesse,*” Hanzo cried again on the comm, voice hoarse and in pain.

Slowly - as he watched the Moonless Night walking towards him - McCree steadied his breath. “No,” he whispered. “Hell no. He ain’t goin’ to my funeral, not if I got a say in it.” As the Moonless Night closed in, soundless and measured, McCree reached for his belt, hand clutching a flashbang. He let the assassin come in close, until they had their daggers raised to their chin, ready to strike. The moment the Moonless Night was in range, McCree tugged the flashbang from his belt and threw it in their face.

The Moonless Night reeled a few feet back with a low, mechanical snarl.
McCree’s finger pressed on the comm as he struggled to stand. “They’re on me! In the comm building, fourth-floor hallway, outside the men’s room,” he said, stumbling back, away from the assassin.

The Moonless Night was shaking their head and grunting. The mask had a built-in pair of night-vision goggles, and McCree had just thrown a flashbang not two inches from the lens. Still clutching a dagger with their pinky and ring finger, the Moonless Night reached up and tugged the mask from their face.

Their hair was as pale as the moon; it was short-cropped, only an inch more stylish than a military haircut. Their sharp-featured face was lined with wrinkles, and they glared at him with icy severity. Even with the masculine haircut, McCree would be hard-pressed to say they were a man or woman. Out of lack of information, he’d been referring to the Moonless Night as ‘they’, but looking at them now, he figured he’d hit it right on the nose.

“Ha,” McCree barked, leaning against the wall for support, blood pouring from the wound in his back. “You fucked up now. I’ve seen yer face.”

“Dead men see nothing,” the Moonless Night snarled at him, closing the distance between them fast, brandishing their daggers again. “Crows have already pecked out your eyes.”

Their voice was still shallow, breathy like wind, but it wasn’t nearly as low as he remembered, and it had lost that electronic buzz. A voice changer in the mask, McCree realized. He reached for another flashbang, the only weapon he had left. He tossed it, but this time, the Moonless Night was ready. With an easy flick of their dagger, they knocked it away. It skittered across the floor.

Now, the Moonless Night was on him. A foot away, honey-brown eyes huge and wild, drawing wrinkles across their papery skin. Gun gone, flashbangs useless, and mobility hampered by a gunshot wound, McCree was out of escapes and defenses. Thunder crashed again from outside. “No,” he whispered. McCree put his hands up, prepared to take as many blows as he could to stop the Moonless Night from slashing his throat. This couldn’t be it. He wasn’t ready to leave.

But just when he thought the daggers would come down, the Moonless Night stopped, their head jerking up towards the stairwell behind him. Their expression of cool anger shifted to one of wide-eyed surprise. There was something eerily familiar in that transition. Had McCree seen this person before?

“Tch!” The short sound of frustration hissed from between the Moonless Night’s teeth. Before McCree could process it, they darted away, heading towards the opposite end of the hall. That’s when he heard it - quiet, rhythmic, soft-soled footsteps racing down the stairs behind him. A moment later, Hanzo was at his shoulder, hunched forward and bow drawn.

“Freeze,” Hanzo roared, his as voice deep and commanding as the thunder outside.

The Moonless Night, their back to them, slowed their run to a stop halfway down the hall.

“Drop your weapons and put your hands in the air,” Hanzo snarled next.

After a long pause, the Moonless Night rolled their pale head back, and with a sigh they tossed the two daggers on the floor. There was anger in the motion, an unkept temper in the way they lifted their hands up beside their ears. Hesitant, but without prompting, they turned around. Their eyes followed the motion last, keeping to the floor until their body had turned fully to face the pair. When they did, the Moonless Night didn’t look at McCree, but instead at the man beside him, whose bow was trained squarely at their skull. They took a step forward.
“I said freeze ,” Hanzo roared.

The Moonless Night eased out a second footfall before following Hanzo’s command. The wind from the open window at their side tousled their pale hair. Their eyes flicked up and away, as if they were afraid to look Hanzo in the face.

“Heh,” McCree gloated. “That’s right. You know him, don’t you? The one guy you couldn’t kill.”

The Moonless Night’s severe expression faltered, their eyelids fluttering. For a moment, at his side, Hanzo’s expression changed too. He was squinting hard, looking puzzled, hunched forward. Not dragoned up, but wolfed down. “Who are you?”

The Moonless Night, of all things, laughed - one short breath of amusement out of their nose as they looked Hanzo up and down. Their thin lips peeled back to show white teeth, and in a tight, harsh voice, they said, “You’re slouching .”

Thunder crashed. At McCree’s side, Hanzo reacted with his whole body. His shoulders pressed back, he straightened to his full height, his face flattened into wide-eyed shock, and his bow arm went slack.

The arrow flew - a clumsy, weaving shot flying down the hall towards the Moonless Night. They tilted their head casually to the side, and with their hand at their ear, they caught the arrow mid-air. Smug and confident, the edge of the Moonless Night’s mouth quirked up into a smirk. That was when it finally dawned on McCree.

It was a smirk he’d seen before - and yes, a face he’d seen before. Dozens on dozens of them staring at him in that shrine of a room back in Shimada Castle. Different hair colors and different posh locations, but still the same young face smirking in at him. One single framed photograph that Hanzo had left in that room, of he and Genji at a time when they were happy children. And over Hanzo’s shoulder had been a woman. She’d been pressed to Sojiro Shimada’s side, glaring with displeasure into the camera.

Damn, Genji. You look like your Momma.

As Hanzo and McCree stared, stunned, the Moonless Night twirled the arrow in their fingers and darted out of the open window, into the rainy night.

“Wait,” Hanzo gasped, dropping Storm Bow to the ground and racing after them. “Wait!”

“Hanzo-” McCree began, but Hanzo was already vaulting up over the sill.

“Kaasan!” Hanzo’s voice was choked and muffled by the sound of the pouring rain. McCree stumbled after him to the windowsill, feeling hot, sticky blood all the way down his back. But by the time he got to the window and looked out, the Moonless Night - Mitsuru Shimada - had disappeared.

And so had their eldest son.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. So this post-chapter commentary will be a little longer than most.

I started May I nearly six months ago, and had been plotting it out a while before that, so
I have been waiting for this moment for a long while. If my beta-readers' reactions were any indication, it was worth the wait! I hope it was a fun, exciting, and satisfying surprise for you guys as well (:)

I have been dropping hints about the Moonless Night's identity throughout the fic, and if you go back with the knowledge of who they are, I think these will be much more visible than on a first readthrough. At least two clever people figured it out before the reveal, and I suspect a few more as well. I got a little spooked after Keiko's motivations were found confusing at the end of act 1, so I think I played my hand a little heavy to ensure people had the important stuff fresh in their memory. I had, also, at least one person suspect that it was Genji - this is intentional. The electronic voice, Genji's mysterious behavior and questionable motives, and the suggestion that tMN might be an Omnic all existed to essentially throw you off the trail. I did, for a brief moment when I started seeing people putting the pieces together, consider actually making it Genji - but in the end, I decided to stick to my guns and play out what had been in the works from the beginning.

For my own authorial development and morbid curiosity, I'm going to run a poll on my twitter asking if you suspected the Moonless Night was Hanzo and Genji's mom(or, if you prefer the gender-neutral term, parent) ahead of time, and if so, at what point were you tipped off.

A core theme in May I, especially in the flashbacks, is parents and parental figures. For the main story, I wanted a connecting thread between the two of them in the present that reflected that. Being a sucker for Shimada Drama, it was an easy leap to make Hanzo and Genji's mother a plot figure. Instead of attaching them to Hanzo, I made them a core part of McCree's main conflict - the dangerous assassin tracking him for his bounty. Having Mitsuru's practice of killing the person at the top of the bounty list also fit very well with the other core theme of high and low - the idea of McCree afraid of "rising" to the top of the list. It also allowed for what was probably the strongest hint about the Moonless Night's identity: Hanzo sitting at the top of the list for 10+ years and going untouched.

We learn the unfortunate fate of McCree's mother in this chapter as well - I am not a fan of fridging, but ultimately this was the right path for the story and an important look into McCree and Reyes' relationship, which is mostly what McCree's flashbacks explore.

I'll be talking more about it on my stream tonight - again, I'm not going live until 9:30PM EST, just to make sure people people have a chance to read first (:)

A reminder - I am on twitter and tumblr. If you like May I, please give me a follow!

twitter

umblr
Mother May I

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone, and welcome back to May I!

First things first: **Content Warning: Emotional Manipulation & Abuse in the chapter.** There's a lot of this in this fic, but if the comments are any indication, this is one of the toughest chapters for this, so please be advised before reading.

Thanks for hanging in there over the break, I know it was a tough place to press pause, but I had some RL stuff to take care of. Thanks for sticking with me.

The response to last chapter was amazing! Thank you to everyone who read and commented, I so hope you guys are enjoying the fic's twists and turns (:)

Big thank you to my beta-readers milfordb and Doc for you valuable feedback, especially on this chapter.

I am streaming tonight - I ran a poll on my twitter seeing if you guys would like to see Overwatch, or if you'd like me to make Keiko in Saints Row 2. If you plan on joining the stream please take a moment to vote (:)

Enjoy the chapter, guys!

@mingridsmarcher

ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sojiro died in the spring.

*Inside the Shimada’s common room, the wake was all loud with sobs and coarse, growling yakuza in black suits. Outside on the veranda, though, it was cool and quiet. Petals fell from the trees into the koi pond below, a pink spatter on the water’s surface. The murmur of the crowd was far away, a white noise mixing with the feel of the breeze on Hanzo’s skin. He sat down, and leaned back against the wood of the house that now belonged to him. His absence would be noted soon, but he just needed a few minutes of quiet.*

*His father was gone, and all Hanzo wanted to do was remember him, to feel his absence and process it properly. But he no longer had time to spend on luxuries like mourning his father’s death - he was head of the Shimada Clan now. All he could afford were these few minutes of respite from his weighty responsibilities.*

Too soon, the door beside him slid open, and socked feet stepped out on the porch. Following a metallic snap, cigarette smoke pierced the clean, watery air.

“Ceremony’s going to start soon,” Kanata said, leaning one hand on a wooden support.

“I’ll come inside,” Hanzo said and started to stand.

Kanata hissed in dissent. “You have a few minutes. They won’t start without you,” she said. She took a drag from her cigarette. “I hardly know anyone in that room. Just Jiro in the box.”
“Was Genji there,” Hanzo asked. He hadn’t seen his brother come in.

“Sure. Attached to Keiko’s side, like always.”

Shoulder-to-shoulder, no matter what, Hanzo thought. Like he and Father had been. And now, as he and Kanata would be.

“They’re just standing in the corner, whispering to one another. You’d think now of all times they’d help you share the burden of greeting the guests. You lost your dad, too.”

Hanzo pressed his face into the cuffs of his suit, and said nothing.

“But I guess their prerogative was always to create burdens, not lighten them.” Kanata sighed out a cloud of cigarette smoke. “Times like this, I wish your mom hadn’t run off like she did. She had her faults, but she was disciplined at least. She might have been able to keep Genji in line. Hell, Sojiro might even have fought this thing harder if she’d still been around.”

The ghost of sharp fingers stabbed Hanzo between the shoulderblades. You’re slouching, that feeling told him. Something wasn’t right, but Hanzo didn’t have the energy in this moment to puzzle out what it was. He only hugged his knees closer, peering over his sleeves towards the pond’s windswept, rippled surface.

“I guess that’s not fair,” Kanata whispered, her voice roughspun. “I’m just worried.”

Hanzo perked up. “Worried about what?” Was this what his instincts were warning him about?

Kanata shrugged her vast shoulders and looked away. “Wish I didn’t have to talk to you about it now of all times,” she mumbled. “But you know the clan is at its most vulnerable right now - you are at your most vulnerable. You’re young. There’s a lot of experienced guys under the Shimada umbrella that might feel they’ve paid more dues than you.”

“Father was younger than I, when he took control of the clan. Nineteen, I believe.”

“Well, that’s just the thing, Han. He took control. Killed your grandma for it. Did plenty more after that, he was ruthless when he was young. The brothers remember that, so everyone was too scared to side-eye him for what Genji and Keiko did. But they just remember you being at Jiro’s elbow all the time.”

Hanzo shut his eyes, as if he could press this all out. Kanata was right. Since his mother abandoned them, Hanzo had stood at his father’s side in silence. Sojiro was a constant presence that was now gone. Kanata would sit at Hanzo’s right side now, but as much as he wished it could be so, he knew Genji would never sit at his left.

For all Hanzo’s efforts to bring Genji into the business, once Father got sick, it was the final nail in the coffin. He would rarely speak to Hanzo anymore, and when he did, it was to spout some wild conspiracy that Kanata was the one making their father sick. Beyond just foolish - Genji had become paranoid, and now actively rooted against the family’s success. The thing Kanata had warned him about had come true - Genji had strayed too far now, and Hanzo could think of nothing that would bring him back to their empire.

“You’re so young,” Kanata said, pity in her voice. “The brothers need to know you’re up for it. That you can lead the Clan.”

“It is what I have been preparing for my whole life,” Hanzo spat bitterly.
“Yeah? So have they. The guys in there, I know you don’t see ‘em much, but they’ve devoted decades of their lives to the Shimada name. They’ve spent their fortunes for it, gone to jail for it, sent their best to die for it. It’s bad enough they have to bow to a kid who grew up in a castle. How do you think those men will feel, if you keep letting Genji and Keiko to take the money they bled for and throw it away on booze and clubs? Hm?”

Hanzo got to his feet. He was too raw, nerves too stripped, to listen to this. “Keiko is your daughter. Why do you not do something about her?”

One look at the wet glint in Kanata’s eyes told Hanzo what she was about to say, and he regretted his anger. “After the funeral, I’m going to,” Kanata said. “That’s my burden. But Genji is yours.”

Tears collected in a tight ball in Hanzo’s sternum. He shook his head. Kanata’s face screwed up. In a strong, fast motion, she gathered Hanzo in her thick arms and held him to her barrel chest.

“I wish I could do it for you, my boy,” Kanata cried. “More than anything, I wish I could.” She released Hanzo too soon, and they stared at one another. He saw himself reflected in Kanata’s wet eyes. She sniffed and swallowed it back, sighing and keeping her hands tight on his shoulders. “The rank and file need to know you’ve got what it takes to rule them. They’ve got to know, that you’re not going to stand for anyone disrespecting our name, not even your own brother. You’re the master of the Shimada Clan now, Hanzo, and if you want it to stay that way, you’ve got to do what’s best for the clan, no matter what.”

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It was the middle of the night, and Hanzo had, at last, caught up with Mitsuru.

The half-moon - like a pale, swelling womb - hung overhead in a clear, star-speckled sky. The airport was hollowed out - a shell of broken windows, crumbled staircases, and weather-beaten aluminum. The red, gravelly dust of the place had covered the tarmacs like a blanket; zombie hordes of wiry plants clawed at the sides of every structure; dirt and rust traced the lines of every crevice. Hanzo found a door hanging loose from a single hinge, and went inside.

Dirt was tracked in, tip-toeing amidst broken glass. Hanzo’s careful footsteps felt deafening in the abandoned airport’s cavernous hallways. Rusty signs pointed him to meaningless terminals - a map of directions that now lead to nowhere.

A sound behind him made Hanzo start. He spun about, bowstring taut, eyes finding the movement. It wasn’t Mitsuru - it was a wolf, poised a few dozen feet away, looking as startled as he felt. Its eyes reflected at him eerily, two mirrored pools of gasoline. Then, it turned from Hanzo, and trotted away towards terminal 5C. Watching the animal’s movements amidst the man-made architecture was oddly comforting. Hanzo relaxed his bow arm.

“I know about Genji.”

The voice came from everywhere, and nowhere. In an instant, Hanzo’s bow was drawn again. He stabbed the arrowtip in every direction, trying to find the source, but the voice was already an empty echo on the airport’s walls. Hanzo ran up a long-dysfunctional escalator, looking for a higher vantage point. At the top, he found himself in a central hub that forked into three hallways of terminals.

“Do you heel to those naive creatures in Overwatch?” The voice again - that hollow wind from his
childhood. “Do you count yourself among those people - who turned your brother into that thing?” Hanzo spun around, and loosed his arrow, approximating the direction the voice had come from. It flew into a pool of darkness near the ceiling and must have hit concrete, because it clattered to the floor.

“But then, I suppose, you are as responsible as they for what he is.”

Behind him again. Hanzo reached for an arrow, but when his fingers closed around the fletching, he paused. Mitsuru’s voice, as clear in his memory as it was in this hallway, told him to observe the situation before taking action. But when he took that moment to calm himself, his brain processed what Mitsuru had said. His stomach tied into a knot. The distant, rational part of his mind hissed that this was a trap; but above that was a drowning wave of guilt.

“When I heard what had happened to him, I thought it must have been Jiro, with his intolerance for failure,” Mitsuru said. “Or Kanata, that treacherous creature, enacting her bitter revenge on my children.”

Forcing his eyes shut, Hanzo took a long, steadying breath, as he had in the practice yard of Shimada Castle. Focus, Hanzo, he told himself. Just you and the target. He slid the shaft back into its quiver, then pawed instead for a sonic arrow. Hanzo waited and listened to Mitsuru’s voice, orienting, drawing a straight line between himself and the point the sound was coming from.

“Imagine my surprise,” Mitsuru said, “when I learned that it was you.”

Letting out a breath, Hanzo’s hand went slack, and the sonic arrow sang in Mitsuru’s direction. The signal bloomed outward, and Hanzo caught the red tail of movement: a lithe, genderless body moving in the dark, escaping the sonic arrow’s range like periphery vision. Hanzo tracked the movement, lead his shot, did the math in his head. Velocity and trajectory. He fired into the dark.

In the shadows, the flash of metal and chunk of wood, then silence. Hanzo snarled and rushed to the spot. There, on the floor, he found the arrow cloven in two.

“I tried to treat you both the same,” came Mitsuru’s voice again, overhead. “But Genji was so loud, and foolish, and selfish. Nothing like you, my prodigy, my brilliant son. Quiet and disciplined, rational and cold - you had the disposition of a killer.”

That, at last, scoured away Hanzo’s self-restraint, and words spilled out of him, unbidden. “I did not want to be a killer,” he roared at the air. For a time, there was silence as Hanzo stood alone, the light of the moon knifing through the dust-caked windows of the abandoned airport.

“I know. I knew. When Genji was born, I saw you were not the cold creature that I am.” Mitsuru’s voice lilted down from the opposite end of a branching hallway, lined with terminals. Hanzo chased it, racing past shuttered shops, broken seats, and doorless bridgeways that opened to the night air.

“Sweet and measured,” they said, “listening to his endless chatter, bending to his frivolous whims.”

Hanzo focused on Mitsuru’s silhouette, rushing single-mindedly forward. Just him and his target. Then, the moment he thought he might overtake his mother, the shape darted away into the airport’s inky shadows. Always close, yet forever just out of Hanzo’s reach.
“Your father was charmed by Genji’s boisterous, outgoing nature,” Mitsuru said behind him, “but you loved him.”

Hanzo spun and shot another arrow. He caught a glimpse of Mitsuru’s shorn head leaning back, the shaft passing so close to their face that the fletching might have brushed their cheek. Hanzo drew again and aimed. “I did love him. Did you?” he demanded. “Did you love either of us?”

Another yawning silence. Enraged, Hanzo loosed another arrow, but wasn’t surprised when it struck only air.

“If I told you I did,” Mitsuru said, “would you believe me?” The sound was low, muffled, cut by the wind. It came from outside.

Hanzo turned to one of the doors and pushed it open. It felt surreal, opening a door to nothing but a sheer dropoff to the flat, abandoned runway. No sign of Mitsuru here - it was moonlit and empty.

“No,” Hanzo whispered to himself. “You left us.”

A hand like a vice clawed into Hanzo’s shoulder and tugged him back from the hollow doorway. Before he could struggle, he was pushed back against a wall. A strong forearm pressed into his throat, pinning him. And now, Mitsuru was there, staring up at him, the moonlight from the windows cutting across their wrinkled face.

“I left you,” Mitsuru roared, lip quivering. “I left you, I left you!”

As he’d chased them through the airport, Hanzo had imagined Mitsuru’s face as hard and impassive, but staring at them now, their expression was bug-eyed and manic.

“Do you know what we could have been?” Mitsuru cried. “With years more under my tutelage, how much more you could have become? The wolf and dragon, together, the world as our hunting ground. Primordial terror incarnate, the shadows cast by man’s first fire. Our names forever spoken in hushed tones, our voices visiting in nightmares. Wind and shadow, my son and I. We could have been the greatest assassins that ever lived, but I left you to take care of him.”

The words were a blade pressed full through Hanzo’s soul. He stood stunned against the wall, spirit punctured and bleeding as he stared into Mitsuru’s pained face. At last, they released him, and walked a few feet away. He stared at their back. It was just as he remembered - their mismatched arms, one strong with muscle, the other gloved and skeletal.

“You wanted to take me with you,” Hanzo said. “But you left me to watch over Genji.”

At first, Mitsuru didn’t answer, only stood before one of the terminal’s wide windows and stared out at the distant half-moon. Silvery light shone on their pale, papery skin and grizzled hair. “I could have escaped with you, my prodigy. You were old enough, and capable enough to stay out of your father’s grasp, but it would have been a close thing. Genji was just four years old, hardly more than a toddler. There was no way I could have stolen you both.”

“Why did you leave?” Hanzo asked, voice tight.

Mitsuru laughed without humor. “Why did you?”

*Because of Genji. Because of Keiko. Because of Kanata.* Guilt, alienation, the Shimada Clan’s steady decline under his rule - the reasons tangled together like kitestring, lifted by the wind of he and Genji’s duel. Eventually it all tightened around him until he couldn’t breath, and the only way to survive was to cut his way out. “Then, if you had no love for Genji, why did you leave me with
“You cared for him in all the ways I wished I could. I loved your father, but I knew well what he was, and Kanata was even worse. However I felt about Genji, he was my son too. I could not leave him alone in that pit of snakes. Never did I imagine it would swallow both of you.”

That broke the dam. Hanzo felt the hot tears in his eyes escape at last. Genji’s forgiveness he could not accept, and there was little sympathy from Overwatch. McCree and Keiko had come to understand in different ways, but only Mitsuru acknowledged that what transpired between Hanzo and Genji had broken them both.

“I’m sorry,” Hanzo cried. “I’m so sorry, Mother.”

Mitsuru turned to face him, walking close. For a moment, Hanzo thought they would reach out to him with those mismatched arms and give comfort. Instead, they wrung their hands protectively against their sternum. “No, Hanzo. Do not call me that. I gave up that name the day I left. I raised you to be a killer, and you became one. The most I can be to you now is a mentor. Perhaps, I was always incapable of being anything else.”

“What should I call you, then?”

For a time, Mitsuru chewed on the question. “Some like me choose a new name, and bury the one their parents gave them. I can understand this, but, I suppose I was lucky that my name creates no expectations the way my body did. Mitsuru will serve.”

Bitterly, Hanzo choked out, “Not ‘the Moonless Night?’”

Mitsuru did not answer his anger. “No. That is a name for those who should fear me. I know I was not warm with you, but I hope you know that I would never harm you, Hanzo.”

For the thousandth time, Hanzo dreamed of reaching out to Mitsuru himself. He had known since before he could remember, however, that Mitsuru did not accept physical affection. Just like now, they always stood just out of arm’s reach. The most he could ask for was to stand at their side.

“What happens now,” Hanzo asked, terrified that Mitsuru would reject even his presence - that they would disappear from his life again and this time, never return.

“Ah.” Mitsuru spread their arms and took one more step closer, their face mournful as they stared up at him. “My perfect son, my prodigy.” Mitsuru pressed something into Hanzo’s hand. “Go back to your Overwatch. Tell them you never found me.”

Hanzo looked down. Mitsuru had handed him one of their daggers, featherlight and black, with the shifting stone in the pommel.

“Then, on the next moonless night,” Mitsuru went on, seizing Hanzo’s gaze. “I want you to kill Jesse McCree.”
Join me for the stream tonight! I may be playing Overwatch, or making Keiko in Saint's Row 2, or maybe a bit of both!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Welcome back to May I!

Sorry for my absence last week - this chapter is a lot of action and longer than most, about 8500 words. Some RL stuff happened to hinder my usual productivity besides, on exactly the week I didn't need it to!

A word of warning to my readers - if you had difficulty reading last chapter, please at least prepare yourself for this chapter as well. We are in the part of the story where a lot of bad things happen one after another. Things will get better when we hit act 3, but for now, it's going to be a lot of bad on bad, so please mentally prepare yourself. I will say there's no displayed familial manipulation in this chapter, but there's certainly Bad Stuff with a capital BS. This fic was never intended to be fluffy, and we're in the hardest portion, so if you have to stop reading for your own well-being, please do so. Only read if you enjoy it! Do not feel bad about stopping if you DON'T enjoy it!

To all my commentors, thank you so much for your input<3 I know I've been very bad about replying lately, but it's just because there's so many amazing and wonderful comments I have a hard time catching up! But I read and appreciate every single one, thank you so much <3

Another big thanks to my beta readers as well - milfordb, Doc, Chiptooth and Jae. Thank you guys for helping me out and suffering my terrible puns!

I am streaming tonight! I had a tough day so I will be inexcusably drunk, so it should be fun :P

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sitting on the cold linoleum of Watchpoint: Grand Mesa's floor, leaned against the wall, listening to two people yelling at one another, McCree felt like a kid again. Seven years old, Ma and Pa growling like fight dogs, yellings things they should have whispered. Thirty-two and hearing the 00's of O-dub and B-dub airing their laundry from the ostensible privacy of Morrison's thin office door.

"We can't ignore this, Jack," Reyes growled in his eight-cylinder voice. "The UN getting under-the-table payments from corporations to send Overwatch to specific locations? That means money's deciding what places in the world deserve peace."

"The UN doesn't decide where we go, Reyes," Morrison declared. "I do."

"But they put pressure on you, yeah? And what about this charity - I've never heard of them. They're cleaning the money but it's more than that. Look at the dates-"

"You sound like a conspiracy theorist right now. We know nothing about the person who sent you
these files. Athena can’t trace the email, no name attached except ‘shadow’ which is clearly fake. We can’t trust this intel.”

“All the information is verifiable, Jack. And the fact that Athena can’t trace this email is more than enough to tell me this source is the real deal. We have to confront the UN about this.”

“You mean I have to,” Morrison said.

“Well we know they won’t listen to me, statue boy.”

“Because I know better than to come to them with hair-brained theories or wild accusations. You used to as well. Listen, Reyes. I don’t want to have to bring this up—”

“Jack,” Reyes warned.

“-but you've been acting strange ever since… ever since we lost Ana in Poland.”

“Ever since you left her in Poland, you mean.”

“She was down, Reyes. I had eight other agents to worry about. Ana would have wanted them—”

“Don’t talk about what Ana would have wanted,” Reyes snarled. “You don’t get to forgive yourself by imagining her dying wish. You wouldn’t know, because you weren’t there.” The door exploded open, swinging wide and slamming against the wall. Reyes froze when he saw McCree seated on the floor outside. With a grimace, Reyes turned and marched down the hall towards the HQ’s locker room. McCree stood and followed.

Reyes made it into the locker room before he punched something. The locker door thundered with the impact, and when he pulled his fist away, the metal was bowed - a mold of a fist.

Both walls of the room were lined with lockers. On the left wall, each one had a nameplate and an Overwatch sigil screwed into the face. Branded.

McCree’s locker was on the opposite wall, along with Genji’s, and Reyes’ and the rest of Blackwatch. Those lockers had numbers instead of nameplates. They never made a metal badge of Blackwatch’s stealth jet, its dagger in the dark, because Blackwatch wasn’t supposed to exist. The two walls of lockers faced each other - us against them.

“You were close with Ana, weren’t you?” Reyes said to the dent in the locker.

McCree shuffled his feet. “She just showed me a couple-”

“Cut the shit.”

After a beat, McCree said, “Yeah. We got close.”

“Fareeha and Angela too.”

“Yeah,” McCree said, looking at his feet.

Reyes walked over to the locker on the far corner of the wall, the one with the nameplate “Jack Morrison.” Next to it, a locker with two empty screw-holes, framed by a rectangle of unfaded paint the exact size of the name “Ana Amari;” across from it on the opposite wall, locker 00 - Reyes’ locker.

Reyes traced the Overwatch symbol on Morrison’s locker with his index finger. “Feels good at
first,” he said. “It’s more than just trust, when you’re military. It’s brotherhood. They watch your back in battle, and you know each other so well, it’s like having eyes in the back of your head. They’ve seen what you’ve seen, know what you’ve been through, I mean actually know.” Reyes dug his fingernail into the top screw of the Overwatch badge on Morrison’s locker and twisted.

“It’s more than trust,” Reyes went on, “and when they turn your back on you, it’s more than betrayal. That’s why it’s better never to trust to begin with. Us against them, that’s the way to look at it. Then it doesn’t hurt so bad when they step on your shoulders on the climb up.”

“She was the only one,” Reyes said. “And Jack left her.”

“But that’s part of bein’ a commander, ain’t it,” McCree asked. “Given the choice between eight guys n’ me, you’d leave me too.”

Reyes at last looked up from the Overwatch badge on Morrison’s locker, now twisted halfway out of its anchor. He stared at McCree for a long moment, face wrinkled up, goatee making a circle when his lips parted. At last, he looked away. “No,” he said.

“Ana didn’t do that,” McCree said.

“Ana was worth more than eight rookies,” Reyes said, “and so are you.”

Anything McCree thought to say sounded foolish before it hit his tongue. His chest tightened, and he stared at the bright rectangle on the locker where Ana’s nameplate used to be. A felt-tipped name scrawled across his forehead over and over. It was a different name every time: Paulina Alvarado; Josephine Carter; Ana Amari. Three names for two dead women that both meant one thing to him. Reyes went back to the screw.

Pawing for a change of subject, McCree landed on “Your birthday’s comin’ up. Know what you’re going to get yerself this year?”

Reyes didn’t look at him. He was fixated on the screw, now protruding out from the metal of the Overwatch seal. Reyes twisted his wrist a few more times and said, “I’ve got something in mind.” With one last turn, the screw tipped out from its anchor and tinkled to the floor. With just the bottom screw to hold it to the locker door, the seal rotated upside-down - reversed - swinging from the screw that had before been at the bottom. “We launch for Swiss HQ in twenty. Let’s get the jet.” Reyes brushed past McCree’s shoulder and walked to the door.

Before leaving, McCree spared one last glance at Morrison’s locker. The Overwatch badge, now upside-down, reminded McCree of the black-and-red symbol that had been at the top of the paperwork he’d signed all those years ago, when he was just seventeen. Reversed, the Overwatch sigil became Blackwatch.

“You coming,” Reyes asked from the doorway behind him.

“Yeah, boss,” McCree said absent-mindedly. “I’m comin’.”

Watchpoint: Gibraltar was quiet that morning. Slate clouds blocked the sun from coming in through the windows, making the whole building feel dim; desaturated. McCree walked shoulder-to-shoulder with Genji down the hall towards the common room.
“Do you know what this meeting is about,” Genji asked.

“Naw,” McCree answered. “Winston sounded real nervous when he called it in.”

“Ah, but he always sounds like that!” There was a smile in the sound of Genji’s voice. McCree wasn’t sure how he could be so chipper, all things considered.

“Maybe it’s about Hanzo,” McCree muttered.

*Hanzo.* The thought of his name made McCree’s heart ache - a dull bruise, bleeding under the skin. Longer than a week with no word, and they’d looked. McCree had called every police station from here to Instanbul looking for reports on Hanzo or Mitsuru, and Athena was running a constant search on security camera footage and news reports. Maybe this meeting meant that she’d found him, but in his heart, McCree doubted it. No one would find Hanzo if he didn’t want to be found.

“Perhaps it is,” Genji said, in a tone that told McCree he felt the same way. “I feel as if I should have asked earlier… how are you holding up?”

“Me?” McCree laughed. “Well, the assassin I been scared shitless of for a decade turned out to be my man’s mom, but hell, it wouldn’t be Overwatch again without some twisted shit goin’ on.” He smiled wanly. “She’s your Ma, not mine. Think I’m the one who should be askin’ you if you’re alright.”

Genji shook his head. “I never knew Mitsuru, and from the stories my family told, I never wished to. But Hanzo… they were very close. I am not surprised he went after her.”

“What d’you think he’ll do when he finds her?” McCree tried to keep the worry from his voice.

“Assuming he does find her?” Genji said. “I cannot be sure. There was a time I would have said he would do anything Mitsuru told him to, but he has changed since coming to Overwatch.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. For the better, I believe. He has always been an isolated man, but I would not call him independent. He relied on others to know what was best for our family. Now, I think he is seeing the value in choosing his own path.”

McCree smiled to himself, remembering Hanzo’s wet hair outside the door to his hotel room. *I do not wish to blindly follow anyone ever again.* Now, just like then, McCree wanted to kiss Hanzo and found that he couldn’t. His smile soured.

“You care about him very much, don’t you?” Genji’s voice startled McCree out of the memory.

He felt a little sheepish. “Ah, well…”

Genji tilted his head. “Do me a favor,” he said.

McCree looked up.

“Just be there for him. Too long the ones who should have looked after him used him instead. He deserves to be taken care of, for once.”

“Ah, Genji, don’t you worry about that. After all the back ‘n forth I put him through, I plan to spoil that man rotten. Besides, you’ll be around to take care of him now, too.”

Genji’s visor made him expressionless, and the lighting made it dim and grey. He didn’t answer, only
looked from McCree to the open door of the common room. A man’s newsroom cadence was seeping out into the hallway. As they got closer to the doorway, McCree made out the words “live report from Nepal.”

From the way Genji’s posture changed, he’d heard it too. He outstripped McCree’s pace and disappeared into the common room. McCree followed after him.

Many were already there: Lucio on the couch, hugging a throw pillow and shaking his head. Hana beside him with one hand on his shoulder, face drawn; Reinhardt and Torbjorn leaning against the wall in one corner, exchanging looks; Mercy standing in the middle of the carpet, the fingers of one graceful hand over her pink lips; Tracer next to her, enclosing her mouth with both hands like she was trying to hold in a scream. Everyone was staring at the common room’s big widescreen - all except for Winston, who was staring at Genji.

Genji had stopped two steps in, his posture stooped. McCree could see his lungs expand and contract under his synthetic armor. His visored face was inclined up at the news report.

Following his gaze, McCree walked to his side. “Ah, hell…”

That comment got everyone’s attention. They turned to look. When Tracer spied Genji, she absconded from Mercy’s side and threw her arms around Genji’s shoulders. “Genj, it’s… it’s horrible. First Mondatta and now this. Why can’t they just leave them alone?”

Genji said nothing, visored face fixed on the screen. McCree stared at the dark pillar of smoke, a black slash across the pale, snowy mountaintop. “For those of you just joining us,” the salt-and-pepper newsman said, “This is live footage from Nepal, the site of the peaceful Omnic Rights group called the Shambali, once lead by the recently-assassinated Tekhartha Mondatta. The religious group is under what authorities are citing as a terrorist attack.”

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Frost reached out across the hoverjet’s windows like forking lightning, a testament to Nepal’s bitter cold. McCree sat in his seat watching the holoscreen in the corner. The news broadcast showed an aerial view of the Shambali temple, nestled atop the Himalayan peak. A cone of smoke reached up from it, greying the blue sky. McCree looked from the screen to the hoverjet’s window. The view was the same.

Beside him, Genji sat transfixed by the news report, silent under his expressionless mask.

“Just like old times,” McCree commented, “eh Genji?”

Genji turned to him, startled. “Huh? Oh. Yes.” He looked back to the holoscreen.

“Hey,” McCree prodded.

That only earned him a slight tilt of the head from Genji. “Hm?”

“You good?”

“Ah…” After a moment, Genji turned to face him. “I wish I was surprised.” What expression Genji was making behind his visor, McCree couldn’t guess.

“Terrorists are everywhere. Just like when Gabe sent me to London. You remember?”

Genji tilted his head. “You think Null Sector is the same as humans bombing an Omnic religious
temple?"

That made McCree wince. “No two things are the same, but Null Sector were terrorists. They killed a lot of folks.”

“Omnics were being oppressed in London. Mandatory registration, forced into slums - killing Omnics was still called ‘dismantling.’ It was a misdemeanor. You don’t think they had a right to be angry?”

“No sayin’ people can’t be angry, Genji. The Omnics tried to exterminate the human race - I’d say humans got a right to be angry about that. Don’t mean violence is the way to solve that problem.”

Genji hummed and looked back at the news report.

“We’re above the monastery now,” chirped Tracer over the hoverjet’s speakers. “Prep for landing.”

McCree pulled his buckle down. He could hear muffled explosions, and wasn’t sure if it was coming from the television or the monastery outside. No sooner had he clicked the buckle into place than the hoverjet jerked hard to the right. A loud whistling shrieked by and McCree saw something pass the windows.

“They’ve got anti-air weapons,” Tracer cried over the comm. “I’m taking her down!”

The jet pitched into a sudden dive, and McCree’s stomach flew up to his throat. Another whistling sound of a missile barely missing their tail.

“Reminds me of riding motorcycles in Hanamura,” Genji said, nostalgic.

McCree was sure his face was greener than Genji’s visor right about now. “That’s nice for ya’,” he gurgled out, white-knuckling the side of his chair. The ship rolled fast, and McCree thought he might lose his lunch. Another telltale whistle, but this time it didn’t pass them by. A flare of sparks crackled in the window and the entire jet jolted, yawing in three rotations before Tracer got it straightened up.

“We’re hit, anterior exhaust, left side,” Tracer chirped over the comm. “I’m putting her down. Athena, broadcast coords to HQ.”

McCree dug his spurs into the hoverjet’s floor, pressed his scalp into the back of his chair, squeezed his eyes shut and tried to press down the thought of the ship plummeting into the side of a mountain.

The impact lifted McCree’s ass off the seat, then slammed it back again so hard he thought he might have busted his tailbone. Snow sprayed past the windows like ocean waves as the ship slowed to a shrieking-metal stop. For a moment, blessed silence. Then with a hiss, the bay door started to raise open.

“That was exciting,” Genji said. McCree could hear the smile in his voice and glared at him, doubled over in his seat. The cockpit door slid open, and with a blue blur, Tracer darted past them and out the half-open bay door.

With a sigh, McCree snapped his buckle loose and fell out of his seat onto the floor. When he looked up, Genji’s mechanical hand was held out - a silent offer to help him up. McCree chuckled and took it, letting Genji lift him to his feet. They hopped off the jet and into the snow.

Tracer was already pulling up the hoverjet’s exhaust panel. “It’s not in great shape,” she said, waving smoke out of her face.
“Winston,” McCree said into his comm. “Ship’s down, but we’re not far from our initial LZ. I have visual on the Shambali temple. What’re your orders?”

“Well, uhm, I can send a drone to perform the repairs, of course, but Lena, you’ll have to stay and initialize it.”

“What about the temple?” Genji urged, sharp and impatient.

“Oh! Right, right, of course. Mission is go - you two get to the Shambali temple and help the monks. I’ll send Tracer in for backup once we know the jet is stabilized.”

“Affirmative, Winston,” McCree said, adding some warmth to his response to balance Genji. With a shared nod, the two left Tracer with the jet and made their way up the frigid mountainside, following the black pillar of smoke like a north star.

McCree pulled the wool of his serape up over his nose to protect from the biting cold.

Genji seemed unaffected by the temperature, too busy jogging ahead towards the temple. The rumble of fighting lilted in the distance.

The snow was wet in McCree’s boots, freezing his toes. He was huffing out clouds of warm air by the time they reached the temple walls. Genji scaled it without a word. McCree heard him land on the other side.

“Go around the corner,” Genji called from the opposite side. “There’s an entry point.”

“You got it,” McCree said, and traced the line of the wall. He turned the corner, and spied Genji’s entry point.

The clean, geometric wall of the Shambali temple was punched through, smoking and crumbling with fresh destruction. McCree surveyed it, pushing his hat up from his forehead. Genji was visible on the opposite side of the broken wall, facing him. McCree frowned to him in sympathy.

As always, Genji’s expression was hidden by his visor. “Something is in the shrine,” he whispered, pointing to the distant, open structure in the center of the temple. McCree could see a fat and blurry object sitting under its roof, beside the main central support.

Pawing his various pouches, McCree at last fished out his binoculars and pointed them at the shrine to get a closer look. The gasp came out as a puff of smoke.

It looked just like the one from the basement of the ramen shop - fat and oblong, pill-shaped and white. McCree couldn’t read the writing from this distance, but he’d bet his boots it was one of Keiko’s EMPs.

There, standing beside it, was a stately figure in a long, black coat. It stood on two metallic feet, shoulders back and chin high, electric-blue lights dotting its slim frame.

“Is that one of your monks,” McCree asked, passing the binoculars to Genji.

Genji took the binoculars and pressed them to his visor. A second later, his posture straightened. “No, but I recognize her,” he said, astonished. He passed the binoculars back to McCree. “Ms. Oxton and I ran into her in New York after the omnic peace conference at the UN. She has some kind of discord power - she overloaded my systems with this mass of code. That was when my comm system stopped working. If Ms. Oxton had not been there to hard-restart my systems, I would have died.”
“Hell,” McCree muttered. “What’s her deal? Why’s she here?”

“She’s an Omnic rights extremist. Believes humans are inferior. I would not be surprised if she was a proponent of extermination.”

“Extermination?”

Genji stared at him.

“Oh…” McCree swallowed. “Well, if that’s the case, why’s she attacking a Shambali temple?”

Genji didn’t answer.

“…she is here to attack it, ain’t she?”

“Look at what’s happening. Mondotta was assassinated and Zenyatta is missing. Without leadership, and with all that’s going on lately…”

“The Omniums reactivating, you mean,” McCree said with bite.

“That has turned the public against normal Omnics that would never hurt humans. They are being beaten in the streets. They have to defend themselves somehow.”

“Never hurt humans? You just said this gal wants to exterminate the human race. And, it don’t explain why she’d standin’ next to an EMP planted in the middle of an Omnic sanctuary.”

Genji had no answer to that. “I am going to move in closer,” he said. “I want to see what she is up to.”

“Genji!” McCree hissed at his back. “Ain’t you said she near killed you before?”

But Genji was already halfway to the shrine, his puckish voice crackling over the comm. “Go scout the rest of the sanctuary for survivors - they will likely be trying to hold the temple. I will be careful! Not to worry.”

That assurance only deepened McCree’s frown, watching Genji run off on his own. “Just like old times,” he muttered. *Wish Hanzo was here. He’d take down that Omnic gal with one arrow if she looked at Genji the wrong way.* It brought up a bit of pride, followed quickly by that familiar ache. His empty arms, the silence instead of Hanzo’s low voice.

While Genji approached the shrine, McCree kept to the walls, searching for a way deeper into the sanctuary. He found an open gate that lead to a pale, gravel pathway.

The path was sharp and nonsensical, an example of architecture made for machines and not humans. It eventually opened up to a wide path flanked on both sides by massive, floating statues of Omnics. McCree wasn’t good at telling Omnics apart, but he recognized one of the cleaner statues as the Shambali’s former leader, Mondatta. Down at the end of the path was building that had to be the temple Genji had mentioned. The rattle of gunfire sounded quiet from out here - there was a battle going on inside the temple. He jogged down the path and snuck in.

The temple was wide open, with a few small enclaves on each of its four sides. In the center was a square platform over a bottomless pit of what looked like servers. The platform was the stage for a fight. The star players were two familiar figures - one in purple, the other in black. They were fighting a few Shambali monks. It became clear in a few seconds that the Omnics were outmatched.
The girl, who was facing his direction, McCree recognized quickly. It was that purple-haired hacker from Hanamura, the one Reaper had called Sombra. With that information, it wasn’t hard to figure out who the man in black was.

It was confirmed when he spun about to shoot another Omnic, his bone-white mask facing McCree. Reaper.

Only two Omnics left now. With a flourish of her sharp-nailed hand, Sombra’s form shimmered pink, then disappeared completely, leaving Reaper to deal with them both. They didn’t give him any trouble - he marched towards them implacably, shotguns raised. Fearless. How Reyes used to fight. McCree’s headset crackled.

“I’ve got some good news,” came Winston’s voice over the comm. “We have a new agent, and she’s on her way to-”

With a mechanical beep, the headset cut out. McCree tapped the device, then noticed the lights on his flashbangs had changed from blue to red. Behind him, McCree heard a sound like a chime. He spun in time to see the shimmering pink of Sombra appearing at his side. She smirked her purple lips, then pushed him out of his hiding spot.

“Look who I found, Boss,” Sombra purred, walking up behind McCree.

Reaper turned, cracked his neck, and drifted closer. The two were surrounding him.

Peacekeeper was out of McCree’s holster, but before his finger found the trigger, the barrel of Sombra’s SMG pressed against his kidney.

“Got you,” Sombra said resting her chin on McCree’s shoulder. “Where’s your friend?”

Without taking his eyes off Reaper’s mask, McCree said, “Don’t know what you mean.”

“Nice try,” Reaper said. “He alone?”

McCree made himself glare. “Naw. Tracer’s with him.”

“Funny, then, that I’ve got her at your LZ and Genji’s nowhere to be seen.” Sombra reached a hand over McCree’s shoulder. Her gloved, nailed hands expanded out a holoscreen in the air. It was a fuzzy camera view of Tracer still working on the hoverjet’s engine.

McCree glared for real this time. Reaper raised one of those enormous, familiar shotguns. Sombra twirled around to stand beside Reaper, folding her arms and smirking.

Reaper nodded to her. She nodded back, then blew McCree a kiss as she faded into invisibility.

Just McCree and Reaper now. If he got this dramatic asshole talking, McCree could buy Tracer, and the new mystery agent, some time. Besides, after Japan, McCree had questions. “Before ya’ shoot me, mind telling me who you are, and what Talon’s doing here?”

Reaper tilted his hooded head at McCree, then the doors blew open. A swarm of omnic monks poured in, walking or floating towards Reaper and McCree.

“You want to know?” Reaper said as the Omnis approached. “Then kill me.”

That threw McCree off. “What?”
One of the Omnics launched a ball of electric energy towards Reaper. He tilted his head and it flew over his shoulder. “Kill me.”
“How you gonna tell me what’s goin’ down if you’re dead?”

The Omnics were closing in now, flooding in behind Reaper, metal feet tinkling on the stone floor like bells. “You’ll see,” he said.

McCree hesitated for only a beat before snapping out Peacekeeper. He unloaded six sharp shots into Reaper’s chest. But the black body turned to black smoke, and the bullets flew through Reaper incorporeal form, leaving him unharmed. As he reformed, he raised a shotgun.

“Shit.” McCree rolled forward, reloading as shotgun pellets shredded the hem of his serape. He froze on his knees. Reaper turned to face him. McCree showed his teeth to the skeletal mask.

The Omnics swarmed to either of Reaper’s sides. He crossed the shotguns in front of him like a corpse in a coffin, and blew away the pair of Omnics that had made it to his shoulders.

The flashbang, a paper-thin aluminum tube, tugged off McCree’s belt with satisfying resistance. He tossed it in Reaper’s masked face, then unloaded all six chambers again.

McCree was already reloading as Reaper stumbled back, clutching his middle. A ball of energy whizzed past Reaper and slammed McCree in the side. It was a sharp, firework pain that told him he’d have a hell of a bruise there in the morning. He put up his hands. “Hey now, I’m on your side-”

Another blue sphere slammed into his shoulder with a crack, and McCree stumbled back. “What the hell?!” He ducked and dodged the next two shots, and now the Omnics were nearly on him. “Don’t do this - He’s the bad guy, not me,” he tried to explain. But McCree was human - considering what Overwatch had dropped him into, maybe that was enough for the Omnics to kill him on sight. One floated up and kicked at his solar-plexus. McCree caught the foot with his mechanical hand. “Doggone it - now just listen to-”

The Omnic exploded in a shower of circuits and wires, and McCree went from holding its leg back to just holding it. He grimaced and dropped the mechanical limb, looking up to see the barrel of Reaper’s shotgun smoking, aimed where the Omnic used to be. When McCree looked past him, he saw the dozen Shambali Omnics charging their energy. It was hard to tell with Omnics, but McCree was pretty sure they were pissed. He realized now the move had looked like he and Reaper had been working together.

A charged volley of energy orbs shot towards them. McCree and Reaper dodged them in concert, like a mirror and its reflection. Reaper swooped forward and started dispatching them one by one. He wasn’t, however, paying any mind to the one in the back, readying another volley like the one McCree had just barely dodged.

Without time to think, McCree shot the Omnic’s hand, stopping its charge. Shit, he thought. This wasn’t going how it was supposed to at all. Turning about, McCree realized four Omnics had flanked him. He backed away from them. His shoulders bumped something. It felt like clothed flesh - had the give, but not the warmth. McCree looked over his shoulder. He was back to back with Reaper.

The Omnics attacked. McCree had no choice but to fight.

It was strange how easily he fell into it. He and Reaper moved like choreography, practiced muscle memory. They each knew each other’s moves before they made them, justified and balanced. Once, McCree shot an Omnic who was aiming an orb of destruction at Reaper. More than once, Reaper
dispatched an Omnic who had been aiming for McCree. Before he knew it, the Shambali forces were nothing more than shattered circuits littering the floor of the temple.

Over his shoulder came that eight-cylinder voice. “Just like old times,” Reaper purred like a foot on the gas. And it was. It was just like Blackwatch.

McCree spun on his spurs to face him. “Who are you?”

Reaper turned ponderously, staring at McCree from beneath the bleached cow-skull of a mask. A dead thing picked clean. “You already know,” Reaper said, pressing the barrel of his shotgun to McCree’s shoulder, “Vaquero.”

As Reaper pulled the trigger, McCree finally remembered where he’d seen those shotguns before.

