Still Breathing

by Jh3richo

Summary

Failure was an ugly thing in Angela Ziegler's mind, and all Switzerland reminded her of was failure.

Failure is what Fareeha Amari believes she is, and the shadow her mother has cast ceases to fade.

Perhaps together they can find a way to forget what the word 'failure' even means, or perhaps together they can learn to just live.

Notes

First ever fanfic written, inspiration struck after seeing the amazing artwork from arbytesslyn (specifically this). Check out her work, it's truly amazing.

Cheers.
Breathing

Tired.

Heaving breaths – her own – echoing off the concrete with the sharp click-clack click-clack of her heels nearly drowned the voices speaking in her ear piece. Not that she was paying them much attention. She had tuned them out after the words 'stay' and 'put' had been ordered to her.

What a damn mess this was.

Their first mission all together again, the first mission of the rebirthed Overwatch, and it had gone to hell in seconds. It was suppose to be simple – weren't they all? – and yet here she was, famed doctor and scientist Angela Ziegler shaking like a leaf in a pitch black garage.

Get a damn grip, A dark voice in her head snarled, you've been in worse. You really have lost your touch.

Five years of less then peaceful work around the world should have kept her on her toes in theory, but it all fell to the wayside when compared to the utter shitshow she was in now.

Overwatch had been shut down, it should have stayed that way, but now it was back. Receiving the recall while tending to patients in Iran had chilled her blood and straightened her spine in a painful way. She knew deep down that she shouldn't have answered it.

So many people had been killed – so many former Overwatch agents had been killed. By who, no one knew, but it was certain that the unnamed assassin was only targeting former agents who stepped too far back into the light.

Which is why Angela had busied herself in her work. After the “incident”, Switzerland never felt the same. It no longer felt like home. She had no desire to revisit the crumbling remains of the Headquarters, had no desire to gather with former members and celebrate and remember, had no desire to even think about any of it.

Failure was an ugly thing in Angela Ziegler's mind, and all Switzerland reminded her of was failure. Your failure.

And yet she had answered the recall. It was done without much thinking on her part, and as soon as she accepted it she wished she could take it back.

The love felt for Overwatch had been pushed into the back of Angela's mind since it all fell to pieces, but a small part of her longed for that love to return. Longed for late nights spent designing her equipment with Torbjörn , for early mornings watching the sunrise over coffee with Jesse, for the gentle pats on the back from Ana, Gabriel, and Jack when she presented her life's work, for all the people who told her they were proud of her and that they loved her.

But she knew it was all gone and never coming back. Just like your parents.

CLANG – She sprang instantly behind a rusted piece of machinery, her heart pounding in her chest and her hands shaking as she gripped her staff tighter. “Someone's here.” She breathed into her earpiece, unable to stop her voice from trembling. God, get a grip! You've been in active combat all your life damn it!

The voice nearly made her miss Winston's immediate reply, “We're on our way! Just ran into a couple of--” He was cut off by his own roar of anger and gunfire, and Angela quickly reached up
to lower the earpiece's volume.

I'm going to kill Reinhardt. She thought with a grimace, the crusader charging off ahead of her the last she had seen of him. They were suppose to stay together, be back up in case Tracer and Torbjörn had been cornered, but at the first signs of trouble he was off with her struggling to keep up.

A combination of his huge steps as well as her own body being horrendously out of shape had left her to get cut off by a group of the rouge omnis they were to destroy. She had tried flight before the mission and decided it was a hard no, so all hopes of soaring above them were gone.

And thus she found herself hiding in an abandoned garage.

The thought of being able to fly again had made her giddy, but the first few attempts did nothing but prove that she was out of shape, out of practice, and in a hell of a lot more pain then ever before. The ports for the wings that she had cut and forced into her own back hadn't seen use for half a decade, of course they would strain under the pressure, but it didn't stop her from hoping they wouldn't.

The suit itself had been with Angela, but the wings had to be left behind without someone to properly fine tune them. It was nostalgic watching Torbjörn produce the all too familiar white and gold from a large case.

Her own breathing was the only sound Angela could hear, and she willed her heart to slow and body to stop shaking. 'Never panic,' the calm voice of Gabriel reminded her, 'the worst thing you can do is panic and shut down. Fear gives you adrenaline, use it to your advantage.'

A deep breath in, a deep breath out. Repeat.

Her thumb rubbed the handle of the Caduceus staff through her thick glove, the smooth motion calming her

Inhale, exhale.

She was so fucking tired.

So much work to be done in so little time, so many lives to save and no time at all, and so much damn paperwork needing to be filed. One couldn't just up and abandon a crisis zone in the Middle East in favor of illegal vigilante justice. Angela had to find people to replace her, send her own personal stock of supplies and still help run the whole operation.

Long nights with little sleep were never a surprise for her, but long nights with little sleep before a mission wasn't something she was prepared for. 'Sleep even if you can't.' Ana had told her once. Angela still didn't know what she meant.

Sleep was a luxury that Angela Ziegler felt she never deserved. Not while there were children cradling the cooling bodies of their parents in the rubble of their home. Not while people were drowning in their own blood alone in a filthy street. Not while people pressed the cool metal of a gun barrel to their foreheads just to avoid another day of painful hunger.

Her hands began shaking for a new reason – a face slowly forming in her mind's eye, a little girl she had patched up while staying in a rather desolate part of what once was Syria. Her eyes were filled with tears from the sting of antiseptic in the gashes on her legs, but someone later told Angela it was also tears of gratitude.

Those eyes we're so big, so bright despite all the torment she had endured, and so hopeful. It was
infectious, it made Angela's numbed heart warm, it gave her hope that she didn't even realize she no longer felt. The girl was struggling to speak in broken English, had just began to thank the doctor when she was no longer sitting up.

The gunshot came after the blood and gore spattered across Angela's face and chest. It came after people were already screaming and running away. After the body had already slumped against Angela's chest.

She didn't look older then ten.

Angela wasn't even ten when she was covered in the blood of her parents.

But she got to live.

Why?

Her hands, her whole body now, shuddered with each thought, more and more bloody faces filling her mind and squeezing her heart. Why did she get to live when so many had died?

Why did she get to grow older, but the little girl in the tent – she didn't even know her name – had to have her life ripped from her? Why couldn't she bring her back from the void when she had brought so many back, ripped so many back?

Gabriel didn't want to be brought back into this world, but you did it anyway. The voice in her head reminded her before sneering, I bet you thought he would thank you, fall at your knees and praise you for being so generous to deny him death, for being so merciful.

Click-clack click-clack

Angela gasped for air she didn't even realize she was lacking, her chest on fire and each breath painful as she leaned heavily on the machinery behind her. The footsteps grew louder, the somehow familiar cadence of heels echoing one after another.

Her hands and feet felt like ice, making her grip on the Caduceus staff nonexistent. The bile rising in her throat combined with the faintness in her head threatened to topple her to the ground. You need to keep a weapon on you at all times, 'Jack had explained to her with waning patience over and over, 'I know you don't like it but I promise it will save your life.'

Go ahead, get the gun, The voice taunted, grab it and take the lives you swore you never would take. Show everyone just how hypocritical you are and put a bullet through everyone you come across. Then they won't live to tell how much of a monster you are.

With the heels came quiet whispers, like multiple people talking at once in a hushed conversation. She couldn't make out what they were saying, there were too many, but they seemed to be repeating something over and over again.

Get the gun you damn fool! The voice snarled, and Angela's free hand released the machine behind her she didn't realize she was gripping with white knuckles.

Was it on the right or the left? Where was the holster? A lump formed in her throat and she willed herself not to whimper around it, her mind swimming. Every movement made a sound, every movement cost her her hiding spot. Where the fuck is the gun?!

The voice laughed in her ear and she could almost feel the hot breath that came with it, You're fucking pathetic! Poor little Angie, all alone with a loaded weapon and too afraid to even remember which side of her hip it's on! What's next, hm? Piss your pants out of fear? Or maybe
The creaking, squeaking, un-oiled garage door was raised, and Angela felt what little air there was in her lungs dispel.

“Doc? You in here?” Tracer called, her shoes scuffing on the concrete as she entered the garage. Angela couldn’t move, couldn’t make a sound, her chest still on fire and her hands still quivering. “I don’t see her Winston, are you sure you got her ping here?”

The Caduceus staff hit the ground with a reverberating CLANG and Angela realized that she was gripping her sides in a tight self-hug, the vomit in the back of her throat dangerously close to escaping. Tracer was beside her in seconds, hair looking completely wind-swept and eyes full of relief.

“Oh thank god! Thought you had done another runner since Winston last pinged your earpiece!” Her expression quickly morphed into concern when Angela didn’t even acknowledge her. “Are you alright, Angie?”

After swallowing the vomit back down she answered, her voice sounding miles away from her body. “Y-yes.” She finally met Tracer's gaze and added, “Someone was in here...did you see anyone?” Tracer turned around immediately, guns raised.

She began moving slowly away from Angela, tossing over her shoulder, “Didn't see anyone, but I'll do a quick check of the place and make sure we ain't got any friends.” Tracer blinked away, the sound repeating a literal second later before she reappeared before the doctor, “All clear! They must have been hiding for a tick before getting out of dodge.”

Angela slowly nodded at this, the voice in the back of her mind nagging her at the inconsistencies but her body moving towards her friend. Tracer was speaking to someone – probably Winston – through her earpiece but Angela wasn't paying attention. She gently picked her staff from the ground, leaning heavily on it and feeling a headache forming behind her eyes.

The walk back to the dropship was a blur to her, too many faces, too much concern, no serious injuries needing tending. Reinhardt had apologized profusely to her for leaving her, and Torbjörn eyed her with a certain understanding at her quick acceptance and request to be alone.

On the flight back the Swede had sat next to her, polishing the Caduceus staff for her and humming softly. His company had always been an uninvited comfort to Angela, he always seemed to know when she needed something without her saying a word.

Her first Christmas with Overwatch she felt hollow. So many were leaving to spend the holidays with family or returning to their home countries to celebrate among countrymen. But Angela had no family after her grandparent's had passed and having not left the country had no reason to travel off base.

Enter Torbjörn, whom she had thought loathed her for all the questions and unsure comments towards his work. He had invited her to return to Sweden with him for the holidays, to spend it with his family. He even presented to her the most beautiful Menorah she had ever seen, unsure of it himself and asking if she still celebrated with a sort of gentle embarrassment.

And Angela cried. She hugged him and cried then and there in his workshop and she hugged him and cried her first night in his home. His wife had been so generous to welcome her the way she did, making sure to understand each and every thing they did for her. His children took to her quickly, the small bodies clinging to her legs and wishing that she come back and play with them again.
And she did. Every year, like clockwork. She owed Torbjörn so much and more for how he cared for her, made sure she always celebrated her birthday or that he was pronouncing the blessings over the candles correctly or even making sure she ate breakfast in the mornings.

*He did all that for you and you left him in the rubble with everyone else.* The voice in her head reminded her, *He opened his heart and let you cry on his shoulder but when he lost it all you ran away like a coward.*

The pain in her chest swelled. The voice was right, she did run. She did unspeakable things, spoke against her family and ran from it all. She didn't deserve any of their kindness. She didn't deserve the love and happiness they showered her with when her flight landed in Gibraltar.

*You don’t deserve to live, so why are you still breathing?*

It was dawn when they arrived back at Watchpoint Gibraltar, and many were heading to bed after the mandatory post-mission meeting. The dark of Angela's room was a comfort, but peeling the suit off of her body, detaching the wings, and stepping into the shower was a much greater comfort.

The water was hot, far to hot for her liking, but she made no move to remedy it. The water streaming down her back took away the numbness in her chest, took her mind off the pain that had been resting there.

She didn't even make moves towards her shampoo or soap, just stood under the showerhead and leaned her head against the cool, sweating tile. The heat was helping her ignore the numbness but also numbing the pain in her back. She'd probably have to take a few painkillers to deal with the soreness in the hollow ports but she was fine with the dull throbbing for now.

Her mind had begun wandering to the paperwork stacked on her desk outside her room in the medbay when the door knob turned. Her eyes were open now, body stiff as the door to the bathroom slowly opened.

Soft voices, like too many people whispering at once could be heard through the patter of running water. The same whispers Angela had heard in the garage. She didn't dare to turn around and face the door, but she could hear it open wider and then stop.

*Click-clack...click-clack...*

The footsteps got closer and she braced herself, eyeing quickly the cheap razor on the edge of the shower.

*Click-clack...click-

She moved quickly, grasping the razor in her hand and swiveling around to throw the shower door open. The razor was raised as if it were a knife, her teeth clenched and blood pumping.

But no one was there.

The door to the bathroom was closed, the lock to it still turned. Her suit and equipment lay untouched on the toilet seat, her pistol still resting on the bathroom counter.

Cold was lazily sliding down her spine with the steaming water from the shower. *Someone was in*
Or you're paranoid. The voice scoffed at her. Angela dropped the razor. She didn't bother turning the shower off or even reaching for her towel, just stepped out of the warmth and walked slowly to the door.

She didn't realize she had the gun in her hand until she was clicking the safety off. The lock made a soft click over the running water, and the door to her bedroom opened slowly. Standing in the doorway, she took in the sight of her dark bedroom, eyes scanning the room for anything out of place.

But there was nothing. Her bed beside the bathroom door, made and unused. A desk opposite the bed, covered in paperwork and books. A book case in the corner, already overflowing. A wardrobe beside the bookcase, untouched and collecting dust.

No one was there.

Angela felt her head swimming as she fumbled with the door, pushing it slightly closed and turning to look at herself in the foggy mirror above the sink. Dark purple crescents rested below her eyes, her cheeks looking hollow and her face pale.

*I haven't slept in almost forty hours, I'm just tired...I'm just paranoid. I just need to--*

Her eyes snapped to stare behind her in the mirror at the figure behind her.

It's image was distorted through the racing droplets on the mirror, but she could see the eyes clearly. Huge, yellow eyes, like an owl's. Round, impossibly so, nonhuman. The whispering was right in her ears, and she could now hear what it was saying.

"-Angela..."

"Why...why would you--"

"--why did yo--"

"Ange--"

"--how..."

Her skin was crawling, the voices as distorted as the figure, each speaking in different tones and decibels. The eyes never blinked, never looked away. They bore into her. It's arm was slowly raised and with it came a slow movement of white and gold from behind it.

The mirror shattered, an alarm blared, and Angela's body violently jolted when she realized she had her gun aimed at what was the mirror.

Her arm tingled in a way that she wished was unfamiliar, the smoke from the barrel of the pistol lazily mixing with the steam of the still running shower. The shower, the alarm, it was all too much noise. But the whispers had stopped. The figure was gone. The gun clattered to the floor.

Angela moved on shaking legs to the shower and turned it off, her head pounding and ears ringing. The alarm was still screaming, and she could barely make out fists pounding on her door. The warmth and softness of her towel around her body soothed her slightly, her fingers tugging on a loose thread as she slowly made her way out of the bathroom.

