**Double Time**

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**Double Time**

by *RenaRoo*

**Summary**

[Hero Time Sequel] After the events of Hero Time, the city and Blood Gulch are prepared for the true return of superheroes in a big way. But while Washington is attempting to adjust to a new relationship and a new living arrangement, the call of new heroes and a new mayor mean major changes for his professional life as well as his personal one. How will the balance of values fare when his new partners come to test everything he’s made of.

**Notes**

We are finally, finally back to this AU that has been the start of just so much in my fandom experience here with RvB. I adore this AU and while I needed the short break it’s fantastic to be back in the swing of things and getting back to the part of the story that captured so many people’s hearts to begin with: the relationship between our hero and our civilian. Hopefully everyone’s as ready for some high octane hero romance as I am!

I want to once again thank my collaborator and the just all around awesome artist @ashleystlawrence who helped inspire this AU as well as has provided just amazing artwork and costume designs throughout the installments. And also to @goodluckdetective for being a huge inspiration for this AU as well. This series is a labor of love dedicated to the inspiration of the two of them.
Cities were never really quiet, and in that way, a hero who worked in a city was never really done. Washington wondered, somewhat idly, if that was the reason behind never exactly hearing about superheroes in the more sprawling wilds of rural country land, but he also supposed that a simple counterpoint was that heroes didn’t look nearly as cool prowling on tree limbs as they did on rooftops.

Clearly.

He looked to the police scanner that Church had built him at the behest of Tucker and tuned into the several frequencies. Really, it was any wonder he was able to patrol without the little device on his wrist formerly – it made finding trouble and being able to assist that much easier.

And it had only been a few months since the entirety of the Blood Gulch Crew had entered into his never-completely-simple life.

“Still nothing?” he asked the air around him, aggravation clear in his sigh. “Though, I suppose that’s better than something. By someone’s book.”

As a professional superhero, Wash knew that not every patrol was met with intrigue, but he was far from ready to call it a night either.

Not until he checked in on his… work in progress.

With an aggravated sigh, the catlike superhero began to change his patrol path and race instead toward the mechanic’s shop where his second longest rehabilitation attempt was stationed.

The Red Dead Blood Gulch Gang had long been operating out of Lopez’s garage – their mechanic the ever befuddled and seemingly unhappy member given the unfortunate codename Brown. It was the kind of information which Wash would have given an arm and a leg to know when he was hunting down their crime patterns as the newly returned superhero Washington.

Instead he gave them practically every other part of their body when he bounced off their hood and windshield.

For being a former criminal organization, even if did fancy itself to be more akin to Robin Hood than straight up debauchery, the Reds were not a particularly intimidating bunch to drop in on. Stealthily as he might have been, Washington couldn’t help but think that former criminals sitting around a mechanic’s garage and drinking beer while the reminisced should have been at least a little aware of his presence. Then again, he was obviously giving the Reds far, far too much credit on nearly every account.

“What’s got Lopez all pinched up and pissed off?” Grif asked, throwing a used can toward the garbage and missing, earning an annoyed look from Simmons.

“I think that’s just his face, guys!” Donut stage whispered to them, using his arm that was still in a brace. Wash tried to take some solace in the fact that it was no longer a cast (there was little to be had).

“He’s turning blue on us, just wait!” Sarge howled. “He’s all in a pissy mood and whatnot because...
we scheduled this meeting for the Gang on one of his precious date nights with our newest getaway driver.”

“How many times do I have to tell you, old man, I’m still your driver!” Grif snapped.

“Probably until you actually start driving again,” Simmons said with a roll of his eye.

“Even so, Sheila hasn’t agreed to be the getaway driver,” Grif argued.

“Oh, she will be! Her time will come, and she will see what her true calling has been all along,” Sarge chuckled.

Lopez sat in the back corner, arms crossed angrily over his chest as he released a long, aggravated sigh but otherwise didn’t even contribute to the conversation.

“Believe me, Sarge, getaway driver is not a calling anyone feels happy to answer to,” Grif huffed.

Having heard more than enough, Washington stepped more fully into the garage and partially into the light, tilting his head. “Strictly speaking, if you’re not doing things illegally anymore, you wouldn’t be a getaway driver at all. Just a driver.”

Nearly all at once, the Reds jumped up in surprise, causing more spilled beer cans than Sarge would have ever allowed in his poker basement. A fact that it pained Wash to know after the time he was drug down there by Tucker for a way to ‘relax with the guys.’

“Wow! Wash! Don’t jump out of the shadows like that!” Donut cried out. “Makes people think you’re about to shake them down for information they don’t have or something!”

Incapable of escaping the flinch that caused him to make, Wash merely sighed. “I’ll make note of that for the future, Donut,” he offered before looking more specifically to Sarge. “But I did promise to make more casual drop ins to see how you guys were doing with keeping the neighborhoods safe instead of taking on the system. In… utterly counter productive ways.”

“Yeah, well, at least painting stoplights and getting back at dumb bakeries was fun,” Grif huffed. “People barely thank you when you work on improving the community. Stupid community. What the fuck has it ever done for us? Nothing. That’s why we became a badass gang to begin with.”

“So eloquent, Grif, no wonder you’ve not been moved up to leader of a mission yet,” Simmons scoffed.

“I know it’s a… difficult adjustment to make,” Wash offered. “But for what it’s worth—“

“Not a hell of a lot, son,” Sarge harrumphed.

“But for what it’s worth,” Wash pressed on, “I think together we’re actually doing something to improve Blood Gulch. I’ve been on the police scanner all night and I’ve not heard anything. That’s the second time this week we’ve had a quiet night.”

“Second time this week you and Tex have had a quiet night,” Simmons corrected.

“Yeah, you’ve still not had us helping out with the actual crime fighting stuff,” Donut whined. “When’s that going to get started? I’d love to start on that stuff! I mean, planting a new community garden and cleaning up the park are great—“

“No they’re not,” Grif retorted.
“But we thought recovering from former villainy would involve more hero-type stuff,” Donut explained with a wide smile.

Wash put his hands on his hips and forced a smile. “I’m afraid I can’t really force crime to happen. And if I could, I wouldn’t. It’s good for our city to have a downtick in dangerous activity. But as soon as we start having emergencies again, when heroes are needed, I’ll know when to call you… So long as your community service hours are being kept up on.” He squinted at them. “They are being kept up, aren’t they?”

The Reds all glanced to each other then back to Washington.

“Oh, yeaaah, sure, Wash! We’re right on those!” Donut called out in what was bound to be his least believable voice.

“No,” Lopez voiced.

“See! Even Lopez agrees about how well we’ve been doing!” Sarge chuckled.

Washington scowled. “No is still no even in Spanish. I understood him perfectly.”

“We’re fine, stop moaning and groaning about the number of hours we have left to our community service,” Grif huffed. “You’re literally the only person who cares.”

“Technically the law cares,” Wash reminded them.

“And we’re only a few hours behind our projected capita, Sir,” Simmons bit out nervously. “We’re good on them, promise!”

Wash sighed. “I know going straight is hard—”

“I’ve never even tried it!” Donut rang in almost instantly.

“Yeah, like you’d know the first thing about going straight,” Grif laughed at Wash’s face.

“You know what?” Washington sighed. “I’m just going to go home. Don’t forget to clock in your community service hours this week. I’m serious. It’s important that you do that.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever, Mister Fancy Pants in a new costume. All blue and disgusting — you should be ashamed of yourself,” Sarge grumbled.

“I’m far from it,” Wash said, heading out of the garage. “Seriously, keep up doing the good work and I wouldn’t have to pay you surprise visits.”

There was some garbled resentment, but Wash was far from caring about it.

With the Reds taken care of for the night, he was on his literal last stop of the night, and couldn’t be happier to finally get there.

Home was still a seemingly normal flat overtop a seemingly normal (because it was) laundromat. But behind such normal doors was security, protection, and — newly added — people waiting for him on the other side of it all.

Coming in through his bedroom window, Wash was at least a little disappointed that his room was empty. He never liked it when he kept people waiting, but living with said people had really made that gut reaction turn up to eleven.
Quickly dispensing with his patrol uniform, Wash changed into some boxers and a tee for comfort before going to the door and hoping that he was only keeping one person waiting instead of two.

In the main room, Tucker was preoccupied with a laptop and wearing pajama pants but not much else. Which, considering his usual bedroom attire, was a bonus, Wash supposed.

There was no Junior which meant the little quasi-alien was in bed and not waiting for the superhero role model to return home safely and give adventurous tales he could draw out and further cover the fridge with.

Standing in the doorway for a moment, Wash leaned against the frame and just looked at the sight set out before him. At his life — so different and new from what he had known just months before. And all because he had, by complete happenstance, ran into Tucker. Tucker and Junior and every remotely wild and obtuse friend and family that came along with them. From Reds to former evil geniuses to old not-so-dead fellow Freelancers, and landlords that Wash was more than happy to never deal with again.

It was all because of Tucker, and Wash’s heart swelled in his chest at the very thought of him.

That was, until Tucker happened to glance up from his laptop, get spooked and scream, and react by throwing a television remote Wash’s way.

Surprised, Wash moved out of the way and let the remote to the new television crash against the wall behind him and shatter. “Tucker! What the hell—“

“Wash!? What the hell is wrong with you? Why do you have to sneak up so quietly everywhere you go!?” Tucker cried out, bewildered. “If you were a cat I’d put a bell on you.”

Wash looked through the darkness at his partner and raised a brow. “Hilarious.”

“It’s not hilarious, it’s a valid threat,” Tucker said, sitting up on his knees and leaning over the back of the couch. “Any trouble tonight?”

Wash walked toward the couch. “Unfortunately no.”

“Unfortunately?” Tucker mocked. “I’ll never understand superheroes, I swear.”

“Unfortunately in that there won’t be a whole lot to tell Junior when he forces us both awake for breakfast in a few hours,” Wash said, leaning against the back of the couch, just inches from Tucker. “And for someone who will never understand superheroes, you’ve done a fairly decent job of getting together quite the crew of superhero tropes to surround yourself with over the years.”

Tucker shrugged passively, a smirk on his lips. “Eh, I’ve got my own power of magnetic personality. I just draw them all in.”

Tilting his head, Wash couldn’t help the fond smile across his face. “You certainly do,” he said. “I just hope it makes you happy.”

“What does?” Tucker asked blissfully, shutting his laptop.

“Being surrounded by bigger than life issues, living here with me, being friends with almost-nearly-convicts, pretending I didn’t see that it was porn on your screen before you shut your laptop,” Wash listed off almost wistfully.

“Make me happy?” Tucker laughed. “Wash, it’s like the definition of what makes me happy right
now. I’m staying up late not because I had to pick up extra late night hours at the diner to cover the appliances. I’m staying up late watching porn in a living room I share with my superhero boyfriend who has a bankroll due to the kinda sketchy government coverup stuff that people on Blood Gulch couldn’t even dream up.” He then raised a brow of his own. “You ever going to tell me the full story of that someday?”

“I’m sure I will,” Wash said. “Just not tonight. Not when I can spend that time sleeping next to you in bed instead.”

Tucker waggled his eyebrow, as to be expected. “That all?”

“Well, I did have a slow night,” Wash lamented before leaning in and meeting Tucker for the kiss the man had been very obviously moving in for the entire conversation.

His life was becoming startlingly routine, but Washington had learned to very much love that.

And he truly did. It was the thing in the world he loved third most of all — right after Tucker and Junior.

At the back of his mind, though, Wash knew to be anxious, even if he wouldn’t dare show it to his partner. Because for a hero, slipping into routines, having things one loved most of all in the world, always seemed to have a price to be paid.

Sooner or later.
I’m just… wow, guys. I one hundred percent am blown away by the amazing response this fic has already gotten. Like, seriously, I’m so pleased I barely have words. Just thank you all so much for supporting and enjoying this series because it sure means a hell of a lot for me. You guys are great.

Special thanks to @freshzombiewriter, @analiarvb, @ketchrey, @fatcatissurprisinglysvelte, @thepheonixqueen, @secretlystephaniebrown, @notatroll7, @the-anonymous-fangirl, @a-taller-tale, @ashleyslawrence, @thefederalarmyofchorus, @xxylophone, @reynbowjedi, @washingtonstub, @i-stole-orions-heart, @sickwithsarcasm, Yin, LillianRain, @goodluckdetective, and @sickwithsarcasmon AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

“**Well? What do you think?**”

There was a look of pure exuberance on Tucker’s face as he asked the question. It was the kind of face that Washington could catch himself standing back and admiring from a distance. There was still a certain disbelief that it could ever be made in his direction.

And then, of course, there was the complete disconnect that came with that expression and that question with that particular subject between them.

Washington looked at the ten year old car that Tucker was exaggeratedly waving to and wondered if his boyfriend even noticed that there were four dents.

“It certainly has four wheels,” Wash mustered.

“That is a sign of a good car,” Caboose nodded sagely beside Washington.

The large, lumbering metapowered non-hero had become one of the many staples to Wash’s new life. Always around with little rhyme or reason – like most of the people that Tucker seemed to attract to his life.

Fortunately, Caboose had taken a shine to Wash. Which was more than could be said for the other staple of Tucker’s life…

“Good car? This thing is an absolute piece of shit,” Church practically screamed.

There was just something about Church’s voice that always managed to make Wash wonder if that robotic body came with something wrong with its speakers, or at least some knob to turn the volume down. *Something… Anything…*

“Dude, I wasn’t going to get a new car for the deal I got on this baby,” Tucker said, running his hand over the hood of the car.

“What was the deal? A pack of gum *and* you take someone’s shitty car off their hands?” Church
snorted.

"You’re just jealous,” Tucker responded with a wave of his hand. “Tell him, Wash.”

Wash raised a brow and fiddled with the sunglasses on his nose. “I don’t really feel much stake in this fight. I’ve never had to own a car before—”

“Right, because of the sweet ass Washcycle,” Tucker said enthusiastically.

“And that is not what the name of my motorcycle is,” Washington sighed for what felt like the millionth time.

Church, crossing his arms and looking even more displeased than usual waved to the car and looked at Wash. Just looking Wash’s way, Church was able to make the superhero’s body fill with dread. “Aren’t you, like, some kind of billionaire?”

“No,” Wash answered flatly.

“You couldn’t even loan your roommate money for a decent car?” Church continued without missing a beat.

“We’re more than roommates, jackass!” Tucker yelled, jumping back to sit on the car. There was an unsavory ripple in the thin metal of the hood from him doing so, but Tucker didn’t even seem to notice. “And besides, I wouldn’t let Wash. I’ve been saving up my own money for a year to get a car! And I got one! It’s the goddamn American dream. Think of the chicks I could pick up in this car!”

“No,” Church replied.

"None,” Church said, not finding much humor in Tucker’s sentiment whatsoever. “Do you always have to act like you’re still single?”

Wash could see in the corner of his eye how Caboose and Church looked to each other with something that was almost like expectation. Wash couldn’t blame them. This did happen more often than he’d like to admit.

"I like it when you act all jealous,” Tucker mused, moving back off the hood and toward the driver side door. “Okay, everyone hop in, we’re ready to do this! Put your complaining where it belongs – far away from me – and let’s get to it!”

There was an audible side from both of Wash’s sides, leading him to look curiously back and forth between Caboose and Church. Both men seemed resigned and displeased.

“What’s happening?” Wash asked, feeling more and more out of the loop.

Without answering, Caboose and Church walked toward the car, Church getting a rathe surprising skip in his step as he dashed around to the passenger side door in the front.

“Shotgun!” Church shouted.

“I didn’t know Sarge was here,” Caboose mused, already getting in the back.
Wash squinted. “We’re grown men, we can’t determine things by shotgun. And I should be in the front… I mean… It’s Tucker’s car and I’m—”

“Sorry, dude, you’re totally right, it’s my car. And the rules of shotgun can’t be overturned,” Tucker shrugged. “Don’t be such a wet blanket, Wash! Keep Caboose company.”

Wash glanced toward the backseat and sighed before getting in himself. “I still have no idea what we’re doing,” he said as he buckled his seatbelt and Tucker started the car.

“The only thing any of us can do now that there’s a car available in the group,” Tucker said. “What every group of hot blooded American men dream of doing with their cars.”

Washington couldn’t help the scowl forming on his face. “I refuse to pick up women in my boyfriend’s car.”

“Oh my god, can you stop calling each other boyfriends around me? I cannot live with myself so long as I’m being reminded what poor tastes Tucker has!” Church whined.

Washington looked to the back of Tucker’s seat expectantly, waiting for him to say something, anything to Church about the constant undermining of their relationship.

It didn’t quite come out, though. And by that, of course, it didn’t come at all.

“Everybody ready?” Tucker asked.

“Yes,” Caboose and Church said at the same time Wash questioned, “What?”

Without more warning than that, Tucker reached for the CD player – by god the piece of junk still played CDs – and turned up the volume just before the speakers in the car began blaring what felt like directly into Wash’s ears.

“What is this why are we doing this?” Wash asked in a string of questions he had no hope of receiving answers to as he covered his ears.

*Is this the real life?*
*Is this just fantasy?*
*Catched in a landslide,*
*No escape from reality.*

Wash’s eyes darted to the rest of the car’s occupants, finding that not only were they not paying him any mind, but they were in a trance-like state singing along with the lyrics. Was this rehearsed? Was he missing something?

“Tucker, I’m confused,” Wash said directly to the back of Tucker’s seat.

“Wash, dude, what do you think is going on? It’s *Party Time!*” Tucker laughed out before continuing on with the lyrics that were only getting louder.

Looking around him again, Wash considered the very real possibilities of living a superheroic lifestyle. His boyfriend and boyfriend’s friends may have been put under mind control. There was some sort of satanic ritual taking place.

Or, Wash was becoming increasingly overwhelmed with the fact that he was surrounded by a history and friendship that predated his relationship by nearly a lifetime.
Unable to even think clearly with the music blasting, Wash took the only logical course of action he could once the head banging began.

Opening the back door, Wash unbuckled himself then tucked and rolled to the relative safety of the sidewalk.

Tucker and company didn’t even slow down all that much as Wash stood up and put a hand to his chin.

“I’m definitely leaning more toward mind control,” he said. “Good thing I’m already wearing my suit under these clothes—”

“Sure you want to do that?”

On instinct, Washington whirled around and held up a throwing knife, ready to throw in the direction of the voice, but he quickly dropped his stance once he saw who was standing in the alley.

“Tex! You’re here, that must mean there was something going on,” Wash said, looking back down the street. “Just as I suspected.”

“No, I just have the additional superpower of ironic timing,” she said, watching with him. “There’s no mind control. They’re just idiots still living off barely remembered nostalgia.”

Wash looked at her worriedly. “Nostalgia?”

“Yeah, nostalgia,” Tex said dully before tilting her head and raising a brow. “You’ve honestly never seen Wayne’s World? Not even one of the SNL skits?”

Blinking blankly, Wash couldn’t help the, “Huh?”

“God, you have to get out more,” Tex laughed. “Wash, you’re going to need a crash course in nerd culture if you want to make this relationship-thing with you and Tucker last. Because these people you’re surrounded by? Nerds. Huge nerds.”

“I suppose I’m supposed to find that endearing about them,” Wash said flatly.

“One would hope since that’s about ninety-five percent of what they are,” Tex pointed out. “But, hey, it’s not like you don’t have any friends outside of Tucker’s, right? That’s only healthy.”

Continuing with blank stares, Wash tilted his head. “I’ve got you.”

Tex snorted. “Pfft, I don’t count.”

“Why not?” Wash asked.

“I’m no one’s friend,” Tex responded with a wave of her hand. “Total antihero badass, remember?”

“Says the woman who is literally the person connected to everyone,” Wash pointed out. “Look, Tex, I’m not saying you’re not right… I’m just saying I’m… a Superhero. That’s literally what I am. I’m not sure I operate in any other capacity beyond what I’m trying to have with Tucker right now. And considering I’m training his son, about half of that is still superheroing. I don’t have a day job, I barely have a secret identity—”

“Okay I’m stopping you right there because this is getting too depressing,” Tex said with a shake of her head. “Like, goddamn, Wash.”
Taking a deep breath of his own, Wash nodded. “Thank you.”

“Well, not that it’s going to help you much in the getting your own life department, but I was about to start patrol,” Tex said, throwing her thumb in the direction of the roofs above them. “If you want to get in on that—”

“Yes, yes please,” Wash said, already unbuttoning his shirt to reveal the suit he had on beneath.

“You really do need to start expanding your horizons, though, or else you’re not going to appreciate what you and Tucker have,” Tex warned. “And believe me, none of us appreciate what you have either. So if you two don’t appreciate it, no one is. No way that can last.”

“Are you seriously giving me relationship advice? You? Who has a robot practically stalking you?” Wash asked, raising a brow.

“What can I say. Wash? It’s an imperfect world,” Tex joked before heading toward the alley’s fire escape. “That’s the reason it needs superheroes.”

Smirking, Wash followed suit. “Can’t deny you have a point there.”

It was the start of a decent patrol, one where Bohemian Rhapsody never seemed completely out of the distance.
Once again I just have to thank all of you so much for your support of the fic! I’m sorry it’s updating so quickly lately, but I’m about to enter “exam season” again, so I’m trying to write as much as I can before I get hit too much by it. Hopefully you all will enjoy this chapter!

Special thanks to @the-anonymous-fangirl, @thefederalarmyofchorus, @ketchrey, @secretlystephaniebrown, @washingtonstub, @a-taller-tale, @freshzombiewriter, @analiarvb, @ashleystlawrence, @theyarethatchwhichweknow, @thepheonixqueen, @notatroll7, assnoot, Arianna, and Yin on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

Tucker’s friends were far from the only adjustment to Washington’s life after they decided to try this whole living together thing. They didn’t even register as the biggest.

That honor belonged to Junior.

While patrolling into the early morning was only natural to Wash, and was even extended now that he did not have to do it completely along thanks to Tex, one thing that his single life had afforded him was the ability to sleep in as late as necessary to make up for the hours lost to his habits.

Living with a child – a rapidly growing, quasi-alien child – was not so prone to that lifestyle.

Deep in sleep, Washington was far from prepared for the way a scaly, hard body threw itself onto his stomach and let out a long string of grunts and honks and blarghs.

His instinctive reaction was to throw off the assailant and grab the knife from under his pillow. But, fortunately, Wash was at least a little used to the ritual by that point.

Eyes still open wide with surprise, Wash glanced toward Junior and forced down a large breath before fully getting to sit up.

Happily, Junior slid down Wash’s chest as the man got up and landed with a bounce on the bed.

“Blargh!” the child cried out excitedly.

“Is your dad at work?” Wash yawned, getting a honk in return. He still had difficulty understanding the child’s rudimentary responses, so he looked to the other side of the bed for his answer.

It was empty.

Tucker had been asleep when Wash got in that morning and they hadn’t actually spoken to each other since Wash bailed – literally – on the car trip of friendship that Tucker, Church, and Caboose had embarked on.

Idly, Wash wondered if that was something he should be more concerned about just before he felt Junior throw himself into Wash’s side again.
Honk!” Junior shouted testily.

“Sorry,” Wash yawned, rubbing at his face. “I’m without coffee at the moment, Junior. Give me a minute or two to work things out in my brain.”

When he glanced back at Junior he was met by a tilted head and none too impressed with his excuses.

Washington let out a little sigh and mustered up the excitement he could find through his tiredness. “How about I make you some breakfast and then you and I can get into our morning practice routine. What do you think?”

That got an excited clatter from Junior and he scrambled from the bed and out the bedroom door.

Taking a moment to sit on the edge of the bed and watch Junior as he left, Wash tried very, very hard to fight the need to go back to sleep and decided to get his blood pumping and get on with the rest of the day regardless.

He stretched, made his deep breathing exercises last a second longer than normal before finally committing himself to fulfilling his promise – and Junior’s demands.

In the kitchen, Junior was already sitting at the table, mandible clicking together excitedly.

Just a while ago, the child had been too small to climb up in the chair by himself. Tucker was complaining about it constantly – about how fast kids grow up and how he needed to take more pictures and preserve these moments.

Wash wasn’t quite at that stage just yet, but he was noticing that Junior’s growth was, even beyond Wash’s expectations, enhanced compared to a human child.

It was something that was only going to get scarier and more worrisome over the years. Especially since they knew so little about Junior’s true biology, and had no connections with a medical license to speak of.

Once when Wash brought it up, Tucker mentioned Doc and then they ended the conversation rather abruptly at the same time.

Taking a note from Tucker’s teachings, Wash grabbed a slab of beef from the freezer, pulled out a cookie tray, and began warming up the stove top to feed the alien child.

There was some pepper and seasoning he added, but after Junior had gagged the last time Wash put salt on the meat, Wash had been too worried to add any himself. He seemed to lack whatever culinary expertise that Tucker had gained over the years in the food industry and from raising a meat eating child with multiple rows of canine teeth.

Junior was practically quivering with excitement by the time Wash walked over to the table with a plate.

As much as Wash had taken a real shine to Junior, he had little love for the kid’s eating habits. They were a bit savage, especially considering the hardly rare stake was bloody and messy. So he busied himself with coffee.

Coffee, the only thing truly keeping him running these days with such little time for sleep split between all of his responsibilities and new social obligations.
Stirring his coffee somewhat absent mindedly, Wash reached for his phone and checked for messages from Tucker. There wasn’t even a good morning text.

“Hm,” Wash hummed before turning and looking toward Junior. The child was smacking his jaws together and licking his lips, being more than done with his bloody meat pile. “Junior, did your dad say anything about me today before he left for work?”

Junior licked his lips again before shaking his head. “Blargh.”

Washington shifted uncomfortably. “I’m… sure it’s nothing. I mean. It shouldn’t be anything. *I’m* the one that should be upset. I was totally left to the wolves yesterday. The social wolves.” He looked at Junior’s blank, non-understanding look back. “I’m not a social person. I’m introverted. He’s extroverted. He just needs to get that. I don’t hold it against him or anything. Right? So maybe he’s wanting to talk in person about it tonight. Or something. I just didn’t understand any of the references. It was awkward. Would’ve been more awkward if I stayed.”

He paused for input. From a four-year-old.

It obviously didn’t come.

“It was less awkward to jump out of a moving car,” Wash explained. “Believe me.”

Junior shifted in his seat and looked toward the training equipment then back. “Honk!”

Relieved that Junior was not interested in the subject and that his own blathering was utterly ignored, Wash let out a long sigh and nodded. “Right, good. Okay let’s get to training. I agree.”

Excitedly, Junior leaped down from his seat and ran toward the equipment.

He dropped and began stretching just the way Wash had taught him, though there was some obvious speed to the motions – he was not taking the time to fully stretch every part of his body the way he should, too wrapped up in his excitement for training.

Wash finished his coffee and headed over to pull out the training mats for them both to play fight and practice on.

Despite what Tucker might joke, Washington really *did* feel strongly about not having a sidekick. The very bureaucratic oversight and ways in which the Freelancers had ran with their superhero academy and the sidekick program had ruined any fanciful notions of that for him.

But Junior had untested strength and power with rapidly accelerated growth. He needed training, he needed someone who could keep up with him and set him on the right path.

Even if Wash didn’t feel very strongly about Tucker, he would want to be that man in Junior’s life.

Still, he was a child. And Wash tried to teach more about control than hard muscle building.

After all, they were dealing with a *four year old* first and foremost.

By the second time Wash used Junior’s momentum against him to flip him onto the mat, earning a series of angry clicks and annoyed *blarghs* from the child, Wash knew that they were at their mental unwind.

“Well, I think you’re doing good, Junior,” Wash said encouragingly. “How about we take a break and get out the crayons and paper!”
Almost immediately, Junior’s face lit up and he let out a long honk before skittering up and racing to his bedroom.

Wash put on another pot of coffee, actually feeling the bags under his eyes, and then started some of his own, more serious workouts.

He had to keep himself in shape as well.

By the time he finished his chin ups, Junior had gone through three pages of paper, drawing his adventures as Super Junior alongside Wash. The first page had a huge black squiggle over it and, from what Wash could see from peering down at it, Junior had instinctively started with his old, gray uniform instead of the new blue one.

Habits died hard. Wash knew that for sure.

The day was going calmly enough, even with the worry at the back of Wash’s mind about himself and Tucker when the door opened and his partner came through with a hand full of mail.

“BLARGH!” Junior screamed out excitedly before racing over and tackling his father’s waist.

“Hey there, my sweaty little Superman!” Tucker greeted happily, sweeping Junior off the ground. It took a little bit more of a struggle than it used to given Junior’s growth. He then glanced to Wash. “You told him how to have an uncanny ability to be at least one block from major crimes every night yet?”

“Not yet,” Wash said. “And that’s not really something taught, it’s more a… part of the calling, if you will.”

“I won’t,” Tucker joked, setting Junior back down and shutting the door. “Picked up the mail.”

“Thanks—” Wash began to say only to be interrupted.

“Figured you might be sore from your little tumble last night,” Tucker said, a little sharper. There was a glint to his eyes that simply wasn’t joking around anymore.

“I’m fine, thank you,” Wash said, taking the mail.

“That’s a shame,” Tucker said flatly. Wash attempted to chalk it up to sarcasm, but truth was he wasn’t so sure. “What is it with you and cars?”

“I don’t know,” Wash said. “But I am sorry if things were… awkward after I bailed. My intent was to make them less awkward,” he explained, opening the mail addressed to him. A furrow grew in his brows as he looked at the seal.

“No, yeah, it was totally fun explaining to the guys why my boyfriend they barely knew decided, without comment, to roll out of the car to escape them. It was great,” Tucker said. When Wash didn’t respond, he moved in curiously. “What? What is it? Something bad?”

Wash stared at his mail intently for a few more minutes before looking up to Tucker somewhat in disbelief. “It’s… from the mayor.”

Tucker raised a brow. “Okay?”

“Addressed to… me. As in… superhero me,” Wash continued, trying to keep down the nausea that was growing inside him. “They know who I am. And they want me to appear at the courthouse
tomorrow.”

For a moment, Tucker opened his mouth, as if he had something, anything to say. Then it snapped closed. They continued staring at each other before Tucker threw up his hands. “I told you it was fucking stupid to have your superhero name be your goddamn last name. Who does that?”

“We don’t know how serious this is,” Wash reacted calmly. “It might just be a talk. I’m the first superhero since Freelancer – well, out in the open at least. Maybe they just want to make some sort of arrangement.”

“Yeah, and maybe along with knowing your address they also have been keeping an eye on the place and now know about Junior!” Tucker snapped back.

“I didn’t know you were worried about that,” Wash replied softly.

“I wasn’t until you pointed out he could cause an intergalactic war!” Tucker reminded him.

They stared at each other, then down to Junior between them. He was tying his makeshift cape on his neck and looked up with bright eyes. “Blargh!”

The nausea came in full stop and Wash looked sickly toward Tucker. “This could be bad.”

“This could be fucking ridiculous and messy,” Tucker replied. “But I think I know how we can make sure Junior’s safe tomorrow while you go play patsy to the mayor.”

“Which would be…” Wash began before closing his eyes and groaning. He really shouldn’t have even bothered asking. “Must we owe more favors to Church?”

“No,” Tucker replied. “But we’re going to, ’cuz I give a damn about my kid!”

Wash had a hard time thinking of an argument against that.
Gahhh I meant to get this out over the weekend, but things got away from me, so I apologize greatly! Hopefully there’ll be a few laughs in this update to make up for the wait ;)

Special thanks to @freshzombiewriter, @thepheonixqueen, @analiarvb, @washingtonstub, @ashleystlawrence, @a-taller-tale, @secretlystephaniebrown, Yin, and mydetheturk on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

The courthouse in downtown, like much of downtown, was completely brand new.

Washington had spent so much time as of late in Blood Gulch he had nearly forgotten that the majority of the city wasn’t still existing in the ruins of the so-called Invasion and the failure of Freelancer nearly five years ago.

It was a sobering experience to say the least. Remembering how little his crimefighting really helped with the infrastructure of everything around him

He was in civilian clothes when he arrived, timidly messing with his sunglasses and shying away from any stray stares he got on the short walk from Tucker’s car to the building.

Logically, he knew the weird looks was from the fact that someone who was in a suit had walked out of as terrible of a car as Tucker’s, but Wash’s worry about his identity and his eyes would not fade quickly now that it was clear that at least someone, and someone important, knew who he really was.

He didn’t need more exploitation of his identity in one day than he was already going to have.

Of course, once he was inside the building, things went rather south on that account.

The secretary looked up to him and smiled broadly. “Mister Murdock?”

Wash fiddled with his tie. “Uh, no. Mister… Washington.”

“Oh!” she said, voice thick and slurring around her highly visible braces. “You’re early for your appointment!” She then looked down to her computer and then back up to Wash. She squinted some. “Have you thought about a more discreet superhero name to go by in public?”

Wash shifted uncomfortably and looked around the room to make sure it was just the two of them. “I haven’t… I’m not supposed to be public as a hero. So it was never supposed to be… much of a problem, actually.”

“Hm,” she replied before clicking around with her mouse. “Okay! You can sit down and wait in here. The mayors are currently scheduled to yell at each other for a few more minutes.”

Confused, Wash furrowed his brow. “What does… I’m not entirely sure what that means?”
“Oh, just wait for it,” she laughed waving her hand nonchalantly. “I’m Katie, by the way.”

“Hello, Katie,” Wash replied, taking a seat. “I’m…”

He hadn’t really thought of a good response. Telling people he was Washington felt wrong to do now that his status as a vigilante was apparently out in the open again. Made it too simple for situations like the current one to happen and more or less ruin his day.

But he hadn’t been called David by anyone in so long…

Tucker didn’t even call him David.

“You’re the superhero Washington!” Katie answered for him instead, barely allowing for the lapse of silence to get awkward. Which Wash supposed was a good thing. Maybe. “I know, that’s why I was able to put you on the mayors’ schedule.”

“You keep using plural,” Wash pointed out.

Katie leaned back into her chair and spun once. “You don’t pay much attention to local politics, do ya?” she slurred out.

“I live in Blood Gulch,” he tried to explain. “It’s… not a normal topic of discussion among my… peers.”

She stopped spinning in her chair to give him a wide eyed look of surprise. “People can still live in Blood Gulch? I thought the whole neighborhood was condemned.”

“No?” Wash replied, quirking a brow just before the giant, oak doors on the other side of Katie’s desk flew open.

“Oh, just you wait until that recount is finalized! The second I no longer have to make decisions with you is the moment that this city is finally going to turn itself around!” a boisterous female voice half-screamed.

“And I believe the moment that recount is finalized, I shall be accepting your written apology and proving to our great city that as difficult as the times have been, we have been moving along just fine by subsiding federal aid!” a pomp male voice asserted back.

Wash stared through his sunglasses at the pair – a man and a woman in white and tan suits respectively.

Then he looked to his watch for the time.

“Mister Washington?” the woman asked, drawing his attention back up to the two of them. “We would like to see you now.”

“Yes we are very happy to have you come in!” the man responded, looking more toward his counterpart than toward Washington.

Washington glanced back and forth between the two of them before slowly rising to his feet. The way both of the… mayors were staring at him was fairly unnerving.

Gathering up his nerves, Wash walked toward the office door between the two of them and glanced back toward Katie who gave him a toothy smile and thumbs up, before stopping shortly inside with the mayors shutting the doors.
“I’ll be honest,” Wash said lowly. “If you were hoping to leverage your knowledge of my secret identity, you blew it by having it known around your office.”

The two looked at him in surprise – the man aghast and the woman raising a suspicious brow.

“Leverage against you, Mister Washington? I would hope that you would think more highly of your elected official…s.”

The woman put her hands on her hips. “You’ll have to forgive Jensen, Mister Washington. She’s young and enthusiastic, but I assure you that the only ones who have been shared any information about you are those which we have already made plans with for our proposal.”

Awkwardly, Wash waited for them to continue, but that had merely caused the two to stare at each other once more and lapse into a silent, hateful staring contest.

Coughing into his fist, Wash pulled at his coat collar with his free hand. “I’m sensing there’s… something else happening here.”

“One moment, Mister Washington,” the woman said, holding up her finger for a moment until, finally, the man blinked and they looked away from each other. “Yes there is. Could you make a point here and share with us who it was you voted for in the recent election? I assure you it will only be used to settle a point and not effect your proposal whatsoever.”