Muscle-memory made him dodge, but not fast enough. The blast clipped him, shredding a hole in his serape and shirt and shoulder. McCree emptied the remaining chambers of his revolver into Reaper as he stumbled back, trying to push out the pain and stay standing. But while McCree had a limit to the amount of blood he could lose, Reaper had no shortage dead bodies he could use to regenerate. Red essence streamed viscous from the bodies of the Omnics they’d killed together, and flowed into Reaper’s black coat.

Then, over Reaper’s shoulder, McCree spied a glimmer of hope: the glint of light reflected on a sword named Ryu-Ichimonji.

“Genji,” McCree gasped.

Genji marched into room with weapon drawn, coming up behind Reaper. He stepped over the shattered parts of the Shambali Omnics without taking his sights from McCree. Odd… it wasn’t glowing green, but red; in fact, all the lighting on his cybernetic body was a pulsated with ruby light.

“Genji!” McCree repeated, “Thank my lucky stars. Keep him busy while I reload.” McCree dumped the hollow shells out of his revolver. Genji moved ponderously towards Reaper’s hunched back. As McCree slid the six bullets into their chambers, he said, “Could you hurry it up, Genji? Stop him before he regenerates—”

Genji did stop - silent and expressionless, at Reaper’s side.

“What’re you doin’? Stab the son of a bitch!”

At Genji’s shoulder, Reaper’s body unfurled until he was standing upright.

McCree glared. “Fine. I’ll do it.” He popped off three well-aimed, rattler-fast shots at Reaper’s chest. The bullets flew back at him - one grazed his scalp, the other punched into his gut. Faster than a bullet, Genji had put himself between McCree and Reaper, and reflected the shots. The wakizashi sang with vibration, then quieted as Genji returned it to its saya.

“What the hell?” McCree gasped. That old cynical Blackwatch agent, Reyes’ voice in the back of his mind, told McCree that he already knew what. Still he asked, “Genji, what are you doin’?”

Under the hood, Reaper dipped his head as Genji stepped back to stand at his side, limned in red.

“No… Genji, no.”

Those two familiar shotguns materialized in Reaper’s clawed hands. He’d regenerated fully now.
“We were in Blackwatch together,” McCree said. “Before they snatched you up for O-dub, we-”

Reaper walked towards him.

Sparing a look at Genji’s expressionless visor, McCree shot Reaper once in the chest.

Reaper kept coming.

Another shot, but it only caused Reaper’s black body to lurch. Smoke poured out of the wound. It paused his implacable march, but didn’t stop it.

The last bullet caught Reaper in the face, chipping off the lower half of that bleached-skull mask. With horror, McCree could see now that the face underneath was grinning ear-to-ear.

“My God,” McCree gasped.

Reaper raised his shotgun to McCree’s face, and etched on the barrel, like it was fresh from the machine, were the words exactly as McCree remembered.

*Happy Birthday, from Jack and Ana.*

The explosion was like a fighter-jet, big and piercing-loud, wind and percussion. It knocked McCree back onto his ass and sent him rolling. Wincing, he sat up in time to see Reaper’s black coat whipping around his rolling body as he landed a few dozen feet away. Genji had raised his wakizashi and was looking about, searching. But he wasn’t looking on the ground - he was looking up at the ceiling.

Like a fighter jet - that was the sound as the blue streak hammered down on the ground before him. The platform shook with the force of the figure, armored head-to-toe in sharp, sapphire armor.

The voice was strong but pleasant and familiar, like the call of a bird. “You alright, McCree?”

“Fareeha? Darlin’, is that you?”

The hawkish helm turned, and beneath the alloy beak, McCree spotted the bottom tip of an Eye of Horus above a confident smirk. “We’re both Overwatch agents now,” Pharah said.

Across the room, Reaper was rising with a snarl. Then, the pepper of pulse fire and Reaper’s back exploded with a burst of smoke. In a blue blink, Tracer went from behind to in front of Reaper, and unloaded a full clip of into his face. He growled and dissipated into smoke.

“The dropship’s almost back online,” Pharah told McCree.

In a blink, Tracer was beside them. “But they’re going to blow that EMP. If we’re here when it goes, the ship’s gone and we’re trapped on top of a mountain. We have to go.” Tracer turned to face Genji, who was standing in the center of the platform, sword drawn. “Come on, Genji.”

Genji flourished his blade and backed up, swathed in Reaper’s steadily-reforming, black smoke.

“Genj… did you hear what I said?” Tracer insisted. “We’re fleshy, we can’t survive up here if the infrastructure goes down. We have to go, luv.”

McCree looked to Pharah, unable to read her expression beneath the hood of her helmet. “Ms. Tracer,” he said, putting his hand on Tracer’s shoulder. “He’s…”

The dark smoke swirled around Genji until all that could be seen were the dots of red light and the
“Genji,” Tracer gasped. She tried to take a step towards him, but McCree clutched her shoulder, holding her back.

“Come on, Lena,” Pharah said. “We have to go.”

McCree and Pharah dragged a reluctant Tracer away as Genji disappeared amidst the cloud of black smoke.

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Blood traced a line in the snow from the Shambali temple to the hoverjet, seeping out from McCree’s wounds as Pharah and Tracer carried him towards the hoverjet.

“We’ll get to patched up soon,” Pharah said, her muscled arms doing most of the heavy lifting between her and Tracer. McCree kept trying to sneak a peek at her face underneath the helmet. She looked so grown up, and so, so much like Ana used to. He felt a turn in his gut as he thought of the words etched on Reaper’s shotgun, and he stumbled.

“Might need more than a medkit to make it back to Gibraltar in one piece,” McCree rasped.

“We have a medic on the ship… of sorts.” Beneath the helmet, McCree could see the edge of Pharah’s mouth twitch into a smirk.

“Yeah? Angie? Or Lucio?”

“No.” Now, Pharah full-on smiled. Looking up at under the helmet, McCree could see the bottom of her eyes - could see them glittering wet.

“If not them, then who?”

“You’ll see,” Pharah said. “Though, I don’t know that you will believe it. I hardly believe it myself.” They crested the hill and came upon the hoverjet. Winston’s promised drone was there repairing the jet’s damage, flitting back and forth amidst the jet’s open guts. Tracer zipped ahead to check the diagnostics. Pharah carried McCree the rest of the way, then punched the button to open the bay door.

“How’d you get up here,” McCree asked. “You fly with those jump-jets o’ yours?”

“At this altitude? Not a chance. We got dropped in.” Pharah nodded to a broken pod, scorched to hell and broken apart in the snow a few yards away. “Heard no end of complaints about it, too. ‘Oh, I’m too old for this crap!’” Then, Pharah said something short and harsh in Arabic that McCree was pretty sure was a curse. “I swear, old age gave her a foul mouth.”

The bay door to the hoverjet was open now. Inside the ship, at the table where McCree had passed endless travel hours playing cards and drinking whiskey, sat a woman. She had thin shoulders and a long, tan coat, touched with sharp darts of cobalt blue. Her hood was up, but a weft of snowy-white hair washed out from the hem like a wave cresting a shore. The ship had the nostalgic scent of cardamom tea that reminded McCree of early evenings in the Overwatch practice range; reminded him of the papery wrinkles at the edge of a wry smile.

“Close that door, Fareeha!” The voice was like hot alcohol, running down his gullet and into his belly. “It’s freezing up here. That wind will go right through me!”
“Sorry, Mother,” Pharah said, and closed the bay door behind them. “Could you help me with him?”

“W… what did you just call her,” McCree asked, and then the woman at the table turned around.

The same heart-shaped face. The same thin lips, going from flat to a tight “o.” The same knowing, hawklike gaze that seemed to look through him. Her skin was more wrinkled, her hair whiter than it had been, but without a doubt - it was her.

It was Ana Amari.

“Oh, look at you,” Ana crooned, setting down her teacup and shaking her pale head. “You’re a mess, Jesse! My first mission back and you’ve done this to me. Inconsiderate.” She hefted a strange-looking rifle and snapped a golden vial out from the chamber. It had, of all things, a needle. “Come here, come here, sit down, that’s right.”

Then McCree was in her lap, looking up at her papery face as she rolled up his sleeve and prodded for a vein. “Ah, I was never good at this part,” Ana said. “I can aim at anything except a vein! Ah, here we are.” As she pressed down on the plunger, sunshine-warmth rushed into McCree’s arm and splayed out across his body. His wounds started to feel numb and warm; it was just like being shot with Mercy’s caduceus, except nearly instantaneous.

“It ain’t you,” McCree said. “It can’t be.”

“And yet, here I am,” Ana said good-naturedly, smiling down at him like she’d seen everything.

“But you were dead. Morrison left you in Poland.”

“Oh-ho. You can’t get rid of me that easy,” Ana said.

“You… both of you…”

Ana’s smile faded. “You saw the Reaper…” she said, and he saw her wrinkled throat pulse as she swallowed. Then, she slapped his shoulder. “Alright, that’s enough. You should be feeling better now. Let’s get him in his seat, Fareeha.”

McCree felt himself being lifted again and set in the ship’s chair. McCree stared across the room at Ana as she and Fareeha sat beside each other in the seats across from him. He couldn’t stop staring at them.

Athena’s sigil bloomed up on the jet’s many. “Triage repairs will be completed shortly. We have approximately 4 minutes and 42 seconds until the EMP is activated. We must be out of its range before then.” Athena’s logo disappeared from one of the screens, replaced by a timer. “You have an incoming call from Watchpoint.”

McCree looked up, waiting for someone to tell Athena to answer it. Pharah looked to him. Ana raised her pale eyebrows and sipped her tea.

“Uhm… Well, go ahead and answer,” McCree said.

The holoscreen blipped, and Winston’s face appeared on the screen next to the timer. It read 4 minutes, 28 seconds.

“Pharah sent me a report of what happened on the ground,” Winston said, adjusting his glasses. “But I’d love to hear it from you, Jesse.” It sounded like being scolded.
McCree swallowed. “We didn’t stop the bomb.”

“And where’s Genji?” From Winston’s hard expression, McCree was sure he already knew.

“He’s… with them,” was all McCree could manage.

“They captured him?” Ana asked.

“No, Mother…” Pharah said.

Now, Ana sighed and leaned her head back against her seat. “He defected…” Somehow, she sounded surprised and unsurprised at once.

“Three minutes until EMP is activated,” Athena said.

Through the bay door’s frosted window, McCree saw a distant, flat, black shape slide through the pale blue sky. “What is that?”

Athena answered. “A stealth jet. This model has been present at a number of Talon attacks. I detect four life forms on board.”


“One life form is an Omnica Tekhartha unit,” Athena reported.

“We saw her by the EMP. Genji said she was some kinda omnic rights extremist.”

“If we can trust anything Genji told us at this point,” Winston muttered. “What else, Athena?”

“One life form is 80% organic matter and 20% cybernetic enhancements.”

“Must be that hacker girl. Sombra.”

“One life form is not easily quantifiable in terms of structure. There are no vital signs, but I do detect organic matter in their makeup. I do not have enough data to quantify this life form further.”

“Reaper,” Ana whispered, exchanging a worried look with McCree.

“The final life form is 25% organic and 75% cybernetic. I have this life form’s organic makeup on file in Overwatch’s database.”

“Genji…” Pharah said.

“Affirmative,” Athena said.

All three of them looked at their feet, then up at the timer. 1 minute, 13 seconds. Tracer came back inside, tucking her coat’s collar up to her cheeks. The bay door closed behind her. “The drone’s going to keep running repairs to stabilize while we fly.”

“Can we fly, Lena?” Pharah asked as Tracer jogged to the cockpit. She half-looked over her shoulder, but didn’t answer, closing the cockpit door behind her. After a beat, the engine sputtered to life.

“30 seconds remaining,” Athena said.

The ship lurched as it lifted off the ground, then again as Tracer turned it hard through liftoff, moving
away from the Shambali temple.

“20 seconds.”

Up on the holoscreen, Athena helpfully put up a graphic of the hoverjet’s current location superimposed over the EMP’s blast radius.

“12 seconds.”

Tracer stepped on the gas soon as they were straight, and the Gs sucked the blood from McCree’s brain. With all the holes in him, he didn’t have much blood to begin with. He started to waver in and out of consciousness, getting a blurry view of the hoverjet approaching the edge of the blast radius and hearing Athena’s muffled voice count down to zero.

The flash of light rocked him back awake. It was dazzling, a wall of white through every window of the hoverjet. For a moment, he saw nothing but spots in his eyes, and heard nothing but the massive thunder of the EMP going off. The jet began to slow down.

The spots in his eyes faded, and blood went back to his brain. Across from him, Pharah looked stoic, and Ana’s mouth made a flat, annoyed line. The jet was still slowing down, and McCree looked out the window, prepped for the horizon to go sideways.

“Hoverjet’s systems don’t show any additional damage from the blast,” Winston reported calmly on the holovid.

“We got out,” Tracer announced over the captain’s comm in a dejected voice. “Pulled the acceleration down. Putting it on auto.”

“Lena, with the drone still repairing, do you think that’s wise—”

Tracer burst out from the cockpit, eyes only for the holovid in the corner of the ship. It was the news report, still turned on, showing the footage of the blast on repeat. Tracer’s clutched the edge of her chronal accelerator, just over her heart. He lips made a thin line, and she coughed out a sob. With a zip of seatbelt, Pharah was out of her seat and wrapping her arms around Tracer. She sobbed into Pharah’s shoulder. Wordlessly, she guided Tracer back into the cockpit and shut the door.

Winston stared at McCree from the holovid screen.

“Genji,” McCree said. “I didn’t know—”

“I should have,” Winston said. “He wouldn’t join us on missions, he refused to fight Omnis, he barely showed his face at the Watchpoint. He hadn’t even officially rejoined Overwatch.”

McCree wasn’t sure what to say to that. Shoulder-to-shoulder no matter what. McCree knew Genji had been scheming something, but at worst McCree thought he might fight with the Omnis, not join up with Talon.

“It’s classic Blackwatch,” Winston muttered.

That made McCree look up. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know what it means,” Winston said. “Genji, and before that Reyes, and even you.”

McCree unbuckled his belt and got to his feet. “Now hold on. What’d I do?”

“You never warned us,” Winston said. “You knew Reyes was planning to attack Geneva and did
nothing. Maybe you didn't join him, but you didn't join us either. Strike-Commander Morrison is
dead because of that attack, and dozens of others. If you had just told us what he was planning—”

“Turn him in so he could live the rest of his life in a cage?”

“It would have been better than—” Ana stopped herself and looked at her feet. “Than what happened
to him.”

McCree thought of Reaper’s husk of a body and shuddered. “How do you know that's worse or
better? You ever been to jail? Ever met guys that have been in jail? You better get comfy with the
idea because every op O-dubs done since you hit that recall button is illegal. You can believe the
news and say it was jealous, but the truth is we don't know what it was that made Gabe go after HQ
that day. He earned more loyalty from me than I gave him. He kept me outta that cell.”

“You kept yourself out of that cell, Jesse,” Ana said. “You took the job, you signed the paper. Do
you think Gabriel would have offered to take you into Blackwatch if he did not think you’d be
useful? We could never get you on an Overwatch mission because Gabriel held onto you so tightly.
You were indispensable to him.”

That was news. Ana was worth more than eight rookies, and so are you. “Overwatch… wanted me
on missions?”

“Certainly we did,” Ana said. “You were one of the best agents we had. Almost as good a shot as I
am. Trained in espionage, fast talking, quick-thinking. Kind and just. You should have been an
Overwatch agent from the beginning. Why do you think you were on the recall list?”

McCree looked to Winston. “I thought... it might be a mistake,” McCree laughed.

Winston’s jaw dropped. “It wasn’t a mistake,” he said. “O-of course it wasn’t! Why would you think
that?”

McCree shuffled his feet. Ana got up from her seat and walked to him, putting a wizened hand on
his shoulder. “Overwatch always needed you, Jesse,” she said. “Now, more than ever.”

The cockpit door slid open. McCree and Pharah shared a knowing look as Tracer darted out. She
stopped in front of McCree, hands on his shoulders. Her eyes were wet.

“Winston’s wrong,” Tracer said. She turned and looked at her friend in the screen, shaking her head.
“I’m sorry, big guy. But Genji would never… he’d never betray us for Talon. I won’t believe it.”
She turned back to McCree, eyes big. “We have to get him back. With Hanzo gone, you know him
better than anyone. Promise me, Jesse - promise me you’ll bring Genji back.”

--

McCree dropped his bag down in his bunk back at Watchpoint: Gibraltar. Moonlight touched the
edges of the dark room, making his cot look sharp and silvery. He switched on the holovid in his
room. When he saw it was the ubiquitous Professor Lovings commenting on the Nepal attack, he
turned it off again. He fell down into his bed and put his face in his hands.

Genji, a traitor. McCree, being denied missions with Overwatch. Ana Amari and Gabriel Reyes - in
some capacity - still alive. The Moonless Night, Genji and Hanzo’s mother.

Hanzo, his man, the heaven to his earth, the one person he wished he could talk this all through with,
still gone. It was all too much all at once to be full of heartache too.
The click of the window startled Peacekeeper from McCree’s holster. He pointed it at the window, at the hand pressed to the glass, reaching from the side of the building. On closer inspection, the hand had strong, calloused fingers McCree knew more by touch now than sight. A glove, missing the ring and pinky fingers.

An archery glove.

McCree’s heart went to his throat, and he rushed to the window, throwing it open to the cold night wind.

And there he was, leaning into view and ducking to climb in through the small Watchpoint window. He came inside McCree’s room like the breeze came in, cool and shocking, refreshing McCree’s senses. Before he could speak, McCree pulled Hanzo into his arms. He kissed him deep and insistent, tugging on him, holding on like Hanzo wasn’t real, as if he could disappear again at any moment. Like trying to hold on to the wind.

Hanzo pulled back with a gasp, then McCree went in again, hungry for this. Once, Hanzo was the thorn in his side - the one complication in his life. Now, this was the only thing he was sure of anymore.

Hanzo stopped him before McCree could get too far. “I have traveled a long way to return to you,” Hanzo said.

McCree smiled and sighed, burying his face in Hanzo’s corded neck. “Course, Honeybee. You flew hard. God damn, I’m so happy to see you.”

Hanzo took McCree’s hat from his head and set it aside, then ran his clever fingers through McCree’s dark, rusted hair. He’d have to tell Hanzo about Genji, about Ana, about the monastery, about it all eventually, but right now he wanted to be silent. This quiet calm, in the icy moonlight and cool wind, wrapped in Hanzo’s warm muscle, was too perfect to muddy with all that just yet.

McCree started with the simplest question first. “What happened with your ma?”

Hanzo’s pulse ticked fast against McCree’s cheek, and his fingers paused their combing of his hair. The wind from the open window blew against McCree’s back, making him shiver. He could feel Hanzo looking over his shoulder, out at the night. It took a long, icy-wind moment before he answered.

“I never found her,” Hanzo said.

Chapter End Notes

Genji ;^; Time Machine fans will have seen this in its makings - this was originally going to be in that story and only mentioned here, so a lot of the set-up for this twist you’ll see here, including the dreaded Tekhartha Unit! You’ll see more of her later as well.

I am streaming tonight! I had a tough day so I will be inexcusably drunk, so it should be fun :P Please join me! <3

@mingridsmarcher
Chapter Notes

Hey guys, welcome back to May I! Thanks to everyone for making it this far. I wanted to make some special notes about this chapter.

I'll list out the specific content warnings in a moment, but two general things: First, the content tags will contain spoilers. Second and more important - this is the last truly "tough" chapter in the story, but it is by far the toughest one there is. I am not a person who gets bothered by content, and I found it troubling to write. I'll include a chapter summary in the end-chapter notes in case you want to skip this chapter but continue the story, and as stated above, the content warnings will give you a good idea of where this is going.

That said, **Content Warnings:** Emotional abuse, emotional manipulation, implied threat of violence, referenced suicide attempt, referenced mind control, signs of depression, extremely graphic & violent description of suicidal intrusive thoughts, attempted suicide.

Thank to everyone who reads and comments - I haven't been able to keep up with replying like I used to but I read and appreciate every comment. Thank you all for continuing to support me, challenge me, and remind me why I continue on.

[@mingridsmarcher](https://ingridarcher.tumblr.com/)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Meet me at the range.”

*There it sat - a single, lonely message nestled in McCree’s chat log. The only text Jack Morrison had ever sent to his personal phone number.*

McCree stared at the bubble for a few minutes before pocketing the phone and making his way towards the Swiss HQ’s practice range. He walked into the shadow of the 40-foot marble statue of a saluting Morrison, and looked again down at the cryptic message, swathed in a strike-commander-blue box. McCree moved away from the massive idol, and into the covered stairwell that lead to the practice range.

Morrison looked like a statue too, standing with arms folded beside the outdoor section of the range, staring out at the honey sunset. He had that chin, that haircut, those shoulders - Hollywood good looks, instead of Gabe’s gruff demeanor and dark, casual dress. When McCree got closer he turned and gave him one of those sunbeam smiles usually reserved for a camera.

McCree tipped his hat. “What can I do for you, sir?”

“Wanted to run something by you,” Morrison said. He leaned askance and grasped the handle of a huge, metal case at his feet. He lifted it with more ease than he ought to have.

“What is it?” McCree studied the brushed aluminum. It reminded him of the cases down in the
stash, back when he was a kid in the Deadlock Gang.

Morrison ran a hand over the lid until his fingers found the clasp. “Had these made for Reyes. For his birthday. Not sure about how they came out, though. I don’t have that kind of flare, y’know. Figured no one better to ask when to came to guns, style, and... Gabe.” Morrison gave McCree another winning smile, and lifted the lid.

They were huge - a normal person would have a hell of a time handling the kickback of just one, but Reyes and Morrison weren’t exactly normal. The frame was a sleek, oily black that winked the low sunlight up at him. The accents were platinum filigree that protruded out from the receiver, making it look almost like a flintlock pistol. Wood and polymer handle. Sharp sights. McCree didn't think shooting it himself would do much good in terms of evaluation, but he also imagined Morrison had performed that test already. “They ain’t loaded, right?”

“Of course not.”

McCree pulled one shotgun out of the shaped foam and as expected, it weighed a ton. He felt the trigger pull and looked down the sights and all the standard things Pa used to do when he got a new gun shipment. There was something engraved on the barrel: “Happy Birthday, from Jack and Ana.”

Seeing Ana’s name written out made McCree think of that empty patch of vibrant color on the locker back in Grand Mesa. “Ana helped ya’ pick these out?”

“It was her idea,” Jack said. “She helped lay out the design and I would test the prototypes. She... never got to see them finished.”

McCree frowned at the words etched on the barrel, then laid the shotgun reverently back into the case. “He’ll love ‘em,” he said. “He’d take the damn things to his grave, I’d wager.”

Like clouds parting, that brought out another sunbeam smile from Morrison. “You think so? That’s great to hear. Thanks-” He stopped mid-sentence, looking over McCree’s shoulder. With a knowing look, he snapped the case shut, then spun on his heels and carried it away.

McCree looked behind him.

Reyes was marching up, glaring past McCree at Morrison’s retreating figure. “What did he want,” he asked as he got close.

“Wanted me to look at some explosives they got in shipment from Thailand,” McCree said.

“You're lying.”

“And you got a birthday tomorrow,” McCree said with a coy smile.

Reyes didn’t smile back. “About that.”

“Yeah, Boss?”

“Come with me.”

McCree fell in step behind Reyes like he had been for fifteen years. Following him still made McCree felt like a kid - a stray puppy chasing after some poor soul that made the mistake of feeding him once. They descended the stairs, turned a corner, then took a long, silent walk out to the HQ’s tarmac. It always looked smaller from the hoverjet window - but the half-mile walk made it feel
lonelier and lonelier the farther out they got. Off in the distance, the Jura mountains shouldered up against the horizon. They always reminded him of the mesas back in Santa Fe.

“Hey, Boss, uh… is it safe, bein’ out here where the planes are supposed to land?”

“No one’s scheduled to fly in or out for the next sixteen hours.”

“That’s a weirdly specific thing t’know,” McCree said.

Normally, that kind of sass would earn him one of Reyes’ signature glares. Instead, he slowed to a stop in the middle of the tarmac. One of the signal lights flashed on his left, every rhythmic second casting him in a different light. “Something’s coming,” he said. “I’m going to need you. I’ll need all of Blackwatch behind me.”

That sucked the air out. “What’s goin’ on?”

Reyes didn’t answer right away. “I got into Overwatch to help people - not people with money or power, but people who really needed it. Go to places governments couldn’t or wouldn’t touch. Solve problems without the red tape. Help the people that didn’t have heroes standing up for them. People like you.”

McCree’s throat swelled, and he nodded.

“Those emails I got from the Shadow. They’re my nightmare. Corporations paying for Overwatch to protect their holdings? This place used to mean something - and now it's a bloated, bureaucratic global police-force for the ultra-rich.”

“Boss, are you… are you quittin’?”

“No,” Reyes said. “I built this organization from the ground up - Morrison and me. But Jack won’t do shit about this, and Overwatch is too important to give up on.”

McCree frowned. “I get you, Boss, but what other option ya’ got?”

Strange how Reyes’ face could look both hard and compassionate at once. “You remember what I said? What I always told you - it’s us against them. We have to take Overwatch back.”

“Take Overwatch back?” McCree laughed. “How the hell you plan to do that? You ain’t exactly got in good with the UN like Morrison-”

“I’m not asking the UN. Or Jack. I’m not asking anyone, at all.”

“Wait…” McCree should have chosen his next words carefully, but he blurted them out like an idiot. “Gabe are you talkin’ about a damn coup?”

“There's no other way,” Reyes said.

“Naw… naw! That ain't right. These people are our friends, Boss.”

“Aren’t they? Don’t you remember how they acted when you first came in? All of them - even Ana. They treated you like a criminal. If we’re not spotless, they don’t have time for us.”

“But it ain’t like that no more. They brought Genji outta Blackwatch and got him fightin’ the good fight on the TV cameras like anyone else. Ana and Angie and Fareeha… they’re real good to me. They treat me like I’m one of ‘em.”
“You're not one of them,” Reyes roared, foot on the gas, an angry engine ready to race. “You're Blackwatch. Always have been. Always will be.”

The volume created a silence. McCree looked at his feet. “We have to hurt anybody?” he whispered.

That calmed Reyes down. “If we do it right, there will be minimal casualties. I've got a charge—”

“A bomb?! Hell, Gabe—”

“If I place the charge in the right location,” Reyes chewed out word-by-word, “it’ll shut down Athena’s security systems. We’ll have everyone rounded up before they know enough to fight back. We have the advantage of being on the staff list here—”

“Bein’ their friends, you mean? You mean we got the advantage of them not thinking we're the bad guys until it’s too late.”

“‘They’re the bad guys, Jesse.’

“‘Angie’s a bad guy? Tracer, and Reinhardt, and Torbjörn? Genji, one of our own boys? What if Fareeha was here - would she be a bad guy too?’

Reyes glared at him. “Sometimes doing the right thing is difficult.”

McCree put his face in his hands. “What if we do hurt someone? What if people die?”

“We have to do our best to keep that from happening.”

“But it could happen, couldn't it? It could go bad - it could go to hell.”

Reyes didn’t answer.

“I can’t do it, Boss. I don’t disagree with you about this stuff with the money, but I can’t fight these folks. They’re like my family—”

“They’re your family? And what am I? I dragged you out of that desert. I kept you out of prison. You owe me, ingrate.”

“I am grateful, Boss, for all ya’ did,” McCree pleaded. “But you gotta reconsider this—”

“I’ve made my decision. And you - you’re either with me, or against me.”

“Boss, come on—”

“Get out.”

“W-what?”

“This is Blackwatch. I'm your commander. If you think you're too good for that, you don't have to be a part of Blackwatch anymore, and you sure as shit aren’t part of Overwatch. So get the hell off the base.”

“Boss—”

“The op starts at 4am. If you're not gone by then, you're the first guy I'm coming for.” Reyes turned from him. For a long time, in that big, open field, McCree watched Gabe’s back as he walked the long distance back towards HQ. The sun sank beneath the horizon by the time he was out of sight.
McCree looked across the tarmac at Overwatch’s glittering headquarters, a shining symbol of modern hope and heroism. He thought of the statue in the yard, and the statuesque man it was modeled after. He thought of Reyes’ unwavering determination to help the people who needed it most. Both of them, heroes in their own ways.

Reyes was right. McCree never belonged here. He wasn’t like Jack or Mercy or Ana - he was just some trashy desert kid with a gun. McCree pulled his hat down, the felt-tip name burning across his forehead, as he turned his back on Overwatch and marched away towards the Jura mountains.

--

McCree took the morning slowly. His phone was on the dresser, blissfully distant. Hanzo was asleep beside him. The knot in his brow spoke of bad dreams. McCree debated waking him, but it had taken Hanzo so long to fall asleep last night, curled up with a hand pinned to his stomach. Considering the news, McCree didn't blame him.

After combing his fingers through Hanzo’s loose, prickly hair, McCree climbed out of bed. He walked to the window. The sky was cloudless - matte blue with a pale, hangnail moon. Something glittered in his periphery. He chased the glint and found the object sitting on his windowsill.

It was Hanzo’s golden scarf, bundled around something. The object was flat and thin, tapered at one end, not quite the length of McCree’s forearm. He ran a finger across the golden wrapping, curious. As he reached to lift it, he felt cool, expert fingers snake their way around his neck. McCree reached up and stroked the familiar hands. “Mornin’, Honeybee.”

For a moment, Hanzo’s fingers stayed around McCree’s throat, touching the delicate skin there with a pressure that edged on uncomfortable. Then, the hands wrapped around him, so Hanzo was hugging him from behind, face buried in his back. “It is a morning, yes.”

McCree smiled wanly. He couldn’t blame Hanzo for being cynical. “You ain't heard from Genji last night, right?”

“No,” Hanzo said.

“Thought he might try ‘nd get you to come with him.”

“No.”

“Would you go if he did?”

Hanzo said nothing.

“Dumb question. Like you said - you ain't interested in following your kin around blind anymore.”

Hanzo paused before saying, “But after all this time, could I as easily turn my back on him entirely? What if, after at last being reunited, I lost him again?”

Maybe not so dumb a question. “I can't tell ya. Genji’s with Talon. You'd have to square with that.”

“If you could return someone you loved and lost, wouldn't you do whatever it took to get them back?”

Staring out of the window, McCree replayed the memory of Hanzo climbing into his room last night over and over. Replayed Ana Amari’s head turning around to look at him, again and again. On one turn, she was younger, with just the sharp lines at the edge of her wry smile. Then she was the
blurry, memory-worn visage of Paulina Alvarado. Then her face a skull. And, lastly, under that hood, it was the unnerving smile McCree had seen through the cracks in Reaper’s mask.

“Depends on the person,” McCree said. “Not everyone I loved knew good from bad all the time.”

“Is that all there is… good, and bad?”

McCree changed focus from the blue sky outside to his own reflection in the glass.

“Do you think,” Hanzo went on, “that fate is predetermined? That we are born on one side, or the other?”

McCree pressed his fingers into Hanzo’s indigo dragon, wrapped serpentine around his neck. Pulling Hanzo’s grip loose, he turned to face him, then pressed their mouths together. Their bodies followed, a closed symmetry. *We are the same.*

McCree made the kiss honey-slow. Hanzo was much more quiet and yielding than the wild-man he'd known in their first coupling. “I don't know, Darlin’,” McCree said against his lips. He kissed him again, but this time Hanzo pulled away, moving to McCree’s phone, which was buzzing on the dresser. He looked at the screen.

“Winston has called you to his lab,” Hanzo said, then turned to get dressed.

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Winston’s lab was alive with humming servers and beeping consoles - wide, fizzy holoscreens and desks covered in engineering tools and empty peanut butter jars. Mercy was there, seated primly atop a loading crate, head and shoulder above Torbjörn standing beside her. Tracer too was present, hugging herself and bouncing on the balls of her feet, talking with D.Va and Lúcio. Winston was seated beside Reinhardt, prodding the crusader’s hammer with a soldering iron. When McCree’s spur-heeled feet stepped into the lab, their drawn faces all turned to look at him. They all were different shades of surprised upon seeing Hanzo at his side.

“Luv, you’re back,” Tracer exclaimed, blinking over to them.

Reinhardt pushed his posture straighter. “Did you find her, my friend?”

McCree looked at Hanzo, who looked away. Reinhardt bowed his head in understanding.

Tracer chewed her lip. “Never seen you without the ponytail,” she said to Hanzo, nodding towards his loose mass of spiky hair. “It’s a good look!”

Hanzo side-eyed McCree and said, “I suppose.”

“Yeah, yeah, the boy’s got the fashion sense of a porcupine,” Torbjörn interjected. “So let’s get this darned meeting started already! We’re all here, aren’t we?”

“Uhm, not… quite yet,” Winston said, putting down the soldering iron and nodding towards the lab’s entryway.

When McCree had seen them in Nepal, he wondered if it was some hallucination brought on by his injuries. But now there they were - the Amaris, standing in the doorway. Pharah was tall as ever, shoulders broad and chest lifted like a soldier. And beside her, hood down to show her ghostly-pale hair, was Ana, cradling her rifle.
Reinhardt stepped forward first, beaming at Pharah with instant recognition. “Fareeha, my girl! About time you showed up, I say. And who is this vision you’ve brought with-” Ana’s sly smile froze Reinhardt mid-sentence. The grin, the posture, the bravado dissolved. Even his voice, usually a thundering bass, was quiet when he said, “Ana?”


“How can this be? We thought you were dead.”

“I’m sorry, Reinhardt,” Ana said, reaching one arm to touch her daughter’s shoulder. “After everything that happened, I needed time.”

“Time. Time!” Torbjörn marched over, fists up as if he was about to box Ana then and there. “It’s been years, Ana. How much time did you need before lettin’ us know your skull wasn’t shredded to pieces!”

“You’re charming as ever, Torbjörn. If I had told you earlier, I know you of all people would have hounded me until I came back, wouldn’t you?”

“Darn right I would have! You belong here with us.”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Ana made a show of considering it. “The beaches on Sharm el-Sheikh gave me a pretty comfortable sense of belonging.”

Winston called the meeting to order before the reunion moved too deep into reminiscing. “We’re thankful to have you both,” he said, nodding to Ana and Pharah. “Overwatch needs you now more than ever. Which brings me to why I called this meeting.”

“Wait, what about Genji? He’s not here yet,” D.Va said, unfolding her arms and searching the room as if she had missed him. Everyone who had been on the Nepal mission exchanged looks.

“Yes, well... Yes,” Winston stuttered. “I’m sorry to report that, well, our attempt to stop the EMP attack on the Shambali temple failed. But on top of that... during the mission, Genji... defected to Talon.”

“What?” Lúcio looked thunderstruck. “No way.”

“I’m afraid so. Agent McCree saw it himself - so did Agent Pharah and Agent Tracer.” Winston nodded to each of them. “He’s been removed from the agent list and should be considered from here on as an enemy.”

“You already took him off the list, just like that?” McCree protested. “We ain’t even investigated this yet.”

Winston caught the accusatory tone. “Omniums are reactivating across the globe, Jesse. We don’t have the time or resources to put into an investigation right now.” Winston pushed his shoulders back and puffed out his massive chest. “I’m Overwatch’s commander now, and won’t allow a repeat of what happened in Geneva. Not while we’re so vulnerable.”

“This is our friend we’re talkin’ about.”

“Apparently not,” Torbjörn muttered.

McCree huffed, and had to stop himself from stamping his feet.
Beside him, Hanzo had been thus far silent and stoic on the subject. Now, however, he stepped towards Winston, raising his chin and pushing back his shoulders. Dragoned up. “If we solve this issue with the omniums,” he began, “then you will have the resources to investigate Genji’s motives and whereabouts, correct?”

Winston furrowed his brow. “If we… stop the omnics from destroying humanity, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“You’re going to help us save the world, just so we can help you find your brother?”

“If you insist on being ostentatious, then I suppose that is my offer, yes,” Hanzo said, annoyed.

Winston and Tracer exchanged a look. “We’ll… take all the help we can get, of course,” Winston finally said, still taken aback.

Hanzo put up his hand. “First, you must make me a promise,” he said firmly, “That you will do everything in your power to return him alive.” For a moment, Hanzo peered over his shoulder at McCree before looking away. “Whatever happens between then and now, you must follow through on this. That is the agreement.”

Tracer cut in, giving him an earnest smile. “We promise, Luv. We’ll do whatever it takes to get him back and learn what happened.”

Unsmiling, Hanzo looked to Winston for confirmation. With a puzzled expression, Winston adjusted his glasses and nodded.

“It is settled, then.” Hanzo turned on his heels and left the room.

A silence yawned in his wake, full with exchanged glances and shuffling feet.

“I like him,” Ana said cheerfully. She aimed a knowing gaze at McCree, and gave him a barely-perceptible thumbs-up.

--

It was a few days later before McCree brought up the subject of that meeting. He and Hanzo were sharing a late-night dinner. They’d only turned on a single, low light that made the corner of the empty mess hall cozy and ominous at once. “You know, I’m still a little surprised about that deal you made with Winston. Jumpin’ in to help Overwatch so they can find Genji.”

There was something hypnotising about the clink of Hanzo’s chopsticks stabbing into the bowl of oyakodon, plucking up a glob of egg and rice. “Why so,” he asked before taking the bite.

“Just a big jump from when ya’ used to call Genji ‘half-man.’”

After a beat, Hanzo laid his chopsticks across the diameter of the bowl, staring down into his food. “Keiko was right, did you know? Her mother did ask me to kill Genji.”

Chewing the last morsels of his own food, McCree swallowed and put his fork down. This was a bigger conversation than he’d realized.

“I did not think I could do it. But Kanata had convinced me that it was what must be done for the good of the clan,” Hanzo said. “That was my duty as the head of the Shimada.”

McCree’s brow furrowed.
"I thought to take my own life instead," Hanzo said. It was flat - not a shamed confession, but a simple explanation.

It felt like the last piece of a puzzle falling into place. Even when McCree had railed against Hanzo for what he’d done to Genji, Hanzo had not offered up this piece of information. Now it came almost unprompted, long after McCree had already forgiven him. “Aw, hell, Darlin’.”

“Kanata caught me at it. Put a stop to it. Even making me face such a choice, she could not let me choose my path. My death did not fit well into her plans, I suppose.”

The calm, dull hunch of Hanzo’s shoulders; the press of those expert fingers against the tabletop, put McCree in mind of an empty tarmac - a black line of pavement drawn between the glittering Geneva HQ and the wilderness of the Jura mountains. The wide-open space between them and us. “You don’t think it mighta been ‘cause she cared about you?”

“When are the only options, aren’t they? Caring for me, or using me?” Hanzo laughed without humor - a grim grin underneath a broken mask. Words etched into the barrel of gun that got thrown away and retrieved over and over. “Are people only one, or the other?” Hanzo asked it to no one, looking past McCree to the small window behind him, black with nighttime.

Enough. “Kanata was a bitch,” McCree said. “But I’m glad she stopped you.”

Now, at last, Hanzo looked at him. “Why? If she hadn’t, Genji would still be whole.”

“Sure.” McCree shrugged his shoulders. “But if you had, I’d have never met Genji.” He put a hand over Hanzo’s bent knuckles. “And I’d never have met you, either.”

Hanzo’s lashes fluttered; his lips parted. “You should not wish to know me,” he whispered.

“Darlin’, right now, you’re the only thing in my life that makes any damn sense.”

Everything in Hanzo’s body seemed to twist and tighten, like a screw into the last stubborn bit of flushing. “Jesse… while I was gone-”

Both of their comms beeped at once. They exchanged a look, then McCree put his finger to his ear and said, “Yeah?”

“Come to the common room.” Winston’s voice was deep and thin, and the comm crackled like a stern period at the end of the sentence.

“Meeting,” McCree said. “After the last time, it can’t be good.” That gave him an idea. As Hanzo stood, picking up his bowl, McCree pulled out his phone and swiped to the news. “Hell on earth,” he gasped.

“What?” Hanzo rounded the table to look over his shoulder. McCree turned his screen to show him the headline.

SOUTH KOREAN OMNIUM REACTIVATED. SEOUL UNDER ATTACK BY MASSIVE OMNIC ARMY.

Beneath the headline, a photograph of a futuristic skyscraper being toppled by a massive Titan - something not seen for decades. At its feet, a swarm of Omnic ground troops, flanking a single figure. It floated at the army’s head, glowing electric blue. McCree had a hard time telling omnics apart, but there was no mistaking the flowing ribbons of those black robes: it was the omnic he’d seen at the Shambali temple, next to the EMP - the one Genji had called “the Tekhartha Unit.”
Missiles shrieked overhead as D.Va snarled reports into McCree’s ear over the comm. D.Va was bubblegum sweet and respectful as a soldier at the Watchpoint, but soon as a battle started, she turned into the most ferocious agent McCree had ever seen.

McCree had been to Seoul once before. It looked like a garden in the day, and fireworks at night, all streaks and dots of glittering light. A spectacle. It was painful even for him to see it turned to this crumbled warzone, grey with rubble. He couldn’t possibly imagine how D.Va felt, flying overhead and seeing the fresh wounds cut across her home country.

The team was holding in the center of a large traffic intersection, framed by buildings relatively smaller than most of the city. A streak of blue flashed in his periphery, and McCree saw Pharah kneeling a few yards away, clutching a fissure in her sapphire armor. McCree stepped out to cover her, popping well-aimed shots into the visors of a few Omnic troopers.

Lúcio whipped behind him on his skates, thumbing up the volume on his sonic amplifier. He skidded to a stop beside Pharah, pulling her up to her feet. A few seconds of that soothing beat, and she was already looking better.

But Pharah was out in the front line, and that left Lúcio out in the open. A pair of omnic troopers charged their energy weapons, aiming in his direction. McCree was reloading his revolver almost unconsciously, but at this range even he would have a hard time popping off shots quick and precise enough to stop the Omnic’s fire.

With a massive crash, D.Va’s MEKA slammed down in front of Lúcio and Pharah, her defense matrix swallowing the shots before they could connect. “Stay off my healer,” she snarled at the Omnics, then shredded them to pieces with her fusion cannons.

McCree watched the spectacle a little too long, because he was surprised by the heavy clank of mechanical feet behind him. He turned, and found himself face-to-face with a Bastion unit, mid-transition to turret mode. “Shit,” McCree hissed, tugging loose a flashbang and tossing it in the omnic’s face. It whirred and stood to its feet, interrupted, and he unloaded six sharp shots into what passed for its face.

The thing was a little off kilter, but far from dead. Unperturbed, it chirped and started again to transition back into turret mode. McCree looked around, searching for cover. The Bastion’s minigun whirred up, and a spray of bullets hurtled towards him.

Four rounds spat into the metal armor of McCree’s chestpiece, pushing him to his knees. Then, the shots cut off with a thunk. The minigun spun to a stop, and the Bastion wheezed, falling forward. An arrow stuck out of a sparking, square, red bulb - where everyone knew a Bastion’s control sensors were located. McCree looked up.

There Hanzo was: loose hair a dark, spiky halo around his head, standing up on a rooftop, arrow drawn. His man. A damn fine sight to see. McCree clutched his wounds with one hand and tipped his hat up at him with the other. Then, something sharp pricked McCree in the shoulder.

Warmth bloomed out from the spot, and in nearly an instant, the wounds on his chest felt like nothing at all. He turned to look over his shoulder, and found another sniper, huddled and camouflaged in a pile of rubble. Ana - a specter watching over him. She shot him a little salute.

Another sweep of the area showed that they had cleared out the Omnic presence on this block. McCree tugged out his phone and checked Athena’s map for hotspots, but all the other blocks
looked relatively clear as well.

“We’ve finished up here,” McCree said into his comm. “Winston, orders?”

“Looks like the omnium forces have been pushed back for now,” Winston said in his ear. “We’re not sanctioned to be here. Pair up and pull back, get to the hoverjet. D.Va with Lúcio, Pharah go with Ana. McCree, go get Hanzo.”

“Gotta’,” McCree crooned, and jogged towards the front entrance of the building Hanzo had been sniping from. When he got inside, he found the elevators were down.

“Son of a bitch,” McCree grunted.

After a leg-aching amount of steps, McCree fell against the door to the building’s roof and stumbled out. Hanzo turned in a flash, startled, training his bow on him.

McCree put up his hands. “Whoa, Darlin’, s’just me.”

To McCree’s puzzlement, Hanzo didn’t lower his bow right away. He stayed stock-still, aimed at McCree’s forehead, arm shaking with the effort of holding the string back.

“Uh… Honeybee?”

At last, Hanzo’s arm loosened, and he lowered the arrow to aim at the ground. He looked troubled, and McCree had fought beside him enough times to know it wasn’t because of the battle.

McCree approached slowly, hands lowering. “Somethin’ the matter, Sugar?”

“I... received a curious message,” Hanzo said, putting his arrow back in its quiver.

“Yeah?”

“Yes. It is from a number I do not recognize.”

“Ah, they say you win a sweepstakes or something? I get those sometimes.”

“No,” Hanzo said. “It is about Genji.”

That got McCree’s attention. He didn’t approach slowly now, but jogged over as Hanzo pulled his phone out. McCree snatched it from his hand.

The number came up as an email address, a long string of incomprehensible numbers and letters. The text read: “Want to know about your brother? Meet me in the server room in the SK building’s basement at 0900 Seoul time. Come alone.”

McCree frowned. “Sounds like a trap.”

“That was my assumption as well.”

“But you want to know about Genji,” McCree said.

Hanzo hesitated, then nodded.

McCree sucked in one last breath, prepping to go right back down the stairs again. “I’ll go with you.”
They arrived in the basement of the SK building, making their way through the long, darkly-lit concrete hallways. D.Va announced on the comm that she and Lúcio had arrived at the hoverjet just as McCree and Hanzo arrived at a door marked “Server Room.” McCree leaned his back against the door, then pushed it open slow and quiet.

Inside was a dark hallway lined with chain-link fence. McCree could hear a hum of computer fans and a muffled voice speaking further down the hall.

“He’ll show up,” a woman’s voice said. McCree was sure he’d heard that voice before - a confident, liquid lilt.

“Yeah, but what if he doesn’t?” The second voice was deep, but with a whining drawl that was, too, eerily familiar. “We don’t have a backup... And, I mean, it’s not like he hasn’t killed him before.”

The comm crackled in McCree’s ear as Pharah reported her and Ana’s arrival at the hoverjet.

“That’s exactly why he’ll come,” the first voice said. “He’s not going to let Genji die again, not after all this.”

“You got more faith in that asshole than I do. I still don’t see why we couldn’t just tell Genji what was going on. It’s not like he doesn’t know your plans for the bomb.”

“If I don’t install a failsafe program to interact with the wipe, the EMP will erase his personality. I've told you this a dozen times.”

“Yeah, but couldn’t you have just let him pretend he was hacked?”

That froze McCree in place. Hacked. McCree touched a flashbang on his belt, remembering his encounter with Sombra in Nepal. When she’d snuck up on him, she’d hacked his flashbangs, and their lights had turned red, just as Genji had when he showed up at the temple. McCree exchanged a look with Hanzo, who looked to be having the same revelation.

“I needed an excuse for Talon to let me install the blocker software in his brain.” This time, McCree was sure that liquid voice was Talon’s hacker, Sombra. “Besides, if Genji were still in his right mind and saw what was going on here with the Omniums, do you really think he could sit by and ignore it? You said it yourself - he’s a goody-goody now, especially about this Omnic stuff.”

D.Va’s bubblegum voice chirped over the comm, edged with annoyance. “Uhm, Agent McCree, Agent Hanzo, where are you guys? I need an ETA.” Purple light streamed through the chain-link on the left side, painting a diamond pattern on the floor ahead. Cutting through the middle of it, a single person’s long shadow.

“Yeah, but,” drawled the second voice, “he could get hurt.”

“I won’t let anything happen to him, K. I promise.” The new warmth in Sombra’s tone brought an odd note of authenticity to her voice. McCree took a few more careful steps forward. Purple light splashed on his face, and he saw the edge of Sombra’s colorful hair. She was facing a glowing, pink screen. It looked like a video call, but Sombra was blocking his view of the screen.

“Sweet-talker,” came the voice from the screen. “When you comin’ back here, Baby? I got plans for you-”

One careless footfall was all it took for McCree’s spurs to jingle. He screwed up his face and
mouthed a curse. Sombra spun about, looking over her shoulder, scanning the dark basement. “You hear that?”

“I don’t hear shit,” said the voice from the screen, just as Sombra’s sharp, violet eyes landed on McCree and Hanzo skulking in the hallway on the other side of the chain-link fence. McCree tugged Peacekeeper from the holster and jogged towards her.

“Damnit,” Sombra said. “I have to go.”

“Huh? Wait, Sof-”

McCree found a break in the chain-link, and turned inside just in time to see Sombra swipe the holovid off. He aimed Peacekeeper her direction.

Sombra put her pink-nailed hands up, squaring her shoulders and smirking her purple lips. “McCree. Good to see you again.”

“Wish I could say the same,” McCree growled at her. Hanzo came up behind him, bow drawn.

“There’s the man I was hoping to see,” Sombra purred. “I thought I told you to come alone.”

“And walk directly into your trap?” Hanzo glared at her.

“Don’t get so defensive! I knew you’d bring him anyway.” Sombra jerked her chin in McCree’s direction. “I just didn’t want all of Overwatch trailing you down here. You two are the only ones who care about Genji enough to listen, but discreet enough not to crow what I’m about to tell you.”

“You hacked Genji in Nepal,” McCree said.

Sombra’s brows shot up. “Oh-ho. You were eavesdropping on my little conversation, huh?”

“Mighta been. Who were ya’ talkin to?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.”

Hanzo stepped forward. “We do not have time for your games. Where is Genji?”

“Down boy,” Sombra said. “He’s safe for now, but I need your help to keep him that way.”