The door opened to present her dripping self to the five other people in the entire watchpoint. She
was instantly bombarded with questions and concerns, someone pressing past her to enter her room. “We heard the alarm and Athena said there was gunfire in your room, what happened?” Winston asked, glancing past her and into her room in concern.

“Someone was here.” Angela answered simply, her voice sounding distant and alien to herself. She let herself be moved into the cold hallway so that Reinhardt could join whoever was in her room in the search for the intruder. Lena, clad in what looked to be her sleepwear, gently held onto her arms and rested her head on Angela’s shoulder.

A few more minutes of unsuccessful questioning from Winston and Reinhardt reemerged from her room shaking his head. Behind him stepped out Fareeha wielding a small handgun of her own in one hand and Angela’s discarded pistol in the other. She held it out to her but when Angela didn’t take it Torbjörn took it instead.

“The good news is that there isn’t much damage to the wall,” Fareeha said and then added with a pointed look at Angela, “and I’d say you won the argument with the mirror, doctor.”

With the excitement gone, so followed the group save for Torbjörn, who walked her back into her room and double checked under and behind everything. Angela sat nonchalantly on her bed, letting her wet hair drip onto the sheets and her towel slide slightly down her frame. The engineer set her gun on her messy desk in the corner before making his way to sit beside her.

He gave her a concerned look before softly asking, “Are you alright, Angie?” Angela looked at him a moment before tearing her gaze away, sudden shame washing over her. His hand gently patted her bareback as he added, “You went through a lot today. First mission back on the job. I...I understand if you’re overwhelmed and afraid. I also understand paranoia after the close call you had earlier.”

“I’m not paranoid.” Angela said mechanically, still not meeting his gaze. “Someone was in here, Torbjörn. The same person from earlier in the garage.” He eyed her warily and she turned to finally look him square in the face. “I know what I saw, what I heard.”

His hand moved to rest on her shoulder and he sighed softly, a sigh that she heard when he would begin an aside to his children to try and make them understand something. “Angela,” Torbjörn started slowly, carefully almost, “you’ve had a long day. You haven’t been up to the same idiotic heroics as the others, it’s alright to be paranoid. And you mentioned you hadn’t slept the entire flight to Gibraltar, so perhaps you’re just tired and a little...overwhelmed.”

“You think I’m crazy.” She whispered staggeringly.

He quickly moved her to look at him, “No! Never, Angela, I’m just...worried.” He gave her an unsteady smile, “It’s been far too long since I’ve seen you, talked to you. I should have wrote more. But you stopped writing back so I assumed...” Guilt and shame rested heavily in Angela’s belly, tears beginning to form in her eyes.

Torbjörn took her hands in his, his calloused fingers gently pressing into her palms as he continued. “I’ve been worried about you since what happened in Zurich. You never let anything show, happiness, grief, anger – you just seemed...despondent. I was worried that you might act rashly. And I still worry, today more than ever. I hate to ask, but Angela, have you thought about, maybe, finding someone to talk to? Or maybe taking medication?”

She paused, her mind racing at what he was asking. “Are you...shrinkin’ me?” She incredulously asked. Torbjörn opened and closed his mouth, trying to find words.

*He’s trying to badger you into doing what he thinks is best for you.* The voice whispered to her,
but he doesn't know you. Doesn't know what you're capable of. You don't need him, don't need his judgment and don't need his opinion.

“I can diagnose myself, thank you very much.” Angela said defensively, pulling away from him and standing.

How could he possibly know what you need? What you want? He has no idea what you've been through.

“And what do you know?” Her voice rose, “You aren't a doctor, you aren't my doctor, and you don't have to take care of me like I'm a child!” Anger suddenly filled her chest, her teeth gritting as she continued, “You're not my keeper, you don't have to care for me or even about me!” She whipped around to face him and yelled at him, “I don't need you to coddle me like you're my parent! I don't need you! I haven't needed you for five fucking years!”

Torbjörn sat with his mouth slightly open, hurt written all over his face. Angela straightened her back slightly, chest heaving and cheeks flushed. The older man carefully raised his hands in defeat and stood from her bed. He silently walked to her door and stepped out into the hallway. He turned and softly uttered, “I'm sorry I upset you, Dr. Ziegler. I won't bother you again.”

The door closed, and all anger inside Angela vanished. She moved on deadened limbs to dress for the day. She no longer felt like sleeping.

Through another door, on the wall adjacent to the door to the hall, was the med-bay, where a stack of paperwork awaited her. Mindless work seemed like what she needed right now, to just stop thinking for a few hours. Maybe a few cups of coffee while she worked, a few glasses of scotch between.

She had an old half empty bottle of whiskey in one of her suitcases, but the sentimental woman in her wanted to save it for when Jesse came back. If he comes back... The dark voice reminded her.

He had answered the recall, had sent them messages and affirmations that he was on his way, but it had been two weeks since they last heard from him. He had mentioned running into some trouble and it seemed like he ran head first into it. There had been nothing but silence and no pings on his communicator for two whole weeks, longer then it should have taken him to get from New Mexico to Gibraltar.

Lena had talked animated about racing one of his bullets as soon as he returned, certain that she could beat him now. Angela let her spirits rise with the others', but as time passed and communications ceased her hope began dying.

The med-bay was quiet, but not empty when she stepped into it. Fareeha Amari stood with her back to Angela, carefully studying one of the large cabinets filled with medicine. Her arms were folded across her chest as she leaned in to read labels, seemingly unaware of the doctor standing behind her.

“Looking for something in particular?” Angela asked, hands on her hips and eyebrows raised. Fareeha didn't jump or even turn to acknowledge her, only hummed to herself and continued reading.

“Yes actually,” She replied slowly, “I was hoping you had a few basic painkillers laying around, over the counter stuff, and yet it seems you don't.” She turned to address Angela and added, “I'm sorry if I disturbed you.”

Angela moved past her and opened the cabinet, glancing over pill bottles and boxes before
selecting a small handful of medication. She set each on her desk, leaning against the cold metal and point to each one individually.

“This one is for headaches and the like, should put you to sleep as well. This one for backaches and other various bodily pains. It'll also make you drowsy but not knock you out. This one for joint pain and this one for sore or stiffness.” Fareeha looked over each bottle before looking back to Angela.

“What about phantom pains?” Angela raised an eyebrow and Fareeha bent down to roll up the legs to her sweat pants. Sleek and glossy, freshly polished no doubt, prosthetic limbs were revealed and Angela mentally slapped herself. Of course Fareeha had prosthetic legs, it was in the file Angela had read when she first arrived.

Angela selected the second pill bottle and handed it to the crouching woman. Fareeha bounced the bottle in her hand after she unrolled her pant legs and frowned at the doctor. “What?” Angela asked defensively.

Fareeha shrugged and became very interested in the bottle of pills. Angela continued staring at her and she finally sighed and confessed. “I've...been in here a while. Came here after I checked your room actually.” Angela raised an eyebrow at her and Fareeha met her questioning looking with one of consideration. “I heard you and Torbjörn. Well, you yelling at Torbjörn.”

Oh.

“Oh.” Angela softly whispered, feeling herself deflate.

Angela moved behind her desk to sit rigidly in her chair, guilt and embarrassment filling her to the brim. Fareeha didn’t meet her gaze, merely continued staring at the bottle of pills. Without warning she looked at the doctor and asked softly, “Are you alright, Dr. Ziegler?”

So much pity thrown your way, The voice laughed in Angela's ear, what ever did you do to deserve such caring friends? Oh that's right, you go up to your elbows in their guts and deny them eternal rest. You do nothing but take so why not take the pity as well?

“I don't need the pity.” Angela hastily spat, more to the voice than to Fareeha. This gained her an uneasy look from the other woman, a look that made Angela's blood boil.

Fareeha set the medicine back onto the desk and folded her arms across her chest again. “It's not pity, Doctor.” She stated simply. “It's concern.” Her eyes stayed trained to Angela's as she continued. “I know what it's like to wrestle with demons, and I know what it's like to not want to discuss them. I spent years with nothing but my thoughts too. I know how lonely it is.”

She continued talking, but Angela wasn't listening anymore. She stared into Fareeha's dark eyes and couldn't see past them. She could see Ana in those eyes, could remember the way they would twinkle with mischief anytime Jack took too long in a meeting.

Angela remembered how Ana would place bets on which new recruit would piss their pant's first and who would be caught in a secret relationship with who. Ana was always up to speed on all of the gossip at Headquarters and it was almost impressive if not so utterly terrifying.

Ana used to tease Gérard about who would win in a duel, her sniper rifle versus his throwing knives. Bets would be placed, the majority leaning towards Ana which usually left Gérard put out. She would constantly pester Jack and Gabriel like the true mother hen she was, always pushing them to actually go to the med-bay after missions and even convincing them both to take a vacation once a year back to America.
The days spent observing her and Jesse on the practice range were some of Angela's favorite. She would sit wrapped in a blanket behind the two on the table heavy powered rifles usually sat with a mug of warm tea in hand and thick ear muffs on. Jesse was always so eager to have her watch him practice, even convincing her to face him in a quick draw a few times. Just watching Ana instruct the over eager young man was an impressive feat. And she never failed to 'let slip' a few funny stories about the old strike-team in between rounds.

Jack’s unemotional retelling of the failed mission left everyone stunned. Ana Amari, war hero, legendary sniper, and mother had been killed in action, her body unrecoverable.

*Mother,* The voice reminded her with the beginnings of a laugh, *to the woman stood before you that you're not even seeing. You don't see her, you see the woman you let die. You don't see another person, you see a stand in.*

“That's not true!” Angela growled under her breath, Fareeha raising eyebrows at her and moving from the front of the desk to the side slowly. The doctor rubbed her eyes and inhaled deeply, “I'm sorry, Fareeha. M-maybe another time...I really just want to be alone right now.”

The soldier had confusion all over her face and she carefully spoke, “Doctor with all due respect, I don't think being alone is a good thing for you right now.” Angela gave the woman a hard glare and Fareeha motioned to the stack of paperwork, “How are you going to get through all of that if you can't even get through me trying to open up to you?”

Caught red handed, and she was even opening up to you! Just tell her the truth, that you don't give two shits about her and that you wished her mother were still alive to answer the recall instead of her. The voice urged Angela.

Fareeha waited for Angela's answer but instead the doctor asked, “Why did you answer the recall?” This seemed to surprise her and she dropped her gaze.

“I assumed it must be important if mother's old communicator turned itself back on.” She sighed, a rueful smile on her face, “I remember getting so angry with her when it would go off in the middle of bed time stories or afternoons out shopping. I honestly didn't know what to feel when it activated after all these years.”

“Excited, I had previously assumed.” Angela said with a semi-smile, “your first answer was always 'Overwatch agent' when asked what you wanted to be when you grew up.”

Fareeha chuckled and added, “Overwatch agent or cowboy. Jesse really sold me on the 'good'ol American west.'” The two shared grins at this and Fareeha said with a laugh, “I'll never forget the look on mother's face when we convinced Winston to program some of the training bots to act like horses.”

Angela couldn't help but laugh at the memory, “I still don't know how you two managed to talk him into that! Or talk me into helping you corral them out of the rec room!”

“You always did have a proverbial stick up your ass, no offense.” Fareeha said with fading laughter, wiping her eyes, “But oh man, the days when you’d join in on our stupid pranks were definitely some of the best. No one ever expected the mature child prodigy to slip a whoopie cushion onto Gabriel's seat before a meeting.”

The two began cracking up again, Fareeha seating herself in a chair beside the desk and holding her sides as a new fit giggles struck them both. “N-no,” Angela caught her breath and met Fareeha's gaze, “if we're talking about great pranks, you being able to *perfectly* emulate your mother's call to attention has to be the best one I remember! Watching new recruits quite literally
shit themselves out of fear never got old!”

The hilarity slowly began fading, the two occasionally sniggering at another memory but slowly composing themselves again.

A peaceful quiet fell for a few moments before Fareeha softly said, “I didn't know how anyone would feel or react when mother's communicator accepted the recall. I'm sure everyone thought she would walk back in like nothing happened, like she had just spent the day at the spa without telling anyone. I can't help but wonder what she'd say if she did come back…”

“I'm sure she'd be very proud of you, Fareeha.” Angela said sincerely.

Fareeha snorted while leaning back in her seat with a slump, “You didn't know my mother very well then.” She shook her head slightly and grimaced, “I'd give anything to know what she'd think of me now. But I know that it's not the answer I'm looking for. I always was a screw up. Couldn't shoot a rifle for shit, couldn't keep my head under pressure, couldn't accept the fact that I had to share my mother with the rest of the world and that the world always won out over me.”

She wiped her eyes and shook her head again, “Sorry, I'm probably really buming you out. I just...wish she was still here. That she'd just magically reappear.”

But she won't. Angela's heart twisted. And she never will. You could have brought her back but you didn't. You are the reason Fareeha lost her mother. You are the reason why she knows what its like to be alone. You are the reason why there is an empty grave six feet under. So do tell me, why are you still breathing?

And at the moment, Angela wasn't. The pain Fareeha felt, the sympathy she was showing, all of it made Angela feel like she was going to vomit. She didn't deserve any of it. That dark voice in her head was right as always. She was a monster who did nothing but take, and take, and take.

Click-clack...click-clack...

Unfocused eyes could see the figure behind Fareeha, towering over her. The eyes were looking straight down at Angela, a shadow cast down its face and masking it. But she didn't need to see to know who it was.

The white and gold wings gradually raised as if ready for flight, the Caduceus staff held in one hand, the head of hair looking closer to white then blonde.

Behind Fareeha stood Mercy, It's hand reaching out and resting long fingers on her shoulder. Angela couldn't breathe. Fareeha had no idea what stood behind her, had no idea of the demon over her shoulder that shared a face with the woman before her.

“Angela?” Fareeha's voice sounded distorted, the whispering louder then before. Blue eyes stayed locked onto Mercy, Angela's chest a fury of pain and her throat refusing to open. She could see Fareeha move towards her, but didn't dare look away from the eyes.

The doctor sat unmoving from her chair, watching as Mercy stepped forward and bent slightly over to look down upon her. It's eyes looked almost hollow, expelling a sort of yellow glow.

“-hy”

“...still breathi--”

“Angela...don't deserve”
“—take and take...and take...an”

“—shouldn't be breathing--”

The whispers had grown louder, too many voices speaking over each other, too much noise. The doppelganger reached it's hand towards Angela, the limb as stiff as the dead.

Fareeha was gone, all that stood before Angela was Mercy, and behind Mercy lay bodies.

Bloody, mangled bodies, one over the other. The little girl with half her head blown off, what was left of Gabriel's wheezing mutilated body spewing black blood everywhere, the top of Genji's head and half of his chest cavity, Gérard's unseeing eyes with a single bullet hole between them, so many soldiers and agents with their hands outstretched towards her.

“Look away, Angela! Don't look!” Her mother had sobbed, but she couldn't tear her eyes away from her father's half crushed body. Fresh tears were still spilling over the single eye that remained, blood mixing with them and trailing down his face.