Wash stared blinking at them and shook his head. “I’m…. afraid that I missed out on the recent election. There was a… lot going on personally. And I’m not even sure where the polling place in Blood Gulch is.”

“You didn’t vote!?” the man cried out. “My god, man, that is your civic duty!”

“There are people still living in Blood Gulch?” the woman asked, seemingly honestly baffled.

“Why do people keep asking that?” Wash replied, growing more and more concerned.

"Oh… it’s… nothing,” the man assured Washington in a tone that could not have been less reassuring if someone tried.

“Yes, it is,” the woman snapped. “There have been no infrastructure projects in that neighborhood since before the Invasion.”

Wash tilted his head. “I’ve noticed,” he said dryly. “But you can see why I haven’t actually been paying much attention to politics lately.”

“Still not an excuse! Why, you don’t even know who your mayor is!” the man said, aghast.

“No one knows who the mayor is until they finish the recounts!” the woman hissed before taking a deep breath and visibly collecting herself. Her gaze returned to Washington. “I’m sure you have questions about who you’re dealing with,” she said.

“Among others,” Wash agreed.

“I am Vanessa Kimball,” she informed him. “And this is Donald Doyle. One of us is mayor of the city… but the election has been tense. And close. We’re currently undergoing the third recount.”

Having never been the most impressed person with politicians, Wash crossed his arms and tilted his head. “Yes, well, I bet if one of you had been campaigning in Blood Gulch it would’ve been
“An oversight to be corrected for sure,” Doyle replied candidly.

“Okay,” Wash said. “Why am I here, though?”

“Well, Washington… you’re a superhero,” Kimball informed him. “You’re the first superhero that has been reported in the city since the Invasion. The idea of superheroes being back has been of much interest to the rest of the city, even if they’ve barely seen more of you than rumors.”

Wash raised a brow again. “I’m… not the kind of superhero that goes around in a cape and inspires people. I work best in the shadows. It’s…. Well, it was the kind of hero my mentor was. I’m not sure my tactics would be enjoyed so much in the spotlight.” He then shifted his gaze quite a few times between them. “And I’m not keen on being used in the shadows by any party…. especially an extension of the government.”

“You seem to be misunderstanding what is the single bipartisan agreement between us,” Doyle said. “We both agree that it has been too long in this city without superheroes. That we want to utilize the potential of superheroes for the good of the entire city again. Put a spotlight on them, if you will.”

"It is an idea of uniting and leading this city, and we need a senior superhero – someone with experience and a connection already forged with the people of the city, to head it,” Kimball continued, arms crossed and eyes set with an intimidating glare.

“I maintain what I said,” Wash said holding up his hands. “I do not work in the spotlight. That leads to… to giant blenders on main street.”

The two looked at him like he had lobsters crawling out of his hair.

“Giant blenders?” Doyle repeated.

“If you don’t want to be in front of the press or on newspapers, I can understand. Hell, I can even sympathize,” Kimball replied, walking toward Wash and putting a strong hand on his shoulder. “But give the second part some consideration, that’s all I ask.”

“Okay,” Wash said warily. “The second part being…”

Kimball guided Wash back toward the door with Doyle flanking his other side. There seemed to be an unspoken pride shared between the two of them as they opened the door and revealed a small group of four teenagers had gathered outside.

Waiting. Dramatically posed. And in some of the worst outfits Wash had ever seen in his life.

“What in the hell?” Wash muttered.

“Mister Washington, meet the Cadets,” Kimball announced. “Teens in training to become the heroes this city deserves.”

“Of course, the in training part would be where we have interest in expanding our relationship with you, Mister Washington,” Doyle continued. “They need guidance – and the city is more than ready to aid your cause in any way… should you choose to pick it up.”

“I don’t do sidekicks,” Wash said plainly.
"Um, Mister Washington," a familiar voice called out.

Wash squinted looking toward the four and realizing the demure one greatly overshown by the flashy, cape swearing atrocity that had made his way to the front, and realized with some shock that there was good reason he recognized that voice. “Katie?"

She waved awkwardly. “We’re not really going to be your sidekicks, Sir. We’re already a team–”

“Of teenage superheroes!” the boisterous one yelled out, hands on his hips.

His skin sparkled. Wash was creeped out. the angsty one with his arms crossed annoyed. The tallest of them didn’t seem to notice anything about his teammates as he stood in his heroic pose.

“We just… We really need a mentor,” Katie continued, putting her hands together and looking at him with big doe eyes. “Please!”

Feeling cornered, Wash wanted to say no. He wanted to say, after everything he had been through, after the disaster that was Freelancer, he deserved to not be put in this situation by anyone – especially not a body of government.

But…

When he was with Freelancer, he wasn’t the hero. He was barely regarded as a hero, making his time with the team a bitter, scrambled memory.

Here, just maybe, this was that chance he had always wanted to make the difference. To prove anyone who ever said otherwise wrong.

“Okay,” Wash said, to the cheering of all those around him. “On one condition.”

Doyle and Kimball looked at each other then to Washington.

“What would that condition be?” Doyle asked worriedly.

“I’m going to need to make an addition to this team,” Wash informed them.
When You Have It All

Chapter Notes

Things may seem a bit slow right now but if you’ve read Texas Time and Hero Time, I’m sure you’re well aware of what that means for the upcoming chapters ; )

Special thanks to @secretlystephaniebrown, @freshzombiewriter, @a-taller-tale, @icefrozenover, @analiarvb, @washingtonstub, Yin, @ashleystlawrence, @thepheonixqueen, @nooryes127, @whimsical-writer, and @notatroll7 on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

“You said yes!?”

Washington wasn’t exactly sure why Church seemed to practically manifest himself during circumstances that would make him completely unhelpful, but it was a talent that he ultimately had to acknowledge.

It was difficult to gauge what Tucker’s exact reaction might have been without Church’s input, but since it was there, Wash found himself being stared down by his partner, arms crossed and dissatisfaction radiating from him.

“What the fuck does that mean!?” he cried out.

“Tucker, dude, if he sold you guys out, I can build something to vaporize him. Like a giant blender or something,” Church assured Tucker. It was only half sarcasm, which probably should have alarmed Washington more than he was currently allowing it to.

“Can I talk to you alone?” Wash asked pointedly to Tucker.

“Why?” Tucker asked critically.

“Because this is a…” Wash pinched between his eyes and sighed. “There’s just something about Church that gives me a headache. Alright? I said it.”

“Hey, fuck you, buddy,” Church said waggling a finger in Wash’s direction. “I’m the best friend. I literally passed up on eternal life and heaven and all that shit to return to these stupid bastards and lead them through their grief and sorrow.”

“You’re not a ghost!” Wash snapped for what felt like the hundredth time in the last six
months. “There is no such thing as ghosts—”

“Dude, how can you say that there’s no such thing as ghosts when you’re a cat-person, I gave birth to a not-alien, and you just signed yourself up to be a drill sergeant for a superhero boot camp?” Tucker demanded. “I feel like there’s not much shit left off the table at this point!”

“Ghosts that can only possess electrical objects are off the table because it doesn’t make sense! Technology and the paranormal don’t function together in that way,” Wash declared. “There’s rules!”

Tucker waved his hand and rolled his eyes. “Rules suck.”

“Yeah, fuck rules,” Church snickered.

"It’s about Junior!” Wash finally blurted out, all but silencing Tucker and Church all at once.

Church glanced between the two of them a few times before raising his hands and turning to walk the rest of the way out of the room. “Right, officially not involved with this one, guys. I’ll grace you with my presence later.”

For his part, Tucker didn’t immediately start screaming. He just looked horrified – and the fact that he was the cause of such an expression, even incidentally, rocked Washington to his core. It nearly made him sick.

“What do you mean it’s about Junior?” Tucker asked darkly.

“It’s part of the arrangement I made, for my services to the mayors,” he explained with some restraint. He was trying his level best to chose each and every word carefully, meaningfully.

But that, of course, would never stop Tucker from being Tucker. “Dude, that makes it sound like you’re some sort of prostitute for the mayors.”

“What?” Wash asked, baffled. “No – no it doesn’t. No one would hear that and think ‘prostitution’ except you.”

“Me and anyone who has watched pornography,” Tucker commented with some relaxation working its way back into his shoulders. The bantering seemed to be getting him back into his zone. “But, no, really. If this has been an open arrangement and you haven’t told me this whole time—”

“As glad as I am that you’re not freaking out still,” Wash said slowly, “let’s move this conversation and concern back to Junior.”

Tucker stared at him for a moment before shaking his head and letting out a huff of laughter. “Fuck, Wash. You still don’t get it, do you?” he asked.

“Get what?” Wash asked.

“I’m joking and being myself because being a parent? I have a baseline of terrified, twenty-four-seven. That’s just how you learn to exist,” Tucker explained flatly. “I only joke about shit I really care about.”

Washington couldn’t help the frown that tugged at the corners of his mouth at that statement. It was so against his own philosophy in life, but he knew he had to respect it on some level – or at least put it on the back burner to question Tucker more thoroughly on later.
“I’m just trying to explain that when I struck that deal with the mayors about training these young superheroes, I was sure to let them know that I was only going to do it if I had permission to add to the team,” Wash explained.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tucker asked, just being obtuse at that point.

“It means that I can add Junior to the roster,” Wash explained. “Keep him by my side, keep him safe—”

Tucker held up a hand to silence Wash. Wash’s mouth closed with an audible click.

“Hold the fuck up,” Tucker gritted out, eyes burning into Wash. “You… You volunteered my son for a government program without consulting me first!?”

Surprised at the outburst, Washington looked at Tucker in confusion. “No, not—”

“You can’t. I can’t believe you’d…” Tucker pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a groan like he was about to have a full migraine. He then glared at Washington with everything in him. “Wash, this is overstepping. We’ve been together for six months!”

Shaking his head, Wash was confused. “How is this overstepping? And how is that any small increment of time?”

“Because you don’t get to make decisions for Junior!” Tucker near yelled. “He’s my son, Wash! And you’re the one who scared the shit out of me about people finding out about him when I didn’t care before! Now you’re handing him over to the Man!?”

Throwing up his hands, Wash was literally lost on how they got to the current point. “Okay, first off, local government is more than a few steps removed from the Man, Tucker—”

“God, you really don’t get it, I think I’m going to be sick,” Tucker wheezed, putting his hands on his knees and wheezing. “Oh my god. We’ll have to move states. Need new names—”

“Tucker, calm down! I didn’t even tell them who I wanted on the team yet!” Wash cried out. “And I definitely didn’t reveal what relation my future additions were going to have to me. I do understand how to maintain private identities, believe it or not.”

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Tucker’s grip on his knees tightened and he looked up, full glare on. “What?” he asked. “Why the fuck are you breaking news to me like this? Just to be dramatic? Oh my fucking god, that’s not how you break news to people, you asshole!”

"I genuinely have no idea what these reactions I’m getting from you are, Tucker,” Wash explained.

“You are so sucked into the superhero mindset you don’t pause for a second and think ‘hey, how do I not give my boyfriend a goddamn heart attack?’” Tucker accused.

“I do not,” Wash replied. “And I’m still confused about what exactly I did wrong here—”

“You’re the absolute worst, oh my god,” Tucker groaned. “So you were going to ask me permission for signing Junior up for this extremely bad idea all along.”

Wash blinked. “Based on your reaction, I’m thinking that’s… the right answer,” he said plainly.

“You weren’t!” Tucker cried out again.
“I can’t take this emotional flip flopping,” Washington warned him.

“Well it’s not like we’re in a car you can roll out of!” Tucker snapped.

“Okay, okay, I should not make decisions like this without family input,” Wash replied. “I get it. I’m learning my boundaries – I just was thinking from the superhero side of things and what would be best for getting Junior for whatever comes in the future for him–”

“Bow chicka bow wow.”

Washington gave Tucker a highly unimpressed look. “That’s your own son.”

“I know, I felt dirty the second it came out of my mouth,” Tucker said with a wave of his hand. “But yes. Good. I can get past this if you’ve learned to promise to not make these kinds of sweeping decisions without my input again.”

“I won’t,” Wash promised.

“Especially since I have some amazing, kickass, awesome ideas to help this situation that will make you kick yourself for not having brought me in sooner,” Tucker announced.

Curious, Wash tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I have some extra suggestions on who you should add to this team, and as resident Dad, I think my opinion weighs pretty heavily in all of this.”

Suggestions?” Wash asked. “Like who?”

Tucker smirked. “When’s the last time you asked Tex for a favor?”

Washington immediately regretted everything.
WHOO I kept on schedule and posted on Monday! Just like I wanted! WHOO. Anyway, this was a SUPREMELY fun chapter to write and I hope that transfers over to your guys’ enjoyment <3 Because it’s time for some shenanigans in this supposed comedy of errors.

Special thanks to @analiarvb, @secretlystephaniebrown, @freshzombiewriter, @washingtonstub, @icefrozenover, @ashleystlawrence, @fuckyeahroosterteethproductions, @thepheonixqueen, @cobaltqueen, @justsmilesome, Yin, @notatroll7, @a-taller-tale, @orestes-swimming, and orangecookiekay on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

Tucker sat back against the hood of his car, right by a dent that would have probably been enough to make a regular car owner take the vehicle immediately to the shop. Of course, it was the least distracting part of the vehicle in Wash’s assessment so Tucker, of course, did nothing to signify embarrassment.

No, he simply leaned back with his arms folded and a significant pout on his face for completely unrelated reasons to the moment at hand.

“I look so dumb,” Tucker groaned.

Washington was wearing spandex and kevlar that fit his every curve so he found little pity within himself to offer Tucker for having to wear sunglasses and a hoodie. “You’re fine.”

Tucker lowered his glasses enough to raise a brow and smirk slightly. “What kind of fine?”

“No,” Washington warned, holding up his hand. “The teenagers will be here soon and I don’t think all of them are aware of my identity. Which is why you’re dressed like that. And why I’m dressed like this.”

“Like a tool?” Tucker asked.

“What is up with you lately?” Washington finally asked, turning enough to leer at Tucker. “You’re just so… aggressive.”

“By who’s standards?” Tucker replied snappishly.

“You just did it again,” Washington said pointing at him. “And now you’re about to change the subject—”

“Did you call Tex like I asked?” Tucker changed subjects, expectedly.

“Goddammit, Tucker,” Wash groaned before rubbing his face. “Yes. Yes, I called Tex to ask her and she spent about ten minutes laughing at me before hanging up. So her not being here has nothing to do with me not coming up on my end.”
“Bow chicka bow wow.”

Letting out a sharp breath, Washington turned toward Tucker and put his hands on his hips. “That has to be the most passive aggressive innuendo I’ve heard in my life,” he announced.

“Heard a lot of them?” Tucker asked, tilting his head.

“Mostly from you,” Wash admitted, looking to his wrist for the time. “Everyone should be arriving soon. You know, you don’t have to be here. I’ll keep Junior by my side. You being here is kind of like… I don’t know. Parents who stay and watch basketball practice.”

Tucker, if possible, got tenser. “Right. Because I’m just an overprotective, single parent.”

Wash looked at Tucker, sensing that barely suppressed upset again. “I didn’t mean it that way—”

“What way?” Tucker asked sharply. “I swear to fucking god, you are so dense. You don’t even know what I’m upset about.”

“No, I don’t, so why don’t you tell me later after we get through here?” Wash offered in what he hoped wasn’t a dismissive tone, though he had his doubts given Tucker’s continuing, building upset. “Tucker—”

“Don’t give my name out in public or anything,” Tucker said, throwing his wrist fully into a dismissive hand wave. “I mean, fuck, hate to have anyone know you’re together with someone when they already seem to know about every other aspect of your life.”

Opening his mouth, Washington tried desperately, and failed, to find an adequate response. But even if he had had more than a few seconds he probably would not have been able to think of anything.

Even so, the moment was thankfully upended by the loud THUD of Junior leaping onto the top of the car and throwing up his arms in an excited honk.

He was wearing his usual playtime ‘superhero suit’ – blanket cape, rubber rain boots, and all. Wash didn’t miss how it was a Texas merch shirt rather than a Washington one.

It was very difficult to not take it immediately into offense.

When neither Tucker nor Wash had responded appropriately toward Junior’s arrival, he clapped his jaws together in warning and glared at them both before performing a little jump and honking again.

Catching on immediately, both Tucker and Washington began clapping for the child’s arrival which led to excitable cooing from Junior.

“You look very heroic, Junior,” Wash commended him while Tucker lifted the little hybrid off the car and onto the street. “You’re going to make all the other heroes very jealous after I introduce you today.”

Tucker gave Wash a look. “Really? He’s wearing rubber boots.”

“Which are insulated from electrocution,” Washington said without pause.

Slowly, Tucker picked Junior back up and held onto him defensively. “What the hell are you planning on doing to the children, Wash?”
“What? Nothing! I didn’t mean it like–” Wash stopped himself and shook his head. “Nevermind. I was just being hyperbolic.”

“Is that a superhero term?” Tucker asked, holding onto Junior despite his son’s struggling to get free.

“No,” Wash said deadpanned just before there was the sound of multiple feet running in their direction. Wash turned and looked as the four teenagers from the courthouse made it to them breathlessly. “Good! You’ve come, and five minutes early. Not to mention you had the foresight to hide your identities by not bringing your personal vehicles with you and hiding them off sight. Very forward thinking.”

The four were catching their breaths.

“Actually,” the one who was scantily clad save for the outrageous cape all but gulped down with his air. “None of us have cars. So we had to catch a bus here. Didn’t even know buses run to this part of town.”

“Oh,” Wash said, rubbing at his neck. “Okay, I’ll be sure to clarify transport with the four of you for next time. But it does show initiative that you changed and hid your clothes in the area. That’s also smart. Did you change in one of the alleys or abandoned buildings?”

Again, a silence fell over the group awkwardly and Jensen rubbed at her arm. “Aw, geesh,” she slurred through her braces. “We kinda rode here in costume.”

Tucker began laughing behind him as Wash stared at the group in disbelief.

“On… the public bus?” Wash asked critically.

“Were we not supposed to do that, Washington, Sir?” the tallest one asked worriedly.

“I told you it was stupid,” the one in orange accents snapped at the group.

“I was just suggesting to be practical!” the scantily clad one cried out.

“Palomo, you just want to show off your tight bod!” Jensen seethed.

“Which is not built,” the yellow one snapped with a shake of his head.

“I’m built! I do cross fit!” Palomo defended.

“Okay, enough!” Washington ordered, getting everyone’s attention back on him. “I’m partially to blame for this, I didn’t go over the basics when we initially met with the mayors. I’m aiming to correct that mistake starting today. So let’s start with an introduction. My name is Washington. I am a senior hero, used to be with the superhero team known as the Freelancers–”

“I used to have all your comics!!!” Jensen exploded with excitement. “On the fan forums I used to multiship you with almost all the other Freelancers! My OTP was definitely you and Maine!”

Wash glanced toward her. “Which… of course is not disconcerting or creepy to me at all.” He then continued. “Before Freelancer I went through the sidekick program as Epsilon. And since Freelancer’s disbandment after the Invasion I have taken up residence here in Blood Gulch to become something of a nighttime vigilante.”

The group watched him in awe.
“Now, I’m going to teach the four of you what I know and, hopefully, help you to become the heroes this city needs,” Wash said further.

“But are they the ones it deserves?” Tucker all but sniggered in the background.

Wash gave him a look before seeing the way Junior was hiding behind his father’s legs, only peaking out to look at the new heroes with caution from time to time.

“Which reminds me,” Wash said, turning to the group. “Introductions are in order. I need names and I need the kind of powers we’re dealing with.”

“Sir, yessir!” the tall one in blue said with a salute. “My name is John Elizabeth Andersmith!” He then flexed, each part of his body that showed skin suddenly morphed before their eyes to a shiny, metallic color. “I can turn my skin into an organic metal.”

“That’s astounding,” Wash said, blinking. He then thought harder about it and tilted his head. “What do you mean by organic metal?”

“Sir?” Andersmith asked back curiously.

“Organic elements and metallic ones aren’t… usually the same,” Wash tried to explain. “So when you say organic metal do you mean like a metal that’s in your body components naturally? Like copper or iron or zinc? Or…”

“I’m… not sure,” Andersmith said. “Isn’t all metal the same?”

“They have different strengths, different melting points,” Wash continued before shaking his head. “You know what? It’s really something we can figure out later. And we will figure it out later. I need to know if you can walk through lava or not without melting.”

“Lava?” the kids repeated in alarm.

“Again, Wash, I ask just what the hell you’re doing in these training sessions,” Tucker called from beside him.

Giving his boyfriend an expectant stare, Wash expected for Tucker to back off but he merely crossed his arms and looked expectantly back. Sighing and giving in, Wash looked back to the teenagers.

Katie Jensen, the secretary Wash remembered readily, stepped forward. She was so excited she was verging on hyperventilating.

“Are you alright?” Wash asked.


Washington rubbed his shoulder. “Right. Let’s just… not discuss that part.”

“Oh! Yeah. Okay. That makes sense,” she said, voice getting more slurred and blubbery as her cheeks lit up. “Stupid, Jensen, stupid. Get it together, girl.”

“Taking sympathy on the young woman, Wash tried to edge her in the right direction. “You were
telling us that you’re magnetic. You mind expanding on that a bit?”

“Of course!” she half-shouted, throwing up her arms in excitement. Sure enough, as she did so, an explosive burst came out from her – moving Tucker’s car back onto the curb, knocking most of her teammates over, and causing the knives at Wash’s utility belt to be thrown backward.

Fortunately, Wash moved fast, flipping back and grabbing each of the throwing knives before they hit Tucker’s car, or, more importantly, Tucker and Junior.

“Holy shit! My car!” Tucker bemoaned.

Curious, Wash glanced toward the vehicle. It literally looked no different than it had beforehand, but that didn’t mean anything.

“Right, magnetism,” Wash finally said, looking back to Jensen. “Thank you for the display.”

Jensen, however, was not as excited and was sitting, hugging her knees and berating herself under her breath.

“Guess that means I’m next!” the scantily clad one said, stepping out ahead of everyone.

Wash pressed his lips to a thin line. “Oh, good,” he said at least seventy-five percent sarcastic.

Fortunately, it went right over the enthusiastic teenager’s head as he stretched and flexed and then grabbed onto the edges of his cape for dramatic effect as he swung his hips.

“Please turn invisible,” Wash said to himself, forcing himself to not look away.

“My name is Charles Palomo,” he announced with a swish of his hips.

“Oh gawd,” Tucker said, aghast.

“And my massively impressive, incredibly sexy power is…” He released his cape and waved his hands in front of him, skin shining and sparks igniting from his fingertips. “I… sparkle!”

Blinking a few times, Washington tried desperately to process the moment. Then he turned his head almost on its side. “You… sparkle?” he clarified.

“I sparkle!” Palomo replied enthusiastically.

“Oh my gawd,” the remaining teenager groaned.

“Right. Okay,” Washington said, not even sure what to do with the information.

“Hey, I don’t know about being a superhero, but I can direct him to the nearest strip club. They’d love to give the fog machine a rest while maintaining their kitsch aesthetic,” Tucker laughed.

“You know, that’s not the most helpful input you could be giving me right now,” Washington told him.

“Who said I was here to be helpful? I relish in being a civilian compared to all you assholes in tights,” Tucker laughed. “I mean, you ever saw Church’s full getup?”

“No, and I can’t even imagine it,” Wash said with a wave of his hand. “Okay we only have one more – what’s your name?”

The last stood his ground and gave a halfhearted shrug. “I’m Bitters. I do stuff with fire. I don’t
feel the need to show off.”

Wash frowned. “This isn’t a show and tell, this is your first training session. It would help us all
tremendously if we all knew what we were working with, Bitters.”

“Yeah, I don’t feel like it,” Bitters replied.

Wash pinched his nose and took a heralding breath. “It’s fine, it’s fine, we’ll work with this,” he
muttered to himself before clapping his hands together. “Okay! Well, we have a good variety of
meta powers here. And hopefully through training we’ll be able to learn how to work off of one
another’s powers and strengths. It’s going to take a lot of training and evaluation.” He glanced
toward Palomo again and then to the others. “And training. And more training. I cannot emphasize
enough that we’re going to need a hell of a lot of training. But fortunately the variety here is—”

Without warning, there was a loud “HONK!” from behind Washington which caused him to turn
on his heels to face the familiar sound.

“What the hell is that?” Bitters asked.

Tucker grabbed his hair in horror, words trying to escape his throat and failing to come out as more
than strangled noise.

But Wash, Wash just found himself filled with a strange pride and genuinely being impressed.

Junior stood underneath the family car, lifting it over his tiny head before he threw it a bit forward
with a BLARGH and getting it off the curb after Jensen’s little explosion.

“That,” Washington answered as Tucker raced over to Junior’s side and checked him out, “is your
new teammate and my current trainee – the Extraterrestrial Kid.”

Tucker shot Washington a dirty look but the rest of the superheroes all clapped and nodded happily
in agreement with the choice of teammate.

“We’ll work on codenames for all of you eventually,” Wash said, turning back toward the
teenagers. “But until then, we work on your teamwork, your perserverance, and your general
aptitude for the job ahead of you. I’m not going to be going easy on any of you, because the villains
and monsters you’ll run into on a daily basis as superheroes have no interest in going easy on you.
And my job is to make sure you all stay alive and well despite that.”

The teenagers immediately looked like they almost regretted the opportunity that had been offered
to the.

Wash rubbed his neck. “Uh… then we’ll go to a nearby diner I really love and get milkshakes.”

“Yes!”

“Alright!”

“Fuck yeah!”

“At least we’re getting something out of this.”

Breathing with relief at the show of approval, Wash then watched as Junior fought to get away
from Tucker’s overly concerned nursing and protectiveness and took off to go stand by his new
teammates, not at all deterred by either the quality of his costume, his height or lack thereof, or the
fact that he, of course, was non-human.

It accented for Wash what a ragtag group he had before him.
This was going to be a challenge.

Jensen raised her hand patiently like she was in a lecture hall.

“Um, Washington, Sir?” she asked timidly. “Not that we’re not super excited and that anyone would doubt a veteran of so many cool things like you… but why are we in the worst part of the city for this training instead of the training room the mayors have built for us?”

Tucker puffed out his bottom lip. “Worst part of town? Seriously?”

“You’re here because no matter what skills you were born with, or what rules you’re told on the first day, nothing is going to show you just where your powers and skill levels are at or give you a clue as to how to work together as a team like a real-life trial,” Washington explained. “Which is why I called in a favor from some friends.”

The kids looked perplexed just before an echo of polka music could be heard echoing around the street corner.

Washington looked back down to his wrist and then to Tucker. “Right on time.”

“How’d you manage that?” Tucker asked. “That’s almost more impressive than the fact you kept a straight face through most of that bullcrap you were talking to these kids. The Reds haven’t been right on time for anything in their entire lives. Combined.”

Wash shrugged and gave a small smirk Tucker’s way. “I gave them the same time as the kids to be here and then just assumed it’d be about fifteen to twenty minutes later.”

“Smart,” Tucker replied, unable to stop the small smirk he had in response.

Without any further ado, the Reds pulled up their jeep right beside Tucker’s car and revealed to be in full costume, looking curiously at the kids.

“Whoo!” Donut said, giving a thumbs up to Palomo. “Nice sparkles!”

“Thanks!” Palomo responded.

“What’d you want us here for, Wash? Is there some kinda freak costume parade in Blood Gulch no one warned us about?” Grif asked dully.

“I want you guys here to… have some fun,” Wash explained cryptically before turning back to the teenagers and Junior. “Everyone, this is the Red Dead Blood Gulch Gang. They’re a group of vandals and anarchists that are on the mend.”

“Yeah, unwillingly,” Grif countered.

“They like to paint stoplights, steal gasoline from gas stations that are overcharging, and break windows of buildings to make a point,” Wash continued.

“We do?” Simmons asked.

“Is that why we brought all these paint cans?” Donut asked.

“They also like to run over superheroes that try to stop them,” Wash said with a slight glare their way which was enough to silence the majority of the Reds and make Sarge chuckle deviously. “So I suppose you could call them armed and dangerous.”
Grif tapped his fingers against the steering wheel. “Dude, what the actual fuck. I thought you were rehabilitating us and all that shit?”

“Oh, I am,” Wash assured them. “And there’s nothing better to teach you a lesson about the downsides of rampant crime than to be hounded by a bunch of super powered teenagers.”

“You’re going to let them chase us around Blood Gulch!?” Simmons cried out.

“You are!?” the kids said excitedly.

“Yes,” Wash answered. “And I want you, Reds, to show these kids what the price of their inactions, failures, or mistakes in the field are by vandalizing any uninhabited property between here and the junkyard,” Wash explained. “All of which they have to clean up if they lose you, and you have to clean up if they catch you.”

The Reds stared at him before leaning in toward each other and loudly whispering between each other. Then they sat back up.

“Challenge accepted, dirtbag!” Sarge announced. “By the way, hate your new costume. Blue and yellow is disgusting!”

Without any further warning, Grif stomped down on the gas pedal and took off down the street to the whooping scream of an excited Donut.

“Wait!” Jensen cried out. “How’re we supposed to catch them?” she asked.

Wash leaned back and shrugged. “I don’t know. That’s what you’re going to show me. I’d hurry if I were you, though. I can guarantee their first crimes are going to be ignoring stoplights and stop signs.”

The kids all looked at each other and then took off with a scream.

Just as Wash had worried they would, they immediately split up without any game plan. “Well,” he sighed as Tucker walked up to his side. “This is going to take a long time.”

“The fact that you’re a bad coach might be at least partially to blame for that, Wash,” Tucker replied with a raised brow. “You’ve not given them any instruction! Any ideas!”

“I know,” Wash said. “Today isn’t about that. Today is about showing them everything they don’t know. Break them in. Make that over confidence they have from having super powers disappear.”

Tucker stared at him. “That’s fucked up.”

“That’s what my mentor did to me,” Wash said with a shrug. “She was the best influence I ever had.”

“Aw, now that just hurts my feelings, Wash,” Tex’s voice called from behind them.

Surprised, both Wash and Tucker turned and were faced with Tex as she casually reappeared from her invisibility.

"Tex!” Tucker said enthusiastically before they fist bumped each other.

“Nice, Wash,” she said, eyes flicking up to him. “You got started without me, asshole.”

“You laughed at me on the phone, you said no,” Washington reminded her.
“I laughed, that wasn’t a no,” she shrugged.

“Well, I’ll introduce you after this practice run ends,” Wash said, looking back toward the streets the teams had ran down, hearing some screeching and yells as well as a light show of sparks in the air. “It… might end quicker than expected. One way or the other.”

“Yeah, no thanks,” Tex said with a wave of her hand. “I don’t… do the kid thing. Or the responsibility thing, or the revealing I’m alive to most people thing. It’s for the best that way. Keeping to the shadows.”

Wash pointed at his chest. “That’s what I wanted to do—”

“But now the government knows everything about you. Congrats,” Tex reminded him. “Which is another reason I’m late,” she said, glancing toward the rooftops. “Tell me, Wash, how long have you been tailed by someone?”

Confused, Washington crossed his arms. “Tailed? I’ve not been tailed. I would have noticed—”

“You are tailed,” she said. “Guy was here even before I was, watching you all. Didn’t get a great look at him and he noticed me and took off before I could get closer and take them out. Somehow they noticed me with my invisibility.”

“That’s… not great,” Tucker lamp shaded.

“What did they want?” Wash demanded, more than a little worried.

“I didn’t catch them, Wash,” she reminded him. “But they were very interested in your little pow wow here. And if I had to take a guess… they’re going to continue to be.”

She began to disappear again at the second sound of an explosion a few blocks over. “Watch out for yourselves, guys. I’m not always going to pop up and save your asses at the last minute.”

Washington watched her disappear before rolling his eyes nearly back into his skull. “Most unhelpful partner ever. Of all time.”

“Wash, this sounds pretty serious,” Tucker said worriedly.

“Almost as serious as your crankiness factor lately,” Wash said, glancing toward him. “You ready to talk about that while we—”

There was a huge crashing noise and Wash sighed.


Wash raised a brow at him before doing as instructed.

It was something they could talk about later, obviously.
There was a part of Washington that was disappointed when he came through the window at four that morning and, rather than finding Tucker awake waiting for him, was instead met with the awkward silence of his partner soundly sleeping.

Even if it had become more and more often that these were the way things were, and even though Wash easily rationalized it by remembering Tucker worked still, after all, he felt a certain pang about it.

Which was nothing compared to the headache he got when the blinds were pulled open and the bedroom light came on only three hours later.

“Agh!” Wash groaned, covering his face with his hands.

“Sorry to interrupt the catnap,” Tucker said sarcastically.

“Most people call it regular sleep but alright,” Wash said, rubbing at his face crankily. “Seriously, though, Tucker, what the hell…?”

“We need to talk,” Tucker announced, sitting on the edge of the bed. He was fully dressed in his work uniform, arms crossed in the sort of aggravated way that reminded Wash of a school teacher for some reason.

“Right now?” Wash asked critically. “I just went to bed,” he double checked the clock to make sure he wasn’t pulling the number out of thin air, “three hours ago.”

“Uh huh,” Tucker replied testily. “I guess that’s only a problem when our moments cut into my sleep schedule and not yours, right? I mean, shit, you save the world and help little ol’ ladies cross the street. I’m just a fucking fry cook. What’s my time worth?”

Finally pushing into a sitting position, Wash took a sharp inhale of air and looked tiredly at Tucker. “That’s not what I’m saying. I’m just saying that… this seems sudden. And I don’t know if talking while angry is a wise choice.”

“Good thing we’re arguing and not talking then,” Tucker snapped.

“We’re arguing?”

“Oh my god, you are so fucking obtuse,” Tucker actually laughed – but it wasn’t the warm cackle
that Wash knew and had grown to feel warmth spread through him at. It was sharp and scathing. Like Tucker’s current tone. “We’ve been arguing for weeks.”

“Weeks?” Wash questioned. “What? Is this going back to the car thing? Do I need to apologize for not being in on your inside joke with your friends?”

Tucker stared at him like he had just spoken in another language for a few minutes. “Oh my god, so fucking obtuse.”

Rubbing at his face, Wash sighed. “Okay, I’ll need you to walk me through this—”

“I don’t want you in on our inside jokes, idiot, I want you to have inside moments with us! And not bail on us by literally rather throwing yourself out of a moving car than have to spend some of your precious free time in our company,” Tucker replied angrily.

Genuinely confused, Wash sat up further. “You’re mad because you want me to be friends with your friends? Even if there’s nothing that we all have in common?”

“No! Wash, dammit!” Tucker groaned grabbing at his hair. “Don’t you get it? I want us to spend time together! Like actually together!”

“We do,” Wash said firmly.

“Not enough that you think of me and Junior as being, I don’t know…” Tucker shook his head harshly. “You… You don’t think of Junior as anything but my kid.”

“Of course he’s your kid,” Wash replied.

“He worships you, dude!” Tucker cried out. “Do you know how much time he spends every night telling me how awesome you are and how excited he is every time there’s a new training exercise or compliment thrown his way. And god, you put him on that superhero team. He’s on cloud nine!”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, Wash tried very hard to keep up with the source of the complaint. “Wait, what’s wrong with all of those things?”

“I’m trying to tell you to think of us as your family, asshole!” Tucker snapped.

“You think I don’t?” Wash asked skeptically.

“I don’t think outside of superhero business, you’ve spent much time with us as anything else. And we fucking live with you, dude,” Tucker pointed out. “And you know why? It’s because you have tried nothing outside of being a superhero. You have, like, no separation between being a superhero and being here with us. Or on the street. Or in the goddamn mayor’s office because your superhero name is just your last name for some godforsaken reason.”

Frowning a bit, Wash held up a finger. “To be fair, I was assigned that name in Freelancer. I never found out if it was coincidence or a terrible joke.”

“This argument’s a joke,” Tucker said, throwing up his hands.

“You’re the one who started it,” Wash attempted to argue only to have Tucker waggle a finger at him.

“Don’t try to be cute or sarcastic, my point still stands!”