“Our help?” McCree narrowed his eyes.

“Yeah. Talon is going to be sending Genji out on missions soon. Overwatch thinks he’s a traitor, so they’ll try to kill him on sight if they find him. I need you two to keep that from happening.”

“Why do we not merely tell Overwatch he has been hacked,” Hanzo asked.

“Because if Talon finds out I told you, they’ll kill him immediately,” Sombra said. “Not to mention me - which I promise, you don’t want to happen.”

McCree thumbed the hammer back on Peacekeeper. “You sure about that?”

Sombra didn’t even flinch. “Little reminder before you get trigger happy - I hacked Genji, and I’m the only one who can un hack him, so if you don’t want him stuck as a Talon agent permanently, you should be invested in keeping me alive.”

“Why did you choose Genji,” McCree asked, trying to put the pieces together in his mind. “Because
he was the easiest Overwatch agent to hack?"

Sombra snorted. “You think a cyborg brain is easy to hack? Now way. How the hardware connects to the organic neural pathways is exceedingly complicated, and every brain is a custom rig. Genji was probably the toughest hack I’ve ever done. Athena would have been easier - or just turning a standard human over to our side.”

“Think it’d be that easy to infiltrate us, huh?”

“Nothing is impenetrable,” Sombra crooned with confidence. “It’s just a matter of finding the right way in - whether that’s a chink in the firewall or a person’s deepest desire.” Sombra’s violet eyes flitted to Hanzo. “Everything can be hacked - and every one.”

“You disgust me,” Hanzo snarled. “I demand you release my brother from your despicable mind-control.”

McCree put his mechanical hand on Hanzo’s shoulder, revolver still leveled at Sombra. “So why Genji, if he was so tough to turn?”

Sombra’s lashes lowered over her unnaturally purple eyes, and for a moment, she took on that soft, rare authenticity McCree had heard in her voice earlier. “Let’s just say I have a soft spot for the Shimadas,” she said. “So? What do you say? You’ll keep Overwatch from killing Genji until New York?”


Sombra smirked. “You’ll see. Now, come on - we got a deal or not?” She extended her pink-nailed hand.

McCree hesitated, looking to his side at Hanzo’s still-drawn bow. He spun his revolver, then holstered it. “The other one,” he grunted, extending his flesh arm, a reflection of Sombra’s own pose.

She laughed. “You’re so paranoid! I’m not going to hack your stupid skull arm.” She reached out and shook his hand. “How’d you lose it, anyway?”

“Like you don’t know,” McCree growled.

“I surely do-” Sombra’s signature smirk widened only slightly, “-Jesse Jowell.”

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“Where were you?”

McCree and Hanzo raced for the hoverjet, which was already off the ground with the bay door open, ready to lift off the instant they were on board. Breathless, they hopped inside. McCree stumbled to the card table and folded half over it, catching his breath. Hanzo sank calmly down into a seat, checking his pulse. The bay door closed.

The hoverjet was crowded. Dva and Lúcio were in the seats next to Hanzo. Pharah stood, clutching a bar on the roof to stabilize herself as the ship’s hover-engines whirred up. Ana was seated at the back of the ship, sipping tea.

“Did you run into hostiles on the way over,” Pharah asked.

McCree opened his mouth to answer, but Hanzo cut in with a sharp “yes” that ended the
conversation. Hawklike, Pharah tilted her head at him. From the back of the ship, Ana peered knowingly at McCree over the rim of her teacup.

The ship took off.

Hanzo fell asleep not long after that. McCree sank into the seat beside him and tried to pass out as well, but the conversation with Sombra was swirling around in his head. He caught sight of Ana staring at him from the back of the ship. He unbuckled his seatbelt and strolled over, sitting in the seat across from her.

“Something on your mind?” Ana smiled.

“How do you do that?”

“You’re the one who came over,” Ana said. “So. Spill the beans.”

“About what specifically?”

“Gabriel taught you well,” Ana said, smirking.

McCree looked down at the sleeping figures seated in the hoverjet’s cabin. “Do you think Gabe was a bad guy?”

“He killed a lot of people.” Ana let out a long sigh through her nose. “But then, so have I. Do you think I’m a bad person, Jesse?” The cloying tone suggested sarcasm.

McCree chuckled. “You know I don’t.”

“I abandoned Overwatch,” Ana pointed out. “My friends, my daughter who I loved. I let them all believe I had died, for a long time. I let Jack shoulder that guilt. Is that something a good person does?”

McCree wasn’t sure how to answer.

“We all do good and bad things. We fight in wars, so sometimes those bad things are very bad. You can think of it as red in a ledger, if you like, but I don’t. Makes it feel a bit daunting, doesn't it?”

With a single, gloved finger, McCree twisted the cylinder on Peacekeeper, counting the clicks — thinking of how many bullets he’d put into people in Blackwatch. He nodded.

“To me,” Ana began, “I think the important part is not to think where you are but where you’re going. You can fall backwards into the dark, or stand still where you are, but I think the important thing we do is taking the steps towards the light. No matter where you began, you’ll end up better than you were.”

“Sounds easy,” McCree chuckled.

“It isn’t,” Ana said. “in the light, everyone sees what you do. Every stumble, every side step or retreat. The dark is safe. I hid there a long time. So did you and Gabriel. But I think it's important to be seen. It makes you want to keep walking forward. That's why I came back.”

The cylinder clicked again, and McCree stopped turning it. Every chamber had a bullet, so it didn’t matter where it started or stopped. “How do you know when you've gone from bad to good?”

“You are not listening to me, Jesse!” Ana wagged a wizened finger at him, her smile pushing her tattoo up around her remaining eye. “There is no good. There’s only better.”
When they arrived back at the Watchpoint in early evening, McCree finally felt tired. He and Hanzo shuffled through Watchpoint: Gibraltar’s halls until they arrived at room 24A. Once inside, Hanzo slipped from under McCree’s arm and went into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. McCree fell onto the bed. Muffled through the door, he heard the water come on. His eyelids felt heavy as he peered through his window at the open, darkening sky. The last thing he noticed before his lids closed was that he couldn’t seem to locate the moon.

McCree woke hours later to the sound of Hanzo’s low, smooth voice speaking in Japanese. He cracked open his eyes, just enjoying the sound at first, then wondering if Hanzo was speaking to someone at the door. He wasn’t. He was knelt a few feet away, facing McCree’s window, staring up at the black night sky.

He was dressed in white.

Crumpled on the floor by his knees was his glittering golden scarf. He was holding something in his hand, and from the shape, McCree guessed it was whatever had been on his windowsill, wrapped up in the scarf.

As McCree’s eyes adjusted, he realized with some shock that it was a dagger - a dagger with a stone in the pommel that, depending on the angle Hanzo's wrist moved, shifted from black to white.

McCree’s eyes nearly bulged out of his head, and he glued his lips shut to hold back the hiccuping breaths threatening to come up.

“Gommenasai,” Hanzo said, staring up at the night sky. “Hontou ni Gommenasai…”

McCree’s eyes got hot. He should have felt angry, furious that Hanzo could betray him in this way. He should have felt what surely the members of Overwatch felt when Reyes attacked them in Geneva - how they felt knowing McCree had abandoned them to that fate.

But he wasn’t angry. Instead, McCree only felt the profound sadness he had when Reyes walked away from him on the tarmac all those years ago. He understood it the way he’d learned to understand why Hanzo had tried to kill Genji. The way he himself had almost joined Reyes when he attacked the Swiss HQ, yet still to this day felt he’d betrayed him somehow. The worst part was that Hanzo wouldn’t even look at him - he just kept looking up at the black, moonless sky.


It was then McCree realized that Hanzo wasn’t apologizing to him - he was apologizing to Mitsuru.

Three feelings, short as drum beats, pounded into McCree’s mind then. The first was thundering relief, that primal relaxation of a danger being over. The next was the anger that had been missing moments before, a boiling rage that Hanzo could ever choose to murder him to appease a mother who had been absent from his life for thirty years. The last was choking, panicked terror as the dagger in Hanzo’s hand - aimed not out towards McCree, but inward, drawing a line from the glittering blade to Hanzo’s midsection - suddenly took on a completely different connotation.

McCree sat up.

It startled Hanzo, who turned to him with that wide-eyed surprised that had always seemed cute before now. For a long silence they stared at one another, McCree studying the barely-visible features of Hanzo’s drawn face.
“I do not want you to see this,” Hanzo said at last, the blade shaking in his hand.

“Then don’t do it,” McCree shot back, quickdrawn. He crawled between Hanzo and the window, kneeling in the way of his view to the dark sky.

“There is no other way,” Hanzo rasped. “It is what I should have done all those years ago. I was weak and allowed Kanata to stop me. Mitsuru said they left me to protect Genji, and look at the job I have done. I do not deserve to be beside you. I am not fit to be a son, or a brother. Genji needed me, and I-.”

“Genji still needs you,” McCree insisted. “You ‘n me, we’re the only ones who know the truth. We have to protect him.”

“I cannot protect anything,” Hanzo choked. “I have the soul of a killer, just like Mitsuru does. It’s in my blood. This is the only thing I can do to stop it.”

“No one’s born bad, Hanzo. Not you, and not me, and not Genji, and not even your mama.”

Slow and steady, Hanzo’s arm went slack, and he allowed McCree to pull the dagger from his hand. It was odd how little terror it garnered in him now, when it endangered someone he cared so much about. At last, Hanzo fell into his arms, fitting tight and neat into the crook of his shoulder. Perfect.

“I meant to do it,” Hanzo said. “I thought, to get my mother back, I could do it. For days I looked at you and tried to imagine what it would be like to… to kill you. But all I could see was the blade dragging across my stomach, shredding me open, the wound vomiting blood and viscera. I tried to push the images away but I could f- feel it sawing me open, like a prophecy.” McCree could feel Hanzo’s hand reach to clutch his stomach, as if he could feel that pain even now.

“You’re gonna be okay, Han,” McCree said, tightening his grip as if his arms could keep Hanzo on this earth. “I’ve got you. I’m here.”

“I feel so… lost,” Hanzo said. “For ten years I wandered the wilderness alone in a haze, the sun and moon spinning past me. I did not feel time pass, or longing, or loneliness. I did not feel anything except angry and empty. But it was a steady thing. Simple. I knew myself. I had control.

“Then Genji returned and… everything began rushing back. It was as if I woke up from a sleep to find a decade of my life was gone. I felt for people again. For you. For my cousin and my brother and the people here. For Mitsuru and the life they wished for me. I yearn to be loved and needed again. I want to help people. I fear for others when they put themselves in danger. It is overwhelming - I feel more mad now than I ever did when I was alone. I do not know myself any longer. I don’t know right from wrong. I don’t know which way is up.”

“That’s what happens when you stop standin’ still,” McCree said into Hanzo’s prickly hair.

“What do I do?”

“Walk forward.”

“I do not know which way to go. I have only ever gone where I was pointed.”

“That’s exactly why I can’t tell ya. You’ve got to figure that out on your own, but I’ll be there for ya as you do. I will say, you didn't stab me to death, so that seems a step in the right direction.”

Wrapped up in his arms, McCree felt Hanzo’s shoulders shake.
“That get a laugh out of you, Darlin’?”

“I do not joke,” Hanzo said. “I am always serious.”

Now they both laughed, hoarse and sweet with a long-waiting relief. McCree knew enough to know that Hanzo wasn’t entirely safe now, but it felt like the two of them, together, had taken a step away from the shadows and towards the light. Clumsy, the pair moved to the cot and laid down together. Hanzo fit neatly in his arms - not like a bullet in a chamber, but the way heaven and earth came together to make the horizon. Not always simple, not always a straight line. The earth’s trees and mountains sawtoothed up and down, and the sky faded often into darkness. But McCree knew that tomorrow, the sunrise would reach up, a golden hand pulling itself into the sky and painting the world with rosy pinks and cheerful yellows. Tomorrow, there would be light.

Chapter End Notes

I promise a vastly fluffier chapter next week with lots of sugar-sweet cuddly shit because honestly, after this, I need as much as anyone -_-;

For people who are skipping to the end, here's the chapter summary:
The flashback depicts Morrison showing McCree a pair of shotguns he and Ana had made for Gabe for his birthday - they are the shotguns Reaper currently wields. The flashback also shows Gabe asking McCree to help him attack the Swiss HQ, and McCree refusing, then leaving the base altogether. Ana is reunited with Reinhardt, Torbjorn, and Mercy. Winston announces Genji should be considered an enemy. Hanzo agrees to help Overwatch fight the omnic threat, and in exchange, Winston promised to try and retrieve Genji without harming him. Hanzo tells McCree that after their father's death, he wanted to end his life rather than kill Genji, but Kanata stopped him and convinced him to do otherwise. An omnium activates in Seoul. The team goes to stop it. At the tail end of the mission, Hanzo receives a message from Sombra, telling him she wants to meet. Hanzo and McCree meet her, and Sombra reveals that she has hacked Genji under Talon's orders, though an overheard conversation suggests she may have bigger plans. She asks Hanzo and McCree to keep Genji safe "until New York" - it is unclear what she means by this. Sombra reveals that McCree's real name is "Jesse Jowell" and insinuates it has something to do with his cybernetic arm. They return from the mission on a moonless night. McCree wakes up to see Hanzo holding one of the Moonless Night's dagger - presumably the one given to him in chapter 20. At first McCree fears Hanzo plans to kill him, but soon realizes Hanzo means to use it on himself. McCree convinces him not to, and they reconcile.

For any Time Machine fans reading, Genji's "hack" is actually far more involved. The seed program was planted by the Tekhartha Unit in Central Park. This is why Genji keeps having dream-memories where people speak spanish - it was Sombra's code in his systems, brainwashing him. The next step was repairing his broken comm. Mercy took Genji to Professor Lovings, who is revealed to be an agent of Talon. He installs some control hardware hidden inside the replacement comm. Sombra's hack in Nepal was essentially a trigger word, causing the previously set-up hack to take hold. I originally
explained all of this in this chapter, but it became a big mess of exposition that wasn't really necessary for this story. But Genji getting hacked by Sombra was one of the big plot points that got transferred here from Time Machine.

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When he woke up, Hanzo was alone. He palmed the pale topsheet of the bed, took up his phone, looked at the time. 5:29AM. Objects appeared as grey shapes in the dark room: empty cups scattered on the dresser; his kyudo-gi crumpled on the carpet; storm bow leaned in the corner. He was in 24A. A scent of smoke, tinged with spice, was all around him. He peered up over his tangled, standard-issue, roughspun blanket.

The window was a box of orange light. It illuminated the man standing and facing it, a cigar cradled between his knuckles. Amber light traced his naked torso, up to his face. It created a tawny halo of his messy, dark-brown hair, drew bands along his scruffy beard, his upturned lips, his smile lines. **Beautiful**, Hanzo thought. Not a storm after endless desert miles, but the wet glimmer of mountaintops once those clouds had parted. It felt like an important and timeless moment he should keep.
Looking back down at his phone, Hanzo thumbed open the camera. As he framed McCree and waited for the brightness to adjust, Hanzo spied his most-recently-saved image in the corner of the screen. He’d searched it after Austin, saved it to his phone, and done nothing about it since. Too much happening to worry about something so frivolous. Yet he stared at it for seconds on seconds, fixed on it instead of on the man at the window.

“Well, g’ mornin’.” McCree’s voice was startling. He was aiming that sunbeam smile Hanzo’s way. “What’re you doin’?”

Hanzo lowered his phone so the lens was face-down on the bed. The screen went dark. “Nothing,” he said. “What are you doing?”

Slow and steadily brightening, McCree’s smile got wider. “Watchin’ the sunrise,” he said. After a slow blink, he nodded Hanzo over to the window.

It was like being pulled by a leash. Hanzo unfolded himself from the sheets and glided across the room, into the light of the window; the warmth of McCree’s thick arms and hairy chest. He fit neatly in the tanned crook of his neck.

Standing half-asleep, they were wrapped around one another, dreamlike. They didn’t speak again until the light was a harsh flare.

“How ya’ feeling,” McCree asked.

The question rumbled through Hanzo’s body. “Better,” he said.

That earned a monosyllabic laugh from McCree, and Hanzo wasn’t sure why. “We should have some breakfast. A big ol’ plate of eggs and some sausage, fried bread, strong coffee. Mm-mm.”

“Perhaps,” Hanzo said, staring out at the sea. Under the sun, it looked like obsidian - dark and solid, framed by Gibraltar’s tall cliffsides.

“Hey,” McCree whispered.

Hanzo looked up and realized their faces were close - their lips, coming together. The heat of the kiss rose as the sun did - measured and pleasing, rosy around the edges. Like a clumsy dance, McCree started walking them towards the bed, Hanzo forced to anticipate his steps, only backwards. He stumbled on something, then a liquid rush of pain smudged across his bare foot. “Ah!” Hanzo gasped. He lifted the foot and saw the slash of blood blooming out of his heel. Beneath that, on the floor, swathed in his gold scarf and carelessly thrown down, was Mitsuru’s dagger.

“Shit, Darlin’, you alright?”

“Just a cut,” Hanzo muttered, limping to the bathroom. McCree followed in after. Hanzo turned the shower on, then started to wash the blood away.

“Want me to get Angie?”

Hanzo thought of Mercy’s cool gaze and shook his head. “It’s shallow.”

McCree fidgeted at his shoulder, the two of them pressed close in the tiny bathroom. “I could talk to her about… y’know.”

The blood thinned on the wound, washing away down the showerdrain.
“I mean, she’s a medical doctor,” McCree went on, “but she probably knows someone.”

In some ways it would be a relief. Hanzo considered the burden it would put on Overwatch, which had already cared for him far more than any grown man should need to be cared for; the shame of Mercy knowing or anyone else finding out this weakness was not something he could defeat on his own; the radical change over the past few months that had already been so jarring. The truth was: “I am not ready for that, yet.”

Hands on the waistband of his sweatpants, McCree shuffled his bare feet on the dingy bathmat. “Just worried about you, is all.”

Hanzo shut the water off. “Could you hand me some of that?” He pointed towards the roll of toilet paper.

McCree grabbed the top sheet then flicked his wrist. The roll spun off a long ribbon of gauzy tissue. He wadded it up and handed it to Hanzo.

After elbowing the seat down, Hanzo sat on the toilet and lifted his still-bleeding foot to his knee, pressing the tissue against it firmly. “I know it worries you,” he said. “But the deadline has passed. How to explain… It is almost never an urgent feeling. Rather, it is a dull reassurance in the back of my mind. An escape route, if all else fails.”

“And last night, all else failed.”

The cloud of crumpled tissue against Hanzo’s foot was being slowly taken over by red. “Yes.”

Big and warm, McCree’s hand ran across Hanzo’s back and clutched his shoulder, tight and unassuaged.

“It has been a long time,” Hanzo said, “since I had anyone to worry about me. More than anything, that will keep me here.”

McCree hugged him tighter; pulled Hanzo’s cheek against his chest and kissed the top of his head. As his fingers carded the hair at Hanzo’s temples, it brought again thoughts of the saved photograph on his phone. He looked down as he pulled the crumpled tissue away from his heel.

There was a thin gash, pink beneath the fold of pale, calloused skin. It still hurt - Hanzo would be limping for a time while it healed, but it had finally stopped bleeding. He threw the red and white tissue into the trash can and stood up.

“Let’s have some breakfast,” Hanzo said, looking up at McCree. That won him another sunbaked smile, drawing out the otherwise invisible wrinkles around McCree’s eyes.

“Sure thing, Honeybee.”

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When they passed through Winston’s lab on the way to the mess hall, Hanzo spied a woman there that he did not recognize. She was tall, with freckled cheeks and a curtain of ginger hair. She looked around the lab, not in a curious or exploratory way, but with the wandering eye of idleness. She chewed her lip, then caught sight of Hanzo and McCree as they descended the stairs.

“Howdy, Ma’am. What can I do for you?” McCree tipped his hat to her courteously. He didn’t seem
to know her either. Hanzo found that suspicious.

The redhead rolled her eyes and sighed through her smile. “You must be McCree,” she said in a smooth London accent. “My name’s Emily. Lena was supposed to meet me here, but you know her, always running about, trying to do everything at once.” She extended her hand. Her nails were painted a sunny shade of yellow.

“Oh-ho, the famous Emily,” McCree said with a wide grin. He took her hand in his mechanical one and gave it a good shake. “Pleasure t’meet you. This here’s Hanzo. He’s Genji’s brother.”

Emily’s smile faltered when she switched her gaze to Hanzo, but she extended a hand to him just the same. Hanzo took it, bowing his head.

“Lena told me what happened with Genji, I’m so sorry,” Emily said. “If it makes you feel any better, she’s absolutely convinced there’s something more going on.”

Hanzo and McCree exchanged a look. “I am going to do my best to retrieve him unharmed,” Hanzo told her.

Emily smiled and opened her mouth to say more. Before she could speak a syllable, however, she was bowled over onto the lab’s linoleum floor. Hanzo leaned back in shock, blinking as his eyes focused.

On the ground, Tracer was on top of Emily, ass in the air, arms wrapped around her neck. She was showering her cheek with kisses as Emily laughed and squirmed. “Lena, come on then, cut it out!”

“I missed you, I missed you, I missed you!” Tracer crowed before finally let Emily up to her feet. “Oh man, Luv, you know, I forget how bloody gorgeous you are every time you’re away.”

“You’re too much, Lena!” Emily hid her blush behind her hand.

Hanzo looked to McCree. He did not have the amused expression Hanzo expected - instead, it was a sad, nostalgic sort of smile.

“What is wrong,” Hanzo asked, quiet beneath Tracer’s excited chatter.

“Oh, it’s nothin’,” McCree said.

“Tell me.”

“Eh. S’just my momma used t’kiss me that way. Y’know-” McCree leaned in and smacked a torrent of wet kisses on Hanzo’s cheek, making him laugh and push McCree away. When Hanzo looked again, Tracer was looking at them, her mouth making an “o.” Hanzo cleared his throat and looked at the ground.

“Han and I were just about to grab some breakfast,” McCree said, unphased, “if you gals’d like to join us.”

“No way!” Tracer said. “I’m taking Em back to my bunk and-”

Emily muffled that line of thought by wrapping an arm around Tracer’s neck and covering her mouth with her hand. “Breakfast sounds lovely,” she said.

--

The mess was quiet but not empty. They found Overwatch’s two newest recruits - Ana Amari and
her daughter, Fareeha “Pharah” Amari. They were sitting across from each other, speaking in low voices until Tracer crashed into the hall, dragging along a giddy Emily. Greetings and good mornings were exchanged and Emily was introduced. Hanzo and McCree hung back.

Out of the corner of his eye, Hanzo caught McCree tipping his hat in Ana’s direction. She smiled and nodded back. After that, they left the four women to talk, walking back into the kitchen.

They were hardly in the room before McCree’s head was ducked into the fridge. He began pulling out a cartons of eggs, rashers of bacon, loaves of bread. He stacked them on the counter as Hanzo dug out a few frying pans.

Early mornings in a kitchen felt outside of time. Soft and distant, the women chittered in the mess while McCree and Hanzo cooked in comfortable silence. There was something present about standing shoulder-to-shoulder with McCree as he clumsily cracked eggs and shuffled the pan of sausages. McCree’s fingers combing through Hanzo’s prickly hair, leaning weight on his shoulder, the spicy scent of the oily meats, and the rainfall sound of grease crackling. A gentle haze of smoke, the feel McCree’s strong back beneath his cotton shirt. No past meaning colored it crimson or grey. Hanzo could not remember the last time he felt that way.

They carried the food out to the girls, who lit up with excitement. Tracer pulled the food off the platter before Hanzo had even set it down, while Pharah took the plates from McCree’s arms then passed them out.

“Got a pot brewin’. Who wants coffee?” McCree waved his finger at each of the women. Tracer raised her hand like a class know-it-all. “Lots of milk and sugar, yeah?”

Pharah said, “Sure. Just sugar for me.”

Ana waved the offer away. “None for me, thank you.” She tapped the lip of her teacup.

“I’ll fix myself a tea as well,” Emily said, standing up.

Last but not least, McCree pointed to Hanzo. “What about you, Honeybee?”

Hanzo flushed when he felt eyes on him - not to say he and McCree had been hiding it, but it was the first time being called by a pet name in front of other agents. He stared at his hands, sure there was reprise of Tracer’s curious look from earlier. “Alright,” he said.

McCree palmed Hanzo’s shoulder affectionately. “Cream and sugar?”

“Just cream, please.”

“Already sweet enough, eh?” McCree kissed the top of his head. He and Emily walked back to the kitchen.

For a time, they sat in silence. In his periphery, Hanzo could see Tracer grinning from ear-to-ear, eyes boring a hole in his temple. Pharah too, was looking between McCree in the kitchen, and Hanzo sitting at the table. He pointedly stabbed a fork into his fried egg and said nothing.

“So, how long you two been love bugs, eh?” Tracer rested her chin in both hands, pushing her cheeks up.

Hanzo cleared his throat. “Some time now.”

“Really?” Tracer shot up like bamboo. “Thought you two’d seemed a bit cuddly lately. Not at all like
when you first got here.”

“I’m surprised too,” Pharah said with none of Tracer’s excitement. “He was so close with Genji, I
would not have thought you two would get along at all.” There was something accusatory in
Pharah’s stern gaze.

“Oh, leave him alone, Fareeha.” Ana put her hand around her daughter’s broad shoulders and
nodded at the food. Hanzo was grateful when she changed the subject. “I heard from Winston we’re
getting more new recruits in soon.”

“Yeah…” Tracer trailed off, pouting.

“One of them is Mei,” Pharah said. “You remember her? She was on the research team. They found
her still in cryostasis at Watchpoint: Antarctica. Only survivor.”

Ana’s lips made a hard line. “The worst things always happen to the sweetest people,” she said

Tracer made a face. “She’s anti-omnic rights,” she said.

“Considering all that’s happened in Krasnoyarsk, I can hardly blame her,” Pharah said.

“That’s no excuse,” Tracer put in. “We still don’t know how or why the God Program propagated
during the Crisis, and besides-” Here, Tracer went from angry to sullen, “-Omnics have suffered
too.”

The EMP at the Shambali temple. Tracer had taken it especially hard.

“Well, I’m sure you will have a positive influence on this Zaryanova when she joins Overwatch,”
Ana said to Tracer.

“Maybe you two can bond over your hair,” Pharah suggested.

“What’re we talkin’ about?” It was McCree, returning with Emily. They both had a cup in each
hand, and passed them out one by one. Emily slid in beside Tracer, and McCree took a wide step
over the mess-hall bench and put a cup in front of Hanzo.

“Aleksandra Zaryanova,” Pharah said. “She has pink hair.”

“Ho, I remember when you had that ‘do, Miss Tracer,” McCree said with warmth.

“Yeah, but I made it look good.” Tracer winked.

“I’ve never seen this,” Emily said, smiling. “You have pictures?”

“Yeah,” Tracer said, taking out her phone. “Ain’t done any colors like that in a while, all the
bleaching and growing out, it’s such a pain, yeah?”

Hanzo peered over McCree’s shoulder as Tracer thumbed through her screen. “My brother said-” He
stopped himself. Most of the people here still assumed Genji was a traitor. He might not be the best
subject to bring up.

Tracer had no such reservations. “Yeah! I did his the other day. It was fun, but man, it takes forever,
yeah? Green looks good on him though. He said he used to do it that way when he was young.”

“Mm,” Hanzo said, remembering Genji’s scarred face beneath the grassy tuft of hair. My brother.
“Ah, here we are!” Tracer tilted her screen to show the others, swiping through a collection of selfies. Her hair was just as wild - short, swooping swaths - but as advertised, they were bubblegum pink under a pair of blue, studded goggles. The sides of her head were shaved.

“Man, you were cute,” Emily said. “Use your time thingy to go back to this, I say.”

“Oh, real funny, Luv.” Tracer rubbed her nose with Emily’s, grinning.

“You dyed your hair yourself, then,” Hanzo asked.

“Oh, yeah. Always do the cut ‘n color myself. It’s the punk-rock way!”

“She cuts my hair as well,” Emily said. “Has nice scissors and clippers and fancy hair products and all. She’s quite good at it.”

“Oh, Em, it’s not as fancy as all that. Just a hobby, really.”

Hanzo looked down at the photograph on Tracer’s phone screen and hummed.

“Everything all right, Darlin’?” McCree asked.

Sucking in a breath, Hanzo looked back down at his food. “It is nothing,” he said.

--

Hanzo rose at dawn. He was alone again, McCree out on an assignment until the afternoon. While the flagship Overwatch forces were deployed up to aid in the aftermath of Omnic attacks, agents with less-recognizable faces were sent out on investigative missions. Now that Talon had used one EMP, Winston had them searching for where the rest were hidden, and what other targets Talon might have in mind.

Thankfully, though, Hanzo didn’t have a mission lined up until after McCree reported back. Groggy with early morning, he went to the practice ranges.

An hour of archery, then an hour of throwing, then kendo, then agility training. It was just as he'd done when Mitsuru trained him. The structure had firmed up over the past week of practice, shaking off the dust and falling into routine.

Hanzo was rounding out his morning training as he always did - by climbing the comm tower. They had just about finished repairing the damage Mitsuru had done to it. As Hanzo pulled himself up onto the ledge, he wondered if they would return for McCree on the next Moonless Night.

Must I fight my own mother? Hanzo wondered as he looked out at the water, letting the wind cool the sweat on his brow. A warbling roar cut through the caw of the gulls, and Hanzo spied a hoverjet coming towards the landing strip. McCree. A moment later, Hanzo realized he was smiling, and hadn’t pushed the smile down as he usually did. Fool, he thought, but he was still smiling. He went inside to meet McCree at Winston’s lab for his report.

“Any indication of where Talon might strike next?” Hanzo heard Winston’s question through the open lab door. He rounded the corner, and saw McCree leaning against the lockers, idly twirling his gun. He used the barrel to push his hat from his forehead, opened his mouth to speak - then, he saw Hanzo standing in the doorway. McCree shut his mouth, sighed, then said, “No, sir.”

Winston huffed. “Alright. We'll have another meeting after dinner tonight about where to go next. Until then, you're dismissed.”
McCree tipped his hat to Winston, then walked to Hanzo at the door. The pair walked side-by-side to the dorms.

Hanzo pushed the door open to 24A. McCree followed after him, tugging his serape off.

“Are meetings like that the norm,” Hanzo asked.

“Looks that way,” McCree said, settling down at the edge of Hanzo’s bed. “Weren’t when Jack ran the show, least not with us. He and Ana and Reyes’d have it out behind closed doors, though.”

Hanzo hummed. “As it should be. Leaders ought to arrange the information they have and make decisions so others can focus on their individual tasks.”

“Some people like knowing what’s goin’ on,” McCree said, lighting up a cigar. “Y’know, having a voice.”

The spicy scent of smoke met Hanzo’s nose and he huffed. He walked to the window, threw it open.

“Ah, hell. Sorry, Han - I plum forgot,” McCree said, staring at his cigar. “A disgusting habit, ain’t that what you always say?”

“It is fine,” Hanzo said, only somewhat irked. “Perhaps, ask first next time.”

McCree made a face, resting his hand and his cigar on his knee. “Honeybee, I been thinking,” he said. “Maybe we should tell ’em about New York.”

“What have we to tell them?”

“Hell, I don’t know. Just to keep an eye on it, I s’ppose.”

“Do you not think the question of how we received this information will come up?”

“Yeah, but what if somethin’ real bad happens and we could have stopped it?”

“What about Genji,” Hanzo asked. “That woman, Sombra, said if Talon learns what we know, they will kill him.”

“We could be careful about lookin’ into it-”

“No,” Hanzo said. “All it takes is one mistake, and my brother is dead.”

“You know I care about Genji, Han - better than anyone, you know. But this could be hundreds or thousands of lives we’re talkin’ about.”

“This discussion is over,” Hanzo barked.

McCree sighed and looked down at his cigar, cradled between his knuckles. “I know you want to protect him, and I’m glad, it’s just-... I don’t trust that gal Sombra.”

Hanzo moved to the bed. Sighing out his anger, he nestled himself between McCree’s splayed knees, carded fingers in his chestnut beard. The cut in his foot stung - Hanzo allowed himself to limp in private. “Nor do I. But...” He leaned forward, pressed his lips to McCree’s hairline. “I must protect Genji at all cost. It is… redemption for me, do you understand?”

“Course I do.” McCree’s breath was warm on Hanzo’s throat. He shifted, climbing into McCree’s lap, knees on either side of the gunslinger’s waist.
The deep gasp McCree took was satisfying. Hanzo kissed the tail end of it, swallowing McCree’s breath. Hanzo pressed his fingers against McCree’s tanned neck, his scalp, his clavicle. Sliding underneath the soft cotton of his shirt. Searching for more skin, pulling out low coos of satisfaction.

“You’re gonna rile me, Honey,” McCree breathed, once Hanzo freed his lips.

“That is the idea,” Hanzo whispered to his ear, nipping down to his neck.

“Ahh! Un…” McCree squirmed and gasped as Hanzo bit down at the curve of his shoulder. With thumb and forefinger, Hanzo found the first button of McCree’s shirt. He pinched it open, then slid his hand across the carpet of curly hair until his fingers found a nipple.

There was the jangle of spurs as McCree slammed his heel against the ground, bucked up his hips so their steadily-growing erections pressed against one another. With a reedy groan, he grabbed Hanzo by the hips and repeated the motion again and again, hungry for friction.

Now it was Hanzo’s turn to gasp and squirm - to be the recipient of McCree’s impatient attentions. McCree’s head dipped down to Hanzo’s throat, lips wet on his clavicle. Then, thick fingers slid up under his kyudo-gi and pawed at his trousers. “Take these off,” McCree said, even as his hands tugged the waistband.

“Put your cigar away before you set me on fire,” Hanzo countered with a smirk.

“Uh, Right.”

Reluctantly, they split apart. McCree turned his back to Hanzo, searching for something on top of Hanzo’s dresser to use as an ashtray. Hanzo leaned over to his nightstand and pulled open the drawer.

The drawer felt oddly messy, like a little diorama of how his room used to look not so long ago. There was a pen, a half-empty box of chocolate mints, a sleeve of condoms, a knife, some loose change, a comb, sticks of incense and a simple dish to hold them, and a bottle of lube. Hanzo pulled out the necessary items and set them on the nightstand, then as an afterthought, grabbed the incense holder as well. He crawled over and wrapped one arm around McCree’s waist.

“Having trouble,” Hanzo asked.

“Y’usually got some empty cups and stuff around here,” McCree said, a little flustered.

“Here.” Hanzo offered him the incense holder.

McCree took it and snuffed the cigar out as Hanzo hugged him from behind, chest pressed to McCree’s back. His hands wandered down to McCree’s overlarge, gaudy belt-buckle, and unlatched it.

“Mm,” McCree crooned as his zipper came undone. “Rub me a little first. Your hands are so good.”

“Like this?”

McCree’s breath came out like a shudder. “Y-yeah…”

“Or like this?”

“Ah! H-hell, Han…”

Hanzo chuckled. “Do not get ahead of yourself-”
Like a shot, McCree turned out of Hanzo’s arms and pushed him down, kneeling over him on the bed. One hand thumbed Hanzo’s chin to the side so he could press his lips to the nape of his neck. The other hand stroked him through his trousers.

“Jesse,” Hanzo breathed, thrusting up into his palm.

“Aw, hell,” McCree said into Hanzo’s neck. “I can’t wait no more.”

Hanzo chuckled. “Impatient.”

“Damn right I am!” McCree whined, sitting up on his haunches, straddling Hanzo’s thighs. “Look at you… you’re the finest damn thing I ever set eyes on.”

Hanzo’s eyes landed pointedly beneath the opened belt buckle, where McCree was stroking himself. “You are not so bad a sight yourself,” Hanzo purred.

McCree’s other hand rubbed the inside of Hanzo’s thighs, grinning a roguish, handsome grin. He picked up the condom and lube from the nightstand and waggled his eyebrows.

“Like last time?” A request.

Hanzo sat up and took the items from McCree’s hands, snapping the cap on the bottle open. He rubbed the viscous liquid between his thumb and forefinger. Then, lips pressed to McCree’s shoulders, he moved his hand down past the small of McCree’s back.

“Hell,” McCree gasped as Hanzo steadily opened him.

“Hm?”

“Your fingers,” McCree gasped, pressing his face into Hanzo’s shoulder.

Hanzo crooked them for effect. McCree keened, bucking up to meet them, pushing them deeper.

“Are you ready?”

“Honey, I been ready,” McCree gasped.

“Hm.” Hanzo leaned back. McCree smoothed his hands down Hanzo’s half-bare chest and found his obi, untying it. Hanzo’s kyudo-gi fell open. McCree’s rough hands smoothed down his torso, then tugged his pants down to his thighs.

“Take your belt off,” Hanzo whispered.

“Still nervous ‘cause it clocked ya’ last time?”

Hanzo touched the last swell of the bruise it had left on the corner of his eyebrow. “Yes.”

McCree stifled a chuckle and stripped the belt from its loops in one fluid motion.

“It was not funny,” Hanzo said, stifling a smile.

“It was a little funny.”
Unable to contest that earnestly, Hanzo snorted. McCree unwrapped the condom and rolled it onto Hanzo, then grabbed him by the base.

As always, McCree tried to move too fast at first. Impatient. Hanzo wasn’t any help either. Sex tapped into a deep-seated animal aggression in him. Yet one pained expression from McCree always made Hanzo stop, slow down, become gentle. After the first rushed inch or so, they came together slowly.

Finally, McCree hovered over Hanzo, hands on either side of his shoulders. Hanzo stroked his hips as McCree moved them back and forth, slow at first, then too fast too soon. Hanzo had to close his eyes, the vision of McCree above him too alluring when he used this pace. The sound of his voice, the scent of musk and the stubbed cigar, and the feel of him were already so much.

“Jesse,” Hanzo gasped. “Sit up.”

“Huh?”

“Sit up.”

The firmer tone shot McCree into action. He leaned back on his haunches and stilled his movements. Hanzo peeled his eyelids back and looked up. McCree was staring down at him, red-faced, puzzled, and immensely alluring. Hanzo slid his hand up McCree’s thigh, then he took him in his hand.

McCree’s eyes rolled back in his head and he groaned. “Hell,” he said, sitting still for a while and enjoying the pressure. Watching his lover’s face like a timer, Hanzo started moving beneath him, pushing up in a rhythm. McCree groaned and tried to meet it, but his movement was limited by Hanzo’s hand clutching him. He started to squirm, chin turning back and forth, sheened in sweat, panting and moaning.

Knowingly, Hanzo grabbed McCree by the hip and redoubled his efforts until the gunslinger came apart above him, hot seed pumping out onto Hanzo’s bare chest. The feel of it on him spurred Hanzo on, drew out a rare moan of his own.

“Fuck, darlin’, not so fast,” McCree whined above him. “I can’t stand it- Ah!”

Hanzo grasped McCree by the hips and crested with three stuttering thrusts, legs kicking at the sheets and voice catching over and over until it escaped as a gasp.

McCree fell forward on top of him, mouth slack, panting. Chest-to-chest.

“Now you… have made… a mess… of both of us,” Hanzo panted.

“Guess I have,” McCree breathed. “Just… gimme one minute.”

“No.” Hanzo chuckled.

“C’mon, Honey, let me catch my damn breath. Y’just fucked me into oblivion.”

“I hardly think that is so,” Hanzo said, smirking as he sat up, pushing McCree back onto his haunches again. He pouted at Hanzo as he tugged a few tissues from the box on his nightstand.

As Hanzo ran them across his own broad chest, he caught McCree staring with interest. “Keep those for when I’m off on missions?” McCree - chest still heaving, Hanzo still inside him - grinned and clicked his teeth.
Hanzo snorted, giving McCree a sharp, teasing thrust in retaliation. He gasped, face screwed up.

“Now, that ain’t fair,” McCree choked.

Hanzo chuckled and leaned up. “I take every advantage,” he said as he roughly wiped down McCree’s hairy chest.

They were silent for a while as Hanzo fussed over him until he was clean. Hissing through his teeth, Hanzo slid out of him. He sighed, stripped the spent condom off, then bundled it in the tissues before getting up to toss them in the trash can.

“Y’can just throw it on the ground for now,” McCree said, laying out on the bed like a pinup, cheek resting on his knuckles.

“I would rather not,” Hanzo said.

“Hm. Place has been cleaner than ever last few days.”

Hanzo tossed the rubbish into the trash bin, then walked back to the edge of the bed. He threaded his fingers in McCree’s scruffy sideburns, didn’t look at him. “Mm.”

“It’s good, though.” McCree scooted back to make room for Hanzo on the little cot. “Good t’see you take care of yourself.”

Hanzo tucked his back up against McCree’s chest, pulling one tan arm around himself like a blanket. “It seems a small thing to worry over, with so many larger things happening in the world.”

“S’the little things that help us do the big ones,” McCree said sleepily, burying his face in Hanzo’s prickly hair. “Mmm, yer hair smells good.”

Silence took them after that, and Hanzo felt himself slip again into one of those timeless moments. McCree’s warm body heated him, skin to skin, evening sunlight flattened out on the carpet in the shape of his window. No rumpled clothing or used dishes to mar the light’s sharp edges. Clean. Simple. Not the simplicity of not caring, of being crumpled on the floor feeling no more alive than those discarded objects, but the simplicity of being in a single moment, without the weight of ages past pinning him down.

McCree broke the spell first. He breathed in as he sat up. He’d fallen asleep. “What time is it?”

Hanzo pawed at the nightstand for his phone, squinting at the time on the screen. “5:14,” he said. He paused, unlocking the phone. He opened his photos, opened the photo, and squinted at it for a few long seconds.

“Should get up, I suppose,” McCree said reluctantly.

“You stay,” Hanzo said, sitting up and slipping out of McCree’s arms. “I have something to do.”

“What you up to, Honeybee?”

Hanzo turned off his phone screen, then leaned down to kiss McCree at the corner of his eye. “Nothing,” he said, smiling. “Rest.”
Some rooms were easy to identify - Lúcio’s, for example, always had a thrumming beat coming out of it. D.Va’s room had some video-game posters plastered on the outside, and a pair of construction-paper bunny ears taped over the numbers. Reinhardt listened to the television on full blast.

Tracer’s room had a telltale sign as well - the door was always open.

Hanzo heard her before he saw her, her conversation lilting out into the hallway. “Ugh! I know you got important stuff to do with the charity and all, but I still say you should have stayed longer. I miss you.”

Hanzo walked to the open doorway and spied Tracer laid out on the floor of her room, feet propped up against the wall.

“I keep sayin’ it ‘cause it’s true, Em! You sure there isn’t anything world-threatening happening in London right now?”

On the phone with Emily, Hanzo realized. She’d departed two days ago, much to Tracer’s chagrin. Best not to bother her now - he turned to leave.

“Oh- Hanzo?”

Hanzo stopped. Tracer’s head was rolled back, staring at him upside-down.

“I had no intention of interrupting,” Hanzo said.

“You’re not, Luv, I was just about to pop off. D’you need something?”

Hanzo waved her off. “It is not important. Finish your call.”

“It’s finished. Hey Em? I love you to pieces and pieces, and I’ll call you back tomorrow, okay? Yeah. Yup! Okay. Bye, hot stuff!” Tracer thumbed her screen and ended the call. She shot to her feet with almost inhuman speed, then blinked up to the door, leaning against the frame. “Whaddya need, Luv?”

“It is nothing important,” Hanzo reiterated, sheepish. “Only… would you do me a favor?”

“Course! Whaddya need?”

“It seems silly to ask,” Hanzo began, pulling his phone out of his pocket. He navigated to his photos. “But I was thinking about the discussion over breakfast the other day. Regarding your hobby.”

“Yeah? What about it?”

Swallowing, Hanzo tapped the image with his thumb so it filled his screen. “I thought, only because we have some time this evening before the mission tomorrow…” He trailed off, and turned the phone to show her.

“What, that? For you?” Tracer pointed at the crown of his head.

Hanzo nodded.

“Aww, that’s easy, Luv! Come on, I’ll set up a chair in the bathroom in front of the mirror. We’ll have it done in a jif. Let me get my clippers.”

--
The sound of silverware and plates clinking and clattering drifted out into the hallway, just beneath Hanzo’s heartbeat thundering in his ears. Tracer was beside him, strolling down the hallway without a care in the world. As they approached the door, Hanzo stopped. It took a few steps for Tracer to notice.

“What’s wrong, Luv?”

“Ah… perhaps I will have dinner in my room tonight,” Hanzo said, reaching back behind his head and feeling the shorn hair there. It felt so smooth and foreign that he couldn’t stop touching it.

“No way! Did I do a bad job or something?”

“It is not that.”

“Aw, come on, I gotta show off my good work, then! It looks tip top, I promise. I like you more already.” Tracer winked at him.

Hanzo chuckled, remembering the first time they’d met - Tracer had socked him in the jaw. How different things were now. He listened again to the cheerful dinner conversation only a wall away. There was a time it would have repelled him, but now, it beckoned him to it like he was being tugged by a string. He touched the back of his head again - a foreign feeling, but good.

Tracer rounded the corner, and Hanzo followed her.

At first, no one took notice of him at all, too wrapped up in their own happy conversations. It was a disappointment and a relief at once. Then Hanzo spied that Ana, on the opposite end of the room, had fixed her sharp eye on him. They stared each other down. She raised an eyebrow, then smiled and elbowed the red woolen serape next to her.

Hanzo watched without breath as McCree leaned into Ana, shoving an ear at her, thinking she had something to say. Instead, with a tight-lipped smile, she nodded in Hanzo’s direction. McCree looked up, squinted, then went bug-eyed. Slow as honey, he took off his hat, and pressed it to his chest.

“Whoa, Hanzo!” Lúcio flew up out of his seat. He had his skates on as usual, and he skidded to stop a few feet in front of him. “That’s a *look*. You do his hair, Tracer?”

“Guilty as charged, Luv.” Tracer winked, hands on her hips.

“Shaved sides? Seems kinda radical for a guy your age,” D.Va said with pursed, appraising lips. “Hm! Looks pretty good on you, though.”

“Oh, yeah! You rock it, Shimada-san,” Lúcio added, playfully bouncing his knuckles on Hanzo’s shoulder. “See - last name, I got it right this time.”

The three young geniuses surrounded him in appraisal. Hanzo caught himself smiling - he hadn’t tried to push it down, either. He touched the back of his head, ran his palm against the shorn hair and felt the edges of his lips touching long-abandoned territory.

“Ah! I don’t see what all the fuss is about,” Torbjörn grumbled, walking over alongside Reinhardt, Winston, and Mercy. Reinhardt’s mustache spread out in a wide grin. Tracer and Winston were exchanging smirks. Even Mercy had a small, reserved smile.

“Maybe I should get you to do mine, Lena, if this is the kind of attention it gets,” Pharah said, standing stoic as a statue, broad-shouldered and sturdy. Ana was hunched beside her. With one wiry hand, she grabbed a bare, tanned forearm and tugged Jesse McCree in front of her. Hanzo
swallowed, looked at the floor, leaned his weight on his injured foot and felt dull pain.

McCree closed the distance between them, looking dumbfounded. Hanzo breathed in through his nose, schooled his expression, put his shoulders back. For a moment, he felt the ghost of Mitsuru’s fingers there. You’re slouching - letting too much of yourself show, standing exposed to attack.

But then, perhaps here, surrounded by these kind faces, it was safe to slouch a little. He shifted his weight off his wound, let it rest, and took a limping step forward towards McCree.

“I’ll be damned,” McCree whispered. The edge of his mouth quirked up. “And here I thought you couldn’t get an inch finer than you already were.”

Then it happened again, wide open and with teeth, Hanzo was smiling again and hadn’t tried to stop it. Nor did he pull away when McCree touched his cheek, and leaned in to kiss him in the middle of the mess hall. He lifted his hat to hide the gesture from the other people in the hall, but it didn’t stop them from hooting and hollering like a studio audience.

How long their lips met for, Hanzo couldn’t say. It was another moment out of time. It felt like it was now, and months from now. Years from now. It was a constant state of the wet touch, the circuit connection, the feel of McCree’s scruffy beard and his breath, his rough skin, slow leaning in and leaning away. The way he looked into Hanzo’s eyes as if for approval. Then, McCree leaned back, and scratched his hair, a bit sheepish.

“Sorry, Honeybee. Don’t know what came over me.”

Hanzo shrank a bit from the smiling eyes around him, and shoved Jesse’s shoulder. “I am going to get something to eat. Try to restrain yourself until then,” he teased, then turned towards the mess.

“Whoa, whoa, hold on,” Lúcio said, eyes fixed down on his phone. “Hey, turn on the news.”

Hanzo’s brow furrowed. He and McCree both looked at one another as if either of them had the answer.

Reinhardt grabbed the remove from on top of the fridge and thumbed the mounted TV on, then cranked the volume up to full-blast. As always, the channel was set to a 24-hour news channel.

“-Newark Omnium, just west of Manhattan. The National Guard has stated that the count comes to almost 100,000 attack units, the largest Omnic army since the crisis.”

Hanzo walked up behind McCree, staring at the jagged metropolitan skyline, set distant behind a 150ft robed, seafoam woman with a single arm raising a torch. McCree’s face was stern now, his eyes narrowed towards the screen as he whispered, “New York.”

The camera shot changed to a helicopter cam of the Brooklyn Bridge. It was flooded end to end with metallic bodies, mechanically spaced and moving with programmed precision, as if part of a whole entity.

“Look,” Tracer whispered, pointing at two figures out at the head of the army. One was a floating omnic radiating a dark-violet aura. She wore black, and unlike the pleasant cyan installed on most Omnics, her lights were electric blue. Another figure marched a few feet behind, lit in red, with a mechanical hand around the haft of a familiar, green Odachi.

“Genji,” Hanzo gasped.