Warm hands cupped her face, smearing blood on her cheeks as her mother turned her head to look into her eyes. “Angela, Schatz, please listen to Mama.” Her mother was sobbing as she pressed kisses into Angela's forehead hurriedly, “You must run when I tell you to. You have to get away from here, towards the mountains, it'll be safe there. Do you understand?”

“Vati...” Angela whispered, staring into her mother's green eyes. Her mother heaved a breath and nodded, brushing her daughter's hair back.

“Vati loves you very much, Angela. So does Mama. That's why--” Her mother choked on a sob before finishing, “That's why you must run, Liebling. Run as fast as you can, and don't look back.”

The ground shook, more loud, pounding footsteps following, screaming mixed in with it all. A loud noise, a mechanical screeching rang through the air, and her mother pushed her away from her. “Run, Angela!” She all but yelled at her, “Get away from here, now!”

Angela stood, never looking away from her mother as she backed out of what was left of their kitchen. Her father's body rest behind her mother, his hand stretched out to her as if he were calling her over.

Arms were suddenly around her middle, lifting her up and pulling her away from the scene. “No!” She screamed, flailing her limbs and willing the arms to release her. “Mutti!” Her mother wasn't moving, was still resting against the overturned kitchen table, with her hands clasped over her mouth and tears racing down her face, the bleeding stumps of her legs resting before her.

The Bastion unit didn't hesitate as it unleashed a torrent of bullets into her mother, flesh and blood spattering the ground violently.

Angela screamed louder, her throat hurting and her arms and legs on fire as she struggled more. “Let me go!” She cried as she was carried away, “I don't want to leave them! Please! I can't leave them!” The grip around her tightened and Angela fought harder, fought to keep the last view of her home in sight. The last view of her parent's slain bodies in sight.

But it was gone. The arms around her held her tightly, and Angela realized she was sobbing.

“You're okay, Angela.” A soft voice whispered into the top of her head, “You're okay, I'm here,
you're okay.”

Angela stopped fighting the embrace and instead melted into it, wrapping her arms around Fareeha and sobbing into her shoulder.

They sat tangled together on the floor until Angela's sobs had died, her breath still catching and small whimpers escaping her throat. Fareeha had Angela practically in her lap, resting against the wall and hands rubbing her back in soothing circles.

When had she hit the floor? The doctor finally pulled away, shame turning her face red as she wiped desperately at her eyes and nose with the sleeve of her sweater. Fareeha waited for her to compose herself a little before she asked in the gentlest voice Angela had ever heard, “Are you alright, Angela?”

Truthfully, she felt better, but her chest was still aching and her head pounding. Sleep threatened to pull her under with each blink, and humiliation numbed her tongue. She shook her head no, more tears on the verge of spilling and her bottom lip quivering.

“It's okay,” Fareeha spoke, “take as long as you need. When you're ready to talk, I'll be here to listen.”

“Don't deserve it...” Angela slurred, sniffling and wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.

“Yes you do.” Fareeha gently grasped her shoulders and pulled her closer. Angela rested her head on the other woman's chest and let hands move through her damp hair. They sat in silence, Fareeha lightly rubbing Angela's scalp and Angela gripping Fareeha's shirt like a lifeline.

“It's never been like this before...” Angela softly uttered. Fareeha hummed in acknowledgment and the doctor continued. “The anxiety...the panic attacks, I'm used to it but...” She sighed and gripped Fareeha tighter, “It's all so much. Coming back to all of this. Seeing everyone again.”

She gained more confidence in herself so she released Fareeha to sit back and wipe her nose again. “Everyone's so happy to be back together, but I can't help but think about what caused us to fall apart in the first place.” Angela's heart twisted painfully and she spoke louder, anger beginning to resurface.

“I don't understand how happy they can be! So many people died because of Overwatch, because of me! But they welcome me back with open arms?! I don't deserve any of it! I don't deserve this... this hero's welcome when I've done nothing but ruin lives! I killed all of their friends! Gérard, Amélie, Jack, Gabriel, Ana--”

Her breath caught in her throat. Fareeha tensed slightly under her and Angela's lip quivered again. “F-Fareeha...” She couldn't stop her voice from cracking as she met the other woman's gaze, “I'm so sorry, Fareeha.” Angela couldn't stop herself from sobbing again, putting her head in her hands and chanting 'I'm sorry' over and over.

“What happened to them wasn't your fault.” Fareeha reasoned over Angela's sobs, “You did your best, Angela. You can't save everyone.”

“Then what's the point!” Angela all but yelled, her entire body shaking.

Fareeha carefully pulled Angela's hands away from her face to look her in the eye. “Angela, you can't put so much blame on yourself. You didn't kill any of them, you tried your hardest to do the opposite.”

Angela continued sobbing, unable to look the soldier in the eye. “You must hate me,” She said.
between sobs, “for what happened...to your mother...f-for what I've done.” Fareeha lowered her
gaze, her own lips twitching slightly.

“But I don't.” She whispered. Angela looked at Fareeha in confusion. “I hate whoever killed her. I
hate her for being careless and letting herself succumb to such a fate. But I could never hate you,
Angela.” She gave a sort of laugh and her voice cracked, “It felt like you were the only person
who really understood, ya'know?”

Angela was dumbfounded at the response. She tried to find words, anything to say, but the only
thing that left her mouth was, “I'm so tired, Fareeha.”

No words were said as Angela let herself be lead out of the med-bay and into her own room. She
sat on the edge of her bed in the same spot as earlier as Fareeha retrieved a glass of water from the
bathroom.

“Are you going to be okay by yourself?” Fareeha asked as Angela sipped the water, “I'll stay if
you want me to.” The blonde passed the now empty glass back into soft hands and whispered.

“I don't want to be alone.” The glass was set on her desk, the lights flicked off, and Angela laid
back without getting under the sheets. Fareeha lay beside her, extending her arms in invitation that
Angela immediately took.

It took them a few moments to get situated and comfortable, Fareeha on her side with Angela
curled into her. As Angela's eyes drooped she quickly forced them back open, fear of Mercy
appearing behind Fareeha again suddenly returning to her.

“What are you afraid of?” Fareeha asked.

Angela let her eyes slide closed as she took a deep breath. “Myself.” She said while expelling air.

A chuckle, “I was thinking more like spiders or bad weather.” Angela couldn't help but smile as
well, her grip loosening on Fareeha. “Why are you afraid of yourself?”

“I...don't know.” Yes you do. “I just feel like I'm a bad luck charm. That everyone who gets too
close will be struck down by some unseen force. Fate, destiny, God...whatever you want to call
it.” Tears began forming in her eyes again and Angela's voice waivered, “I deserve it for what I've
done, but no one else deserves it. No one else deserves to die.”

Fareeha leaned back slightly to look at Angela, worry etched onto her face. “You keep saying that
you 'deserve it for what you've done', but what could have you done that's so horrible?”

Lived. The voice responded.

A sobbed ripped through her and she buried her face in Fareeha's neck. A warm arm pulled her
closer, holding her tightly as her body shook with each sob. With the sobs came wails, fists
forming in her own blonde hair as the whispering returned.

“Angela,” Fareeha shook her gently, “please you're worrying me.” The whispers threatened to
drown out Fareeha, but the soldier persisted. “You don't have to say anything that you don't want
to. I'm sorry if I pushed too far. I just want to help you.”

You don’t need help! The voice yelled over Fareeha and the whispers, You don't need anything!
You don't need to breathe! You don't need to live! You're better off dea-

“Just shut up!” Angela's voice roared, fingernails digging into her scalp painfully. The pain chased
the voice away, chased the whispers away. But Fareeha's warmth stayed right beside her.
The sobs gradually died, Angela's grip on her own head loosened, but Fareeha stayed beside her.

She sniffled, wiping her red nose for the umpteenth time of the morning and shakily apologized for yelling. “Don't be.” Fareeha whispered back, “I shouldn't have overstepped, I'm sorry too.”

“So please don't be.” Angela whimpered, scooting herself up to lay her head beside Fareeha's, “I didn't mean to yell at you. I...I was really yelling at myself in the moment.” Blue eyes studied dark brown and Angela couldn't help but add, “Now I really sound crazy.”

Fareeha gave her a smile and moved her arm under the pillows, “We're illegally in an abandoned military watchpoint housing a genetically modified gorilla, a time traveling ex pilot, a literal German giant, and a man who still listens to music from a century old music player. I don't think you're crazy.”

The doctor couldn't help but laugh, a few tears leaking out onto the pillow. “But I do think you need to help yourself before helping anyone else.” Fareeha traced a crease on the pillowcase as she continued, “I've seen first hand what happens when you don't. I've lost too many men to their own guns. I can't lose a friend, too. Not when I just got you back.”

A lump formed in Angela's throat. When she was younger she had never truly considered the two of them friends. It had always been Jesse and Fareeha, thick as thieves. It made her feel jealous of the strange relationship they had. Fareeha Amari was untouchable, but somehow Jesse McCree managed to open her up to being as wild as he was.

As they grew older Fareeha had shown more interested in Angela's line of work, constantly asking about the Valkyrie suit's inner workings or diagnostics. Ana had pushed Angela to try and talk Fareeha into the medical field, but she couldn't bring herself to do it even once. The way Fareeha talked about being a soldier, about helping people, had given Angela hope for the future of Overwatch.

But when it all shut down, when the original strike team rest shattered on the floor, Fareeha had been the first to write to Angela. The letter had been surprising to say the least, detailing her current whereabouts with the Egyptian military as well as her condolences about the fall of Overwatch. She was the first person to acknowledge the harsh slam Angela received from not only the media but from former Overwatch Agents for speaking against the operation.

The offer to catch up someday over coffee was lost to the thousands of requests for her assistance in hospitals or warzones. But they were here now. No more hospitals, no more warzones.

No more voices.

“I don't want to go anywhere.” Angela whispered. Fareeha stared into her eyes and Angela revised her statement, “I won't go anywhere.”

“I'm glad.” Fareeha said with a smile, “Overwatch wouldn't be the same without you, Angela.”

“It wouldn't be the same without you either, Fareeha.” Angela relaxed into the bed, “Thank you. I'm sorry you had to see me like this.”

“Maybe you can listen to me rant about the current state of political affairs in Europe and we'll call it even.” The two grinned and the younger woman yawned, “Or maybe you can make breakfast in the morning and we'll talk more about my mommy issues.”

“It is the morning.” Angela chortled, deciding both were too drained to discuss it and choosing to file the latter of the sentence away for later.
Fareeha groaned and rubbed her eyes, “Well shit, so it is. Dinner, then?” Angela hummed in response and Fareeha snuggled into the pillow, “I’m not going anywhere, Ange.”

Angela moved to rest against Fareeha, curling into her warmth and sighing deeply. “I know.” She breathed out, eyelids heavy. Fareeha’s own deep breathing combined with the strong "thu-thump" of her heart soothed the doctor’s mind.

*A deep breath in, a deep breath out.*
Try

Chapter Summary

“You and Jalal were in Siwa.” Angela reminded her. The soldier lowered her gaze again, hands trembling slightly. “Fareeha,” Angela softly asked, keeping her hand on her arm, “what happened in Siwa?”

Chapter Notes

The follow up that never meant to be, but is now. I'll be honest this was written within the span of a few hours and there's bound to be numerous mistakes but oh well. No proofreading, we die like men.

Cheers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If she could sleep for just a few more hours, it'd be fine.

And yet as soon as she got comfortable, as soon as she lay just right...

But what about that email I haven't finished yet? Or those files I need to sort? And there's still an unopened box of equipment lying on my desk that needs to be opened...

Angela groaned into her pillow and rolled onto her side, glaring at the digital clock on the wall.

2:46. Damn it all.

It was only a matter of time until her insomnia reared its ugly head again. The past week's peaceful slumber had been a welcome surprise. The past week in itself had been a welcome surprise. The newly revived Overwatch's first mission had been a success, they had finally received word from Jesse, and Angela had managed to hide from both Fareeha and Torbjörn successfully.

The morning after her...breakdown, Angela had spouted apologies until her face nearly turned purple. Fareeha had merely waved her off, telling her that she understood where it came from and not to hesitate to reach out to her again.

Like anyone could understand whatever the hell is wrong with me... Angela thought ruefully as she pulled the sheets back and slid less than gracefully out of bed. She picked her discarded socks off the floor and looked at the previous day’s clothes on the floor with an unimpressed eye.

I suppose I should ask Winston to add a new hamper to the grocery list. Socked feet moved away from the bed and into the bathroom to pull the silky robe Lena had given her off a hook by the new mirror.

“I don’t understand why she'd send it to me,” Lena had said while giving Angela the pale blue
robe, “s'not like I ever use robes. Feel bad about not liking it, Emily said I look good in blue, but I've got not use for it. I'm sure she won't mind if I regift it!”

She had to admit, it was quite comfortable garment. Not that she had ever really used robes either, but once she put it on Angela could see why Emily would buy it.

The door to her room slid open and Angela stepped out into the chilly hall, tugging the robe tighter around herself to keep the chill out. She ended up going back for a thick fleece blanket to wrap around her shoulders.

It was quite the walk to the rec room turned kitchen, down long hallways and around corners that were collecting dust. She could have accepted a room in the dormitories closer to the rec room but chose against it and instead moved into a spare room in the med-bay. “I'm more used to sleeping in hospitals anyway,” She reasoned with Winston, “makes it easier to take care of sudden emergencies. Besides, my office is in here.”

It was a rather good idea if it didn't put Angela on in a secluded corner of the Watchpoint. It was unsettling, how empty and lifeless the Watchpoint seemed. So many offices that rest empty, so much paperwork left untouched and covered in dust, so many knick-knacks left behind in the dormitories.

Winston had admitted to letting the place go while giving everyone the 'grand tour'. The rec room had been littered with empty peanut butter jars the scientist tried to hurriedly collect while mentioning recycling. Angela couldn't help but laugh at how embarrassed he was, teasing him about his 'bad habits'.

But now the rec room held a few old couches and chairs around a large holoscreen, the kitchen's industrial refrigerator, oven, and dishwasher, table, and cabinets containing packaged food the team had silently agreed not to date check.

Angela flicked the lights on and turned the holoscreen on a late night Numbani talk show for background noise. The blanket was tossed carelessly onto the back of the couch. The chair she pulled towards the cabinets made a grating noise against the tile floor. She carefully climbed onto the chair, opening one of the cabinets and pushing past various boxed meals and more jars of peanut butter.

“Aha!” A bag of caramel chunks dropped to the counter below in victory, and Angela moved to the next cabinet in search of a tub she had seen earlier. Sure enough, a two gallon tub of popcorn kernels sat beside a questionable bag of instant noodles.

While not the best at cooking in general, Angela had a few 'recipes' learned from college that she swore by. Most containing more sugar then she'd like to admit, but with so little time in her life to actually learn she accepted her snacking habits and embraced them.

The caramel chunks were dumped into one pot and three popcorn kernels into another. The stove top clicked on and Angela moved the chair back to the table. She glanced at the holoscreen, unimpressed with the show currently on and moved to change it. Now playing a nature documentary, Angela returned to the stove top to stir the caramel.