Growing exhausted of the exchange, Wash held up his hands. “What point? What do you want
from me, Tucker? I do think of you all as my family. I just. I don’t know how to… civilian anymore. It’s been a very long time since it was relevant to my interests.”

“Is it relevant now?” Tucker asked. “Are we relevant to your interests?”

“Yes,” Wash said without hesitation. “But I still don’t know what you want from me, Tucker.”

“You’re asking for me to literally spell this out for you,” Tucker remarked dully.

“Yes. Yes, I am,” Wash replied more snappishly than he would have liked, but his frustration was only growing.

“I don’t know,” Tucker said, folding his arms across his chest again.

“Oh, don’t make me beg, I’m trying to meet you on your own terms here,” Wash half begged.”

Tucker looked at him almost apologetically. “No, I mean, I don’t actually know.”

Washington stared at him for a good long moment before letting his temper actually flare up.

“What do you mean you don’t actually know? What does that mean? You’re the one who is mad at me! Not the other way around here!”

“I know!” Tucker yelled back.

“Obviously, you don’t!” Wash squeaked out before rubbing his face. “Oh my god, we are literally fighting over nothing and I’m tired—”

“It’s not all about you! That’s what we’re fighting about!” Tucker yelled back. “No fight in the history of ever has been about nothing Wash! You wanna know what we’re fighting over? It’s that you still can’t get out of the mentality that it’s just you!”

“That’s not true,” Wash scoffed. “I’m very concerned about you and about Junior – I love spending time with Junior, working with him, drawing with him.”

“All of those things you just described doing with my son? They’re all superhero related,” Tucker replied coarsely. “You connect to us on a purely superheroic level, and I want – I need to know that you’re not going to get tired of us if there’s no threat of us becoming dudesels in distress anymore. That if you’re not being a superhero, you’re going to be our Wash. Because if not… That’s not a relationship, Wash.”

“What’re you saying?” Wash asked, voice growing quiet and timid despite himself. “Tucker, what’re you saying here?”

“I’m saying you’re more than a hero to us, Wash,” Tucker replied tiredly. “It’d be nice to know and feel like that wasn’t all we were to you.”

That was something that Wash could understand.

“What do I need to do to make sure you know that then?” Wash asked. “Because I promise you that you’re so much more to me than just that. Absolutely, completely. And I will prove it.”

For the first time that day, Tucker cracked a smile. “Oh, yeah? Just like that?”

“Yes, just like that,” Wash replied. “What do you need me to do in order to prove just how much I mean it?”
Tucker gave him an appraising look, as if he could somehow inspect Wash’s face and assess his truthfulness.

At the moment, Wash wasn’t entirely sure he couldn’t do just that.

Finally, though, he smirked and pointed at Wash. “You are going to get yourself and Junior over to the diner when I get off shift at three this afternoon and we’re going to prove this is a family kinda thing by having linner.”

After a moment of passing silence, Wash tilted his head.

“I’m sorry, what?” he asked worriedly. “I… Is that something I should be familiar with?”

Tucker rolled his eyes so far that his head followed them. “Oh, my god, Wash. You’ve never heard of linner?”

Squinting, Wash worried that he was missing something genuinely important. “No?”


“What? Like brunch?” Wash tried to clarify.

“Yeah, duh. Breakfast-lunch and lunch-dinner, and if you’re super dedicated to the three meals per day you’ve got that dinfast–”

“You are literally making things up right in front of my face right now,” Wash surmised. “Linner is not a thing.”

“It absolutely is a thing, ask anyone who has worked in dining services! What do you eat after you get off the lunch rush shift? Linner. Duh. Trust me on this, mister-didn’t-even-know-you-could-put-hot-sauce-in-eggs.”

“Which is still weird,” Washington clarified.

“No, it’s not, it’s delicious,” Tucker said, voice eased back into that comfortable banter that had Washington believing that they were perhaps finally over whatever hill they had been on just a few moments earlier. “We’ll have linner at the diner and then I’ll be happy with the progress.”

“Progress being…” Wash pressed.

“You being human as much as you’re superhuman, Wash,” Tucker pushed. “C’mon. You’ve gotta know that what we were doing before now… it’s been very one-sided.”

“You want me to get some kind of job and hide what I’m doing all the time?” Wash tried to catch up. “I already wear sunglasses–”

“I just want you to have a life, Wash, jesus christ, calm down,” Tucker said, beginning to edge back into irritability.

“Says the man who’s been yelling at me for about two weeks,” Wash replied flatly. When Tucker didn’t let up, he gave a defeated sigh and leaned back into the pillows behind him. He was way too tired. “Linner will start me on the path toward humanity in your eyes again?”

“Linner will start you on the path to behaving like a proper person in general, yes,” Tucker said, sounding pleased. “I’d have offered brunch, but I suspect you’re about to sleep in until about one.”
“Just one?” Wash mused, eyes already sliding closed.

“Yes, just one, because that’s when I told Junior to make sure you started getting ready for dinner. So you’re not getting out of this any time fast, Wash. You’re stuck with your promises while you’re with me,” Tucker chuckled.

“Mmph,” Wash responded, which might have at one point almost formed something similar to a sentence prior to his head hitting the pillows.

Practically drained of any emotional and physical energy, Wash wasn’t sure if he would have made it through another argument even Tucker had continued trying. But even in the haze of approaching sleep, he noted the shifting of the mattress as Tucker got up and of the brush of a hand through his hair.

“Alright, you big dummy, sleep or something already. We’ll work on your human exercises later,” Tucker promised.

Before the bedroom door was bothered, Wash was out again, but a weight he hadn’t even realized was there was all but gone. He truly felt as though he could breathe again. And he was more than ready to have a frankly restful sleep.

At least, he was until the door came flying open what felt like only seconds later and slammed against the door.

Alarmed, Wash leaped to his feet on the bed and looked toward the door.

“Wash!” Tucker yelled.

“What?!! What?!!” Washington demanded, feeling dizzy with confusion – had the conversation just finished? Was he dreaming? What happened? Tucker was wearing the same outfit from before and–

“On the news!” Tucker said, rushing over and grabbing Wash’s wrist before yanking him toward the television room. “There’s some asshole on the news!”

“What?” Wash asked, dreariness setting in again. “There’s always an asshole on the news? What’s special–”

Washington came to a stop, sobering up from his sleepiness as soon as his eyes landed on the news report flashing across the screen. It was the courthouse in the middle of the city, and it was literally burning, a dark figure stand on top of it in black and green.

Alarmed and surprised, Wash leaned toward the screen and read the alerts at the bottom.

_Professed Supervillain Calls For Freelancer Superhero Washington_

Tucker was past hysteric. “Who the fuck is that?”

“Don’t know,” Wash said, going for his hidden closet for his fresh suit. “I’m going to find out, though.”

“You can’t be serious,” Tucker blanched. “But–”

“But nothing, this is part of the superhero job,” Wash replied, putting on his visor. “I take it _almost_ as seriously as dinner.” When he looked to Tucker he was disappointed to not find a smirk. “I’ll
“Yeah, that’s what I’m worried about now,” Tucker replied sourly. “Aren’t you exhausted? You’ve only slept, like, four hours!”

“Three, but who’s counting,” Wash said, heading for the downstairs exit where his motorcycle was waiting. “Don’t worry, I’ll take a cat nap after.”

“And then make it to linner,” Tucker pressed, less conviction in his voice than before.

“Absolutely,” Wash promised before getting on his bike and heading off.
Washington's Partner

Chapter Notes

I apologize for not having this out sooner, guys! It was meant to come out Monday but, well, life happens sometimes, as they say lol. Hopefully you’ll all find it in your hearts to forgive me and will enjoy this chapter no less for it <3 Thank you so much for the continued support!

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City traffic was enough to make any self-respecting superhero question their methods of transportation. With half the city still trying to get to work or on with their schedules in spite or maybe even because things were burning down at the center of the city, and the other half trying to go toward the destruction for a front seat view, Washington barely had a conventional route he could utilize to his advantage.

Fortunately being a superhero wearing spandex and kevlar did somewhat give license for more unconventional emergency maneuvers.

Like ducking between cars by riding up on the sidewalk, weaving in and out of the foot and vehicular traffic as needed on his mad dash toward the capital building.

Looking to his modified dash, Wash reached momentarily for the emergency line and automatically dialed one of the only two numbers which were programmed into the bike.

He wasn’t sure why he was surprised it took nearly ten rings for Tex to pick up. But his patience was nearly running as thin as his time.

“Are you seriously calling me at seven in the morning?” Tex demanded.

“Did you really take ten rings to answer an emergency line?” Wash questioned back. “Listen, it doesn’t matter what time it is. Tex, the capital is on fire and there’s some huge asshole calling me out by name on it. I think it may be a message.”

“Wow, you think?” Tex snorted.

“It might be related to the guy you said was watching our practice run the other day with the superkids—”

“Oh, god, don’t get that started as a thing. If a person in the press hears you say that out loud, it’s going to be their name forever. How demeaning—”

“Are you going to come and help me out with this or not?” Wash asked testily. “I’m already on my way. ETA two minutes. It’s too much of an emergency to not respond as quickly as possible, but if you get started now, I think I can keep the banter up at least long enough for you to get here—”
“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Tex laughed. “You think I’m coming to bail you out? What, for free? Why would I do that? I didn’t come to help my friends out – like my actual friends – for four years. What makes downtown so damn special?”

“What are you saying? You’re a hero!” Wash yelled at her.

“No, I’m a vigilante,” Tex snapped. “Specifically I’m a vigilante for Blood Gulch. The guy wants to burn down something around here, I’ll have his ass handed to him before he’ll know what hit him. But I’m not going out to the middle of the city and offer my services for some kinda.. I don’t know. It feels like they don’t even know Blood Gulch still exists or something. Assholes. Let ‘em burn.”

“You can’t be serious,” Wash balked.

Tex hesitated. “Do… you know me? At all?”

“You absolutely can be serious,” Wash corrected himself. “Jesus Christ.”

“Hey, no reason to bring him into this. Aren’t I judged enough?”

“You know what would probably help the city remember Blood Gulch more?” Wash demanded, looking toward the roads ahead as he continued his bob and weave. “If the people from Blood Gulch made themselves known, by helping the city at large.”

Tex hummed over the line. “Dunno. Sounds fake.”

“You’re not going to help me,” Wash clarified.

“I am not going to help you,” Tex replied shortly. “Sorry to disappoint you but, well, I’m not really that sorry to be honest. We are who we are, Wash.”

“And you’re supposed to be a hero,” Wash responded sourly.

“I’m a vigilante. I’m an artist in my own medium, I know who I am, don’t really feel like trying to fit someone else’s ideals of what that should entail anymore. Didn’t work out so great for me at Freelancer, after all,” she defended.

“That’s not how I remember it,” Wash said clearly.

“Oh?”

“I remember you being the best we’d ever seen. I remember you coming out of nowhere and taring up the ranks as we knew them,” he told her truthfully.

“Flattery will get you anywhere but me at your side during this stupidity run you’re doing for a bunch of bureaucrats who don’t give a damn about our town,” she informed him. “But good try. Just for that, I’ll actually stay up long enough to watch you kick this guy’s ass on the television. So try not to make it too boring or anything. I might nod off.”

“You’re useless,” Wash said, coming up on the fiery scene. “Have to go. Superhero business abounds.”

“Sure it does, hero,” Tex mocked before hanging up.

Burying the disappointment and worry he had that he was going to have to tackle this all on his own, Wash pulled up on the scene, surprising the uniformed police officers and emergency
workers who were gathered around.

“T’m Washington,” he told them, kicking down the stand for his bike and heading toward the line.

An officer stepped up, looking Wash over suspiciously. “How do we know you’re not a part of this junk?”

"He isn’t, Officer! He’s here on our behest!"

Washington and the officer both turned to look as Doyle and Kimball pushed their ways through the crowd and against each other. They struggled against each other to reach them first but once they were in front of the officer and Washington they separated and straightened out their suits.

“Mister Mayor,” the officer nodded, then hesitantly nodded toward Kimball. “And… Missus Mayor… Um. Have they finished the recounts or…?”

“That’s part of the problem!” Kimball cried out, throwing up her arms. “The physical ballots are in that building as we speak!”

“If the whole building burns down we’ll never know for sure who won the election!” Doyle cried out. “My word, we’ll have to hold another one! We’ll have to campaign all over again! How can either of us afford such a thing?”

Raising a brow, Wash crossed his arms. “I’m sure these are questions that could stand to be asked later, Mayors. Right now I’m more curious about just what this arsonist seems to want with me.”

Together, they all looked to the roof of the building where the black and green clad man continued to stand, seemingly unconcerned with the flames licking at the sky around him.

Wash couldn’t help but give the man props for dedication to the dramatics.

“It would seem that he is challenging you as an adversary, Washington,” Doyle marveled.

“Well, no shit, Donald,” Kimball snapped.

“If you could just contain your vile language, Vanessa,” Doyle countered.

“This isn’t helping anything,” Wash said, narrowly avoiding the urge to roll his eyes. “I’m going to face him.”

“Should we call in the team?” Kimball asked.

Caught off guard once more, Washington looked at Mayor-ish Kimball and Mayor-ish Doyle in confusion. “The team?” he repeated before the meaning truly hit him. “The team? No. Absolutely not. They’re children. They’ve trained all of three times and of those times they’ve been successful none.”

“You cannot be thinking of doing this alone,” Doyle tried to argue.

“There’s no thinking to do about it,” Wash replied, internally imagining the passive aggressive comebacks he could have in the ready for Tex when he got finished with everything there. “This is just a matter of doing my duty. Please stay with the police and help evacuate the surrounding block just in case they continue to have problems with the fire.”

While Doyle seemed obviously disturbed by the instructions, Kimball immediately turned on the officers and waved them off. “You heard the man, let him through! Let him handle this! He’s the
Washington scanned the area quickly, glancing from one end of the town hall to the other. There were multiple buildings in the immediate surrounding area and the building to the right had a fourth floor with a window facing the top of the flaming government building.

When he looked back to the building itself, he locked gazes with the mysterious man on the top of the villain. A green X covered his face and his uniform was black, bulky. He was large and imposing.

And the moment he broke his gaze with Washington, he turned and calmly walked back into the flames of the building.

“I’m going to smell like smoke for dinner,” Wash muttered to himself before enacting his plan.

As quickly as he could, using the superhuman agility to his advantage, Wash leaped from the sidewalk to grasp onto the ledge of the second floor window. He flipped the rest of the way up and with a more calculated jump, made his way to the third story window, but then utilized the momentum to turn himself up toward the fourth floor where he kicked off the seal to land onto the town hall ledge where his adversary had been standing.

The heat was intense and the smoke thick, but Wash could see the clearing where the responsible party had walked into.

He knew a trap when he saw one, but Washington had to keep moving forward.

There were ways to turn a trap on its head, to make a disadvantage an advantage. He just had to keep on his toes.

And, well, that was at least one thing that cats were fairly good at.

That and getting hit by cars.

"You came, Washington," a deep voice echoed through the building, making it difficult to isolate and determine the direction of in the crackling fire. “I knew you would. You are, after all, a professional above all else.”

“I’d say there were other reasons for coming.” Wash replied, looking around warily. “Like fire damage. Having nothing else going on. The fact that some asshole called out for me on the news.”

“And still you came into a certain trap.”

Wash scowled. “Well, have to say, you didn’t give many options when you light a government building on fire. You really know how to set a scene, I have to say.”

“That would be because I am a professional as well…”

Confused, Wash heard a large crack behind him and spun on his heels to face the approaching villain. But by the time he had turned around with a throwing knife at the ready, he saw a glowing spark set on the floor. “What the–”

He only yelled a the spark blew him back with an explosive force he was entirely unprepared for.

There was no time to think, only instinct saved him as he flipped to his feet and managed to stick the landing, scrambling to hold as many of his throwing knives at the ready as he possibly could.
Walking through the flames, the villain made his presence known again. “You are facing an equal, Washington,” he declared. “I am Locus. I, too, was born with abilities beyond that of a normal human. Born with gifts from a god who believes that it is time for the human race to take the next evolutionary step forward. The next revolutionary step forward for us all.”

“Oh, great,” Wash hissed between his gritted teeth. “You’re one of those.”

“I am,” Locus replied. “And I am interested in a proposal for you – for all of our superior kind.”

“No thanks,” Wash replied. “I like to keep my lunacy on a less cryptically genocidal-leaning path. Like converting a bunch of clown anarchist vandals into presentable citizens kind of lunacy.”

“You mock me,” Locus stated flatly. “Perhaps you still don’t understand what it is I offer. Or… perhaps you do.”

Squinting, Wash tilted his head. “What does that even mean?” he asked.

“I suppose there is time to still learn,” Locus replied. “I admire Freelancer. What its potential had been. I wonder sometimes if I may have ever been one of you. It’s a question I ask myself often enough. Perhaps I shall see if I deserved the spot by taking on you.”

“Hero worshiping biggotry,” Wash replied dully. “Figures that the only impact Freelancer had on the world at large was negative. Great.”

Locus shook his head once. “No. Not negative. Far from negative. The impact Freelancer shall have on this city, on the world, will be… rejuvenating of the entire species.”

“Sure,” Washington said getting into position for a fight. “If you mean that its impact was training me to stop you from doing something ridiculous and demented then I’d have to agree with you.”

“It will be an honor to kill the last Freelancer,” Locus replied before flicking his fingers, another spark generating from the motion and flying toward Washington.

Having learned from the previous time, Wash swiftly moved past the trajectory of the upcoming explosion and moved in for a close attack. He swiped up with his readied blades only for Locus to expertly dodge them.

Wash swiped again with the opposing arm, but each swing was a miss with Locus easily stepping back from each as if Washington was a young sidekick again, unable to stick a hit against his mentor.

“Damn it,” he hissed under his breath.

Not wasting any more of the space they had that wasn’t diminished to the ongoing fire, Washington pivoted forward again with a jab, except instead of landing on Locus’ shoulder, the man caught his wrist between his two hands. The move was so swift and the strength so off the charts, Locus’ palms nearly touched despite Wash’s wrist being between them.

Letting out a yell, Wash threw his head back. “Two powers!?” he cried out in shock.

“I am far more than my appearance would suggest, Washington,” Locus said lowly. “Just as I suspect you are.” He threw Wash back out onto the balcony, out of the fire and smoke but back into the public’s eye. “Which is why you must either join my cause today… or you must be stopped.
“Heh,” Wash choked out, rolling onto his knees, keeping his crushed arm close to his chest as he used the other to waveringly get to his feet. “You don’t know much about me if you think I can be stopped just by… a few flesh wounds.”

“Believe me, Washington,” Locus said lowly. “I know far more about you than you could ever dream.”

Washington raised a brow at the statement, but he didn’t bother questioning it. He was in such intense pain from his wrist he barely could keep his focus. But he had to. He knew the moment he didn’t give Locus his full attention, the man was going to truly blast him.

And Wash was ready for it. At least, he was until he heard a familiar noise.

A triumphant HONK came from inside the building on fire behind them.

Shocked, Washington turned his head immediately toward the noise, his heart nearly stopping. “Junior!?” he called out almost hysterical.

No matter how quickly Washington turned to look in the direction of the call, however, he found himself staring only at the flames of the building behind them. There was no Junior there.

“What?” he asked out loud. “But I heard… I don’t understand–”

“And that is why you will die,” Locus informed him just before Washington noticed the hiss of a spark landing at his feet.

“Shit–” Wash got out just before a blinding explosion. His ears rang and his body felt weightless for a moment. He couldn’t think straight, couldn’t move, only feel the momentary flicker of worry and hysteria – the mounting fear of leaving everything he had worked so hard toward behind – before noise, smell, sight – sensation all came colliding into him at once as his body hit the pavement and he rolled with the momentum – everything stinging and burning.

There were screams and gasps all around him, only disorienting Washington further.

He landed on his back, looking up at the skies in confusion and distress.

“I’m going to miss dinner,” he realized out loud just before he could hear the crunch of heavy footsteps coming toward him.

“Still alive, Washington? Good. I’m glad. A quick defeat was not what I had in mind.”

There was another hissing of sparks but just as Wash was expecting to see them make contact with him, something else dropped into his vision.

“You!” Locus growled as a blue glow covered Wash and the new arrival from the explosion.

“Looks like I came just in time,” a smug voice said in response.

Wash attempted to roll over, get a look at the situation, assess how much danger he was still in. But upon doing so, everything went black. And, just a little bit, orange.
I’m so sorry to everyone for the exceptionally long wait! I had finals and surgical assessment last week and was traveling a lot at the beginning of this week. But! Better late than never! We have this chapter primed and ready for you all ; )

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For reasons that probably spoke a lot to his general psyche, Washington opened his eyes half expecting to see the inside of a dumpster. And it was only a little disconcerting that he found himself a little disappointed when that was not the case.

Still, he felt like he had hit the broadside of someone’s getaway vehicle. And that wasn’t a feeling that was going to get old any time soon.

“Oh, goodness! It looks as though you’ve finally decided to join the world of the waking!”

The voice was unfamiliar, but so loud and so incapable of being ignored that Washington found himself turning to face it all the same. When he did, he was met by a dark woman with graying hair and a white surgical mask on with purple trimming.

Medical getup was less disconcerting.

“What’s going on? Where am I?” Washington began with a low panic just before trying to raise into a sitting position and finding his body very much protested every bit of it He hit the mattress of the stiff cot almost immediately. “Ow.”

“And that, dear Donald, is why I make a point of not healing everything at once when I receive class S patients! They always think they’re ready to get up and get rolling before they have even the slightest medical approval,” the doctor informed someone over her shoulder.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Washington tried to get his thoughts collected – the courthouse was on fire, Locus, explosions, super strength, Junior – but the more he thought, the less sense he could make. And worst of all, the more he realized that he didn’t have time to be laying in a cot in who-knew-where nor to play around with the mysterious doctor figure. He needed to save the city and the people and–

“I have to leave,” he announced before attempting to sit up again. Only that time, the mysterious doctor pushed down on his shoulders and forced him to lay back.

“My, you are persistent. And one track minded,” she said with a tone that belied some amusement with his struggle.
“There are people in danger,” Washington attempted to argue only for a finger to be pushed against his lips.

“Only one of those people are my patient, Mister Washington! And the danger he is in is of being sedated should he not take the time to breathe, to listen, and to accept the medical care being provided to him by our wonderful city tax payers at the moment,” she warned.

Wash squinted at her. “I don’t know you,” he said, as if that was supposed to be the only response necessary for ending the current nonsense.

“Yes, well, that would be expected when you haven’t given any of us time for an introduction,” she replied cheerfully. “My name is Doctor Emily Grey! I specialize in Class S patients, but of course I can also see any patient with normal anatomy and physiology. They’re just far less interesting.”

“She’s a friend, Washington,” Doyle spoke up, finally stepping out from behind the doctor. “A personal friend and an expert in her field. The moment I saw that you needed help after that brute Locus finished with you, I knew to call her up immediately.”

“Locus,” Wash spat out the name like it was poison. He pushed up again only for Doctor Grey to shove him back down. “Is everyone safe? The courthouse–”

“Burned down, I’m afraid,” Kimball said, revealing herself to be not too far behind Doyle. “Along with the physical copies of the ballots. We’re going to have to have a special election to decide this monstrosity of an election.”

There were few things less on Wash’s mind at that moment than the major dick waving contest that was this apparent election between Kimball and Doyle. But he should have figured one of the first things out of at least one of their mouths was going to be about it.

“Civilians?” he asked.

“I’m sure their voter turnout will be even lower than it was for the first election,” Doyle sighed.

“Were any hurt?” Wash asked more testily.

“Oh, gracious me, no, of course not,” Doyle said firmly. “Everyone stayed back, just as you advised!”

“But their wallets are going to be hurting,” Kimball said sourly. “All the infrastructure damage that will have to repaired? There’s no way we can risk lowering taxes in any bracket.” She then turned her hardened eyes on Washington. “Which is exactly why I wanted you to call on the team for backup! I knew that even if you could manage this on your own – which you couldn’t – it was going to be disastrous for the public property!”

“They weren’t ready,” Wash said pointedly. “We just started training and…” Remembering the training session, Wash felt his eyes widen and he began to push again only to be held down by Grey who was still examining him, flashing an opthalmoscope in his eyes. “Wait! What time is it? I have to leave! I have an appointment–”

"I am afraid that linner will have to wait,” the doctor announced.

Wash squinted at her and opened his mouth to respond only for a tongue depressor to be stuck to the back of his throat and causing him to gag. After getting over the initial shock, he gagged on the stick and forced Grey to withdraw it from her throat. “H-how do you know about linner? I thought it was something that Tucker made up--"
“Because your significant other has been hardly held back in the hallway and told us all about it,” Kimball replied.

“You seem to be rather… unused to the ins and outs of having a secret identity,” Doyle reprimanded.

“Says the people who found out my identity and sent me mail directly to my home,” Wash groused. “If Tucker’s here then I want to see him.”

“Done!” Tucker yelled just before kicking the door in, to the seeming shock of the young heroes who had been standing on both sides of it. Washington made a mental note to put in some new training exercises that involved building the group some backbones in the future.

“Tucker,” Wash said. “I’m sorry I missed–”

“Oh, shut up,” Tucker said, marching up to his bedside and letting Wash see for the first time that he was visibly shaken, pale, and red-eyed behind his glasses. “Just… Man, I don’t even want to hear it right now.”

“You that angry that I didn’t keep my promise?” Wash tried to joke.

“Shut up,” Tucker snorted, grabbing his hand. “I’m upset that you got your ass kicked on television and I had to watch it. C’mon. You can’t do that to me. You know Church and I have a running bet on your battles.”

“Yeah, so sorry to disappoint the betting pool,” Wash answered. “I’m okay, though. That… That Locus guy took me by surprise. I’m amazed he didn’t do more damage–”

Banter was good, banter was almost normal.

But when Washington watched Tucker’s face he didn’t see any amusement or acceptance of the levity. There was a strict seriousness in Tucker’s face instead, something that sat as unnaturally on his brow as a scowl.

Washington leaned back some. “What? What’s wrong–”

“You almost die on national television and you have to ask me what’s wrong, Wash?” Tucker asked stiffly. “Wow, I must be one cold motherfucker to you, huh?”

“That’s not what I mean,” Wash tried to argue just before there was another throat clearing to interrupt him.

Both Tucker and Wash turned to look at Doctor Grey again as she waved her hand and showed that brilliant white smile. “Hello again! It certainly sounds like there is a lot of talking that should be happening between the two of you! Communication is highly important for a relationship!”

“We know,” both Wash and Tucker said at once only to glance at each other again.

“But I do have a lot of patients to get to and I need to know if I have permission to do my special doctoral duty yet or not,” she said, eyes more locked on Tucker than on Wash.

Wash then looked curiously toward Tucker. “What’s she talking about–?”

“Oh, the healing thing, right,” Tucker said, snapping his fingers. “Yeah, Doc, lay it on him. We’ve still got a lot to do today!”
“Healing?” Washington parroted as the doctor neared him. “You mean there was a way to heal me and you were choosing not to?”

“Well, yeah, I know you,” Tucker replied, crossing his arms. “I nursed you to health before, remember? Injuries were about the only thing that was going to keep you planted in this bed long enough to hear a few people out.”

“That seems exploitative,” Wash grumbled as Doctor Grey laid literal hands on him.

“Oh, most certainly,” Doctor Grey said brightly. “But considering how jarring my power can be, sometimes it’s less helpful for me to heal you while you’re unconscious than to wait until your bones feel a bit more settled as they are!”

Washington shifted uncomfortably but allowed the woman to do her work.

“I’d do what the nice lady calls for, Grandpa. She’s a professional and what not. Especially for our kind.”

Alarmed, mostly because he hadn’t heard or seen anyone else enter the room, Wash sat up more and found himself looking toward the door of the room where a man in gray and orange was leaning against the door, a broad, sleazy smile across his face.

"Who the hell is this?” Washington demanded.

“Please, Mister Washington, lie down for the most effective use of my powers,” Doctor Grey said in the same happy tone, though it edged on warning.

“Well, is that any way to greet the man who just saved your life,” the man continued smoothly.

Tucker shrugged. “It’s true, Wash. Everyone saw it – Locus was coming for you again when Felix came out of nowhere and helped put a stop to him.”

A little calmer, Wash still looked at the Felix-character suspiciously. “You… You saved my life?” he asked warily.

“Sure thing,” Felix replied casually. “Though you shouldn’t be too surprised. Locus is somewhat out of your league, old man.”

“Old man?” Wash asked almost hysterically. “You’re can’t be that much older than me.”

“But I’m fresh and new in the public eye,” Felix said, tapping on his visor. “I’ve barely been in the public eye for an hour more,” Wash said critically.

“And healed!” Grey announced happily, clapping her hands together. She apparently had been paying no mind to the conversation.

Washington hated to admit it, but he felt more than a hundred percent better as he pushed himself up into a sitting position. He was able to get more of a look at Felix that way – see the sleek design of his suit, the high end equipment from head to toe, and the way he seemed to be genuinely fitted like a superhero that would have made the front poses of a Freelancer lineup.

It kind of made him hate the guy more.

But Wash was quickly yanked from his thoughts as Tucker grabbed his bicep tightly. “Hey, cool it, Wash,” Tucker said soothingly. “He saved your life, dude! The least you can say is a thank you! I’d
kick Junior’s ass for not saying thank you to the guy who saved him!”

Jarred by the statement, Wash looked at Tucker wide eyed. “Junior… Tucker, I think–”

“I think you’re needing to thank someone,” Tucker urged, tugging on the man’s arm.

Feeling like a little child being led through his manners, Wash let out a thick huff of air and then looked toward Felix. “Thank you,” he said uncomfortably. “Thank you for saving my life. I owe you.”

“You bet you do,” Felix grinned, “Partner. We’ll hash out the details with Vanessa later, until then I’ll leave you to sort things out with your… buddy here,” he joked with a wave of his hand as he headed out the door. “Stay sharp, Washington.”

Washington kept watching over Felix, bewildered and unnerved all at once, but he had little time to truly concentrate on it because Tucker was pulling an arm around his shoulders and giving him a half hug.

“Wow, you’re really healed! Even that nasty bump on your head! That’s amazing, Doc!” Tucker called out, sounding genuinely elated.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she laughed. “I’m always happy to help. Imagine my shock at how normal the majority of Washington’s physiology is compared to other heroes!”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Wash said to Grey, though his focus was still on the hall and Felix. “Guess there’s no end to the number of people I’m thankful toward lately.”

Tucker gave him a curious look but didn’t press it, at least not yet. Wash was sure there was more to discuss later.
Who’s ready for things to get SAPPY in here? I am. I’m totally read for some more sap. Which is why I wrote it. ;P

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When Wash *usually* opened the door and was met by Church’s unimpressed expression, he was a swath of emotions ranging from mutually annoyed to exhaustedly accepting.

On *that* rarest of nights, Wash was relieved and – more than even that – had been the one to call up the annoyed former super villain himself.

“I hate babysitting,” Church reported immediately, shoving past Washington without even bothering to shut the door behind him.

“I know,” Wash replied, taking the time to shut the door.

“Junior hates me babysitting even more,” Church continued, turning and giving a level glare toward Wash. “Like, I’m pretty sure that little demon is big enough now that if I was organic in any way he’d just eat me and be done with it.”

Wash let the rant run its course and began gathering the rest of his gear and putting on his visor. Junior murmured angrily and chewed on the edge of the couch in agitation as he watched get ready to leave him.

“Does Tucker know that you’re talking to me without him forcing you to?” Church asked testily, looking through the fridge for beer. “He might get jealous or something else disgusting.”

“Pretty sure he’d just consider it a breakthrough and annoy us both,” Wash replied dryly. He stopped by the couch where the supremely upset Junior leered at him. He offered an apologetic smile and then held out his fist for a bump.

With a small chatter, Junior complied, apparently willing to allow all transgressions to melt away so long as his hero worship could continue.

“I don’t get why you’re doing this,” Church said, leaning against the kitchen island with his beer. Like he *always* did despite his inability to drink with nothing but a robotic gullet. “I mean, I’d personally quit the hero business after getting my ass handed to me on national television by a single dude with a shitty costume.”

“Black’s intimidating,” Wash replied, looking toward Church with a raised brow. “I guess you’d have been more impressed if he was wearing a florescent wig and bought the rest of his gear from Hot Topic.”
Church had the gall to look offended and waved to his chest and the Ursula sweatshirt that Wash was just about sick of seeing. “This is official Disney merchandise!”

“Right,” Wash replied. “In any case, getting my ass kicked, as you say, is exactly why I’m going out tonight. I need to make some adjustments to my plans for the future. Need to restrategize—”

Letting out an annoyed groan Church held up his hands and shook his head. “And I made the mistake of making you think I actually cared. My mistake. Please get your dumb face out of here before I’m further annoyed. Too late. Now get out of here before I’m further annoyed. I’ll even say please. Since you cornballs love that bullshit.”

With a long sigh, Washington ignored Church and made his way instead over to the far more annoyed and far more curious Junior who was standing on the couch seat and leaned up against the back, trying to watch Wash more carefully.

“Sorry to be in such a rush, and for the unexpected babysitting, kiddo,” Wash said to the hybrid child. “I’ll be home before you know it, though.”

“Yeah, you’ve done a bang up job of keeping promises lately,” Church mocked.

Screwing his eyes shut, Washington let out a long grunt of aggravation. “Church.”

The robot crossed his arms and tilted his head. “Yeah? Church what?”

“Nevermind, just… watch Junior and try not to kill each other,” Wash said, heading for the stairwell. “Surely that won’t be too difficult for you to manage.”

“I’ll manage the shit out of it just to spite you,” Church snapped nonsensically.

Washington didn’t even bother responding to that notion, merely shaking his head as he headed up the stairs and got to the roof. He kept telling himself that arguing with his boyfriend’s best friend was really not the best use of his time.

On the roof, though, away from wandering eyes of the strange community he had built out of his once very quiet and lonesome apartment, Washington was able to regress to nearly pure muscle memory.

His motorcycle was maybe his favorite piece of equipment to use for obvious reasons, but his natural abilities and the training he had underwent through the sidekick program at Freelancer was truly most fulfilled by traveling across the rooftops of Blood Gulch.

Racing forward one step at a time, one leap at a time, Washington felt everything fro the cool winds working against hi to the vibrations of the loud sounds of the city.

Even before Tucker, even before being tied by mind, body, and soul to the strange Blood Gulch community, Washington had been letting the connection with the city and its winds

Which was a good thing because reaching destinations like Sarge’s falling apart house could otherwise easily discourage any veteran superhero who had ambitions of bettering the world.

Especially when the front door flew open and Sarge stood patiently with a gun trained between his eyes.

“You’re’a trespassing, Scumbag!” Sarge called out without even taking the time to see that it was Washington on the other side of the gun.
“Guns are not legal inside city limits,” Washington reminded him dully. “And I have friends in high places these days.”

“Oh, right,” Sarge responded, putting his muzzle of his gun down. “But you should know, as a retired officer of the law, I have a conceal and carry! So, as the great Reds before me have said: Naner naner nah hoo!”

“I still don’t believe a word of any of that,” Wash replied, lowering his hands with some amount of confidence that Sarge wouldn’t shoot him at that point. No matter how earned or unearned that feeling might have been.

“Hmph,” Sarge muttered. “Good thing I don’t care much for the opinion of someone who got their butt handed to them in front of national television.” He gave an appraising look over Washington. “Look pretty good now, though. Only bruised your ego?”

“Not nearly as much as the fact that everyone else keeps bringing it up for some reason,” Wash remarked. “But somehow I think I’ll manage. What I need to know is if Blood Gulch is still going to have some form of superheroes supporting it even without my oversight.”

Sarge tilted his head. “After that performance, you really think the only thing keeping the Red Dead Blood Gulch Gang on the current path is fealty to someone who can’t hold his own against someone in a terrible costume?”

“I really don’t think anyone who was a villain in this neighborhood has any right to judge other costumes, and I refuse to resort to complimenting someone who tried to kill me, but there was definitely a good sense of style with the Locus guy.”

“Please, he wore green,” Sarge snorted. “That’s almost as bad as you – going around, showing off your physique in a costume that’s blue. Disgusting and foolish.”