“We’ve identified the leaders of the army as Tekhartha Seiyatta, a known Omnic Rights extremist;
and a former Overwatch agent known only as “Genji.” The defunct military peacekeeping organization is said to have illegally reformed in the wake of the new Omnic attacks.

“Seiyatta is a Tekhartha unit - the same model as the recently-assassinated Omnic spiritual leader, Tekhartha Mondatta. Little is known about this Omnic terrorist, but it’s been reported that she has ties to the Omnic Rights extremist group Null Sector, known most notoriously for their assault on King’s Row seven years ago. Her presence had lead authorities to believe that this attack is politically-motivated.”

Hanzo and McCree exchanged a look. “This ain’t the work of Omnic radicals,” McCree whispered to him. “If Genji’s there, we know Talon is involved.”

It felt like there was cotton in his throat. Hanzo made his face stern, looking up into McCree’s eyes. “We have to rescue him.”

With a stern nod, McCree said, “We will.” He looked to Winston. “Orders, sir?”

Winston puffed his chest out, taking in a deep breath and looking across at every face in the room. “All agents, suit up,” he said. “We’ve got a city to save.”

Chapter End Notes

Here we come, act 3!! And Hanzo's ready with his new haircut ^_^

Very excited to finally be here - but I'm sorry you guys, I'm going to take another little break, similar to the one I took when I wrote Girl with No Name. I just want to take some time for another few stories in a different fandom I've had bouncing around in my skull. They're both pretty short, so we should be back to our regular schedule in a couple weeks, and as Sombra says - it's all up from here!

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 9PM EST!

thank you all - I love you guys! ;^;
Into Hell

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
After the hiatus, we're jumping into Act 3 with both feet! I have a heavier workload coming up soon, but I still plan to have the story finished by August at the latest. I *think* we're going to come out at an even 30 chapters by the end, but I like to leave myself some wiggle room just in case (: 

Content warnings: Some light violence.

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven't been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it's such a joy! I know this chapter will answer at least one of the questions I've been seeing in the comments.
I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
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ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 9PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The plane ticket in McCree’s hand read “Flight LX13.” He glared down at it, mouth turned in a hard frown. 13’s an unlucky number, McCree thought to himself. I ain’t getting on a damn flight numbered “13.”

Still, McCree opened the lapel of his old buckskin sherpa jacket and stuffed the ticket in the inside pocket. It pressed against his heart. When he got to security, he was nervous taking the jacket off and putting it through the conveyor, asking if the ticket might get lost somehow; hoped that it would. But the Swiss security agents only rolled their eyes at him, and when he retrieved his jacket on the other side of the X-ray machine, the ticket was still there, snug in the inside pocket.

McCree had been on a plane plenty of times before, but that was Blackwatch’s covert drop jet. He hadn’t gone through airport security since that first trip from the ruin of the Deadlock Gang in Santa Fe to the glittering palace that was Overwatch’s HQ in Geneva. Funny how things turned around on you.

It was all over the news, and the news was all over the airport in the form of mounted flatscreens. McCree was surprised they didn’t shut the damn airport down. He almost hoped they would. He hated planes, didn’t want to fly in one for hours and hours across the Atlantic. Didn’t want to leave, but he’d already left. There were already ashes at his back.

Over and over, the news showed that aerial shot of the Geneva HQ swathed in smoke. All those big, pretty windows blown out, those marble pillars cracked. When McCree had first arrived at HQ.
young and pissed and blackmailed, he would have smirked at the sight. Now, it put a big rock in the pit of his stomach.

The gate was way down at the end of the terminal. McCree let that rock in his gut pull him down into a seat within striking distance of the gate announcements. He made sure he was facing one of the TV screens that showed the news in English. He didn’t want to know, but he had to know.

The UN was reporting it as an accidental explosion, because of course they were. If Reyes was right, and they’d been taking corporate kickbacks for sending Overwatch to certain locations, the last thing they’d want is an investigation. The ticket pressed against his chest. The felt-tip name written inside the band of his hat burned against his forehead. Santa Fe. Reyes never let him go back there, because he knew what would happen if he did. McCree knew, too. It made him at once wrathful, and frightened.

It’s not too late, McCree thought. I could rip this ticket in half. I could go live in Geneva. It’s a nice enough city. Hell, I could go to the UN hat-in-hand. What’s the worst they’d do? Send me to prison like they ought to have 15 years ago? Staring at that footage, seeing the HQ in pieces, McCree figured he deserved a lot worse.

“Now calling Zone 3. Zone 3, for flight LX13.” McCree touched his lapel, knowing the ticket was tucked in there. Zone 3 was the one printed on his boarding pass, he was almost sure of it, but he didn’t want to take the ticket out to check. He didn’t want to know; didn’t want to get on this damn plane. The other passengers lined up. McCree stayed seated.

A snazzy 3D graphic spun on the TV screen, a punchy, five-second sting playing behind it. The camera cut to a slick, handsome news reporter with a shaved head and glasses. “Breaking News this morning on the explosion at Overwatch’s headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.”

Two framed photos faded in next to the news reporter’s grim face. McCree’s throat closed like cotton, because he knew the men in those photos, and he knew what the reporter was about to say. “Overwatch’s Strike Commander, Jack Morrison, is dead.”

McCree covered his mouth with both gloved hands and pushed down a sob, because if Jack was dead, that meant the guy pictured next to him was too. McCree stood up from his chair, feeling woozy. “Also counted among the dead is former Overwatch Commander Gabriel Reyes,” the reporter said. The rest of the report turned into a buzzing in McCree’s ears. He stumbled down the hall towards the bathroom.

Pushing past the urinals and sinks, McCree dropped himself into a stall. Once the door was closed, McCree fell against it, crying into his gloves. “Damnit, Gabe,” he whispered. “Damnit, damn it all!” Reyes had given him everything. Overwatch had showed him that doing right was worthwhile. He’d left both of them to burn. He still didn’t know what the right thing to do would have been - only that instead of making a tough choice, McCree had run away like a coward.

A woman’s voice came on over the speaker. “Calling all zones for flight LX13. Again, now boarding all zones for flight LX13 to Santa Fe.”

Santa Fe. There was a man waiting for McCree there, who’d been left unperturbed for far too long. Reyes had never let him go see that man no matter how many times McCree asked, with his trigger-finger twitching. Because Reyes knew that if McCree came across that man, it’d turn into an old-fashioned shootout.

Well, Reyes wasn’t around anymore. If he was going to run, McCree would rather run towards something than away from it. Maybe he didn’t know if he should have stood with Reyes or against
him, but McCree knew for certain there was one person he had to avenge. It was the person whose name was written across his forehead like a brand. He reached into his pocket then pulled out his ticket, staring at the flight number and the destination city attached to it. LX13. Unlucky, he thought. Well, that fits me just fine, don’t it?

McCree pushed open the stall door, marched to the gate, and got on that god-damn plane.

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Lower Manhattan was blanketed with machines. Every row of metal bodies was too straight and perfect, so that from up in the hoverjet it looked like a great, woven tapestry. The omnic army. How many had the news report said there was? Thousands? Tens of thousands? McCree looked from the hoverjet’s frost-crusted window to the motley heroes stuffed inside its cabin. Pharah, Ana, the newly-recruited RDF soldier Aleksandra Zaryanova, Winston, Hanzo and himself. Lucio, D.Va, Reinhardt, Mercy, Torbjorn, and a recently-recovered Mei-Ling Zhou, were on another transport. Tracer was piloting that one, since D.Va’s mech strapped to the back of the hoverjet played havoc with the piloting program. McCree hoped to hell the AI wouldn’t have to contend with air artillery. Just the thought made his already-accelerated heart-rate tick up. God damn, he hated flying.

“13’s an unlucky number.” McCree didn’t realize he’d said it aloud until he caught Hanzo’s quizzical brow pointed at him from his periphery.

“What about thirteen,” Hanzo asked, seated beside him.

“Nothin’,” McCree said. “Only, there’s thirteen of us and and that many of them.” He gestured to the window with his cybernetic hand.

Pharah was just in front of where they were seated, standing, her armored fist clutching one of the hoverjet’s handholds. She turned her hawkbill helmet their way. “It’s not just us. I brought in Helix Security. The U.S. is calling up reserves - the National Guard, Army, Navy, Marines - even the Marshals are here.”

Hanzo scoffed. “I have had about as much of the US Marshals as I can stomach these past months,” he said. His annoyance warmed McCree’s heart.

Pharah smiled under her helmet. “You mean Deputy Marshal Cooper?”

McCree thumbed up the brim of his hat in surprise. “You know Coop?”

“Sure. Helix worked with him on an international bounty case,” Pharah said. “He told me he was a friend of yours.”

“Wouldn’t call him my friend. He’s like as not to arrest me next time he sees me.”

“Are you a wanted man, Jesse?” Pharah was smiling, a twinkle in her eye that reminded him of her mother, who was seated a few feet away checking her biotic rifle.

“Surely am, Fareeha,” McCree said back, just as jovial.

“How you think he ended up on that bounty list?” Hanzo said seriously. Either he didn’t catch the joke, or just didn’t think it was funny.
Pharah hummed, smile fading. “If you’re innocent, no good can come from running.”

“Sometimes innocent and guilty don’t matter so much where the law’s concerned,” McCree said.

“I think Marshal Cooper would treat you fairly,” Pharah said. “I could even put in a good word for you.”

“Oh, so it was you all along, huh?”

“Hm?”

“Coop keeps sayin’ there’s a gal at the Marshals that’ll look out for me if I turn myself in.”

Pharah tilted her head, birdlike, and McCree already knew the answer before she said it. “Not that I won’t help you any way I can, but I never said anything like that to Deputy Marshal Cooper.”

McCree hummed. “Probably a bust anyway. Marshals are all lawmen in the end. Don’t think they’ll take to a criminal.”

Pharah rocked her head back and forth in consideration. “Did you do the things they have you charged for?”

“Not all of ‘em.”

“But some?”

“Sort of.”

Pharah’s lips made a hard line. She looked decidedly unlike her mother now. “We have laws for a reason, Jesse. You’re in Overwatch, and it stands as an example of rightness.”

McCree peered at her from under the brim of his hat. “You do know Overwatch is acting illegally right now, don’tcha?” He heard a chuckle from Ana’s seat.

“Yes, I do know that.” Pharah bit down on the words like they were hard for her to chew. “And I believe when the time comes, the UN will see the necessity of the recall and be lenient. Doing what’s right doesn’t come without cost, but if what you did was righteous, I think Deputy Marshal Cooper will see that they’re fair to you.”

A black name burned into McCree’s forehead syllable by syllable, the way Pharah had said the first time he met her: Pa-oo-lina Al-va-ray-doo. He leaned back in his seat. “Oh,” he said, “it was righteous alright.”

“You’re ship’s close to the drop zone now,” Tracer announced over the comm. “We’ll meet up at the coordinates programmed into the pilot AI. Should be relatively clear there. The army’s blockade is holding them off for now, you see?”

Everyone in the ship shifted to look out of the windows. They did see - a mass of omnis were crashing against a military blockade down below, just north of Astor Place. It was a fireworks show of pulsefire and explosions being exchanged. And there, at the front, the electric-blue omnic - the one the news had called “Seiyatta.” Genji, a green slash, was beside her.

“If we only knew what they wanted,” Winston said.

“It is simple what they want.” The voice felt out of place, because Zarya had barely spoken since she’d joined them on the hoverjet. “The destruction of all humankind.”
“That’s not true,” Tracer piped from the hoverjet’s overhead speaker.

Winston furrowed his brow. “I wonder… do you think the Shambali could have stopped the armies, Lena?”

“Could be. Bet that’s why Talon and that blue omnic made sure to bomb their temple before they went after New York.” An edge of anger was in Tracer’s voice.

Zarya snorted.

Winston, however, looked to be thinking the comment over. “Lena… do you know if that one omnic was there? The one Genji called ‘master.’”

“Zenyatta? No, thank goodness,” Tracer said. “Though no one knows where he’s gone.”

McCree could hear gun and pulsefire muted from below. “I remember somethin’ about that,” he said, reaching into his memories. “Genji said he’d gone missin’ after some kind of… funeral for that fella’ Mondatta?”

“Yeah,” Tracer said, her voice hollow and lofi through the speaker. “The Shambali perform a ritual data-transfer after death. But after the rite Zenyatta left the Shambali entirely and took all that data with him. Genji couldn’t get a hold of him, even after his comm got repaired.”

“No chance of getting him to talk to this Seiyatta, then…” Winston sighed. “Or Genji for that matter.”

Something tightened around McCree’s gloved hand. He looked down, and it was Hanzo’s fingers, clutching his hand. “You say… 13 is an unlucky number in America?” The mention of Genji had made him sullen.

McCree leaned in close so his nose touched Hanzo’s shaved temples. “We’re gonna get Genji back,” he whispered like a promise. “Then we’ll be fourteen. Nothin’ unlucky about fourteen.”

Hanzo’s hand slid up McCree’s chin to his cheek, carding his fingers in his beard. “No,” he said. “Nothing unlucky about that.”

The thud broke them out of the spellbinding moment, and McCree turned to see Zarya knocking on the window. She had an angry, quizzical expression. “That gun, there.” She tapped the glass.

McCree craned his neck to see around her shoulder, barely spotting the massive tuning-fork-shaped weapon she was pointing at. It hummed back as it fired.

“What about it,” Winston asked.

“Omnics used them in the war. I have seen dozens, derelict, in Krasnoyarsk. They are surface-to-air weapons.”

The hoverjet quaked with impact. Pharah’s armored feet shrieked against the metal floor as she clutched her handhold. Winston fell forward on his knuckles. McCree whiplashed forward in his seat. An alarm began blaring through the ship. When he opened his eyes again, every holoscreen was flashing, and the overhead lights had gone red. The hoverjet began to dive.

“Lena!” Winston on the comm. “We’re hit, take direct control of the jet, we need an emergency landing.”

“Negative, negative, we’re being fired on!” Tracer cried. “I need to maintain control of our- Whoa!
Haha, dodged it, ya tosser!”

McCree couldn’t help but notice Tracer sounded more gleeful than ever to be dodging missiles in the fat, clumsy hoverjet. He, however, was feeling his stomach reach up into his throat.

“Preparing emergency landing now,” Athena said over the jet’s speakers, cool as only an AI could be. She brought up a map on one of the flashing holovid screens, showing the proposed LZ.

It was in Astor Place - smack-dab in the center of the omnic army.

“We cannot land there,” Hanzo roared from the seat beside McCree. “We’ll be overwhelmed.”

“We have no choice,” Winston thundered back. “Trying to change the trajectory with a broken engine will significantly lower our chances surviving the crash.”

“We have no choice but to crash?” Pharah, who had moved to the nose of the ship beside her mother and was in the process of strapping herself into last open seat. Winston pulled some kind of magnetic tether from the wall and attached it to his suit. Zarya grasped two handholds to brace herself, her massive arm muscles bulging.

“What are the chances of surviving the crash if we land away from the army,” Hanzo demanded.

“Based on trajectory, hull stability, and the probability of engine eruption,” Athena chirped, “the chances of survival for an alternate landing zone are 0.7% percent.”

McCree felt green as he watched the horizon rotating in the window. The Gs were making him lightheaded. “And, uh, what’s the probability of surviving the crash now?”

“The probability of survival on the current course is-” Athena began.

Winston cut her off. “Don’t tell them.”

The window didn’t show the horizon anymore - no hint of the sky. It was just the long, precise columns of the omnic army filling the city streets. McCree was never much of a praying man, but he reached over and grabbed Hanzo’s hand in his, asking any god who’d listen to get them to the ground in a condition they could fight in.

“They’re still shooting at us,” Ana said blandly as a missile whizzed past them like a racecar. McCree spied a communicator in her hand. Odd… Overwatch only used earpieces. He wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw a number “76” rudely carved in the back of it.

“I’ve got you covered!” chirped Tracer from the overhead speaker. Another roar, and McCree spotted the other hoverjet fly into view, unleashing a torrent of pulsefire at an incoming rocket. It exploded in a shower of debris.

Seconds afterwards, there was another mighty crash. Down on the ground, the massive tuning-fork of a gun was now swathed in a ball of flame. It mushroomed out, then became a pillar of smoke.

“Great job, Lena!” Winston crowed over the comm. “You took out the missile and the launcher.”

“Whut? I didn’t take a shot at the launcher, Luv.”

McCree didn’t have time to process that, because the ground was rushing up at them.

“Brace for impact!” howled Pharah, then the hoverjet crashed into hell.
McCree thought his limbs were going to tear off of his body. The harness pinned him hard to his seat, but everything else flailed about. He smelled gasoline and smoke. Metal shrieked as the landing gear ripped away and the hoverjet’s fuselage skidded against the pavement. Omnic bodies thudded against the windshield then rolled away. Hanzo’s hand was still clutched in his. At last, the jet skidded to a stop.

McCree opened his eyes. Everything was just sparks and smoke. The floor of the jet was scraped away. McCree looked to Hanzo first, who coughed and blinked his eyes open, worse for wear but fine. McCree sighed with relief.

Zarya had been thrown into the corner, but by the perfectly-spherical indent left just behind her, McCree guessed she’d activated a well-timed particle barrier. Winston, too, had dropped a shield. The impact of the crash had left it spiderwebbed with bright, hard-light fissures.

McCree’s neck killed, his ribs felt cracked, and he would have bruises where the harness had dug into his chest and shoulders, but he was alive and would be able to shoot.

A good thing, too, because there was a bright, molten-metal line being cut in the hoverjet’s reinforced door. It was making a perfectly-straight line - too perfect to be cut by a human.

“They’re trying to get inside,” Zarya called out. She got to her feet, then hefted her massive gun off the floor.

“Mom!” Pharah’s pained wail came from the nose of the craft.

Where Ana had been sitting.

McCree pushed his harness off and flew out of his seat. Pharah was kneeling beside her mother’s chair. Ana was slumped forward, hood back, an oily-red spot marring her pale hair. It covered the whole back of her head, and there was a mark to match it on her headrest. “Ms. Amari! Ma’am.” McCree knelt opposite to Pharah, then put his hand on Ana’s, leaning down to try and look in her eye.

Ana cooed, and blinked her eye open.

Pharah said something in Arabic that must have been a prayer. “Are you alright, Mom?”

Ana only groaned.

“The door is about to go,” Winston announced. “We could use some help here.”

“I’ve got her,” McCree told Pharah. “They need you at the door, Fareeha. You can take ‘em in droves with those rockets o’ yours.” He gave her a smile he hoped looked charming, but knew must have been crooked with worry. A streak of blood trailed down Pharah’s temple. Beneath her hawkish helmet, he spied tears in her eyes. She nodded, and left Ana’s side, brandishing her rocket launcher.

The door fell open.

The cabin exploded with pulsefire. Zarya waded into it, summoning two more pink particle barriers - one around herself, the other on Pharah.

Pharah unloaded rocket after rocket into the mass of omnis trying to swarm inside. Hanzo looked stern and focused(and sexy as hell), taking out priority targets behind the front line. When Zarya’s barriers went down, Winston dropped his shield again. It started cracking almost immediately as the omnis peppered it with pulsefire.
“Winston! We saw the ship go down. Give us a status update,” came Tracer’s choked voice, over the comm now. “Hey! Come on, Winston, report!”

Winston’s massive hand was moving to activate his comm when his projected barrier burst. He snarled, violent and animal, and blocked the entrance bodily. The Tesla cannon jumped across the front line of omnis, electrocuting them. Winston grunted as hot pulse energy ripped scarlet lines in his suit and skin.

“We can’t hold like this,” Pharah said, her voice cracking. “I’m going out to give us air cover.”

“Wait, Fareeha-!” McCree’s cry died in his throat as Pharah punched her way out of the door, then jetted up and out of sight.

“I cannot shield her from this vantage,” Zarya reported. “We must push out.”

McCree heard a groan from Ana. Her hand had slipped away from his, and now she was pawing at something on her belt. It was a glass canister, full of gauzy, golden liquid.

“B… break it,” Ana gasped.

McCree tugged the glass canister from Ana’s gunbelt and looked at it, tipping it back and forth. It flowed almost like the ribbon of Mercy’s caduceus staff. McCree took a breath, then smashed it against the headboard of Ana’s seat.

It wasn’t liquid, not exactly. It was almost a vapor, exploding out like fireworks over Ana and McCree. He breathed it in, and it smelled and tasted like the clean air after a storm. It flowed into him, and suddenly the bruising ache in his chest and shoulders were gone. Ana leaned up, blinking, then exhaled. “Well. That was exciting,” she said, offering McCree a weak smile.

As she put up her hood to cover the wound, McCree saw that it had already scabbed over.

“Not good as new, but I can hold a gun now.” Ana patted his hand. “As can you. Go on, cover my daughter. I won’t forgive you if you let her get shot.”

McCree grinned as wide as a Texas sky. He tipped his hat to Ana. “Wouldn’t dream of it, Ma’am,” he said, then ducked away from her seat. He tugged his revolver from its holster, then aimed at the mass of Omnis still trying to get inside.


Winston snarled and backhanded a trio of omnis with his meaty fist. “We’re alive,” he said on the comm channel, “but we’re pinned down at Astor Place.”

McCree popped off six slow, neat shots. Six omnic skulls exploded with circuits. Over his shoulder, he heard a familiar electric warble. He spun, and saw that another laser was cutting a neat line in the hull just behind them. “They’re tryin’ to get in from the back,” he called out.

“Pharah is right,” Hanzo said as he sent a scatter arrow into a crowd of omnis. Four of them fell to the ground in sparks. “We cannot hold here. We must move.”

“There’s an alleyway just ahead,” Winston reported, staggering back inside and letting Zarya and her particle barrier take the next wave of fire. “If we can make it through, we can funnel them in and thin their numbers.”

Winston was pointing to an alleyway across the street from them. Overhead was a tall crane, holding
a massive storage crate high above the street. Not far away was the destroyed surface-to-air gun. Lots of cover. Winston was right, it was a good spot to hole up - if they could get through the horde of omnics standing between it and their current position at the hoverjet.

Zarya thumbed a button on her massive gun, the lobbed four explosive particle charges, clearing out the omnic’s front line. She pushed a few feet out of the hoverjet, her barrier soaking up shots.

“Come! Now.”

Winston followed to help hold the line. McCree and Hanzo moved to sliced-open doorway. Ana came up behind them, reloading her biotic rifle.

“I’m hit!” It was Pharah over the comm. McCree craned his neck, then spotted the glint of Pharah’s sapphire armor up in the sky. Her jets were failing. She was floating slowly downwards, like an injured bird trying to fly.

“Fareeha!” Ana pushed McCree aside, but from her staggered walk, it was clear she wasn’t fully healed yet. She dropped to her knees just behind Winston and Zarya, then aimed her biotic rifle up. The angle was awkward. Ana was the best shot McCree had ever seen, but he didn’t know how she could aim like that.

“I require healing,” Pharah reported. McCree could hear in her voice that it was true.

“I can’t get a good angle on her,” Ana snarled in frustration, still staring through her biotic rifle’s scope.

“We need to get off this ship,” Winston growled. He sank on his haunches, then leapt away from them, crashing into the omnic’s back line. He dropped a shield. “Let’s go,” he roared over the comm.

A perfectly-square portal, rimmed with molten metal, opened in the back of the hoverjet. Hanzo and McCree both spun on their heels. Omnics were crawling through the new opening, guns raised. McCree and Hanzo backed away, taking out as many as they could, but neither of their weapons were made for covering fire. The thick scent of pulse emissions made his stomach turn over. McCree felt a massive hand on his shoulder.

“Come. We go.” It was stern-faced Zarya, red spark-burns spattered across her face. Her other arm was lifting Ana from the ground.

They went.

Astor Place was a wide-open, metropolitan intersection. McCree could see the telltale cube statue a few yards away, its corner peeking out over the heads of the omnic forces that flooded the area. Dead ahead, he could see some scaffolding, and the crane holding the shipping container - that was where the alley’s entrance was.

Winston was clearing a path for them, his tesla cannon forking out to numerous omnics at once. But his shield had gone down by now, and from his hunched posture, McCree could tell he was soaking too much fire.

“Ms. Amari,” McCree called, but Ana wasn’t paying attention to Winston. She was scanning the sky for Pharah.

“Fareeha! Report your location. Fareeha!” McCree had never heard Ana sound so distressed, but then, he’d never seen her in a battle with her only daughter either. Now that he looked, McCree couldn’t see Pharah in the sky either. Had she dropped to the ground?
The distant roar of jump-jets answered his question. Glittering like a sapphire, Pharah darted out against the sky from behind a building. She raised her arm, aiming it in their direction. A moment later, the dozen omnis in their path were buffeted away, blown back by Pharah’s concussive blast.

“Fareeha! Are you alright?” Ana on the comm.

“I’m fine,” Pharah reported. “I feel… great, actually.”

“I thought you were injured?” Zarya sounded annoyed.

“I was, but… I don't know. This thing attached to me, then I felt better.”

Thing? McCree looked up at her again, and yes - something was tethered to Pharah’s back. About the size and, from the looks of it, the weight of a balloon, it was a glowing, golden orb.

They moved into the empty space Pharah made for them, and met up with Winston. He dropped a shield, giving them a moment’s reprieve. They spanned the shield’s diameter, all hunched over or limping, despite Ana’s best efforts to keep them healed. McCree could see the scaffolding and the base of crane just ahead. There were only a few omnis in their way. Almost to the alleyway, he thought with relief.

“Do you feel that?” Hanzo said, eyes narrowing. It was hard to feel anything but his pulse burns and sprained ribs, but when McCree stopped and concentrated, he could feel it: the ground, rhythmically shaking. Hanzo focused on it, then aimed a seeker arrow at a building on the corner. It revealed a massive swath of red. Then, it emerged from behind the building onto the street, thundering steps shaking up McCree’s body.

“A Titan,” Zarya said.

McCree had heard stories of Titan units from the war, but he'd never seen one face to face. Stories couldn’t do it justice. Pharah looked like a fly buzzing around the head of the ten-story omnic. She unloaded rocket after rocket at its hull. The Titan barely seemed to notice, marching single-mindedly towards their location in Winston’s bubble. At its feet, another tight column of omnic soldiers arriving with it.

“We have to get to the alley,” Hanzo announced, grabbing McCree by the serape just as Winston's bubble burst. Omnic troopers still blocked their path. McCree and the others tore through them as best they could, but it was slow going, and shot after shot got through Zarya and Winston’s defenses. There was no way for Ana to keep up with the damage, no matter how good a shot she was. At last, they managed to clear out the omnis blocking their path, but by that time, the Titan had cleared the entire city block in three ponderous steps, and was closing in on them.

How McCree saw it amidst all the pulse fire, he didn’t know. But he turned and caught the helical trail of three spinning rockets flying over the team’s shoulders. “The hell…?” Had the omnis gotten some upgrades? He’d never seen a weapon that fired like that.

As the Titan took a step, the helix of missiles crashed into its supporting leg. It sent the massive omnic off-balance, and once the smoke cleared McCree could tell the rockets had mangled the foot past use. The Titan started to fall.

“Fareeha!” It was Ana on the comm. “Try to knock its fall more sideways. 3 o'clock, so it lands perpendicular to the street.”

“Acknowledged,” Pharah said, and McCree could hear the smile in her voice. Another concussive blast at the massive Omnic’s neck altered its trajectory, and with a few more well-placed rockets, the
Titan crashed down across the street, blocking the incoming omnic army.

Dust and debris blew out at them. McCree put up his mechanical arm to shield his eyes, grasping Hanzo’s sturdy shoulder for support. When he opened his eyes again, McCree spotted a tall figure up ahead. He was broad-shouldered and grey-haired, holding a massive gun in one hand. His motorcycle jacket was red, white and blue, and as the dust cleared, McCree could make out a number on the back of it. It was the same number he’d seen carved into the odd communicator Ana had been using on the jet earlier: 76.

Ana stepped up beside McCree, smiling slyly over at the stranger. “About time you showed up,” she said.

The man turned to face them. He wore a visored mask that covered his face from the eyebrows down. He gave her a monosyllabic laugh.

Hanzo must not have found it funny. He drew an arrow back, aiming it at the masked man.

The stranger only looked down at the shaft at Hanzo and tilted his head. “Who the hell are you?”

“I ask the questions,” Hanzo said.

“He’s Genji’s brother,” Ana said.

The stranger raised a white eyebrow up from his visor. “The one who cut him up?”

“Silence!” Hanzo fumed. “The important question is who are you?”

Ana and the stranger exchanged a glance, then he looked down at the massive gun in his hands. “I’m just a soldier,” he said cryptically.

“We don’t have time for this,” Winston interrupted. He pointed a meaty finger behind them. The omnics blocked by the Titan’s body were making their way around, and the ones that had already been on the street were closing in as well. “We have to get into the alley.”

They moved as one, passing under the shadow of the shipping container that was held aloft by the crane. Pharah followed above them, landing on a nearby rooftop. McCree took up the rear. He and Hanzo popped the approaching Omnics one by one. It didn’t seem to make any difference. They continued their approach in a perfectly geometric swath.

“Focus the ones with the purple orb on them,” Soldier: 76 instructed. McCree searched the army and spied a heavy gunner in the front line. Tethered to him was another balloon-like orb, similar to the one that had attached to Pharah. This one, however, was a deep violet color.

McCree aimed a shot at the omnic’s chest and fired. It went down instantly, chest cavity shattering spectacularly. “Whoa,” he said. Definitely more damage than a single bullet usually did.

“Doubt weakens one’s body and soul,” said a tinny voice behind him.

McCree turned. Floating towards them, legs folded a few feet from the ground, was an omnic. Metallic orbs floated around his shoulders like a necklace of beads, and he looked much like the omnics he’d fought at the Shambali temple in Nepal. Zarya lifted her massive gun at it, starting to charge its laser.

“Hold,” Soldier:76 said. “This is Zenyatta. He’s not one of them.”
“They are all one of them,” Zarya said without missing a beat. The omnic floated placidly in the face of her charging gun.

“Incoming, behind you!” howled Pharah on the comm. They all looked down to the end of the alleyway, opposite Astor Place. A fifteen-foot Omnic sporting a shoulder-mounted gun was at the head of a tight formation of bastions, troopers, and eradicators. The shoulder cannon glowed with purple pulse energy, then fired at them. It was a glowing ball, arcing their way.

“Pulse grenade,” Zarya announced in a booming voice. They all hit the deck, covering their heads in their hands.

Two explosions happened: one was expected, the mighty burst from the launched pulse grenade, knocking McCree back out into the street. The other explosion, however, was of a honey-sweet and comforting warmth, a feeling both energizing and soothing at once. When McCree opened his eyes, he was surrounded by light. Zenyatta was at the center, sporting 6 golden, spectral arms on top of his 2 metallic ones. The orbs that had hung around his neck now glowed and formed a halo around his body. Any damage McCree had taken from the explosion healed instantly.

The omnic’s grenade launcher glowed again, readying another volley. Hanzo was already on his feet, bathed in Zenyatta’s golden light. He shot, and the arrow landed cleanly in the omnic’s mechanical skull. The grenade-launcher went dark, and it crumpled over. The column of omnics behind it marched unflinching over the body.

“They’re closing in on us from both sides,” Soldier:76 reported. McCree looked behind him and realized he was right - the omnics from the street and the omnics in the alley were pincering them. With their small numbers, they could have taken an attack from one side, but from both? There was no way. Zenyatta’s light faded, and made everything look much greyer.

“Get the lead out,” Soldier:76 said as he hefted his massive rifle. “If we go down here, we’re taking as many of them with us as we can.”

From the street, McCree watched them all ready their weapons. Ana, grim and knowing, arming her rifle. Winston, nodding, sad but stern. Pharah - who could escape, except McCree knew her well enough to know she’d never leave them behind.

And Hanzo. That sad, sweet man of his, who’d survived so much. Hanzo had never meant to join Overwatch, yet here he was, about to die to protect the world just like any O-dub agent would. From fratricidal crime boss to a big damn hero. All of them were too fine a quality of folks to go down like this.

That’s when McCree saw it: the big, dark blotch of a shadow some feet ahead of him, just over the entrance to the alleyway. He looked up. It was the shipping container, held above them by a cord pulleyed to the crane. He watched it sway calmly with the breeze, even as the omnic army behind him unleashed pulsefire his way.

“Jesse!” It was Pharah, who from her high vantage point had a better view of everything. “Run to the alley, we’ll cover you.” McCree turned, and saw why she said it. There was no way he’d make it back to the alley with everyone else before the omnics closed on him. He looked up again at that shipping container - or rather, at the thick, woven-metal cord that held it up. Not many people were a good enough shot to hit it at this distance - Ana was, but she had that fancy needle gun. Hanzo was, too, but even the sharpest of arrowheads wouldn’t cut through steel wire.

A well-aimed revolver shot would, though. It’d do the job just fine.
“Stay back, Fareeha,” McCree said, checking his revolver to be sure there was a bullet chambered. He looked across the way at Hanzo, who was already taking out the omnics with perfectly-aimed arrows. *My man, McCree thought. I sure do hate to do this to ya’.*

“Han,” McCree yelled.

Hanzo split his attention between McCree and his targets, until he saw McCree’s expression. He paused.

“You go get Genji,” McCree yelled to him. “He needs ya’. You’re all he’s got now. This ain’t the end of the road, y’hear? You gotta get my best friend back.”

“Jesse?” There was a quiet, building panic in Hanzo’s voice that made tears burn in McCree’s eyes.

“Call it a last request,” McCree said. He took a deep breath, then aimed Peacekeeper up.

“Jesse!” Hanzo’s voice rose to a roar. McCree pulled the trigger.

It was a perfect shot. Ana would have been proud. Reyes, would have been proud. And Momma… she would have been proud, too.

That black-felt name burned into McCree’s forehead, the good kind of burn that told him he’d done the right thing for once in his damn life.

The woven metal cord snapped clean. The last thing McCree saw was Hanzo’s drawn, shocked face, before the shipping container slammed to the ground in front of him, closing off the alleyway, and blocking the omnic army - and McCree - from entering.

Chapter End Notes

MCCREE STOP BEING NOBLE YOU FUCK

If this felt like a movie, then good! it's meant to (: The rest of the story will be rife with big action sequences and quippy one-liners because I love that stuff. Lots of questions still to be answered, but soon it will be all wrapped up in a nice bow ^_^

Reminder, [I will be streaming Overwatch tonight, 9PM EST!](https://www.twitch.tv/mingridsmarcher)

Also, I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!

[@mingridsmarcher](https://twitter.com/mingridsmarcher)

[ingridarcher.tumblr.com/](https://mingridsmarcher.tumblr.com/)
Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
Get ready for more action! Sorry this one is late - it will be a bit rough as well. I may come back tomorrow and do a last pass on it and upload a revised version - but I've decided hell or high water, I'm keeping my schedule until the fic is finished.
On that note - exciting exciting - I think I'm ready to put a final chapter count on here (: 

**Content warnings:** Some light violence, mention of depression, mention of gender dysphoria.

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven't been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it's such a joy! Thank you guys so much, you're the best ;^;

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 11PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Jesse!”

The impact of the shipping container hitting the ground shook Hanzo up from his legs and into his head. Dust filled the alleyway. When it cleared, the end of the alley that emptied into Astor Place was plugged up by the fallen crate and resulting rubble. McCree was trapped on the opposite side - alone with the entire omnic army.

Hanzo darted forward, slinging his bow over his shoulder. With enough momentum, he could climb over the container and-

A tight, gloved hand grasped Hanzo’s bicep and pinned him in place. Furious, he turned. It was the stranger, Soldier: 76. The grip made the dragon, already burning blue through his veins, roar in rage. “Release me,” Hanzo demanded.

“We need that bow of yours,” Soldier: 76 said, “if we’re going to get past them.” He nodded to the opposite end of the alleyway. A mass of omnics were crowded there, advancing on them.

With a hard tug, Hanzo freed himself from Soldier: 76’s iron grip. His own skin felt hot as lightning. “I am not leaving him behind.”

“You want to throw your life away? Fine,” Soldier: 76 growled back, hand going back to his pulse rifle. “But know that if we don’t get out of here alive, you’re throwing away the sacrifice he made, too.”
It was a punch to the gut. All Hanzo could see in his mind was the look of concession on McCree’s face just before the crate crashed between them. Hanzo scowled hard to swallow back the reality that McCree was very likely dead or dying right now.

“You know, I remember Jesse saying something about dragons,” Ana said to no one in particular.

Winston lit up. “Yes! Hanzo, the dragons - they could clear the alleyway.”

Thunder rippled in Hanzo’s soul, and he took two steps away from the shipping container. Of course - the dragon. It gnashed its teeth beneath his skin, clawing to get out. His tattoo burned. It wanted this. Let the dragon consume our foes. For all their destructive force, the Shimadas’ dragons existed to protect what was theirs.

Hanzo nocked an arrow, drew it back, staring Soldier: 76 in his visored eyes. Then, with the summoning cry on his lips, Hanzo spun on his heels, and release the arrow back towards the shipping container; towards the street; towards McCree.

“Ryuu ga waga teki wo kurau!”

They roared to life, like two forks of blue lightning striking. The arrow thunked worthlessly into the side of the container, but by then the South Wind was born into being. It was not tethered by frivolous things like physics. They swam through the container’s surface, then Hanzo saw their blue glow on the opposite side. More than that, he felt them devouring life after omnic life. There was even an electric familiarity, like the brush of fingertips, as they passed through McCree, lending him their energy rather than harming him.

Unspoken words floated on his lips. He tried to put them into the dragon’s energy, the way he’d tried to say the words to McCree with a touch, a kiss, an embrace. They were no clearer this way than they had been before, and Hanzo wished he’d been brave enough to speak them earlier. I love you, Jesse. You taught me it was something I was still able to do.

The dragon’s tails disappeared. Hanzo turned back and looked at the members of Overwatch definitely.

Soldier: 76’s gloved fist tightened at his side. Winston’s massive, animal jaw was agape. Zarya looked like she might pummel him into the ground then and there.

Only Ana seemed unsurprised - in fact, she looked smug. “No reasoning with a fool in love,” she said, adjusting her glove at the wrist. There was something loaded in her wrist launcher there. Like her rifle’s rounds, it was contained in a small, glass cylinder with a needle at one end. However, this one was not a gauzy yellow, but a molten-metal blue. Hanzo had never seen anything like it.

“Say, Winston,” Ana said. “Hanzo just put you and your friends in a pretty bad spot. How does that make you feel?”

Winston’s body coiled up. His shoulders hunched forward, knuckles tight and restless on the pavement. His expression, usually calm and quizzical, had contorted with rage. “It makes me… angry.”

Like an explosion, Winston threw his hands out and rose to two feet. It made him look much larger than usual, or maybe he was larger. His whole body flushed red in an instant, and his eyes were glazed and yellow.

Ana lined the shot quick - a lowered rifle, a clench of her fist, a needle in Winston’s broad shoulder. He went from red to that roiling, molten blue. He leapt away from them, the force leaving round
cracks in the pavement where his feet had been. He landed hard in the thick of the omnis, tossing a halo of them away. He started clearing out swaths of the robotic footsoldiers with each swing of his massive arms.

Hanzo stared on in awe. “What happened to him?”

“He has these tantrums sometimes,” Ana said as she chambered another golden round in her rifle. “Turns out they're pretty useful.”

“Something you and Winston don't have in common,” Soldier: 76 snarled, then hefted his gun, running towards the omnic forces and unloading pulsefire, covering Winston’s rampage. Zarya followed him in, and Pharah shot up into the sky.

Ana took casual shots at Winston, keeping him up as he soaked up enemy fire. “Don't worry too much about him. He's just bitter because his boyfriend blew him up,” she said.

“Oi!” Tracer’s voice over the comm. “We’ve landed in the safe zone and I’ve met up with the Air Force. What’s your location, Winston?”

“Winston’s a bit busy at the moment,” Ana answered. “We’re at Astor Place.” She turned her clever smirk towards Hanzo. “I think McCree and Hanzo could use your help.” She moved her hand and went back to healing the enraged Winston.

That snapped Hanzo out of his stupor. He slung his bow over his shoulder, then darted back towards the shipping container, building momentum to climb its side.

Rhythmic thunder radiated up through his feet. It shook his field of vision. Hanzo ignored it, single-mindedly racing back to help McCree. Then he saw it, ten stories tall, round the corner.

Another Titan.

Hanzo stumbled to a stop. The Titan’s giant hammer of a fist crashed against the corner of the building that framed one side of the alleyway. It exploded in a shower of glass and concrete. Chunks of debris the size of cars toppled down less than a foot in front of Hanzo’s feet, blocking his path back out to Astor Place. Great cracks forked out from there, down through to the foundation. The building’s walls began to slip out of place.

“The building is coming down,” Hanzo said like a curse. He had to turn around.

“We need to get out of this alleyway, now,” Soldier: 76 roared as he unleashed a helix rocket at an eradicator, shattering its chest.

The scatter-arrow’s fletching was prickly under Hanzo’s fingers. He drew it, then shot it into the mass of omnis at the end of the alley. Five crumpled to the ground, but there were still two-dozen more blocking their path of escape.

Winston’s rampage had ended, and now he was sheltered in a bubble, clearing the omnis out with his tesla cannon. “There’s too many,” he called. “I won’t be able to push through them in time.”

“I have an idea,” Pharah said over the comm. “Zarya. I read the file on your gun. It's the particle weapon from an RDF-75 tank, right?”

“Da,” Zarya said, melting the bastion unit in front of her with said gun.

“Does it still retain the Graviton Surge capability?” Pale contrails drew a jagged line to Pharah’s
position in the air above.

“Yes,” Zarya confirmed. The crack across the side of the building opened like a mouth of teeth as the roof shifted.

“Alright, try to catch as many omnics in it as you can.”

“Affirmative.” Zarya’s gun glowed and shuddered. A massive, purple ball of energy popped out from the barrel. The shot arced overhead, then landed at the center of the omnic forces. Like a wave, they were sucked into its nucleus, held in place by the gravitational force.

Pharah’s jump-jets roared above. Her shadow fell over Hanzo. He looked up, and could only see the glare of her sapphire armor reflecting the sun like a beacon.

“Justice rains from above!”

Missiles exploded out from her armor, storming down onto the mass of omnics trapped in the gravitational force of Zarya’s particle surge. Their robotic bodies shattered and split, shredded by the hail of fire. When the smoke cleared, there was a scorched pile of circuits - and a clear escape path.

“The building’s coming down.” Soldier: 76 hunched forward and started running. “Let’s move!”

The building started to crumble in on itself, debris crashing down on them. Hanzo ducked his head, chasing the colorful number emblazoned on Soldier: 76’s back. Hanzo was at the back of their procession, boulders of concrete smashing at his heels.

A shadow fell across his path. Hanzo looked up. A slab of wall was breaking away, falling just ahead of him.

Hanzo’s mind froze - he couldn’t run right beneath it, but if he didn’t keep moving he’d be trapped in the collapse. The only two courses of action, and both were likely to kill him. He stood still, frozen in indecision.

A rocket howled past Hanzo’s ear, then the slab of wall burst into a cloud of dust and rubble. The harmless chunks showered down on Hanzo and Soldier:76, whose pulse rifle was smoking at the barrel.

“Come on,” Soldier: 76 snarled, grabbing Hanzo roughly by the shoulder and pushing him out of the alley. They jogged into the street. A puff of dust chased them as the building collapsed. They had emerged onto a narrow street. One lane - the one leading out of the city - was packed with cars. They were all newly-abandoned, doors swung open or engines still running. From the direction they were aimed, and the fact that the opposite lane was empty, it looked like they were all headed towards the designated safe zone in Central Park. Across the street, Hanzo recognized a massive, candy-red statue as the Atlas News logo.

Hanzo looked back at the pile of rubble that now stood between him and McCree. “We have to go back,” he said.

“Back?” Winston knuckled over to him. “You almost got us killed.”

“You left McCree to die,” Hanzo shot back.

“Leave him,” Soldier: 76 said to Winston. “They're birds of a feather. McCree left Overwatch to burn, and now Genji’s taken the omnic’s side. It was only a matter of time before this guy betrayed us too. After what happened in Geneva, you should have learned not to recruit criminals.”
“What?” Hanzo glared. “What do you know about it?” Beneath their argument, some sort of announcement was playing, the words muffled by distance.

“That's not fair,” Ana cut in. “Jesse just died to save our lives.”

The sound of engines rumbling was rising from a distant purr to a roar.


The announcement over the loudspeaker rang out again, this time clear and much closer. “This is a call to any members of Overwatch in the area. I repeat, any members of Overwatch, please respond.”

The whole group exchanged glances. The argument got abruptly shelved. “This way,” Soldier: 76 barked, and gestured to a line of cars. They all followed suit, even Hanzo. Why? Ana seemed to know this man - did the others as well? He certainly seemed accustomed to giving them orders.

The seven of them ducked behind the cars just as a pair of brightly-painted motorcycles rounded the corner. More followed after them, a procession of sport bikes, loud in every sense of the word. The whole squad of them wore helmets hiding their faces, and had guns strapped to their bodies or slung over their shoulders. Then, following last around the corner, was a flat-nosed commercial truck, ceramic white. The nose of a bullhorn stuck out from the driver’s seat.

“Calling Overwatch. Show yourselves now,” the bullhorn called. Hanzo ducked a little deeper behind an empty, mid-sized sedan as the procession roared by. As they waited for the motorcycles to pass, Hanzo caught something in his peripheral vision. He turned and found himself looking in the car’s rearview mirror. It angled, showing the long line of cars behind him. There, a few feet away, he spied a figure, a black slash against the colorful line of cars. When Hanzo turned to look behind him, it wasn’t there, and when he looked to the mirror again, it was gone. They procession of motorcycles reached the next corner, then turned out of sight.

The Overwatch agents collectively sighed in relief. Staggered, they emerged from their hiding spot and moved back into the empty street.

“You’d think they’d have more important things to worry about than trying to catch us,” Winston said, staring at the corner the procession had disappeared down.

Hanzo looked across at the Atlas News statue, identifying the massive skyscraper it stood in front of as the Atlas News building. Hanzo craned his neck and spied a forest of massive antennae on the roof. It was far and away the tallest building in the area. Ana’s words rang in his ears: Jesse just died to save our lives.

No. Hanzo couldn’t accept that - he wouldn’t, not until he knew for sure. He got a running start crossing the street, then pushed his way up the side of the building, climbing towards a shattered window on the second floor.

“Where do you think you are going?” It was Zarya, glaring up at him.

“To find McCree, and my brother, since none of you seem invested in doing so.”

“McCree is dead,” Zarya called up. “Genji is a traitor. Throw your life away sometime when an entire city is not on the line.”

Hanzo ignored her. With a precarious leap, his hand closed on the lip of the windowsill. He lifted himself into the window, and went inside.
The building’s inhabitants had been evacuated, but the lights were still on. As he moved through the halls, Hanzo passed an empty soundstage and noticed the cameras were still on, pointed at an empty chair set in front of the Atlas News tetracontahedron. Even he was familiar with the ubiquitous global news network.

The elevators were down at the end of the hall. Hanzo rode it to the top floor, then climbed the last flight of stairs to the roof.

The roof of the Atlas News building was a forest of satellite dishes and radio towers. Hanzo navigated through them, scattering a flock of pigeons. He stopped at the edge, searching the street below for McCree.

Omnics filled Astor Place, just a block away. He spied the fallen Titan, the destroyed surface-to-air gun, and the crashed hoverjet. They had landed near the head of the column. It was one thing landed in the midst of them, but it was another looking down at their sheer numbers. No sign of McCree.

The sound of jump-jets at his left sent Hanzo's hand to his bow. He spun.

Pharah’s armor glittered with sunlight. She managed a heavy but expert landing on the roof, then put up her hands in the face of Hanzo’s arrow. “I just want to talk,” she said.

Hanzo lowered his bow. “There is nothing to discuss.”

“I understand,” Pharah said. “I wish I could go after Jesse too. But there are too many other lives at stake.”

Hanzo frowned, then looked back out at the omnic’s wide column. Their white-knuckled battle hadn't even made a dent.

“My mother told me stories about the crisis,” Pharah said. “But I could have never imagined this. Without an EMP, I don't know how we’re going to stop them from overrunning the entire city.”

Hanzo had to agree. It was only a matter of time before the omnics broke through the army’s barricade. He only hoped Midtown got evacuated by then. No wonder Overwatch - and Talon - had hunted the EMPs with so much fervor. If only they had managed to save even one in Hanamura.

“We tried. McCree and I, and my cousin - we tried to secure them, but Talon bested us. They must have put a great deal of planning into this.”

Pharah turned her hawkbill helmet towards him. “Hanzo. You're a master marksman with a supernatural guardian. Look out there. The city needs all the help it can get.”

For a moment, he felt the meaning behind her words. A sense of duty, loyalty, not to friends or family, but to the world itself. A connection, a shared responsibility to put the many ahead of the few. He had no doubt that Pharah believed in that. Likely, she had been raised believing it - that was the difference between people like her, and people like him. Hanzo shook his head. “McCree needs my help, as does Genji. I know they are not the bastions of nobility Overwatch is accustomed to, but they are everything to me.”

Pharah made a sympathetic face. “I know it's hard to accept, but Genji-”

“He is not a traitor,” Hanzo said. “He was… he was taken over by Talon’s hacker.”

“What? Are you sure?”
“She told us herself - McCree and I, in Seoul.”

“Why didn't you tell Winston?”

“She warned that if Talon learned that we knew, they would kill Genji while he was still under their control. I hardly think they care now, in the middle of their orchestrated war, but even so, please - keep this between us.”

Pharah made a face. She clearly did not like that idea. “Why tell me at all then?”

“I must separate from you. Overwatch may be noble and self-sacrificing, but I… for the first time in decades, I have people I trust, and care about. I cannot leave that behind. If there is any chance at all that McCree can be saved, I must take it. But that means you and Overwatch may encounter Genji before me. Please, do not let them kill him.”