One kernel popped followed by the remaining two. In went a few more handfuls. The caramel had melted slightly. More stirring. Angela couldn't suppress a yawn, rubbing her eyes gently.

“Oh, good morning Doctor.” Athena's soft voice spoke from somewhere above Angela.

“Good morning, Athena.”
“If I might ask, what are you making? It's quite late to be cooking a meal.”

Angela chuckled, “Nothing that's good for me. Just a late night snack and then off to bed” The AI was silent for a few more moments and the doctor jokingly said, “What? So you'll let Winston gorge himself on peanut butter but I can't make bastardized caramel popcorn at three in the morning?”

“Winston's peanut butter consumption takes place midmorning and midday. I was merely concerned at your being awake at such an hour. Are you having difficulties sleeping, Doctor?” Athena asked.

“I'm fine, Athena, I assure you. Just a little restlessness and a nonstop train of thought.”

The AI was quiet for a moment before speaking again. “May I ask something out of line, Doctor Ziegler?”

Angela narrowed her brows and stopped her stirring, “I suppose so Athena. Though I can't imagine what such a question would be.”

“I'm programmed to hear every word spoken on the Watchpoint, programmed to be everywhere at once and programmed to record such information. I am also aware that this disturbs agents and so I refrain from making myself known in private situations.” Angela couldn't help but glance up where the voice was coming from as she continued stirring.

“I know all of this, Athena. What are you getting at?”

The nature film paused and Athena's logo appeared on the holoscreen, giving Angela something to look at while they spoke. “What happened six days ago in your room. You have yet to speak of it again to anyone. Surely you would follow up with Chief Engineer Lindholm and Lieutenant Colonel Amari if you were truly alright. I suppose what I'm asking is if you are alright, Doctor Ziegler?”

The million dollar question, unasked since that blur of a morning. The popcorn kernels began popping loudly in their pot. “I suppose I am.” Angela answered as she turned to stir the rapidly melting caramel, “I was overwhelmed, out of my depth. I just haven't gotten around to speaking to Fareeha or Torbjörn; I've been too busy.”

Athena's logo seemed to spin in thought before she spoke again, “You were in anguish. Experiencing something unlike a tired and overwhelmed mind. Perhaps you should allow me to conduct a full body scan to see if I can find a physical cause to your problems.”

“It's not a physical problem, Athena.” The doctor said softly, a gnawing sensation beginning in the back of her head. “You need not worry about me. If I'm not alright, I'll let you know. It was merely an anxiety spell.”

The AI was silent again, and Angela turned to view the holoscreen. The nature film began again, Athena's logo vanishing with her parting message, “I'll leave the two of you to yourselves. Thank you, Doctor Ziegler.”

Angela raised an eyebrow at the resumed documentary, eyes moving to the figure now in the doorway.

Fareeha gripped the frame tightly with one hand and pushed her hair back with the other. Sweat clung to her forehead and stuck a few strands there, her chest heaving slightly. The tank top she wore looked soaked through. “Fareeha?” Angela asked cautiously.
The woman released the door frame and moved to sit at the table, resting her head in her hands and letting out a shaky breath. Angela flicked the stove top off and abandoned her creation to sit in the chair opposite Fareeha.

The doctor slowly reached her hand out to touch the soldier's arm, jolting her upright. The two stared at each other, one's face full of concern and the other's wild and unfocused. “Fareeha are you alright?”

Fareeha shook her head and wiped her mouth on the back of her hand. “Bad dream.” She mumbled thickly. Angela stood and turned back to the kitchen to fix a glass of water. It hadn't even hit the table when Fareeha took the glass from her hand and swallowed half the glass in one go, pausing to suck in air before drinking the last of it.

Angela turned to refill the glass and Fareeha asked a little stronger, “What are you making?” The refilled glass was set back on the table and Angela stirred the caramel.

“Caramel popcorn,” She replied coolly, “would you like to talk about your dream?”

She took the silence as a no and lifted the now melted caramel to slowly pour over the popcorn. It smelled heavenly, Angela's mouth instantly watering and she wondered how long she'd have to work out to compensate.

The thickly coated popcorn was moved to a baking sheet and the last of the caramel was spooned out of the pot. Angela tossed the dirty dishes into the small sink beside the oven unceremoniously and left her creation to cool on the counter. She retook her seat, resting her hands on the table and trying to gauge the other woman's expression.

She looked haggard. Dark crescents hung under her eyes, sweat clinging to her forehead and upper lip, fingers twitching around the glass of water. She wouldn't meet the doctor's gaze, staring a hole into the table's surface.

It was baffling to see her in such at state to Angela, but not surprising. If she recalled correctly Fareeha had served about ten years in the Egyptian military. Athena did call her Lieutenant Colonel...

“The popcorn should be done in a few minutes,” Angela began softly, “I'm more than happy to share with you.” She couldn't help a shy smile from growing on her face, “I suppose I owe it to you, small it may be, for putting up with me.”

Fareeha released the glass of water, bringing her hands up to cover her face again. “You don't have to say anything you don't want to.” The doctor reached her hands out slowly, palms up. “I didn't do much talking when you were there for me. And what you did for me, how you helped me, it's a two-way street, Fareeha. Let me help you now.”

Her hands were lowered to fold over each other, her eyes red and still not meeting Angela's. “They drilled it in our heads to get the mission done.” She said with uncertainty, “Get results, get out of the fire, don't ask questions, don't look back.”

“But I always looked back. The things we did, the people we left behind...” She finally met the doctor's gaze with a hollow look as she slowly articulated her words, “I've killed people, Angela. Because I was told to.”

A chill zipped up Angela's spine at this. To see this woman, who did nothing but making awful jokes and puns with Lena over meals and seemed to be ready to laugh everything off, suddenly in a much darker light wasn't something Angela expected so soon.
Everyone had skeletons in their closets, it was to be expected in this line of work and Angela was expected as a trained professional to help them with such things. But to see Fareeha, who Angela hadn't truly realized had most likely seen the same amount of carnage as she, no longer as a young jokester was startling to say the least.

“There was a man in my company,” Fareeha continued, never breaking line of sight, “he was the closest thing I had to a best friend. Jalal and I evened each other out. He was calm and a great shot, I was angry and a good tactician. We were a great team.”

“We got assigned to a checkpoint in Siwa, simple work...” She trailed off, her eyes glassy and unseeing. Angela leaned forward and put a hand on Fareeha's arm, pulling her back to the present. She gave Angela a bewildered look, frowning deeper in concentration.

“You and Jalal were in Siwa.” Angela reminded her. The soldier lowered her gaze again, hands trembling slightly. “Fareeha,” Angela softly asked, keeping her hand on her arm, “what happened in Siwa?”

“Our own drone strike hit the checkpoint.” Fareeha barely whispered, her voice hoarse as she forced out the rest. “It got hacked by some unknown force and turned on us. Jalal and I watched it from our station a few miles away. We were ordered to get out of the zone, leave civilians and injured behind. He refused. We argued and he told me that I was brutish for not caring about our company.”

She looked away in shame as she spoke, “He disobeyed direct orders and saved two lives. I ran like a fucking coward. He was mistaken for a rebel fighter and was shot four times in the back trying to get to evac. I didn't help him, I didn't go back for him. I left him to die.”

She wet her lips and blinked rapidly to try and stop tears, “I think I loved him.” She barked out a wet laugh and wiped her nose on her arm while adding, “I think I've loved a lot of men and women, but Jalal...”

“He meant a lot to you.” Angela finished for her. “I understand Fareeha, I really do.” She moved to take Fareeha's hands in her own, gently rubbing the backs of her hands. “Thank you for telling me. I know it's hard to talk about these things, but it does help to talk about them, to just let it all out.”

“Nothing helps.” The woman spat out, yanking her hands away. “I've tried drinking, I've tried medication, I've tried mindless sex, nothing. I feel nothing! I'm just a machine made to do nothing but slaughter, I can't do anything right!”

“Tha't's not true, Fareeha!” Angela said perhaps a little too loudly.

The Egyptian woman slammed her palms on the table and all but yelled back, “What the hell do you know?! Have you been beaten when you disobey orders? Or yelled at when you lace your shoes the wrong way?" She was shaking now, tears running down her face, “What about being told you're a disappointment? Told that what you want isn't right, that you can't? You have no fucking idea what it's like!” Angela opened her mouth to respond but was immediately cut off, “No, you don't! You don't know and never will because your parents were dead! You were alone from the start!”

There was a twisted smile on her face as she said at a lower volume, dark and serious, “How it feels to have your own parents hate what you do? Or what it's like to wake up to an empty house every fucking day? What it's like to be told that you don't matter, because 'the rest of the world needs me more, habibti'? Do you have any idea what that feels like?” Angela opened her mouth to respond but was immediately cut off, “No, you don't! You don't know and never will because your parents were dead! You were alone from the start!”
It felt like the wind had been knocked out of Angela.

It was a low blow, but she was right.

Angela didn't know, couldn't know the pain Fareeha was talking about. She didn't get to be raised by her mother, didn't get to have that love and nurturing in her life, didn't get to have arguments and rough patches. Angela didn't get to love her mother for as long as Fareeha did, and Angela didn't have to feel that love ripped from her like Fareeha did. She was alone.

“I was. But that doesn't mean you have to shoulder the anger and pain you feel by yourself.” Angela's voice was small as she tried to find the right words and calm her trembling voice, “I didn't expect you to understand my torments, but I was grateful that you were there to just...keep me warm. That's all we really need sometimes, Fareeha, is someone to not understand but to just listen and be there.”

She reached her hands out again, inches from touching the other woman and whispered, “Let me listen to you and be here for you. When you were there for me earlier this week...I don't think I've ever felt more safe. I want you to feel the same way.”

The younger woman was watching the doctor with wide eyes now. She looked stiff, letting her eyes and nose run freely. Her hands slowly met Angela's and their fingers laced together.

“You're so gentle, Fareeha. You're calm, you're comforting, you radiate happiness. I didn't think anything aside from a bottle of scotch and a handful of sleeping medication could get me through my...bad moments. You amaze me, Fareeha. Inspire me. You...” Something caught in Angela's throat and she found herself blinking around tears she hadn't realize she had. “You make me want to try.”

They sat in silence, neither moving.

“Sometimes I don't want to try.” Fareeha barely whispered.

Angela couldn't stop her own tears. There was a new kind of hurt and anger bubbling in her chest. The kind of hurt and anger that made her want to scream and hit and fight. The kind of hurt and anger that made her want to do unspeakable things to people she knew and didn't know.

It was a new kind of hurt, a new kind of anger, a new kind of emotion entirely that she couldn't name. It infuriated her to no end. It hurt, it enraged, it longed, and it made her get up from her chair and walk around to Fareeha to pull her into a hug.

“What can I do to make you want to try?” Angela asked softly, remembering how wonderful it felt to have fingers caressing her scalp and bringing her hands to Fareeha's thick hair.

She was silent again, slowly bringing her arms up to hug Angela back. Her head rested just below Angela's chest and she leaned heavily into the embrace. “Don't leave me.” She answered with a cracking voice and a soft sob.

Angela stood holding Fareeha until her knees began to ache, gently pulling the woman to her feet and towards the couch. Fareeha curled her legs under herself, leaning on the arm of the couch as Angela set her glass of water on the small coffee table before her. The blanket was draped loosely around the soldier. She left her briefly to retrieve her sweets.

Once settled, Angela laid the baking sheet across her legs and asked, “Athena could you put on a new film for us? Something lighthearted perhaps.” The nature documentary paused and the holoscreen flicked over a few title screens before stopping on the opening scene of an animated children's movie. “Smartass.” Angela muttered under her breath, pulling a piece of caramel
popcorn off and handing it to the woman beside her.

Fareeha eyed the sweet carefully before taking it from the Swiss woman. “Don't expect anything great,” Angela said around the three pieces she already had in her mouth, “It's meant to be a quick fix for my unyielding sweet tooth.”

The characters on screen began singing, something about 'true love's kiss', which nearly engulfed Fareeha's soft voice. “This is surprisingly good.” Angela smirked and scooted the baking sheet closer so that it rested on both their thighs.

They didn't speak past this, instead silently watching the movie that Angela noted as something she had no memory of ever watching when she was younger and eating the caramel popcorn. Fareeha gave Angela a weak but playful grin when the blonde shoveled a handful of popcorn into her mouth, looking like a deer in headlights when realizing she was being watched.

She felt guilty for eating the majority of the ungodly sweets, transferring the now empty tray to the coffee table and sinking into the couch cushions. Half of the blanket was offered to her and gratefully accepted. Their silence was comfortable, the two occasionally brushing thighs as they shifted positions or maneuvering the blanket to better shield themselves from the cold.

At one point Fareeha pushed the blanket off with a grimace and set both feet on the ground, leaning over the edge to tug her sleeping pants up. “What's the matter?” Angela asked.

“Stumps hurt.” Fareeha grunted as she finished pulling the pant legs up past her knees. She reached under to flip a small panel open on one leg, grasping for something.

“Let me help you.” Angela said as she set the blanket aside and sank to the floor. Her fingers brushed past Fareeha's and into the small panel, feeling a tiny lever and raising an eyebrow.

“The lever disconnects the nerve sensors,” Fareeha explained, “below the lever should be a button that detaches the limb from the connector.” Angela carefully pulled the lever, producing a pained hiss from the woman above her. Once the button was pushed the prosthetic loosely hung in place and Fareeha reached down to disconnect something else, pulling the whole thing off.

Angela detached the other leg and laid both on the ground beside the couch, watching as Fareeha gently massaged the scarred flesh surrounding the metal connector just above where her knees would be. The Swiss woman reclaimed her seat and spread the blanket back over the two, leaning against the arm rest and yawning.

“Angela,” Fareeha turned to look at her head on with an expression of regret before running a hand through her hair and saying, “I'm sorry for what I said. All of it. And don't give me that 'it's okay' bullshit because it's not. I guess I just...wanted to make you hate me as much as I hate me.” Angela furrowed her brows at this but let her continue. “Even after I said all of that...fucked up stuff, you kept saying such nice things. I didn't deserve to hear them, I still don't, and I'm so sorry.”

Angela sat up slightly and put her hand on Fareeha's shoulder, “Fareeha, you just told me earlier this week that I deserve to be heard when I'm hurting. Do you honestly think I'm going to turn around and not listen to you when you're hurting?” She looked away and bit her lip at this and the blonde gripped her tighter, “You also told me that it felt like I was the only person who understood what it felt like. But I'm not, I can't even imagine what it was like for you. But I know what it's like to be alone with those feelings.”

“I can't imagine what it was like for you either,” Fareeha met her gaze again, “I got to have my childhood, I got to have my parents. You...”
She looked away, an all too familiar heat behind her eyes and pain in her chest on the rise. Angela hated talking about her parents, about what happened. Every thought took her back to that ruined kitchen, took her back to the screeching Bastion Unit. She relived it enough in her dreams and panic attacks to last her the lifetimes her parents should have lived.