“Blue is heroic,” Wash argued before he could catch himself. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Oh my god, what am I doing? I’m arguing with a madman who thinks painting street signs is a productive use of his time.”

“You’ve never seen what a menace those street signs could have been before I taught them what’s what!” Sarge argued. He chuckled. “Ah, those were the days. Before you came along and tried to make everyone go straight! Which is fairly ironic all things considering.”

“Oh, shut up,” Wash snapped. “This isn’t what I’m here for.”

“What are you here for, Washington?” Sarge asked suspiciously. “This is my home.”

“I came here because I faced my own mortality and I need to make sure that in the event of my death, that you – as the leader of your little delinquent group of poker buddies – can be relied on to still take care of the neighborhood,” Wash explained simply. “And that Tucker and Junior are going to be provided for.”

Sarge stared at him for a curiously long amount of time, his expression mostly unreadable.

“Yeah, sure,” Sarge replied with a casual shrug. “Why not? The boys seem to like them even before you came along. In fact, I think we may like them in spite of you coming along.”

Perhaps a bit in spite of himself as well, Washington let out a breath he hadn’t realized he had been holding. “Thank you, Sarge. That’s actually a comforting thing to hear.”
“It is? Damn it all, that wasn’t what I wanted at all,” Sarge muttered to himself. “Well, fine, whatever. I suppose I’ll admit to comforting you inadvertently someday. When forced under extreme interrogation or even torture.”

“Hm, and comfort is rapidly being lost,” Wash said to somewhat comfort the old, grouchy man.”

“Heh heh Bingo. Still got it,” Sarge chuckled. “But seriously, Kitty-cat, Blood Gulch belonged to the Reds long before you came along and proved to make a good hood ornament of nearly every type of vehicle one could imagine.”

“My humor is being drained rapidly,” Wash warned.

“I’m just telling ya not to sweat it,” Sarge said. “We’ll do what we always do in Blood Gulch. Rage against the establishment, fortify ourselves against mild annoyances. And stubbornly refuse to take care of the rest of the world. Even if it’s only three streets away from our neighborhood.”

“Okay I’m appreciating this conversation less and less the longer I stand here, so I’m going to make my leave. Somewhat dramatically,” Wash said, heading toward the other side of the street. “Pretty sure I saw a fire escape I could climb over here.”

“If you were my friend instead of acting like a parole officer for me and my movement, I would offer letting you use the second floor of my house! But you’ve not lost enough clothes on strip poker night for me to even call us acquainted!” Sarge continued to mock, shouting to make his point as Wash crossed the street.

“I’m honestly ignoring you!” Wash called back as he reached the other side of the street and quickly made his way to the rooftops on the very fire escape he had been mentioning.

Once again, he let his instincts run supreme. With the arrangement with the Reds no longer a concern, he could truly let loose and concentrate on a more average patrol. Specifically one that included taking out as many small time muggers and thieves as possible.

*Those* plans for his evening, however, did not get him far when he was tackled by an invisible, but recognizable force and sent rolling onto the rooftop.

“*Tex!*” he growled as he looked up and saw his fellow hero appear.

“Stay down,” she ordered, looking around warily before turning invisible again and slinking to his side, close enough he could feel her shoulder brushing his own.

“Tex,” he whispered. “What are you doing?”

"Do you not have some kind of cat sense or something?” her disembodied voice asked testily. “*Something* useful in that repertoire of stupid you call your super powers?”

“I see very well in the dark,” Wash replied flatly.

“God you’re lame,” she muttered back.

Squinting at her general area in annoyance, Wash pushed himself slightly off the pavement. “*You sure* you and Church can’t work… *whatever* it is out? It seems like you were made for each other. You definitely hold the same opinions of me.”

“Don’t offend me, I’m trying to save your life,” Tex said testily.
“From what?” he demanded.

“There’s something that was watching you from a few rooftops over. Again. And I’m not convinced it doesn’t have something to do with the asshole who kicked your sorry feline butt on public access,” she explained. After allowing a moment to lapse into silence, she reappeared where she stood and scowled toward the buildings across the road. “Damn. Got away again.”

Officially annoyed, Wash leaped to his feet and glared at Tex. “Okay, start explaining stuff to me, and maybe start with why you didn’t help me the other day if you were seeing me get my feline butt handed to me.”

Tex turned and gave him a particularly daunting look.

Flinching back Wash felt that swelling of boldness die a bit in his chest before he shrugged. “Please?”

She then shook her head. “No. I’m still looking into it.”

“Into what?” Wash demanded. “And what do you know about this Felix character that apparently saved my life? He seeps like… like…”

“A jackass?” Tex questioned.

“That’s putting it mildly. But… he saved my life,” Wash grunted out almost reluctantly. “And Tucker seemed to trust him.”

“Well, no shit, he saved the thing Tucker’s currently fucking. He’s lucky Tucker didn’t make moves on him,” Tex snorted.

“That thing is me, though,” Wash snapped.

“Which I’ve saved before, too. But Tucker knows better than to make moves on me. I would so kick his ass without thinking twice,” Tex chuckled. “But that’s beyond the point.”

Throwing up his hands, Wash was just about done with the circles they were running in. “What is the point, Tex? What the hell is going on?”

“I’m not in the business of giving straight answers,” Tex replied simply. “And for the record, I’m also not in the business of working with partners. Every time I do, I get disappointed. And I like you too much at a distance to really ruin that right now, so there’s your answer for earlier.”

Washington scowled at her. “You really believe I’m going to accept that as the final answer there. Tex, I can tell you know there’s more going on. And to be honest, as someone else who is pretty dedicated to a solo career, I’m not thrilled with needing to rely on you being truthful with me.”

“Solo career?” Tex laughed, looking back at him. “Wash, fuck off. You think you’re solo? You’re the furthest thing from it. Your problem is that you haven’t figured out yet when you’re relying on people too much and when they are or aren’t the right people to be relying on.” She looked off, a frown tugging at her lips. “Guess that was a lesson CT hadn’t gotten to yet.”

Thrown off at first, Wash let his jaw hang open. It quickly snapped shut however and he glared at his former teammate. “You don’t get to evoke Connie on the fly like that. She was my mentor. And she taught me everything I know.”

“Same,” Tex said. “In a less professional sense. Not that it matters in the end.” She turned away
from Wash. “CT trusted me to help her with her suspicions. And because of that I know something about what’s going on right now, Wash. Can you trust me enough to take my advice blindly?”

“I don’t know,” Wash said honestly. “Maybe I have to remind you that Connie ended up dead by the end of all that. And I still haven’t gotten any answers for it.”

Tex hummed rather than fire back with a similarly damning remark, but Wash didn’t miss the way her eyes flickered with her glare. “Go home, Wash,” she said instead. “You might’ve come out of that fight physically intact, but you shouldn’t be out superheroing with any wounds. That includes your pride.”

“One to talk,” Wash said back. “You better keep me updated on whatever this mysterious thing that’s watching me is.”

“Maybe I will,” Tex responded before disappearing.

Wash waited for a moment, until every sense he had told him he was alone. Then he reluctantly took Tex’s advice and started the journey back home. He hadn’t been able to keep track of his request to Tex like he had Sarge, but he figured she had been looking out for Tucker, Junior, and the rest of the Blood Gulch gang longer than Wash had ever been in the picture.

He wouldn’t have to ask the same morbid line of questions of her.

There were only three buildings between him and home when he recognized an outline standing on his roof.

Encouraged and intrigued, Wash sped up, getting to the rooftop in record time, expecting to be met with the smells of a meal from the diner waiting on him along with Tucker.

He wasn’t.

Once Tucker heard him coming, he turned and gave Wash something of a distant look, almost like he was struggling with what expression to pull. It wasn’t the most inviting reception Wash had has.

“No leftovers from the diner tonight?” Wash asked as he landed on the roof. “I almost feel forgotten.”

“You went out tonight,” Tucker stated plainly. “One night after that thing with Locus and you went out again.”

“I’m fully healed,” Wash responded quickly, tilting his head. “You didn’t mind when I saved you and your son just two nights after being hit by a car.”

“Your son,” Tucker repeated again, the hint of anger in his voice not at all lost on Wash.

“We need to talk?” Washington asked worriedly.

“We need to talk,” Tucker confirmed, crossing his arms. “But I’m not really sure what either of us can say?”

“What does that mean?” Wash asked.

“I really don’t know,” Tucker said. “I feel like we’re stuck but we barely have even gotten started.”

“This stuff,” Wash said, waving to his suit and to the skyline of the city. “Tucker, it’s going to be a routine for me. And for you.”
“And this,” Tucker said, pointing at himself and to the door down to the apartment where Junior was no doubt eavesdropping eagerly. “This is going to be a routine for us, too. But only if we both want it to be.”

Taken aback, Wash tilted up his chin. “You think I don’t want it to be?”

“I think we need to work together to figure out how this is going to work. Especially where Junior is involved,” Tucker pressed. “Because I’m fine with babysitters if I know ahead of time.”

Suddenly, relief took over Wash’s body and he sighed with relief. “Church drank all the beer.”

“Yes!” Tucker shouted throwing up his arms. “Wash, you know we have to hide it! He completely wastes it! He can’t even get drunk.”

“You’re right,” Wash laughed. “My mistake.”

“You better believe it is,” Tucker said, poking Wash’s chest. “And mister superhero, I think I’m allowed to request one night off from you after near death experiences. It’s only fair.”

“You’re right,” Wash laughed. “But I had to put some things in order. Had to make sure plans were in place for bad scenarios. That I’m trusting all the right people.”

Tucker raised an eyebrow. “Are you trusting all the right people?” he asked curiously.

“I’m trusting you,” Wash responded lightly. “That’s more than enough for me. Now, c’mon. Let’s eat some Dinfast.”

“Dinfast?” Tucker asked, swinging an arm around Wash’s shoulders and guiding him toward the stairwell. “What the hell’s that.”

A/N: Long time no see, I apologize so much but I needed to take some time for a really tough situation and it brought me back to a thunder, hopefully giving you something enjoyable in the process!

Special thanks to @analiarvb, @secretlystephaniebrown, @notatroll7, @thepheonixqueen, @ashleystlawrence, @a-taller-tale, @mercuryblacksleg, @thesolesurvivormichael, @icefrozenover, @washingtonstub, and Yin on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

There was an ache to his bones and his joints that was leading Washington to wonder what sort of side effects his miraculous healing thanks to Doctor Grey may have had that she had neglected to inform him of. Or, at the very least, that she had informed him of but was lost in the quick speed at which every other bit of information she had given him and Tucker.

Which was also making him regret telling the doctor that it was fine to share confidential information with Tucker in the room since, well…

“It’s too early for you to be out there! Did you forget that you almost died? That that Locus dude is still on the loose? Oh my god, you want me to just stand on the sidelines through all of this like some dudesel in distress! Joke’s on you, Wash! I’m no Church!”

A certain headache was growing right between Washington’s eyes that was making him reconsider the importance of everything.

“From my understanding, Church had some helpful advice to give and a few inventions,” Wash mused, crossing another rooftop despite having to hold a phone to his ear.

“Did you just say I’m lower than Church?” Tucker asked hysterically. “I’m… wow, I’m beyond offended.”

“And if that’s what I had meant, you should be. Fortunately for all of us, I actually was—” Wash stopped talking when he saw the next checkpoint coming up. “Tucker, I have to get back to this. You can yell at me later.”

“Oh, boy, can I yell at you later. I have enough in me to yell at you for the rest of the week!” he all but threatened.

“Right, love you too,” Wash said, pulling his phone away to hang up just as he could barely hear Tucker say What did you just say—

As much as he hated hanging up on Tucker (which he honestly didn’t under the circumstances but it was easier to tell himself that), Washington had other responsibilities to attend to.

Like the sound of polka music gradually increasing from the distance with minor explosions and a few street lamps falling over not far behind it.
Starring expectantly at the distance, Wash took a deep breath and checked the time.

Slower and just as destructive.

It was like they hadn’t been running this drill for weeks or something. Washington, with all his aches and groans in check, was slowly losing his patience with the young recruits.

… and with the gleefulness the Reds took in causing more damage than absolutely necessary for their drills. But that was another battle for another time.

Seeing the Reds’ jeep rounding the corner and coming onto the end street with his pupils nowhere in sight, Washington took drastic action and leaped down from the rooftop.

Aimed just right, Wash managed to land right between Grif and Simmons and onto the front console, causing the two to scream like banshees before realizing it was him.

“Whoo, Wash! You sure know how to make an entrance!” Donut called from the back before turning toward Sarge. “Sarge! Load me up.”

“Firecracker engaged,” Sarge said gleefully before planting said firecracker in Donut’s hand.

“Wait!” Wash called out only to be drowned out by Donut’s screams of fire! before lobbing the firecracker. “Okay that’s enough! Too much public damage for one night!”

“You said that tonight we weren’t stopping until those young’uns finally put an end to our reign on the streets themselves!” Sarge reminded him, beginning to hand another firecracker toward Donut.

“Yeah, which we basically took as free range from now ‘til the end of eternity,” Simmons added.

“Your call, dude,” Grif reminded Wash. “And if you dented anything in my car for cool points swear to god I’ll instruct my sister to make Tucker’s shifts living hell for the next few weeks. We’ll see who’s got the best payback—”

“Yeah, that’s going to be a real change up from what’s going on right now,” Wash remarked. “And I’m going back on my word. This ends now before the entire block goes up in smoke.”

And with that pronouncement, he grabbed the firecracker from Sarge’s hand and grabbed the gear shift and put them in park, which nearly sent all of them flying.

“Holy shit, what the fuck, that was the dumbest, what the fuck, you’re trying to tear up my car, fuck fuck!” Grif cried out.

“Please, your fifth member is a mechanic,” Wash responded, breaking the firecracker over his knee as he jumped out of the car. He then did a full double take on the team. “Wait… where is Lopez?”

“Señor Brown in public, Fancypants Hero!” Sarge barked back. “We use codenames in this crew.”

“Right, whatever, where is he?” Wash demanded.

“On a daaaaate,” Donut said gleefully. “I’m so proud of him. He’s come so far!”

“Alright, enough of this,” Wash said, waving his hand and walking toward the street where the out of breath heroes were coming their way.

The young heroes nearly tripped over themselves as they cam barreling toward the Reds and Wash. Almost immediately, however, upon seeing Wash they all stumbled to a halt, grabbing their knees
and heaving.

“So… so close…” Jensen gasped. She then flinched with the others as Palomo wheezed and hit the pavement in a massive body flop.

Wash temporarily glanced toward Palomo before looking to the rest of them. “No. You weren’t close. You weren’t even in the same ballpark as close and we’ve been running these drills repeatedly for over a week now.”

“Blargh!” Junior argued, the only one seemingly not out of breath.

“No excuses,” Wash argued, holding up his hand to stop the rest from joining in. “There is something about the dynamic of this team that needs to be tweaked. Something small, that if changed, would make the difference between mediocrity and excellence in your futures.”

Palomo, pushing himself up off the pavement, tilted his head in enthusiastic surprise. “You think we’re mediocre now!?”

“No,” Wash said with a scowl. “You’re on the road toward being that way.”

Bitters glanced to the rest of the team and then back to Wash. “Okay, I can’t be the only one who finds that insulting, right? I mean, I know we suck, but what kind of teacher admits it to us out loud?”

“The best!” Andersmith called out excitedly.

“Me,” Wash answered more directly.

“Who is the best!” Andersmith continued.

“Well, if we’re on the road to mediocrity… isn’t mediocrity like halfway to decency? So can’t we just continue on it?” Palomo asked curiously.

“No, that’s not how we’re doing this,” Wash said. “We need direction. We need–”

“A leader.”

The voice sent a shock through them all, causing everyone to turn on their heels to face its origin. And, sure enough, Wash found himself facing his former saver and apparent fellow city hero, Felix. Smiling wide and invitingly.

“How did you sneak up on us?” Wash demanded.

“Guess all you attention was directed elsewhere,” Felix shrugged as he walked closer to the young heroes. “Happens. Anyway, is this the young heroes that Kimball was telling me about? Training them up or something? Heard it was her idea. Guess your retirement was more eminent than I realized. You should’ve let me know if we’re going to be partners here, Washy.”

Washington couldn’t help the way his nose curled. “Washy? Really?”

Felix didn’t seem to even acknowledge the comments as he strolled over to where the young heroes were finally getting to their feet. They seemed more than impressed with his appearance, and were even bothering to dust themselves off and smile at him.

“Say, you know what this team is really lacking that would make all the difference in the world?” Felix asked.
“I was about to explain to them the new training regiment that would address that,” Wash said thinly. “Confidence-building exercises which will independently aid their growing comfort with their own powersets so they can learn new applications of them.”

“Ugh, so long and so boring,” Felix laughed. “We don’t know how quickly these natural-born heroes will be needed! It could be tomorrow!” The young ones gasped. “It could be today!” They gasped even louder. “We have to have the men prepared, don’t we?”

“Um, and lady,” Jensen piped up with a timid hand up as if she was in a kindergarten classroom.

“There are no immediate preps for becoming a superhero,” Wash argued. “And these kids are not going into the field any time soon.”

“What!?” the kids all cried out at once while Junior honked.

“You’re the barrier for entry?” Felix snorted before giving an exaggerated smile to the kids. “I think the whole country saw why that’s not exactly a high bar.”

Feeling the twitch return to his eye, Wash got in Felix’s face. “Right? And what exactly is your idea that would get things turned out sooner?”

“What you need here,” Felix said, rubbing his chin as he looked over the group, “Is a leader. And who better to be the leader than your most promising future hero?”

Everyone straightened up, delight in their eyes, but Wash could see that Felix’s gaze was only on one junior hero.

And that junior hero happened to be Junior.

Wash tilted his chin back. “Oh no.”
Chapter Notes

Once more, sorry there was a bit of a wait to this chapter, but it was an absolute blast to write and I hope that comes across in the writing! Because I really did have a lot of fun with this one. And hey hey hey, look where we’re getting in the plot ; ) I’ll give you a hint: IT THICKENS

Special thanks to @notatroll7, @secretlystephaniebrown, @analiarvb, @thepheonixqueen, @icefrozenover, @washingtonstub, BetaZack, Yin, and Enmuse on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

Junior might have been bouncing off the literal walls but it could have not been more opposite of the reaction that Tucker was giving Wash at that moment. His boyfriend was staring at him like he had just announced that he was going to kick him out of the apartment.

“You want Junior to be the leader?” Tucker demanded, all but throwing a bloody steak onto a plate and handing it off to the chattering alien child. “Of your ridiculous superhero team? What the fuck’s wrong with you?”

“It’s not my team, they are their own team. I’m just training and guiding them at the behest of the local government which… seems to know my identity,” Wash responded awkwardly.

“Sure that doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that, like an idiot, your codename is your last name? Seriously, Wash, who does that?” Tucker asked, throwing his hands in the air.

Scratching at the back of his neck Washington shrugged. “I… guess it was poor planning. To be honest, a lot of the days between me being a protege and joining the team and the team deciding to selfimplode during the Invasion is sketchy.”

“Dude, I was friends with Tex at the time, alright? Sketchy doesn’t even cover half of it,” Tucker responded. “But that doesn’t detract from the point that you think a five year old can lead a team of teenagers. How is that the best option for everyone involved?” Tucker demanded.

“You’ve not met these teenagers,” Wash argued. When he saw that the attempt at levity was not appealing to Tucker, Wash sighed and leaned back against the kitchen island. “And it’s not a for sure thing. It’s something I’m debating at the moment. There’s no reason to panic.”

“I’m not panicking because I’m not letting it happen,” Tucker said plainly. “Don’t you need a permission form signed or something? Yeah, it’s not happening. Case closed!”

Completely thrown off, Wash crossed his arms and just looked at Tucker utterly perplexed. “Tucker, it wasn’t even my idea. It was something recommended to me, and I’m just considering it. Junior has the most natural talent of the team, he’s the one making the most progress, and in general he’s just really good at this compared to everyone else. Not to mention I have the most one-on-one training with him. I don’t know why you’re reacting so badly to this!”
Tucker turned on Wash with a nearly offended look to his face. “Because things are moving too fast, Wash!” he snapped.

Washington stared at Tucker for a good long moment, then glanced toward the table where Junior was happily tearing his steak apart. Then he looked to Tucker again.

“We’ve not been talking about the same thing, have we?” Washington asked lowly, doing his level best to keep the conversation from Junior.

A break in Tucker’s expression flashed for a moment and he looked off, rubbing at the back of his neck. “I guess not.”

“I need more than that, Tucker,” Wash responded plainly. “It’s not fair to me to have no straight answers from you lately.”

“Dude, more is the problem,” Tucker explained with a defeated sigh. “You want more from me, cool, but you’ve gotta give me more first. More like actually trying to spend time with me and my friends. More like letting me in when you decide to travel across the city and do something stupid. More like letting me decide what’s right or not for my son.”

Wash frowned, doing his best to accept the words no matter the stinging they left. “If you want more then we can’t be moving too fast, you know,” he pointed out somberly.

“It is when you say shit like love you and haven’t even started tolerating my friends yet,” Tucker said lowly.

Realization began to dawn on the hero. “You’re freaking out because I said I love you first,” Wash said almost in awe.

“Dude, that’s not… No. Just that–”

“Tucker, we’re living together,” Wash pointed out. “How this the part you’re freaking out over?”

“Because we’ve done everything backwards! It’s like the story of my fucking life!” Tucker cried out. “Kid before I have so much as a fucking date, dude inviting me to live with him before we fucking kiss, I love you before fucking… It’s too much! And now you’re coming home and telling me decisions you’re making for Junior before you even refer to him as your own kid? Like, Wash, goddamn, give me some sort of bar for normal.”

“Normal?” Wash almost laughed. “I’m a superhero. There is no normal, Tucker. I thought that’s why we’ve been working so well since we met. We are both in the category of exceptional.”

“Please, the only thing exceptional on my end is my ass,” Tucker snorted. “And my calves. And my kickass car–”

“That’s debatable,” Wash muttered.

“I just feel like this relationship is both… running ahead of me and also hitting a wall at the same time. We’ve gotta change something,” Tucker all but begged.

"Okay, fine,” Wash said, sounding more defensive than he initially meant it. “You’re right. Something needs to change here. But I’m out of suggestions for what that should be. What should it be?”

As if Wash’s life was not already the butt of some cosmic joke, his phone began ringing on the
kitchen island right behind him, drawing both his and Tucker’s looks at the same time.

“I don’t know, maybe that?” Tucker said with an eyebrow quirked.

“Don’t be smug,” Wash admonished his boyfriend as he reached for the phone and answered it. “Who is it?”

“You’re lucky I’m not in Blood Gulch right now or I’d punch you for that. Way to answer a phone like a complete dick, Washington.”

Straightening up, Wash turned toward his side some and walked away from Tucker and Junior. “Tex? Where are you? What’re you–”

“Investigating something. Getting some assistance. Whatever answer’ll make you ask less questions,” she responded distractedly.

“None of those answers lead to less questions,” Wash pointed out. “What’s going on?”

“What’s going on is that something is up, alright? Something is wrong in Blood Gulch right now, and it’s about to get worse,” she answered.

“Going cryptic is supposedly my job, Tex, what the hell’s happening?” Wash continued, instinctively heading toward his secreted away uniform.

“It has something to do with your new buddy Locus,” Tex explained. “I don’t know what. Just know that he’s been in Blood Gulch before, and my information’s telling me he’s in Blood Gulch now. So why don’t you do the block a favor and stop babysitting the mayors’ pet project and instead be a bit of a superhero.”

“Wow, speaking of rude,” Wash replied unimpressively.

“Yeah, don’t get your ass kicked by Felix this time,” Tex cautioned.

“Wait,” Wash stopped in his tracks. “Felix was the other hero. Locus was the one who set the building on fire.”

“Whatever, who cares, I’m telling you to watch out,” Tex said, again sounding extremely distracted.

“Tex, that’s an important distinction to make!” Wash cried out. “Did you mean Felix has been in Blood Gulch before? Why would he have been in Blood Gulch before? What is going on?”

The most aggravated noise in the world came through the phone. “Wash, if I knew all those answers, why the fuck would I be doing what I’m doing now and not telling you what to do?”

And with that, Tex hung up abruptly. Wash pulled his phone from his ear and glanced toward it appraisingly.

“What’s up? Tucker asked almost cautiously.

“I think I’m finally learning what Church and Tex see in each other, and it isn’t pretty,” Wash replied.

“Yeah, I was there for it. I watched the slow motion explosion and everything,” Tucker said with a full body shrug. “But what’s up with you? You’re not going out, are you? We’re, like, having a moment.”
“And we can continue to have it when we–” Wash began only for Tucker’s hand to slap itself over his mouth. He let out a muffled few choice words before pulling Tucker’s hand away. “Tucker, what the hell?”

“You were about to say famous last words, and I’m fucking tired of living a tragic cliche. So how about don’t,” Tucker snapped angrily.

Wash blinked a few times before nodding. “Okay. So… you just don’t want me to say anything while I get ready to leave?”

Tucker’s frown grew more concerned. “I don’t know what I want.”

“Well, that makes two of us, Tucker,” Wash answered before grabbing his things. “Junior’s trying to suit up and sneak out of his room, by the way. So watch out for that.”

“How–”

“Cat-like peripheral vision,” Wash responded only half jokingly. He looked toward Tucker seriously. “I don’t regret saying I love you. It was time someone did. Maybe fast is just how we are. We’re the only couple in our group who’s actually trying to work past things and make them work. So maybe we should just rely on instinct.”

Putting a hand to his chin, Tucker hummed, “I don’t know, Grif and Simmons seem fine.”

“They’re not a couple,” Wash said before stopping. “Wait, they are? I didn’t see it–”

“You’re a moron,” Tucker responded casually. “Lopez and Sheila are doing fine. I heard Donut’s dates with Doc are heating up. And–”

“Okay, stop, I get it. We suck, but we’ll work through the suck,” Wash replied. “Can I at least say goodbye?”

“You have permission to say see you later,” Tucker quipped.

“Alright then,” Wash said, suited up and heading toward the window. “See you later.”

He was already on the window ledge and leaping down to the alley floor when Tucker ran to the window and stuck his head out. “Seriously, Wash! You die or something out there, I’ll kill ya!” he called after him.

The smirk on Wash’s face could not have been larger, even as he raced to cover ground and find the supposed problems in Blood Gulch Tex was mysteriously aware of.

Wash couldn’t help but wonder if they had had more time to get a decent explanation if they hadn’t been shouting at each other, but his attention was soon spared for more realistic problems. Like how a shadowy figure across the street seemed to move with uncomfortable dexterity to the rooftops.

“That is far too close to my home,” Wash growled out before racing across the street and leaping to the fire escape with catlike grace.

In no time, Washington was landing on the roof and ready to chase down the figure when, to his surprise, it was waiting for him, standing cockily with his arms crossed.

“Felix?” Wash questioned, taken aback. “What… What are you doing here?”
Checking his location, Wash was relieved that the laundromat was not visible, still around the block. But it was too close, and they were halfway to Church’s junkyard haven. A few more blocks from Sheila’s diner.

A near perfect triangulation of the places Wash held dearest. And the mysterious new hero he knew next to nothing about was standing right there.

Felix tilted his head, smirking. “Guess I could ask you the same thing, huh?”

Though the effect was lost with his visor on, Washington raised an eyebrow. “No. Because everyone knows that I patrol this neighborhood. It’s… It’s like being surprised that Daredevil is in Hell’s Kitchen.”

Snorting, Felix waved his hand. “Oh my god, you are such a nerd. Wait… Haha oh this is almost too good – you think you’re some kind of real life Daredevil!” He clapped his hands together. “Oh, that is just too good. I see it all now. The hardly shaven jaw. The attitude. The martial arts. Regularly getting your ass handed to you but still coming up on top at the end. Beautiful. Simply beautiful.”

Washington stared at him, though his hand did subconsciously reach up to test his stubble. “If you’re wanting to commandeer another training session, I’m afraid you’re late for the day. And I’m still only considering the recommendation,” Wash explained. “You don’t know the team as well as I do—”

“And what exactly is there to know, Wash?” Felix asked. “They’re a bunch of losers. You know that, I know that. They have flashy powers but no talent. They’re around in ridiculous costumes to help whoever’s mayor at the end of the day look like they’re being productive with the current superhero nostalgia this city’s been feeling.”

Narrowing his eyes, Wash felt an impulsive anger take hold of him. “I’d appreciate if you didn’t talk about my students like that,” Wash told him. “They’re young, they’re kids, but they’re learning. And more than that they want to do good with their powers. That’s more responsibility and awareness of potential than most adults have well into their lives. They’re definitely getting started on the right path sooner than I did.”

There was something unnerving about the way Felix’s smile refused to falter. “And just what path is that one, Wash? Is it the one where you don’t even notice that Locus has been scouring your neighborhood looking for you ever since your little encounter?”

Taken aback, Wash tilted his head. “How do you…?”

“Because I’m the best at what I do,” Felix responded casually, shrugging his shoulders. “Want to know what it is, I do?”

Wash glared at him. “Are you here to take more glory for going after Locus? If so, you can have it. But I’m going to be looking for him, too, He’s on my streets. And I’m going after him because it’s the right thing to do.”

“Wash, Waaash, you’re reading me all wrong,” Felix explained. “I’m not insulting kids – even if their talent is… minor at best! I’m not even really trying to step on your territory. I’m just reaching out a hand for you to take,” Felix explained, offering said hand. “Because, buddy, I’ve been fighting Locus across the world for a long time. And to take him down, you’re going to need a partner. One who knows what he’s doing. One who has his partner’s best interests at heart. What’d’ya say?”
Looking Felix over, Wash wasn’t quite sure what he was feeling like saying. He didn’t need another partner. He didn’t even need another hero. And allowing someone access to his time as a hero was dangerous – he had never anticipated the potential overlaps of his identities to cause so much danger to the people around him. He had never assumed the time of Heroes and Villains would return again.

And yet… There was an urge for him to reach out and accept that hand. It defied his logic and instinct.

Because Felix was right… He needed help with Locus.

But that train of thought keyed Wash into something that snapped him out of the moment. He stepped back and tilted his head at Felix. “What do you mean that you’ve been fighting Locus across the world? Why haven’t I ever heard of either of you before then?”

Suddenly, for only a moment, Felix dropped his complacent face, an unreadable emotion taking the cockiness’ place for just the blink of an eye. “What?” Felix laughed it off. “You want my whole backstory? Kimball’s vetting not enough for you, Mister High and Mighty?”

"This doesn’t have to do with the mayors, this has to do with you dodging a simple question,” Wash pointed out. “And the more you dodge it, the more my suspicions grow, Felix. So I’d like an answer if you have one to give…”

Before either of them could carry the conversation further, Wash felt the hair rise on the back of his neck, and he had just enough time to glance over as a bright spark dropped onto the rooftop by them.

“What the–”

“Get down! It’s Locus!” Felix ordered, leaping toward Wash.

But there was a thunderous boom and Wash could barely hear anything or see anything. He was certain that the ringing of his head was from having been caught in the explosion, but as he blinked and looked around, he found himself on the sidewalk opposite of the building where fire was now pluming from the roof. Standing straight, completely unharmed.

Confused, Wash looked around himself, patting on his unsinged uniform and scratching his head. “What the hell?”

Another explosion caused Wash to jump slightly and he looked up toward the source just in time to see Locus walk out from the flames, dragging an unconscious Felix beside him. He stopped at the ledge, gazing down at Wash as people began to gather to see what was happening.

“That was meant for you,” Locus announced, dropping Felix to where he hung over the ledge. “These results are… unfortunate.”

Without further commentary, Locus disappeared before their very eyes and Washington was left standing as stunned as the citizenry around him.

After a few moments, one of the people looked warily at Wash. “Um. Shouldn’t you be pulling that other costumed freak away from the fire before he… like burns and dies?”

Wash let out a full body sigh and shook his head. “Some partner,” he groaned, starting toward the building to do just that, and leave himself open to wonder just what the hell had happened to keep him away from the explosion that Locus had seemed so intent on getting Wash with.
“And why didn’t he kill Felix if they’re nemeses,” Wash wondered out loud, landing on the rooftop and checking to see if Felix was actually unconscious.

To his shock, the other hero seemed to be.

“Well…” Wash grunted as sirens began to be heard in the distance. “Fuck. I don’t know what’s going on in my personal life or my superhero life.”
Team Felix

Chapter Notes

I am running out of things to say in these intros because they’re coming far too close together and I’m used to making 50% of my notes an apology for how long it took to get the chapter out. There are pros and cons to regular updates. Hopefully for you all, more pros than cons!

Special thanks to @analiarvb, @secretlystephaniebrown, @washingtonstub, @icefrozenover, Enmuse, Yin, and @notatroll7 on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

Wash couldn’t even remember when was the last time it was him sitting in a waiting room in anticipation of news about someone else. He was willing to wager it had been a fairly long time, though. And he was not exactly pleased with his own apathy at the circumstances.

Fortunately, he wasn’t alone with his thoughts or too long because the door was kicked open and revealed both mayoral candidates in wait.

“What the hell is going on!?” Kimball demanded.

“And are you alright, dear Washington?” Doyle added more softly.

Blinking some, Wash settled back in his seat. “For once it’s not me laying in a sick bed so I’m going to assume that I’ll pull through,” he responded flatly. “Not so sure about my… backup.”

Kimball was by far the most reactive, throwing up her arms. “What the hell is going on in that borough of yours?” she yelled. “First it’s basically off the map for the past ten years, suddenly you inform us of its electoral capabilities and all we’ve gotten is complaints about teenagers exploding things, disrupting of the peace by some vigilante gang, and now the two superheroes that we have turned this city’s attention toward as a unifying force are blown to hell on its streets!”

Doyle put a hand to his chin. “In truth, it’s beginning to seem as though learning about Blood Gulch has been far less advantageous to anyone than previously ignoring it.”

More than a little peeved at the attitudes on display, Washington narrowed his eyes. “Perhaps ignoring these issues and an entire population was beneficial to the people who might be responsible for helping to fix the areas, but it’s far from helpful to those of us trying to live and improve Blood Gulch or any other inner city borough like it,” Wash reminded them sharply. “And don’t you two have an emergency election to worry about appeasing voters with? Voters like the people in Blood Gulch?”

They stared at him.

“The reason no one knows about Blood Gulch is that it has a zero-point-zero-zero-two percent voter turnout to begin with and, so far as we can tell, no town hall activity,” Doyle explained.

“Resources aren’t going to be going toward somewhere that doesn’t want to be active,” Kimball agreed.
Wash squinted at them both. “At this point you two are going to be co-mayors forever.”

“God no,” both said at the same time.

Just as Wash was working around what to say next to the mayors, the door was kicked in again. Except the doorway then almost immediately became clogged as four teenagers attempted to cross through it at the same time.

“Ow! Watch where you’re stepping!” Jensen whined.

“Tell Palomo to stop swinging his elbow into me!” Bitters snapped back.

“That’s not my elbow,” Palomo informed them only to spur more struggling.

“Do not – ghk – worry, friends!” Andersmith called out heroically. “We can work through all of this if we just keep trying together!”

They pushed more and, of course, had no progress in attempting the same thing again. They then erupted into petty squabbling that was giving Washington a nauseous wave of secondhand embarrassment on top of all the other issues going on in his life at the moment.

He looked instead to the mayors and waved his hands dramatically toward the teenagers. “You summoned the teenagers I’m training to come here? Why? There’s literally no reason for it.”

“That would be because you’re being shortsighted,” Kimball argued. “These children are the future protectors of this electoral map.”

“City,” Doyle corrected.

“Exactly,” Kimball nodded.

“It is thus important for them to be up to date on any new information you and – bless his poor soul – Felix can give them about the current enemy who continues to defile and destroy public property,” Doyle explained.

“And to know what they’re putting on the line every time they put on those garish costumes,” Kimball noted.

Wash pulled a frown and squinted at them. Suddenly feeling extraordinarily uncomfortable in his skintight suit. “Garish?”

Doyle smiled uneasily and waved his hands passively. “Certain looks are not for everyone, of course. Our senses of style not being what yours are, of course–”

The teenagers were still struggling which was more than enough excuse for Wash to raise to his feet and shake his head. “Forget it,” he advised to the mayors. “I really don’t like where the conversation is going.”