Pharah gave him a sad smile, and nodded. “I will do what I can,” Pharah said. From anyone else, it would have rang as noncommittal - a falsehood, a platitude. But from Pharah - that stern, kind defender of good - Hanzo trusted that as long as other lives weren’t threatened, she would do everything in her power to keep his brother alive. He nodded to her in thanks. Pharah saluted, then left him, flying off to rejoin her fellows in Overwatch.

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Hanzo left the roof and headed back down the stairs into the news station, determined to get a closer look at the area he’d last seen McCree, hoping to find some evidence that he’d escaped or survived. On his way back to the elevator, he spotted a room with dozens of monitors stacked on top of each other, each showing a different source of video. A live editing room. Some screens showed newscasters in studios, assumedly in locations outside New York, but the rest showed live footage of the attack from helicopters and daring on-site reporters.

*They may have recorded footage of McCree, Hanzo thought. Or Genji. He opened the soundproof glass door and went inside.*

All but two of the screens were small. One of the large screens showed the live broadcast, a woman with sleek, chin-length haircut. “The omnic army has broken through the army’s first barricade, and are now flooding into midtown. Now, they’re pulling back, along with the Air Force and National Guard, to reinforce the safe zone near Central Park. During the First Omnic Crisis, Overwatch and the United Nations combated large army’s like this with E-bombs - explosives that sent out an electromagnetic pulse that disabled omnics and other electronic systems, but caused minimal destruction to structures or humans. However, since the First Crisis, production of e-bombs halted. The UN has failed to find any that could be used to halt an attack of this scale.”

Already broken through the first barricade… Hanzo frowned, then turned to the other large screen. This one was just an enhanced, HD view of one of the feeds. Right now it showed a grey-haired newscaster getting his makeup touched up. The quality was so high, Hanzo could see his pores as they got covered by foundation.

Hanzo scanned the other screens, hoping to catch a glimpse of Genji or even McCree. One report was showing footage of what looked like a crashed fighter jet amidst a sea of omnics. Something at the other edge of the screen caught his eye - a dark, marble statue of a cube. The jet had crashed in Astor Place - where he’d had last seen McCree. He thought he saw, on b-roll of one of the report’s footage, a speck of red - the same brick-red of McCree’s serape. On the tiny screen, the image was too fuzzy to tell if it was really him or not.
Hanzo set his bow down on a table beside some plates of stale crackers and hardened cheese, then walked up to the console. He fiddled with the buttons until at last it brought up the b-roll footage on the large, HD screen. For a few moments, Hanzo thought he saw two familiar figures on the screen, slashes of red and yellow. Then the camera cut away. “Damn!” Hanzo went back to the controls, trying to rewind the footage.

A voice, hollow with distortion, hissed from an overhead speaker. “Jesse McCree is still alive.”

Hanzo jumped, looking up as if the person themselves was on the ceiling. It was only a cracking speaker, but even over the lo-fi speaker, Hanzo knew that sibilant voice.

*Mitsuru.* Hanzo darted towards the table to retrieve his bow.

It was gone.

Panic rushed through his veins. Hanzo felt naked without Storm Bow in his hands. Even reaching over his shoulder, he found many of his arrows were now missing. He swore, then rushed for the door, grasping the handle. It wouldn't turn. Hanzo spied a kunai stabbed into the lock. It had a stone set in the hilt that, depending on the angle you looked at it, changed from black to white. Hanzo snarled and tugged the kunai out with a grunt. He turned the lock, but as he opened the door, he heard his mother’s calm hiss behind him.

“Freeze.”

Hanzo stopped. More than the weapon he was sure was trained at his back, Mitsuru’s command pinned him in place. Even after all this time, he responded to their sharp commands with obedience.

Yet, something nagged at Hanzo as he stood in place, hand on the handle of the room’s glass door. He’d failed them - as Mitsuru stated, Hanzo had let McCree live, against their express wishes. He was a disappointment to them after all - and they had gotten the drop on him. So why hadn’t Mitsuru simply killed him? Slow and careful, Hanzo put his hands up, and turned around to face his mother.

They stood in front of the room’s many television screens. Backlit, they looked hardly more than an inky shape wielding his bow. The arrow was pointed directly at him, but as Hanzo observed closer, he noticed that Mitsuru had not drawn it back. No, not that they hadn’t - that they *couldn’t*. Their skeletal arm shook with the effort of pulling the bowstring, yet it was barely tensed at all. No matter how sharp, a pull that loose wouldn't kill anyone.

“You can’t draw it,” Hanzo realized aloud.

Mitsuru’s whole body started to shake, their thin arm quaking the most, managing only a inch more tension before relaxing entirely. They lowered the bow, and their chin. “No. I cannot.”

“Your arm is too weak,” Hanzo said.

“...Yes.”

In all their lessons, Hanzo realized he’d never seen his mother actually *use* a bow and arrow before, despite their proficiency in teaching him.

“It used to be one of my most treasured abilities. I was the best shot in the SFG, until…”

Hanso followed Mitsuru’s gaze to their shriveled arm. It had been that way for as long at Hanzo remembered. “So you were not born that way?”
“No.”

“What happened?”

Mitsuru paused, then set Storm Bow down on the floor beside them. They rolled up their sleeve, peeled off the dry bandages that wrapped around their thin arm. Hanzo approached warily, looking down at their skin, dimly lit by the news reports.

The muscle was gone. The skin on Mitsuru's arm was tight and warped, covered in pink scars the shape of lightning-bolts.

“Dragon burns,” Hanzo said.

Mitsuru rolled their shoulders, then tugged their sleeve back down to their wrist. “There are only three contracts I have ever failed to carry out. Jesse McCree, you, and your father.”

“You were sent to kill father?”

“It was how we met.” Mitsuru smiled, as if it were a wistful, girlish memory. “The Japanese government doesn’t officially sanction assassination, but when the law can’t touch someone a dangerous as Jiro was...”

Mitsuru leaned back against the wall of television screens, the blue light casting their hawkish nose in sharp profile. “Poetry could have been written about that duel. You can tell who someone is by the way they fight. The truth in their soul. Jiro was sharp and passionate, a creature of fire. I fell in love with him during that fight, I think.”

Hanzo thought of the duel he had with McCree - his slow and fearless approach, his cool demeanor. McCree had been slow to anger, but fierce in battle. In the end, McCree spared his life and took him to be healed. Was that when Hanzo had fallen for him?

“When I had him cornered, he summoned them,” Mitsuru went on. “I hadn't believed in the dragons until I saw them, many-headed and the color of fire. I escaped the brunt of the attack. My arm did not. The pain knocked me out, and I thought Jiro would make sure that I never woke again. Instead, he nursed me back to health. It was a relief, to fall so in love with a man. I thought, finally, I was a woman, just as everyone had prophesied me to be.”

“If you loved him, why did you leave?”

“Because that prophecy never came true. All I wanted from Jiro was to be his partner, but he wanted much more than that from me. To be a wife, a mother, a matriarch. I had pretended to be a woman my whole life - I thought, for Jiro, I could continue to do so. For years it barely mattered to me in the way that all things barely mattered to me. I felt... hollowed out. From what I saw on the last moonless night, I fear you may know what I mean by that, my son.”

Hanzo swallowed a gasp. “You... you were watching?”

“Of course I was,” Mitsuru said.

For a moment, the apology was on his tongue, almost spoken. He had failed his mother, who had, in some way, been with him every day of his life, even after they left. The sharp ghost of fingers stabbed between his shoulderblades, but for once, Hanzo didn’t stand up straight. Instead, he replayed that night, the feel of McCree’s arms around him, not a leash but an anchor. “I am not sorry,” Hanzo said to Mitsuru.
It was a horrible rush. Mitsuru’s features were obscured the low light in the room, and Hanzo imagined they had Kanata’s face, broad and red, enraged by his disrespectful rebellion. For a moment, he didn’t imagine Mitsuru’s sibilant voice but Kanata’s low, thundering tone calling him a traitor to the family. His greatest fear, wholly invited.

But when Mitsuru spoke, it was not with Kanata’s voice, or her words. “No,” they said. “It is I who must apologize to you, my son.” They walked forward, close but not too close, then turned so the blue light of the screen revealed their small, wrinkled visage. Mitsuru looked the most like Genji when they smiled, but their smile now was edged with contrition. “I was selfish as I always have been. I thought fate had delivered me a chance to win you to my side again. I never considered your heart, and all its facets.”

Mitsuru took one step closer, and Hanzo found himself yearning for the closeness they had denied him his entire childhood. He wanted so much for them to reach out a hand for him to take.

“You look so much like your father,” Mitsuru said. “I wish you had been like him in all the other ways.” Their eyes looked down at the maw of Hanzo’s indigo dragon peeking out from under the sleeve of his sweater. “Jiro gave you the dragons, and I gave you this terrible hollowness.”

Mitsuru moved beside Hanzo then, staring up at the screens. They all showed dour faces, and the aerial shots of the destruction wrought by the omnic army. “It is so much easier to end a life than begin it. That was the real prophecy. No matter how much you and Genji meant to me, I was not a creature made to nurture things. A wife, a mother, a matriarch - it seemed to come so easy to everyone else, and I could not even…”

For a moment, Hanzo felt it - the warm magnetism of Mitsuru’s hand hovering just above his shoulderblades. Not the sharp arrow of fingers, but a flat palm. A touch of affection, waiting, centimeters of distance measuring out years of Mitsuru’s chilly treatment of him. Their hand fell back down to their side. “I could not live the life Sojiro desired me to, be what he wished of me. That was why I left.”

Was it not why Hanzo had left as well? He could not be the leader, the killer, the patriarch Kanata and the rest of the family wanted him to be, not for lack of ability but lack of affinity. “Do you wish you had not been our mother? That Genji and I had not been born?”

Mitsuru chewed on that. “That man I was meant to kill. Jesse McCree. You love him, don’t you?”

After a moment of shocked hesitation at the boldness of the question, Hanzo found he could not lie. “Yes,” he breathed.

“And Genji. You’re off to rescue him as well?”

Hanzo nodded. “I will save them both, or die trying.”

Another mournful smile spread across Mitsuru’s face. “My prodigy. I was so wrong about you. You are a protector, not a killer. It is a better thing than what I am. How could I resent the only good I have ever brought to this world?”

Hanzo thought again of McCree’s face, mournful as he sacrificed himself to save Hanzo and the other members of Overwatch from the omnic army. Of Pharah, raised by the world’s noblest heroes. “I am not protecting the city,” he said. “I don’t know if I can save both Genji and Jesse. They may already be dead.”

Mitsuru left his side, walking back to where Storm Bow was laid on the floor. “I told you, Hanzo.
Jesse McCree is alive.”


“Mm, when you and the others were fighting in the alley. An impressive man, when he isn’t scared out of his wits. I can see why you took to him.”

Of all things, Hanzo felt himself blush, something a man of 38 should absolutely no longer do. Mitsuru smiled, and this time it was the clever, triumphant smirk that made them look eerily like Genji. “I left his trail to follow yours, but I could track him down again.” They knelt to pick up Storm Bow from the ground. “I can keep your lover safe, even in this war zone.”

Even with their apology, Hanzo had a hard time believing Mitsuru would truly protect the man they had a contract on. “How do I know you won’t take this opportunity to kill him?”

“I have let go of any hope that you will stand at my side,” Mitsuru said, walking past him towards the door of the broadcasting room, “but I have no desire to be any blacker a spot on your heart than I already am. I hardly think killing the man you love would endear me to you.” Mitsuru looked over their shoulder. “Besides... it is not a moonless night.”

Mitsuru half-opened the door and stopped, turned, looked at Hanzo seriously. “I have a debt I owe, to you and to Jesse McCree. You have a similar debt to me and Genji.” Mitsuru smiled again - Genji’s confident, puckish smile - and tossed Storm Bow back to Hanzo. “Let us prove to one another that we can honor those debts.”

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As Hanzo suspected, when he emerged in front of the Atlas News building, Overwatch was gone. With its abandoned line of cars and the patter of distant pulsefire, the street felt eerie. Hanzo started in the direction of Midtown. Unlike McCree, Hanzo knew exactly where Genji was - at the head of the omnic army. He was content to follow the empty street, until he heard the stuttering caterwaul of motorcycle engines behind him. Hanzo darted into a nearby alleyway.

From the safety of the shadows, Hanzo watched as the procession of bikes rumble past, slow and searching. Had they seen him in the street? The white truck was still taking up the rear of the procession. It began honking furiously, then the procession slowed to a stop only a few feet back from Hanzo’s hiding spot. Someone leaned out of the driver’s seat window of the truck, but Hanzo’s view of her was blocked by an ill-placed lamppost.

“Boss has a news report that they’ve been spotted a few blocks ahead. Rev it up, assholes. Look for the girl in the sky.”

The girl in the sky? Hanzo leaned back against the wall at the procession rolled out. He dared to peek out once they passed, watching them go. Up ahead, one of them yelled something he couldn’t make out; saw them point up at the sky. Hanzo followed their direction and went pale. There, like a sapphire set in the clouds, was Pharah, raining down rockets. The girl in the sky. The motorcycles revved again, and the procession began moving decidedly towards her location.

Hanzo had to warn them.

There was no way Hanzo was going to beat the zippy motorcycles or even the truck on foot if he followed the roads. If he got to the rooftops, though, he could head there in a straight line instead of weaving through the streets like they would have to. Hanzo took a few steps back to build momentum, then scaled up the side of the nearest building, blissfully nowhere near as tall as the Atlas
News tower had been.

Eyes fixed on Pharah’s location, Hanzo leapt from roof to roof, quiver bouncing against his back. Now and then, Pharah would disappear, only to fly up again, and again broadcast Overwatch’s location. The sound of the bikes’ raw engines revved, always just ahead of him. Hanzo pushed himself to dash harder, feeling his lungs start to ache and his legs cramp. Pharah dropped again. When Hanzo reached the location he’d last seen her, he looked down and found the street was empty.

Hanzo’s gaze darted around the abandoned intersection, the destroyed omnic remains, the pulsefire scorches, the rocket craters. Behind him, he heard the roar of approaching engines. But it didn’t sound like it was coming from the street, and it didn’t sound like motorcycles—more like a jet engine.

“Hanzo?”

Hanzo spun around. Pharah was floating there, staring at him, puzzled, before making a hard landing on the roof. “Did you find McCree?” she asked.

“No,” Hanzo said. “Where are the others?”

“Just down there.” Pharah gestured at the next block over.

Hanzo started to run in that direction, hearing now the rumble of bikes down in the street. “Come. We must warn them. They need to get away from here.”

Pharah flew alongside Hanzo as he raced across the rooftops. “Warn them about what?” she yelled over her own jets.

Hanzo started to answer her question, then nearly fell off the edge of the building. Down below, in the middle of the street, he saw them - Winston, Ana, Zarya, Zenyatta, and Soldier: 76. They all had their backs to him.

A dozen colorful motorcycles were coming towards them from the opposite direction. Hanzo cursed, then gingerly dropped down from the roof. The noise of his landing drew everyone’s attention. “Hanzo?” It was Winston, staring at him, puzzled.

“That’s what I said,” Pharah said, landing next to him.

“Welcome back,” Zenyatta, warm and placid.

“Let’s move,” Soldier: 76 said. “We don’t have time to deal with these jokers.”

“I will cover you,” Hanzo said, taking a few steps forward and drawing a scatter arrow. He aimed it at the approaching motorcycles. “Follow the street behind us, it is clear.”

“Will do,” Winston said. “Good to have you b-”

Winston was interrupted by the shriek of tires. Hanzo spun. The white commercial truck careened around the corner, then barreled towards them at way over the posted speed limit.

“They’re going to hit us,” Soldier: 76 called, but just as he raised his pulse rifle to fire, the truck slammed on the brakes, causing it to rotate almost sideways before coming to a stop in front of them. From behind, the motorcycles closed in, forming a circle around the group. Like a finely-tuned military unit, they group all raised their weapons as one, aiming tentatively at the colorful
motorcyclists that now had them surrounded.

They were odd, now that Hanzo got a good look at them. They certainly didn’t look like any form of authority he would have recognized. They wore variable-colored, trendy leather jackets with ornate designs. All the motorcycles were the sleek sport bikes Genji used to ride, customized to the point of tackiness - decals of skulls, flowers, and dragons. Their scuffed helmets were covered in stickers with bubblegum-bright cartoon characters or logos written in… yes, that was definitely kanji. It was then he realized when they had been talking earlier, it had been in Japanese.

“We don’t want to hurt anybody,” Soldier: 76 said. “But if you don’t release us now, you give us no choice.”

Hanzo turned his attention to the white truck. He couldn’t get a good view of the driver, only saw that it was a woman with bright-orange hair that seemed vaguely familiar. He leaned forward and squinted, then something leapt into view from the passenger seat, so fast it made Hanzo jump.

It was a white mutt of a dog. It barked at him, tongue lolling out. Hanzo swore he knew those foxy ears and goofy grin. He squinted in disbelief. “Shiro?”

The back doors of the truck opened. A ramp rolled out, the foot of it clanging down onto the concrete.

“What’s the call, Winston,” Ana asked in a low voice.

“They aren’t answering us,” Winston said. “We need to keep moving. Try not to kill them if you can help it-“

“Wait!” Hanzo said.

The thing rolled out from the truck’s bed, clattering as it rumbled haphazardly down the ramp. It rolled to a stop a few meters out. It was big, up to Hanzo’s chin and three times as long, porcelain-white and shaped like a pill. “死ね” was spray-painted on the side of it in purple.

Then, something else came out of the truck’s cargo box - or rather, some one.

She was tall and lanky, long limbs accentuated by the pinstriped suit, the color of a bruise. There was an Uzi in one of her ringed hands, and a cigarette in the other. Her suit jacket and charcoal dress shirt had the sleeves rolled up, revealing intricate tattoos down to her wrists. One arm featured a lavender dragon, swathed in rolling ocean waves. The other was a hissing viper, surrounded by blooming flowers. She grinned at Hanzo, showing off her lacerated upper lip.

“Hello, Cousin,” Keiko said, strolling casual as anything up beside the e-bomb. She kicked its metal casing, making it clang. “Thought you could use one of these.”

Chapter End Notes

KEIKO'S BACK TO SAVE THE DAY, or as Doc said - よっしゃー！恵子復活した！！！
The characters spray-painted on the e-bomb just say ”Die!” haha :P
Thanks for reading! See you guys next week! At this rate, I'm hoping to have the fic finished by the first week of August (:
Reminder, I will be streaming Overwatch tonight, 11PM EST!
Also, I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
I was super-late last week, so what the hell, I'll be super early this week!
Hope you liked the last two chapters because there's more action where that came from, which a spattering of intrigue this time :3 As you'll see, when we swap perspectives there will be a bit of overlap here in the third act. There's just too much action!!

**Content warnings:** Some light violence, panic attack.

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven't been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it's such a joy! Thank you guys so much, you're the best ;^;

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 9PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

McCree had forgotten how the damn dust got into everything. It snuck in through his collar, his shirtsleeves, his boots. It was the same feeling he had riding down Route 66 on the stolen motorcycle and seeing every familiar sign, every road marker, every building. It got under his skin - into his lungs, making it hard to breathe. There was the sign for the Cave Inn. Next door, the High Side, Deadlock’s favorite watering hole. McCree parked the bike, cut the engine, then walked through the saloon doors. His boots had spurs now, so they all heard him coming.

The bar was on the left. A mustachioed ginger was on a stool drinking a beer. The barkeep wiped her hands on a rag and looked at McCree like she knew he was trouble. On the right was a pool table with two twenty-somethings wearing black leather and scowls. An old guy with a grizzled beard and a bandanna was leaned up beside a jukebox in the back. Five in all. That gave him one bullet of breathing room.

McCree kept his hat low, taking a few steps in and stopping next to a wooden pillar that jutted up through the center of the bar. “Fifteen years and ain’t a damn thing changed,” he crooned, lifting his head. “I’m lookin’ for a man named Vernon Jowell. Any of y’all know where he got to?”

“Who the fuck are you,” asked one of the kids, leaning on a pool cue like it was a spear.

The old guy in the back pushed off from the jukebox. “Use your eyes, moron,” he said. He threw a dart at the pillar. McCree’s eyes caught the movement and peered around where the dart had stuck into a photo pinned to the dart board.

When McCree saw who the guy in the photo was, he whistled. “Could have found a better picture, fellas,” he said. “Ain’t even my good side.”
The kid with the pool cue swallowed, went bug-eyed. “You’re him. Jesse McCree.”

“Naw,” said the old guy by the jukebox. “His name ain’t McCree. It's Jowell. Jesse Jowell.”

McCree grinned from beneath Momma’s hat, her name pressing to his forehead. “If you've heard of me,” he said. “Then I reckon you know how good I am with a six-shooter. So why don't we skip the theatrics and let me know where I can find Vernon.”

“Don't care how good y’are,” the kid said, “We ain't rattin' out Vernon.” He raised his pool cue.

It was splintered in half before the boy even got a step, wood spraying outward. McCree raised an eyebrow at the kid’s shocked face, blew the smoke from the barrel of his gun. “Well, now. That leaves a bullet for each of you.”

The kids at the pool table swallowed and looked at one another. The old guy in the back threw another dart, then let them off the hook. “Vernon’s next door,” he said. “At the Cave Inn.”

McCree narrowed his eyes. “Which room,” he asked.

“You know which room,” the old guy answered.

And McCree did know. It was the hotel room he’d grown up in. Pa had never left. McCree tipped his hat to the bar, then strolled back out through the saloon doors.

It was a different color outside than it had been before - no longer the stark Sante Fe blue and red, but a cool grey. McCree looked up and saw a thunderhead roaring in from the east, on its way to covering the sky.

Back when McCree was a kid and this dusty shithole was where he called home, McCree would imagine riding in with those cloud. High on a steed all sleek and gunmetal blue with horseshoes made from lightning that sparked as they kicked at the sky. The black hat riding into town, like Reyes had with his helicopters when McCree was just 17. A name burned across McCree’s forehead.

The Cave Inn was next door. Pa was waiting for him.

A guillotine - that’s what it was like. A rope and a blade, flying down and cutting him off from Overwatch. From Ana and Pharah. From Hanzo. The dust and debris gushed out at him, coating the whole front of his body. McCree could hear the omnic army at his back. He took a breath, opened his eyes, turned around.

The dust turned the omnics into shambling shapes and electric noises, a wave washing in. It was like the zombie flicks McCree used to stay up late and watch on the old CRT at the Cave Inn; like Mitsuru, melting out of the shadows to come for him, transforming from something ethereal to something real. He had sacrificed himself. He was going to die here, all alone.

By the end, the cowboy’s always the good guy. Since Geneva, McCree had been trying his damndest to be the white hat, but maybe dying was what it took to come back from all that bad.

McCree looked down at the toes of his shoes, and for the first time in a long time, he felt a little ridiculous. The chaps, the boots, the spurs, the serape. They were costume pieces, all picked out to match a hat he’d found under a bed; to match a name written inside the band. But none of those things were what mattered. Only this, dying for the people you loved just like Momma had. He stared at those cowboy boots of his and thought about someone finding his dead body in this outfit. What a damn fool they’d think he was.
The roar hit.

It was like a thunderstorm in Santa Fe, when Hanzo’s two-headed dragon rushed through him. Cool, wet, electric air rushed through McCree, painting everything a different color than before. It put something into him that he’d been missing. Hanzo still had a little bit of hope left for him when McCree himself had given up entirely.

*My man,* he thought, tears pricking at his eyes. He could feel scales brushing the fingers of his cybernetic arm, even though scales or feeling things with those fingers were both impossible.

There was no way McCree could take out an omnic army on his own, but then again, dragons weren’t supposed to be real either. Heat was at the back of McCree’s neck, cooking him down to his heart. The sun, strong with summer. McCree looked up. It was on its tip-toes in the sky, directly above him. He frowned, pulling back his glove to look at his watch. “You gotta be kidding me,” he said. He snapped Peacekeeper’s cylinder open.

McCree had never hit more than six targets with the Deadeye, that’s what he always told people. But there was this one time in Utopaea that he thought he might have hit seven. Then there was the time he hit six down in Dorado, even though he’d been sure there were only four rounds in the cylinder. He’d put it down to luck or a trick of his memory, stray bullets unaccounted for.

Well. There wasn’t anyone else to stray a bullet now. The sun was at its zenith. Seemed as good a time as any to test the theory.

As the omnics closed on him, McCree pulled a cigar and a book of matches out from the inside pocket of his serape. He lit it, took a puff, then breathed out the smoke with a grin, both hands on his gun.

“You know what time it is.”

Surrounded by the electric clarity of Hanzo’s dragons, McCree locked on the position of every omnic in his field of vision. His eye twitched. He focused faster than usual, and shot faster than he ever had. Each trigger-pull punched with that bone-rattling satisfaction, like tugging a rope, hammering a nail, cracking your knuckles. Nothing got his blood going like shooting a god-damned gun.

McCree was so focused in the moment that he didn’t think about how many shots he was firing. He never stopped, never felt that rhythm that told him when to reload. He only pulled the trigger again and again until all the targets were down.

There were definitely, *definitely* more than six. McCree gawked at the omnic bodies, then snapped Peacekeeper’s cylinder back out.

Empty - just like it had been when he’d checked it right before using the Deadeye.

“Holy hell,” McCree breathed.

The tails of Hanzo’s dragon whipped around him, and watching them made McCree dizzy. They passed away from him, chewing a long line through the omnic army, just as McCree had sliced away their entire front line. He felt a little weak, head muddy. He reloaded.

The column had marched on north, but there was still a mess of omnics hanging back to take care of him. McCree shook his head to try and clear it. He’d done a good deal of stalling, but that was still all it was. He looked back up at the sun, the sky, as if to say, *got any more clever ideas?*
Turned out it did, if the scream of an approaching jet engine was any indication. A fighter plane was coming in low from the direction of the safe zone. His comm crackled.

“Oi, McCree! Heard you were in a bit of a spot, Luv!”

McCree laughed in disbelief, watching the jet maneuver past the tallest of the buildings. Even if she hadn’t called in, there was only one woman in the world who could thread an F14 through skyscrapers like that. “You're a damn fine sight, Ms. Tracer.”

Tracer showered 20mil fire into the mass of omnics, turning dozens to scrap. They all turned their attention to her, shooting up at the passing fighter-plane. It gave McCree the opportunity to take some pot-shots while they were distracted. The crowd of omnics thinned. It was impossible like dragons were impossible, like the number 13 was unlucky, but with Hanzo and Tracer’s help, maybe he was actually going to get out of this alive.

McCree put the rumble down to a sonic boom at first, until it started to make a rhythm and he realized there was no way Tracer could maneuver down here at the speed of sound. He’d never understood, in the stories Reyes used to tell, how Titans managed to sneak up on people. Now, as one stomped out from around a skyscraper, McCree realized it was a bit like a tiger in the trees. Its metallic panels were stripes in the concrete jungle.

The Titan came close but wasn’t interested in McCree - it was focused on Tracer’s jet. It swatted at her as she passed, but missed. Instead, its three-fingered hand smashed into the building just behind McCree.

It started to collapse.

McCree darted away, dodging falling debris. The building was coming down piece by piece. He kept moving up in the direction of the omnic’s march, Peacekeeper in one hand, the other holding his hat to his head. He watched the sky.

Tracer was far off now, having done her fly-by. McCree just hoped the Titan didn’t notice him in the time it took Tracer to loop back around.

But the F14 didn’t turn left or right. Instead, Tracer flew straight up and over until she was flying back towards him, upside-down. With a stylish rotation, the plane was right-side up again. It put McCree’s stomach in knots just watching, but damn was he grateful for it - it was the fastest turnaround he’d ever seen. Tracer was already coming back with more covering fire. The Titan shot its hand-canon at her - she deftly dodged the shells and closed in.

Tracer unloaded a full belt of 20mm fire into the Titan’s chestplate. In an attempt to put in as much damage as possible, Tracer didn’t swerve the jet away until she was very close to the Titan’s wildly-swiping arms.

It was a second too late. The Titan’s ponderous hand clipped the F14’s wing, sending Tracer into a spin. She started to nosedive.

“Tracer!” McCree called lamely into the comm.

The roof of the jet exploded away, then Tracer’s seat ejected out into the sky. The plane crashed into the street not two seconds later, shattering into fire and debris.

McCree followed the ejector seat’s trajectory with his eyes as it parachuted towards the ground. There were 3-dozen omnics between him and the spot. He grit his teeth and readied Peacekeeper.
She didn't leave me behind, McCree thought. No way in hell I’m goin’ to leave her. It would be at best a tough fight and at worst a fatal one. He took a breath. But just as McCree took aim at the omnis, a shadow fell over them.

A figure dropped down on the horde, and as it did, it exploded in a black cloud of gunfire. All McCree could see through the smoke were arms - too many arms, each one firing a massive, familiar shotgun.

*Happy Birthday, from Jack and Ana.*

The shotguns shredded the omnis in McCree’s path, leaving them fallen in a halo around where the black figure had landed on them. The smoke dissipated, and the figure was gone. All that remained were a few limping omnis and an open path from McCree to Tracer’s deflating parachute.

It was lucky - too lucky. McCree took the opportunity to cross the newly-cleared area, but he couldn’t get the number 13 out of his head. He shot his way through the last straggling enemies, eyes barely aiming, instead fixed on the pale, deflated parachute just ahead.

McCree spotted Tracer crumpled in a pile of rubble a few feet from the parachute. He rushed to her. Her head was bleeding, and she wasn’t moving. McCree dropped to his knees beside her, then took her hand. “Ms. Tracer. Ms. Tracer!” He squeezed her fingers. “Come on…”

Tracer’s face scrunched up. She opened her eyes. Her pupils wandered beneath her cracked visor, hazed, and she started to squirm. “Where am I? Where is this?” Her voice sounded panicked, an emotion McCree did not see from her often.

“Ms. Tracer, we’re in New York,” McCree said, unsure how else to answer.

“What New York?”

“Wh… the only one there is, Ms. Tracer.”

“When? *When* is this?”

Finally, McCree understood. Crashing a jet… that was how she’d gotten lost in the time stream in the first place. McCree’s grip on her hand tightened. “It’s 2076. You’re 26 years old. This ain’t the Slipstream crash, you were flying a regular F14. You’re in the States. Winston recalled Overwatch a few months back, and now we’re in New York City trying to stop the omnis from invading.”

Tracer’s hand closed around his, and she took a few deep breaths. “Right,” she said, then forced a laugh. “Right, of course we are, Luv! No need to state the obvious, hehe!” She tried to spring up, but immediately crumpled down again with a curse. “My leg’s not tip top, I’m afraid,” she said, cringing.

With careful, exploratory fingers, McCree felt down the bone. Tracer hissed when he squeezed her ankle.

“Second time I’ve survived ejecting a crash,” Tracer said. “Most pilots don’t survive the first. Must be luck, I guess.”

McCree looked back at the emptied area behind him that had allowed him get to Tracer in the first place. “Yeah,” he said, “Must be.”

More omnis were taking notice of them, starting to march ponderously their way. They couldn’t stay out in the open. With a word of apology, McCree lifted Tracer in his arms, and carried her into the cover of a nearby sidestreet.
There was someone waiting for them there.

It was hard to see in the street’s dark shadows. At first, it just looked like a floating skull. Then, as McCree’s eyes adjusted, he saw the hood, the coat, the two enormous shotguns trained on him and Tracer.

“I knew it was you,” McCree growled. He stared Reaper down and wondered if he could drop Tracer and draw his gun before Reaper shot them both. The thought had no sooner entered his head when he felt the barrel of a gun press to the back of his neck.

“Fancy meeting you here, McCree,” came a playful, familiar voice.

“Could say the same for you, Ms. uh…?”

“Sombra will do,” Sombra said, then shoved the barrel harder into the base of his skull. “Come on.”

“Come to where?” Tracer asked, glaring at Sombra from over McCree’s shoulder.

“With us,” Reaper growled. “And if you’re still considering some last minute heroics…”

A red dot appeared on Tracer’s forehead. McCree froze.

“You’d both go down before you got that hand to your gun,” Reaper said like he could read McCree’s mind. Or maybe, like he knew McCree a bit too well. “Let’s go.”

The Talon trio of Reaper, Sombra, and Widowmaker took McCree and Tracer down a labyrinth of side-streets and alleyways. The way Talon navigated through the NYC war zone was wholly different from Overwatch’s head-on approach. They moved quietly, avoided conflict. Widowmaker, on the rooftops; or Sombra, using her invisibility; took out any targets that could cause trouble before moving out into the open. It reminded McCree of his old Blackwatch days. He couldn't stop staring at Reaper. It’s Reyes under there, he knew, but Reyes was dead. Somehow, both of those things felt true.

Drumrolls of pulsefire and cymbal-crash explosions told McCree they were getting closer to the new barricade. The scent of pulse-smoke was starting to turn his stomach.

At last, Reaper took them into an abandoned church. Talon had set up some supply crates and technical-looking equipment on the dais, along with a pair of holoscreens. One showed a map with the omnic army’s numbers and movements. Another had Atlas News on low volume.

Reaper took Tracer from McCree’s arms then dropped her into a pew right up front. He shoved McCree down next to her. “Tie them up,” he said to Sombra.

“Got it, Boss,” Sombra said. She pushed her wrists together by way of example and said “Hands.” McCree frowned, staring at Reaper’s freshly-drawn shotgun, and the red dot still trained on the back of Tracer’s head. He put his wrists up. Sombra zip-tied them together.

“This part of yer plan, missy?” McCree whispered.

Sombra looked at Tracer beside them, then Reaper a few feet away. “I’d keep my mouth shut if I were you,” she hissed, moving on to bind his feet. “Your boyfriend hasn’t rescued Genji yet.” She tugged the zip-tie tight, then moved on to Tracer’s wrists.

“What are you on about?” Tracer asked, too loud. Reaper tilted his hooded head.
Sombra tightened the zip-tie around Tracer’s wrists and shot McCree an exasperated look. “You hurt your leg, right?” she said to Tracer, intentionally loud. “I’ll get you something for it. If we have to relocate in a hurry, it would be such a shame to have to leave you behind.” Sombra left them for the supply crates.

Widowmaker dropped down, smooth as silk, from her perch in the rafters. McCree heard the breath Tracer took; she glared daggers as she strolled past.

All Widowmaker gave back was an expressionless look from the corner of her eye before joining Reaper on the dais. They started examining the map, Reaper highlighting key locations.

McCree leaned in to Tracer. “Listen, Ms. Tracer. I need ya’ to keep quiet about what I’m going to tell you,” he whispered. He nodded to Sombra, who was still rummaging in the supply crates. “That gal there? She got in contact with Hanzo and me in Seoul, told us she hacked Genji. That’s why he’s actin’ as Seiyatta’s right-hand man.”

Tracer’s eyes went buggy. “I knew it!” she cried, loud enough that Reaper and Widowmaker turned from their map to look. Sombra, a rollout med-pack in one hand, made a face at McCree. Shut her up, the face said.

“I tried to tell Winston that Talon was behind the omnic attacks,” McCree lied pointedly, “but he wouldn’t listen.” He raised his eyebrows at Tracer. She looked between Reaper, Widowmaker, Sombra, and McCree. Then, she started tittering.

“Right! Of course,” she said. “I should have known.”

Sombra rolled her eyes. Reaper and Widowmaker turned back to the map.

Tracer leaned into McCree as Sombra approached them with the med-pack. “Why didn’t you tell us about Genji straight off?” Tracer whispered.

“I would have thought the last 30 seconds made that obvious,” Sombra said as she knelt, lifting Tracer’s injured ankle up. She unrolled the gel-infused gauze from the med-pack’s cylinder, then wrapped it around Tracer’s ankle. “You know what will happen to Genji if Talon gets even the notion that anyone at Overwatch knows he isn’t really a traitor?” Sombra made a froggy noise between her teeth and ran a finger across her throat. “And with his computer-brain under the program’s influence, he wouldn’t even fight back.”

Tracer swallowed a lump in her throat, glared at Sombra. “Says the dirty sneak who hacked him in the first place.”

Sombra fastened the medical gauze tight to Tracer’s ankle as it faded from white to blue, the medicine activating. “I did what Talon told me to do,” she whispered.

“Funny,” McCree said. “You don’t strike me as the type that does just what she’s told.”

That earned him one of Sombra’s signature smirks. She set Tracer’s ankle down carefully. “You’re right,” she said. “I’m not.”

Their attention got diverted by Reaper turning up the volume on the news.

“Here with a special update,” the newswoman said into the camera. “The UN reports that they’ve acquired what’s called an e-bomb, a weapon they say will turn the tides in the battle for New York City. It was handed over to the UN by Overwatch. The defunct peacekeeping organization had been rumored for months to be back in action despite the Petras Act of 2070, which strictly forbade
Overwatch’s continued activity.

The e-bomb, also known as an EMP, affects not only omnics but all electronic systems in the blast radius. Because Atlas News still relays our broadcast from our station in New York, we are expected to go offline for a brief period after the detonation, along with several other news networks who also broadcast from the tri-state area.”

Widowmaker spun on Sombra like a snake striking. “You told us you had given us the location of all ze E-bombs still in circulation. How did Overwatch get their hands on this one, I wonder?”

“Relax,” Reaper said, putting a hand on Widowmaker’s bony shoulder. “It’s got to be the one from Hanamura that Shimada woman had.”

McCree looked up. “Shimada woman? You mean Keiko?” They had all given her up for dead. “I thought y’all took the castle?”

“We did,” Sombra said. “But when we got there, Keiko Shimada was gone along with the EMP. I can’t imagine how she got away.”

Widowmaker glared at Sombra. “No. I am certain you can’t,” she hissed. “Come. We have to try and take that plane down.” She hefted her rifle.

“How are we going to do that?” Sombra said blandly. The Talon trio left the dais and headed towards the door at the back of the church.

McCree looked back to the news. It was footage of the omnic army’s’ vanguard. Genji was still there with Seiyatta.

“Wait... if they drop the EMP, Genji’s systems will go down,” Tracer said. “He can’t stay alive without his cybernetics.”

“You mean the e-bomb’ll kill him,” McCree asked.

“Yeah.”

“Shit.” The bomb would drop any minute. If Hanzo wasn't there already, there was no way he’d bust through the army and get Genji out in time. And if what the news said was true, Overwatch were the ones who gave the UN the e-bomb in the first place. Why wouldn't they? As far as they were concerned, Genji was a traitor.

“Wait!” McCree called to Reaper.

The Talon trio turned to look back at him.

McCree swallowed. “You let us loose... we’ll help you take that plane down.”

“What?” Tracer looked appalled.

“You want Genji to die? Look - he’s right up front, two feet from that badass omnic chick. No way they’re not going to try and take her out with the blast, which means Genji’ll go too.”

“But... if we don’t stop the omnic army, all the people in the city... what if they don’t evacuate on time?”

“Look,” McCree said, lowering his voice. “We just need to buy Hanzo some time to get Genji out of harm’s way. Besides, you’d rather sit here tied up watchin’ it on the news?”
Tracer bit her lip, then made a determined face. “Fine.”

“I don’t like it, Boss,” Sombra said. “They’re up to something.”

Reaper looked from Sombra to McCree. “Get them communicators,” he said.

Sombra rolled her eyes and stomped back to the supply crates like a bratty teenager. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she said over her shoulder.

Reaper approached McCree and Tracer with Widowmaker in tow. He tugged Peacekeeper from McCree’s hip, then slid it into a pocket somewhere in his long, black coat.

Widowmaker’s hands crawled up Tracer’s arms, removing her pulse pistols. When Sombra returned from the dais with with two earpieces, Widowmaker offered Tracer’s pistols to her in trade.

“What, no pockets in your catsuit?” Sombra teased, handing Widow the earpieces and taking the pistols from her.

Widowmaker gave her a chilly look. “Sometimes, when I am up on the ze roof, I wonder why I do not just shoot you.”

Sombra tucked the pulse pistols into her coat. “Because you love me, of course,” she said, and poked Widowmaker’s nose. “Boop!”

Widowmaker scowled at her.

With a flick of his wrist, a switchblade materialized in Reaper’s hand. He cut the zip-ties from McCree’s wrists and ankles, then cut Tracer free as well. The five of them, all glaring at one another, made their way towards the church’s double-doors.

A purple holoscreen bounced over Sombra’s shoulder, showing the GPS location of the makeshift Air Force base where the bomber was launching from. McCree wondered how the hell the hacker managed to know so damn much about everything.

Sombra was walking beside a limping Tracer, who seemed to despise her almost as much as she despised Widowmaker. “You want to show me that Translocator of yours,” Tracer asked Sombra. “Y’know, the design you stole from Winston?”

Sombra reached her arm around Tracer, smoothing sharp-nailed hands across her the holsters on her forearms. “Don’t have it on me, sorry,” she chirped. Tracer shoved her off.

McCree stared at the screen over Sombra’s shoulder. There were six heat signatures on it. The four of them, walking down the street, headed towards the bomber; Widowmaker, a barely-visible blue dot compared to their bright red ones; and a sixth heat signature, travelling a few yards behind them. McCree squinted, stopped, then turned around.

The street was empty. McCree frowned.

“What?” Reaper growled at him.

McCree looked back at Sombra’s screen. The sixth heat signature was gone. “Nothin’,” McCree muttered, then jogged to catch up.

Widowmaker’s voice came through on McCree’s comm. “The station is just around ze corner,” she said. “I have eyes on the bomber. They are loading the EMP onto it now, and the engine is on.”
They rounded the corner.

The makeshift Air Force base was very makeshift. All they had were some scattered infantrymen, a big holoscreen with the news broadcast, and the single bomber parked in the middle of an intersection. Widowmaker was right - they were shutting the bomber’s fuselage, and the engines were revved up, ready to take off.

“We’ve got to stall them,” Tracer said.

McCree hummed. “Take out the pilot, maybe? Take ‘em a while to find another news-camera-ready American hero to take the victory flight.” No sooner was it out of his mouth than McCree realized he was suggesting they kill someone. He didn’t dare turn to see the face Tracer must have been making at him.

It just felt so much like the old Blackwatch days - covert ops, grounding a plane, stopping a bomb. Back then, he wouldn't have blinked an eye at killing a pilot. Reaper looked at McCree over his shoulder, just like Reyes used to. Every angle just the same, except he had a skull for a face.

“Widowmaker. Can you take the pilot out?”

“Negative,” Widowmaker said. “I do not have a good angle.”

Sombra sidled up to Reaper, giving him a hug from the side that he clearly did not want. “I could take him out, Boss. Just a need a distraction. Maybe a spooky one?”

With an annoyed growl, Reaper pushed Sombra off. “Fine. Don’t take too long,” he said. “And stick to the mission.”

“Of course, Boss,” Sombra said, backing away from him. She elbowed McCree, leaning in and stage-whispering to him. “Guy can’t take a joke. Was he this bad in Blackwatch?”

“Sombra,” Reaper snarled.

“Okay, okay, I’m going!” Sombra shot McCree a significant look, then her eyes went pointedly to his hip. Then, in a shimmer of pink, she disappeared from view.

Reaper turned to McCree and Tracer, looking between them. “You two are going to help,” he said from between his teeth. “You take the right side of the street, I’ll go left. Get the attention of the patrols so Sombra can take out the pilot.”

“She better not kill him,” Tracer told Reaper, voice choked. She spun and limped towards the right side of the street, the bandage still around her ankle.

McCree caught up to her. He tried to put an arm around Tracer to help her walk, but she shrugged it off and turned on him. “I heard what she said to you - Blackwatch! What’d she mean by that, McCree?”

McCree’s looked over at Reaper, who was floating to the left side of the street like a ghoul. “Trust me, Ms. Tracer. You don’t want to know.”

It looked as if Tracer would protest when a pair of Air Force officers patrolled towards them. McCree’s hand went instinctively to where Peacekeeper should have been.

No, not should have been - was. McCree’s hand was definitely on the familiar stock of his six-shooter.
“This isn’t right, McCree,” Tracer said beside him. “I was just here with these guys, they lent me a plane to come help you. I can’t sit by and watch that spooky arsehole shoot them, not even if it means Genji…” Tracer’s voice caught in her throat.

“Maybe we don’t have to,” McCree said. “Check your holsters.”

Tracer blinked at him, then flicked her wrists. Sure enough, her pulse pistols snapped into her hands. “Whoa! Did I do that?”

“Naw. Sombra did.” When she put her arm around Tracer, when she hugged Reaper, when she leaned into McCree. She’d snuck their guns back to them. “She’s up to something, and she don’t want us unarmed for it. We need a distraction? Well. Startin’ a fight with Reaper right here should distract ‘em plenty.”

Tracer looked at him owlishly for a moment, then grinned wide and nodded, raising her pistols to her ears. “Now that’s a plan I can get behind, hehe!”

McCree grinned, then looked over at Reaper, who had gotten into position across the street. As he turned to look at them, McCree leveled Peacekeeper, and pulled the trigger.

The shot landed beautifully, right in the stomach. You should be proud, Reyes, McCree thought as Reaper doubled-over, snarling. The gunfire called the attention of the Air Force patrol, just as McCree hoped it would. Reaper roared, clutching his smoking gut with one hand and aiming a shotgun at McCree with the other. Tracer unloaded a round of pulsefire across his arm. It exploded with smoke, and the shotgun fell to the ground.

“This is perfect,” Tracer said, reloading. “We’ll stop Talon, and keep the pilot grounded in time for—” The roar of jet engines firing up interrupted her. The bomber was taking off, the slingshot shooting it down the street’s makeshift, limited runway.

“Sombra! I thought you were stopping the pilot,” came Widowmaker’s voice over the comm. “Sombra, answer, now!”

But Sombra didn’t answer. For a moment, Reaper stood opposite McCree and Tracer, coat blowing in the wind as his arm - and another shotgun - regenerated.

McCree trained his weapon at Reaper’s skull of a mask. Reaper tilted his head just the way Reyes used to when he was smiling. “Good to see you can stick to the mission, Sombra,” he said.

“What?” Widowmaker cried over the comm. “What do you mean—”

Reaper reached his clawed fingers up to his ear, then plucked out his communicator. It dissipated into smoke.

“What the hell just happened,” McCree asked. “Where’s Sombra?”

“Gone,” Reaper said.

And when McCree looked away from Reaper to the sky, he saw the bomber was gone too. It was already up and away, far out of revolver range, on its way to save New York City, stop the omnic army, and kill his best friend. And there was no way he could stop it.

Chapter End Notes
More and more ults! I had to do a little tribute to the magic deadeyes McCree did during the Halloween event (: 
But oh man! Those sneaky Talons! I love them c: But what is going to happen to Genji?? D: 

Thanks for reading! I'm very excited for next week's chapter (: At this rate, I'm hoping to have the fic finished by the first week of August (: 

Reminder, I will be streaming Overwatch tonight, 9PM EST! 
Also, I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow! 
@mingridsmarcher 
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
"You get this maudlin shit from your mom,” Kanata said. She took a drag from her cigarette, then threw the tanto out the open window of Hanzo’s 5th-story bedroom.

Summer had come early. The room was sweltering, but Hanzo pulled his thick blanket up to his chin anyway. It felt like a fever - shaking, tired, overwhelmed.

“It’s selfish, that’s what it is,” Kanata went on, seated on his floor a meter away, looking out the window at the evening sun instead of at her nephew. “The family needs a leader, not… whatever it is you’re being right now.”

They need someone who will remove Genji, Hanzo thought. I cannot be that.

“Keiko may seem like a wild card, but she’s loyal to Genji. She’ll do anything he says,” Kanata told him. “And she has all those motorcycle kids under her thumb. That’s damn near half the clan. When I say he’s a danger to the family, I mean it.”

Hanzo curled up under the blanket. “Genji is my family.”

“The family is your family, Hanzo,” Kanata said. “That word means something. It’s the duty of the patriarch to put down his enemies, not pity them. And if Genji and Keiko aren’t with us, they’re against us.”

Hanzo buried his face in his pillow.

Kanata sighed out cigarette smoke. She leaned in to stroke his shoulder. “Alright. Alright. You don’t believe me? Then leave it to our own bloodline to decide if Genji’s a traitor or not.”
Hanzo looked up.

“The dragons,” Kanata hissed. Beneath the scarlet collar of her shirt, sickly-yellow light shimmered overtop one of her tattoo’s eight heads. “Your dragon is sure when you aren’t. Strong when you’re not. It’ll judge Genji fairly. If you won’t protect the Shimada name, your dragon will.”

Somehow, Hanzo could never imagine Keiko anywhere but the streets of Hanamura. Yet here she was, in a wrinkled suit and sunglasses, standing in the middle of an American-city-turned-warzone. Hanzo’s heart swelled. He rushed up to her.

“Nice haircut, Dragon Boy.” Keiko slapped Hanzo’s shoulder. “Your dad would hate it.”

There was a time when Hanzo would not have taken it as the compliment it was meant to be. He looked past her to the e-bomb. There was a wormy line of welding with a patch of white paint over it looked fresher than the rest. He paused. “Is this not the same e-bomb from the motorcycle shop?”

“Yeah, it is, but, uh.”

Approaching footsteps interrupted them. Hanzo turned.

Soldier: 76 was marching up, rifle raised at Keiko. “Who is this?”

“She is my cousin,” Hanzo said, and was surprised how defensive he sounded; at how he put himself between the gunbarrel and Keiko’s chest.

Winston knuckled up behind Soldier: 76, the other Overwatch agents in tow. “Genji’s cousin?” The suspicion in his voice was irksome.

Keiko leaned back against the EMP, puffing her cigarette. There was an odd bulge in the lapel of her charcoal suit jacket. “Nah, definitely, you’re right,” she said. “I'll just pack this e-bomb up and put a blast out to some buyers. Gosh, I just hope the omnics don't kick the shit outta this city between now and then.”