Blinking away tears and struggling to find an out to the conversation, a thought came to her mind and she couldn't help but smile as she asked, “So, the current state of political affairs in Europe?”


Angela inhaled the smell of frying eggs deeply, opening her eyes and blinking to try and clear her blurry vision. She tried to shift to her side but was halted by heavy weight on her chest. Looking down she was greeted to a head of thick black hair and attached to the hair, a sleeping Fareeha laying on top of her.

She lifted her hand to gently brush hair out of Fareeha's face, smiling at her peaceful expression. Angela carefully slid her off and onto the couch cushions while sliding the blanketed woman seated beside her and carefully slid Fareeha off and onto the couch cushions while sliding the sleeping Fareeha laying on top of her.

She lifted her hand to gently brush hair out of Fareeha's face, smiling at her peaceful expression. Angela carefully slid her off and onto the couch cushions while slinking off the couch herself. With the blanket securely tucked under the sleeping woman, Angela turned to see Torbjörn in front of the stove.

He stood on a simple black step stool, his beard unbraided and his hair unbrushed as he cracked more eggs into the pan he was cooking out of. Angela retied her robe and slowly approached the table, trying to pull a chair out as quietly as possible.

“Good morning, Doctor Ziegler.” Torbjörn curtly greeted without turning around.

“Good morning...” Angela whispered, guilt sitting heavily in her stomach. Talk to him, you need to talk to him. “Torbjörn?” She cursed herself for how small her voice sounded. He hummed in question, keeping his back to her. “I...” She didn't even know where to start.

Emotions were swirling in her stomach, the gnawing sensation returning to the spot in the back of her head and her fingers tapping unrhythmically on the table. He glanced over his shoulder and quickly turned to fully face her with a look of concern. “Angela?” He asked softly.

“I'm sorry.” She broke, tears cresting down her cheeks as she dug her nails into the table. “I'm so sorry, Torbjörn. I didn't mean to say those things I just—I was—I didn't...” She let out a shaky sob and pushed her hair back, “You were right. I was out of my depth, I was afraid, I...I need help.”

Torbjörn was beside her in seconds, pulling her out of her seat and into a tight hug. “It's alright Älskling,” He rubbed her back in soothing circles and sighed, “I wasn't angry with you. I was worried about you and I've been worried about you since. I don't think I'll ever stop worrying about you, truth be told.”

Angela couldn’t help but laugh into his shoulder, sniffling and reaching up to wipe her nose. “I'm sorry I never wrote back.”

“I'm sorry I never visited.” The Swede pulled away and smiled up at her, “But I'm here now, Angie, and I'm not going anywhere. Whatever you need, anything at all, let me be like the father I was years ago and take care of you.”

Her heart felt shattered and made whole again at his words. She hugged him again, unable to stop her tears.
They stood linked together for a few minutes before he quickly broke away, cursing about the eggs. Angela couldn't help but laugh at him, wiping her face with the sleeve of her robe. After he animatedly saved the breakfast he was cooking, he turned and motioned to the couch with his spatula. “So, you and Fareeha...?”

Angela couldn't help but blush at the way he said it and quickly spluttered out a response. “W-we were just talking! I was making a late night snack and she had a nightmare so we stayed up for a few hours--”

“So the pot full of caramel cement was your doing, eh?” Torbjörn said slyly, pointing to the offending pot still in the sink. Angela looked between the sink and Torbjörn, the older man raising an eyebrow at her and miming a scrubbing motion.

With an exaggerated sigh she stood and walked to the sink, pulling her sleeves up and running the water. “What?” Torbjörn asked playfully, “Too good to wash your own dishes now? You make the mess, you clean it up, Goldilocks.” Angela couldn't help but grin at the old nickname.

“Oh please, you know I'm far too lazy to do my own dishes.”

He clicked his tongue at this and said, “Then perhaps you should wake up your late night snack buddy and make her come help you.”

Angela looked over at the couch where Fareeha was still sleeping soundly, curled into the thick blanket. “Let her sleep,” Angela said softly, unable to keep the smile off her face, “I think she's having a good dream.”

She didn't see Torbjörn looking between the two with a knowing smile on his face. “Alright, Älskling, I believe you.”

Chapter End Notes

Like I said, we die like men.

I also made a Tumblr like a normal human bean, so come poke fun at those numerous mistakes at jhericho.tumblr.com
Who Fareeha was was a blurred line. Where did Ana Amari’s only child start and the highly esteemed soldier begin? Were there even things in between, was she – could she be – anything more to anyone?

I've worked this one over and over and have reached the point where I'm semi alright with how it turned out but still not completely satisfied and have no idea on how to make it to meet my own standards. Oddly enough, this was started before the previous chapters were even thoughts in my head.

"Shit!"

"Pharah! Mercy!"

"No!"

The screaming was gone the instant they passed over the edge of the cliff. The wind was howling in her ears as gravity drug them closer and closer to the water's edge. Her arms struggled to keep a grip on the Raptora suit, it's massive wings digging painfully into her chest as she clung tightly to the unconscious woman inside the suit.

The wings to the Valkyrie suit were extended as far as possible as they tried to support more weight than they were made for. Her back was on fire, the pain ripping a yell from her mouth and causing the split in her lip to widen.

She should have stayed with McCree. If she had just stayed with Jesse, they wouldn't be in this mess. And yet, Pharah had thrust herself into the middle of a firefight, entering a deadly duel in the air, rockets versus sniper rounds.

Their second mission and Angela was once again in the worst position possible. Well, perhaps not the worse. Everyone had sustained injuries of varying degrees, from Torbjörn's sprained ankle to the shotgun shells littering Reinhardt's flank.

Hurtling off a cliff into a less than calm ocean was pretty bad, but not her worst Thursday night.

The information of a Talon operation in Greece literally appeared out of nowhere. Winston spent countless hours trying to track the anonymous source that leaked the information, tried to find out who the whistleblower might be.
Everyone spent one long night on high alert, Athena's sudden announcement of an unidentified hacker in her systems leaving the team uneasy. “I don't want to poke back too hard.” Winston grimly told them the following morning. “Whoever this is was able to break into our mainframe in what seems like seconds. If they could do that they can certainly see me trying to break into theirs, and it's not an easy hack. I'm afraid if I poke too hard they might do something worse to us.”

The message was simple: Illios. Archaeology site. Talon.

The messenger was a lot less simple. The information was relayed through a serious of various codes that took Winston hours to figure out. He couldn't quite put his finger on one part of the message, one word that was repeated over and over throughout the endless codes. Boop.

The scientist decided to remain in Gibraltar just in case it was a trap to lure them away from the Watchpoint, leaving the remaining six to head straight into a probable trap in Greece. There was heated debate about what Talon could be after at an archaeology site, the only logical explanation being artifacts.

It made Angela laugh. World renowned terrorist organization Talon, stealing ancient Greek artifacts in the night like petty art thieves. She was laughing a lot less when their newly refurbished ORCA landed in the middle of a heated battle between Talon forces and Illios police officers.

“It's important that we not be see,” Winston had explained their first night in the Watchpoint, “if word gets out that we're operating again we'll all be in hot water.”

“Like a slap on the wrist hot water?” Lena had asked through a mouthful of cheese pizza.

“Like we're committing high treason, hot water.” The gorilla clarified.

Which made their sudden appearance all the more fantastic. Angela ignored the questions the police threw her way as she patched up their wounds, giving them plastic smiles and reassurances that they'd be alright. Winston had tried to calm the tension by reminding the team that everyone had a price, but it only seemed to raise everyone's blood pressure at the thought of having to bribe the police.

The plan they had come up with had to be revised quickly to account for the unwanted guests. Tracer would take to the backlines with Torbjörn and provide cover for him while he set up behind the enemy with his turret. McCree and Pharah were to flank the sides and watch for anyone trying to ambush Reinhardt as he marched straight on and into the site, hopefully pushing Talon back and into Torbjörn and Tracer.

Which meant Angela was stuck once again cowering behind Reinhardt's shield, praying to whoever or whatever was listening that he didn't charge off to god-knows-what. Just watching Pharah shoot off in the air made her itch to join her.

The past few weeks had been successful to say the least. Angela had forced herself to get into the gym and start working out again. She knew she was out of shape, but god. Watching Lena run a mile in a little over three minutes made her tired. Listening to Fareeha explain proper form for deadlifting and squats made her body ache.

Progress was made, slowly but surely. Her own personal training with her wings was going better than expected. Within a week in a half she could lift off the ground, and at the end of two weeks she could hang in the air for ten minutes. It still made her back sore, but it was a soreness she gladly welcomed.
Angela had asked Fareeha if she would help her run field tests in the air, but she was always shot down, no pun intended. If the doctor was honest, it felt like Fareeha was avoiding her on work out days. She always had an excuse to not accompany Angela into the gym, always seemed very eager to escape the gym when she walked in on Angela.

It infuriated her to no end, and she never failed to ask what was wrong on the nights they found themselves both in the rec room eating sweets until sunrise. Fareeha would laugh and shrug it off, always managing to change the conversation.

Their meetings had started off unplanned. They never intended to have repeats of the first night in the rec room, but it became a sort of ritual.

Just before three am, they would wake and head to rec room. Whoever got in first would begin preparations for a snack, whoever got in second would choose from a colorful array of children's movies. It was odd to say the least, and when they'd occasionally get an uninvited guest neither knew how to explain.

They had gone through a rainbow of disgustingly sweet treats: cakes, pastries, cheap boxed pudding, cookies, the list seemed endless. Fareeha had surprised Angela with her prowess in the kitchen and she'd be lying if it didn't make her embarrassed of her own half-assed cooking skills. “Mom was never around to make this kind of stuff,” Fareeha explained nonchalance on morning while pulling a pan of brownies out of the oven, “so I taught myself.”

Ana had been discussed some nights. She was never the center of the conversation, and that was alright. Fareeha expressed her desire to let their quiet moments be just that, a moment to step back and breathe, a moment of calm. Angela couldn't agree more, thankful that whenever the conversation turned serious and dark it was quickly broken by a joke or question.

It was such a blessing, their moments of calm. Some nights neither would speak, just go through the usual motions and curl up on the couch to watch whatever was playing. Some nights neither would stop speaking, interrupting each other to try and get thoughts or opinions out before they were forgotten.

Some nights it was like the other wasn't even there, that they were two individuals stuck in the hells that were their minds and memories. And some nights it was like they were the last two people on Earth, clinging together for comfort and warmth to chase away the whispers of the past.

Every night Fareeha sat a little closer to Angela. Every night Angela removed Fareeha's prosthetic legs. Every night they shared a blanket. Every night Angela found herself watching Fareeha and smiling without realizing what she was doing.

And every morning the two woke up tangled together on the couch. And every morning they returned to their rooms without speaking to get ready for the day.

Lena had taken it upon herself to bug the living shit out of Angela about it. “So you two spend the entire night together, eating sweets and watching movies, sharing a blanket, and just get up in the morning like it didn't even happened?”

“What's so horrible about it?” Angela asked.

“What's so horrible about it is that you're doing fuck all!” The shorter woman grabbed Angela's shoulders and lightly shook her, “Angie, what is the first thing everyone notices about Fareeha?”

Angela made a face and slowly answered, “She's tall...?”

“No no no! She's hot! She's got muscles, she's got charisma, she's got really nice tits! C'mon
Angie, it's not brain surgery!” Lena waggled her eyebrows and smirked, “Or maybe you're just a really good actress.”

“Lena,” Angela carefully removed her hands and stepped back, “Fareeha is nice and she's my friend. And you're missing the glaringly obvious: I'm not gay.”

The ex-pilot scoffed, raising her eyebrows and grimacing. Angela frowned deeper at the face and rolled her eyes, stepping around Lena to walk away. From behind her she could hear the woman mocking her in a comically thick German accent. “Lena, I'm not gay! Lena, zhe sky izn't blue it'z purple and vater izn't vet!”

The pestering was endless. It didn't help that when she ate lunch with Torbjörn he would make comments of the similar caliber, much tamer comments, but still hinting at the same conclusion: you spend a lot of time together, so are you together?

Angela hadn't brought it up to Fareeha during their occasional vents of frustration for fear it would make things awkward. The last thing she wanted was for a good thing to turn sour. Especially after they had discussed how terrible they handled relationships in the past.

All of the men Angela had been with left her feeling wholly dissatisfied with just about everything. All of the men and women Fareeha had been with had abused her kindness and left her feeling, in her own words, 'emotionally constipated'. They both agreed there had been the one or two good relationships that didn't work out, but neither delved too deep into their love lives.

It was ironic, really. They could openly admit to how many people they've let die, how many times they've thought the world would be better off with them dead, but they drew the line at partners.

Jesse loved to burst into their conversations some nights to describe in excruciating detail his past experiences with men and women, which probably lead to the line being drawn. Angela didn't think she could ever hear certain words again without blushing deeply.

“Mercy, are you ready to move out?” Reinhardt asked over his shoulder.

The doctor finished bandaging a rather large gash on an officer's leg before picking the Caduceus staff up and nodding. The German man barked a harsh order for the Illios Police Force to stay back. No one seemed to have the courage to challenge the crusader or his hammer.

The two moved slowly in the dark, Reinhardt's energy barrier giving them just enough light to see the area immediately around them. “McCree, Pharah, update on the path?” Angela asked into her earpiece. She touched the side of her halo, four blue blips appearing in the holographic interface that lowered to her eyes.

“Left's clear, over.”

“No hostiles spotted to the right, over.”

The excavation site was dead ahead. There were a few work lights illuminating the site, some overturned or broken by gunfire. Bodies lay untouched, Talon soldiers and police alike. “Turret's up!” Torbjörn said.

“Move in on my count.” Reinhardt lowered his barrier, wielding his hammer before himself. Angela gripped her staff tighter, inhaling the scent of blood around her deeply and spreading her wings. “Now!” He bellowed, his rocket thrusters propelling him forward.

Angela flew in after him, raising her staff and engaging it's first command to unleash a torrent of
nanites into the crusader. As soon as they touched the site gunfire erupted from all around them. The barrier was brought back up to block most of it, a few bullets pinged off Reinhardt's armor.

The doctor stood beside him to avoid as much gunfire as possible, two of the four blips on her screen approaching rapidly. “Got some friends comin' in hot to the left!” McCree announced.

Seconds later the man took a leap off some scaffolding and landed in a roll, revolver already raised and firing at the hostiles following him. “On your right!” Pharah called, Reinhardt swiveling instantly to block the impact of a rocket.

The rockets thundered into the ground, ripping screams from Talon soldiers and flinging torn limbs into the air in every which way. McCree glanced at the scene a gave a low whistle, “Nice shootin' there.”

A few soldiers rushed at them head on, and those that didn't get taken out by McCree's bullets were gone the instant Reinhardt swung his hammer. The sound of bodies impacting the weapon made a sickening sound. When he brought it back to raise his barrier Angela noted it was coated in blood.

A loud and reverberating gunshot followed by Pharah's pained cry turned Angela's attention to the sky. “Sniper, right side!” Another shot, a miss. “They're up on top of some ruins!”

“I'm on it!” Tracer cried.