He then walked closer to the entrance and snapped his fingers right in front of the kids’ faces. It got their attentions almost immediately.

“Okay, that’s enough,” Wash snapped at them. “What’s the first thing I tell you to do before every practice? Every drill? Every talk?”

“Um,” they all echoed at once, though at least they seemed to stop struggling.
Andersmith cleared his throat and looked over everyone else’s heads. “I believe, that what you are consistently telling us is to use our heads.”

Washington felt some relief and sighed as he crossed his arms. At least one person seemed to be listening to him. “That’s right. Thank you, Andersmith. So let’s try doing just that.”

“Got it, Sir!” Andersmith said, backing away from the group and flexing in that familiar way that caused his body to become solid metal.

For a moment, it simply left Washington blinking in confusion before Andersmith lowered his head and began the charge. Horrified, Wash raised up his hands and shook his head. “No no, wait!”

It was too late.

Andersmith collided with the three other teenagers, sending them flying into the waiting room on top of Washington, and even knocking into the mayors. He then stood proudly as the only unscathed member of the group with his hands on his hips. The self satisfaction was pouring off of him.

“My word,” Doyle huffed underneath the pile.

“I see your training is going well, Washington,” Kimball said more harshly, pushing people off her as much as she could.

“Progress is what’s important, no one else seems to get that,” Wash mused mostly to himself before seeing Jensen and Palomo’s offered hands. He blinked before taking them and allowing himself to be helped up. “I suppose the next logical step would be to ask you four why you came down here in such a rush, wouldn’t it?”

“You kidding?” Palomo asked, nearly bouncing on his feet. Something that, considering the fleshiness of his costume, he probably truly shouldn’t have done. “The big fight was all over social media!”

“Big fight?” Wash asked, brows furrowing. “But there weren’t cameras around.”

“Oh my god, you are such a Silver Age hero,” Bitters groaned.

“Everyone records everything on their phones these days, Mister Washington,” Jensen reasoned. “There’s no way something as epic as a rematch between you, Felix, and Locus would go without being recorded and posted everywhere immediately.” She then turned toward Bitters and crossed her arms. “Also, Antoine, I would be doing a disservice to actual fans everywhere by not pointing out that given his age and the relative late start he had on the Freelancers, Washington is obviously from the Bronze Age. It’s very well documented on the superhero wiki. The only official source for superhero information.”

"Everyone, be quiet,” Wash ordered. Once all sets of eyes were on him he pointed accusingly at Bitters and Jensen. “Just how old do you think I am?”

“Um,” both teens hummed at the same time.

Wash opened his mouth to further press the matter when the poor, battered door was kicked in again. He threw up his hands. “Does no one respect public proper– Tucker?”

Just as the words left his mouth, Tucker shoved past everyone and threw a hand over Wash’s mouth. “Shhhh!” he growled, looking around the room through his sunglasses. He had a hoodie up
and tied tight like a complete dork and was wearing a thick coat even though it was summer. The latter detail probably explained why his hand was so sweaty.

“Okay, enough,” Wash grunted, pulling Tucker’s hand off his mouth. “What are you—” he then looked over Tucker’s shoulder as he heard honking and cooing from the doorway. “Why are both of you here right now!?”

“Because you keep trying to die and it used to be funny when it was just cars that were after you but now it seems like explosions have it in for you,” Tucker explained. “A-K-A I was worried.”

“First off, explosions have it out for everyone. I don’t happen to be special in that department,” Wash pointed out. “Two, how the hell does everyone know about this already!? Where is this video supposedly on… the youtubes.”

Tucker literally did a full body cringe. “Youtubes? Oh my god, Wash, that’s so sad.”

“Silver Age, that cements it,” Bitters muttered loudly enough for even Wash to hear.

“I don’t know about Silver Age, but definitely a silver fox,” Palomo stage whispered back, leading to a level of discomfort that Wash had not realized he was capable of around teenagers.

“Regardless of what everyone saw, I’m fine,” Wash assured everyone.

“Duh. We know,” Bitters groaned.

“We did all see the video,” Andersmith pointed out.

Washington looked around the room and slowly put everything together at last. His glares stopped at his boyfriend. “Are you telling me that all of you aren’t here to check on me but actually here to check on Felix?” he demanded.

An uncomfortable silence only occasionally interrupted with a cough took hold of the room.

Washington stared at them all as the realization slowly dawned on him. Then he couldn’t help but look more than a little betrayed. “Wait? Does everyone in here like him more than me?”

“No!” they all said far too quickly.

“Felix has just been working so hard on building up superhero relations with the government behind the scenes, even before we got in contact with you,” Kimball tried to explain in what passed for her as a gentle tone.

“And he’s so cool!” Palomo quickly added.

“He offered to help me with my powers,” Jensen explained,

“And give me some pointers,” Andersmith continued.

Junior just gave Washington an expectant look. That cut the superhero more to the bone than anything.

“Ouch,” Wash said out loud just before Tucker punched his shoulder. “Double ouch?”

“I came here for you,” Tucker informed him. “But… yeah, I’m worried about the only guy who seems to be around saving your butt lately, too. I mean, if he’s in the hospital bed this time, it’s
going to be you next time. And I’ve had more than enough of that for a while, thanks,” Tucker said, making a point to still wave his arm in the brace.

Washington exhaled quickly, and almost stubbornly. “You’re all right. And that’s why I’m here, too. I owe Felix, and being a superhero isn’t a competition, it’s a trust between you and every other person who seeks to do the right thing,” he explained.

“Glad to hear you say that, Wash, tickles my little heart,” Felix’s cocksure voice said from the hospital door.

“Felix!” more than half the room cheered, heading to where he and Doctor Grey were standing.

Felix’s grin still managed to be unbearable to Wash, but he tried to let it go. After all, the man had been injured on account of him – on account of telling him that Locus was stalking Wash’s neighborhood without him even noticing.

“Because if this was a competition, I think we all know who’d be winning,” Felix continued to joke, but his eyes never left Wash for even a moment.

That was more than enough to make Wash squint suspiciously at Felix, even while Tucker yanked on his arm again.

“You sure you came out of all that alright?” Tucker asked.

"Kind of,” Wash said lowly, so that only Tucker could hear. He then looked intently at his boyfriend. ‘Can you show me the video everyone’s talking about? Because there were things that happened in that fight that have me asking a lot of questions I’m not sure I’m going to like the answer to or not.”

Tucker let his sunglasses slide down his nose enough that Wash could get the full effect of his eyebrow raised. “Yeah, I guess,” he replied suspiciously. “What kind of questions do you have?”

“I want to know how I ended up on the other side of the street just before that explosion happened, and I want to know why said explosion wasn’t as bad as it looked,” Wash explained. “And I want to know why Felix seems to be doing more behind the scenes than he apparently wants me to know.”

Rolling his eyes, Tucker sighed. “You’re just so against equal opportunity for people to save you for once, aren’t you, dude?” he asked.

“No!” Wash defended. “Tucker, I’m trusting you, aren’t I?”

“Pff, yeah, but you’re also sleeping with me so I’d hope some trust issues weren’t working their way in there too much,” Tucker joked, pulling out his phone. “I can’t believe you don’t know how to pull up a video. Where’ve you been for the last ten years?”

“It’s not that I don’t… Forget it,” Wash grunted. “Let’s just see how far this rabbit hole takes us…”
Delegation Time

Chapter Notes

Plot plot plot we’re starting to come all together and I’m so excited to be on this ride wth you all <3

Special thanks to @secretlystephaniebrown, @notatroll7, @analiarvb, Enmuse, Yin, @a-taller-tale, @thephoenixqueen, @spooky-circuits, @washingtonstub, @icefrozenover, and @the-space-nerd-97 on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feed back! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

“I hope you have enough brains to realize that it’s completely ridiculous how high tech your apartment equipment is but you never use the internet,” Church grouched, hood up and robotic eyes glowing through the shade as he typed on Tucker’s laptop. “I mean, who doesn’t have a personal computer these days? And you’re asking me to use the keyboard from Mister Stickyfingers himself.”

“Hey, don’t hate on me. I never thought anyone else would be touching my computer,” Tucker defended, leaning against the back of the couch coolly. It was his feeble attempt to seem like he wasn’t losing his mind trying to make sure that Church wasn’t looking at anything embarrassing.

Washington didn’t quite understand the paranoia the situation held for Tucker.

“This would go a lot quicker if you let Church hook up directly to the interphase like he suggested earlier,” Wash pointed out to Tucker.

Tucker’s eyes flickered immediately toward Wash. “Yeah, that’s not happening. Or did you forget we have…”

Wash squinted back at him. “We have what?”

For a moment, Tucker attempted to sign something to Wash with the raising and lowering of his eyebrows a few times. When that didn’t work he went for a full body shrug. “Wash, the… the photos.”

Staring back at Tucker blankly, Wash tilted his head. “Photos?”

“The photos,” Tucker pressed.

Suddenly, Washington perfectly understood the paranoia the situation held for Tucker.

“Why are you keeping those on your computer!?” Wash demanded.

“Why do you think the keyboard is sticky!?” Tucker fired back.

Church held up his hands to stop them both. “Stop! Desist! I cannot keep pretending to be deaf here. Okay? I’m going to delete my entire memory of this conversation as soon as everything’s settled here. And I hope you both know you’re fucking stupid and act like horny teenagers.”
Taken aback, Wash waved to his chest. “Me? A horny teenager? I understand saying that about Tucker–”

“What the fuck, Wash,” Tucker said, throwing his arms in the air.

“Okay done,” Church declared, shoving the laptop from his lap to the coffee table. “Both of you shut the fuck up. I finished your stupid pet project, and it’s time for you two to leave me alone even if I’m your tech guy because putting together a compilation of all the angles and footage of this non-event for you is one thing, but having to listen to your relationship up close and personal is honest to god mortifying. May we never speak of this again.”

“Thank you… Church… I suppose” Wash said, though the sentiment seemed foreign and distasteful on his own tongue.

Tucker took a moment to glance back and forth between them before shoving Church out of the way and sliding into his preferred spot on the couch. “Yeah, yeah, what the fuck ever, Church. I don’t want to hear it. Do you know how many nights you and Tex were having sex and I could hear you through those paper thin walls? Fucksake. How’s a guy supposed to masturbate?”

“Oh, like it stopped you,” Church snorted, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, it probably helped,” Tucker said back before physically freezing. “Wait what.”

“Wait what,” Church said at the same time.

There was then a long, uncomfortable silence between the former roommates as if there was a dawning realization on them both. Washington really wasn’t sure what to think about it. “Tucker? Church?”

“Oh my god I forgot about that night,” Tucker gasped.

“We’re never supposed to talk about that, you promised,” Church responded almost viciously.

“You were crying–”

“GODDAMMIT, TUCKER, I TOLD YOU IT WASN’T THE BAD KIND OF CRYING–”

Not sure what else was within his powers to do at that point, Washington held up his hands and released a resounding clap to draw the other two supposed-adults’ attention back to him and the present. Tucker looked amused and befuddled, Church simply looked irate.

“The video! Please!” Wash begged. “I… I literally cannot take another word of this conversation.”

Tucker grew a put off expression. “Wash, ridiculous fucking conversations are my entire life. On repeat. You have to accept that part of me as much as you accept the part of me that takes pictures in the bedroom.”

“I never accepted that part, it just happened! And you’ve got them saved on your computer now!” Wash cried out.

“So you don’t like the me that takes photos of us?” Tucker asked.

“What is with you lately?” Wash demanded, nearly grabbing for his hair. “How come you turn everything I say into an argument? I don’t understand–”

“Because you never fight back!” Tucker yelled.
“I don’t want to fight you!” Wash snapped.

“No, you just want to sit back and judge and make snide comments about things in my life you don’t approve of while I’m not allowed to have any say so in the parts of your life that annoy the goddamn shit out of me!” Tucker snarled.

“What do I do that annoys you?” Wash demanded. “Tell me or I can’t fix it, Tucker, that’s how communication works.”

“Does it, Wash? Because I thought communication was for you to roll out of a moving vehicle rather than spend time with me and my friends when we’re not fucking or dealing with your superhero bullshit that you bring home!” Tucker growled. “Not to mention the fact that now you’re taking Junior and putting him out there on the line, too! Like what the fuck kind of conversation do you want to have?”

“Fine! I’ll stop being snide!” Wash agreed. “But you have to stop having yelling contests with me rather than just tell me what’s bothering you!”

“You know what bothers me?” Tucker demanded. “The fact that you shed on the pillows and bed linings!”

Despite himself, Washington reflexively gasped. “I told you I have a condition. I can’t help that.”

“Yeah, the condition is you’re part goddamn cat and you fucking act like it! Never cuddling when I want it, just when you want it, and then randomly you’ll bring up the fact that I wear socks to bed and scoot away!”

“It’s not that you wear socks to bed, it’s where you wear your socks that isn’t as original or funny as you think it is after the eighteenth time!” Wash cried out.

“Oh my fucking god, it is my responsibility to humanity to put a stop to this conversation before it gets more disgusting,” Church announced before reaching forward and pressing play with the spacebar only for the spacebar to stay down. “Jesus christ, Tucker, I’m buying you a flesh light.

“Good, because I know who’s not getting any,” Tucker decreed.

Washington opened his mouth to protest that that wasn’t as much of a punishment as Tucker seemed to think it was when the videos all began playing on the screen.

Each video was timed to correspond despite being from very different angles, and some squares were left blank, only to join up and sync with the others as the videos progressed.

Instantly intrigued, Washington leaned in and tried to get a sense of the videos and how they were all in one way or another pointed toward the building which had exploded just in the moments before its explosion. For the moment being, it was him and Felix on the roof talking. But there was no sound.

“Why can’t I hear anything?” Wash asked.

“Yeah this is kinda boring,” Tucker huffed.

“Because I was annoyed listening to thirteen different teenagers either narrating a livestream like they’re the first geniuses ever to catch superheroes on camera, or mouth breathers who were fucking with their shit and causing nothing but rustling,” Church answered, leaning back against
the couch with his arms crossed. “You’re welcome, by the way. I also took care of the shaky cam because none of these fuckers have apparently heard the virtues of stabilizing before.”

“None of what you just said makes sense to me,” Wash said, watching the screen intently.

Still, he could feel Church’s eyeballs burning into the side of his skull.

“What century are you from? Goddamn,” Church marveled.

“This one?” Wash deadpanned as he continued to watch the footage.

It was annoying that he could not hear their conversation – for some reason, while he remembered the gist of it, the specifics, their words were a fog in Wash’s mind. Like he had barely witnessed it himself at all. A part of him was hoping to clear that up through the camera but apparently that was all for naught.

Then, he could see it. Wash watched himself jump back reflexively from the bright spark of one of Locus’ explosives land between them.

But, weirdly enough, Felix did not have any reaction at all. He was standing confidently, staring at Wash as if nothing had just crashed down between them. That was odd to Washington, since he had not figured Felix for that sort of inexperience. But what truly bothered him was how smug Felix looked despite the intensity of the moment.

Surely he hadn’t appeared that cocky in their conversation. Wash hadn’t remembered the desire to outright punch the fellow superhero.

Then, there were two flashes, one after the other. So quick, it was difficult to tell them apart, but Wash caught the faint difference.

Those Felix reacted to, but not in the way that Washington had been anticipating for him to. Instead of bounding away from the ensuing explosion, he seemed to turn his attention toward the streets.

And Wash…

Well, to Wash’s astonishment, he wasn’t there after the flashes at all, and suddenly the explosion occurred, the building went up in flames, and soon Locus emerged dragging Felix.

A few of the cameras panned across the street to where Washington appeared almost miraculously.

“Whoa,” Tucker said, glancing in Wash’s direction. “When’d you start moving that fast.”

“I can’t,” Wash said simply. “I have no idea how I got out of the explosion. Maybe a concussive force from the explosion, but I didn’t feel like it–”

“Dude, no concussive force would have that trajectory for you to land perfectly on the other side of the street.” Church snorted. “Trust me, I went to the academy and they wouldn’t shut the hell up about this shit. By the way, letting your guard down, Wash? Newbie mistake. If I were still arching? You’d be stone cold dead for sure.”

“Whatever, Wash would kick your ass,” Tucker snorted.

“Not my ass, don’t you remember my Alphabots?” Church argued.

“Oh, yeah. Where’d those things go, anyway–”
“Wait,” Wash interrupted. “Didn’t either of you notice that Felix had no reaction to the bomb? I mean, I may have let my guard down. Maybe. But he never had a guard. He was more worried about where I went than the explosion under his own feet.”

“Sounds like usual goody-two-shoes hero bullshit to me,” Church said with a huge roll of his eyes. Ignoring Church’s usual bastion of optimism, Wash pointed toward the screen. “Church, can you take the footage back some and slow it down? To the second where I disappeared from the roof?”

That earned Washington an indignant look if he’d ever seen one. “Do you two not know how to do anything beyond plug in an Xbox?”

“Dude, how dare you suggest we wouldn’t ask you to do that, too,” Tucker joked. “Please,” Wash tried with about as much sincerity as he could muster. Which, given, was not much considering the circumstances.

Church continued to give him a dull look before opening up the video files again and beginning to move his fingers so quickly across the keyboard that Tucker’s disgusting buttons could hardly keep up.

But when they finally operated accordingly, Wash got what he wanted – slowed down video of the moments that took him from the rooftop to the safety of the sidewalk in the instant of a flash.

He had been right. There were definitely two distinct flashes, one before the explosion, and one pursuing it. And it was within the pursuing flash that everything in the images where Wash was blurred to a single, pixelated mesh of color. Gray, blue, yellow.

But, for a moment, Wash could swear there was more blue than the moment before.

Then he was gone from the screen until the pan down.

“Something happened there,” Wash said decisively, pointing at the screen “Can you see it?”

“What? The blur? Or the blur?” Tucker asked with a yawn.

“How can you say that’s just a blur? This saved my life, the least we can do is get to the bottom of this,” Wash said, putting a hand to his chin. “My hero partner back when I was with the sidekick program taught me the basics of detective work. I need to go back to the scene and look for clues. Find Felix and talk to him about what he remembers. Then I need to ask the Reds to cover patrolling Blood Gulch for the night. Maybe I could get someone else to cover training tomorrow and–”

Wash looked up when he heard the most disgusted noise a robot could make coming from Church who stared at him dully.

“You have something you need to say, Church?” Wash asked with a raise of his brow.

“Yeah, you’re a goddamn idiot,” he said lowly before looking toward Tucker for a moment and then back to Wash. “Biggest fucking idiot, I swear–”

"Watch it, Church," Wash said in warning, his patience officially at an end.

“No, you watch it,” Church snapped back. “I’ll get a hold of Tex and the Reds and get this city protected. You can phone your Mayors in between them campaigning for an election no one
actually cares about to get them to talk to this Felix chump for you. But before you call in sick to the kiddie heroes, how about you take care of house.”

Tucker looked exasperated. “Church—”

“No, dude, I’m sick of this,” Church said, heading toward the door. “And you two better use this time to actually talk.”

Washington blinked a few times, flinching when Church slammed the door closed behind him, and then looked in surprise to Tucker, who seemed significantly less shocked by Church’s declarations. He only seemed annoyed.

“He acts like he knows what’s going on between us,” Wash pointed out.

“Yeah, well, he’s my best friend,” Tucker reminded Wash. “What we do is… talk.”

“We do, but I. It’s like we talk at different levels. You never hear what I’m saying under what I’m saying, you know?” Tucker tried with what seemed to be great difficulty to explain.

“Honestly, Tucker, I don’t know,” Wash replied. “I… I know everyone jokes that I get cryptic at times. But… I always say what I mean at the end of the day. I’ve never had a problem where that wasn’t the case.”

“Yeah, and some of the things you say probably coulda stood to be kept to yourself,” Tucker noted bitingly.

Despite his first instinct to argue the point, Wash took a breath and sat down on the couch too. “Okay. That’s fair. But I also think it’s fair to point out that sometimes… if you’re frustrated that I’m not seeing through your words to a deeper meaning, you could at least give me a hint. It’s been a while since I was in AP English. I’m not used to looking for metaphors.”

That got Tucker to actually snort. “You woulda been a nerd.” He exhaled. “Yeah, but you’ve got a point. It goes both ways. Like me.”

“See, I got that reference,” Wash joked.

“Don’t be an ass,” Tucker laughed. “But… Okay you know how the other day we were on the phone… and you just said the thing? The big thing?”

“Love?” Wash asked, brows knitting together.

“Yeah. You just said it and I know you mean it but like… I don’t know if I can ask you to like… show it instead of just running off trying to fight out of giant pyramids with riddles and mazes,” Tucker pointed out.

"Those aren’t really something outside of the comic books.” Wash pointed out. “Kind of like capes.”

“One of your new proteges wears a cape,” Tucker pointed out.

“Yes… well we’re just glad he wears at least that much considering his powers are basically to… well, sparkle,” Wash shrugged. “Tucker… I’m… I’m sorry if my words don’t always match my actions. And I know that, at least on some level, the excuse that I’m a superhero and that’s just part
of what I do isn’t nearly enough to cover it. So instead I’m going to ask that… Ask that you give me *something* I can do to prove that I’m serious. *Really* serious this time.”

Tucker squinted at him. “This is sounding like a setup for something else to go the way of *linner.*”

Wash sighed. “I know.”

“We’ll be vaguer then,” Tucker decided. “What Church just did earlier? Delegating some of those responsibilities of yours that you hold so dear? Why can’t you do that, I don’t know, more long term?”

Confused, Wash tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“Why can’t you spread around some of the territory, let other heroes and trainees take care of things that aren’t immediate. Don’t patrol *every* night. Trust other people to be part of this team you’ve got building up here,” Tucker offered. “If you delegate more… you’d have more time for things like *linner* and going to the park with Junior and me.”

“I…” Wash began to protest but he took a breath. “Okay. I can… *delegate* more. But I *still* want to find out what happened there at the explosion,” he said with a nod to the blur.

“Yeah, sure, okay. But if anything you should take that as a sign,” Tucker shrugged. “Even when bad shit’s happening to us… it always seems to work out, doesn’t it?”

*Is* that what I’m taking from that?” Wash asked critically.

“Work with me here, Wash,” Tucker all but demanded.


“Oh, *that’s* reassuring,” Tucker laughed, but he seemed to actually mean it.

At least, Wash *hoped* so.
Sorry for the wait, but I had a great vacation last week at my family’s house and it’s been a lot of fun to play around with how to deliver this chapter. Hope you’re all happy with the product <3

Special thanks to @a-taller-tale, @secretlystephaniebrown, @cobaltqueen, @washingtonstub, @icefrozenover, @analiarvb, @notatroll7, Enmuse, Yin, and @thepheonixqueen on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

There were many ways that things could go wrong for them. Off the top of his head, Washington could think of twelve – maybe twenty if he did not double check the basket.

Really, just based on statistics, they were going to be in for a devastating time if he didn’t turn on the news and at least see the weather–

“Oh my god, Wash, we have been waiting at the door for ten minutes,” Tucker moaned from said door, his head rolling back and hitting the wood panel.

Even Junior was beginning to get restless, running in and out of the apartment through Tucker’s legs no matter how much of a tight squeeze it had become for him as of late.

“It’s just… waiting for an accident,” Wash replied candidly, looking at Tucker. “Something could go wrong any minute and we’re just… not going to be prepared for it.”

Tucker narrowed his eyes. “Will you feel better if I let you wear your uniform under your clothes like last time?” he asked.

“Maybe,” Wash said, rubbing at his scruffy chin.

When was the last time he had shaved?

“Really? Because last time we went to the park and I let you do that, you had to wear a turtle neck and long pants to cover up the stupid thing and you nearly had a heat stroke,” Tucker reminded him. “Instead you went under that tree for shade and ended up sleeping the entire time.”

Pausing, Washington found he couldn’t stop rubbing the scruff. “Actually, I don’t think I was sleeping. That might’ve actually been a heatstroke.”

“You’re absolutely ridiculous,” Tucker said simply, like that was the end of the conversation. He then turned back around and pulled Junior up into his arms with some great difficulty. “For someone who hasn’t had much to do this month, you really struggle with the concept of free time.”

“Struggle’s a harsh term for it.” Wash replied, finally walking to the door and grabbing the basket and apartment keys along the way. “Struggle would imply I was still clean cut every day. That I set up google alerts on my phone to check on everyone else’s progress without me. That I was hunting down Locus at night.”
Tucker finally gave up his struggle and set Junior down before glancing curiously at Washington. “So what’s it mean that you’re not doing all of those things and are still freaking out?”

Wash adjusted his sunglasses as they headed down the stairs and to the street. “I… I guess the only logical answer is that I’m… enjoying myself,” he said with some great amount of difficulty. “That I… like having less responsibility. Which, just to be clear, is completely against everything I know about myself as a person.”

To Washington’s infinite surprise, Tucker actually grew something of an affection smirk at the comment. “You’re a big dork underneath your scruff, y’know that?”

“That would also go against everything I know about myself,” Wash noted before finally sighing and gathering the last of his things. “But I guess discovering yourself is something you do when you have the time for it.”

“Nah, it’s something you do when the chips are down and you don’t know what’s going to happen next,” Tucker assured him, finally taking Junior’s hand and leading him out the door just in time for Wash to grab the young alien’s other hand. “That’s why you already know you’re a hero who sacrifices life and limb for ungrateful idiots all the time.”

“Is that really any way to talk about your friends?” Wash asked without being able to stop himself. For his troubles he got a grin and a punch to his shoulder as they moved out onto the streets and toward Blood Gulch’s one, only, and most disappointing public park.

“No need to be a jackass,” Tucker laughed.

The truth was, Washington still wasn’t sure how he felt about having time off to himself. There was a lot with his time that was just a curious anomaly. But the one thing he got used to almost immediately was the smile it put on Tucker’s face and the relaxation in the man’s shoulders.

For the first time in months, Tucker truly looked like the guy who had fished Wash out of the dumpster. In all the best ways.

And as much as there was a longing in Wash’s heart to go out, to do more, to be a hero, he also had to concede to the reality that at least some of that ache was ebbed by Tucker’s continued happiness. With the satisfaction of fulfilling the responsibilities he had to his own, personal, new responsibilities.

Balance seemed to be the word that Washington had been looking for but not quite found.

Getting to the park, there really wasn’t much of a surprise that there was no one else there. It was Blood Gulch after all, and if Junior hadn’t had skin as thick as literal scales and the ability to chew through most metals, Wash was sure Tucker would have been more apprehensive about letting him play on the equipment.

As it currently stood, the only thing between Junior’s enjoyment and Wash and Tucker appreciating a cool summer breeze was that some debris and tree branches were blocking one of the slides.

“You know what’d make my vote for this whole mayor thing?” Tucker asked, setting aside the book bag he shrugged off. “How about some goddamn civic service around here?”

“It’d be a good platform,” Wash agreed. “Between this stuff and the potholes.”
“Dude, don’t get me started on the potholes. The potholes are destroying the wheels of my car,” Tucker whined. Junior was hanging off his arm and, unlike only a few months ago, Tucker strained to lift him just enough to not have his feet on the ground. “Okay, li’l dude, you need to go play on the monkey bars while Wash and I clear this side of the playground up.”

Junior’s mandibles clicked together and he took off with a bounce in his step.

“I love how you volunteer me for things without asking,” Wash said dryly as they walked toward the slide.

“Oh, shut up, Mister Superhero,” Tucker laughed, beginning to tug on the smaller branches and leaving the actual heavy lifting to Wash. “You love this civil service shit.”

“And you don’t take any pride in your neighborhood?” Wash asked critically, lifting up some of the larger debris and carrying it toward the unempted trash bin.

“No, I take pride in a paycheck,” Tucker responded. “Someone’s job could be to take care of this shit. Like Donut. Donut’s job could be to clean stuff. He needs another job. Lopez could probably use another job, too. And Doc. Fuck everyone we know is poor. Why isn’t the city paying people to do stuff it needs done?”

“Maybe because most of the people you just mentioned are part of the reason things keep getting broken around here,” Wash offered.

“That’s so not true. You can’t blame us for potholes. That shit’s from like… you causing explosions or something. How do potholes get made anyway?” Tucker asked curiously.

“I don’t make things explode,” Wash replied, aghast. “I save people from explosions.”

“Dude, it was just a way of pointing out that you like to, I don’t know, profile Blood Gulchers as some kinda depraved super villains,” Tucker responded sharply.

Washington stared at him. “Tucker. Literally all of your friends are former super villains, dating former super villains, or under the guardianship of former super villains,” he reminded him. “And that last one — Kai? I highly suspect she was lying when she told us at our last get together that she was legal drinking age.”

Tucker blinked. “Well, duh,” he replied. “But, I mean, you knew what you were getting into with us. And now you’re one of us. How’s that for losers?”

Humming to himself, Wash threw out the last of the debris just before Junior tested his luck and slid down the slide regardless of their preparedness. “I guess it’s slightly better trajectory than what usually happens to self-made superheroes,” he said as he caught Junior just before he landed.

“And what’s the usual trajectory?” Tucker snarked. “Dead before befriending super villains?”

“Basically,” Wash answered with a laugh, putting Junior down. He waited for the bundle of energy to race off again for parts of the jungle gym unknown and then turned to face Tucker more seriously. “Listen… I… Thank you for getting me to open up to… more help. Letting people, I don’t know, delegate some of my responsibilities. That way I can have more time to appreciate what I’m protecting… To appreciate you and Junior.”

There was a moment where Tucker seemed actually, genuinely speechless, though of course it did not last long. “Holy shit, that’s… Yeah. Good. Glad you get it!” He paused before rubbing his neck and then looking reluctantly back at Wash. “I know you don’t talk about Freelancer much… but
the fact is… I wasn’t ever a hero and I wasn’t ever involved with the cops-and-robbers bullshit, but I watched what it did to the people who… I mean, at the time… Church and Tex were more than my best friends. Those years before I dropped out of college when I realized there weren’t any greek sororities, just Greek classes, they were my family. Our stupid little apartment, watching stupid reality shows, listening to Church try to take over the world with a computer that totally had a separate window for porn hidden in the corner, I’m sure of it. It was awesome… until it was like… Everyone forgot how to appreciate the things that counted. I don’t even know why Tex and Church were doing what they were doing before it all broke apart in the end. I don’t think they did either. And y’know. It killed my best friend to an annoying robot-status, and my other best friend disappeared for years without even bothering to tell us she was alive. Shit sucked. And I don’t… I need to know you’re not going to forget what you’ve got to come home to, too.”

Taken aback, Wash tilted his head and looked to Tucker, watching as a faint but still noticeable blush was beginning to spread across the other man’s cheeks. Tucker then covered his face and groaned.

“Nevermind, that was way too sappy,” Tucker whined.

“Well, I guess that makes me a cornball because I appreciated every word,” Washington assured him.

“Yeah?” Tucker asked, peeking between his fingers.

“Yeah,” Wash assured him.

“In that case,” Tucker said, losing any for of seeming embarrassment he once held. “Do you mind setting up the picnic table over there and stuff while I make sure there’s no more dangerous crap around the play area?”

Washington rubbed his scruffy chin. “Hm, sounds like you’re asking for permission to stroll around while I continue to do all the work. But sure.”

“And they say cats can’t learn tricks,” Tucker laughed, turning and walking with some pep in his step toward where Junior was hanging upside down from the monkey bars. “Is that a monkey I see or is it a little me?”

Junior cooed in joy, bringing a smile to Wash’s face as he grabbed up the picnic stuff and started toward the table.

It looked clear from the short distance between it and Wash, for which he was grateful. Less bird droppings or used needles to deal with the better in Blood Gulch, after all. But he found himself coming to a standstill when the easy breeze of the summer day temporarily picked up to a full on gust. It forced Wash to hold up his arm and shield from the blast until it passed as quickly as it came.

“ Weird,” Wash muttered, lowering his arm before seeing that there was suddenly a scrap of paper on the table.

Sighing at the litter, Wash walked over to the table, dropped the basket onto the table, and reached over to throwaway what he had to assume was trash before noticing thick letters strewn across it in what smelled like fresh sharpie.

“The hell,” Wash said out loud before grabbing the note and reading it.

Only Trust Who You Know
Washington felt a cold chill run down his spine and he glanced around the park. He tuned out the joyous sounds of Tucker and Junior playing around on the playground and tried instead to focus on finding anyone in the area — anyone at all, who could be the source of the note and the sudden sense of dread spreading across him.

With enhanced senses, he surely enough detected someone in the line of trees nearby.

Eyes narrowed, Wash pulled a throwing knife he had secreted away in the back of his belt and threw it across the park with expert precision. It was a warning, and it left its mark by sticking to the side of the tree’s bark.

The action had been fierce enough that Tucker and Junior’s attentions were now drawn to Wash, and Tucker was immediately picking up the kid who he could now barely carry despite Junior’s protests.

“Wash! What the hell’s going on?” he demanded.

Not answering Tucker, Washington kept his hand back ready to grab for another — last — throwing knife on his person and glared at the trees. “I know you’re there, come out. Slowly.”

“Easy, easy,” a sly and familiar voice said before two gloved hands held themselves up and Felix walked out from behind the tree. “Just a friend, checking in on you. Haven’t seen you on the prowl much, after all. Had to make sure everything’s going alright.”

“Felix?” Wash asked, not easing up. Still, despite himself, a sense of calm was coming over his body. “What are you… How?”

For a moment, Washington spared a glance toward Tucker and Junior just to see as Tucker was already backing toward the playground to keep distance and find a way to cover his face. It was something they had known to look out for eventually, but Washington couldn’t help but feel the uselessness of it all. They were dealing with someone who had been watching them from the shadows while they carried on with their family day with some amount of reckless abandon.

Stupid stupid stupid, Wash, he growled to himself.

“Oh, come on, now, Wash,” Felix said with an easy shrug. “I mean, after all, who do you think let Kimball in on your little secret? I have to keep an eye out for my partner. And that means knowing who I’m keeping that eye on.”

“I don’t know you, doesn’t seem fair in return,” Wash said. “I don’t appreciate you coming around my family uninvited. I don’t appreciate you spying on me uninvited. And I don’t appreciate you sharing my secrets without permission,” Wash said darkly. “Leave. After all, I should only trust who I know.”

Felix seemed to hang back for a moment, as if he was expecting something else. But when it didn’t happen, he straightened up and grew a soured look. “That’s a dumb catchphrase, Wash. You could use a little more trust. But, hey, I’ll just take my leave if you don’t want a guardian hero keeping an eye out for you.”

Washington didn’t ease up until he was certain that the other hero was gone. Then he stood in silence, taking in the moment as best he could, while Tucker and Junior came up to his side.

“He’s watching us? Like… some kinda voyeur? What the fuck. I liked him but that’s weird,” Tucker said, struggling to hold Junior by his side.
“He didn’t recognize the phrase,” Wash said, glancing down to the note in his hand.

“What phrase?” Tucker asked curiously.

“Guardian hero keeping an eye out for you,” Wash repeated, getting lost in thought.

“Is that the phrase? What are we talking about?” Tucker demanded. “Wash! Hello? You there?”

Washington glanced back to Tucker and took a breath. “He wasn’t here for us. And this note I found isn’t from him. And I think we’re about to have more going on than I realized.”

Tucker stared straight into his eyes for a solid thirty seconds before pinching the bridge of his nose and letting out a long hiss of air. “Okay, sit down and go through what every part of that meant. We made way too much progress on talking feelings today for you to start your cryptic shit again, Wash.”

“Right, sorry,” Wash apologized, sitting at the table, though suddenly very aware of their surroundings.

Tucker sat down with him and they began their chat about mysterious superheroes, unknown anomalies, and blue blurs.

If they had been on the internet, they probably would have been at conspiracy theory websites already.
There were probably less dramatic ways to get into Church’s apartment, but Washington was running too short on time to act outside of his own instincts. So he went with the picking of the lock on the window and lifting it open so as to perch on the ledge as dusk settled behind him.

The usual.

By the time Church actually paused from typing at his computer, as if finally aware of another presence, Washington had thought of at least half a dozen ways any sort of villain or regular robber probably could have dismantled him. And it certainly wasn’t because they had known each other for six months and the level of aggression between being Tucker’s boyfriend and being Tucker’s best friend had only proved to mount itself higher.