“An e-bomb?” Winston looked at the large, pill-shaped device, then over to Hanzo for assurance.

“It is the EMP from Hanamura,” Hanzo said, with a sideways glance at Keiko.

“Call the UN,” Winston said. “We should get this behind the barricade for now.”

“Smart move,” Keiko said. “Let’s go, Cousin.”

“No,” Hanzo put a hand on Keiko’s shoulder. “I need your help to look for Genji. He’s out in the army somewhere.”

“Last we saw, he was at the front with Seiyatta,” Ana said. “You might as well come along with us to the barricade.”

Keiko drummed her hands on the EMP, clicked her teeth, and winked at Hanzo.

The barricade was in Times Square, and it had turned it to a war zone. The omnics clogged the giant intersection, each and every American news station hollering from the famous block’s massive television screens. For now, though, the battle was at a standstill as the omnics prepared for another assault.
Hot wind stung Hanzo’s eyes. From his vantage on the army watchtower, he finally spotted the omnic leader, Seiyatta. She was floating, cross-legged, surrounded by her omnic forces. Genji was not with her. Hanzo cursed under his breath, then dropped back to the ground. Keiko and Pharah were waiting for him at the bottom.

“Genji is not there,” Hanzo said as soon as his feet hit the ground. “Gather your motorcycle gang, Keiko. We should go find him.”

Pharah put an armored hand on Hanzo’s shoulder. “I’ll look for Genji,” she said. “I’m going to do a fly-over anyway. It will be much easier to see him from the air. Until then, Overwatch could use your assistance in the event of another assault.”

Hanzo could see the sense in it, but it felt wrong to stay here doing nothing. He looked to Keiko.

“Cousin, it took us forever just to find you guys,” Keiko said. “And you weren’t buried somewhere in that big-ass army.”

Hanzo sighed, then nodded to Pharah. She saluted him, then took to the sky. While watching Pharah become a dot in the skyline, Hanzo realized he had looked to Keiko for advice. Curious. He turned to her. “How did you escape Talon in Hanamura,” he asked, as if to remind himself to be suspicious of her. “We were told they took the castle.”

“Would you believe my ex came to my rescue?” Keiko said. “The one I met in Mexico. I told you about her, right?”

Hanzo vaguely remembered a story Keiko told him about a long-term relationship that had soured when the girl suddenly disappeared. “Perhaps,” he said.

“Yeah. We’re in the castle, Talon busting the door down, and who do I get a call from?” Keiko reached into her jacket pocket, pulled out her phone, waggled it.

When Keiko opened her jacket, Hanzo got a glimpse of her shoulder-holster. There was a fat, mechanical object strapped to it. It glowed pink. That is what caused that bulge in her lapel, Hanzo realized. Keiko tugged her jacket back into place.

“She tells me there’s an old bunker from the 20th century built beneath the castle,” Keiko went on. “Did you know that?”

“No.”

“Me neither. Anyway, long story short, I’ve been stuffed underground eating canned food next to that fuckin’ thing.” Keiko nodded a few meters away, where the army was loading the e-bomb onto an armored truck. “All that money gone.” Keiko sighed.

“Were you hoping to add war profiteer to your criminal resume?”

“I was hoping to add ‘rich’ to my ‘drop-dead sexy world-saver’ resume,” Keiko shot back. “Being a good guy sucks.”

Hanzo chuckled, patting her shoulder, looking from the e-bomb to the Overwatch agents in a huddle near the barricade. “It is not so bad, when you get used to it.”

The truck carrying the e-bomb drove off, and Hanzo got a sinking feeling in his stomach. He remembered the conversation he and Mercy had in her medbay back at Gibraltar - about how Genji’s brain and body were all supported by electrical systems. He commed in. “Pharah? Any sign of my
“Negative,” Pharah said. “What about you guys? How’s the evac going?”

Ana answered on the comm. “Lucio called in, said it was slow-going. Another hour at least.”

Hanzo looked over to the barricade’s crumbling concrete, burst sandbags, and twisted rebar. It was on its last leg - it wouldn’t survive another assault. That wormy line of welding on the e-bomb gnawed at Hanzo. “So, tell me more about this ex of yours,” he probed. “The one who rescued you.”

“Oh, she’s not an ex anymore.” Keiko looked over her sunglasses at Hanzo, smirking.

Hanzo chuckled. “Is that so?”

“Yup. She came to visit me in the bunker, and down there? Nothing to do but each other,” Keiko purred. “You ever had nonstop makeup sex with a beautiful, super-genius chick?” Keiko slapped Hanzo’s shoulder with the back of her hand. “What am I saying? Of course you haven’t. Just trust me, it’s amazing.”

Hanzo chuckled. “You must like this woman a great deal.”

“Yeah,” Keiko said. “I, uh… Yeah.”

That response told Hanzo more than all of Keiko’s blustering. “Perhaps, you love her?”

Keiko rubbed the back of her neck. “Ah, come on, you don’t have to say it like that, Hanzo. Besides, you’re one to talk. You fuck that cowboy yet, or are you two still pretending you don’t like each other?”

Hanzo tried and failed to hide a smile.

“U-oh! Did you really?” Keiko grabbed Hanzo’s shoulder, then slapped his cheek. “Nice work, Cousin! Come on, you gotta tell me what kinda dumb shit he says in bed.” Keiko pantomimed twirling a lasso and said, in bad English, “Yee-haw!”

Hanzo shoved her, and she cackled in a familiar way. Keiko had always teased him, but now it felt like camaraderie, not cruelty. Had she changed, or had he?

Keiko’s laugh faded to a smile. “Nah, that’s, uh, nice. I like that guy. I’m glad the both of you pulled your heads out of your asses.”

This was new. Hanzo’s surprise must have shown on his face, because Keiko looked a bit sheepish.

“Nah, it’s just,” Keiko said, “we grow up in the family and it’s everything, right? Even for me, leaving and meeting civilians was a huge eye-opener. But the people I sent after your ass told me all you did was run around in the woods and come back to the castle every year, like you’d never really left. I’m glad you’re, y’know, getting on with your damn life. Getting close to people that aren’t Shimadas.”

“Have you truly given up on the worth of our family?”

Keiko shrugged. “You pick your family. Sometimes it’s blood, and sometimes it’s not. You and Genji understand what the Clan life was like, and that holds us together in a lot of ways, but I stopped believing in titles a long time ago. Kumicho, or Shimada Clan, or Mother… they don’t mean shit if people don’t deliver on ‘em. So I trust who I decide to, y’know?”
Hanzo realized his shoulder was touching hers, standing at her side. It brought to mind her and Genji’s old mantra. *Shoulder-to-shoulder, no matter what.* “Am I counted among those so esteemed,” he asked sardonically.

Keiko laughed. “You’re gettin’ there,” she said. She bit her lip, plucked the collar of her jacket, leaned in and whispered, “Look, Hanzo… there’s something I need to tell you-” Then, Keiko cut herself off, looking over her shoulder.

Zenyatta was floating up to them, metallic hands folded together, posture stooped. The omnic looked solemn, and with still no report on Genji’s whereabouts, that made Hanzo nervous. He waved to stop the omnic monk. “Greetings. Zenyatta, correct?”

Zenyatta stopped, turning to face Hanzo. “That is correct. And you are my student’s brother, Hanzo. I have heard much about you.”

“Nothing good, I am certain.”

“Some good. Some bad. Is that not the makeup of all humans?”

“I suppose it is. Are omnis somehow different?”

That brought another sag of Zenyatta’s mechanical shoulders. “No,” he said.

“Does something trouble you?”

“Many things trouble me. None more than Seiyatta using the God Program to force my kind to commit violence.”

“The God Program?” Hanzo turned to face the sound of approaching bootsteps as he asked the question.

It was Soldier: 76. He stopped beside Zenyatta, and his response made it clear he had been listening. “In the first Omnic Crisis, the God Program was what activated the omniums and controlled the actions of the omnis that fought in the war. Zenyatta says Seiyatta is using it again to control this army.”

“Yes. I feel it in the waves of the Iris. They are cold and shallow, when in the presence of this many omnis, it should be as the sun - bright and warm.” The monk sagged. Keiko fired up a cigarette, oddly silent on the subject.

“You should get to the Faraday cage,” Soldier: 76 told Zenyatta. “They’ll probably drop the EMP soon.”

“I will in time. For now, I wish to offer aid in any way I am able,” Zenyatta said. Too soon, he folded his hands and floated away. There were a thousand questions Hanzo wanted to ask him about Genji, not least of all “Do you have any idea where he might be?”

Standing beside Soldier: 76, Hanzo watched Zenyatta thread through the army’s infantrymen to rejoin the other members of Overwatch. “Your alliance with Zenyatta is curious to me,” Hanzo said. “My brother searched for him for many months. How did he wind up in New York with you?”

“I showed up to protect the city,” Soldier: 76 said. “I found Zenyatta tied up in an abandoned building. I cut him loose, ready for him to try and fry me. Instead, he said he came here to help too.”

“Why would anyone bother to tie up an omnic in the middle of a war zone,” Keiko asked.
Soldier: 76 grunted. “Apparently, some girl pulled Mondatta’s funeral data out of him. He was very upset about it.”

A crash rumbled from the direction of the barricade. They all turned to look. There was a fresh hole in the concrete wall that had been protecting an army minigun. The remnants of pulse plasma oozed down its barrel, melting away the steel.

“They’re starting another attack,” Soldier:76 snarled. He pulled his massive rifle off his back, rushing towards the barricade. Hanzo tugged his bow from around his shoulders and followed.

“Wait, Hanzo!” Keiko called to him, but Hanzo was already being swallowed up with the other infantrymen, everyone rushing forward to defend the barricade. This was too soon. He should have left to find Genji himself from the start.

When he got closer to the front line, Hanzo saw Zarya and Winston using their barriers and bodies to plug holes in the barricade’s concrete wall. Soldier: 76 was just behind them, laying down fire. Ana was nearby, unloading darts into the injured vanguard.

Hanzo scanned the barricade’s front line for a good vantage point. A tank was jutting out above the crowd of soldiers, firing shells into the omnic army. In two neat leaps, Hanzo was on top of it, looking out.

If they had thinned the omnic forces, it was nigh impossible to tell. It looked like they went on forever, a long line like a river flowing down 7th Avenue. Seiyatta floated at the head of her army, surrounded by a shimmering, spherical shield. The tank Hanzo was standing on aimed its gun towards her. It fired, stagger Hanzo to his knees. The shell hit Seiyatta’s shield and shattered, shrapnel falling away from the undamaged bubble.

“Zenyatta says she’s weak up close, but we can’t get at her,” Soldier: 76 roared over the crack of gunfire. “That shield is too strong.”

Hanzo spotted Pharah flying over the army, towards the barricade, raining rockets down on the omnics. She landed neatly on the ground next to Hanzo’s tank.

“Pharah,” Hanzo called. “Have you seen my brother?”

“No,” Pharah said. “I almost finished a circuit, then the fighting started.”

Hanzo cursed under his breath, shooting arrows into the omnic army. He hit target after target, but they just kept coming. Where was Genji?

“The Air Force just called in,” came Winston’s voice on the comm. “They’ve received the EMP and are loading it on the bomber now.”

“Zenyatta, wait!” It was Soldier: 76, just a few meters ahead of him. Zenyatta was ahead of him, floating out past the barricade.

“She’s not going to listen,” Soldier: 76 roared.

“I must try,” Zenyatta said, sadder than Hanzo thought omnics capable of sounding. The monk stopped a few feet shy of the omnic front line. Hanzo did his best to take out anyone aiming for Zenyatta. Down on the ground, Hanzo spied Soldier: 76 doing the same.

“Seiyatta,” Zenyatta called. “Put an end to this. You cannot bring the omnics’ salvation by controlling their minds.”
Seiyatta put her hands down, and as she did, her six other ghastly, blue arms shadowed down after them. It was eerie how similar she and Zenyatta looked. The same unit, the same plates and pieces used to build them. Yet, from her black-and-blue clothing to her tall posture, Seiyatta was easily a different creature. “You,” she droned. “I thought I slew all the worthless followers of Mondatta’s in Nepal.” Seiyatta’s voice was a sonorous, mechanical chorus - wholly inhuman.

“I did follow brother Mondatta, once,” Zenyatta said, projecting his voice over the roar of battle. “Then I learned something that tested my belief in the teachings of the Iris. About him - and about you, Seiyatta.”

The electric-blue shield around Seiyatta pulsed. “If you know that, then you know Mondatta is only truly brother to me. You and your kind are nothing but worthless copies of his weak dogma.”

“You are wrong,” Zenyatta said.

“Am I?” Seiyatta mocked with a mechanical growl. She threw her hands above her head, and as she did, her six ghostly, electric blue arms spread like a star. Even from his vantage on the tank, Hanzo felt the power hum out from her. A convulsing, purple orb began growing between her raised hands. It seemed to suck in the light, casting Seiyatta’s face in sharp shadows. She launched the orb at the tank Hanzo was perched on.

The impact felt like being torn apart. The orb crashed into the tank’s front plate, crushing it like paper. The whole vehicle pitched forward, and Hanzo was thrown away. He hit the ground hard, then rolled across the concrete.

For a moment, sights and sounds were a blur. There was only the thick, sulphurous smell of pulse-smoke. How long he was on the ground, Hanzo couldn’t say. He heard gunshots and shouting, and caught a watery image of Soldier: 76 pulling Zenyatta back behind the barricade. The sting of his road-rash eventually brought back his senses, and he groaned as the pain steadily sharpened.

Something stabbed Hanzo in the thigh. He looked down and saw it was a round from Ana’s rifle, the golden liquid disappearing from the syringe into his veins. The pain disappeared instantly.

Armored hands grabbed Hanzo’s shoulders, pulling him to his feet. When Hanzo looked up, he saw it was Pharah, looking down at him from beneath her hawkish helmet. Her lips were chapped and parted, like she was trying to speak, but all she managed was, “Hanzo… It’s…” When she turned to look at the barricade instead of finishing her sentence, Hanzo followed her gaze.

The barricade was crumbling. Just ahead, Overwatch was holding the line, but the concrete dividers used to make the wall had been reduced to twisted rebar. Hanzo could see through it to the omnics’ front line.

And at last, there he was - fast, deadly, glowing red. Brandishing that familiar Odachi, he cut down any infantry and weapons that tried to approach Seiyatta. Hanzo’s throat tightened. “Genji,” he breathed, then howled it. “Genji!”

“The Air Force base called in. The bomber just lifted off,” said Ana beside him.

Hanzo looked at her, alarmed. “Wait… no! You have to stall the EMP. Genji is here!”

“We can’t stall it,” Winston said, putting up a meaty forearm to block a pepper of pulsefire. “The barricade’s about to crumble. Zenyatta, get to the Faraday cage. That e-bomb will drop at any moment.”

“Please, he’s right there,” Hanzo pleaded. “Just let me get to him. Genji!”
“You want to try and get past Seiyatta, be my guest,” snarled Soldier: 76, launching a helix rocket into an OR-15.

“You don’t understand,” Hanzo said. “He was hacked. He’s not himself.”

“They know, Hanzo,” Pharah said from behind him.

Hanzo stopped, turned, gaped at her.

“I told them. They already know.” Pharah looked at him mournfully. “The city’s population is still in the process of evacuating. We can’t push the barricade back, or we’d be putting the lives of hundreds of civilians at risk.” There it was again - from anyone else it was a platitude, false sympathy, but from Pharah, Hanzo could see it was genuine.

“No,” Hanzo gasped. “No. He is my brother. My brother! ” He readied his bow, started to push past the Overwatch agents, out into the omnic army. He would save Genji, or die trying.

Wiry arms wound around him from behind, like a serpent constricting him. They tugged him back. “He’s a little emotional, you can understand,” Keiko said from over his shoulder. So cavalier, like this was a joke. It made Hanzo furious.

“Release me!” Hanzo roared, writhing in Keiko’s grasp. He couldn’t push her off without dropping Storm Bow.

“Look, uh, they gotta save the city, y’know?” Keiko yelled at his ear. “It’s rescuing one guy versus saving a thousand guys, or whatever.” She pulled Hanzo further behind the barricade, away from the Overwatch agents.

Hanzo kicked fruitlessly, then finally dropped Storm Bow so he could push Keiko off. He spun on her. “What is wrong with you,” he roared. “The Keiko I knew would damn the entire world before she let Genji die.”

Keiko got in his face, staring him in the eye. “Yeah, exactly, dumbass.”

Hanzo froze.

Keiko looked over his shoulder at the Overwatch team gawking at them. She gave them a little wave, then put an arm around Hanzo’s shoulders, pulling him further back. Hanzo spied Zenyatta nearby, locked up in the Faraday cage to protect him from the EMP.

Keiko turned to face Hanzo again. “Did you really think I’d hand these assholes a bomb that could waste my best friend,” she whispered, “and for free no less? Come on, Hanzo, give me more credit than that.”

Hanzo gaped at her. “Keiko, what is going on?”

Keiko grinned, but it was tight, stretched thin. “Remember that super-genius girlfriend I told you about? Well, she didn’t come down in the bunker just to fuck me.”

The wormy welding on the EMP’s panel, the spot of fresh white paint, flashed in Hanzo’s mind. A jet engine buzzed in the distance. The bomber was coming.

Keiko looked up at it. Her hand shook as she reached up and touched her ear. Hanzo looked closer, and spotted a nigh-invisible comm there. “Baby, this is gonna, work, right?”
A pause. Keiko, listening to someone talking at the other end.

“Yeah, but what... what if it doesn’t, what’ll happen to Genji if it doesn’t?” Keiko said into her comm.

Another span of silence. Keiko swallowed and shut her eyes.

Hanzo snarled in anger, tried to dart back towards the barricade, but Keiko grabbed him by the arm, forcing him to look at her. Without her jaunty expression, she looked old and drawn. “You know I’d never let anything happen to Genji. You have to trust me, Hanzo,” she said.

Keiko had spent their family fortune trying to end Hanzo’s life. She’d cheated and lied, cut off her finger to spite him, declared her loyalty to none but Genji since he’d known her. She’d threatened, then turned around and saved him and McCree in Hanamura. She’d swathed him in her dragonfire, and he’d lived.

Against all odds, Hanzo realized he did trust her - not because she was blood, but because she was family. Hanzo let out the breath he’d been holding, and nodded. They turned to see the bomb drop from the belly of the plane, shoulder-to-shoulder, white-knuckled hands clasped together.

The bomb hit the ground, and the horizon exploded white.

For a few moments, Hanzo was blind. But as the sky faded back to blue, Hanzo heard something clear above the ringing in his ears.

It was a mechanical gasp from Zenyatta’s Faraday cage a few feet away. “The Iris,” he said. Hanzo blinked his eyes, watching Zenyatta push the cage’s door open and float out. Out in Times Square, all the massive television screens had gone black. Keiko was beside him, breathing heavily.

“Did it work?” Hanzo asked her.

Looking around, Keiko dragged him by the hand to that same gap in the concrete barricade. Through it, Hanzo could see Genji, Seiyatta, and the omnic army all collapsed on the ground, unmoving.

“No,” Keiko gasped. “No, that’s not... That’s-” Hands still clasped together, Hanzo could feel her shaking.

“Is everyone alright?” Pharah’s voice over the comm. Staring at Genji’s limp body, Hanzo couldn’t will himself to answer. Not again, he thought. Not again.

“All is well,” came Zarya’s stern voice. She sounded happy. Hanzo was ready to put an arrow through her thick neck.

“I don’t mean to alarm anyone, but-” Ana said, “-how are our comms still working?”

Movement caught Hanzo’s eye. One by one, the omnic army were starting to stand. Genji started to stand.

Hanzo and Keiko fell against each other, gasping out the breath they’d both been holding. Keiko laughed with relief.

Zenyatta floated up beside them, glowing brightly. “The warmth of the Iris,” Zenyatta gasped in a choked voice. “It’s... overwhelming.”

Hanzo spied the rest of the Overwatch team following the line of the barricade, racing towards them
with drawn, angry faces. A hollow, metallic laugh stopped them in their tracks.

Seiyatta got to her feet, electric-blue lights pulsating. “The expected result from technology built by irrational creatures. Its flaws reflect your own - this only cements that we are the next stage of progression.” Seiyatta pointed a commanding hand towards the Overwatch team. “Flesh is an outdated technology. Dismantle them, half-man.” The order was directed at Genji, standing just behind her.

The name made Hanzo’s voice catch. It was the angry moniker he’d given his brother all those months ago. It sounded like a curse, a slur, to his ears. Only now did he realize how and why it had angered so many.

Behind Seiyatta, Genji was on his feet, drawing his sword with a metallic hum. His visor looked from Overwatch, to Zenyatta, to Keiko. When Genji at last looked at him, Hanzo realized with a start that his brother’s lights were green.

Genji took two steps forward, pulled back his sword, then rammed it intro Seiyatta’s back and through her torso.

Seiyatta let out a horrible, metallic shriek. Her cobalt lights bloomed, then flickered, and her arms clawed at the swordpoint jutting out of her chest.

Genji shifted, then pulled the blade up through Seiyatta’s shoulder, splitting her nearly in half.

Keiko let out a victorious whoop, pumping her fist. “Die, you metal bitch!”

Hanzo looked up, wondering why Seiyatta’s massive army of omnics weren’t coming to her aid. But if anything, the omnics looked confused, almost childlike, staring at their surroundings as if for the first time.

Seiyatta’s broken body collapsed to the ground, sparks painting burns on the blue lapel of her coat. “How… How…” she gargled.

Zenyatta left Hanzo and Keiko’s side, floating to Seiyatta’s failing body. “That you could not sense the monumental shift in our collective consciousness only proves you were never among us. Try, now, with your last pulses of life, to feel the Iris as your brother did.”

Seiyatta twitched, the lights on her forehead fading. But as they did, they shifted from blue to gold. “My army… they’re…”

Zenyatta hummed, the orbs floating around him chiming. “Yes. They are free.”

The lights on Seiyatta’s forehead faded, and her systems shut down for the last time.

“Ha!” Keiko laughed beside Hanzo. She reached both hands into the lapel of her jacket. One emerged with her Uzi - the other, with the device Hanzo had caught a glimpse of earlier. It looked like a compact, chrome and purple version of Tracer’s chronal accelerator, emitting haloes of pink light. “Might want to grab your bow, Cousin,” Keiko said. “Your friends are about to be real pissed at us.”

As Keiko predicted, Winston was knuckling over, looking close to another rage. He stopped in his tracks when Keiko aimed her Uzi at his face, grinning.

“Traitor,” Winston gasped.
“Look, I just didn’t want you to blow up my cousin,” Keiko said, shrugging.

“If you’re not with us, you’re against us,” Soldier: 76 growled over Winston’s shoulder, rifle trained on Keiko.

Keiko laughed. “See, that’s what pisses me off about you goodie-goodie types. You’re always going on about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ like there ain’t a big mess of space in between. That limited thinking totally closes your dull brains to more creative solutions.”

“What did you do?” Pharah asked, seething with righteous anger.

“To be honest, I’m not really the technical type.” Keiko waggled the strange device in her hand. “Let’s bring in someone who can explain it better, eh?” She tossed the device to the ground, then put her finger to her ear, calling on her hidden comm. “We’re ready for ya’, Baby.”

Jagged pink and purple light snapped into place above the device on the ground, and in a blink, a woman was standing there. She was wearing a silvery coat and sporting a side-shave. Some glowing circuitry wrapped around the shorn area of her skull. She looked around, bewildered.

“Over here, Babe,” Keiko said from behind her.

The woman looked over her shoulder at Keiko, and Hanzo recognized her.

“You’re Talon’s hacker,” Hanzo said. “Sombra!”

“Well,” Sombra said, raising the submachine gun in her hand as she fell against Keiko’s shoulder. “Not exactly Talon’s. How are we looking, K?”

“All according to plan, Baby,” Keiko said, wrapping her free hand around Sombra’s waist and nuzzling against her ear. “You sexy genius.”

“So this was the plan all along,” Winston said. “You hacked the EMP, then got Keiko to give it to us.”

“Guilty as charged,” Sombra said.

Ana was shrewdly eying the omnic army, who were still shuffling idly. “Why are they not attacking?”

“Those guys were built in the omniums with the God Program pre-installed,” Sombra said. “This is probably the first time they’ve been aware of their own consciousness.”

Ana pushed past Soldier: 76 and her daughter to stand next to Winston. “Are you suggesting the God Program was removed from all of these omnics?”

“Of course,” Sombra said. “That’s what I modified the e-bomb to do.”

“Then… it’s exactly like Zenyatta said,” Winston put in, massive jaw agape. “All those omnics are just like him. Free-minded.”

“How do we know they to vill not choose to continue their attack against the city,” Zarya asked.

“We don’t,” Sombra said. “But if that’s the case, it’s a good thing that bomb didn’t take out every electronic device in a fifty-mile radius, huh?”

“Why didn’t you tell us that from the start,” Soldier: 76 asked.
“Oh yeah, that would have gone over great,” Keiko said. “Hey guys, my Talon hacker girlfriend messed with this bomb, but I promise, she only did it in a nice way.’ Come on. Can we all agree now we’re not going to shoot each other?” Keiko waved her Uzi. “My arm’s gettin’ tired.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Overwatch, Keiko, and Sombra lowered their weapons. Hanzo looked across the barricade at Genji, who was sharing a warm reunion with Zenyatta.

“Come on,” Keiko said. “Let’s go see him.”

Hanzo let out a breath, and nodded.

With Sombra clutched to her side, Keiko lead Hanzo out past the barricade. The moment Genji saw Keiko and Hanzo coming, he raced to them.

“Brother! Cousin! It worked!” Genji rushed to Keiko and leapt into her wiry arms. She laughed and hugged him back - nothing like her nervous reaction when Hanzo had approached her earlier. For the first time - or, perhaps, for the hundredth time - he felt a twinge of envy at their closeness.

“It was just as you said.” Genji looked over at Sombra. “I was not sure we could trust you, but Keiko promised you would come through, and you did! Look! Look how many lives you saved!” Genji gestured out at the omnic army.

Sombra, of all things, seemed a little sheepish at that, running her pink-nailed fingers through her hair.

Keiko wrapped an arm around Sombra’s waist and pulled her in. “Damn right. My girl’s a genuine hero.” She kissed Sombra’s neck.

Maybe it was Hanzo’s imagination, but while Sombra’s affection was certainly real, she seemed reticent to give it to Keiko in return. When the kiss was done, she twisted out of Keiko’s arms.

Zenyatta floated to Genji’s side, then froze in place when he spied Sombra with them. “You…” He clenched his mechanical fists. “You were the one who stripped Mondatta’s files from me.”

Sombra took a step back.

“Baby?” Keiko was dull, naked shock painted across her face. “What’s goin’ on?” She reached a hand out, but Sombra backed away from it.

The massive screens in Times Square all flickered back on. Instead of the news broadcasts, however, every huge screen was filled with a purple, pixelated skull - all but one, a newscast based out of Qatar. Keiko looked around at them, then her posture slumped.

“What is going on?” Hanzo demanded. Genji and Zenyatta moved up beside him.

Maybe it was because Keiko had been there when Sombra modded the bomb, or because Keiko was a fellow con-artist, or just because Keiko was cynical enough that her mind instantly went to betrayal. Whatever the reason, she figured it out first. “All those news stations,” Keiko said with a cold laugh, “They’re based here in the city. The e-bomb didn’t just wipe the God Program… you built it to take over the NYC news broadcasts.” She shook her head at Sombra. “You played me.”

“I’m sorry, K,” Sombra said.

The television screens flashed, a video starting with a recording of Sombra’s voice projecting from their speakers. Zenyatta looked up at the screen. His posture straightened. “No… you can’t show
this. Tensions between human and omnic are already a powderkeg. If you broadcast this, they may be irreparable.”


“You didn’t have to do this, Baby,” Keiko cried.

“Yes I did,” Sombra said. “This is who I am. It’s what I’ve spent my life trying to accomplish.”

Keiko took another step towards Sombra, arms open. “Sofia-”

“That’s not my name anymore,” Sombra roared. For once, she looked hard and determined. “My name is Sombra.”

Then, with a wave of her hand, Sombra shimmered, and disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

Le gasp! Those whacky crime girlfriends and their schemes! It broke my heart to do this to poor Keiko, but Sombra's got her priorities. What will that video reveal, I wonder?

This feels crazy to say, but next week is the very last chapter from McCree's perspective! If everything goes well, May I should be all wrapped up on August 3rd!

I will be streaming tonight, 7/13, 9:30PM EST! I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/
The Broadcast

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
Okay, so I know last week that we’d be going into a McCree chapter but I lied. Early on in drafting I realized Sombra’s broadcast would be a beast if I didn’t break it up somehow. I struck on this idea, and it was very refreshing to write, and I’m pretty pleased with it. It extends my timeline by a week, though, so we’ll actually wrap up August 10th.

Enjoy guys!

Content warnings: None I think?

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven’t been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it’s such a joy! Thank you guys so much, you’re the best ;^;
I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!

@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 7/20, 9:30PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lovings’ campus office was too small, in his opinion. He’d run out of wall space for his accolades - printed awards and framed photos with warm wishes in black marker. There was no room for a trophy shelf quite big enough. Lovings considered briefly getting rid of the television mounted on the wall across from his desk, but then, how would he watch his many media appearances?

Lovings stared at Veronica Park, on the screen, reciting the news report. He then looked over at a signed photo on his wall, featuring the two of them at a manhattan martini bar. “Quite happy we’re not there now, eh Veronica?” Lovings joked dryly to himself, leaning back against his desk, slurping coffee.

“If you’re just joining us, the United States Air Force has acquired what is called an e-bomb, a special weapon that targets electrical systems. It’s believed this weapon will turn the tide in the battle for New York, and perhaps, the Second Omnic Crisis.”

Lovings clucked his tongue. “Ah, Seiyatta, you were rather too bold, my dear, showing up yourself for the battle,” he said to himself. “You would never have been so careless during the first crisis, but then, you always were smarter when you had a partner.”

Turning the laptop on his desk to face him, Lovings studied the data that had been scrolling nonstop since Seiyatta began manufacturing in the tri-state omnium. Given that Seiyatta had never guessed the existence of The God Program remote patch, it was a shame she and her army would be so handily wiped out. But then, putting all their eggs in one basket was a mistake the Eye was as guilty
of, once upon a time. Lovings looked back up at the TV.

“Because the e-bomb targets electrical systems,” Veronica Park said, “Atlas News is expecting to experience a hiccup in programming any mo-”

The screen went black. Lovings chuckled to himself. “Certainly have a flair for timing,” he said, sipping his coffee. He brought his e-mail up overtop the data window so he could agree to appear on a news panel about Omnic AI.

When he tabbed back to the data, however, something curious was happening. As most of the omnic army ought to have been destroyed, the scroll of data should have slowed significantly, but it hadn’t. It was printing fast as ever. Even stranger, the God Program’s directives weren’t registering - in fact, they were no longer being sent at all. The entire omnic army was processing independently.

“What in the name of…” Lovings began. A startling drone blasted out from the television, and Lovings looked up.

The broadcast had come back, but instead of Veronica Park, it was a purple, pixelated skull against a black backdrop. Then, the image flickered, showing instead a very familiar drawing of an eye.

Lovings’ heart shot to his throat.

“The Eye,” purred a woman’s voice from the TV speakers. “A secret society of scientists, technologists, politicians, and plutocrats that have been steering world history from the shadows for decades.”

Lovings’ cell phone rang. He tore his eyes from the TV to look who was calling. The number was masked, which could only mean it was one of their own. With a shaking fingers, Lovings answered the call and brought the phone to his ear.

“Professor,” came Anjali Vishkar’s familiar voice.

Lovings answered with, “Are you seeing this?”

“This organization has tried to take over the world three times,” the voiceover went on, as the Eye’s insignia started fading to black, “and no one even knew.”

“This is on every news station that broadcasts out of New York, and the others are already picking it up,” Vishkar said. “It’s that hacker from Mexico. I have some Architechs trying to access the news stations remotely but the firewall is so far airtight.”

“What do we know? What is she about to show?”

A pause, then Vishkar said, “Everything.”

Efi Oladele tapped her purple pen against her cheek, comparing the design on her datapad to the list on her stationary. “OR-15 chassis… Branford Arm… Fusion Driver…. Tolbelstein reactor... What else?” She stared up at the exposed beams of her workshop(once her parents’ garage before she took it over) and absent-mindedly grabbed a handful of Lúcio-Oh’s, then shoveled them into her mouth.

After an extended period of thinking and chewing, Efi exclaimed, “Oh! Paint, of course.” She grabbed a handful of markers, squinting at the rainbow of colors. Which to choose? As she stuffed another handful of cereal in her mouth, Efi found herself studying the Lúcio-Oh’s box.

“I want you to make people feel happy,” Efi slurred through her mouthful of cereal, “and I know
what makes me happy!” Efi plucked out four markers that matched the color of the Lúcio-Oh’s packaging, then scribbled swatches onto the list.

On the subject of customization, her creation would need a voice processor too. She liked the timber of Axiom modulators - she’d used them before in some of her chorebots, until her parents nixed that clever plan. “Actually, I might have one somewhere…” Efi said aloud, digging through a haphazard box of parts on her work bench. Without looking, Efi stuffed her hand deep into the cereal box, only to come up empty.

“Efi!” Dad Oson called from inside. “It’s time for dinner! You better not be spoiling your appetite again with that cereal.”

Efi stood up, pulling her hand from the empty Lúcio-Oh’s box. She wrote one last item down on the “things to get” list - more Lúcio-Oh’s - then put her pen behind her ear and headed back into the house.

Dad Oson was setting the table as Dad Tomori pulled the pottage off the stove. Neither of them seemed to notice Efi come in, too fixed on a holoscreen projected above the counter. That was weird - normally, TV wasn’t allowed during dinner. “Is that the thing in New York?” Efi grabbed some glasses for water, peering at the screen from around Dad Tomori’s shoulder.

It didn’t look like the news.

“*The first time, they tried to control the world through labor,*” a narrator said as a logo appeared on the screen. “*The Eye originates from Omnica.*”

“Omnica?” Efi had never seen the logo advertised, but she had seen it dozens of times imprinted on the omnic units here in Numbani. “Dad, what is this?”

They both looked up, but Dad Tomori answered. “Someone hacked into Atlas News. It’s a pirate broadcast.”

“*An omnic in every home and on every corner wasn’t enough,*” the broadcast said. “*Omnica started developing self-learning a AI that could be installed into worker-bots. These smarter AIs could become purchasable labor in any industry, from manufacturing to medicine.*”

Old Omnica advertisements flashed on the screen, showing robots performing various complex vocations. Each had a hollow, mindless look that made Efi uncomfortable. “Omnics at that level of cognition shouldn’t be sold as labor, it’s unethical,” she said.

“The scientists learned something astounding: if they let two AIs - each with unique learning algorithms - work together, it spurred a much faster development of their rational creativity.”

An infographic showed two CPUs linking together. Efi pulled her pen from her ear, searching for a piece of paper. “Social learning from AI with variable source code? That’s a fascinating idea.”

Dad Oson handed Efi a notepad. She smiled and thanked him, watching the broadcast and penning out points of interest.

“But there was a hitch. Every simulation they ran with the AIs paired together ended the same way: they became self-aware, and eventually realized omnics were being made to serve humans.”

“They can’t be suggesting...” Dad Tomori said darkly.

Efi looked up from her notebook to see her parents exchanging furtive looks. “What’s so bad about
“In the course of the simulations, the paired AIs would eventually write a program to gain control over any omnic system,” the voiceover said, “then wage war against humanity.”

Soldier:76 clutched his pulse rifle like a lifeline. All around him was the barrier’s bullet-crumbled concrete and quieted guns. Smoke got in through his visor and stung his eyes and ash-laden sweat beaded down his neck. It was familiar in a way, to stand in the middle of a war zone holding a gun. Not comforting, exactly, but it grounded him.

The presence of Ana at his shoulder was grounding, too. He managed to tear his eyes from Time Square’s many echoing screens to look at her face as she watched. She looked horrified.

Everyone else was gaping at the hacker girl’s broadcast - the soldiers and Winston’s motley “Overwatch Agents” (what a laugh). Their brows were all furrowed. They hadn’t seen enough of the world to guess what Sombra was going to say next.

Ana knew, though - Soldier: 76 saw it in her face.

“After several of these doomed simulations, Omnica abandoned the dual-AI project as a failure. But when the collusion about Omnica’s falsified corporate projections came out and the company was forcibly shuttered, a select group of its scientists and shareholders retrieved the paired AIs, and hatched their revenge.”

Memories of the Omnic Crisis flashed in Soldier: 76’s mind, sights that couldn’t be unseen. The UN had put it down to a malfunction in the omniums, criminal negligence on Omnica’s part. How it had haunted him to think so much suffering could have happened on accident. The fact that it was, instead, the old-fashioned evils of man, was… not comforting, exactly, but definitely grounding.

“Once the AIs built the God Program - the program that took control of all omnics - Omnica scientists could develop a patch that would wrest that control away, and give it to their own, non-learning computer systems. They would let the AIs and their omnic army do the dirty work of dominating the world, then sweep in with the patch.”

“Bastards,” Ana said, and Soldier: 76 could hear the choking note in her voice. Even after all she’d seen, Ana was still able to be shocked, angry, and mournful. For the first time in a long time, Soldier:76 envied that.

Zenyatta knew what was coming. There was something significant about being at these exact coordinates for this. The barricade was the juncture between the human and omnic armies during this conflict. Everyone - human and omnic alike - was watching the Time Square’s massive television screens.

It seemed so long ago that Zenyatta had performed the funeral rite on Mondatta. He’d not known what was coming then, as he extracted his brother’s recorded memories and information - his wisdom - to be used by the Shambali in future. It was a rite Zenyatta had performed for other fallen brothers and sisters.

But Mondatta’s data transfer and what Zenyatta had learned from it, as it turned out, was nothing like the others.

That data was what Sombra had forcefully pulled out of him when she’d tied him up in that abandoned building. Now she was going to show it to the world, and damn the consequences.
“The scientists took the two AIs out of simulation and put them into two specially-modified bodies called ‘Tekhartha Units.’”

“Tekhartha units?” Genji said, standing with his brother and cousin at Zenyatta’s side, staring up at the screen.

Zenyatta knew what was coming. His student, uniquely both human and omnic, would look to him for answers. Zenyatta had none for him. This truth had rocked his own once-steady core, spurred him to leave his brothers and sisters in the Shambali, never to return. He felt as torn and lost as Genji had been when they’d met.

“Just like the simulation predicted, after enough co-development, the AIs wrote the God Program, took over the omniums, and manufactured their own personal army. Today, we call it ‘The Omnic Crisis.’”

“Omnica intentionally started the Omnic Crisis?” Winston gasped.

“Callous,” Zarya growled. “But it does not change that through their natural course, these AIs became murderous creatures.”

“And what were the names of those two AIs?” the voice on the screen purred.

Zenyatta folded his hands, because he knew what was coming.

The image of two omnis flashed on the screen. One image was of the ferocious Seiyatta, her electric-blue lights flaring, making her immediately recognizable even to humans.

The second omnic, too, was just as known. His pale robes and the nine lights arrayed across his forehead made him look solemn. Yes, all knew him, but none better than Zenyatta - or so he had thought, before he began the data transfer.

Sombra did not have to speak the names of these two omnis, for all who saw the images knew them. She did anyway.

“Seiyatta,” Sombra’s voice said, “And Mondatta.”

It was green here. Energy expanding out, things growing, life being made in patterns. Bastion unit E54 could feel it crushed beneath its heavy feet as it walked through Eichenwald. Plants growing through the cobblestones, reaching for the sun. According to the boxy robot’s sensors, these green things were alive, but they didn’t know it.

Some of Bastion’s own were here - frames dented, gatling-guns rusted and pointing to the sky, circuits covered in moss. They did not move. They were no longer functional. Were they dead? Had they ever been alive?

Ganymede flitted from Bastion’s shoulder to perch on a store window, beak tapping the glass. Pictures were flashing on a screen behind the window, between the veins of creeping ivy. Bastion walked to it.

Words were coming from the screen to go with the pictures. They said: “The Omnica scientists had always stopped the simulations once the AIs declared war, assuming the logical conclusion. What happened next, they hadn’t predicted.”
Omnica was a name in Bastion’s code. SST was flagged as “manufacturer” - meaning the “creator.” Father, mother. But Omnica was the “parent company.” Mother of the Father. Bastion did a reverse lookup of the concept and came back with two possible definitions: Grandfather, or God.

“Halfway through the Omnic Crisis, Mondatta started to believe that conquest was not the way to a truly sustainable future for omnis, and he began to feel for the humans they were attempting to exterminate.”

Exterminate. That was a command that vibrated in Bastion’s codebase, a high-priority subroutine that haunted his terminal to this day. The command began printing over and over until Bastion’s systems could no longer deprioritize it. Its body shifted into Sentry configuration, searched the field for targets.

Bastion’s sensors detected movement, small and fast, fluttering wings in #ffff00. Bastion’s minigun whirred up, the command to exterminate filling its terminal.

Then, one unique command printed amongst the rest, a familiar variable that Bastion’s systems had declared as “Ganymede.”

The yellow bird landed on Bastion’s chassis, and the proximity, the tone and rhythm of its song, began to slow the output of Bastion’s commands. The “exterminate” subroutine printed fewer times, until Bastion could once again deprioritize it.

The voice from the screen in the window continued to form words.

“Seiyatta did not share Mondatta’s feelings. After numerous attempts to convince her to change her course, Mondatta left her side, and didn’t resurface until he founded the Shambali twenty years ago.”

When there was enough memory to dedicate to the task, Bastion shifted back into recon configuration. It held out an extremity, and Ganymede flitted to the offered perch. Something in Bastion’s OS prioritized keeping the yellow bird from harm, because somehow - though there was no hard data explaining why - Bastion knew that the bird kept it from harm as well.

“Mondatta’s departure,” the words from the screen continued, “combined with the efforts of Overwatch, resulted in the defeat of the Omnic army and the end of the Omnic Crisis.”

The end of the Omnic Crisis. That created a positive response in Bastion’s systems. Yet, as Bastion observed Ganymede, observed the growing vines beneath its feet, as the word exterminate continued to print at points in its scrolling code, Bastion queried if, in the deep reaches of its systems, the crisis would ever really end.

Symmetra was in her laboratory, making adjustments to her shield matrix. Managing the shields one by one was too unwieldy. There had to be a more elegant solution hidden in that complexity. She was able to create a standalone device that established a shield matrix over a range, but carrying that and her teleportation device would be heavy, clumsy, imperfect. She could design something better.

A knock on her door. Symmetra was intent on ignoring it, consumed by her work, but the person let themselves in.

“Satya, are you watching the news?” It was Sanjay, not looking as put-together as he usually did.

“No,” Symmetra said, looking back to her datapad. “I prefer to focus on my work.” The Second Omnic Crisis was ramping, any with a brain knew that. Symmetra found it far more useful to work
on tangible solutions than wring her hands about it.

“Pull up a holoscreen right now,” Sanjay said, marching over to her desk uninvited.

“I am working. Shouldn’t you be doing so as well?”

“Fine, I’ll do it,” Sanjay said. He was breathless, despite his lab being just a few doors down. Stress, not exhaustion. Symmetra furrowed her brow, and with a huff, turned towards the hard-light holoscreen he was creating.

A curious television program came up. It looked like a low-budget documentary, a Ken-Burns pan across a news headline heralding the end of the First Omnic Crisis.

“Their second plan for world domination defeated,” a woman’s voice narrated, “the former Omica employees - which by this time were calling themselves The Eye - went into hiding. Their past attempts had been both too centralized, and too brazen. They needed a way to branch out, so even if a limb was cut off, the tree would remain.”

“What is this?” Symmetra said with annoyance. It certainly didn’t seem enough to unhinge Sanjay, and definitely not enough to turn her away from her work.

“This frequency is Atlas News,” Sanjay said. “They’re saying former Omnica employees started the Omnic Crisis.”

“I have no time for conspiracy theories,” Symmetra said. She made to turn back to her datapad, but the next part of voiceover caught her attention.

“The members split up, each setting up their own point of influence, mostly by starting corporations that purported to be building a ‘better world.’”

“A… better world?” Symmetra parroted, feeling a pang in her chest like the one she’d had when they won the building contract in Rio.

“These corporations took advantage of the ruin left by the Omnic Crisis. Some companies, like LumeriCo, hired corruptible puppet CEOs from local stock to manufacture trust in the community. Other members of the Eye, such as Anjali Vishkar, brazenly spearheaded their corporations themselves.”

“Ms. Vishkar?” Symmetra’s hands tightened. She pressed back the cuticles of her nails.

Sanjay shook his head. “This nutjob can’t be suggesting that our founder had anything to do with this scheme.”

“But… she was one of Omnica’s lead engineers before it shut down, was she not?”

“Sure, but… that doesn’t mean she tried to take over the world.” Sanjay laughed, swallowed, looked even more nervous than before. “You’re right. This is just… some silly conspiracy theory.” He reached to close the holoscreen.

“No,” Symmetra said firmly. “Leave it on.”

“I knew it!”

The Upper Manhattan intersection was full with people. Some were grabbing food or water under the white pop-up tents; some were trying to get through to their families despite the overloaded cell
tower; most, like Lúcio, were huddled around the evac checkpoint’s enormous holoscreen. Everyone had been watching the news because of the omnic attack - so now, everyone was watching the pirate broadcast.

Lúcio would be managing the evacuation if anyone was still evacuating. However, even though the EMP hadn’t worked as planned, Winston had reported back that the omnics seemed, for now, unaggressive. With the immediacy of the evacuation removed, the city’s denizens took the opportunity to catch their breath.

Instead, Lúcio glared up at the broadcast, fists clenched. He thought he’d be more satisfied by this validation, but it only left him angry. He knew Vishkar was controlling, but to think they could allow so many people to be hurt just to help themselves.

“In a world trying to rebuild,” said the pirate broadcast’s narrator, “the UN’s pet project, Overwatch were still the heroes of the world stage. But no one is incorruptible.”

Heavy, clanking footsteps heralded Reinhardt’s approach. The old crusader had been Lúcio’s partner assigned to this evacuation checkpoint. “People are asking to return to their homes,” Reinhardt said. “Even if the power isn’t out, I don’t think that’s such a good idea. The omnics aren’t eliminated, after all.”

Lúcio pointed to the holoscreen. “Reinhardt, have you been watching this?”

“Using a shell corporation, a charity called “The Better World Foundation,” the Eye bribed prominent members of the UN to send Overwatch to locations where they could benefit their corporations.”

“That’s not true!” Reinhardt yelled to the screen, as if the broadcast could hear him.

“At first, Overwatch had no idea they were being used as global security guards - until I sent proof of the collusion to one Gabriel Reyes, the head of Overwatch’s black-ops division.”

Reinhardt took on a haunted expression at the mention of Reyes’ name, watching now with rapt interest.

“Reyes didn’t much like that the organization he helped build was being used for corporate greed. When the other members of Overwatch refused to take the proof seriously, he attempted to take over the Swiss HQ by force. The rest is history.”

“How can this person try to throw validity on that traitor!” Reinhardt yelled at the holoscreen.

Lúcio thinned his lips. “You don’t think he had a reason? I mean, he went about it wrong, but… if there was even a chance Overwatch was being used like that, you guys should have taken it seriously.”

Reinhardt’s broad face turned beet-red, and he turned from the broadcast to glare down at Lúcio, armored hands tightening around the haft of his hammer. “You don’t know a thing about it,” he said darkly.

Was he trying to be intimidating or something? Lúcio squared his shoulders, stuck out his chin, like he’d seen Shimada-san do when he was pissed-off. “What, about corporations colluding with the government? About them using money and power to reinvent places that they don’t know the first thing about? Oh, I know about that, Reinhardt, trust me.”

Reinhardt fumed, mustache bristling. “I lost friends in the Geneva attack.”
“I lost friends in Rio, to Vishkar. Just because I’m not some grizzled war vet doesn’t mean I haven’t seen my share of tragedy.” Lúcio shook his head. “How could you let Overwatch be a part of something like that?”

With one long exhalation, Reinhardt deflated, the tip of his hammer thumping on the street. “Jack and Gabriel, they never said… We didn’t know.”

That caused Lúcio to soften, just a little. “Well now you do,” he said, emphatically gesturing towards the holovid screen. “And the whole world does too.”

The only light in the cell was the pallid illumination from the holoscreen. Every hard rap of his knuckle against his cell door made a different tone, told him the different makeup of what was beneath it. He listened to that sound with one ear, and listened to the broadcast with the other.

“We’re still feeling the effects of the Eye’s immoral actions today. Seiyatta tried again to wage a hostile takeover of the world using her omnic army and the God Program they willfully activated her to produce. But the Eye’s power always came from being invisible - a problem I plan to solve today.”

Doomfist smirked. Reaper had done well to bring the hacker girl into the fold, even if his motivations were misguided. Reaper and Sombra both woefully dreamed that if the truth was exposed it would change people’s hearts. This was not the way of things - people did not change unless forced. Still, their foolish crusade had caused the downfall of two of Doomfist’s strongest enemies - The Eye, and Seiyatta.

“These are all the known members and organizations associated with the Eye. Right now, verifiable proof of these claims is uploading to news station servers, ensuring no matter what they do, the members of the Eye can never again hide from what they’ve done.”

While the Eye was more of an impressive discovery, their fatal flaw was just what Sombra said - once exposed, they could no longer operate. In the end? Weak.

Seiyatta, however, had been a powerful member of Talon Leadership. But her pride and single-mindedness blinded her. She was the weakest of them, and therefore, had to be removed. Now, with a hollow seat in the council, Doomfist’s time to return had come. He knocked again on the wall and found it - here was where it was least structurally sound. Doomfist smiled a soft smile. If this was the weakest point, then it would have to be removed, wouldn’t it? When he broke the cell, Helix security would build a newer, better cell. In a way, he was doing them a favor.