“Pharah, land,” Angela kept trying to find the woman in the dark sky, “it's too risky for me to go up there if the sniper has your position.”

“Right behind you!” She answered over coms, landing less than gracefully seconds later. She held her left shoulder in pain and tossed a few plates of her suit away. “Armor piercing rounds.” She said gruffly, looking at the shredded plates in disgust.

Angela turned her beam to the woman, “Patching you up, just a few moments.” The golden light enveloped Pharah and Angela couldn't help but smirk at the awed look on her face.

“So this is what this feels like.” She wondered aloud.

“Don't get used to it, I'd like to not have to do this. The bullet will need to be removed later, but you should feel no pain.” Angela said, watching Pharah roll her shoulder and give her a curt nod.

“Keep with McCree until we get confirmation from Tracer about the sniper.”

“Yes ma'am.” Pharah said with a smirk before she aimed her rocket launcher and swiveled to fire off a few rounds, taking out a few soldiers trying to ambush them from behind.

Angela turned to view the two blips off in the distance, one turning slightly yellow. “Torbjörn, status report.”

“Just a few hostiles trying to get my turret.” He answered instantly, grunting before letting out a laugh, “Better to be the hammer than the nail!”

“Tracer? Update on the sniper?” Reinhardt asked, lowering his barrier again to fling a large scar of fire at a rather tightly packed group of soldiers.

Angela watched her blip vanish and reappear every few seconds, turning red instantly before vanishing and reappearing back to blue. “Tracer! What's going on?!”

“It's her!” Tracer growled in response, heaving a breath and adding, “That purple lady from Kings
Row!" There was an echoed gunshot through Tracer's com and she laughed and yelled out, "Missed me, love!"

"Lemme know if you need backup," McCree called out as he took a soldier's knee out, "I've gotta feelin' this is gonna get hairy real quick if she's here!"

Angela raised an eyebrow at the cowboy, "You know who she's talking about?"

McCree pulled something out of the underside of his holster and tossed it up into the air, "Flash bang incoming!" Angela turned her head just in time to miss the loud bang and crack of light, stunning a few soldier's who were trying to come down the ramp. "Yeah I know'er! She was part of the group that had me tied down back in the States, annoying as shit!"

There was a soft roaring in the distance that was gradually growing louder, the sounds of gunfire seeming quiet compared. Torbjörn cursed into the coms and practically yelled, "There's a whole fleet of'em coming around!"

"I see'em too!" Tracer added, "Big ships! One's got a big scar on the side of it!" McCree looked towards the dark sky in a slight panic.

"The one with the scar, is it on the front?" He asked quickly as he reloaded his revolver.

"Yeah, look's pretty gnarly—OI!" Tracer was cut off with a gasp like she had been hit hard. Her coms picked up a scuffle, like she had been taken to the ground.

Reinhardt's barrier had small cracks forming at it's edges and he tossed over his shoulder, "The barrier is failing! I must retract it and let it rebuild itself!"

"Not a good time to do that!" McCree growled, looking at Angela and stating darkly, "If who I think is on that ship is on it, we're in deep horse shit." She raised an eyebrow at him and he looked around, "Do we have any idea what they're here for? Maybe we can take it before they get it."

Pharah was hovering off the ground barely above Reinhardt's shield as she raised her wrist to fire a small rocket that propelled a few soldier's backwards. "We have no idea what their target is," She called down to him, "we just know that we can't let them be here! Who's on that ship?"

"The Reaper." He said grimly, leveling his revolver with a head and pulling the trigger. "The one who's been killing former Overwatch members. I was tracking him for a bounty and he came for me, him and that spider bitch."

Chills raced down Angela's spin. The person she was the most worried about could be coming straight for them. She had read the reports of the deaths, and seen the pictures of what they looked like during autopsy.

There were barely any bodies left. All of the corpses had been obliterated. It looked like they had been through a woodchipper, only a few fingers still attached to what would be left of hands, only a few strings of muscle still clinging tightly to bones that were shattered beyond belief. They all looked like they had been decaying for months.

It was definitely motivation for her to not step too far out her line of work, to try and not draw attention to herself. But here she was, once again part of Overwatch, once again on a mission, and in the way of whatever he wanted. And in a bright and flashy angel suit. Honestly fuck this.

"We have a mission, and we must complete it. We were told of this operation for a reason, so we have to stop it." Pharah declared, the others adding their agreements.
Reinhardt's shield had a rapidly forming crack right down the middle and he gripped his hammer tighter, “I can't hold it forever!”

“Let it down on my mark,” Pharah ordered as she reloaded her launcher and checked a remaining panel on the top of her shoulder, “we can't waste any more time! I'm going back in the air to try and slow their fleet!”

“No you are not!” Angela barked, glaring daggers at the woman and pulling her own pistol from it's holster, “The sniper is--”

“The sniper is busy dealing with Tracer and I trust her to take care of it! We aren't arguing over this, Mercy, I have to engage now or we might fall here!” She flicked her visor down and reached up to mute her coms, saying directly to Angela, “I'll be alright, trust me.”

With that she was gone, calling for Reinhard to drop his barrier. As soon as it was down Angela dove into a small alcove. She fired aimlessly and was surprised to hear some of her shots find their marks. Torbjörn yelled that their ground numbers were dwindling. Reinhardt swung his hammer forward and slammed it into the ground, the earth shattering before it and knocking Talon forces to the ground.

McCree was on the downed soldiers instantly, his revolver rapidly firing and landing headshot after headshot. The whole ordeal lasted only a few seconds but added a heaping pile of bodies to the collection around them. The sky above them was alight with rockets exploding, the loud and reverberating BOOMS of their contact with the ship shaking the ground.

“Gotta say, I'm pretty jealous of her,” McCree said with a chuckle, “but I suppose I don't like flying that much, never--” He was cut off by a loud TAK-TAK and his own shriek of pain. Angela turned in time to watch a clawed gauntlet grasp his cybernetic arm and pull it backwards, the metal bending as easily as rubber.

McCree was thrown to the ground, the dark figure behind him slamming a steel boot into his back and leaning towards the doctor. The moonlight cast a faint spotlight on the bone white, skeletal mask looking back at Angela. She stood paralyzed as a clawed hand reached forward and wrapped tightly around her neck, jerking her forward to painfully lean on the tips of her toes.

Reinhardt had his hammer raised, about to strike the figure when they lifted a shotgun and fired it into the crusader's side. He stumbled backwards, clutching his flank and losing his grip on his hammer. The hammer hit the ground with a resounding THUD and so followed it's wielder. Angela was shaking, tears beginning to form in her eyes from the smell of rotting flesh that emanated from the wraith before her. She was brought closer until she was bent nose to nose with The Reaper.

They stared back at each other in silence for what felt like hours, the screams of Torbjörn in Angela's coms lost to the blood roaring in her ears and the icy feeling in her limbs. The claws released her neck for a split second but caught her by the chin before she could fall forward, squeezing her face painfully but not enough to break the skin. She gasped for air but quickly closed her mouth, the smell of death so strong that she could taste it.

The Reaper spoke first in a harsh, grated voice. “Well well well, it's been a while, wouldn't you agree, Doctor Ziegler?” He shook her slightly at her silence and leaned closer to growl in her face, “I'll give you more than you deserve and won't kill you where you stand just yet; I want to hear you plead for your pathetic, empty life.” A claw bore painfully into her lower lip, dragging at it roughly and breaking the skin.

She was shaken again but was only spurred into action by the shotgun that dug into the center of
“W-who are you?” She could only whisper, her voice hoarse from fear and unable to hide it.

“You’re asking the wrong questions, dear doctor.” The Reaper released her face and push her upright with his shotgun, leaving it at her chest and bringing a hand up to rest on the mask. “The question isn’t who am I...but what have you made me into.” Angela's mind was racing at this, her stomach churning as The Reaper flicked a small corner of his mask up and began removing the whole thing.

Just before it could be removed, McCree rose up behind The Reaper and fired his revolver into his side. The Reaper howled in pain and harshly slapped Angela across the face as he went to the ground, claws tearing through the thin flesh of her face. His body dissipated into smoke and raced across the ground. The two watched in shock as the smoke rose up to reform back into The Reaper's cloaked form a few feet away, clenching and unclenching his clawed hands.

He glanced over his shoulder, mask still intact and said cryptically, “We'll meet again, and when we do I won't spare you any words, Goldilocks. You either, you damn ingrate.” Angela's stomach dropped out at the old nickname and The Reaper laughed at her reaction. His body slowly began to fade away until he was gone, his laugh carried away by the wind.

McCree winced as he stepped forward and gripped Angela's shoulder, “You alright?” She slowly nodded, half her face burning with pain and her lip steadily bleeding down her chin. Reinhardt's low groaning turning the two to look at him. “Help him first, I'll be fine with m'gimpy arm for now.” The cowboy said with a slight smile that vanishing into another wince as he tried to move his shoulder.

Angela had Reinhardt standing in a remarkable thirty seconds, his side still bleeding slightly under his shredded armor. “I don't want to hear an earful from you,” He waved her off as he leaned heavily onto his hammer, “I'll already be getting it from Torbjörn for wrecking my armor already. Speaking of, Torbjörn! How are things looking on your side?”

“The last are trying to retreat into my turret,” Torbjörn said, “all that looks to be left aside from a few stragglers are those ships.” Angela turned her gaze to the sky and watched Pharah's blip move further and further way and couldn't help the sense of dread filling her stomach. Tracer's blip was no longer moving.

“Tracer what is your status?” Angela asked in a panic. Her coms rustled and more gunfire could be heard over them.

There was a pain cry and Tracer yelped. Her blip had turned orange. Angela turned in time to watch Pharah's still blue blip vanish in a large ball of flames and fire. “Rocket barrage incoming!”

“Now there's a light show,” McCree said with a grin, the rockets and missiles illuminating the ship with the large scar he had been talking about. It began pulling away immediately, heading out towards the sea. “Looks like we sent them runnin'! This calls for a celebration!”

Angela was far from celebrating. Tracer wasn't responding and her blip was dangerously still. She opened her mouth to ask--

_Crack_

Gravity seemed to cease to be, all sound vanishing as Angela watched Pharah's red blip fall rapidly out of the sky. She was moving before realizing what she was doing, before the rational part of her brain could stop her from launching herself into the air.
Her wings spread and boosted her into the sky, her arms stretched out as far as possible as the blip grew bigger. Pharah's limp form was soon visible and Angela willed herself to move faster. She barely grabbed the woman's arm before she was immediately pulled into Pharah's downward spiral, momentum pushing them further out and away from land while sending them plummeting.

Angela managed to hold on long enough to gain enough speed to wrap her arms around Fareeha's form, ignoring the Raptora's painful edges and corners as she clung to the woman's back.

“Shit!

“Pharah! Mercy!”

“No!”

Angela could hear the voices in stereo, her coms painfully loud in her ears. “Come on,” She whispered to her suit, straining to keep her wings open against the harsh wind, “come on!” The synthetic muscle and tissue in her back was burning intensely, a knot beginning to form in the center of her shoulders. The pain ripped a yelp from her but she kept her wings open, feeling blood rolling down her chin from her lip.

The ocean they were rapidly approaching looked like thick, black blood to Angela. The water was choppy, debris from the ships floating along the surface and following the waves back to the cliff. There was no beach, no sand, just water that lead straight into stone.

She angled herself as best she could in an upright position and took a deep breath through the nose. Angela was in agony as she forced her wings to spread wider, catching air and pulling them backwards slightly and into a gentle glide. The knot in her back caused her to freeze up, her grip loosening on Fareeha's limp body and her vision blurring.

“No!” She gasped, her lungs stinging as she breathed. Her grip on Fareeha returned and the doctor could feel the muscles in her back tearing. Her head was pounding, instinct screaming at her to let the unconscious woman go, to end the torment. The sight of Fareeha's shattered visor, the sight of blood steadily flowing from her head, it was enough to keep Angela from acting upon those instincts. *I am not losing anyone else, not now, not ever! I will not lose again!* She thought in her head, her teeth grinding together and pain lessening with her new found will. *Not her!*

They hit the water harshly, but it was enough to save them from any severely broken bones. Angela knew she was badly bruised but ignored the pain by repeating her mantra to herself. *Not her, not her, not her!* The doctor struggled to pull Fareeha above water, the weight of her suit trying to pull her under. They finally crested the surface and Angela gasped for air, the soreness in her chest and back combined with the weight of the soldier in her arms threatening to pull her under again.

The waves pushed and pulled the two back and forth, taking them closer and closer to where land met sea. Angela couldn't help but curse at the rocks that rest in their path, managing to turn the two so that she would take the brunt force of them.

The first hit didn't hurt as much as she was anticipating but it still knocked the wind out of her. The way at which the Valkyrie suit's wings were sitting made it so that the painfully dug into their ports upon impact. Angela's gasp of pain lead to water rushing into her mouth and getting sucked into her lungs, the back of her throat burning as she tried to hack up the sea water.

The second hit came too soon for Angela to prepare for. The wings were shoved deeper into the ports, water sucked back into her airway, and this time she lost her hold on Fareeha. The woman vanished beneath the water's surface and Angela couldn't help her panic as she sank under to save
her. Fareeha wasn't too far below, but Angela's limbs strained to keep hold of her and pull her up. She kicked with all her might, her lungs burning from the lack of oxygen and her eyes and lacerations stinging from the salt water.

A wave pushed them further apart and Angela struggled to turn to grab the woman again. Her arms reached out, about to grab onto the Raptora's wings when Angela was slammed into another rock. The ports gave way to the wings and they thrust into her back, ripping her skin in two and slashing her already torn muscles apart.

It felt like Angela had been struck by lightening. The pain consumed her, it filled her head to toe, it took her vision, her hearing – or was that the ocean? The ocean seemed so calm around her, so gentle the further she sank into it's warm embrace. Was it warm, or was she just chilled to the bone? She accepted the water filling her lungs, watching small bubbles that formed from her nostrils gracefully drift upwards.

It was so quiet, so calm. It was like the mornings she spent with Fareeha – Fareeha was beside her like she was those mornings. The woman would have looked so peaceful if not for the blood forming a crimson halo around her head in the water. She looked like she was sleeping, looked the same she had after those quiet mornings before she woke up and removed herself from Angela's chest.

Angela’s chest felt warm now, like it was going to burn a hole straight through her. It should have been painful, but she felt so numb. It felt like when she was back in the garage, when she first encountered Mercy. She felt like she didn't feel, and that was okay. No one would mind if she rested, if she let her eyes close and let her mind wander.

Fareeha was with her, it would be okay. Fareeha was safe, Fareeha was warm. Fareeha was right beside her like she was when she came face to face with Mercy, like she was during those quiet mornings. Fareeha wouldn't leave her. And she wouldn't leave Fareeha. She would rest her eyes, embraced in Fareeha's warmth. She would rest and they would both wake in a few hours, together as they were when they fell asleep. With her... Angela's mind whispered for her as she let herself be held tightly by the ocean, as she sank further into the darkness.