Church nearly leaped out of his seat when he saw Wash, hand over his chest as his head leaned back. He was running fans loudly to apparently cool down his robotic body. “Jesus Fucking Christ,” he half-shouted. “You are, quite possibly, the worst fucking sight in the world for anyone with a remotely questionable past and maybe-not-so-great present record. Just so you’re aware.”

“Consider me aware,” Wash replied, continuing into the apartment as if acknowledgement served as invitation — which it practically did in Blood Gulch anymore.

Narrowing his eyes, Church crossed his arms and leaned back into his seat. “If you’re here to ask me for another updated superhero suit, you can fucking forget it. Tucker still owes me, like, three bar hops before the current disaster you’re wearing is paid off.”

“You consider your own work a disaster?” Wash asked casually, raising his brow.

Caught off guard, Church opened his mouth, closed it, muttered a bit. “I… that’s. No. Obviously. Just that… you. And your… like, corniness. It infects any design. And I hate it. Shut up,” he finally spat out. “What’re you here for?”

“I’m wondering if you’ve seen Tex,” Wash explained lowly.

As expected, Church pulled a full body flinch at the bare mention of his ex.

“No, of course not. That only happened once,” Wash replied casually.
“You’re such a fucking dick, I don’t know how Tucker puts up with you,” Church responded, somewhat aghast. “Like it’s amazing. Do you have any idea what a fucking saint he has to be for that?”

“I’m aware,” Wash replied flatly. “But this is about Tex. Have you seen her? I’ve only gotten texts and phone calls from her for the better part of a month and none of those have been more than… cryptic, at best.”

For a moment, Church looked at Wash puzzled. Then it just went to smug.

“Wow. Cryptic. How horrible. Would hate to be around someone who only spoke in cryptic codes all the goddamn time for the sake of being dramatic and secretive,” Church replied before turning back to his computer.

“You’re pissed that I exist and changed up whatever groove that Blood Gulch had before, I get it,” Wash replied with an aggravated sigh. “You want nothing to ever change and your misery to be the only thing that matters. But that’s just too bad, Church, because I’m around, and with a possible future mayor who is actually interested in bringing back a sense of real status quo to the city, these are things that are going to be good and they’re hopefully going to be permanent.” Knowing that the aggressive route was going to get him nowhere with Church’s legendary stubbornness, Wash reached up and pinched his brow and sighed. “Look, you and I both care about Tex not being in trouble and I’m worried about how little I’ve seen of her lately. Especially with things being questionable with new heroes popping up, and the Reds getting more active on my orders around Blood Gulch. I just want to know she’s okay.”

“Wow, must suck to not see Tex for ages and have to worry about the worst for her. I feel so bad for you right now I could barf,” Church returned angrily.

“So you’ve not seen Tex,” Wash surmised.

“Oh, I’ve seen her plenty while you played House,” Church responded. “Who do you think I’m codebreaking for at the moment? Just the lawls? She’s been up my ass getting shit out of me for whatever nonsense she’s been playing for months now. Dunno why you’re not included. Probably for the best. She’s probably aware what a nuisance you are.”

Caught off guard, Wash neared Church. “What? You two are working together? On what—“

“I don’t know,” Church groaned before catching himself and shaking his head. “Actually, I know. I totally know because I totally asked why I was doing this instead of just… y’know, following her orders without question. But because she respected me so totally much by asking me to do this for her, I don’t have to tell you. She obviously wants to keep it to herself.”

Washington stared at Church for a moment before rushing to the back of his computer chair and attempting to lean in over his shoulder.

“Hey! What the hell! Back off!” Church cried out over dramatically, pulling against Wash to no avail.

“Just let me see what you’re working on—“ Wash said before seeing that there were multiple black windows all across the computer screen with white, green, blue, and red text in brackets that continued to fly out at speeds that nearly crossed Wash’s eyes. He leaned back and away from the screen entirely.

“What the hell’s that?” he asked, shocked.
“Codebreaking, the fuck did you think it looked like?” Church asked, taking the initiative to shove Wash further away from him though, with his strength, it did little other than causing his own chair to roll away from his station. Church then erupted into a series of frustrated, mewling noises that never quite formed words before he threw up his arms and glared at Wash. “Would you just fucking leave already?”

“No, I haven’t gotten everything I’m here for,” Wash said simply.

“Oh my god you are the worst superhero,” Church groaned, clapping his hands over his face and dragging them down dramatically. “What, Wash? What do you want from me other than my sanity? Which you are doing wonders for making me lose entirely.”

Ignoring the dramatics, Wash looked intently toward Church. “I want you — whenever you take time off from… all of this — to head over to my apartment and completely redo the security system.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Church cried out in annoyance. “I’m not a fucking handyman, Wash!”

“It’s not a favor and it’s not a request,” Wash answered.

“Your people skills are astoundingly inept,” Church continued to insult.

“It’s a safety precaution for Tucker and Junior,” Wash went on without pause. “The stuff I’ve gotten into… it’s making me nervous. Nervous enough that I’m questioning the validity of the security system as it stands now. I think that whatever’s coming is going to be worse than what I’ve prepared for, and I think there’s reason to believe that I’ve been watched and followed to the point that Tucker and Junior’s security has been jeopardized.”

Taking a moment to let the words wash over him, Church leaned back and narrowed his eyes once more. “You’re… What are you involved with?”

“I don’t know, but it could go to the top, and with as chummy as at least one of our mayoral candidates are with Felix—”

“Dude, what the fuck’s wrong with Felix?” Church scoffed. “Did he save your ass too many times? Embarrass poor widdle kitty cat?”

“He found us in a park and threatened us about six hours ago,” Wash replied critically.

“Whoa,” Church said, brows raised. “Did you deserve it?”

“Did Tucker?” Wash snapped, beginning to lose his cool.

“I mean, he did make the choice to fuck you against my better judgment so,” Church responded with a rotation of his hand.

“You might be the worst friend a person could have,” Wash reveled out loud.

“Wrong, asshole! I’m the best friend a person could have because I’m going to pull your asses out of the fire and go look over your security system and what not and then give Tucker relationship advice. Again. For ten hours. Again,” Church replied, shutting off his computer after a final line of text that was incomprehensible to Wash. “And probably suffer the wrath of my ex-girlfriend for putting off her shit… again. I’m like the most selfless motehrfucker in this entire goddamn world, and it’s about time someone around here recognized me for it.”
“You’re doing a good job of recognizing yourself,” Wash amended. “Are you heading over right now?”

“No, I’m stopping everything in my tracks for a pizza I can’t eat — of course I’m heading over there, you just said my best friend is about to get himself damseled. I’m either going to stop that shit or I’m going to enjoy watching it unfold,” Church said wryly.

“Good, tell Tucker I’ll be home late,” Wash said, heading for the window.

“Wait a second, Washington,” Church called out, drawing the hero’s attention again.

“What?”

“Mayor reestablishing a good status quo… mayoral candidate with a suspicious relationship to the guy who’s threatening you,” Church listed off his fingers. “Do you… have some kinda political angle in all of this going on, too? Hm?”

“What’s it matter?” Wash asked. “I’m calling balls and strikes and Kimball’s got questionable company and policies.”

Church’s brows raised again. “Kimball, hm? Interesting. Interesting. You know, this really is something you should talk to your boy…. Nope. Still can’t say that word for you two. Anyway, hope you talk to Tucker about it because that’ll be an amazing one. I would actually sit in the room and watch that one.”

“Tucker’s not for Kimball,” Wash said with a shake of his head.

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha,” Church called out in bland succession before heading for his door. “Oh, yeah. Definitely going to be in the room for that one.”

Wash scrutinized the robot as he made his way out but shook his head and left all the same. There was a lot to do that night, and Tucker’s annoying friends were something to deal with at a later date.
Back before things became public and Wash felt himself on call twenty-four-seven, he and Tucker had devised a communication of sticky notes that, to some, would seem archaic in nature at that point. Items needed from the store. Times to meet the following day. And who was going to be babysitting Junior if/when Wash needed to pick him up.

Downright domesticated sort of things that Washington had taken for granted at the time.

Of course, right around the time he was beginning to miss those simplicities, he was met with a giant, pink sticky note on the window of his apartment — his strangely closed window — that read simply ‘Your Locked Out ;-(‘

Wash pulled the note from the window and leered at it for a moment. “He could’ve at least gotten the right you’re,” he said before cupping a hand over his visor and peering into the window for any sign of life on the other side.

He was really too tired to go all the way around the apartment building, up the stairs, and go through the lengthy process of identification through the new security system that Church had fashioned them with.

There was also the (fairly large) chance that Church was being a chucklefuck and never put him in the new system to begin with. That was something that would have been right up the robot’s alley.

Fortunately for Wash, that was an answer still left for another time, as instead there was a clacking noise from the window a few feet away from his own that got Wash’s attention. He looked that way just before the window came open and Junior’s long neck stuck out, his head looking in Wash’s way as he honked.

“You’re going to let me in the easy way?” Wash asked, dexterously leaping from one seal to the other. “Your father might consider that treason at this point. And I don’t even know what made him mad this time.”

The alien child stopped and looked Wash in the face at that statement. He then let out a low growl and slammed the window shut right in front of Wash.

Wash blinked in surprise.

After a few moments of hanging from Junior’s window, utterly stunned, Washington began to feel the strain on his hands from his hold and began glancing back and forth from his own bedroom window to the child’s bedroom window. He was going to have to make a snap judgment,
eventually, on where to go forward.

Still, he decided to press his luck and knock on Junior’s window instead.

Fortunately, Junior responded immediately by opening the window again.

“So sometimes adults get confused and things that should seem pretty obvious aren’t so obvious to them. We get kind of dumb like that when we’re old,” he informed the younger, want-to-be hero. “So I didn’t mean to make it sound like it was your dad who was being ridiculous by being mad. I — the grown man in full spandex hanging from a window — am the one who is ridiculous. And I’m sorry I wasn’t clearer about that.”

Junior swiftly let out an appreciable, cooing noise and widened the window before stepping back and giving Wash room to enter his apartment.

Their apartment, Wash quickly corrected himself before slipping in.

“Thank you,” Wash said gently before rubbing his wrists and palms tenderly as he took a good, long look around the room. It seemed like no matter how often he stepped within it, he found himself surprised by the amount of hero worship that Junior still had. The posters, the piles of well loved comics. Merchandise, t-shirts thrown about the room. The lines between fictional tales and the real super heroics of their world was worn fairly thin there.

It did not help that the most common among the heroes featured in the room had increasingly become Wash himself.

Junior stared at him, mandibles clicking in a suspicious manner that Washington only partially caught onto the meaning of after a few long moments of awkward.

“You’re actually still mad at me… or your father’s still mad at me,” Wash surmised from the glares he was receiving.

Less than impressed, Junior leaped from the floor to his bed and bounced toward his alarm clock, pointing out the hour.

“I’m… not spending enough time with you both?” Wash tried to extrapolate.

With another roll of his eyes and a bounce that landed him into a sitting position on the edge of the bed, Junior reached for just beneath his mattress and produced the self-made cape that he commonly wore at training sessions.

Training sessions which Wash had mostly not been heading himself anymore sense ‘diversifying’ his responsibilities.

“I can’t imagine that’s something that would upset your father,” Wash pointed out. “Tucker’s worried when I take you out for training in… well, public. So I get why you’re upset, but you’re not helping with why he is.”

For a moment, Junior’s mandibles clicked and quivered in thought before he snapped his fingers and reached for the rest of his costume — which was suspiciously easily on hand — and began to pull the costume completely together. He then stood beside Wash, hands on his hips, proudly posing.

Scratching at his scruff, Wash wondered when he was going to be as good at reading Junior’s meaning as Tucker was. If ever.
Junior growled and then pointed adamantly toward the window, tugging on Washington’s glove as he did so.

“What? You’ll… tell me why your dad’s mad if we patrol together?” Wash tried, furrowing his brows. “That’s not much of a trade off.”

He meant his words, but as they came tumbling out, Wash could see the glint in Junior’s eyes. Perhaps, to the child, spending a one-on-one patrol with his personal hero, with his for-all-intents-and-purposes stepfather, was worth the leverage of solving a current spat.

“Oh kay,” Wash conceded. “But we’re going to be careful, and we’re going to besneaky about it, alright? Because no matter what I did to get Tucker angry, it will not be worth the anger I’m going to be getting from him the second he learns I took a four year old with me to punch some bad guys.”

The child didn’t seem to mind any of the words except for punch some bad guys at which point he began bouncing around and excitedly honking.

Alarmed, Washington rushed forward and partially covered Junior’s mouth, getting a good chomp from the rows of teeth in response. But once Junior noticed what Wash was doing he nodded excitedly and squirmed out of the hero’s grips. He began climbing onto the window seal sloppily and Washington nearly had a heart attack at that alone and ran forward to grab Junior by the cape and hold him steady.

It was going to be a long patrol.

In a combination of his own exhaustion and attempting to make pace easier for Junior’s shorter stride, Washington made their rooftop journey around the block last a touch longer than was the norm for him. He partially agreed to the arrangement because of the very little likelihood that they would run into any trouble at four thirty in the morning, the sun due to rise sooner than later.

He also agreed to it because even if things did go pear shaped, at the very least they were going to do so at a pace where Wash could quickly disengage from Junior’s side and keep the child clear of real danger.

Junior kept up with Wash at a speed that was genuinely surprising at first. Washington hesitated before quickening their strides just a bit. He apparently had underestimated the speed and agility that Junior had gained already under his training and the limited teamwork training there had been between Junior and the teenagers Kimball and Doyle had saddled him with.

“Your form has improved amazingly,” he said out loud finally, earning a pleased coo from Junior. “Do you think the others have nearly as much potential as you?”

At that, the child let out a snort and shook his head before shrugging. Then he got cocky and began doing some fancy footwork on the ledge of the building they were currently on.

“Alright, easy now,” Wash said warmly, grabbing Junior by the cape and pulling him more toward the center after an uncomfortable lurch had set in his stomach. “No need to make more trouble for your dad.”

The thought of that made a laugh for Junior and he pulled away from Wash’s grip before leaping to the distant ledge overlooking the roads of Blood Gulch. He then sat on his haunches, looking over like a gargoyle.

A true natural at the pose, really.
Washington strolled over to Junior’s side and looked with him over the city, arms crossed, when he noticed a few posters he could have sworn were not there a week before. Large cut outs with cheesy stars and stripes, big thumbs up — and two familiar superhero cutouts just behind it.

Narrowing his eyes, Wash dropped his arms from their crossed position and squinted at it all. “Are those…” he said lowly while Junior cackled below him. “Those are three life sized cut outs of me, Felix, and Mayor-elect Kimball. She’s using us for advertisements. I didn’t agree to that!”

Junior continued to cackle beside him, earning a look of ire.

“Just laugh it up, see who gets an allowance when they’re older,” Wash threatened only half-heartedly before tapping the kid’s shoulder. “Stay here, I’ll be right back with something for your collection.”

At that notion, Junior nearly leaped up and called out in excitement. But Wash wasn’t watching him, instead leaping down and, as always, landing on his feet as he reached the pavement below. He could hear Junior clapping.

“Sarcasm at four,” Wash muttered, crossing the road to where the cut outs were. “We’re going to have a problem when he’s a teenager.” He stopped on the sidewalk and took a deep breath. His heart was pounding and he had to truly think back on his words before realizing why.

It had slipped out so easily, but it was such a huge thing and it could not have been dignified with such a lackadaisical musing.

He said we and he meant them and suddenly Wash remembered what their fight was about.

“Fuck,” Wash said, running his hand through his hair. “My personal life and my hero life are too messy, I’ve not made any lines. Tucker and I are never talking about the same things because everything bleeds over and I think maybe my value systems are circling the drain. Fuck. I had a more honest conversation with Church than I had with the man I’m sleeping with.” He paused, then again, for good measure, “Fuck.”

When Wash gathered his thoughts up enough to look in front of him again, he was met by his own smiling face standing supportively behind Kimball. He couldn’t help the natural glare.

“What are you smiling about? You don’t have your shit together either,” he told the cut out before grabbing it and yanking it forcefully from the display.

Turning around, Wash was ready to cross the street back to where Junior should have been up on the rooftop, but instead he was met by the sight of Junior already down on the ground level, waving at him.

Flustered and surprised, Wash looked up, then back down, then up and then back at Junior. “How did you—“

Junior blarghed and leaped higher than possible for any four year old human and landed squarely on his feet.

“Well, why? You’re just going to have to get up on the rooftop again when I come over,” Wash scolded before Junior honked and pointed behind Wash. “What? I don’t get what you…” He then glanced over his shoulder and saw the Felix cut out. “Oh. Of course you want them both.”

Looking back across the street Wash rubbed at his neck with his free hand. He knew Junior wasn’t fully aware of the situation from the park the other day but it was still awkward as hell to think
there would be a life size cut out of Felix in the apartment. “Junior, are you sure you want—“

Before Washington could fully finish his words, however, he saw that Junior was crossing the street bounding toward him. At four to five in the morning, that normally would not have been much cause for alarm, but for that moment, Wash’s cat-like senses bristled him from head to toe and he could hear zooming in from the distance a car.

“Junior!” he screamed out before diving after his stepson, shielding him with a bear hug just before his shoulder blade hit the corner of the car.

He was obscenely familiar with how these things usually worked out and was ready to tuck into a roll that would protect Junior and shield his own vitals as they rolled over the hood of the vehicle. But it never really came.

Washington felt the catch of his suit being grabbed by the neckline and his whole body being sent in a whirl of motion toward the other side of the street.

Before he could even blink, Wash was rolling with Junior into the remaining cut outs, breaking Felix’s in half.

Groaning, Wash rubbed at his head and looked up — noticing the wisp of red hair just before flinching at the screeching of car tires and someone laying on the horn.

“Tex, you have either the best or the worst timing. Ever. Of all…” he stopped mid sentence as he finally got a full look at the person before them. “You’re not Tex.”

The woman adjusted her goggles. “What? Surely some time travel didn’t make everyone forget Carolina, Washington. I was only you team leader, after all.”
It's a Trap!

Chapter Notes

I was so, so broken up over Adam West dying. He was such a fundamental part of getting into the world of superheroes for me and I loved and admired him so dearly. I’m not sure if my adoration for him and his incarnation of Batman comes through in my writing at all, but even if it doesn’t I hope that I and others inspired by his heroics find a way to continue the legacy that endeared him to us oh so much.

Special thanks to @analiarvb, @secretlystephaniebrown, @i-stole-orions-heart, @cobaltqueen, @icefrozenover, @thepheonixqueen, Enmuse, @a-taller-tale, Yin, @notatroll7, @vpzerada, @washingtonstub, and Awesome_Milkshakes on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feed back! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

He honest to god didn’t know what to make of her.

“What’s the matter, Wash? Cat got your tongue?”

Junior, somewhat in spite toward Washington, began snorting in laughter which only doubled when the hero gave him a warning glare. It was a lost cause getting any respect around everyone there, that much was for sure. Someday Wash was going to accept that as the status quo of Blood Gulch and not be as irritated by it as he was that moment.

Refocusing on the redheaded woman before him, Wash wasn’t sure what to do next. She clearly was someone he remembered, and yet someone he wasn’t sure he knew at all. A paradoxical confusion he hadn’t felt since the time he realized that Texas was still alive and around to lend, or in most cases not lend, her helping hand in Blood Gulch.

“You’re… from Freelancer,” he put together.

The woman stared back at him for a moment, a flicker of disappointment across her face before she sighed and lifted up her goggles. “I was kinda wondering what the time paradox was going to do with all the nonsense that happened in Freelancer. Was kinda hoping I had left more of an impact.” She looked into Wash’s eyes, her green eyes nearly electric in they brightness. “Guess I could have done more to reach out and make an impact to other members of the team, too, though. For that I’m sorry, Washington.”

Suddenly, it all came colliding on him at once. Wash let go of Junior and got to his feet.

“Field leader — Carolina. How… But… You…” he stammered before holding up his hands and taking a long breath. He then looked back at her seriously. “Explain the time paradox comment because I find when words like that are used, the other nonsense falls in order or by the sideline.”

“Of course,” Carolina answered before holding up a finger. “Give me one and three quarters of a second, though.”

“Wha—“ Wash began.

Suddenly a blur of blue swept past him from one direction, nearly causing him to stumble back
along with Junior, who hit the ground rear first, and then from the other side, which blew Wash forward before he found more solid footing. Carolina was standing in front of them still, hands on her hips and things seemingly unchanged.

That was, seemingly unchanged until an explosion went off down the road from them.

Shocked, Washington and Junior both turned toward the explosion and looked amazed.

“What the hell was that?” Wash demanded.

“Just for amusement’s sake, do you want that answered or do you want the paradox thing answered?” Carolina asked dryly.

“Which answer is more relevant to keeping us further from death?” Wash asked critically.

“There’s a debate to be had on that,” Carolina hummed in response, foot tapping.

“Forget it — answer the explosion thing first!” Wash decided, throwing up his hands.

“Right, that was the Felix stand up cut out,” Carolina answered, pointing to the display behind them.

Caught off guard, both Wash and Junior spun around toward the display only to see it completely gone, only the Wash cut out he had grabbed before was still with them. Then he turned back to Carolina.

“Why was it rigged to explode!?” he demanded.

“I thought that part was obvious at this point,” Carolina said, cocking her head to the side. “Didn’t you read the note I gave you?”

“The note—“ Wash began before thinking back on the day at the park. “You were warning me about Felix in the park… and now you’re saving me from exploding posters of him.” He looked at Carolina. “Sounds like you’re coming back from the dead to tell me that Felix is evil.”

“Well… I mean, have you met him?” Carolina asked. “No one talks with that many double meanings without being a secret bad guy. I mean, why else would someone be so cryptic all the damn time?”

Washington and Junior glanced at each other before looking back to Carolina.

“People say I’m cryptic,” Wash pointed out. “Usually it’s to protect the people I love from my identity.”

“That they know about?” Carolina asked critically.

“You’re cryptic — leaving a random note in the park instead of saying hello. Sounds like you’re evil,” Wash argued.

“I couldn’t walk up and say hi, you were being watched by Felix. And I was totally right,” Carolina reminded him. “You’re welcome by the way. For both saves.”

“You sound eerily like Tex,” Wash said with a squint.

For a moment, the comment seemed to turn Carolina almost to stone, her face frozen in shock.
Washington, a little concerned, reached out toward her to see if she had somehow managed to hurt herself. “Carolina? Are you…”

Suddenly Carolina grabbed him by his shoulders and began quickly shaking him, an intensity of fire in her eyes as she did so. “You take that comment back right now I swear to god if anyone heard you if somehow she heard you don’t you realize how offensive that is oh my god what’s wrong with you can’t you see that there’s no worst way to offend a woman children spend their whole lives trying not to grow up to be just like either of their parents you shut up don’t you know what’s good for you punk take it back right now—”

Junior honked in alarm while Washington tried not to grow dizzy from the shaking.

Finally, he grabbed Carolina’s hands and forcefully yanked them off his shoulders. “Stop that! I can’t understand a single word you’re saying!” he snapped at her. “What was that? Super speed?”

Carolina blinked a few times then put a hand against her forehead. “Wow, sorry. That was maybe an overreaction there.”

“You think?” Wash asked critically.

“Look, I meant what I said in my note the other day,” Carolina said, dropping her hand and looking intently into Washington’s eyes. “Both that you shouldn’t trust people you don’t know… and that you need to put some faith in the people you do know right now. Because what’s going on? It’s too big to explain to you just yet.”

Washington crossed his arms. “Well that statement sure builds a bridge of trust between us,” he said sarcastically.

“I just saved you from a car and from an exploding Felix,” she counted on her fingers. “Exploding Felixes, by the way, have trended toward a bad omen for you lately if you haven’t noticed.”

Blinking, Wash rubbed at his neck. “Well… you’re not wrong.”

“Right. Because I’m right about this,” Carolina argued flippantly. “But even if you can’t trust me because of some paradox I’m not going to explain to you right now—”

“Blargh!” Junior pointed out.

“Agreed, it’s very alarming that she keeps mentioning things she can’t mention,” Wash muttered.

“You’re not going to trust me, fine. I’m pretty much an unknown in this equation, I get that,” Carolina remarked. “But if you can’t trust me, then by all means, trust the advice I gave you before. Trust who you know.”

For a moment, Wash wasn’t even sure what she was talking about, but the events of the last few days all came clicking together, and his eyes widened. “You’ve been working with Tex and Church behind the scenes. You’re the reason I’ve not been seeing much of Tex — you and whatever it is she has Church working on decoding.”

Carolina waved her hand in a seesaw fashion. “Eh. I’ve kept away from dealing with Church… for… reasons.”

“Cryptic again,” Wash warned.

“You are such a killjoy compared to the Wash I used to know,” Carolina said. “I kind of like it.
You have the air of experienced badass. You even have a sidekick. Man, it’s like you grew up on us—"

“Ju—“ Wash caught himself and shook his head. “The Extraterrestrial Kid is not my sidekick. I don’t believe in sidekicks. I think they churn out kids into mini child soldiers and set their lives on a path not completely of their own choosing.”

Raising an eyebrow, Carolina crossed her arms. “Wow. Pretty strong opinion for a former sidekick.”

Junior gasped and covered his mouth like the world’s largest secret had just been revealed to him.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Wash said flippantly. He never took his eyes off of Carolina. “I deserve to know what’s going on if it’s my life that’s on the line. If Felix is bad, then he also knows far more about my personal life than I care for him to know. And that’s not getting into the situation with Locus and the mayors.”

“Yeah, we’re trying to figure out which of them is the pack mule for their payments,” Carolina said with a shrug. “Church was supposed to be finished with that by now but, fuck if someone here didn’t happen to distract him with lots of useless security upgrades.”

Washington raised his hands up. “Wait a minute — what are you talking about? Someone’s paying Locus?”

“And Felix,” Carolina explained. “Don’t tell me you didn’t notice that their costumes match.”

While Washington stared straight back at Carolina, Junior snorted behind him.

“It has to be Kimball — didn’t you see how she’s the one putting up these traps?” Wash said, pointing to the broken Kimball stand up. “It’s obvious.”

“Uh, obviously a plant,” Carolina argued. “Would you just trust that I’m on this already? Sheesh.”

“No, you said to trust who I know, and I’d trust this more if it was coming out of Tex’s mouth,” Washington said firmly. “Speaking of which, why isn’t she the one here dropping these morale bombs on me right now instead of you?”

“Wash, do you really not know what’s happening right now?” Carolina asked skeptically. “Weren’t you the sidekick to a detective superhero?”

Squinting at her, Wash began to feel even more on edge than he had before. “What do you mean?”

“Think about what’s coming up, and why someone just wanted to take you out of the picture,” Carolina said, waving to the cardboard cut outs behind them. “There’s an election — one where funds are being funneled to mercenaries with incredible powers. And tonight is the night of their big debate.”

Wash looked at her incredulously. “And—“

“And anyone who could put whatever plans they have in danger is going to be taken out of the picture,” she said seriously. “Anyone.”

Eyes widening, the realization hit him like a ton of bricks. “Tucker,” he gasped. “Tex is going to save him?”
It was then Carolina’s turn to squint and tilt her head. “Who? I was talking about the kids you were training—“

“Goddammit!” Wash shouted, throwing down the cut out and leaping past Carolina while Junior let out a series of alarmed honks. “Watch Junior!”

“What?” Carolina called out behind him. “I don’t do kids— Ow fuck! It just bit me—“

Washington didn’t have time to look back and scold either of them.

He had to get to Tucker. He had to call the Reds. *He needed to check on even Church.*

And he had to beat himself up for not realizing the danger himself right away.
Coming to the Rescue

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the extra long hiatus, everyone. I meant only for a week’s vacation, but I’m sure you all know how life is. Fortunately, I was able to get us another chapter out before I left for RTX!!! I’m so excited to meet friends and fellow RT fans in Austin!

Special thanks to @analiarvb, @icefrozenover, @cobaltqueen, @washingtonstub, @secretlystephaniebrown, @notatroll7, Enmuse, thewolvesrunwild, Yin, LordFluffySword, @thepheonixqueen, and @a-taller-tale on AO3 and tumblr for the wonderful feedback! I truly appreciate it more than you know.

“I realize this is somewhat ironic coming from me, but I think you’d better slow down,” Carolina recommended, running backwards to talk to Washington as he raced forward. Streaks of blue raced behind her in a dazzling display, sparks flying from the astounding friction of her feet against the pavement. It was enough to make Washington wonder how he could have ever forgotten someone like her.

“Tucker and the others — they’re in danger!” he got out as close to incoherently as he could muster without diving right over the edge.

“Understandable, but I’m not the one you need to slow down for,” Carolina argued with a nod of her head back behind them.

At first Washington was confused by the sentiment, but once he turned just enough to look over his shoulder, he could see exactly what his fellow former superhero meant.

Junior was bumbling along behind them, breathing heavy, but still keeping pace. What Washington could see of his reptilian cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were wide as saucers. Even knowing as little about Junior’s species and anatomy as he did, Washington could clearly see this was a little child positively terrified out of his mind.

And his father’s boyfriend was the selfless dick responsible.

“Junior,” Wash got out in his own gulp of air before skidding to a stop and turning around to meet the babe.

Carolina, seeming to be slowing but also to run off some of that kinetic energy obviously built up through her body, circled Wash a few times at super speed before coming to a stop herself at last, hands on her hips and very clearly not even beginning to be out of breath, or breaking a sweat. She simply stopped with her hands on her hips and waited for things to play out.

Once Junior was close enough, Washington dropped down on one knee and clapped his hands on the young alien’s shoulders. He looked as meaningfully into Junior’s eyes as he could, and rubbed tiny circles against Junior’s skin with his thumbs. It was a little sentiment that seemed to amount to nothing in the grand scheme of things, but Washington could swear that he saw little Junior begin to breathe easier.
“I’m going to take care of your dad, Junior,” Wash informed him. “Him… and you… Really, everyone is my responsibility. No matter how much they sometimes contradict. No matter how hard it sometimes is to balance it all. The buck stops with me. And I need to go find Tucker and make sure he’s safe because that’s my job.”

The four year old’s eyes were still far too wide, but they narrowed ever so slightly and his jaws began to chatter. As if he was fully aware of what the next talking point was going to be and he had to make it clear he really didn’t like where Wash was going before he got there.

“I know, but part of my other responsibility all this time has been to try to teach you… and the others… all of the others, how to be heroes, too,” Wash said. “I might’ve not done a good job with everyone else… Really, I’m just not creative enough to figure out how to totally utilize the Reds outside of training and reckless endangerment… and Palomo’s super power to sparkle bothered me on such a fundamental level that I never really allowed it much extra thought, honestly.”

Junior tilted his head as if attempting to force Wash’s hand to get on with it.

“My point is, for all my mistakes, for all the ways I’ve come short as a hero and as a friend and… as a boyfriend,” Wash looked at the kid seriously. “I know that of anyone and everyone, you’ve got the right heart and the right instincts to be a better hero — a better person than any one of us. That I never needed to push you in the right direction, because your arrows shoot straight,” Wash continued. He watched the way a certain twinkle returned to Junior’s eyes as the fear slowly faded away. “So right now, while I go and make sure your father’s okay, I need you to do for the others I failed what you’ve done for me, Junior. I need you to show them the right way to be a hero. And make sure they’re okay first. That means Church, Caboose… the Reds… the other kids if you can get a hold of them. Make sure they’re okay. And make sure they’re safe. And keep them that way until I can come back and make everything right.”

For a moment Junior seemed uncertain of what to do. His mandibles clattered together and he shifted his weight from foot to foot. Wash could see the way his glances very pointedly looked toward the direction of the gas station and garage that they all knew the Reds hung around at.

But he wasn’t moving yet.

He was still worried about Tucker.

“Junior, I’m trusting you a lot here,” Washington reminded him as softly as he could, given the heightened stakes. “Even if I haven’t shown I deserved it in a while, I need you to trust me, too here. Alright?”

For a moment, Junior seemed uncertain. His dark eyes flickered down in thought before he looked back up to Washington and nodded assuredly. His little fists came up and he let out a cooing sound followed by a couple of chattering clicks of his teeth.

That was a yes if Washington had ever heard one.

Washington smiled in turn and rubbed Junior’s head. “I know I can trust you. Let’s hope you can do the same for me.”

With a deep breath, Junior turned toward the direction of the Reds’ garage and took off as fast as his legs could take him in those rubber rain boots.

Getting back onto his feet, Washington watched after Junior almost in admiration. It was almost surprising to him just how much he had meant every word about the faith he had in just what kind
of admirable superhero Junior was one day going to be.

“Wow,” Carolina’s voice pulled Wash from his thoughts. “That was… sweet. If not entirely corny. Sweet.”

“The last thing I would ever want is for that kid to see his father in danger or hurt or…” Wash closed his eyes tightly, perishing even the thought of worse for Tucker.

“He might be seeing that with your other buddies, or sending him into danger,” Carolina pointed out as she folded her arms. “None of them had a Tex heading after them.”

“Which is why you’re going to follow him,” Washington informed her, looking at her seriously. Carolina only stared at him at first before holding up a finger and shaking her head. “I don’t do kids.”

“He’s not a kid, he’s a superhero, and he’ll need someone who’s used to training those by his side no matter what he finds without me,” Wash said confidently.

There was a moment where some fondness flickered across Carolina’s face. “You starting to remember me again?”

“I… I don’t even know what you mean entirely,” Wash answered. “But I was taught by a great hero to trust my guts. And for whatever reason — subconscious memory or just… maybe the fact you’ve saved us about three times that I’m aware of, I trust you.”

“I’d be flattered if you all hadn’t also trusted obvious villains,” Carolina pointed out.

“Go watch after my child,” Wash ordered flatly.

Adjusting her goggles, Carolina seemed to be taking her time, until she put one foot forward and in a burst of static and wind, was out of Washington’s sight entirely. The boom was nearly enough to make him step back.

Shaking his head, Washington glared after her. “Showoff,” he uttered before his own words began to ring in his ears.

*My child.*

And, suddenly, a whole new rush was flowing through Washington’s system. “I have to find Tucker,” he determined.

With a renewed energy, Washington began racing forward toward the laundromat, barely paying attention to his surroundings. All of his focus was on getting to Tucker. Getting to their home. And, if everything was fine and people were safe, making sure to let his boyfriend know that he finally got it. That he finally was on the same page.

With perhaps some well deserved shoving it in Tucker’s face that *all of this* would have easily been talked through if he had used some *adult like words* to put into perspective that they were a family.

They were a family and Wash needed to think more on those terms.

Which became very hard to do when he reached the laundromat’s back alley entrance and found that the secret garage had been left open.
What the hell?” Washington got out before looking around worriedly and heading on into the
apartment. That door, too, was left open and Washington was left in what looked like the sight of a
struggle.


Running in at full speed seemed to have its consequences as his feet struck something hard right in
front of him that went all the way up to his shins. And, however ungracefully, Washington hit the
carpet chin first.

“Ouch! Son of a bitch!” Tex’s voice screamed out at him before an invisible fist punched Wash’s
shoulder.

“Ow!” Wash growled before stopping, eyes widening as he scrambled to sit upright. “Wait! Tex? Is
that you?”

Slowly, the other vigilante dropped her invisibility and revealed she was sitting on the floor,
roughed up and with a black eye.

“I didn’t know you could get black eyes,” Wash said almost mystified.

“Yeah? I didn’t know that cats couldn’t land on their goddamn feet!” she snapped before spitting
some reddened spit to the side and onto Wash and Tucker’s carpet. “You didn’t tell me these
assholes had a psychic. I dropped my defenses. Got suckered.”

“What?” Washington asked before he could catch himself. Holding out his hands and rapidly
shaking head, he kept his fellow vigilante from really answering the question. “Nevermind any of
that, I don’t actually care. What I do care about is what the fuck happened here? Who trashed my
apartment, and, more importantly, where is Tucker?”

Tex squinted at him as if trying to size him up. “You’re joking right? There are two assholes who
have been on your grill this whole time while I told you to stay uninvolved with the city shit and
one of them showed off that he knew your secret identities, and you’re asking me who came and
wrecked your shit?”