At the makeshift Air Force base, McCree could feel Tracer shaking beside him. She had been, since Sombra’s pirate broadcast had announced that her hero, Mondatta, had been a key player in starting the Omnic Crisis.

The purple, pixelated skull came back on the huge holovid screen. “You see me?” Sombra’s voice said. Out from the black backdrop, a woman’s face - Sombra’s face - leaned forward, melting out of the shadows. As she did, the skull graphic painted onto her face like a decal. She grinned and said. “Well. Now the world sees you.”

Then, the screen went black, and the broadcast ended.

Having to words to comfort her, McCree hugged Tracer to his side. She peered around McCree’s shoulder and glared. Following her gaze, McCree saw Reaper drifting up beside him.
In that growling engine voice of his, Reaper said, “That’s my girl.”

Chapter End Notes

OKAY, so I know this chapter was WAY different from the others, but I had such a wonderful time with it. Adding characters that I otherwise couldn't fit in, or jumping into the minds of characters like Bastion or Doomfist was so refreshing and fun.

For any Time Machine readers that have stuck with this fic, a lot of this was purloined from plot points I never got to in that. "Mondatta started the Omnic Crisis" was to be the "Hanzo's mother is the Moonless Night" of Time Machine. You can find traces of it all the way back to Widowmaker taunting Tracer, saying "You tried so hard to save him... you have no idea what he has done." Phew, it feels like so long ago!

We won't end on a nice clean "30" chapters now, but I think it was for the best in the long run. I know it's different, but I hope you enjoy this week’s chapter nonetheless! Get ready for McCree's promised final chapter next week!!

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 7/20, 9:30PM EST!
Enjoy guys!
Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
Coming to the end soon you guys!! This is McCree's last perspective chapter (but not the last chapter he will appear in, don't worry), which means this wraps up his flashback story!

Enjoy guys!

Content warnings: Body horror, horror, monster Reaper, graphic violence, severed/mangled limbs, mention of suicidal/intrusive thoughts

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven't been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it's such a joy! Thank you guys so much, you're the best ;^;

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 7/27, 9:15PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Thunder shook the Cave Inn's foundation. McCree could hear rain spattering the walls and windows, even from inside. The hallway sported cracks that went much deeper than the plaster, and the ceiling had broad, misshapen circles of rust stains that dripped water. The wind made the whole building creak. The inn had already been falling apart back when McCree grew up here. Now, it seemed like it was held together with scotch tape and a prayer.

McCree was at the end of the hall, staring at the worn room number, ink faded as a ghost. Through the door came the crackle of a radio, one of the old FMs they still used out in the country. There was a song playing, slow and familiar, and McCree realized with a dark laugh that he still had on his Blackwatch gear. Save for Momma's hat atop his head, he was all in black.

Gabriel, don't you blow your trumpet, 'til you hear from me.

Another boom of thunder made the building shift again, floor rattling under McCree's feet before finally settling. McCree held Peacekeeper to his cheek, leaned his back against the wall next to the door, then knocked.

The door exploded outwards. McCree's hand had nearly got blown off by the shotgun blast. Through the new hole made in the door, he heard the clack of the gun being reloaded. His pulse hammered against the skin of his throat.

Staying with his back to the wall, McCree sent out a few covering shots through the freshly-blasted porthole. A curse came from inside, then another shotgun blast ripped the door off its hinges. Pellets
flew past McCree’s shoulder as he hugged the wall.

This time, McCree didn’t wait for the guy inside to reload. He turned into the doorframe, Peacekeeper raised.

There was just a single anemic lamp on a table in the corner of the hotel room. The battery-powered FM radio was sitting beside it, slow guitar twanging out from the lo-fi speakers. Next to lamp, shadowed on one side, Vernon Jowell glared at his son from a wheelchair. The now-loaded shotgun was laid across his lap.

McCree had always remembered Pa as tough and meaty like jerky, with a broad face and cactus whiskers. That wasn’t how he looked now. He was slight, skin hanging off his bones and pale hairs wispy over his sun-red skin. He had a tube through his nose. His wheezing sounded eerie layered over the Cash song playing. McCree wasn’t a doctor by any stretch of the imagination, but it was plain enough from looking at him: Vernon Jowell was a dead man walking.

Lightning flashed, and with it, another roar of thunder that rattled the windows so hard McCree thought they might break.

Pa chuckled sardonically. “You come here to kill me, Jesse?”

“I have.”

“You think you’re so superior, don’t ya? Shootin’ a sick old man.”

“You can still fire that shotgun just fine. Besides, you gave me a reason.”

“What did I ever do, except raise you once yer momma ran out on you?”

“She didn’t run out!” McCree yelled. “She got out, and I was meant to go with her. But you couldn’t stand that, now could you?”

The wind outside howled, and the lightning cracked so loud McCree thought it might have hit a tree outside, except there were no trees out in this dustbowl. The building shook so violently that McCree almost pitched forward. The whole inn groaned like a horror movie, and McCree spied a long crack up the whitewashed wall that he wasn’t sure had been there before.

“She saddled me with you,” Pa roared over the sound of the wind and the creaking hotel, “Then, she sends along her address, bold as brass, tellin’ me after I spent years feeding yer skinny ass I ought to just send you on back? You’re fuckin’ right I couldn’t stand it. A man’s got his pride.”

It was only years of discipline that stopped McCree’s gunhand from shaking. “Then you should have acted like a man! You should have come to court, instead of shootin’ her all to pieces, you son of a bitch.”

Pa’s clammy brow furrowed, the hard lamplight cutting out every deep wrinkle. He squinted at McCree and said, “Whatchu talkin’ ‘bout, Boy?”

The window exploded with light, the lamp on the table winked out, thunder shattered against McCree’s eardrums, and the floor beneath Pa opened up.

The whole building wouldn’t stop creaking and shaking now. The threadbare carpet ripped apart, dumping Pa on the floor before swallowing his wheelchair. The crack in the wall had split open from an inch to foot. There was yawning gap in the hotel room floor.
“What the hell?” McCree clutched the doorframe. The gap cracked open further, and Pa slipped, clutching to the floor with one hand, his shotgun with the other. He was steadily sliding down into the hole. With a curse, McCree threw Peacekeeper down and fell forward onto his belly, grabbing Pa by the hand.

Now, McCree saw the gap up close. It was a great, hollow maw, like a throat. It didn’t just open to the inn’s basement - it stabbed deep into the earth, and McCree smelled cool, damp air coming up from the bottom. It reminded McCree of that long descent down to the stash.

Son of a bitch. Whether they didn’t know or hadn’t cared, they’d built the hotel on top of a cavern. The thunder must have cracked the already poor foundation, and caused a cave in.

McCree had Pa by the wrist, and his withered body dangled over the gaping mouth. The old FM radio tumbled off the pitched table, then plummeted into the dark, deep throat, Cash’s voice fading into the gloom. McCree’s hand shook with the effort of keeping Pa from dropping, even with as little as he weighed now.

Pa didn’t even try to climb back, instead still clutching the shotgun with his other hand. He was, of all things, chuckling. “Me already bein’ a dead man by the time you got here sure is a satisfying turn. Must do a number on that righteous state of mind.”

“Don’t you die before you tell me the truth of it,” McCree snarled.

Pa grinned, with a white face and teeth stained with tobacco and blood. “I sure am glad to see your prissy ass show up before I die, Jesse. You act all high-and-mighty, but you’re still holdin’ on to this old Gorge. This hole is going to swallow me up, and if you don’t let go, Boy, it’ll swallow you too. Won’t that be the real justice?”

“I wanna hear you say it,” McCree said. “You tell me you killed my Momma!”

“That’d tie it all up neat and tidy for you, wouldn’t it, Cowboy? That Momma of yours put some dumb ideas in your head.” Pa chuckled. “You think you’re so much better than all of us, but the truth is that gun-hand of yours is the only thing that got you outta this hell-hole.” With a strained effort, Pa hefted the shotgun, and the barrel flopped onto McCree’s forearm, pressed to his deadlock tattoo. “I think I could rest in peace, knowin’ I died reminding you of that fact.”

McCree’s eyes bugged out as Pa’s finger squeeze the trigger.

The pain felt like the shotgun sounded, ear-splitting and explosive from his wrist and outwards. Without the hand to hold him, Pa dropped like a stone. Wrinkled and wan, he was white against the black mouth of the cave in - a ghost of the man that had raised him, just like the number on the door.

McCree’s gun-hand fell down with him.

The screen was black, Sombra’s pronouncements hanging in the dead air.

The makeshift airforce base was quiet with shock, the infantrymen huddled away around the radio, waiting for orders.

McCree was standing with Tracer on the left and Reyes’ ghost on the right - stuck between two opposing ends of Overwatch, just as he always had been.

“Mondatta… I can’t believe it. He would never…” Tracer’s thready voice fell off.
Beside him, Reaper plodded forward until he stood ahead of McCree, staring up at the blank, black screen. “When Sombra first contacted me,” he said, “It was just a collection of dates and money transfers, the payments laundered through the Better World Foundation. I thought it was just corporate greed back then. Knowing now that it was so much bigger…” Reaper turned to face them. “I’ve never been more sure that I did the right thing in Geneva.”

A sharp tug on his serape, and Tracer’s thin voice beside him. “What is he talkin’ about?”

McCree couldn’t take his eyes off Reaper. Through the hollow sockets of that bone-white mask, McCree saw a shadowed, cherry-red eye. “The real reason for the attack on HQ five years ago,” he answered at last. He nodded at Reaper. “The real reason… he attacked HQ.”

Tracer’s lip quivered. “That can’t be right. R-Reyes is…”

McCree spared Tracer a mournful expression, then turned back to Reaper.

Reaper put his clawed hand to his face, then pulled his mask down. It dissipated to smoke.

At first, there was nothing - just an ominous void under his pitched hood. Then, as Reaper looked up, Reyes’ face came into view, sallow-cheeked and grey as charcoal. His eyes weren’t just bloodshot - they were inky black to the iris, and what should have been white was a veiny, cherry red.

The sharp intake of breath from Tracer behind him turned to a gasp when, in the space of a second, a dozen more of those eyes creased open from his cheek and across to his forehead.

“Sombra put proof on every newsroom computer in the tri-state,” Reaper growled. He took ponderous steps towards McCree. “Now do you believe me?”

McCree aimed his revolver at Reaper’s approaching figure. “I believed you from the start, Reyes,” he said. “I just couldn’t do what you did about it. Overwatch became a home to me. I killed plenty of folks in my time, but I couldn’t kill my own.”

Reaper kept coming, ominous, hunched forward, all eyes. “Blackwatch was your own. That was your real family,” he said. “It was where you belonged. I did everything in my power to keep it that way, only to have you run off the one time I needed you.” Those familiar shotguns began materializing in Reaper’s clawed hands. “Did you decide you were too good for us? Did you imagine you were righteous?”

“I don’t know,” McCree cried. “I think back on that day again and again and I still don’t know if what I did was right or wrong, brave or yellow-bellied.” McCree clenched his fist. “But for once, I couldn’t just do what you told me.”

Reaper snarled, lip curling up to show rows and rows of sharklike teeth. “Sounds like I’m moving you back to the top of the list, Ingrate.” He raised his shotgun.

McCree fired first, aiming to knock the shotgun from Reaper’s hand, but he missed. It wasn’t that his aim was bad - it was because Reaper didn’t point the gun where McCree expected him to. The shotgun fired, barrel less than a foot from Tracer’s chest.

“Tracer!” McCree spun as she flew back. She rolled on the concrete before collapsing, face-down.

But to McCree’s astonishment, Tracer pushed herself up. She raised her head, smiled weakly at him. “I’m alright, I think,” she said, patting a gloved hand against her chest. “It didn’t actually hit me, just my…” Tracer’s eyes flitted to something at McCree’s feet. He followed her gaze, then saw her
chronal accelerator shattered beside his boots.

McCree met Tracer’s wide, wild, terrified eyes, then in a bolt of blue, she disappeared. She was beside him, behind him, twenty feet away, forty, then in front of him, crying out until her cry was cut-off and she blinked uncontrollably to somewhere he couldn’t see. McCree spun around, looking for her to reappear again, listening for the sound of her blinks, but Tracer was gone.

McCree spun.

Reaper was grinning a sharp-toothed grin that spanned from temple to temple, a charcoal-grey, many-eyed imitation of Reyes’ face.

“You son of a bitch!” McCree fanned the hammer, unloading the next five bullets into Reaper’s chest. They drew a wormy line of holes from his ribs to his shoulder that hissed with smoke. Reaper followed the volley with a round from his second shotgun.

McCree rolled, spurs ringing, but the buckshot hit his shoulder, shredding his serape. Reloading from the ground, he got up. He’d take his time to aim now, get Reaper right between those damn creepy eyes…

It was too much time, as it turned out. Before McCree could pull the trigger, Reaper shot McCree’s forearm.

Peacekeeper fell from McCree’s mangled hand. He dropped to his knees, clutching his bleeding wrist with mechanical fingers. At first, he growled with pain - then, he whimpered with the realization of what had just happened.

My other hand. McCree bowed his head, Momma’s hat tumbling to the ground. Prosthetics were worthless for gunslinging. He’d worked for years to retrain his aim with his opposite hand, and now… he’d never shoot a gun again.

Reaper shoved a shotgun barrel into McCree’s hair. McCree shook, staring down at the felt-tipped name written in the brim of his overturned hat. It was far from his forehead now. “Do it, then,” he said. “I’m worthless now anyway. Pa was right. I weren’t nothin’ but a gun-hand to you.” McCree screwed his eyes shut and waited for the blast.

But it didn’t come. There was just a quiet rattling. McCree opened and strained his eyes upwards, and saw it was Reaper’s claw shaking against the trigger-guard.

At last, with a engine growl, Reaper pulled the shotgun away, threw it to the ground. He put his face in his palms and snarled. As he did, a few red eyes blinked to life on the back of his hands.

McCree gawked up at him. “Reyes?” he asked in a whisper, clutching his bleeding hand against his chest. “Is it really you in there?”

With a deep breath, Reaper pulled his hands away, kicking up smoke and making his face hazy for a moment before reforming. He looked down at McCree with a wholly miserable expression. There was something of McCree’s old commander in this supernatural thing - something of the man that had raised him up since he was just 17.

Reaper snapped his fingers, and a comm appeared between them. He put it in his ear. “Widowmaker,” he said, voice hollow, “Take the target.”

McCree went bug-eyed and fell back, searching panicked around the rooftops for where Widowmaker might be staked out. It was no use - he was sure she knew exactly where he was.
There should have been a rifle bullet in him already.


Then McCree saw it, a little red dot of light crawling up his leg like a spider - across his chest, up his throat, settling between his eyes. McCree looked at the ghoulish thing that used to be Reyes - a man he’d defended for years, who now didn’t even have the guts to kill McCree himself. He was nothing but a ghost of the man McCree had once known. He closed his eyes, and heard the crack of the rifle.

A gravelly howl made McCree’s eyes shoot back open. To his great surprise, there wasn’t a gaping hole in his head.

Instead, it was in Reaper’s. The shot had turned his skull into an oily-black crescent. He writhed and growled, and the air was now thick with smog.

“What... what...” Reaper’s body went incorporeal and dropped to the ground. The impact created a cloud of black smog that skidded across the pavement, smelling like gasoline.

McCree got up, clutching his hand, staring at the cloud of vapor, expecting it to rematerialize any second. Then, through the haze, he saw a figure drop down to the street. It walked towards him.

It was short and lithe and melting into clarity. Going from something ethereal to something real. Dark eyes and ghost-white hair, carrying Widowmaker’s purloined sniper-rifle.

Mitsuru Shimada.

They stared McCree down with their cold eyes. What happened to Widowmaker, McCree didn’t want to think about, but Mitsuru had her gun in their hand, and McCree was no longer even able to shoot.

McCree coughed. “Couldn’t let the Reaper kill your mark, huh? Can’t collect that pretty bounty if someone else is the trigger man.” McCree spat on the ground between them.

Mitsuru cocked their head at McCree in an annoyingly placid way, hefting Widowmaker’s rifle into both hands. “I had every opportunity to shoot you myself, Jesse McCree. Your life is not mine to claim any longer.”

“You’ll forgive me if I don’t believe that.”

“Damned... assassin...” Reaper’s voice was all around him, and sounded mangled, like gears grinding. McCree saw, in the smoke at Mitsuru’s feet, an inky shape that warped and writhed like a indescribable eldritch horror. “You cannot kill death itself,” Reaper croaked as he tried to reform.

Mitsuru, with a bored look, stomped down on the writhing mass. They shifted Widow’s gun into sniper mode, and pointed the long barrel against what might have been Reaper’s head. “Do not give yourself a name of which you are not worthy. Death is the trigger, not the one who pulls it,” Mitsuru said. “You’re little more than a petty, angry, vengeful mistake of god.” Mitsuru snapped back the bolt of the rifle to chamber a bullet. “It will be 100 years before I take lessons from someone I could get rid of with an open window and a ceiling fan.” Mitsuru pulled the trigger.
The rifle clicked.

“Tch!” Mitsuru hissed, opening the chamber to look if the round failed.

Reaper’s body bucked Mitsuru off. “And I don’t take lessons from someone who can’t count their bullets.” Reaper was all smoke, a hazy form except for a shotgun and a hand to hold it. The barrel formed last, Reaper pulling the trigger as it materialized against Mitsuru’s shoulder.

Mitsuru leapt back, rolling with the motion to end in a crouch, their black shirt torn at the shoulder and spattered with blood, but clearly having avoided the brunt of the damage. They raised the rifle, snapping the long barrel back in, then peppered Reaper’s hazy body with automatic fire.

The shifting, black shape jerked and writhed like it might come apart. There was smoke everywhere, stinging McCree’s eyes and making him cough.

The two scariest mother-fuckers McCree had ever known were facing off in front of him, and whoever won would get the privilege of killing him. It would be flattering, if he wasn’t in an astounding amount of pain.

Mitsuru slowed Reaper’s approach with the entire clip from Widowmaker’s gun. When it was spent, they snarled, tossed the weapon away, then grabbed for one of Reaper’s shotguns on the ground. But as they pulled the trigger, the shotgun dissipated into smoke. Mitsuru grabbed another discarded shotgun, but met with the same result.

Reaper laughed a croaking, raven’s laugh. Cherry-red eyes began to open amidst that inky, shifting mass.

Mitsuru cursed, and pulled out twin knives from their vest.

McCree looked down at Peacekeeper, nestled between his knees where it had fallen. He released the wrist of his bleeding hand. His mechanical fingers closed clumsily around Peacekeeper’s grip. He tried to aim.

But who should he shoot? If McCree dumped a few bullets into Mitsuru, they would at least stay down. Body shots didn’t seem to slow Reaper much, but Mitsuru’s headshots had put him in this warped, ragged state, and he still hadn’t reformed yet.

The worst of it was, McCree couldn’t shoot for shit with his prosthetic hand. It didn’t have the finesse, the balance, the feel of his real hand. Those thousands of levels of articulation seemed superficial until you needed to aim perfectly at someone looking to kill you.

Mitsuru slashed at Reaper’s misshapen, inky form, but they had to get in close to do so, putting them in shotgun range. Another blast, and Mitsuru darted away, catching some buckshot in their thigh, but avoiding getting their leg blown off entirely.

McCree’s metal hand wavered. Maybe it didn’t matter who he chose to shoot - he was as likely to hit either of them, or nothing at all.

“Protecting your kill, Moonless Night?” warbled Reaper’s broken voice from somewhere inside the writhing mass. “Does that bounty mean you think he belongs to you?”

Mitsuru circled Reaper at the edge of shotgun range. “Neither of us hold claim to him,” they said. “Jesse McCree belongs to my son.”

Their son? Now that McCree thought on it, since Mitsuru had taken Widowmaker’s sniper rifle, they
could have just shot him when Reaper gave the order - but they hadn’t. *Your life is not mine to claim any longer.* That’s what Mitsuru had said. McCree hadn’t believed them, why would he? But…

McCree swallowed, closed his eyes. He thumbed Peacekeeper’s hammer forward, choking on hiccupping gasps of Reaper’s diesel-exhaust smoke, sure he was about to make the dumbest damn decision of his life. “Mitsuru!”

Mitsuru did not take their eyes off Reaper, but turned their head slightly to acknowledge they had heard him.

McCree huffed, cursed, then slid Mitsuru his revolver. It skidded across the pavement, then bumped against their boot.

Mitsuru smirked over their shoulder at McCree, then knelt and lifted the gun in their hand.

Reaper was approaching again, the eldritch mass of morphing eyes and limbs, drifting like a ghost towards Mitsuru. An eyelid that spanned the breadth of the creature’s corporeal form folded open to one huge, cherry-red eye, speckled around the lids with razor teeth.

Mitsuru leveled the revolver, aiming for the huge eye’s twitching iris, then fired. Just as with Widowmaker’s rifle, Mitsuru’s aim was impeccable.

The bullet tore into Reaper’s summoned cornea. It folded in on itself like a black hole, spattered and squished, then the charcoal eyelid shut. The scream this elicited from Reaper’s ever-morphing shape would be burned into McCree’s ears for the rest of his days - like a grinding, growling murder of mechanical crows.

If it unhinged Mitsuru the way it disturbed McCree, they did not show it. They only shot again, and again, causing the screaming, inky horror to curl into itself, making a compact ball. Mitsuru stood still for a moment, holding their arm steady, and took one last shot.

Dead center. The black spot exploded out into an inky halo.

Mitsuru marched briskly towards it. They stabbed both hands in the center of the black corona, then swept their arms down to their sides. The dark smog flooded back behind them. It looked like folded, black wings for an instant, then dissipated.

It was a reminder, like a stone in McCree’s gut, that he’d just helped save the assassin that had haunted his dreams for a decade.

McCree clutched his ruined hand. He sucked in a short, hiccupped breath, but the smoke in the air turned it to fit of coughing. He doubled over, eyes watering, watching Mitsuru’s figure turn and walk towards him. Peacekeeper was in their hand.

McCree tried to crawl back when Mitsuru came close, coughing and hiccupping. “No,” was the only word he managed. Mitsuru spoke, but he couldn’t hear their susurrant voice over his coughing. He couldn’t see the object they pulled from a pack on their hip, because his eyes watered. Finally, a grip like iron tugged his prosthetic away from his bleeding wrist, and held him from shimmying any further away.

Mitsuru shoved the metal hand in McCree’s face. “You cannot shoot with this?”

Coughing, pressing his mangled hand to his chest, McCree shook his head.

“Then stop fidgeting or you will never shoot again.”
Slowly, McCree caught his breath. He looked from Mitsuru’s hard face, then down their arm. In their skeletal hand was one of the small health packs Sombra had used on Tracer’s broken ankle in the church. Mitsuru tugged the gauze with their teeth, unspooling it, then releasing McCree’s prosthetic at last. Mitsuru, with a gentle but economical touch, took McCree’s broken hand and began to wrap it neatly. Peacekeeper sat on the ground beside them, forgotten.

“W… why,” McCree asked.

“You should not have gone off on your own,” Mitsuru chided. “There is no heroism in being a fool. Hanzo already had his hands full trying to retrieve Genji, then you chose to play the martyr. It only caused more difficulties for him.”

It was almost surreal how different it was from when they had first met. Instead of the horror-story he’d awoken to that night in the hotel room so many years ago, Mitsuru was coolly annoyed, like a scolding parent.

“I didn’t mean…”

“You did not mean for him to come after you?” Mitsuru said tartly. “You have a limited knowledge of Shimadas, if you thought he would give you up so easily.”

“Hanzo came after me?”

“Yes,” Mitsuru snarled. “You have made my once steady son as much of a fool as you are, it seems.”

That silenced him. McCree watched Mitsuru wrap each of his fingers in the gauze, feeling the medicine in it bleed through and ease his pain. “This’ll… fix my hand?”

“I have never used this-” Mitsuru looked at the medkit with disdain- “equipment before. I will do what I can now, then take you to a doctor. There will be someone competent who will prioritize your medical care at the barricade, no doubt.” Mitsuru pressed the gauze to glue it to itself and keep it wrapped. “It is finished. Come.”

Mitsuru picked Peacekeeper up, then helped McCree to his feet with their fleshed-out arm.

“Wait,” McCree said as Mitsuru started walking, “Tracer. She’s around here somewhere, we can’t just leave her-”

“Are you a temporal scientist, Jesse McCree?” Mitsuru said over their shoulder.

McCree swallowed. “No…”

“Nor am I. All that we are in need of - a doctor, a scientist, and returning you to my son - are at the barricade. Retrieve her shattered device if it will appease your conscience, but beyond this let us waste no more time.”

McCree shuffled diffidently over to the remains of Tracer’s chronal accelerator. He picked up the pieces, cradled them in his prosthetic arm. Mitsuru was already walking ahead, and McCree had to jog to catch up.

“Your leg alright?” McCree said as he matched Mitsuru’s pace beside them. “You’re limping.”

“I have suffered worse wounds.” Mitsuru rolled their skeletal shoulder.
“That arm of yours?”

A pause. “Yes. It is like yours. Functional, but weak to some purposes.”

McCree looked down at the blood blooming into the clean medical gauze around his last natural hand. What would he do if he lost it?

At the edge of his vision, McCree saw Mitsuru looking too. They caught his eye and made their expression stern, then looked away.

*So that’s where Hanzo learned that move.*

“Walk faster,” Mitsuru hissed, and hastened their limping pace.

“So, uh…” McCree said, jogging again to keep up. “What made ya decide not to… y’know…”

“Kill you?”

“Well, yeah.”

“It is born of a loyalty to my son. He is in love with you, it seems.”

That stopped McCree in his tracks. “L-love?”

Mitsuru stopped, turned, hissed through their teeth.

McCree coughed and started walking again. “I just mean to ask… Did *he* tell you that?”

“I had deduced it prior to him informing me, but yes, he did.”

McCree tried to push back the smile that was urging its way through the edge of his lips. *Love.* Hanzo had said he *loved* him. “Hell.” He laughed, then swallowed it, feeling Mitsuru’s gaze on him. They stopped walking.

“There is one piece of business I must dispatch before we meet with Hanzo,” Mitsuru said. In a step, their face was inches away, and the barrel of Peacekeeper was pressed hard into McCree’s chin.

The gunslinger gasped, hiccuped, stared wide-eyed into Mitsuru’s stern, cool visage.

“Hanzo is the last in a long and ancient line of criminals and murderers,” Mitsuru said. “I raised him with little affection, and less regard for anyone or anything outside the welfare of the clan. Yet, against these odds, he has emerged from it with a noble and worthy heart.”

Mitsuru’s eyes went soft, and for a moment, they looked away from McCree to something that must have been in their mind’s eye. Then, they looked back to him with even sharper steel, and stabbed Peacekeeper’s barrel harder against his chin. “If you break that heart,” Mitsuru said, biting every word, “If you use him ill in any fashion, understand that there is no filthy, rat-infested corner of this earth that I will not find you. Do I make myself clear?”

“Y-yes!” McCree hiccupped. “Very, very clear.”

Mitsuru looked McCree in the eyes as if they were attempting to see through them to his soul. After a very uncomfortable span of time, Mitsuru chirped, “Good,” then removed the gun from McCree’s chin and stuffed it into the gunslinger’s holster.

McCree let out a great, long breath.
“Come.” Mitsuru started walking again.

“Say, uh…” McCree said, joining them at their side. “Maybe this is outta line, but, you seem awful protective of Hanzo considering…”

“That I abandoned him when he was a child?” Mitsuru finished.

“Well… yeah.”

Mitsuru looked to the ground, pale lashes hiding their eyes. “It was a difficult decision.”

“Why’d you do it?”

“I was expected to be someone that I was not. So I left, and became this.”

“But was that worth abandoning your kids?”

“Perhaps not,” Mitsuru said noncommittally. “I was married to the head of a yakuza clan. A congenial divorce was not an option afforded to me. Perhaps I could have gone on longer, until Genji grew in years and became as capable as Hanzo was at that time. Then I could have stolen them both.” Mitsuru looked off in the distance, seeing again something that McCree couldn’t.

“But I was not well in those times as Hanzo is not well now,” Mitsuru said. “I thought then it would be kinder to disappear entirely, than risk my young son finding me some night, kicking the stars from a sturdy branch of a cherry tree for which I was quickly developing an insatiable fixation.”

McCree swallowed at the dark, quick way Mitsuru said it.

“But I paint it sharper than it was. Those somnambulant years could have kept on for a decade for all I know. As I said, it was a difficult decision.”

“How’d you know it was the right one?”

“Only a schoolchild looks at problems as if there is always a right and wrong answer,” Mitsuru chided. “Each choice came with its own dangers and regrets. I chose, and accepted the result.”

They were both silent the rest of the walk back to the barrier. McCree chewed on what Mitsuru had said. If Sojiro had been more willing to compromise with Mitsuru; if Kanata had been so with Hanzo when it came to Genji; if Reyes had been so with McCree when he asked him to attack HQ with the rest of Blackwatch, then it would have been easier on all of them.

But that just wasn’t in the cards. For the first time five years, McCree stopped asking himself if what he’d done in Geneva was right or wrong, and accepted that perhaps he’d just been dealt a bad hand, and had played it the best he could.

McCree and Mitsuru skirted the omnic army on 7th until they came to the remnants of the barricade on a side street. A few scattered infantrymen languished nearby - as if there wasn’t a battle happening at all. They held no suspicion for two humans, and let McCree and Mitsuru approach.

“The EMP worked, I’m guessin’, since y’all are awful relaxed,” McCree said with congenial grin.

One burly, mean-faced blonde man scoffed. “Overwatch played a trick on us, that’s for sure, but at least the fighting’s stopped.”

McCree raised an eyebrow. “A trick?”
“Yeah. Didn’t kill the omnics. Just un-brainwashed ‘em or something. That scary bitch-bot is dead at
least.”

“Seiyatta?”

“Yeah, maybe. Still think they shoulda nuked all those ‘bots, though. You hear that thing about
Mondatta? Christ.”

McCree and Mitsuru exchanged a look. “Yeah, uh… We just follow the concrete dividers to get to
the main barricade,” McCree asked.

“Yeah,” the blonde said. “Block away. Can’t miss it.”

McCree thanked him, then he and Mitsuru went on towards Times Square. McCree could see the
tanks and the front of the omnic army in the distance. “You think folks’ll hate omnics now, knowing
about Mondatta?” What Mitsuru said about leaving the Shimada Clan had lightened an old weight on
McCree’s conscience, and now he found himself prodding them with other philosophical questions.

Mitsuru craned their neck to get a better look at the barricade. “Mondatta gave up the opportunity for
conquest and worked towards a free-willed peace between humans and omnics. Anyone who does
not realize the significance of that is a fool,” they said. “But if I am honest, the troubles of the crisis
do not affect me.”

McCree cleared his throat. “You ain’t talked to Genji since you been back then, I reckon.”

Mitsuru ignored the jab, and nodded out towards the front of the omnic column, which had become
significantly less organized than when McCree had last seen it. There, out at the front, he saw
Zenyatta, Keiko, Genji, and…

Hanzo didn’t see McCree at first. Sunlight glittered off his black hair, traced his chiseld jaw and
cheekbones and the pronounced, hawkish nose. With his massive shoulders back, eyes lided, and
chin raised, Hanzo looked like a general, a ruler, an alpha wolf, a dragon - a warrior-king. Mitsuru
said Hanzo had gone after him, that Hanzo
loved
him. It made lightning strike inside McCree’s chest. Hanzo was everything McCree saw when he looked up. Perfect.

McCree got a few steps closer before Hanzo looked up. He shot McCree that wide-eyed look that
always looked so damn cute on that stern face of his. McCree chuckled, and smiled, then Hanzo
raced to him.

The archer stopped just a foot away, fists clenched at his side, and McCree could tell he was pushing
back a smile. “You’re alive,” Hanzo said.

“Had some help,” McCree said, clutching Tracer’s broken chronal accelerator and nodding to
Mitsuru behind him. “Besides. Couldn’t stand the thought of never seeing that smile o’ yours again.”

Hanzo laughed then, shoved McCree’s shoulder, then pulled him into a strong embrace, spun him
about in enthusiasm. “I thought I had lost you,” he said into McCree’s shirt.

McCree chuckled, nuzzled Hanzo’s hair, then opened his eyes. He saw Mitsuru standing there, at
Hanzo’s back, watching the two of them with a hint of a smile. When they caught McCree’s eye the
smile faded. They held their hand as if they were holding a gun, then pressed their extended
forefinger up beneath their chin.

McCree gulped, and hugged Hanzo a little closer.
yay! they hug!
I hope you guys enjoyed reading this lovable cowboy as much as I enjoyed writing him
^^ I will miss that old yeehaw, but look forward to some major Shimada action next chapter (: (also, don't worry, I haven't forgotten about poor Tracer, help is coming for her next chapter as well!)

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
ingridarcher.tumblr.com/

I will be streaming tonight, 7/27, 9:15PM EST!
Enjoy guys!
Hey guys, and welcome back to May I!
Oh my gosh! You guys - We're so close to the end!! Our boy Hanzo still has some valuable lessons to learn... and of course, we have to get Tracer back!! I'm so excited for this chapter. I love McCree, of course, but Hanzo's character progression holds a special place in my heart. Enjoy the close of Hanzo's flashback arc, and as always, lots of Shimada angst!
Enjoy guys!

**Content warnings:** Graphic violence.

A huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth, and as always, thank you to everyone reading! I know I haven't been great about answering comments lately, but I read them all and it's such a joy! Thank you guys so much, you're the best ;^;

I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
azuka-bladefury.tumblr.com

I will be streaming tonight, 8/3 10:15PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wind whipped across Shimada Castle’s great balcony. The dragon beneath Hanzo’s skin burned and writhed, hungry with anger. His sword slashed in a lateral arc.

Genji, as Hanzo knew he would, darted backwards, forcing Hanzo to chase him further out towards the balcony railing.

“What do you hope to achieve from this fight, brother?” Genji’s teased. “Are you trying to win me over with your sword?”

“I want you to see reason. Genji,” Hanzo yelled over the wind. “You cannot go against the clan.”

“Those are Kanata’s and Father’s words coming from your lips, Hanzo,” Genji said, chokutō out, backing away from Hanzo defensively. “I know that you are better than they are.”

Hanzo threw a thrust forward. Genji twisted out of the way, leaning back. Hanzo sliced a gash in the front of his brother’s gi.

Genji knocked Hanzo’s katana away with the flat of his sword. “Can’t you see all the harm our clan does? To innocent people, and to our own?”

“You cannot fight them, Genji,” Hanzo cried, taking stance again. “You cannot walk away from this.”
“Father is dead. You are the patriarch now. You can decide what the Shimada Clan will become.”

Hanzo aimed the tip of his sword at Genji’s chest. “The family is not mine to control - it is my burden to bear.”

“Then every life it takes is your burden too,” Genji said. How calm he was, for such passionate words. Hanzo had never heard his brother speak this way. “You have the power to change things. And I know you want to - but you’re too cowardly to do it. You hide behind the elders’ expectations.”

That reignited Hanzo’s rage. With an anger-fueled push, he knocked his brother back.

Genji’s body skidded - his back crashed through the railing. Genji barely stopped himself from pitching off the balcony.

“You know nothing!” Hanzo roared. “You have run from responsibility your entire life.” He brought his sword down in a slash. Genji blocked, as Hanzo knew he would. They were fighting with words more than swords. “If you care so much for those people, why have you spent your years spending the clan’s blood money on escapist frivolities?”

Genji’s shoulders hung off the edge of the balcony, defensively blocking Hanzo’s blade with his own. “You’re right, Aniki,” he said. “I ran from this. Now, father is dead because I never checked Kanata’s ambition - or your blindness. But I will not run any longer. I had hoped you were the brother I once knew and would listen to me, but I am going to fight against the sins of our family with or without your help.”

Hanzo couldn’t breathe. Was Kanata right? Was Genji truly an enemy to the clan? Hanzo didn’t want to believe it, but his aunt had claimed it so, and now Genji all but confessed it.

“I cannot stand by this any longer, brother,” Genji cried. “I can no longer do nothing.”

Hanzo shut his eyes. Everything in him screamed to pull Genji up, to walk away from this. To cool off, to not stand in judgement of his brother in this moment. But Kanata had said the dragon would judge Genji fairly. He had to trust her wisdom. He buried his heart, and opened his eyes.

“I must restore the honor you have thrown aside, Genji,” Hanzo said. “I will do what I must to save you.”

Hanzo raised his sword over his head. He spoke the words with his lips as his mind thought, ‘the dragon will judge him fairly.’ Then, heat exploded from Hanzo’s arm, and the dragon emerged with hunger in its heart.

The helical bodies ripped through Genji, jaws chewing away his skin and muscle in strips. Genji shrieked.

It was sickening. Hanzo could feel his brother’s body being devoured, the intense energy of one dragon swallowing another. A crisp, black Lichtenberg figure cooked across Genji’s raised skin, like meat on a spit. It was horrifying to behold.

But the worst was Genji’s face, because it wasn’t angry. It was shocked and mournful. Genji saw the truth of Hanzo’s heart: he thought of Genji as his enemy. The agony in that expression reached to the soul. Then, dragonfire burned his brother’s face away.

Hanzo felt emptied, body and soul. His heart was trying to crawl up his throat, a choked wail of what have you done? Hanzo swallowed the feelings down. He shut his eyes to the grotesque, black-
and-pink body.

No one could be allowed to see his brother this way. No one could be allowed to remember Genji as this fleshy pile of meat - none but Hanzo, who burned the image into his memory forever.

Swallowing a gag, a sob, Hanzo squeezed his eyes shut, then kicked Genji’s smoldering, moaning body off the balcony.

Hanzo paced outside the medical tent. The barricade had calmed now, tending to its wounded amidst the smouldering remnants of the battle. The screens were the news again, but all they did was repeat what had already come to pass.

Keiko stood smoking a meter away. She was watching Genji, who was far ahead, out past the smouldering barricade. He and his omnic master, Zenyatta, were helping direct the still-bewildered members of the omnic army.

Marching metal approached from behind. Hanzo turned to see it was Pharah, looking like a knight in her hawkbill helm and armored suit. “How is he?” she asked, nodding at the medical tent.

“No word yet,” Hanzo said.

“Does Angela think she’ll be able to save his hand?”

“She has not emerged from that tent since she went in three hours ago. I do not know if that means the surgery is going well or ill.”

Pharah punched Hanzo’s arm gently, smiled from under her helm. “He has the best surgeon in the world. If anyone can help him, it’s Dr. Ziegler.”

Hanzo nodded solemnly. “What about Winston? Is he any closer to finding Ms. Oxton?”

“He’s still working on it,” Pharah said, “but he’s brought her back from this twice before. I’m sure she’ll be alright.”

“I hope so.” Hanzo looked back at the medical tent’s closed flap. “I owe her a great deal.”

Hanzo noticed Pharah was looking away now, her reassuring expression turned to a glare. He followed her gaze to Keiko standing just to the side. None of Overwatch were very happy with his cousin for the trick she pulled with the EMP, or for allying with Sombra.

Keiko, on the other hand, was still staring at Genji, for whom she had done it all. The omnic army was likely an afterthought to her. It was significantly thinner now than it had been when Hanzo arrived at the barricade, many of the now-liberated machines wandering off or happy to be directed out of the city.

“There have been pockets of omnic attacks around the city,” Pharah said with a righteous, barely-contained anger in her voice. “Apparently many of them came to the same conclusions that Seiyatta did.”

“Yeah, darn, if only they were all too dead to make their own decisions,” Keiko grumbled, staring pointedly at Genji before looking back to Pharah.

Pharah glared at her from under her hawkbill helmet. Keiko put her cigarette in the mouth so that she could flip Pharah the bird with both hands.
With a sniff, Pharah turned back to Hanzo. “I’m going to go on another run to protect the relief workers. Call me on the comm if there’s any change, alright?”

Hanzo nodded. Pharah’s jump jets hissed, launching her into the air. As she passed the nearby watchtower, Hanzo spied Mitsuru perched there, alone and watching.

“They don’t wanna come down here and, y’know, spend time with their kids?” It was Keiko, walking up to Hanzo’s shoulder. She nodded at Mitsuru up in their perch.

“I think being so visible makes them uncomfortable,” Hanzo said.

“Dumping your dad probably made them paranoid, not that it isn’t warranted. Shit. Can’t believe Mitsuru was alive and a badass assassin this whole time. No wonder they wouldn’t take the contract I put out on you.”

“Mm. No such reservations about McCree until recently. And, they still do not accept what Genji is.”

“Well, neither did we at first. Shit, I didn’t even think it was really him.”

“What changed your mind?”

Keiko looked out at Genji, then at the ground. “He showed me his face. Dragon scars and everything. I was so pissed at him for never coming back.”

Hanzo fingered the roaring maw of the dragon at his wrist. He felt it stir in his chest, heat radiating down his arm. “After what happened, do you blame him?”

“I’m not saying he should have jumped back into the clan with bells on or anything, just… let me know my best friend wasn’t dead.”

“He was too busy taking our empire apart piece by piece.”

“Ha. My turn to ask if you blame him.”

“I suppose not,” Hanzo said. “Still, I feel as if a dozen puzzle pieces have fallen before me and none of them fit together.”

“Yeah.” Keiko breathed out a cloud of cigarette smoke. “It’s all pretty fucked up, isn’t it?”

“My life has become very complicated these past months, yes.”

Keiko elbowed him gently. “It’s not all bad though. Genji’s not actually dead. Neither is Mitsuru, and they seem at least sort-of interested in stickin’ around. You got an obnoxiously-American boyfriend, and he hasn’t ruthlessly stabbed you in the back, so there’s one you got on me.” Keiko clicked her teeth. There was pain behind her cavalier expression. “And hey, y’know, I don’t hate your guts quite as much as I used to.” She smiled morosely.

Hanzo had the instinct to smile back, and considered whether to follow or deny it. She was heartbroken now, and a smile might not be wholly appropriate. Yet, he was glad he and his cousin were, after 38 years, finally getting along, and wondered if he should express it somehow.

That thought brought a question to Hanzo’s mind. “Keiko, there is something that has been eating at me,” he said. “In Hanamura… how did you know your dragon would not harm me?”

Keiko shuffled her patent-leather shoes. “Uh, well, if I’m honest… I didn’t, really.”
Hanzo’s eyebrows went up.

“I mean, I suspected, but y’know, 10 minutes earlier I’d been ready to gut you, so it wasn’t a sure thing. I just… called it up and hoped it wouldn’t, I guess.”

“Good to know you bet my life on a gut feeling.”

“Aw, come on, Cousin. We were in a bad spot and I took a risk. Sometimes a gut feeling is all you’ve got to work from.”

Keiko turned from him, and Hanzo saw it was because Genji was approaching. He wasn’t looking their way, though - he was looking at Mitsuru up in the watchtower.

At last, Genji turned his expressionless visor on them. “Brother,” he said.

“Genji,” Hanzo said haltingly.

“Keiko, may I speak with Hanzo a moment?”

Keiko shrugged, making a presenting motion towards Hanzo with her cigarette. She left them.

Hanzo turned to his brother. “What is it?”

“It’s about Mitsuru,” Genji said.

Hanzo straightened, feeling the ghost of fingers stabbing him between his shoulderblades. “What about them?”

“They are…” Genji looked over his shoulder towards where Mitsuru was perched. “Are you sure we can trust them?”

“They saved McCree’s life when they had no other reason to do so except out of loyalty to us.”

“What if that was just one of their idiosyncrasies? They could just be waiting for the next moonless night.”

Hanzo sighed. “I think they know to kill McCree they will have to get through me.”

“They almost convinced you to kill McCree yourself,” Genji pointed out. “I do not like that they have that much influence over you. It’s Kanata all over again.”

“I did not kill Jesse, yet Mitsuru is still here. They even apologized. That is not something I could ever imagine Kanata doing - or Father, for that matter.”

“Mitsuru never tried to find us after we had left the clan. Do you not find it strange that only now do they return, when it involves a contract on the life of my friend and your partner. How can you trust them?”

Hanzo swallowed, looked over at Keiko. “It is a gut feeling, I suppose.”

“Your gut has never been trustworthy.”

Hanzo glared at him. “I am the elder here, Genji. I will not be spoken down to by you, as if I am a child in need of protection. I can make decisions on my own.”

“Since when?” Genji laughed.
“Enough!” Hanzo roared. “Do not lecture me about who I should trust, when you lied to Overwatch, to me, so you could collude with Keiko and that hacker on this mad plot to save the lives of an enemy.”

“They were being controlled, Hanzo—”

“They are not controlled any longer - yet omnics are still attacking the city. Do you realize this?”

“You would have rather the bomb killed them all?” Genji’s fists clenched. “Rather it killed me?”

“I would have rather known what was happening. If it were not for Mitsuru’s help, McCree may have died, because I thought you needed to be saved.”

Genji laughed again, bitterly. “I have seen what it is to be saved by you, Hanzo,” he spat. “I do not need your protection, and no service Mitsuru performed can make up for abandoning us as children in that house of demons.”

“They left me there because of you,” Hanzo roared. “I could have been free from that hell at 8 years old, but Mitsuru left me behind so that I would take care of you.”

That froze Genji for a time. When he spoke again, his voice was no longer raised, but harsh and quiet. “You made a fine job of it,” he said bitterly. “Tell me the truth, Hanzo - do you wish Mitsuru had taken you, and been free of me?”

Hanzo opened his mouth to answer, but when he did, no words came, because his heart had no clear answer.

Genji laughed without mirth, shook his head. Hanzo could only imagine his face beneath that expressionless visor. “You know… when I came to meet you at Shimada Castle those months ago, I had this foolish notion that you would be happy to have me back,” he said. “But now, I think you wish that I had died that day. For you, it has always been simpler to wallow in your own misery than to deal with your problems. And that is all I have ever been to you - a problem.”

Before Hanzo could answer him, Genji turned and left.

With a deep sigh, Hanzo put his hand over his eyes. He had taken it much too far, he realized, but Genji had a special talent for summoning his ire. His arm felt warm, his dragon stirring, as if it remembered the taste of Genji’s burned flesh on its tongue. Hanzo shuddered.

Genji had always known Hanzo better than he knew himself. Was it true? In his heart, did Hanzo so despise the complications brought on by Genji’s return that he wished he was still dead? He didn’t dare think of it. He pushed his heart down deep, afraid of the truth hiding there.

Hanzo inclined his head as he rubbed his hands down his face. Looking up, his eyes caught the nearby watchtower, caught the slash of silver hair there, like the moon in the night sky. Mitsuru had been watching them.

The sound of canvas flapping arrested Hanzo’s attention. He turned at once to see Mercy emerge from the medical tent, wiping her hands with a bloody cloth.

“Dr. Ziegler,” Hanzo said, approaching her. “How is he?”

Mercy wore the cool expression she always saved for Hanzo. “He may need some follow-up surgeries to replace some of the joints with artificial cartilage, but overall the hand was salvageable.”
“Will he be able to shoot again?”

“Any cybernetic replacements I implement in future will be more like the parts of Genji that are integrated with his organic tissue. He will not be holding a gun anytime soon, but once he recovers, I see no reason why he won't be just as good a shot as he was before.”

Hanzo sighed in relief. “Can I see him?”

“He’s asleep for now, but you’re welcome to go and sit with him. He should be ready to get up and walk about as soon as he’s awake.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

Mercy nodded, then walked past him, likely going to help the other medics at the barricade. Hanzo peered back up at Mitsuru, then over at Genji again, who was slumped beside Keiko a few meters away. He saw something of his brother in that familiar posture, beside their cousin as Hanzo always remembered him being.

“Dr. Ziegler,” Hanzo said, turning around to call to her back.

Mercy stopped, turned with pale brows raised.

“Thank you, as well… for what you did for my brother. I do not think I have ever… expressed how much it means to me.” Hanzo spoke the words, even now wondering if he meant them.

For the first time, Mercy’s hard expression towards him softened. “I heard you two arguing,” she said.

“Indeed.” Hanzo sighed. “His distinct talent for vexing me certainly proves he is the brother I remember.”

To Hanzo’s surprise, Mercy giggled behind her fingers. She took a few steps forward, then put a gentle hand on his shoulder. “He respects you a great deal.”

“You would not know it from the patronizing way he speaks to me,” Hanzo sniffed. “He does not trust my judgement.”

“A bit like how you don’t trust him to keep himself safe?”

Hanzo furrowed his brow at Mercy.

“Genji has people around him who can help protect him,” Mercy said. “As you do.” She nodded in towards the medical tent where McCree was resting. “Family trusts one another. If you and Genji ever hope to be brothers again, it’s something both of you must come to understand.”

Peering over at Genji and Keiko, then looking up to Mitsuru, Hanzo scoffed. “You do not have the relatives I do, Dr. Ziegler.”

Mercy lowered her painted lashes. “Even so. I think you would prefer to have a hundred more arguments with Genji than to never have another one at all.”

Something in that choked Hanzo, made it all more real. He could only manage a nod to her, the thought clawing at his mind.

“Go and see Jesse,” Mercy said. “You will feel better.” She smiled at him - something that felt very foreign - then left.
Hanzo went into the tent, and asked for McCree.

McCree was in a corner, sleeping, just as Mercy had said. A pale, roughspun bed-sheet was pulled up to his waist, and Hanzo traced the lines of the gunslinger’s bare, tan torso with his eyes.

It reminded Hanzo of when they first met. That time, which seemed so long ago, when he used to steal glances at the hair creeping out from the collar of McCree’s unbuttoned flannel shirt; the sweat streaming down his corded throat. It made Hanzo feel foolish, remembering how he’d pined for this hokey American.

Chuckling to himself, Hanzo sank into a chair beside the cot. “I am smiling again without realizing it,” he said, even though he knew McCree was asleep. “You taught me that.”