It felt like thousands of hands were gripping her body, pulling her further down. Angela's whispers slowly became the whispers of those holding her, asking her again and again if she was breathing, if she deserved to ever breathe again. But she wasn't, and she wouldn't. And it was okay because Fareeha was with her.

The ghosts could take hold of her body and pull her further into their hold, they could rip into her flesh and tear her body apart. Mercy could descend upon her and remind her of all of the lives she took, could stare into her very soul with it's owlish eyes and consume her very soul, unravel her mind and leave her as empty as she deserved to be.

But it's okay...Fareeha is...Fareeha...I...

“Fareeha?” The door slowly creaked open, light sliding across the hardwood floor and revealing the small bundle of thick duvet resting beside the front door. Curled right next to the shoe rack, almost on the welcome mat, and clutching a small flashlight, she sat facing the door, not turning at the call of her name.

“Sweet pea?” Her father called again, kneeling beside her self-made den and pulling part of it
back to reveal her. He raised an eyebrow at her with a smile and asked, “What are you doing out of bed, Reba? It's past eleven and you've got school in the morning.”

Fareeha glanced back at her father for only a moment before returning her gaze to the door, stating simply, “Mom isn't home yet.” Her father made noise of understanding and unwrapped the duvet further, slinging a corner around his shoulders and patting his leg. Fareeha moved to rest on him immediately, her flashlight blinding the two of them as she moved.

“If you're waiting for Mom, you'll be waiting for a while.” Her father said softly, “She's on an important mission with Uncle Jack and Uncle Gabe.”

Fareeha glanced up at her father with a perplexed look, “Mom's on a mission near the border of Spain and Portugal with Strike Commander Reyes and Second Commander Morrison to take back the ocean front from omnic forces. Suspected heavy push back from Titan units, newer models upgraded by the Ultimate Programs, or as the civies call them, God Programs. The mission should have end by thirteen hundred and her flight back should have landed by twenty-one hundred.”

Her father laughed, a rich sound that Fareeha felt in her chest. “You can remember all of this but you can't remember your ballet routine?” He laughed again, hugging her close and kissing the top of her head, “Never change, sweet pea.”

Fareeha made a face and groaned at the thought of her dance class, “I hate ballet. All of the other girls are weird.”

“Oh? How so?” Her father asked as he shifted slightly to lean against the wall.

She paused, trying to think of how to tell him what she felt without spilling all of the beans. “Everyone treats me different.” It wasn't a lie. They did treat her different. They would make fun of her hair beads, make fun of her strange accent, and everyone was shushed when talking about what the fun things their parents did with them. It was like they thought Fareeha couldn’t understand the concept of having parents who were always present.

Her father sighed and nudged Fareeha to look at him. She turned, resting her head on his shoulder and looked up at him. He had scruff on his chin and jaw, his long hair pulled back hastily, almost falling out. His glasses rested low on his nose, enough to make him look like a wizened old man despite his young age.

“They just don’t understand. Sometimes, people get mean towards things they don't understand, and they do and say things they don't really mean.”

“Is that why people are mean to the good omnics?” Fareeha asked softly, looking up at her father and awaiting his response.

He winced slightly and his brow furrowed, “I don't really know, sweet pea. It's hard to tell if a person is good or bad, and it's even harder to tell if an omnic is.” She frowned at this and her father continued, “But I believe that there are good omnics like there are good people. We see enough of the bad on TV not to hope that there's some good out there too.”

“Dad?” He hummed in response. “Are they good?” She motioned to the picture by the door of her mother and her comrades.

“Yes Fareeha, I think they are. Do you think they are good?” Fareeha paused, thinking hard about her answer.

“Well...I think that wars are bad. And that fighting in wars is bad too. But I don't think Mom's bad like the omnics are bad. But I also don't think she's...good?” She paused again and sat up, looking
away and quietly admitting, “I wish she wouldn't fight in the war.”

Her father rested a hand on her shoulder and answered back in a similar tone, “I wish she didn't have to. But there are people and things in this world that...sometimes, people are...” He sighed and moved his glasses up to his forehead, looking into Fareeha's eyes with a strange look of longing on his face.

“Not every heart's the same, Fareeha. Sometimes the world is cruel to people, and that makes them sad. And sometimes people have so much sadness inside them that it turns to hurt and anger, and it makes them do cruel things in return.”

“Kind of like the girls in dance class?” Fareeha asked.

Her father chuckled and nodded, “Yeah, kind of like the girls in dance class.” He turned serious again and put a hand on her head, ruffling her hair. “But sometimes, that sadness doesn't turn to hurt or anger. Sometimes people stay sad and don't know how to be happy. That's what your mother is trying to fix, she's trying to show people how to be happy again by helping them.”

“I want to do that.” Fareeha said before repeating herself in a more confident voice, “I want to show people how to be happy. I don't want people to be sad, or hurt, or angry. I want everyone to be as happy as I am when Mom comes home! Or as happy as Uncle Gabe looks when Uncle Jack makes a joke! Or as happy as Mr. Reinhardt is all the time!”

Her father chuckled and looked down at her with a smile and watery eyes, “I hope you won't have to, that when you get big everyone will be as happy as you are. But don't forget, Fareeha, there are some people who only know how to be happy by hurting others.”

Fareeha wrapped her arms around her father's neck and clung to him tightly. “I won't hurt anyone, not ever. I'll be a hero someday, Dad, even better than Mom! I promise.”

“I don't doubt you, sweet pea. You're gonna change the world someday, and I'm going to be right here the whole time.”

“I wish Mom was here the whole time...” Fareeha's voice cracked, tears forming in her eyes.

Her father hugged her closer and asked softly, “She wishes she were too. Is there anything I can say to make you feel better?”

Fareeha let her tears slip down her cheeks as she answered, “She'll come back home, won't she?”

He tensed at this, his own voice wavering and barely there. “Of course, sweet pea. She loves you too much not to.”

Fareeha let her eyes close, let herself be held tightly. She didn't want to move, didn't want to leave. She never wanted to get up and out of the floor, and she never wanted to let go.

She gasped, her eyes snapping open to stare at a blurry blob of brown. Her ears felt stuffed, muting the voices yelling around her as she sat up quickly and turned to the side to vomit sea water. It burned horribly, her throat feeling like it would split in two by the time she had been reduced to spitting into the sand.

“-reeha?” She shook her head to try and clear her ears, warm water gushing out of one ear and
granting her hearing once more. “Fareeha?” Jesse asked with a snivel, and she turned to look at him.

He was a sight to see, hat off and hair wild. He had tears running down his face and snot in his mustache and beard. His arm immediately went around her and he sobbed out a few broken sentences into her head. She noticed his cybernetic arm was removed and resting in his lap.

Fareeha pushed him away, slightly dizzy and uncomfortably sticky and cold. She then realized the top half of the Raptora suit had been ripped from her body, pieces of the armor laying around the two in the sand, the Caduceus staff a few feet away. “W-what?” She asked hoarsely, struggling to speak with her scratched throat.

“You went down,” Jesse wiped at his face with his serape, “and you were just...gone. We couldn't find you n'I thought you was...” He sobbed again, his voice broken, “and Angie...”

Fareeha's eyes widened, her memory returning to her. She had been hit, she went down. A hand reached up to touch where the bullet hit her, her fingers meeting solid flesh and dried blood. It was healed but she could feel a scar across her temple that traveled into her hair.

“Where is she?” Fareeha asked, vaguely remembering her angelic form racing towards her before she passed out. Jesse began crying harder and Fareeha's stomach dropped out. “Jesse? Where is Angela?”

He glanced behind Fareeha and whispered, “They've been tryin' for a while...but she's just not...” Fareeha turned to gaze at the scene about a yard away.

Torbjörn's limb attachment had been thrown in the sand to the side, both hands pumping quickly onto Angela's chest. He tipped her head back, leaning forward to blow air into her mouth before returning to compressions. Reinhardt stood behind him cradling Lena in his arms, the crusader out of his armor and sopping wet. Angela lay unmoving.

Fareeha felt cold and numb. The Swiss woman’s lips were blue, her skin an unhealthy pale. She wasn’t moving. Neither was Fareeha.

Her world suddenly became only Angela's body and her own. Her ears weren't ringing, but something loud was booming far away as she stared. The explosions increased and she looked behind Angela to see a line where night became day.

Behind Angela looked warm, the sand looked more yellow, the explosions formed there. Behind Angela was Siwa. Behind Angela was Jalal.

He was the complete opposite of Angela. His body was dark, stained with blood, his lips were cracked from the heat. His eyes were open, only slightly, and he stared at her. His uniform was shredded, matching his flesh that was jutting out.

“It happened again.” She stated aloud. Her hands tightened painfully into fists, fingernails digging harsh crescents into her palm. “I did it again. I fucking did it again!” Tears were forming in Fareeha's eyes and she hunched over to rest her head in the sand.

Jesse gripped her shoulder and shook her, bringing her back to Illios and saying, “No, c'mon now, you can't blame yourself.” He sniffed and raised her to lean against him. His breathing hitched and he held her tighter and admitted, “You scared the shit outta me. I thought...” Jesse pulled back a little to look into Fareeha's eyes, snot welling in his nose again and more tears spilling down his cheeks. “I thought I lost m'lil sister.”

Fareeha hugged Jesse tightly, letting her own tears fall as her world came crashing down.
Is this how Angela feels when she says she doesn't deserve anything? It was a question and a thought that served her no good to ask, Angela was dead. She killed her like she killed Jalal. Angela told her to stay, told her no good would come of her fighting the Talon ships head-on. Jalal told her to go, told her no good would come of her as she was a selfish brute who didn't care about others.

But what was true now? Fareeha learned to care about others, to put aside the mission to take care of her own. That's what she was doing when she took to the skies. No, I did it for the mission. The realization hit, a chilling thought that she finally realized about herself.

She did it for the mission under the guise that if she were to die no one else would have to in her place. She was reckless because if anyone were to die, it should be her. Fareeha went back into the air hoping she would be shot down, hoping that she wouldn't have to spend another morning looking in the mirror and not seeing herself.

Who Fareeha was was a blurred line. Where did Ana Amari's only child start and the highly esteemed soldier begin? Were there even things in between, was she – could she be – anything more to anyone?

Overwatch told her that she was the next generation of heroes when she was younger. The army told her she was just another able body with a gun when she enlisted. Helix told her she was one of the greatest security chiefs they had when she returned from missions. Jalal told her she was the most beautiful woman in the world when he had first kissed her.

Jalal had made her feel like more than what she felt. He made her feel like an individual person, not a spare Ana Amari or a spare soldier or a spare security chief. When he died – when she killed him, she no longer felt like an individual. Fareeha could never say the same things he said herself and believe them, it all felt empty. Convincing herself she was worth anything other than to replace the fallen wasn't worth the effort and wasted time.

Fareeha accepted her fate. Accepted the fact that she'd never actually be Fareeha, that she'd always be the shadow of Ana Amari, legendary sniper, war hero, founder of Overwatch. She forced herself to conform to the shape of her mother, forced herself to carry herself to the higher standard, to the arrogance her mother had shown.

If her mother had been more than that it didn't matter. Ana had laughed in the face of danger, so must her daughter. Ana had boasted about her natural talent and prowess on the battlefield, so must her daughter. Ana had been a pillar of strength and never showed weakness, so must her daughter. Ana had died fighting, so must her daughter.

Fareeha was worthless unless she conformed. The chance to unravel her own fate, to find herself, had been lost to the years. She had been held to such a height that if she were to fall she would never rise again.

But Fareeha had fallen. When she lost Jalal, when she lost Okoro and Khalil, when she lost so many men due to her jadedness. And she was falling again because Angela was gone.

Angela made Fareeha stop seeing herself as her mother, made her feel like she had the right to be Fareeha and only Fareeha. Angela opened her heart and let her confess what she felt, Angela let her feel. Angela told her she was worth living for herself, told her that she was warm and safe and comforting.

Angela made Fareeha feel like she could stop acting and just live. Fareeha wanted to stop acting and just live. But how could she possibly live knowing that she causes so much pain? It would
have been better if her mother had lived, if Fareeha had listened to the voice in her head that told her to eat lead.

Fareeha wouldn't be in so much pain right now if she wasn't alive. She wouldn't be in so much pain if Angela was still breathing.

She sobbed into Jesse's neck, clinging tightly to him and refusing to let go. It didn't seem real. I couldn't be real. Who was she suppose to talk to now, who was she suppose to eat sweets with and watch kids films with? Who was she suppose to care about now, who was she suppose to love?

Fareeha gasped at the thought, her chest constricting at her revelation. Did she love Angela? She loved how untamable her hair seemed to be. She loved how passionate she'd get when discussing travel. She loved how little wrinkles would form around her eyes when she smiled.

It didn't feel like the love she had felt in previous relationships. That sort of love was only for how physically satisfying her partners could be and the praise she received from them. That kind of love was hollow and had no ground to stand on, and that's why Fareeha never stayed. Her mother taught her that lesson well.

Angela was so easy to love, but not in any way Fareeha had loved before. Perhaps it had to do with how backwards their relationship had begun. Perhaps it had to do with how shattered they both were. There were endless possibilities, but they couldn't stop the conclusion she came to. Fareeha loved Angela for making her want to live.

*But what was the point now?* Fareeha became acutely aware of Jesse's Peacekeeper in it's holster. It was loaded, it was always loaded. She was faster than Jesse, it could be done in seconds. *No, he's suffered enough.* A soft voice whispered in her ear, Angela's voice, *So have you. And you will continue to until you die.*

The soldier detached herself from the cowboy and slowly rose to her feet, her body shaking from the chill she couldn't rid herself of. Fareeha watched Torbjörn try again and again, breathing air into Angela's lungs one last time.

He sat back, his expression eerily neutral. Lena held her bomber jacket out to him and he took it without looking at her. The jacket was gently spread over Angela's face and Torbjörn turned his back on the scene, walking a few paces down the beach. He didn't make it but just more few steps before he collapsed to his knees, hunched in the sand and unmoving.

Fareeha returned her gaze to Angela – to the body. It wasn't Angela. Angela was dead because of her.

Death shouldn't bother her, she's been surrounded by it since she was born. Fareeha was born in death and she has lived in death. The first time it staggered her, threw her into a mindless realm of unpassing time was when she received the news that her mother had been killed in action.

She knew deep down that her mother wouldn't want her to mourn, that she'd want her to continue forward and not look back. But Fareeha barely knew her mother and would never have the chance to.

It seemed like Fareeha knew Angela for a lifetime despite the short three months spent together. And despite being surrounded by friends, by family, Fareeha was alone once again. She had strayed away from faith long ago, but perhaps it was just God's will that she be alone for forever.

Maybe she deserved to be. She was always so angry for no reason, would become filled with rage
over the smallest things and lash out at people. She lashed out to Angela more than once, so maybe this was the chain reaction.

But she shouldn't dwell on the past. She was the new Ana Amari, and she had to move on.

Her feet carried her to her discarded armor, collecting the scratched metal plates and tucking them under her arms. Fareeha picked up her helmet last and turned to Jesse. “The mission is over. We need to leave.” He stared up at her in confusion and disbelief.