Wash stared back at her for a moment. “Yes.”

“It was Felix and Locus, Wash!” Tex snapped.

“But where is Tucker!?” Wash demanded.

“I don’t know, you didn’t warn me about a psychic and blindsided me!” Tex snapped.

“You’re joking right? There are two assholes who have been on your grill this whole time while I told you to stay uninvolved with the city shit and one of them showed off that he knew your secret identities, and you’re asking me who came and wrecked your shit?”

Wash stared back at her for a moment. “Yes.”

“It was Felix and Locus, Wash!” Tex snapped.

“But where is Tucker!?” Wash demanded.

“I don’t know, you didn’t warn me about a psychic and blindsided me!” Tex snapped.

“You’re supposed to be the best! How were you not prepared for anything?” Wash cried out, arms
in the air.

“Because being the best usually means I don’t have to be!” Tex snapped before pinching the bridge
of her nose and taking a deep breath. “Okay, stop, this isn’t getting us anywhere.”

“Where did they take Tucker? Did they hurt him? What happened?” Washington demanded, very
quickly losing his cool. “And what about everyone else—“

“Church is safe, I got to him first,” Tex assured him.

Washington opened his mouth, his jaw jutted out as the facts began to compile right in front of him.
“You went to Church first. You prioritized Church over Tucker and now Tucker could be in danger or dead or worse because of it!” Washington growled out.

“What’s worse than death?” Tex asked with a sarcastic tilt of her head.

“I don’t know, but probably something dramatic!” Wash snapped. “I mean, jesus christ, Tex! How could you—“

“Because I figured you’d have your shit together enough by now that you’d be the one rescuing Tucker,” Tex snapped. “God forbid I assume my two friends fucking each other were getting along for once!”

Washington clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. “Church is just a robot and you went to save him first!”

Tex narrowed her good eye. “Yeah, because that robot is my damsel to save, Wash! So how about you stop flipping the fuck out and use those supposed detective skills of yours to get a clue as to where these fuckers might have taken Tucker.”

“Oh, don’t be a Church about it,” Tex responded with a roll of her eyes. “Speaking of whom, I didn’t save him first just because it’s been made a habit due to years of practice. I saved him because Carolina and I—“

“Who you still need to explain to me,” Wash muttered as he slowly got back to his feet.

“Have been forcing him to do some cyber security efforts and save us the trouble of going into buildings and breaking open things to find clues,” Tex explained. “Turns out, most people just hide everything on the web behind shitty firewalls.”

Wash’s head was still spinning from the punch, but he focused himself enough to look at Tex and get out his next serious question. “Wait. What is it that you have had Church looking for? Why was it so important?”

“Because, as you know, superheroes rarely just pop out of nowhere and get traction. It takes finances, it takes equipment and PR and a superhero and super villain no one’s ever heard of just coming out of the blue and having the attention of the whole city like Felix and Locus did? It doesn’t happen. I should know,” Tex explained. “I rode into town with nothing but the clothes on my back and I didn’t get anywhere for the longest time without some guidance and maybe a little publicity from an established and trusted team like Freelancer.”

It all began to click. “Someone’s funding them?” Wash asked critically.

“Not just them,” Tex explained. “Someone’s also funding both of the campaigns for mayor right now. And they just happen to be the same person for some reason. I can’t imagine that it’s just a
coincidence that some mysterious no one is just throwing money around like this.”

It all came together and Washington ignored the pain in his gut as he started off toward the door.

“Wait, Wash!” Tex yelled after him, sounding more aggravated than before. “Where the fuck are you going?”

“To save Tucker,” Wash said.

“Where at?” she clarified.

“There’s a debate for the mayoral election today!” Wash called back. “I think these guys are going to try for something… dramatic.” He stopped at the top of the stairwell for his apartment only to be reminded that the secreted garage had been left open, and of course that meant that his own motorcycle was long gone. His heart sank as he imagined having to wait at a bus stop.

But then Tex came up behind him. He looked at her seriously. “Did you drive your motorcycle here?”

She glared at him. “No one gets to drive my bike but me, Wash,” she warned.

“Do you take passengers?” he asked desperately.

“Do you backseat drive?” she asked seriously.

“I will keep my mouth shut,” he promised.

She huffed and jumped over the stairwell’s railing to hit the ground running. Wash followed suit.

“I seriously doubt you have the restraint,” she remarked.

And she was probably right, Washington simply didn’t care though.

It was time to save his family and the day. And, maybe, democracy as a side note.
While I certainly can’t apologize enough for how long it’s taken for me to get this chapter out, I just want to say I can’t thank all of you enough for your patience and understanding. We’re almost done with another installment of this universe and the enormity of that is really getting to me, choking me up almost. I love writing Hero Time so much and it’s been such a joy to share it all with you. Thank you so very much.

And as always, a special thanks to Enmuse, Yin, thewolvesrunwild, @notatroll7, @secretlystephaniebrown, @cobaltqueen, @icefrozenover, @analiarvb, @the-space-nerd-97, Kiwibat, @wholehoggz, @festiveshrimps, and @washingtonstub for the feedback and support!

Washington’s thoughts probably shouldn’t have been on the fact that Church would kill him if he saw the position he was in, and yet as he clutched to Tex for dear life as she drove through the city streets with something akin to reckless abandon, he found himself very much thinking along those lines. In fact, he was thinking about a lot of the people that he knew were relying on them at that moment.

Church was only topped by Caboose and the Reds and the teenage heroes who had so much further to go and the restaurant crew and Junior who looked up at him the way Wash had never been looked up to before and — Tucker. God, Tucker most of all.

When Washington felt the need to protect the city, to protect Blood Gulch of all places, a big part of that had been under the idea that if he went somewhere he could work in the shadows, where he could work without connections or fears of tripping on his own strings of attachment, that he would be the sort of acclaimed hero who could single handedly clean up an entire town.

But he had never been closer, never been more compromised than at that moment, realizing he had an entire family relying on him. And that thought was enough for the sake of righteous fury that he was probably going to do something heroic, something to put an end to the nonsense, but also something very, very inescapably stupid.

“Can’t this go faster?” Wash demanded.

Tex didn’t even flinch toward glancing back at him, eyes set on the road ahead of her.

“Washington, there was one agreement. One. And I didn’t even prompt it. You made it. And it was about how much I fucking hate backseat driving. Are you backseating me right now?” the leather clad woman snapped angrily.

“With my boyfriend at stake? Yes!” Wash cried out to the point that his voice crackled.

“That’s another thing,” Tex continued, voice still a firm growl. “I’m glad you’re having whatever midlife crisis-slash-epiphany or whatever that you’re playing house with my friend you’ve been fucking for a few months.”
“Do you have to say everything so graphically?” Wash’s voice cracked again.

“Really, I think it’s fucking fantastic that you’re holding fast to the whole queer-and-here stuff,” she continued, ignoring Wash’s input entirely. “But, jesus christ, if you can go a solid minute without finding a way to work boyfriend or family or step-son into your corny speeches, I’d be able to stop feeling the puke in the back of my mouth.”

Wash bristled. “You have a problem with us being boyfriends?”

“No, it’s just weird because you’ve not called each other that for months and suddenly you can’t shut up. It’s like you just realized it for the first time or something,” Tex remarked scornfully.

“I did realize it for the first time!” Wash argued. “I had no idea how much all of it meant to me until it finally happened — until I was faced with what I was about to lose, I realized what I’d had all along and what I was really fighting for. Not just the city or being a hero, but because my family is part of the city and I now know that the city is full of that kind of love—”

Tex swerved side to side, nearly tipping the bike and them over and definitely almost causing Washington to go flying off the back of the bike had he not been already holding onto her for dear life.

“Tex, what the fuck are you doing?” he demanded.

“Sorry, my eyes rolled in the back of my head. I almost passed out from a sugar rush,” she replied. “Really, it’s your own fault.”

“My family is at risk! Can’t you take this a little more seriously?” Wash snapped only to be taken by surprise when she swerved back and forth again — that time fairly deliberately. “You’re hysterical,” he said flatly.

“You’re disgusting. Also you must have cat claws or something because that time I was trying really hard to knock you off,” she said simply.

Squinting at her, Wash gripped her tighter just in case she was going to pull another maneuver. “And you’re the worst.”

“Dumbass,” she laughed almost affectionately. “I’m the best.”

They sped past another corner and soon were faced with the sort of traffic and crowds that were to be expected downtown during some sort of parade or major event that wasn’t an electoral campaign. It wasn’t like their city was particularly well known for political involvement, after all, that’s how they got into the nonsense of the mayoral tie to begin with.

“This is more crowded than a sports thing,” Wash announced.

“A sports thing?” Tex snorted beside him. “Fuck, Wash, you can’t even name a single sport?”

“Basketball,” Wash replied almost mindlessly, his full attention on scanning the crowds for anything suspicious.

“There you go,” Tex joked.

“My boyfriend likes basketball,” Wash continued, finally honing in on a center stage where posters for both Kimball and Doyle were set up.
“Oh my god you can’t stop yourself. It’s like compulsive gay,” Tex marveled. “Other than breaking his arm, have you hung out with Donut any? You probably have more in common than you think.”

“Do you know how wrong that sounds?” Washington began to argue only for them both to stiffen and hold their places as the crowd erupted into cheers and claps as the curtains on the stage opened and allowed the mayoral candidates to make their way through to the podiums set up for them.

“Finally!” someone in the crowd jeered. “We can finally put this whole political mess to rest!”

“Yeah, I don’t even care who won at this point,” another person answered.

“People are so politically inactive. It’s disgusting how little they care about their civic duties,” Tex claimed.

Washington looked at her suspiciously. “Oh? I’m guessing you’re the one other person in our district who happened to register and vote then, if you care so much about it.”

“What? No, of course not,” Tex scoffed. “I’m legally dead. I said it’s disgusting how little they care about their civic duties. Which is basically just to vote. My civic duty is to stop time itself from collapsing in on itself, straighten out underground alien mobsters, and stop alien civil wars from reaching our own planet as a theater for their squabbling. You’re welcome, Democracy.”

Washington gave her a look which Tex seemingly didn’t even notice. Instead she was thrusting down on the kickstand and letting the engine of her bike idle as she leaned back and crossed her arms over her chest.

“What’re you doing?” Wash asked.

“Waiting for the big speech to tell us what the fuck’s going on,” she declared. “Man, you really have been focusing on petty crimes too much. Don’t you even remember how this whole thing with super villains goes down? We’ve got to hear the speech and know what the fuck we’re up against or else we’ll fall right into a trap.”

Surprised, Washington did a double take of their surroundings — a sea of bystanders around them and the mayors. “How is that falling more into a trap than sticking out like two sore thumbs in the middle of this crowd?” He paused and realized no one was really paying them any mind. “What the hell is wrong with these people? I’m wearing a spandex costume.”

“Hidden in plain sight, my friend,” Tex shrugged. “Honestly next to some conventions, we’re like third rate shitty cosplayers. Our costumes aren’t nearly as elaborate as they could be.”

“Elaborate sounds like a codeword for easily pulled apart in a fight,” Wash replied flatly.

“Again, you’ve not been to enough superhero conventions,” Tex shrugged.

Annoyed and not needing more attitude from the most attitude driven woman he had ever met, Wash swung his leg over the back of the bike and got off. An action that actually seemed to surprise Tex as she bothered looking his way for once.

“Uh, what the fuck are you doing?” she demanded.

“Getting to the stage,” Wash confirmed before pushing forward through the crowd.

“Why?” she asked, still not moving from her spot. “I already told you what to do — sit and listen.
No reason to go in half-cocked. Man. Where’s Tucker when you need him.”

“Tucker’s not with us, and your covert research you and your new partner failed to let me in on said that financial backing for the assholes responsible has something to do with the mayors,” Wash yelled over his shoulder. “Hence, I’m going to get answers and not sit around waiting for them to fall into our laps!”

“Fucking hell, you’ve not learned anything from working in Blood Gulch,” Tex shook her head. “That’s the only way these things get done, don’t even kid yourself. No one from our part of town is capable of moving the plot forward on their own. It’s our fucking Kryptonite.”

“Then it’s a good thing I’m not a native,” Wash argued, turning back to face the stage.

He was making his way through the crowd rather quickly, but the further he progressed, the more pushback he was getting. Despite a part of the city only a few blocks over being practically abandoned, there were enough citizens available for this conference to pack in like sardines. And it was mightily inconvenient when no one seemed willing to budge even for a superhero.

“I’m sorry — excuse me — please — I have to — the stage!” Wash gritted out as he bumped through them all.

There was a tapping on the mic and the clearing of a throat before Kimball’s voice, amplified across the town square, came through loud and clear. “Greetings, citizens. Your appearance in support of the democratic process as well as for the institutions of law and justice in our grand city could not be accepted with more appreciation and joy than what we have now,” Kimball announced to the cheers of the crowd.

Wash pushed to get closer, looking across the stage angrily. There was no sign of Felix.

“Hey, watch it! I’ve got a kid here!” the woman shoved yelled at him angrily.

“I understand, my boyfriend has a son. Who’s like a son to me, excuse me,” Wash said, continuing forward.

“I don’t need your life story, just don’t shove us, fucksake!” the woman cried out.

“Hey, language!” Wash sputtered out. He stopped and looked back in the general direction of the woman even as moved further forward. “I… I have a boyfriend! We’re a family!”

While he got a few looks for his outburst, most people seemed transfixed on the stage and on Kimball and Doyle themselves. They were both dressed in fine suits and seemed ready for a long and probably costly to tax payers ceremony.

“I believe that our city has waited long enough for an answer as to who is mayor and-and-and-and,” Doyle began stuttering just as Washington reached the corner of the stage and was being pushed back by some bodyguards with earpieces.

“Hey, listen, something’s wrong here,” Washington tried to explain and push through when the guard snorted.

“No, he always stutters and faints like that,” the guard responded.

As if on cue, Doyle dropped his mic entirely and let out a sharp yell before hitting the stage.

Washington squinted. “This isn’t right,” he managed again.
“While we… we wait on my… colleague to be-be…” Kimball attempted to transition only to grip to the sides of her podium, hanging her head over. The microphone clattered against the side of the podium causing an uneasy noise across the intercoms. The whole crowd shuttered in response. “No… No please!” she yelled out, away from the mic before hunkering down on the ground, covering her head with her arms.

Everyone gasped and began muttering in confusion.

“What’s going on!?” someone cried out.

Washington took the opportunity to at last push past the security guards only to be stopped dead in his tracks as a familiar black and orange clad figure strolled across the stage and picked up the dropped microphone. He tapped it once, twice and then cleared his throat, a sneer on his face.

“What’s going on, ladies and gentlemen, is that you’re witnessing two regular, mortal humans being put exactly in their place,” Felix announced. Everyone grew silent watching him with wide eyes. But Felix seemed to just enjoy it, stepping back and tilting his head to look at the the huddled forms of the would-be mayors. “You know, it’s amazing how much effect a little… mental push can do to humans. You just get to know them well enough to know what illusions to cast, what weaknesses to exploit, and suddenly anyone is just putty in your hands.” He turned back toward the crowd and smiled coyly. “Of course… fortunately for our species, we’re not all just human anymore.”

Washington felt his blood run cold as he looked at Felix and began to realize just where things were going.

“See, when I was growing up, there were so few special people… well, I always had to wonder, why, if someone was special, they would choose to put their lives at risk every single day to rescue non-special humans,” Felix continued. “I couldn’t fathom it. Haven’t they ever heard about evolution? Haven’t they ever heard of survival of the fittest?” He glanced out over the crowd. “The way I see things… if monsters and aliens and bad guys with powers crush a population because they’re not special enough to stop them… What a waste for someone with special powers to inevitably end up dead trying to rescue them! It’s bad math! It’s bad science! Because if I, for example, am better than you, if I am smarter than you, if I am deadlier than you, well, then, I guess it should just be my right to kill you then, isn’t it? And, really, that should be the right of all super powered people. Because we are better than you. And we are going to outnumber you.”

Having had enough of the übermensch philosophizing, Washington pushed forward onto the stage. “And then what’s next, Felix?” he demanded loudly.

Felix didn’t seem surprised by the interruption, in fact his smile even widened as he slowly turned his head in Washington’s direction. “Wash, buddy… I was wondering when you would show up. Perfect example of Mister Hero. Always gotta save the day! Always have to try to make worth out of the absolute most worthless people. Talking about utter wastes, talk about bad math. How many of those nine lives you got left?” He bared his teeth as his grin grew impossibly large. “Were losing any of them worth it? Really?”

Wash stood his ground. “Everything I do? I make it count,” Washington assured him. “You didn’t answer my question, Felix… if there are no regular people in the world, then what makes people special anyway? What’s the point of having abilities if it’s not to evolve our community? To make things worth fighting for again?”

“Hm, what comes after everyone’s special, you ask?” Felix hummed. “I have an answer for that,
don’t you worry, but that’s not to spoil the surprise. No… I want you to keep asking yourself my question… How many lives have you got left? And how much are they worth?” He produced from his utility belt a button that he then pressed showily.

Washington didn’t make any sudden moves even as the stage shook and people screamed. The curtains behind the podiums fell away and the stage opened up to reveal an elaborate platform raising up a large, imposing machine that—

“It’s a giant blender,” Wash marveled. “How the fuck…”

There was a clang of glass that drew Wash’s attention to the inside of the giant kitchen utility and the air was immediately knocked out of him.

_Tucker was stuck in the blender._
We’re so close to the end, y’all! I’m so nervous and excited and I really hope I can deliver for you all… on the blender joke that has been waiting for three years to be told. Let me tell you. Sitting on a giant blender being a plot element has been MAJORLY difficult but I managed.

And as always, a special thanks to @analiarvb, @icefrozenover, @washingtonstub, @cobaltqueen, @notatroll7, @secretlystephaniebrown, NinjaAtticus, Yin, Enmuse, @iamalore, and @the-space-nerd-97 for the feedback and support!

In some ways, it was simply undeniable how his relationship with Tucker had forever changed him. Such as the fact that they were boyfriends and had a family and Washington’s brain was somewhat stuck on repeat when it came to that revelation. Those were undeniable facts.

It was also an undeniable fact that Tucker’s penchant for certain expletives had rubbed off on Washington in that time that they were together as boyfriends living as a family with an alien son.

“What the actual fuck?” Wash asked, squinting at the enormous glass display before them. He then looked, somewhat mortified, at Felix. “You have a giant blender? You made a giant blender death trap? How over the top does your evil go?”

“Oh, it goes, Washington,” Felix replied sinisterly. “It goes all the way over the top. So far over that people in airplanes feel it flying over their heads. Because that’s how far I’m willing to go. That’s how far Evil is willing to go to prove the undeniable truth that the world works on one law. Whoever’s stronger than you, whoever’s faster than you, and whoever’s better than you has the right to kill you. And for humans to get any better — for our species to improve to the point that like your alien bastard the norm of our anatomy is to be extraordinary — we have to take charge and take out those who are too weak to stand.”

Angrily, Washington pivoted to punch at Felix’s stupid smug face. “You can’t even give straight answers!”

However, to Wash’s pain, the same force field which Felix had used when they first met protected him — a psionic shield of sorts, glowing around Felix protectively just inches from his face where Wash experienced it as a hard stop and a good way to crush all of his knuckles in a single blow.

Recoiling protectively over his fist, Washington hissed at the pain. “Goddammit.”

“You know, Locus was really holding out hope for you to see the way, Washy boy,” Felix laughed.  “After all, you were a Freelancer. You were one of the top superheroes in the game, even if it was only for a hot minute, and as such we could’ve used you. Could’ve used any of you for our message. But, of course, besides being a normmie fucker you’re also probably one of the lamest superheroes around. I mean. The abilities of a cat? What the fuck does that even mean? You squeeze through tight spaces? You stare into blank space at nothing for hours? Your weakness is fucking water? What does it mean, Washington?” he was laughing. “Ah, well. As you know, my whole schtick is survival of the fittest and, well, Washy boy,” Felix reached out with his hand, and
though it was far from within physical reach of Washington, he could feel a clutching force on his neck, choking him.

Wash gasped and coughed, the force carrying him up into the air, clutching him, strangling him, until his feet didn’t even scrape the ground anymore. It was then that it clicked — Felix’s powers wasn’t a shield, it wasn’t telepathy — Felix was a full on psionic manipulator. A full psychic force.

“You’re just not better than me,” Felix said with a toothy smile before tossing Wash back over his shoulder like he was nothing.

The sudden release was jarring, but being able to breathe also gave Wash the ability to finally think straight as well, and while Felix was turning back to the horrified crowds, Washington easily maneuvered himself through the air and stuck his landing.

“Now, what to do with all you normal sheep, all you unproven masses,” Felix hummed to himself, tapping his chin.

“Hey, Felix!” Wash roared before propelling himself forward, producing knives from his belt. “Cats land on their feet!”

Felix turned on his heel and seemed genuinely off guard at first, though the slashing motion meant for his head was stopped short by another psionic shield. His tightly controlled smile was tested, flickering with irritation and anger for a moment before he ultimately blew Washington back with a strong psychic blast.

Once again, Wash landed on his feet, but there were still gasps and cries from the crowd of onlookers. Which unfortunately forced Wash to be acutely aware that everything he was doing in that moment was right on display for everyone.

“You’re a weakling, but I’ll give you this, Wash, you’ve got the steel balls to keep trying to fight above your pay grade. Maybe that’s what Locus saw in you that was such a threat to our mission,” Felix thought out loud. He paused and tapped his chin again, a smug smirk. “Speaking of which, where is my favorite tri-powered mercenary?” He snapped his fingers, making a big production of the motion. “Oh, that’s right! I know where he is!”

With just as much theatrics, Felix waved his hands to the giant crowd of people, making everyone gasp and cry out again. The reaction only tripled once a spot in the middle of them that had been seemingly vacant filled itself — Locus had the ability to turn invisible. And his horrifying stature was only made more distressing to the citizenry around him when he lifted up his hands and showed that between each finger was a glowing orb of the white hot energy that he had been using the times Wash confronted him before.

Wash’s eyes widened and he stepped toward the end of the stage. “Everyone run away from him! He has explosives!” he screamed, immediately causing a rush of panic and horror, people crying out and attempting to do as Wash ordered.

Only, they soon began running face first into a large, bowl like energy, keeping them all contained within the square.

At first Wash was confused, but then he looked over to Felix, seeing beads of sweat trickle down the sides of his face, a smirk squarely on his face as he shrugged at Wash. “What, you expected us to make this easy for you?”

“Make what easy!? What do you want!” Wash demanded angrily.
“To make a point, dumbass. Obviously,” Felix sneered. “I need everyone here to see that there’s a goddamn difference between them and us. And that even their chosen hero, the person not only they trust to protect them, but the city officials themselves chose to protect them, sees that en masse like this, altogether on display with the horrors of their true humanity showing… they are nothing as a group compared to the extraordinary, compared to those who with real power in this world.”

Gritting his teeth, Washington tightened his fists. “You have lost your mind,” he snapped.

“No, Wash, I only tell the truth,” Felix explained cheekily. “See, this is all a little test, a little project we’ve been working on for quite a while. One that’s going to test how much of a hero you are and who you’re a hero for. Because you better believe, just like every time he’s done it before, Locus is going to drop those little balls of his concentrated energy and send every person in my little bubble here straight to a kinetically charged hell. But you also better believe that I’m about to test how your disgusting, normmie boyfriend deserves his head by starting up that giant blender of his own imagination. And without super speed, or strength, or vulnerability, or flight, or anything you better believe those blades are going to chop him up to a nice, lovely little normmie soup right before your eyes.” Felix grinned even wider. “Of course, one of these scenarios can be stopped by you. Only one. And the onus, here, is on you to decide which one matters most. Which one is going to be saved — just how little an insignificant, unextraordinary life matters among the new gods.”

Washington looked between the crowds and Tucker. There really shouldn’t have been any debate, any hesitation. A real hero should have been prepared to take on both on their own. No need for extra time.

And if the needs of the many—

But Wash couldn’t even think of the many.

“You’re a monster, what kind of choice is this?” Wash demanded angrily.

“I guess you could call it Sophie’s,” Felix shrugged. “By the by, I might enjoy making long, exhilarating speeches, but don’t mistake that for stupidity. I know you’re trying to waste time so that you can try to worm your way out of making a real decision here. And, I have to say, Washington, nice try, but the clock is already ticking.”

To his horror, Wash could hear the sound of metal clashing, gears beginning to wind up. He looked to the side as Tucker backed up to press against the glass interior of the giant blender. The blades at the top of the center pillar were picking up speed, and the bottom were starting to follow suit. And the sloped interior beneath Tucker’s feet were dragging him toward the blender’s blades. “Tucker!”

Almost immediately after, there were massive screams erupting from the crowd and when Washington looked back he could see the people pressing against the forcefield enclosing them, scrambling to get away from the glowing orbs that Locus had just released among them, all of them rolling out into the crowd, glowing brighter as they prepared to release all of their kinetic energy like Wash had witnessed before.

Locus tilted his head at Washington menacingly. “My kinetic blasts are connected to my higher consciousness, Washington of Freelancer. Which means if you fight me, keep me busy and focused on you for the next few minutes instead of focused on blowing up the citizens of this city to bits, then they can all be saved,” Locus informed him darkly. “All but the one not in our trap.”
“Blah blah blah — Sophie’s choice, like I said, Agent Washington,” Felix grinned ear to ear.

“Fight me, Washington of Freelancer, or show the whole world the worth of those who are weak and small,” Locus beckoned.

“Alternatively, go home tonight and explain to the hellspawn you’ve helped raise why he’s superior to his chum dad in every way,” Felix chuckled. “Get it? Chum? Because that’s what the normmies is going to end up being.”

Washington’s brain was so torn on the options that it all but stopped functioning, to the point that he could only focus on one statement.

“Higher consciousness?” Wash said out loud before taking in the way Felix was sweating. “That’s be really bad for a psionic making shields around an entire block then if all those little explosions went off at once,” Wash informed Felix at once. “Have fun with that. I have to focus on my family, but fortunately I didn’t come alone!”


Locus had more of a resigned reaction and quickly turned to hold up his arm and block something.

Tex made herself visible again as she landed and looked angrily toward Washington.

“You motherfucker I had the element of surprise! You gave away my position, goddammit! I told you I always wait until they’re done with their stupid speeches!”

“I know, Tex, but I don’t have time for that!!” Washington shouted over his shoulder as he raced to the giant blender and pressed his hands against the glass where Tucker’s back was firmly pressed already on the other side. Tucker was shouting something at him, but between the thickness of the glass and the whirling of the machine, Washington couldn’t even begin to make it all out. “I’m sorry, I should’ve figured all this out sooner, I should’ve been there for you and Junior more and I just… I’m going to make everything right for our family now, Tucker! I promise!”

Wash screamed at the top of his lungs for him.

Tucker didn’t really react, but his shoe slipped off and was immediately decimated by the blender.

That time Wash joined Tucker in a harmonized “Fuck!”

“Tex!” Wash called out, pulling his knives in between each of his fingers. He looked to see that she was at the moment engaged in an intense combat with Locus. “Okay nevermind, I see you’re kind of busy to punch through bullet proof glass.” He then looked up and down the machine, taking a breath, and then punching out with his right fist so hard that the throwing knives between his fingers were able to sink through the pleated glass. “Oh fuck it’s working,” Wash muttered before doing the same with his left fist only slightly higher. “Hold on, Tucker!”

He climbed as quickly as he could, scaling the ridiculously sized blender until he reached the very top of it. It was not an easy feat, but standing on the edge of the opening of the blender made it clear that the scaling was not going to be the worst part.

“Goddamn,” Wash groaned, leaning his head back and taking a breath before looking down into the blender cup below. The blades were several layers down to the base, rotating in different directions at different speeds, and some of the platforms’ curved blades’ path were separated by mere centimeters.

He needed to be calculating and fast and agile, and land on his feet every time without missing a single beat or it would be the both of them that was chum.
“I can do this,” Wash psyched himself up. “I can do this—“

Without losing count, Wash leaped past the top most blade, landing on the second as it came down right in front of him. He then leaned back to ride the giant, comical blade for exactly half a second before flipping over the back of it, narrowly missing the next blade and landing on the last.

He was then speeding around quickly, occasionally seeing Tucker as he did so.

“Tuck — Er!” Wash called out each time he whirled past his partner, his boyfriend, the father of his stepson to be. “I—Am—Here!”

“IDIOT!” Tucker cried out.

“You—’re—Wel—Come!” Wash responded flatly, beginning to get immensely motion sick.


“Don’t—Question— Me — I’m— A — Professional!” Wash snapped back, turning just enough around on the blade to face the pillar at the center, and sure enough, there was a mechanism available to him, he just needed to perfectly thread the needle, throwing a knife while spinning around on a high powered blade trying eviscerate his boyfriend, hit it through a small hole, and jack up the mechanics within the blender’s spinning pillar. “Simple,” Wash muttered to himself.

By the time they completed what might have very well been the hundredth spin, Washington did notice an small issue that could have made the precision throw a little more difficult to stomach. And that was that Tucker happened to be on the other side of the pillar almost exactly. Meaning Wash being even the slightest bit off in his estimates would spell disaster for them both.

“Dammit,” he hissed, crouching even lower to steady himself as much as possible. He took aim.

“Waaaaassshhh,” Tucker echoed nervously.

“I’m— Going— To— Save— You—“ Wash bared out between his teeth before finally throwing the knife in his hand, trusting his aim to be true.

The moment the knife left his hand, Washington realized just why Tucker was beckoning him, as he slipped from his spot and was being taken toward the blades. Washington heard a CLNK of the knife striking metal but was too concerned for Tucker to turn and check to see if his mark had been met or not.

“Tucker!” Washington cried out before diving full force toward his boyfriend, his partner, and grabbing him, curling tightly around him in full preparation to receive the first cuts of the blade. But when it struck his back, it was hardly at any force at all, more nudging them along the bottom of the giant blender in a carousel type fashion than in a smoothie sort of deal.

Washington opened his eyes, seeing in the periphery that sparks were flying from the pillar. He made the shot. “Wow, I can’t believe I did it.”

“Wash?” Tucker uttered, muffled against Washington’s chest.

Surprised, Wash backed up enough, clutching Tucker’s shoulders, to hold him at arm’s length. He gave Tucker the full look over. “Oh my god, Tucker! Tucker, I was so worried! I get it all now, you’re my boyfriend! I love you! it bothers me when we’re not getting along, but it kills me to think you’re endangered. And Junior! And our house! And we’re a family, Tucker! I can’t believe
I don’t spend more time in your shitty car listening to music I don’t care about and the complaining of your asshole friends. Your asshole friends are my asshole friends now! I don’t want any of that to ever be under appreciated again!”

Tucker looked at him in a mix of confusion and shock. “You jumped inside of a giant blender to save me, dude. I get it. You went Tucker and now you can’t go back.”


“Which, I mean, awesome but also… dude, you did even look for a way to unplug it,” Tucker pressed.

“Is that the natural response?” Washington asked. “I’ve never used a blender.”

The never learned what the natural response to a giant blender was supposed to be, however, as there was a loud knocking on the glass which drew their attention. When they turned, Tex was leaning against the blender, waving sarcastically before making a fist and punching through the glass.

“You also could’ve done that,” Tucker continued to nitpick.

“I saved you,” Washington reminded him.

“Yeah, not very fucking efficiently!” Tucker cried back.

Washington helped Tucker to his feet and looked to Tex. “Where’s Felix and Locus?”

“They bailed when the calvary arrived,” Tex informed them before throwing a thumb over her shoulder. Behind her lined up Carolina, the Reds, the teenagers, and Junior. The latter, of course, immediately racing to throw himself into his father’s arms. “Which means we need a new plan.”

“A plan with everyone,” Wash announced. “This isn’t the kind of city that only needs one hero working for the greater good, it needs all of its heroes working for its greater good. And I know what heroes to start with.”

He briskly left Tucker’s side and walked past Tex and the others to get to the podiums where Doyle and Kimball were getting back to their senses after Felix’s psychic attack.

“Mayor Doyle, Mayor Kimball,” Wash called to them, drawing their attentions. “I believe that a third party has been causing a lot of the election woes you’re both sick of dealing with. And I think they’re also responsible for those deranged super junkies that just tried to decimate you and the city you love. And I think he’s been financially backing both of you through hedge funds. Either of you know who that might be?”

The two glanced at each other then to Washington.

“You wouldn’t happen to be familiar with the large, golden building in the middle of the better part of the city, would you?” Doyle asked.
Oh my gosh we’re so close to the end it’s almost stifling. But... I need to make things clear. When I was writing this chapter the Charlottesville protests and riots were taking place and... it cautioned me toward publishing this chapter so close to it because while I had drafted out this story back last summer, well before even the election, the coincidences in parallels between the villains’ motivations and the movements that are sweeping across America are hard for me to not address. I believe satire is a tool of ridicule, and I think history’s greatest monsters – which I shouldn’t have to clarify are the Nazis and the KKK – are therefore the objects of such satire because it removes their power. It removes their attempts at reclaiming certain speech and certain iconography. A smarter person than me on the subject has pointed out how nationalism and fascism cannot survive satire – which is why media was controlled by the Nazi regime in Germany, and it’s why lampoons like Mel Brook’s The Producers and Blazing Saddles are not reclaimed by the current fascists while other characters and songs from more dramatic portrayals like American History X and even Inglorious Basterds have.

I’m not trying to be self-important. I’m a nobody fanfic writer who has been blessed with the amount of readers who I have had read to this point in this small story that is a soft romantic comedy of errors. It’s imperfect and in many ways impractical, but the satire here toward Nazism and fascism, and the parallels between the villains of this story and those ideologies are purposeful because I want to use my spite toward those ideologies for something that can be damning in satire. And any failure this chapter and the ones leading to it have had in not making that as clear as possible are entirely on me. And I would appreciate the rightfully made criticism of it as a result.

This may seem like an unnecessary author’s note to make 22 chapters into a 24 chapter story, but it was the only way I could feel right on any level publishing the chapter given the current events.

I hope that that is a clear statement and an understandable one. And I hope that moving forward we can all hope for a better outlook for tomorrow by fighting back with any tools we have. Even if those tools are silly, nonsense superhero parodies made with love.

And as always, a special thanks to @analiarvb, @secretlystephaniebrown, NinjaAtticus, @the-space-nerd-97, @icefrozenover, and @washingtonstub for the feedback and support!

“How confident are you in this plan actually working?” Carolina asked as she stood beside Washington, looking up to the large skyscraper decked out in solid gold. “I’m not attempting to undermine, it’s just that I don’t really remember you taking charge very often in Freelancer. As in I don’t remember you taking charge at... well, at all. And suddenly you’re leading a battalion of superheroes who barely know what they’re doing.”
Washington glanced toward her before looking back to the building. “Well, to be completely honest with you I barely remember you being a part of Freelancer and you were apparently our leader so… Our confused confidence is about equal.”

“Ouch, alright then,” she said before a flash of blue sped past them and blew the wind through Wash’s hair as he stood where they had been on the sidewalk.

He was beginning to think he didn’t like speedsters. But it was all according to plan. Sort of.

Turning around, Washington faced the gathered group — the Reds, the teenagers, Tucker for reasons beyond Wash’s own machinations, Tex, and Tex’s motorcycle which she looked far too cool leaning back against. Wash wouldn’t have been able to pull that off if he tried. Maybe his next costume update could use a jacket.

*Focus,*” Wash admonished himself before walking over to everyone. “I have Carolina scouting the perimeter and giving us a good estimate of where we can go to press our advantage on Locus, Felix, and their financial backer. Given what Kimball and Doyle told us, the police will stay back to give us the element of surprise and help the clean up afterwards.”

“Fuck, you didn’t mention police, Wash!” Grif growled, looking around warily. “We’re not exactly the cleanest guys outside of Blood Gulch, if you get what I mean.”

“I’m squeaky clean outside of home,” Simmons argued. “I’m a librarian!”

“Dagnabit, Grif! We don’t care about your poor hygiene! In fact, quite the opposite! I anti-care about how long it’s been since the last time we took you outside the garage and hosed you down with a smattering of dishwashing soap,” Sarge announced loudly. “But one thing I can say for certain is that *sure as this suit may be Red,* I won’t allow for you to take our moment of shining glory with the Big Timers away from us! This is what I’ve always wanted since retirement! I mean. We. What we have always wanted.”