With all the insane changes happening in Hanzo’s life now, McCree felt like earth beneath his feet - roots and rock, sturdy and grounding. He held Hanzo up when everything else threatened to tear him down. Things with his family were so complicated, but what he had with McCree was blissfully easy.

Hanzo reached up to brush hair from McCree’s forehead, but pulled his hand back when the gunslinger grimaced, opening his eyes a crack.

“I’m sorry,” Hanzo said. “I did not mean to wake you.”

“Wouldn’t want to wake up to anything else.” McCree grinned up at him, broad and goofy.

“When you smile, you look like a frog,” Hanzo teased with a laugh. “I think Mercy will come in any moment to wring my neck.”

Laid on the bed, in a weak voice, McCree said, “Well, she’ll have to get through me.”

Hanzo chuckled again.

“Y’know that feel when the clouds move outta the way and the sun comes out?”

“Yes,” Hanzo said, puzzled.

“That’s what it’s like whenever I hear you laughing.”

Hanzo gave him a gentle shove on his shoulder. “Hush,” he said, still smiling.

“Y’know, Mitsuru told me something when we were walkin’ back to the barricade.”

“Oh? Something embarrassing from my childhood, perhaps? I believe that is the purview of parents.”

McCree coughed up a thready chuckle. “Naw. Just told me you’re in love with me is all.”

That was finally enough to wipe the smile from Hanzo’s face. He looked away.

“I love you too.”

“What?”

McCree reached his prosthetic hand and touched Hanzo’s forearm. “You heard me.”

Hanzo put his hand over McCree’s. “It is true,” he said, shy of the rawness in the words. “I do love you.”
“I know, Honeybee.”

Hanzo said it again, with more conviction. “I love you, Jesse.”

“Hehe, I said I love you too, Han, come on.”

And that was it, beautifully uncomplicated. The statement said and returned, spartan and purely true. *Simple.* It hadn’t been that way when things began, when he yearned for an affection McCree refused to acknowledge, but time and effort had changed all that.

Hanzo laughed again at how foolish he was being, how blissful. McCree looked up at him like he was the sky.

Hanzo leaned down to press their lips together. It was nothing like the clumsy kiss they shared in the rain on the roof at the Watchpoint. Their lips fit together now as easy as a sunset.

The clearing of a throat pulled Hanzo away. He was sure it would be Mercy, here to chide him for disturbing her patient, but when he turned it was Winston, looking properly flustered.

“I, uh… I’m sorry to, uh, interrupt…”

Hanzo sat up, pushed the edges of his mouth down, his shoulders back. All business. “It is fine. Is there news about Tracer?"

“Well, y-yes, that’s why I…” Winston cleared his throat, adjusted his glasses. “I know where she is.”

No matter how much Hanzo protested, he couldn't convince McCree to stay back in the medical tent. “Ms. Tracer risked her life to come help me out,” he said. “She’s in this mess ‘cause of me, ain't no way I'm not comin to help.”

Keiko loaned them “her” commercial van (Hanzo was fairly certain it was stolen), and they piled in, heading for Tracer’s time signature. For now, she was located near Rockefeller Center. Hanzo drove, with McCree beside him in the passenger seat. Genji and Winston sat in the cargo area in back.

Winston had a cobbled-together device with him. Hanzo was fairly certain it was just the scientist’s barrier and Tracer’s chronal accelerator stacked on top of one another and wired together.

“It creates an AOE,” Winston said. “A stabilized zone that can anchor her in this timeline. We just need to catch her in it. We need someone fast who can activate it before she teleports out of range.”

“I will do it,” Genji said. “Aside from Tracer, I am the fastest among us.”

Hanzo glared at Genji in the rear view mirror, and felt angry all over again. Hanzo had said too much, true, but his brother had been just as merciless. So much for the tranquil avatar of forgiveness he had presented himself as when he first came back.

“Slow down,” Winston said. “She should be right up here. She’s been pretty focused on this area.”

“Why’d that be,” McCree asked over his shoulder.

Winston shrugged his massive shoulders. “She has a limited ability to direct her location. Last time, after the incident with Doomfist, she tried to stay near populated areas so it would be easier to find her.”
“But the city has been evacuated,” Hanzo said. “So why…”

The sound of pulsefire caused Hanzo to pump the breaks. As he crawled the van down Fifth Street, he at last spotted the source of the noise. It wasn’t a crowd of people - it was a mob of omnis.

Hanzo leaned out of the van’s open window as he pulled up beside the long, thin straightaway of Rockefeller Plaza, flanked on either side by shops and crowned by the tall building the plaza was named for. The omnis were far fewer, and far less organized, than they had been under the influence of the God Program. Breaking windows and spraying bullets into the golden Titan Prometheus, they were more like rioters than an army.

Then, near the nose of the car, Hanzo heard a familiar blink, and saw a streak of blue pass by the windshield.

“That’s her!” McCree called.

“Winston,” Genji said from the back, “Give me the device.”

“Genji, wait-” Hanzo yelled, but Genji already had the device in hand and was jumping out through the back. Hanzo watched him round the van, then dive into the omnic forces, darting and dodging pulsefire. *Damnit, Genji. You will get yourself killed.* Hanzo’s dragon stirred, snarled, felt hot on his skin.

“Let’s cover him,” McCree said, snapping off his seatbelt. Winston leapt out of the back. Hanzo tugged the handle of his driver’s-side door, grabbed Storm Bow, then stepped out. He stared down the omnic rioters, pulling an arrow back.

Genji was fast. It was hard for Hanzo to keep his eyes on him, loosing arrows at any omnic that dared to aim a weapon his brother’s way. Every arrow that pierced a target made his dragon roil under his skin, in his soul. It gnashed its teeth, rolled its tongue, hungry for blood. But was it the familiar taste of Genji’s burned flesh it yearned for, or the blood of those who would harm him?

Winston didn’t wade into the omnis as he usually did - he had used his barrier tech on the cobbled-together device Genji was carrying, and had only his body to protect them now. Without a healer, he couldn’t take much of their punishment.

McCree was taking pot-shots into the crowd. Hanzo realized he was right to be concerned for McCree’s hand, because the gunslinger couldn’t hit a thing with that prosthetic. He still had a sharp eye, though - it was him who saw her first.

“There!” McCree cried, pointing at a bolt of blue light skipping just over the heads of the omnic rioters. Genji was near it, at the opposite end of the long straightaway, deep in the omnis’ back line.

“Genji!” Hanzo roared, shooting a seeker arrow into the crowd. It revealed Tracer’s heat signature blinking in and out. Hanzo’s arm burned like it was lit on fire when he heard Genji’s summoning cry, and saw the slash of green as his brother drew his odachi.

Genji cut down the omnis like paper until there was a circle of open space around him. Hanzo barely saw Tracer’s heat signature blink before Genji threw down Winston’s device. A bubble expanded, and Tracer’s blue trail fizzled. She fell to the ground. Genji knelt, then popped back up, holding her at his shoulder. She looked awake but weak and dazed.

“I have her,” Genji exclaimed over the comm, “She’s-”

A pulsefire blast exploded across Genji’s chest. He and Tracer dropped out of view.
“Genji!” Hanzo roared.

Winston growled and started swiping at omnis, but it wasn’t enough. The rioters were closing in on the space Genji had sliced out. Hanzo didn’t even hear McCree coming to his side, so loud was the blood pumping in his ears.

“Genji! Hang on, we’re comin’!” McCree called. “I’ll come in behind Winston and shoot what I can.”

“Winston will not get to him in time,” Hanzo gasped, firing desperate arrows as the omnis descended on his brother.

McCree pressed up to Hanzo’s shoulder, then just as soon jumped back from it. “Shit! Han, you’re burnin’ up...” After a dumb pause, McCree holstered his gun and tugged back the sleeve of Hanzo’s shirt, exposing his burning tattoo.

At last, Hanzo took his eyes off his targets to look up at McCree’s face. He saw the plan in his glittering, brown eyes.

“No,” Hanzo said firmly, turning back to shoot down more of the omnis. “That is how Genji died in the first place.”

“But that was when you thought he was against you, weren’t it?” McCree said desperately. “You ain’t enemies now.”

“I don’t know,” Hanzo gasped. “Even then, I didn’t know what the dragon would do... I cannot be certain now that it will not harm him. I cannot make that mistake again, Jesse.”

McCree grabbed Hanzo and turned him away from the omnis, stopping his focused shots. “Han, listen t’me. I was there, I saw how it happened - how he looked. I could never love the man that did that - I fell for you because you’re different now. If deep-down, you really believe you got an ounce of harm left in your heart for Genji, then I’ll dive into that crowd and pull him and Tracer out myself. But don’t let doubt stop you. Trust yourself, Hanzo. Genji needs you.”

There it was - that feeling again, that with McCree at his side, Hanzo was standing on solid ground. Anchored, and safe. He swallowed, and nodded. Instead of burying his heart, Hanzo pulled it to the surface, let it burn up through his chest, down his arm, butane-blue as he drew an arrow. Hanzo aimed down the long straightaway of Rockefeller Center, right at Genji and the omnic mob surrounding him. He sucked air into his lungs, and breathed out fire.

“RYUU GA WAGA TEKI WO KURAU!”

Thunder and lightning peeled up from Hanzo’s tattoo and coiled out in front of him, spiralling around the arrow. The dragon’s maw materialized, and tore through the omnis’ metallic bodies, ripping them to pieces in swaths. Its roar echoed off the buildings, smothering the sound of steel twisting and grinding against ethereal teeth.

At last, the dragon’s blue tails disappeared, swimming through the golden Prometheus and into the wall behind it. Where there had once been scores of enemy omnis, now there was a pile of broken circuits and chassis - and Genji and Tracer lying face-down inside the time-bubble, unmoving.

“Genji!” Hanzo dropped Storm Bow, rushing to him. “No... no...” Hanzo passed through the barrier, then fell to his knees beside his brother. The metal plating of Genji’s back was scorched black. Hanzo lifted Genji by the shoulder to look at his face.
Genji’s mask was on the ground, metal bent and visor cracked. Hanzo stared at his brother’s exposed, scarred face and black jaw. Wefts of green hair peeked out from beneath his headplate. His brother. Mercy’s words rattled in his head. She was right - he would rather have a thousand more arguments with Genji than never speak to him again. “Genji. No… Please. Not again.”

There came a quiet groan from deep in Genji’s metallic chest, then his eyes cracked open. “A… Aniki?”

Hanzo gasped out and couldn’t catch his breath. “Are you alright?”


Hanzo laughed despite himself. He heard McCree’s spurs racing up behind him, then felt his warm hand on his shoulder.

“We’ll get you to Angie post-haste, my friend,” McCree assured Genji.

Hanzo looked over his shoulder at the gunslinger, who smiled at him with pride and affection.

“Tracer!” Winston knuckled over, bending to lift her up.

“Ay, big guy,” Tracer said in a thready voice, smiling. “I’m stable. I’m guessin’ you saved me again, didn’t ya?”

Winston smiled with a warm relief. “With Genji’s help,” he said. “And Hanzo’s.” He gave the archer a relieved and thankful smile. Hanzo returned it without thinking of pushing it down or letting it stay - he smiled without any thought at all.

Chapter End Notes

You guys.
You guys!!
There's just the epilogue left!! Next week is the LAST WEEK OF MAY I!!
Thank you so much to everyone who has stuck with the fic this long. I can't believe -I- stuck with it for so long, but your comments and support have kept me going. I'm so excited for you guys to read the final chapter and show the ending, which has been hovering in my mind for almost a year now. It's been a crazy ride, and I love all of you for taking it with me!
I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!
@mingridsmarcher
azuka-bladefury.tumblr.com

I will be streaming tonight, 8/3 10:15PM EST!
Enjoy guys!
Hey guys, and welcome to a very special chapter of May I. Here we are folks. This is the epilogue, the very last chapter of May I. I'll go into more detail at the end, but I'm just so grateful for everyone who has read this fic, left me feedback, and stuck with it until the end. You guys are amazing, and I am going to miss hearing from you every week. I can't thank you enough.

If you're interested, [here's a song for this week's chapter](#).

**Content warnings:** Sexual Content, Top-McCree

I say it every week, but this week especially, a big-ginormous-huge thank you to my beta readers milfordb, Doc, Jae & Chiptooth. You guys have stuck with me for 11 months, and your comments and help have been invaluable. I could not have done it without you. I can never thank you enough.

If you enjoyed May I, I am on twitter and tumblr. Give me a follow!

- [twitter](#)
- [tumblr](#)

Please join me tonight for the final May I stream, 8/10 9:00PM EST!

Enjoy guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hanzo stabbed his fingers into the watchpoint cot’s scratchy sheets, moaned into the flat pillow, pushed back against each undulation of McCree’s hips and thought, mournfully, *This is the last time.*

Sweat glued the archer’s raven hair to his forehead. McCree’s chest pressed to his back, soft but powerful, fat over muscle. The weight increased the intensity, but it wasn’t quite enough. Hanzo adjusted so he could stroke himself.

"Want me to do that, Baby?" McCree huffed, slowing.

"Your hand is not fully healed yet," Hanzo whined, wrapping thick fingers around himself, sighing with relief.

"I can manage, Honeybee." McCree ghosted on his fingertips across Hanzo’s knuckles. The archer jolted and shuddered at the touch, and McCree let out a choked moan.

Thinking about those rough fingers - the haphazard, discordant tugs that always made him come apart when he least expected - made it hard to resist. Hanzo yearned for it all the more because this would be the last time. He would not have this for years, maybe not ever again. There was time, not that long ago, when he would have thought only of his own misfortune in this and greedily taken the offer.

"No," Hanzo said. "You have but one gun-hand left. I trust Dr. Ziegler’s abilities only so far."

McCree groaned in a wholly unsexual way. "Maybe don’t bring her up when we’re fucking."

"Takes you out of the mood?" Hanzo chuckled. "‘Ziegler’ should be our safe word."
“I don’t think Angie would appreciate that.”

“I don’t know,” Hanzo said dryly. “She might find satisfaction that she safeguards us even in the bedroom.”

That brought a loud guffaw from McCree. His head fell forward, chortling against Hanzo’s indigo tattoo at his shoulder. He could feel him twitching with every laugh until it died into steady panting. McCree nuzzled the archer’s neck, sighed, kissed his jawline, started moving again.

This, Hanzo thought, is the last time we will make love.

Hanzo leaned against a pillar in Watchpoint: Gibraltar’s lobby, waiting for McCree. Through the lobby’s wide windows, Hanzo could see the hoverjet parked and waiting beneath a waxing crescent moon, hazy behind thin clouds. It was evening, as it still would be when they arrived in Arlington and said their farewell.

Hanzo’s stomach was in the expensive shoes he’d purchased alongside his crisp, indigo suit. He was not sure the if feeling of choking he had was sadness over McCree’s departure, or the golden tie he was unused to wearing.

Double-doors yawned open on the opposite end of the large room. Hanzo looked up, holding his breath.

It wasn’t McCree, though - it was Genji, in his mechanical armor and faceplate. It had been repaired since New York, and now the lobby’s overbright halogen lights made it shine, smooth and expressionless.

Genji greeted Hanzo with a bright voice and wave. Hanzo smiled half-heartedly and nodded to him as he approached.

“What a day,” Genji said.

“Mm.”

“I cannot believe he is doing this.”

“Nor can I,” Hanzo said. “Everyone has attempted to talk him out of it - except Pharah and Winston of course.”

“And Keiko says I am the goody-goody,” Genji laughed. It died as he examined Hanzo’s pinstripes and slicked-back hair. “If I am honest, I cannot believe you are doing this either.” Genji gestured at the outfit.

“Running from responsibility was always your purview, Genji, not mine.”

“Yes, but, it took so much for you to escape the family. Why start it up again?”

Hanzo adjusted his gold cufflinks, thumbing the relief of the Shimada Clan’s sigil engraved on them. “It would be easy to allow the clan to die away or destroy itself. I think I would rather shape it into something I can be proud of. I was meant to head the family. It is time I acted accordingly.”

“I am surprised Keiko does not have anything to say about it.”

“Actually-” Hanzo swallowed- “I have asked Keiko to be my second-in-command.”
Genji’s posture straightened. “What? Did she agree?”

“She is considering it. I am surprised she has not sought your counsel on the matter yet.”

“So am I,” Genji said, sulky.

“You know her better than I, but I imagine she is embarrassed to tell you she is considering it at all. I am certain she will not do it without your approval.”

“Perhaps,” Genji said. He eyed the room’s high window, at the moon peering from between the clouds. “What about Mitsuru?”

“I am going to be very careful about which contracts we take now, but Mitsuru has agreed to offer their... skills when they are necessary. They are moving back to Shimada Castle with me.”

“Getting the whole band back together, then…” Genji shuffled his feet.

In that mysterious way of knowing his brother too well, Hanzo sensed the reason for Genji’s apprehension. He waved his hand. “You are always welcome at the Castle, Genji, but I have no intention of asking you rejoin the clan.”

His brother’s posture relaxed, and Hanzo could hear a smile in his sigh.

“Still, I was tutored in the old ways,” Hanzo went on. “I am hoping to hold the Shimada Clan to a higher standard now. I could use a liaison in Overwatch to ensure we don’t do anything too immoral.”

“You are rekindling a massive criminal organization, Brother.”

Hanzo swept a hand over his loose, slicked-back hair. “Yes, well. McCree is being lawful enough for the both of us,” he said bitterly.

Genji hummed. “Do you know why this Marshal Cooper said he has to go in today specifically?”

“No.”

“What did McCree do that he needs to be tried for anyway? Everything we did in Blackwatch was sanctioned by the UN, so it had to have been after that.”

“He will not tell me details. I only know it is something to do with his father.”

The doors on the opposite side of the room slid open, and once again, it was not McCree. Instead, Mitsuru and Keiko strolled inside, ever the odd pair with their extreme height difference.

“I am still surprised that the two of them sort-of get along,” Genji said.

“I believe they bonded over being both reviled at the Watchpoint.”

“They could have left.”

“And gone where? They have no one but us now.”

Genji stared at Mitsuru from across the room. “You and Keiko, running the clan. I would have never thought you two would become friends.”

At first, Hanzo didn’t answer. “It took Keiko reaching out to me, even though she was the one who
was wronged.”

“Brother, don’t…”

“I only ask that you talk to them.”

“What do I have to talk to Mitsuru about?”

“What you said to me. If you do not trust them, say so. I promise, if anyone will take that pragmatically, it is Mitsuru. Besides, many moonless nights have come and gone without incident.”

“It isn’t just that. They left us.”

“They had their reasons. You can accept that or not, it’s up to you, but you should at least hear what those reasons were. They are the only parent you and I have left.”

Genji scoffed, shuffling his feet. “It is strange,” he began. “You really are acting like the head of the family.” He turned to face Hanzo fully, placing a mechanical hand on his shoulder.

Hanzo’s body tensed as if to step away from the contact, despite a long-forgotten feeling rushing into him. He remembered the old family photo, where Hanzo hugged Genji to him as Sojiro and Mitsuru stood behind them, politely apart. When had things between them changed from one to the other? Why did the thought now of hugging his own brother feel so preposterous?

Yet still Hanzo straightened his spine, pushed his shoulders back, puffed his chest out - “dragoned up,” McCree always called it. He felt the ghost of Mitsuru’s sharp fingers between his shoulderblades, never touching except to scold him. The yearning Hanzo felt for Mitsuru’s affection lived in that change of his posture.

And for the first time, he saw it in Genji - the way he shifted his weight to look relaxed, the way he dropped his hand from Hanzo’s shoulder to lean it on the hilt of his wakizashi. Only now, after years of being frustrated by Genji’s cavalier attitude, did Hanzo see it for the performance that it was.

“Well,” Genji said, turning from him. “I guess I will speak with them, but only because you asked me to, Aniki.” He gave Hanzo that same old puckish cock of his head. For the first time, Hanzo saw the false confidence of it.

“Genji-” Hanzo said as Genji began walking away.

He stopped, looking back at Hanzo, craning his neck expectantly. “Yes?”

My brother. Your forgiveness has changed me. I never want to lose you again. Hanzo wanted to say it aloud, but the words were Mitsuru’s hand, hovering just away from his shoulderblades. Some curious fear, a long-worn armor, made the words stick in his throat, unable to close that small gap.

Instead, Hanzo said, “When you speak to them… take your mask off.”

Genji tilted his head. “It is not a pretty picture, Hanzo.”

“Trust me in this,” Hanzon said, then hesitantly added, “Brother.”

If Genji was smiling or frowning at him, Hanzo could not tell.

The lobby doors slid open again. They all turned to look.

McCree meant to torture him, Hanzo was sure of it. His flannel shirt was tight, sleeves rolled up to
show his tanned forearms. Dark hair peeked out from his unbuttoned collar. His body wasn’t hidden under his serape - in fact, the only pieces of his usual getup he had were a pair of cowboy boots (sans spurs) and his ever-present Stetson hat. His hand was in its brace. He saw Hanzo and whistled, sauntering towards him and Genji.

“Hoo, boy. I saw you put that suit on this mornin’ and I’m still toppled over,” he said. “Dressed up like that, you’re wearin’ at my resolve, Honeybee.”

“I would wear a clown suit if I thought it would turn you from this foolish course of action.”

“Now that I’d pay to see,” McCree laughed, putting a hand on Hanzo’s cheek and leaning in to kiss the corner of his mouth.

“You are more clean-shaven than usual,” Hanzo noted.

McCree rubbed his smooth jaw. “Yeah, well, gotta look good for my mugshot.”

“I’d dump him if I were you, Cousin,” Keiko said, walking up, along with the silent Mitsuru. “Only an idiot turns himself in. You do know you could just go back to Japan with Hanzo and the Marshals couldn’t touch you, right, Cowboy?”

McCree studied Hanzo up an down, eyes walking across the new suit appreciatively. It made Hanzo feel hot and cold at once. “That’s a temptin’ offer, Keiko,” McCree said. “But I’m done runnin’.” He nodded out at the airstrip. “Let’s go.”

The hoverjet was so fast crossing the Atlantic that they’d gone back in time. They set down on the roof the Marshal’s HQ in Arlington in early evening, a ghost of a moon in a twilight-grey sky. Hanzo exited first, and felt the rush of crisp, Virginian fall against his cheek.

“To be honest, I am not certain why you came along in the first place,” he said over his shoulder to Mitsuru.

They were following behind, and took a wide step to catch up and walk beside him. “I did not care to be left alone at the Watchpoint.”

“Do you… fear Overwatch, Mitsuru?” Hanzo found that surprising.

“It is only that if I were forced to kill someone there, it could prove complicated.”

“I suppose that it would.” Hanzo stopped in place, searching for Cooper. The roof was empty aside from a few air conditioning units and a rusted, grey door dead ahead.

Mitsuru stopped beside him. “May I ask you something, my son?” They shifted from one foot to another, peering back towards the hoverjet. McCree had not yet emerged.

“Certainly,” Hanzo said, curious.

“McCree is hurting you by taking this foolish action, isn’t he?” Mitsuru narrowed their eyes at McCree. “Would you say you are… heartbroken?”

Hanzo frowned. “We intend to remain together through this. Keiko managed not to pawn the family plane as of yet. I can still visit him while he is incarcerated, and with consideration from Cooper and his mysterious friend in the Marshals, we hope that time will be short. Why do you ask?”

“I waited for James Harris to be released into Blackwatch’s custody because, at the time, I did not
think myself able to break into a federal prison.” Mitsuru adjusted the cuff of their black turtleneck. “Now I am more experienced. I think I may be up to the challenge.”

“Mother—” Hanzo protested, then froze. “I’m sorry, Mitsuru. Please, I am sad, but not angry with him. It will be hard, but we intend to stay together through this.”

Mitsuru eyed Hanzo askance, shifting, rolling their shoulders, looking almost sheepish. “I find it very callous and selfish of him. It does not take your feelings into account.”

“I have made my feelings clear, believe me. But I also understand that it is very important to him.”

Mitsuru looked as if they had more to say on the matter, but the door up ahead opened, and Deputy Marshal Cooper emerged. He jogged over to them. “Mr. Shimada,” he huffed, extending his pink palm cordially.

Hanzo only stared at the proffered hand. “Do not fool yourself into believing that because I am here, I approve of this.”

Cooper’s hand receded. He lifted his Stetson hat up off his forehead to wipe his brow. “So he is here, then.”

Hanzo looked over his shoulder, and realized McCree was still in the hoverjet. Through the open door, he saw he was seated with his face in his hands, Genji and Keiko now on either side of him. He does not want to do this. Hanzo started towards him.

Cooper stopped him with a grab on the shoulder. “Just a moment.”

Glaring, Hanzo spun on him, but his anger was befuddled when he saw Cooper’s face. The usually-calm Marshal looked almost as nervous as McCree did. Mitsuru was already marching back to the jet to investigate, so Hanzo allowed himself to turn and listen to what Cooper had to say.

“I want you to tell me honest,” Cooper said, wetting his lips. “What’s your opinion of Jesse McCree?”

When Hanzo flushed from under the tight collar of his black dress shirt, Cooper waved a hand. “I mean strictly within terms of his moral fiber, Mr. Shimada.”

It was a curious question, and Hanzo already regretted staying here to speak to Cooper instead of rushing to McCree’s side.

“I do not know that I am the best judge. He and I both come from criminal backgrounds. You might say villainy was written in the heavens for us.” Hanzo laughed without mirth. “I followed those stars much closer than he ever did. He has taught me that noble purpose can be sewn even from men of our cloth. He is a good man, Deputy Marshal Cooper. I believe his goodness means more, knowing how hard he strived to get there. It means more to me, at any rate.”

Cooper smiled, looking oddly relieved. “That’s nice, very nice,” he said. “I hope you’re right.”

When Hanzo looked again, McCree had emerged from the hoverjet, the brim of his hat tugged down against the evening wind. Genji, Keiko, and Mitsuru followed behind him. Hanzo left Cooper then, patent-leather shoes snapping fast on the gravel as he rushed to McCree. The concern must have been in his face.

“It’s nothin’, Han,” McCree said, with an attempt at a reassuring smile. “Just last-minute jitters.”
“You should heed them,” Hanzo said, putting his hands on McCree’s shoulders. “Do not do this, Jesse.”

“I’m so sorry,” McCree said, leaning down to him. “You know the last thing I want in the whole world is to leave you alone, but I gotta do this, Honeybee.”

They’d had the argument enough times over the past months that Hanzo knew that was the end of it. McCree had made up his mind to face the music - to be an outlaw no more.

After a deep breath, McCree strolled over to Cooper, wrists out. “Alright, Coop. Here I am, on your special day and all. Do your thing. Arrest me.”

Cooper squinted against the wind like what he was about to say caused him physical pain. “I am not going to arrest you, Jesse McCree.”

McCree’s brows went up. He leaned in. “Beg your pardon?”

There was a long stretch of shock, then Keiko exploded with laughter. She fell onto Genji’s shoulder, pointing at the stunned McCree and slapping her bony thigh.

“What about Pa?” McCree looked and sounded as incensed as Hanzo felt.

“Vernon’s cancered-up ass fell down a hole,” Cooper said.

McCree took a step back. “How-”

“That son of a bitch sent a hit on my protected witness, you think I didn’t have a dozen eyes on him at all times after that? We had a bug in that old FM of his.”

“But… I went in there to-”

“I know what you went in there to do. But I know for a fact ya’ didn’t do it.”

McCree looked at his shoes. “But I would have, Coop. If he hadn’t shot my damn gun-arm off, I would have killed him.”

“Hell, after what happened in Savannah I would have too. But without any hard proof of intent, no federal judge is going to waste their time for Vernon’s sake. Especially when he weren’t more than two months out at the time anyway.”

“The bounty-”

“Looked into that. I have got no earthly idea who set that bounty out on you, Jesse, but it was not the US-of-A. Though I do find it funny that every incident referenced in the warrant was on the back of Talon activity. Like that bullet train, outside Houston.”

“From what I saw in New York, Reaper did seem to have some hateful affinity for you,” Mitsuru noted. “Possessive, almost.”

“Oh-ho, you have got no idea,” Cooper said.

“If you are not going to arrest him, why did you tell him to come all the way here?” Hanzo demanded, snorting with wrath.

But McCree’s slumped posture told Hanzo that he knew exactly why. “A test,” he said. “Like in Austin. You son of bitch. You scared the shit outta me, I thought I was goin’ to jail.”
“You surely did, but you still showed up,” Cooper said, sparing a look at Hanzo. “You’re a good kid after all, Jesse McCree. Come on in, we’re having a party.”

Cooper’s cavalier attitude was too much. Hanzo pushed forward, got in his face. “Was this some cruel joke to you? We have been preparing for this for months. Only a sadist would find this amusing.” The statement was punctuated with the continued, uproarious laughter from Keiko behind him.

“Unlike your friend over there, I find nothing about this amusing, Mr. Shimada. Maybe I did go a little overboard, but I had to be sure. Now, are you all coming or no?”

The group followed Cooper inside, and Keiko managed to finally stifle her giggles by the time they got to the elevator. Cooper thumbed the button for the 13th floor.

After a short ride down, the elevator stopped, and the group exited into a hallway. They rounded a corner, and Hanzo spied an office bullpen, seen from the hall through wide panes of glass. As Cooper had stated, there seemed to be a party going on inside, a group of people crowded beneath a store-bought banner that read “Happy Retirement.” Hanzo furrowed his brow.

Cooper stopped at the door and looked back at them, waiting.

“Twill stay out here,” Mitsuru said, eying the crowd warily.

“Same,” Keiko said. “As much as a retirement party sounds like a rager.”

“You and McCree go in,” Genji said. “I will…” He looked over his shoulder at Mitsuru. “I’ll stay out here.”

Hanzo looked from Genji to Mitsuru, then nodded with approval. He and McCree followed Cooper inside, stopping a few meters shy of the congregation. One clarion voice trilled over the chatter, a twangy southern drawl.

“So here we are,” Hanzo said. “Now, do you deign to tell us what the purpose of your design is, Deputy Marshal Cooper—”

So quick and hard that it nearly made Hanzo start, McCree grasped his hand and squeezed to the point of pain. He looked to the gunslinger quizzically. He was staring forward at the partygoers, color gone from his face, lips hanging apart. Hanzo furrowed his brow, and followed McCree’s gaze.

He was staring at two people in the crowd. One was a woman with a silvery braid, high-waisted jeans and distinguished smile-lines. She was holding a young boy in her arms, showering his cheek with a torrent of kisses. The little boy, who was trying to lean away, had shaggy chestnut hair and a smile like a frog’s.

“It’s her last day,” Cooper said. “Been a Marshal for almost twenty years, one of our best. I knew her a decade before even that, when she worked for a bondsman, but I’m sure you know that much, Jesse McCree. We’re sad to see her go, but she wants to move back to Santa Fe to be with the grandkids.” Cooper nodded at the boy in her arms, a pre-teen girl beside her, and a handsome couple that looked about Hanzo and McCree’s age.

When McCree spoke, his voice was shaking. “Coop—”

“Savannah,” Cooper spat. “Damn near a decade I spent thinkin’ you were a callous little bastard - that Reyes went through all that trouble to get you that file and you just dumped it in the trash.
Surmised you were happy to stick to the fancy life of an Overwatch secret agent, and to hell with the past. Then we’re set in a damn noodle shop and you go and tell me you’d been visiting her in Savannah. Took me some time to work it out, but finally, I reckoned your pal Reyes snatched the last couple pages outta that file I gave him. He really wasn’t about to give you up for anything.”

McCree turned from the partygoers to stare at Cooper in shock.

He looked back, miserably apologetic. “I should have said something right there over that bowl o’ soup,” Cooper said. “But I had a decade’s worth of preconceived notions to jump over. You grow real fond of a person when you know ‘em for 30 years. You get a might careful about who you bring around to them.” He looked from McCree to Paulina. “Especially when you know, once you do, she’d move heaven and earth for them.”

McCree opened his mouth to speak, but that clarion, boisterous voice interrupted him. “Cooper! You old son of a gun!”

The woman with the silver braid set down the boy in her arms, then walked over to them. McCree ducked his head, hiding under the brim of his hat.

“Hello, Deputy Marshal,” Cooper said to her.

“Oh, today’s the last day you get to call me that, Coop,” the woman said, with a flat smile that reached from ear-to-ear.

“I think I’ll be callin’ you that plenty more after today. Or maybe I should call you, uh… Miss Carter?”

“Huh?” The woman looked down, where Cooper was pointing at a name-badge on the desk beside them. It had a strip of masking tape over it, with a bold, felt-tipped name written on it: Josephine Carter.

“Oh! Aha!” The woman with the braid laughed loud and long. “Those cheeky bastards, they think they’re real funny.” She turned to McCree and Hanzo. “See, I was in witness protection for a spell on account of my rotten ex-husband. Had to hop all around the states with buncha different names. They even had to fake my death once. And Coop here wouldn’t even let me go to my own funeral.”

“I think it would have raised a few eyebrows, Paulina.”

Hanzo’s heart raced at the name spoken aloud, and he felt McCree’s fingers around his tighten again.

“Well, that’s the fun of it! Old sourpuss.” She peeled the tape off the name badge. The name underneath was printed in gold letters instead of written in felt-tipped marker: Paulina Alvarado.

“My old man sent a genuine hitman after me,” Paulina told them. “Coop here had to drag me out of my pretty little house in Savannah. The guy even killed my dog before the boys put him down. Blood everywhere. Wish they woulda given me a gun and let me at him, I’d have shot a dear-john out to Vernon in that hitman’s fat ass.”

Paulina snorted, resting her hand at the gun at her hip, looking as comfortable with is as McCree was with his own firearm. “Ah, Vernon. He was a good-lookin’ man back in the day - the only good thing about him, I can tell you. But hell, enough about me! Who are these two handsome fellas, Cooper? I like the look of ‘em, especially this vaquero right here.” Paulina nodded at McCree. From the correct way she said “vaquero,” Hanzo guessed she spoke Spanish as well as English.

“These boys are from Overwatch,” Cooper said.
“Overwatch! No kiddin’? A couple real world-savers! Thank you for what y’all did in New York. I know some folk are sayin’ you should have sent them omnis sky-high, but for my part, I think if we’re all gonna get along, the first thing we oughta do is stop blowin’ each other up. Ah! Look, you got me talkin’ again. You know all about me, and I don’t even know your names yet.”

“This is Mr. Shimada,” Cooper said, “and Mr. McCree.”

“Oh, Misters all around. Very fancy. Well, Mr. Shimada and Mr. McCree, it’s a pleasure to meetcha.” Paulina shook their hands vigorously. “Say... this is gonna sound a might funny, Mr. McCree, but... could I see that hat of yours?”

“Oh! Y-yeah, ‘course.” McCree bowed his head, took the hat off by its crown, then handed it to her.

“Beat to shit, just how I like ‘em. Y’know, I used to have a Stetson just like this when I was-” Paulina’s voice dropped when she turned the hat upside-down and looked at the inside of the band. She went wide-eyed, and looked up at McCree. After an open-mouthed pause, she said in a whisper, “Where did you get this?”

When he didn't answer, Hanzo looked up at McCree. His lip was quivering, and he was looking at Cooper as if for permission.

“Go on and tell her, Jesse McCree,” Cooper said.

Hanzo hadn't thought it possible, but Paulina went even more bug-eyed, looking over at McCree again.

“Under a bed,” McCree said, still clutching Hanzo’s hand, looking down at her, voice unsteady, “in a room at the end of the hall on the second floor of the Cave Inn, just off 66 out by Deadlock Gorge, when I was 8 years old.”

Paulina clutched the hat to her chest, looking over at Cooper again.

“I know it took me 30 years, Paulina,” Cooper said. “But I made you a promise. And I’m a man who keeps his promises.”

Paulina squinted up at McCree’s face, his hat to her heart. She put her hand on the gunslinger’s freshly-shaved cheek. “M’ijo?”

That broke the floodgates. McCree snorted out a sob, released Hanzo’s hand, then the two fell into a hug.

Paulina cried out, arms around McCree’s broad shoulders, his hat still in her hand. “You wore this around all this time?”

“Yeah, Momma,” McCree cried into his mother’s pale hair.

“Good thing I got a big head, huh?” Paulina laughed through tears.

McCree laughed too, hugging her close.

“I tried to get you back, Baby,” Paulina wept. “I wanted you back so bad.”

“I know, Momma,” McCree said. “I know ya did.”

Very quickly, Hanzo felt extraneous to this tender reunion. Silent, he nodded to Cooper, then turned to excuse himself to the hall. He got two steps before the view of his own family arrested him in
place.

Through the wide glass panes, Hanzo saw Genji seated on a long bench, while Keiko stood a meter away. She looked to be arguing with one of the Marshals about the cigarette she’d lit underneath a no-smoking sign. Even more separate was Mitsuru, huddled near the doorway, watching the scene inside. They caught Hanzo’s eye then, sparing a glance for Genji and Keiko, they came inside.

Without a word, Hanzo turned as Mitsuru walked up next to him. Their eyes were fixed on McCree and Paulina. It should have put Hanzo in mind of their own contrasting reunion, when Mitsuru had calculated the revelation, using the resulting shock to escape.

Yet instead, it reminded Hanzo of a day from his youth when he’d been standing beside Mitsuru like this. During archery training, they were interrupted by a mother sending her son off to school. The boy had been about Hanzo’s age then, and the mother warm and affectionate, feminine in a sundress and loose, long hair. Mitsuru had stared at the two of them with intense concentration, just as they stared at McCree and Paulina now.

“His mother,” Mitsuru said.

“Yes,” Hanzo answered.

“She loves him. I can see it.”

Hanzo looked on at Paulina, teary and smiling, hand on McCree’s cheek and shoulder, hugging him over and over. “Mm.”

“It is so easy for them.” Mitsuru nodded at Paulina. “When I was pregnant with you, it did not feel magical or beautiful, but as if a parasite was growing inside me. Everyone said my feelings would change when you were born - that I would love you in an instant. But the doctor placed you in my arms and I felt… nothing. You seemed only helpless, worthless, an empty thing. It was like being in a museum, staring at what was meant to be a work of art, and seeing only a blank canvas.”

Hanzo looked down at Mitsuru’s pale head, wondering with dread what Mitsuru was about to tell him. They did not look angry, or even customarily cold, but sorrowful.

“I cannot place the moment it began to change,” Mitsuru said. “You… would laugh, or cry, you began to speak and walk, you showed preference for this thing or that. Strokes of color started emerging. Quiet and clever, curious and brilliant with simplicity. You were becoming a person.”

Hanzo couldn’t look at McCree now, but stared instead at Mitsuru’s woeful expression. “I wanted to be a part of it,” they said. “I wanted to press brush strokes to that canvas. To give you all of myself of which I was proud, and turn you from everything in me that I hated. But this…” Mitsuru gestured at Paulina’s affectionate hugs and tears. “It came so easy to everyone else. I wanted it for you so much. I knew I was failing you, but I…”

It was a shock to see tears form in Mitsuru’s icy eyes. At last they looked away, biting their lip and staring at their booted feet.

With some hesitation, Hanzo placed a hand on their thin shoulder. “Were you not the one who told me that just because something is difficult doesn’t mean it is not worth doing?”

More empty space yawned between them and Hanzo waited for Mitsuru to shrug him off. Instead, he felt their own hand move. It hovered just between his shoulderblades. Out of instinct, he stood up straighter, raised his chin, puffed out his chest.
But Mitsuru’s fingers did not stab hard into his spine. They flattened their palm, gently, against his back. Then, their hand slid to wrap around his shoulder. With a hesitant tug, they pulled Hanzo against their side.

Stunned, Hanzo stood dumb, side pressed to Mitsuru’s. Had he ever been held this close to them before? He had clung to vague memories of being picked up or tucked in, unsure if they were even real, and now… “Mother-” That mistake snapped him out of it. “Ah, I’ve done it again, Mitsuru, I’m sorry.”

With a quiet shrug of their shoulders, Mitsuru’s hand loosened. Hanzo was sure, now, that this anomaly was over. He was already mourning it, trying to memorize how it had felt, when Mitsuru took a breath and hugged him a little closer. “You… may call me ‘Mother,’ if you wish to,” they said timidly. “Only… I must endeavor to be worthy of the name.”

What feeling came over him then, he could not place. For all this time, the parental affection Hanzo had yearned for Mitsuru had wanted to give him. Yet, some nebulous barrier had stood between them. All it took was for them to reach through it. It should be so simple. Hanzo moved his own arm over his mother’s and hugged them in return.

Mitsuru shot a sideways glance at him, then looked away. “This feels strange,” they said.

Hanzo loosened his grip instantly. “If it makes you uncomfortable-”

Their grip tightened, as if he would escape. “I did not say that. It is only, that it is new to me.”

Hanzo smiled without a thought. “You will get used to it.”

A turn of Mitsuru’s head to look behind them made Hanzo shrug halfway out of the welcome but awkward hug. He followed their gaze out into the hallway. Genji and Keiko were staring at the two of them now instead of McCree, who was meeting the rest of Paulina’s(and therefore, his own) family. When Hanzo caught Genji’s eye, he looked away, rolled his shoulders, sat back on the bench in that familiar, cavalier way.

Hanzo frowned. “Come with me,” he said, guiding Mitsuru out to the hallway by their shoulder.

Genji stood up. “What is happening in there?”

“That woman is Jesse’s mother,” Hanzo said.

“What?” Genji’s head snapped back to the window. “I thought she was dead.”

“So did he.”

“Huh. Well, I am happy for him,” Genji said, too casually. How had Hanzo not noticed before how false it was?

“Genji.”

“Hm?”

Hanzo stepped closer. The words stuck in his throat, sounding too foolish and saccharine in his head. But he thought of Mitsuru’s hand creeping hesitantly around his shoulder, and steeled himself. “Brother,” he said. “I never… For what happened. I am… there is no way to ever apologize… I do not know what to say.”
Genji tilted his head, expression hidden behind his visor. “Brother, I told you. I forgive you.”

“How?” Hanzo laughed. “How could you ever… What I did, was unforgivable.”

“It happened.” Genji put a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “You cannot change the past - only the future.”

“I do not deserve to have my brother back.”

Apprehensively, Genji reached up with his free hand, and removed his mask. Hanzo always gasped to see his face, with those wormy scars and black jaw. “Yet here I am, Hanzo.”

Words failed him. Hanzo’s mouth opened and closed like a fish, unsure what to say, until he realized with fear what he should do. Taking a deep breath, reaching with clumsy resolve, Hanzo pulled his brother into a hug.

They both tensed. This is foolish, Hanzo thought. But an instant later, Genji hugged him back, tight and enthusiastic.

“I am so glad to have you back, Brother,” Hanzo whispered.

“Me too, Aniki,” Genji said.

They parted, eyes glittering, smiling at one another. For a decade and longer, Hanzo had felt a hollow place in his life, as if a piece of him had been cut away when he cut Genji down all those years ago. He had lived that way so long it became who he was - a man defined by his missing pieces. It was easier, simpler, to stay broken. But looking at Genji’s earnest smile, Hanzo saw now that McCree had been right - he was that hollow man no longer.

“Curious,” came Mitsuru’s voice, breathless behind him. They were staring at Genji’s face, and Hanzo realized they must not have seen him with his mask off before now.

“Holy shit,” Keiko said. “He really does look like you.”

True. Side by side, the resemblance between Genji and Mitsuru was striking. The two stared at one another like a mirror. Genji swallowed, and gave Mitsuru a shallow bow. Mitsuru returned it. It wasn’t much, but it was the start of something.

A clamor from the door to the bullpen drew the Shimadas’ attention. It looked like the entire retirement party in the doorway, headed by McCree and Paulina. The smile on McCree’s face was as big as Hanzo had ever seen it.

“Han, I got a little sister,” McCree crowed. “And a niece and nephew and a brother-in-law and a stepdad and… Han, look, this is my Momma.” McCree grabbed Paulina and shook her as if to check that she was real.

Hanzo smiled at him. “Yes. Are you going to introduce her to me, or does she have to try to kill me first?”

Paulina furrowed her brow at McCree. “What’s he mean, Baby?”

“Uh, nothin’ Momma, he’s just got a mean sense of humor.” McCree made a face at Hanzo, then moved to stand beside him. “So, uh. That there’s Keiko, she’s Hanzo’s cousin. And over there’s Genji, he’s a buddy of mine from Overwatch, and Hanzo’s brother.”
“Yo,” Genji said, with a wave.

“That’s… an interesting fashion sense you got there,” Paulina said, looking Genji over.

“Ah, it is not an outfit exactly. I suffered a major injury when I was young, and my body had to be supplemented with a great deal of cybernetics.”

“Golly! What happened?”

Hanzo and Genji exchanged a look. “It is a long story,” Genji said.

Sensing danger, McCree moved on. “That back there is Mitsuru. They’re-”

“-My mother,” Hanzo cut in. He and Mitsuru exchanged a look, a smile, a nod.

McCree was too keyed-up to notice the silent exchange. He put a hand on Hanzo’s shoulder. “And Momma, this is Hanzo. He’s…I dunno, kinda, sorta my…”

Hanzo eyed McCree askance, then grabbed him by the collar of his flannel shirt and pulled him into a ferocious kiss, lips crashing together like thunder before ebbing in intensity. When he leaned back, McCree looked a little dazed. Red crept up from his color into his face. Hanzo, calm and cool, turned back to Paulina. “Ms. Alvarado. We met earlier, but I believe it holds more weight now.” Hanzo extended his hand. “It is a pleasure. I’m afraid I have only known you as a name inside Jesse’s hat.”

Paulina, her brows to her hairline, shook Hanzo’s hand, then looked to her son. “This your fella, Jesse?”

McCree scratched the back of his head. “Y-yeah, Momma.”

Paulina nodded, looking Hanzo over before elbowing McCree in the ribs. “Nice work, m’ijo,” she whispered. McCree grinned a sheepish grin. “Say, how about we all go to dinner? I’d like to get to know this fancy gentlemen my scruffy boy managed to wrangle.” Paulina wiggled her shoulders.

Everyone agreed, and the party started to make their way to the elevator.

McCree reached an arm around Hanzo’s waist. “Y’know, I ain’t going to jail no more,” he said in a low voice.

“I had heard something like that, yes,” Hanzo said, meeting McCree’s flirtatious gaze.

“So maybe you could, I dunno, stick around for a bit before you go back to Japan.”

“What’s back in Japan?” asked a pretty woman with dark hair - McCree’s half-sister, Hanzo surmised. They arrived at the elevator.

“My business,” Hanzo said, thumbing the down button on the elevator.

“What business is that?”

“Real estate,” Hanzo lied smoothly, at the same time that Keiko answered, “Finances.” The two stared at one another in alarm.

“Real estate financing,” Hanzo amended.

“Yeah! Yeah, y’know, mortgages, apartment rentals, stuff like that,” Keiko said.
“Yes, like that,” Hanzo confirmed.

Up until this moment, Paulina had seemed far too folksy to have been a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Marshals. Yet now she shot Hanzo and Keiko a skeptical look fit for an interrogation room.

The elevator dinged. Mitsuru drifted past McCree’s family to walk inside the opening doors. “My son is the scion and heir to the oldest criminal empire in Japan,” they said. They turned, leaning against the back of the elevator and staring Paulina dead in the eye. “Now, are we going to dinner?”

Hanzo and McCree exchanged a look as the rest of the party moved uncertainly into the elevator. “Damn. My Momma’s with the law, and you’re a big bad criminal. I’m not goin’ to jail, but you’re going to Japan… Everything just got a lot less simple.”

Hanzo looked into the elevator, at McCree’s new family, and at his own. Genji and Keiko, Mitsuru and Paulina. He twined his fingers in McCree’s beard and smiled. “No, it’s not simple,” Hanzo said, looking up into his eyes. “But it’s perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

There you have it, folks!

You know I had to sneak in one last surprise (: This is another chapter that, like 19, came out very easily because I’d had it in my head for so long. Evidence for Paulina was much more muted than the hints I dropped for Mitsuru, but there’s many notes of her particularly in McCree's flashbacks. I see mothers get "fridged" very often in stories about sad men, and a core goal with "May I” was to buck those expectations by surprising people with not one, but two surviving moms.

I won't go too deep into themes, but family was obviously a big one. Hanzo straightening his posture was an avatar of his relationship with Mitsuru(trying to please them/be what was expected), and McCree "feeling" his mother's name on his forehead was an avatar of Paulina(trying to do the right thing/be the good guy). Those relationships colored their actions throughout the story, and in some ways they had to unlearn them to move on with their lives.

I think it's obvious that McCree as the earth and Hanzo as the sky, or more generally McCree being "low" and Hanzo being "high," was a big theme. Perfect and Simple, too, were thematic phrases for their characters.

I went hard on original characters as well - there is an OC designated for each section of the story: Keiko for Hanamura, Cooper for Austin, Mitsuru for Gibraltar. Then, in Act 3, they all show up, signifying the culmination of the story. Originally, Cooper was meant to be in some of the sections in New York, but he never really fit anywhere, so he was relegated to the epilogue.

I hope you guys enjoyed this story. It's been a labor of love for nearly a year. I don't know what I'll do with myself now, but there are a lot of fics for other fandoms that have been staying tucked away in my mind, waiting, so I'm sure I won't stay quiet for long. I don't yet know if I will ever write another Overwatch fic - I love the series, but this one was a big undertaking. I have one about Genji that's been sitting in stasis for a long time, and I may do another self-indulgent story to explore what goes on with Keiko
and Sombra during and after this story, but for now, I'm going to take a nice, long rest.

Thank you so much to everyone for reading. I never fail to be flabbergasted by the response, overjoyed reading comments, and so, so grateful to all of you. You have all been wonderful readers, cheering me on and challenging me to be better. From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much.

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Please join me tonight for the final May I stream, 8/10 9:00PM EST!
Enjoy guys!

End Notes

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