“For favor,” Lopez huffed angrily.

“Thanks, Sarge. I think,” Wash remarked in confusion before looking back to everyone else. “Tex, did you do what I asked—“

“I did it, but it wasn’t because you asked,” Tex snapped. “It’s because I owed a favor to Tucker.”

“Don’t use real names while we’re here,” Wash hissed.

“Oh! Does that mean I get to go by my codename?” Donut called out. “Double-Oh-Donut! Finally!”

Tucker looked at Wash win an expression that could only be described as not entirely impressed. “Yeah, Wash. We got it done. As stupid of an idea as it might be.”

“Your love and support means enough to me even if you being here and putting everything I care about in direct risk again after I almost lost it all might cause a slight aneurysm in the next half hour,” Washington replied.

“Oh, for fucksake, can you save the kissing ass until after we successfully complete our first mission?” Bitters demanded.

“It’s so exciting!” Jensen beamed.
“It should be pants-shittingly terrifying,” Washington corrected them. “This isn’t a simulation, this isn’t a game. This isn’t a training exercise where the only consequences are community service and spending a few hours being yelled at by me.”

“Ugh, it can only be better than that,” Palomo groaned.

“No, it’s not better. It’s far worse,” Wash said sternly, getting the teenagers’ attention almost immediately. “We’re about to face other super powered people. Very, very strong super powered people who are villains. You could even call them super villains.”

Andersmith leaned toward the other teens. “Perfect timing for a dramatic pause. I knew we were being trained by a true professional!”

“They aren’t going to hesitate to kill you,” Wash snapped. “And, to be honest, I can’t even assure you that any of you are ready for this level of crime fighting. Quite the opposite. I think you’re ill prepared and have not a single bit of experience or ingenuity to really work your way out of what’s to come.”

“Wow, so this pep talk’s going great,” Bitters scoffed.

“But you’re here because you — all four of you — have said to me that you want to be superheroes,” Wash continued. “And to be honest, all of you…” he paused, looking at Palomo sparkling. “…most of you have powers that would put mine to shame. I’m asking you to help, making you part of the plan because I believe that it can’t be done without you.”

They all stared at him.

“Wow,” Jensen gasped. “That’s the most inspiring thing anyone’s ever said to me!”

“Really?” Tucker asked critically.

“Must have a low threshold,” Tex shrugged at him.

“Hey, where’s our pep talk?” Simmons whined.

Washington looked at the Reds for a good, long minute and then shrugged. “We all make it out of this alive, I’ll stop blackmailing you do civil service stuff and instead we’ll just, I don’t know, call it square? You can fight crime or injustice or whatever it is you tell yourselves on your own time.”

“Fuck,” Grif laughed. “Good enough for me, don’t know about you guys.”

Tex’s head tilted. “Where’s mine, Mister Man?” she asked sarcastically.

“Tex, you get to punch things,” Wash answered.

She snapped her fingers in feigned surprise. “Fuck, you know me so well,” Tex smirked.

“Okay, is everyone settled finally?” Wash asked.

No sooner had the words left his mouth than the wind beat against his back and Carolina reappeared by his side with a schematic in hand. “Here, drew this along the way. It’s kind of like a platformer, the final boss is on the top floor with his two goons.”

Wash looked at her, mildly concerned. “Do we have to fight our way through each floor? Are there ninjas involved? There’s always ninjas,” he muttered.
“I mean, we could,” Carolina shrugged. “But I think the quickest route is to take the elevator straight up.”

Pausing his looking over the schematic, Wash glanced at her. “What? Seriously?”

“Mhmm,” Carolina nodded. “Did it four times just to make sure. Ugh. It was so slow..”

“O…kay then,” Wash folded the schematic up and looked to the gathered team. “Everyone? To the elevator.”

As everyone rushed forward and ignored the receptionist who seemed rather miffed at the influx of people in tights, Washington hung back just a moment until it was just him, Tucker, and Junior standing on the sidewalk. They stared at each other for a long moment before Wash coughed into his fist to clear his throat. “I—"

“You want me to wait with Junior,” Tucker answered.

“Last time you were there for a big climactic battle we both ended up in a hospital,” Wash reminded him awkwardly. “And you were only involved with my superhero bullshit because Junior was at risk. And. Well. Today he’s… out here. With you. Safe. And I’d prefer to keep things that way.”

Tucker rolled his eyes but he wasn’t arguing, and that in itself made Wash breathe a little easier. “You’re so predictable.”

“Hate the tropes, not the hero,” Wash joked back.

Junior looked between them, the ridges over his eyes raised expectantly.

Tucker looked at Wash again, a little more warily, a little more nervous. “Did you… Earlier. You said you figured out the problem, that you figured out what we were super fucking bad at saying to each other. Y’know. The family shit.”

“Yeah?” Wash asked, tilting his head.

“Well… I mean… did you mean it?” Tucker asked.

Washington stared at his boyfriend for a good long moment. “That I love you? That I love having a family? That I love that I have something other than the city itself as a reason to go home safe every night? Absolutely I mean it. I mean every damn word of it.”

“Okay,” Tucker said with a fond exhale of air as he smirked at Wash.

“Okay,” Wash replied with a gentle smile of his own.

“Cool,” Tucker continued.

“Really cool,” Wash challenged.

They stood there, equally matched for a moment before Wash glanced toward the building and the sight of Tex about to punch the elevator’s open door button in frustration.

“Yeah, I really don’t have time to keep putting this off so you win,” Wash admitted to Tucker.

“Of course I do,” Tucker replied before grabbing Wash by the shoulders and pulling him down for a kiss.
While surprised at first, Washington nearly melted into the warmth of the gesture, wrapping his own arms around Tucker again and only pulling away to rest their foreheads against one another.

“Please stay safe, both of you,” Washington urged.

“No worries, I called Caboose and Church like you asked. They should be here any minute with my car,” Tucker answered, as if that was the sort of answer that would have given Washington any relief whatsoever.

“Great,” he forced himself to say.

They reluctantly parted, Washington taking a deep breath before pushing forward through the gaudy building’s doors and straight to the elevator.

“For the record, that took fucking forever,” Tex announced as Wash entered the elevator and she finally was able to punch the button to the top floor. “Carolina already ditched us and went up the stairs.”

“I was having a moment,” Wash answered, crossing his arms as he stood as close to the elevator doors as he dared get, everyone else crammed in the machine like sardines.

“We know,” the entire elevator replied.

Annoyed, Wash just stared at the digital floor gage and watched as it slowly passed floor by floor.

“How tall is this building again?” he asked curiously.

“Seventy-two floors, according to these schematics Miss Carolina got us,” Jensen replied, a rustling of paper could be heard in the main back.

For a moment, Washington just nodded to the news and then paused as he glanced at the large panel of elevator buttons again. He then looked over his shoulder suspiciously.

“It says seventy-five,” he informed them all.

“Yes, but if you notice, there’s nine rows of eight buttons. Which simple multiplication would tell you is seventy-two,” Simmons’ voice piped up.

“So they lied about three floors?” Tex scoffed.

“They don’t have six, thirteen, or thirty-three listed,” Grif pointed out. “Must be superstitious.”

“Must be liars,” Wash growled, putting his hands on his hips as he went back to watching the floor gage rise. “And I don’t think the world needs more liars.”

They all fell quiet for another three floors before Wash glanced over to Tex who had her arms crossed and was glaring at him.

“What? Was that too corny?” he asked.

“I feel like my cool factor will suffocate in this elevator before we get to the top,” Tex replied. “And you’re not helping.”

They fall silent again and go back to looking at the floor gage.

Once they reach the sixties, there’s an audible sigh across the elevator.
“This was not the bombastic lead up to this confrontation I was expecting,” Washington admitted reluctantly.

There was a grumble of agreeable noises that might have, under other circumstances, been a good thing but at that moment fell a little flat for Washington. He was ready for the elevator ride to be over and he was certain everyone else was, too, given how many elbows were being thrown and distressed whispers echoing about.

“Does everyone remember the plan?” Washington asked on floor seventy.

“Yes,” most murmured.

“There was a plan?” Palomo squawked.

Washington opened his mouth to address Palomo’s ignorance but didn’t have time, as the elevator doors opened and immediately a small, glowing ball of kinetic energy rolled toward them.

“Everyone—“ Wash began to shout only for there to be a zoom of air past them all, fast enough to cause ears to pop, and the object was gone.

Everyone looked toward the large bay windows just outside the elevator where there was a gigantic explosion followed by another flash of blue.

Carolina stood, not even winded, before them. Her arms were crossed cockily. “What? You think I was watching from the shadows all this time and I hadn’t learned out to deal with these situations? A girl could get offended.”

“Nice!” Donut chirped up from the back.

A slow clapping drew everyone’s attention away from the moment of accomplishment from Carolina and toward the end of the long hallway where Felix and Locus stood between the group of heroes and the door to their financial backer. Locus stood silent and menacing, but Felix continued the clapping.

“Well then, it looks like our favorite cheaters made it to the top of the tower. Just to meet their demises all the same,” Felix hissed darkly.

“Dude, if you honestly expected people to fight their entire way up a seventy-two floor building just because you filled it with traps and ninjas when an elevator’s right there, your evil plans could use some work,” Grif retorted.

“It should be noted that while the Red Dead Blood Gulch Gang are notably recovered villains, there’s nothing in our verbal contracts to Washington that involves us not working as Evil Consultants,” Simmons added.

“Yeah, we start at two hundred dollars an hour, and the clock started with the first suggestion,” Grif continued. “If you want us to use stairs, don’t put a goddamn elevator right in front of us.”

“Shut up!” Felix snarled. “I’m not talking to you… you powerless, useless nothings.” He focused his gaze back on Washington, Tex, and Carolina. “I’m talking about the cheaters who aren’t playing by the rules because they don’t want to be tested, they don’t want to unleash their real potential.”

Having heard enough, Washington stepped toward Felix. “I don’t care about your approval, Felix. I never did. But I especially don’t care for it after you tried to put my boyfriend — tried to put my partner, who I have a family with, that I value very much — in a giant blender to try to kill him.”
Carolina looked Wash over. “Was… What happened to your speaking ability? Did you have a stroke or was that just pure corn?”

“It’s compulsory gay,” Tex clarified for them. “Wash just figured out the guy he’s been sleeping with is his boyfriend. I’ll catch you up on it… Honestly, never. I don’t really care that much about their relationship anymore because Washington sucked up all the caring for it within a hundred mile radius.”

Wash glared at Tex and motioned toward the obvious villains in front of them. “Can we police my PDA at some other time?”

“I, for one, am very curious about how compulsory Washington’s gay is!” Donut called again from the back.

“Shut up already!” Felix roared. “I am sick and tired of your oblivious bullshit routine! You obviously didn’t hear me the first time around, so let me make it crystal fucking clear to you that we’re just the beginning of a brand new enterprise here — a new stage of evolution for all of humanity, and no matter how much you whine and how much you play the world’s lovable idiots, you’re the ones that history is going to be remember as trying to keep our new humanity left behind!”

Locus turned just slightly enough toward Felix to be obviously glaring at him even behind his eyeless mask. “Felix,” he said in warning.

“No, shut the fuck up,” Felix snapped. “You’re not the most powerful one around anymore, Locus. I am. And I’m going to keep these idiots in their goddamn places.”

Tex visibly bristled. “Hold the hell up! Who’s the strongest?”

Everyone else in the elevator other than Carolina slowly sidestepped from Tex at the same time.

Felix seemed to be more taken aback by the challenge in Tex’s voice than anything else, but he quickly smoothed out his expression and turned just enough toward Locus to clear his throat and stage whisper, “Say, uh, I think those two just volunteered to take you on.”

“Two on one?” Locus said in a blood curdling low voice. “It’s the closest to a fair fight I’ve had in a long time.”

Without further warning, Tex turned invisible and Carolina zipped off at such high speeds that she was nothing but a blur of motion to the rest of them. But, of course, Locus did his disappearing trick as well.

“The best battle of them all and we’re not even going to see it!?” Sarge bellowed. “What a cop out! This is an absolute outrage!”

“Sarge!” Wash snapped. “Keep on task! Reds! Kids! Flank sides, Felix is mine!”

“Right!” everyone agreed at once before barreling out of the elevator in their designated spots while Washington raced forward, pulling throwing knives from his belt as he lunged for Felix.

When he saw what was happening, Felix let out an actual laugh. “You’re going to try and flank me? Me? You couldn’t even take me head on! You ran like the little pussy cat you are, Washington! Ran to your little boyfriend!”

With an aggressive growl, Wash threw the four knives in his right hand right for Felix’s head,
which a psionic shield deflected almost immediately. It only served to make Felix’s smile widen.

“Wow, you really can’t teach an old cat new tricks. Seriously, Wash, when are you going to learn that you’re simply outclassed by the rest of our superior species?” he chuckled with a shake of his head. “Ah, well, it’s like they say,” he continued manically, raising his hands as the thrown knives lifted up telekinetically and turned to face Washington. “Survival of the fittest!”

Washington slid to a halt just before the blades were sent hurdling through the air at him. It was a simple enough leap over the arc of the blades, and he was fully prepared for a twist and pivot—certain that Felix would have foreseen Wash’s moves coming and adjusted for them. But to his surprise, they continued on their path. And once Wash landed, facing where he had just stood, he suddenly saw why.

Immediately, Wash’s heart sunk.

“W-Wash,” Tucker choked out, torso already gushing with the throwing knives—Wash’s throwing knives—sticking out of him.

“Tucker,” Wash gasped before screwing his eyes shut and grabbing at his hair. He tried to focus on the tangible sensation. “No. No. Remember it’s part of the plan…”

“Plan? Is it part of your plan to watch everything you betrayed your powers for go up in flames? All because of your own fault?” Felix mocked, walking forward with pure malice in his expression.

Washington wasted no time in turning on his heels and tossing another set of knives Felix’s way, ignoring Tucker’s voice “Wash, stop! Help!”

“Who would have thought you were so heartless, Washington,” Felix continued, stopping the knives midair again. He smirked, sweat trickling down his brows. “I’m almost impressed.”

“Impressed with what, dickbag?” Grif cried out first.

“Your costume sucks! And your colors don’t match!” Simmons joined from his corner of the room.

“Your complexion truly leaves something to be desired!” Donut called.

“And I’d say you fight like a little bitch, but considering everyone here knows that our little bitches are whipping your teammate’s ass, I don’t want to inadvertantly compliment you with an outdated phrase!” Sarge hollered. “So you suck!”

“Lo que ellos dicen,” Lopez yelled flatly.

Felix took his gaze off of Washington for a moment to look around the room, growling as he saw he was surrounded by the dissenting voices. “What is this? What the fuck do you think you’re doing? Do you think I could ever remotely care about your opinions? You… you normies!”

“Thing is, Felix,” Wash said, slowly getting to his feet, “I think opinions matter a hell of a lot to you. And I think it’s harder for your ego to not hear insults that ring true than it is for you to continue making the illusions that give you the upper edge. Especially if we distract you and force you to use multiple powers at the same time.”

Before Felix could respond, a thick black smog began to build up around him. Wind from a newly opened window made sure it gusted into Felix’s face directly as Bitters stood in front of it, full body smoldering hot. “Eat carbon dioxide, asshole!” Bitters commanded.
Felix forcibly coughed a few times before shaking his head and surrounding himself with a tighter, more visible shield. “You can’t break me with some stupid insults and your lame ass cat powers, Washington! My powers are beyond you! Beyond all of you!”

“Maybe,” Wash admitted. “But they’re not beyond all of us when we’re working together, right, Andersmith?”

“What?” Felix got out before glancing over his shoulder just in time for Andersmith, his metallic skin shielding over his normal body, began hammering into the psionic shield. Immediately it began cracking under the stress, letting more smog through to Felix, causing him to cough.

“Wash, that speech was fucking lame, man!” Grif yelled out.

“Grif! We’re supposed to be demoralizing Felix now! Not Wash! That can wait until later,” Simmons reminded him.

“Oh, right,” Grif replied before cupping his hands and shouting, “I wear orange better than you, motherfucker!”

Palomo somersaulted to get right in front of Felix and wave jazz hands before giving off a flurry of sparkler-grade mini explosions off his skin. “Aaaaaand sparkle!”

“Fuck off!” Felix screeched, causing the shield around him to burst out in a wave of energy, knocking into everyone in the hallway. He clasped his hands on his knees and gasped for air as everyone else tried to gather their senses.

Everyone save for Washington. Palomo had been between him and Felix — fortunately for Washington, not so fortunately for Palomo.

“Felix,” Wash said, walking over to the super villain just before grabbing him by the nape of his costume. “Never threaten my family again.”

The punch Wash clocked Felix with was loud enough for an audible crack, sending the unconscious super villain to the floor in a heap. And making Washington regret his life choices immediately because that was his good hand and he was fairly sure that popped a few of his knuckles.

Just for his frizzled nerves, Wash turned around and looked directly to where the illusion of Tucker, injured and bleeding, had been before. And despite himself, Washington felt an immediate wave of relief when there was no such sight to be found with the psychic completely out.

There was a large thunk which turned Wash’s attention back to the matters at hand. Which happened to include Carolina and Tex throwing Locus’ body next to Felix.

“Did it honestly take all of you to put one down?” Tex demanded. “What babies.”

“And our fight was invisible,” Carolina reminded them, arms crossed.

“Not all of us,” Wash argued. “Remember the plan, Jensen’s ahead of us—“

The large golden doors at the end of the hall opened and revealed Jensen sitting in a chair, rather ludicrously tied up, while a tall, wrinkled, potato looking bald man with a sleazy looking ascot stood behind her.

“And what was it that the young Miss Jensen was meant to evoke, Mister Washington?” the man
asked curiously. “I do believe that whatever it had been, it must have failed for, you see, no plan survives contact with the enemy, as General Erwin Rommel once said.”

Washington’s nose curled. “Are you quoting a literal Nazi?”

“Holy shit, what an utter douchebag, he’s definitely the main asshole of the assholes,” Grif added.

“Forget all that, he has Katie!” Palomo cried out.

“She’s fine for now, and will continue to remain fine so long as Mister Washington and I can have a civil chat,” the man continued, a small smile appearing on his wrinkled face. “And civil chats often require less distance between us.”

“Stand down,” Washington ordered everyone around him before slowly walking forward. “You’re Malcolm Hargrove, I assume.”

“You assume correctly,” Hargrove replied, brows raised. “Though, I must confess, that surprises me. I go through great lengths to keep my name private.”

“Yet you have the biggest building in the best part of the city and wrapped it up in gold,” Wash pointed out. “And you flashily made a big production of your two lackeys spewing your superior race rhetoric in front of the whole city. My boyfriend would say that you’re trying to compensate for something there.”

Hargrove did not seem particularly amused by the rhetoric. “And you believe that my bodyguards were acting out on behalf of some of my beliefs? That I would deign to believe in a superiority of those gifted with powers over those who are not? Do you even know what my powers are before you cast judgment?”

“Is it really necessary?” Wash asked, standing just inside the door to the extravagant, technology filled office.

“It’s simply everything,” Hargrove insisted, lifting his hands, eyes aglow. “You see, my abilities manifested late in life. Well after I struggled among mere humans, succeeded among them. It was not until other powered beings began to surface that I was able to unlock my own power. The power to enhance the abilities of other powered individuals. To make them better, stronger — more useful.” He lowered his hands, eyes returning to normal. “Of course, when I attempted to give power to those without our genetic evolution, it simply did not work. Their destinies were fixed, whereas ours were only unlocking. And after alien races began to threaten our world with their superior anatomy and technology, I knew there could only be one way to see to it that humanity survived.”

Wash was close enough to the office to see how advanced the tech was — not simply advanced, but how alien it was. And how familiar the retrofitting of it made it all seem. “You… were the one supplying those pods to Omega and Wyoming a few months ago,” Wash realized out loud. “You were still performing experiments, in Blood Gulch.”

“Where none of my experiments would be missed, yes,” Hargrove huffed. “Especially when it was so politically unimportant during an important, and seemingly unending mayoral election.”

“Prolonging bureaucracy! Absolutely diabolical!” Sarge howled from the back.

“But you don’t have powers of your own, you just enhance others,” Wash clarified, ignoring the rest of his team. “That’s why you had Felix and Locus with their whole charade.”
“I find that the greatest of our species are those who best utilize the tools they have,” Hargrove conceded. “It’s partially why I’ve come to admire you, Mister Washington. You have so little in the way of ability and yet here you are, not only facing me but leading a battalion of our fellow superior species.”

“Holy shit, someone shut him up. This race superiority bullshit is giving me fucking hives!” Grif demanded.

“Yeah, Wash, just punch him, he doesn’t have powers,” Simmons begged.

“He has power, it’s influence,” Wash contested, not taking his eyes off Hargrove. “And he has lots of wealth. Which is why, I imagine, Tex and Carolina were working to hack your systems for so long.” He smirked. “Fortunately, we found a shortcut.”

Hargrove raised a brow only to be caught off guard when all the computers surrounding him began to light up with a single, blue symbol — α. “What is this?” he turned and glared furiously at Washington. “What have you done!?”

“We have a friend who is very good with computers, but he needed to be closer to your servers for some one-on-one contact with it,” Carolina smirked, crossing her arms.

“Luckily, my boyfriend let him borrow a car,” Wash grinned. “And now that he has control of your system, he can finish what Tex was having him work on for the past few weeks while I was busy chasing my own tail: taking away a chunk of your influence and power — hitting you wear it hurts. The gold in your pockets.”

“Ha! Try to keep up the taxes on this giant golden phallic symbol now!” Donut hooted. He then paused and tilted his head. “Speaking of which… Does anyone else notice his head—“

“DONUT!”

“You can’t do this!” Hargrove snarled. “I won’t let you. I have evidence of your tampering — I’ll have you arrested at once—“

“About that,” Jensen finally spoke up, revealing she had untied her own ropes. “You didn’t really ask me about my powers, Mister Hargrove.” She then looked to Washington.

“Do it, Jensen,” he nodded.

She let out a huff and then lunged her body forward, throwing her arms out as she did so — a pulse unleashed from her so large that it hit every corner of the room, and with it every electronic blew circuits, spewing sparks all around Jensen and Hargrove. She then grinned at Hargrove, showing off her currently plastic retainer. “I’m kinda like a magnet!”

“This isn’t… you can’t!” Hargrove choked out angrily.

“Can and have,” Wash assured him.

In the midst of their triumph, however, there was a sound of something rolling. Washington looked down to the floor of the office and saw a pulsing small orb of kinetic energy. “What the—“ he looked back up to Hargrove just in time for Locus to make himself — and Felix thrown over his shoulders — visible. “Locus!”

“This is far from the end of things, Washington,” Locus said darkly. “You are a threat I will not avoid taking head on again.”
At that, Locus grabbed Hargrove and disappeared again, moments before the orb began its signature light show.

“Jensen!” Wash yelled, grabbing her by the wrists and flinging her back into the hallway. “Everyone! Run—“

The explosion went off and Wash could only see white.
Out of the many, *many* things Washington expected to wake up to, humming from a woman was not one of them.

Things were fuzzy at first, his eyes felt sore like they had swollen past his sockets. And he finally felt the tug of bandages and casts. But there was a warmth and security beyond it all that made him *want* to wake up more. Made him *want* to see what the source of the humming could have been.

And even already being met with the unexpected, Washington managed to find a way to be surprised. Opening his eyes completely, adjusting for the bright light, Wash found himself laying in a cot of a very sterile looking room. And, to the biggest surprise of all, he found himself completely surrounded.

To his right, Tucker sat in a chair, completely asleep with Junior sprawled across his lap. The Reds were strewn across the left side of the room, half out of costume and most sprawled out on the floor. The teenagers were patched up mildly, laying in a heap across one another behind Tucker and Junior’s chair. And sitting on the windowsill, back to back, a powered down Church and a snoring Tex leaned against each other with Caboose at their feet.

In truth, Washington was more stunned by the sight than anything else. Through his haze and shock, there was something warm and intangible overcoming him at the sight.

He moved to sit up, get an even better look at the room and start at least the *process* of getting bearings together when the soft hum he had awakened to immediately stopped. Wash tried to come his neck toward the origin of it but before he could quite manage it with the crick in his neck, a gust of wind met his face.

*Blinking*, Washington sat completely up, fully awake.

And for his troubles, Wash was met with the sound of clicking heels in the adjacent hall picking up speed on the way to his room. Then another gust of wind hit Wash’s face, but that time it ended with a familiar redhead standing at the side of his bed Tucker and Junior weren’t on.

“See, I told you I’d get you as soon as he was awake,” Carolina said very matter of factly.

The clicking heels brought to the doorway Doctor Grey – the eccentric woman from before with
healing powers. “I never doubted your vigilance, dear,” Grey said kindly. She was also speaking in
what must have counted as hushed tones because she saved most of the bombast she had introduced
herself to Wash with before. And in the process, didn’t wake most of the company surrounding
Washington.

Most of the company having also been those with Wash at the tower.

Eyes widening, Wash looked around to make a quick head count. “The explosion! Did everyone
make it out okay?”

“My, aren’t we the genuine article!” Grey said in a soft laugh. “So much immediate concern for
others. You hardly see such theatrics anymore.”

That, of course, answered no concerns of Wash’s so he looked to Carolina instead.

“It all worked,” she assured him. “Your ridiculous plan to pull together all your resources on truly
ridiculous people somehow managed to save the day, the city, democracy, and everyone’s lives at
once,” Carolina crossed her arms and smirked at him. “I’ll be honest, I’m genuinely impressed by
all of it. And by you.”

Smirking some of his own, Wash achingly rubbed the back of his neck. “It helps when you’re
lucky enough in your life to meet amazing people.”

“All of which would just be pieces of a puzzle no one else could’ve seen the answer to without
your guidance and leadership,” Carolina assured him. She shook her head fondly. “Where’d you
learn to pull people together like that?”

For a moment, pride swelled in his chest. But for Wash it didn’t last long, not when he remembered
just where he learned that amazing, wondrous trait from.

Looking over his shoulder toward Tucker, Washington took a deep breath, the smile on his face
small and genuine.

“I learned it from my boyfriend,” he said so saccharine that there wasn’t any need for Carolina to
let out the disgusted noise that she did anyway. Wash was aware of the type of sap that he was.

“Tomorrow can you do something about that too?” Carolina asked the doctor. “His blood sugar is
off the charts with all the corn syrup he’s been gargling.”

“I believe it’s beautiful, but yes, I will heal him of all physical ailments in the morning,” Grey
assured them both.

Washington paused then looked toward Grey, eyebrows furrowed. “You have powers to heal
people right?”

“That is correct, Mister Washington,” Grey responded delightfully.

“Then couldn’t you just heal me now?” Wash asked, looking over himself, covered in bandages
and left wrist in a cast.

“Oh, silly, then you’ll never learn to stop putting yourself in front of explosions!” Grey laughed.

“Is that ethical?” Wash asked, amazed and put off by the answer.

“Ha, oh, Mister Washington, you are rather humorous for a repeat patient,” Doctor Grey laughed,
turning to head out the door. “I look forward to the many, many times we’re sure to see each other in your continuing adventures!”

Watching after the doctor, Wash couldn’t help but blink a few times. He then glanced toward Carolina. “I’ll be frank with you, she’s kind of terrifying.”

“I like it,” Carolina said firmly. She shifted her weight and looked down, her mouth working itself into a thoughtful frown. “Wash,” she said softly.

“Yeah?” he asked in return.

“I… Well. I don’t know how to say this but…” she looked toward him, her bright green eyes shining. “Thank you. Thank you for… well, rolling with the punches and trusting me when you didn’t know if you should or not. Letting me be a part of your little… thousand piece puzzle here. It felt… nice. Felt right. In a way I’ve not really been able to find since Freelancer.”

Taken aback, Wash tilted his head to the side, immediately flinching at the crick it gave his neck. “Carolina… I don’t know half of what’s happened or what exactly you even mean, but… You once put me on your team. I hope you’ll let us accept you into ours.”

Carolina glanced at him, a little reluctant. But the vulnerable expression quickly disappeared and she nodded over Wash’s shoulder. “We’ll talk later, alright, Wash? Looks like someone super worried about you wants a turn.”

Before Washington could object, there was a streak of blue and a gust of wind, and then Carolina was completely gone from sight. Leaving only confusion in her wake.

Still, Wash turned around and swelled up with emotion yet again when he tuned to see a wide awake Tucker sitting in his chair, trying to not wake Junior while also fighting the urge to leap up, given the quiver of his buckled knees.

“Hey,” Wash said breathlessly.

“You idiot,” Tucker said flatly. “You’re only supposed to get in explosions with me. I thought we totally settled that with Omega and Wyoming.”

“Well, I have every intention of not getting into another one without you. Or with you for that matter,” Wash joked. “I can’t have my boyfriend breaking his other arm. That really limits my enjoyment of an afternoon.”

“Shut up.” Tucker laughed, shifting Junior enough that he could lean over the cot and meet Washington halfway for the kiss the hero hadn’t realized he needed since the start of the whole Felix and Locus mess. It was just right and meant to be and full of love in all the ways that Wash had never found or even looked for before.

And it was theirs. Together.

Just like their worries and dangers were now theirs together.

Wash pulled back just enough to rest his forehead against Tucker’s.

“You thinking this is just the beginning?” Tucker asked.

“Yeah, I do,” Wash replied quietly. “Good and bad. And I want to make sure that, for as much as I can control it, it’ll be for good.”
Tucker huffed a laugh. “Oh? And where are you going to get the superpower to do that?”

“I know people,” Wash smirked against Tucker’s cheek. “It’s the extra superpower I learned I had.”

“Sounds fake,” Tucker nuzzled him as he laughed, “but okay.”

They rested face to face against each other for a moment, basking in each other’s warmth.

When the moment ended with a disgusted noise from the window.

“Compulsory, I’m telling you!” Tex all but shouted.
Back to Abnormal

Chapter Notes

Wow it’s just so hard to believe we’re finally here! It’s over, this fic. It honestly feels like I just started it, though I know you all have been incredibly patient with me when it comes to some sporadic updates and I can’t thank you enough for it. This AU will be taking a short hiatus after this story and will start back up again with the fourth and final installment “Evil Time”, so I hope this story satisfies all of you for now. It was a real privilege to get to know so many of you through this fic. I can’t thank you all enough.

And special thanks to @analiarvb, Enmuse, @icefrozenover, Yin, @cobaltqueen, @secretlystephaniebrown, @thatgothamguy, @washingtonstub, and @amethyst-dark-moon for the feedback and support!

The mayor and deputy mayor waved to the crowd gathered outside the capital. Even with the election finally reaching its conclusion, the shared duty of leadership was growing to be the norm. And behind them, in full view of the public, was the team of four teenage heroes who had bravely put their lives on the line for the city.

Off to the side of the large stage and in the shadows from the crowds, Washington watched with a small smirk on his face. He leaned his shoulder against the capital building and looked on over the peace reigning over the community that had been sent into a panic not so long ago.

It was the nice part of town so it felt a little bizarre to be there, but it was worth it just to see the pride and acceptance on his students’ faces.

When he felt a brush of air, he didn’t have to look to see who was standing just by his shoulder, instead opting to keep his attention on the group of kids.

“It’s hard to believe you’re not up there. If anyone deserves accolades today, it’s probably you,” Carolina said. “Hard to believe you’re the rookie who trained as Epsilon.”

“Yeah, I try not to think of my time as a sidekick,” Wash answered. “Though maybe I should give it a try more often. CT was always pretty strict about how our kind of skill sets worked best in the shadows. Considering how all this nonsense happened, I’m beginning to believe she had a point or two.” He turned to look at his former team leader more directly. She didn’t seem like a day older than the last time he had seen her. “You and Tex pretty much cracked this entire code before I had the faintest idea of what was going on. If I’d trusted my instincts sooner, if I’d reached out to other people sooner, then we might have had a whole lot less calamity the other day.”

“It also would have been distressingly boring,” Carolina snarked in return. “And warring in the shadows, not being the kind of hero people in the city can imagine being there to save them at a moment’s notice, it has its advantages for sure. But so does what you did, Wash.”

“Yeah?” Washington laughed. “What’d I do?”

She looked at him, a seriousness in her eyes. It almost surprised Wash with how nakedly the
emotions were being laid bare for him to see. “You became a hero for other heroes, Wash. I don’t think that’s anything to think twice about. It’s not something I managed even leading Freelancer. It’s not something Tex did or ever had interest in doing. It’s something CT did. And you managed it on a scale even larger than hers.”

Wash kept quiet for a long moment then looked at Carolina. “You know, the more you’re around, the more I seem to remember about you from Freelancer. And I have to say, being the best like you were, it was pretty inspiring.”

Carolina actually rolled her eyes to that. “A comedian’s comedian,” she said dismissively. “I know what I am, Wash, even if there isn’t a word for it yet, even if no one else can put their thumbs on it. It makes me happy to do what I do and to do it the way I do it now. It’s about the only meaning I can find in why I’m still here when everything’s so different from… from what I would have expected.”

“I guess it’s what you make of it at the end of the day,” Washington decided. “That’s just how life works… But… I suspect you know that at least a little bit. I mean, you managed the miracle of getting Tex and Church to work on the same project for a hot minute. Not even Tucker’s managed that.”

“It’s not as difficult as you’d imagine,” Carolina laughed. “You could say I have… some experience in the field.”

“Really? You’ll have to tell me about it sometime,” Wash replied. “But I get the feeling that there’s something else you wanted to tell me.”

“Yes,” Carolina said, crossing her arms. “You know, you really brought everyone together for that stunt we pulled. I can guarantee it wouldn’t have happened without you or the weight your name carries with all those groups,” she explained lowly.

“I didn’t do that much,” Wash tried to brush off.

“Oh, but you did,” Carolina assured him. “And my concern… Well, my concern is that you will again in the near future whether any of us like it or not.” Her eyes flickered toward him once more. “Do you think, should the time arise for it, you could manage it a second time?”

Wash looked over Carolina curiously. “Why? Would you think I’d have to?” he asked stiffly.

“I think we haven’t seen the end of things yet, and I think our enemies learned something very valuable that day,” Carolina continued. “And I think that if they act on it — on the importance of cooperation and larger numbers, varied skills — we may have come across an entirely new problem to tackle.”

Wash lowered his head then glanced back at Carolina. “I guess we’ll have to cross that bridge when we get there,” he decided, voice cool but attentive.

“Got other things to worry about right now?” she asked.

“No,” Washington replied, glancing over to the side street where a screeching, exceedingly loud car was pulling around the corner to face them. “No not at all. I just have other priorities too.”

With that, Washington walked toward the car, looking over his shoulder, Wash smiled a smile. “Want to come with?”

Carolina tapped her foot and looked toward the disgustingly beat up and old car that bounced with
the bass. “It sounds increasingly annoying.”

“Only because it is,” he laughed to her.

They shared a long fit of laughter before Carolina rubbed her shoulder. “You know what? Why not. I’m stuck in this decade anyway and my cell phone’s crap without new satellites up.”

Wash blinked. “Wait what.”

“Like I said, I’ll tell you about it sometime,” she assured him before leading the walk to the car.

Having little other choice, Washington followed suit, though at the car itself, he took the lead since the passenger seat was open. He slid into the car and slid into his side.

The music was blasting Bohemian Rhapsody again, and Tucker was bopping his head in tandem along with the rest of their crew. Tucker smirked at him and leaned over the armrests to plant a kiss on Wash’s cheek. “You brought another straggler?” he asked with a laugh.

“I brought another friend,” Wash answered before leaning in and giving Tucker a real kiss.

“Wow, guess that means you won’t be jumping out of the moving car this time then, you’ve got a vested interest,” Church announced from the back. He then stammered a bit when he saw it was Carolina. “Oh, it’s you.”

“It’s me,” she agreed, settling next to Caboose.

“If she’s here to stay and Wash is here to stay, can we finally all be friends in the car?” Caboose asked out loud.

“Yeah, Caboose,” Wash said, leaning back in his seat and allowing Tucker to concentrate on the road. “I think that’s exactly what it means.

Because, at the end of the day, it was everything a hero could have wanted.

For now.

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