The hurt on his face should have affected her, but Fareeha let herself be numb. When Jesse didn't move she left him, walking past him and away from the scene. Her rocket launcher wasn't among her things, probably lost to the sea. It was a shame, she would have loved to do nothing more than fire it at her own chest just so she could feel anything. Another shame that she'd have to wait to feel until they were back in Gibraltar where her combat knife await her in it's case, tucked under her bed.

It was a feeling returned to her, it didn't make her feel anything but ashamed of herself, but it was better than feeling like wood.

Fareeha stopped walking when Lena suddenly cried out. It wasn't a cry of pain or sorrow, but of surprise. Fareeha turned to look over her shoulder in time to watch the body slowly raise into a sitting position.

The jacket slid off, eyes slowly blinking and fingers gradually moving. A hand was raised to her nose and came away bloody, Angela's eyebrows narrowing at the sight. “Wh-what happened?” She asked slowly, her accent thick and her voice gravelly.

Fareeha stood still as everyone else surrounded the Swiss woman. She felt frozen to the spot as she watched the dead woman look around the group in confusion. Blue eyes met brown, and Fareeha could feel again. She could feel the guilt and shame inside her, but the relief she felt overpowered them in the moment. She collapsed to the ground, body shaking from more than the cold as she wailed into her hands.

She couldn't remember boarding the ORCA, couldn't remember who gave her a paper cup of hot tea, couldn't remember being swaddled like a baby in a thick blanket.

She could remember Angela's corpse laying in the sand now sitting beside her with a similar paper cup and thick blanket.

Angela's nose was still bleeding, tissues stuffed up her nostrils to try and staunch the flow. She looked exhausted, dark bags under her eyes and her face a little whiter, but she was breathing. She was here. Fareeha wasn't alone.

Fareeha wanted to ask how the hell Angela had suddenly risen from the dead but couldn't move her tongue. She felt horrible, her head pounding and throat sore from sea water and crying. Her entire body ached with every move and her stumps were cramping fiercely. She could barely sit up in the small booth seat the two were currently resting on, but it was alright as they were supporting each other.

Angela leaned against Fareeha's shoulder and Fareeha leaned against Angela's head. Reinhardt said it was best for them to stick together to try and conduct more heat but they would have been together despite it.

It would be just around three in Gibraltar if the clock above Angela's head was right. Fareeha pulled her arm out of her blanket and and carefully placed it around the blonde. Angela sighed and
snuggled into the hold, her cold nose poking Fareeha in the neck.

“I was so scared.” Angela whispered, “I thought I lost you.”

Fareeha still couldn't bring herself to speak. Whether it was her exhaustion or her fear of confessing her feelings, she responded by pulling Angela closer and closing her eyes.

She was in pain, physically, mentally, emotionally. But she was alive. They were both alive. That made it worth the pain to Fareeha.

Their tea had been set on the table before them, one blanket being discarded in favor of one. Angela lay back on the seat, Fareeha following her and resting her head on the blonde's collarbone. She nearly rose at Angela's wince but was halted by a hand in her hair keeping her where she was. “It's alright. It's just my back, it's still repairing itself.” Angela softly said.

Fareeha narrowed her brows at the words. Repairing itself? It spurred more questions she was itching to have answered. But she still couldn't speak, was still too numb to make any noise. So Fareeha let Angela's fingers gently massage her scalp as she slowly drifted off. They were alive, they were safe, they were together.

There was nothing to be feared when Angela held Fareeha. Not her legacy, not Siwa, not death. There were so many emotions felt when Angela held Fareeha and it all culminated into one thought, one word.

*Home.*

“-so there I was, surrounded by three, no, four bandits.” Jesse held his fork up like he was looking down the sights of Peacekeeper and continued his story, “I told'em I'd give'em a chance to turn tail and turn themselves into to the local sheriff, but they weren't havin' it. Tried to act all tough and barred their teeth at me.”

Fareeha had her cheek against her fist, listening half-heartedly to the cowboy's tall-tale as she pushed a rather large chunk of chicken around her bowl of soup. Lena had already burned through four bowls of the stuff and had been eyeing Fareeha's for a while, but she was thankfully distracted by Jesse.

Distraction was welcomed by everyone since Illios. Fareeha, for example, had distracted herself by spending the past week in the armory with Torbjörn arguing over how to repair the Raptora.

She was hellbent on repairing it herself with the small kit she took from Helix, but the Swede continuously insisted upon helping. Having to explain the difference between the high octane graphene primary layer and the carbon fiber under armor for what felt like the millionth time was highly grating on Fareeha's nerves. She would have thought he'd know all of this but he continued to ask the same questions over and over again.

When she would reach her boiling point with Torbjörn she would go to the gym to try and blow off steam. She was usually alone, thank god, but earlier her workout had been interrupted by Angela.

The doctor still hadn't fully explained herself for what the hell happened in Illios, always giving vague answers about the Valkyrie suit or the development of her nanites before whisking herself away to do something in her office. It made frustrated Fareeha to no end, but she kept reminding
herself that no matter what had happened, it was a harsh thing Angela went through and shouldn’t have to be pushed to talk about. That Fareeha knew from experience.

Angela entering the gym was a surprise to say the least, and Fareeha nearly dropped the weights she was lifting on her own foot when Angela walked around to get her attention. The admittance to herself that she felt something for the doctor intensified even more at that moment, and Fareeha kicked herself for not noticing the fact that she always felt like this.

Fareeha avoided Angela like the plague when it came to the gym solely because she couldn't stop looking at her.

Angela always wore the same salmon coloured tank top that showed off the multitude of scars up and down her arms and shoulders as well as a few freckles. She always wore the same grey leggings that made Fareeha realized just how wide her hips and thighs were. But worst of all, Angela always wore thin rimmed, round glasses and had enough bobby pins to hijack a commercial airliner in a failed attempt to pin her bangs back.

In conclusion, Fareeha found Angela insanely adorable, so much so that upon first viewing she did drop a weight on her foot. She couldn't get enough of the look of the usually smartly dressed doctor and, although she would never in her life admit it, couldn't take her eyes off Angela as she did her workout. The first time Fareeha helped Angela with her form for squatting she thought she was going to pass out.

And so she decided for the sake of decency to work out whenever Angela wasn't. Fareeha had slapped herself plenty of times over how childish it was. She was a soldier, she was used to working out with other well-fit bodies and not feeling flustered. But upon further thought maybe well-fit was the key. Angela didn't have a body that was hard with muscles, which threw Fareeha for a loop.

So when Angela was suddenly in front of her in her usual work out clothing, Fareeha's mind began struggling to find a reason to leave. Angela motioned for her to take her earphones out and Fareeha obeyed, raising a questioning brow.

“Haven't seen you in here in a while! Well, I see you leaving occasionally.” She cleared her throat and motioned to weight bench, “I was wondering if you'd help me. It's, uh, been a while.”

Fareeha nodded and followed her to the bench, stopping and narrowing her brows. “Are you sure you should be bench pressing? Torbjörn told me that the Valkyrie suit's wings were stabbed into your back, you couldn't have fully healed in just a week even with nanites.”

Angela opened and closed her mouth and Fareeha folded her arms across her chest as a rush of adrenaline kicked in, “How are you even here?” She hesitated a moment before forcing herself to come out with it, almost afraid to say it aloud for fear it would happen again, “You died, Angela. So how are you alive right now?”

The Swiss woman lowered her gaze and sat on the bench, clasping her hands together. After a few beats of silence she softly began. “A few years into my time in Overwatch I had a theory about nanites. They can't exist inside the body for long before they try and 'repair' what isn't broken and begin eating away at the flesh. That's why I developed them to decay themselves and be destroyed by white blood cells.”

Angela paused and rubbed her hands up and down her arms as if cold, still not meeting Fareeha's gaze. “My theory was this: what if I could find a way to merge a nanite with a white blood cell? That way instead of destroying flesh after healing it could assist in fighting off infection. The first few tests weren't as successful as I had hoped, but I needed results.”
She bit her lip and softly admitted, “I...may have jumped through a few hoops to achieve what I wanted. I won't go into the details of it, but in summary: I found a way to keep nanites in a body without decay and without fusing them. They're less sentient than normal nanites and they can't be used as actively because of this. It...takes them a while to 'warm up', but after a short period they are able to repair more than regular nanites.”

Fareeha's chest felt a little tighter at the knowledge and she slowly asked, “So you have nanites that live in your body all the time?” Angela nodded. “And they...resurrected you?”

“I wouldn't call it that!” Angela quickly said, “It's not that simple, there's an order to how they operate that's at least a mile long, but it's not like that!”

Fareeha made a face and couldn't help but laugh. “I'm sorry, but you were dead. Not breathing, gone. And then you're suddenly back to life, poof, no big deal? That's not being resurrected?”

Angela's voice was small as she asked, “Please don't call it that.” Fareeha frowned at this but didn't say anything. “I never intended for it to be like this. I just wanted to stop soldiers from coming back in body bags. I just wanted the nanites to be able to instantly heal wounds instead of having to be inserted directly via the Caduceus staff or other conductors.”

“The truth is, I don't know. I have no idea what this,” Angela articulated by holding her hands out in front of herself, “is. The only thing I know is that I've successfully Frankensteined myself and I don't know how the hell to fix it.” She laughed bitterly and formed fists, “Guess it's what I get, what a cruel but fitting punishment for playing God, huh? Go where no man has gone before for a price.”

Guilt stirred in Fareeha's stomach but she pushed it down. They were both hurting from the incident, that much was certain, and the thought of losing the doctor nearly drove Fareeha to an edge she stood on too many times.

“Angela, I'm sorry.” She moved to sit beside her on the bench, their thighs barely touching. She struggled to speak her mind. Fareeha wanted to be angry at the woman for things she wasn't responsible for. Fareeha also wanted to confess her newly uncovered feelings but didn't know where to even begin.

“I thought someone else I cared about died because I fucked up.” She said with a long exhale, looking into Angela's eyes as she spoke. "When I came to on the beach and saw you lying there it felt like...the whole world ended. I didn't...know if I could go on, or where to go from there. I thought I was alone again.”

Angela took Fareeha's hand and laced their fingers together, nodding for her to continue. “Angela I...” She trailed off, hesitant to say what she wanted to.

Fareeha had said the words 'I love you' so many times to so many people that it didn't feel enough, like it wasn't special enough.

She didn't even know if this was what love was. Fareeha had rushed into so many relationships in a search to feel some form of closeness and Angela deserved more, deserved better. Yes, Fareeha felt love for Angela, but whether or not it was the same love her parents had – a love that vanished after time – or the love the children's movies sang about Fareeha didn't know.

So she told her in the most honest way she could.

“I don't want to lose you.” Fareeha whispered, tightening their hand hold and looking into blue eyes, “I don't want to hurt you either, and I'm sorry if I asked too much or seemed like a complete
ass about it. Thank you for telling me, I see now how hard it was to.”

Angela smiled and sighed in relief, “I’ve never told anyone about it before. I think Torbjörn knows because he's a parent and what doesn't he know about me at this point?” She reached up to remove her glasses and sternly said, “I'm not going to lose or hurt you either, Fareeha. But you have to stop being so damn reckless. Would it kill you to listen to me when I tell you to stay put?”

“Guess we'll have to find out.” Fareeha said with a smirk, Angela shaking her head and laughing. They were so close, Fareeha noticed, inches apart. It would be so easy to close the distance and kiss her with the passion and emotion Fareeha was feeling right now. But that wasn't what Angela deserved, she decided, Angela deserved better.

“You look like you're thinking too much,” Angela squeezed her hand, bringing her out of her thoughts.

Fareeha couldn't help but turn the charm on and raise her eyebrows, “If thinking about you is too much then guilty as charged.” Angela covered her mouth to stifle her chortle, her eyes bugging out slightly as she snorted into her laugh. This caused her to laugh harder and snort a few more times, Fareeha grinning big.

“You snort!” Fareeha laughed in return and Angela quickly bat her on the shoulder and denied it furiously.

“If you tell anyone...” Angela began before laughing again and shaking her head, “oh I don't know what I'll do, but you'll regret it.”

The challenge spurred Fareeha on, curiosity to see the doctor do her worse leading to Fareeha reenacting it all to Jesse hours later. He appreciated it greatly, already creating four new jokes by the time he stopped laughing.

Which is why when Angela entered the rec room to get herself a bowl of soup, Fareeha nudged Jesse and nodded towards the doctor. He grinned and winked at her in understanding, halting his story to wave to the blonde. “Well, you're just the porcine I was looking for, Angie! C'mon and sit down here next to me, I promise I won't boar you to death!”

Fareeha had taken to biting her lip to keep herself from openly laughing, Lena raising an eyebrow but laughing cautiously. Angela only stared.

“What's the hold up?” Jesse asked, leaning across the table, “Don't tell me you're piggy about where you sit!” He sealed Fareeha's fate when he pushed his nose up and gave out a loud snort.

Angela's face went beet red and the cowboy laughed, wiping his eyes and waving his hands, “Wait, please God, wait just a second before you hog-tie me, I got more!”

Her death glare turned to Fareeha and it suddenly wasn't funny anymore to the Egyptian.

Angela walked past the table, pausing to lean down and whisper in Fareeha's ear. “I'm going to make you regret this, Fareeha Almas Amari.” Color drained from Fareeha's face and Angela took notice with a cheeky grin, “Uh oh, didn't think I'd abuse power and dig into your personal file, eh? I play dirty, something you probably should have known before you started this.”

She walked out of the room with a little wave and a smile that was pure evil, “Have a good lunch, Jesse, Lena, Reba.”

Jesse was on Fareeha instantly, “Reba? Reba?” She couldn't hide her blush if she tried.
Lena grabbed Jesse's arm tightly and wheezed out, “R-Reba McEntire!” The two were gone, tears forming in their eyes.

Fareeha pushed her soup around it's bowl and mumbled under her breath, “You mispronounce your own name once and your family never lets it go.”

“Wait, you mispronounced your own name?!” Jesse gasped, Fareeha quickly reeling back to try and explain herself.

“I was barely talking when it happened! I wasn't even two and I couldn't say 'Fareeha'? It's a hard name!”

The gunslinger shook his head and wiped his eyes, “Oh lord, I think I'm gonna puke. That's funnier then a cat with a 'tater chip bag on it's head.”

*Okay, so maybe I thought wrong.* Fareeha thought to herself as she shoved Jesse roughly with a smile of her own, *Maybe I don't love Angela after all...*

As she ate her soup she couldn't help but smile to herself, remembering the way Angela said her full name. Despite being said as a threat, it sounded so lovely in that Swiss German accent. It was a lovely sound Fareeha would gladly accept ridicule for if it meant she could hear it again.

Fareeha would do anything just to hear Angela laugh, or see her smile, or hold her close.

*...but then again what the hell do I know?*

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Chapter End Notes

If you enjoy reading my Suffering™, then consider following me on my tumblr! It's about as bad as these fics are, which is apparently something people enjoy. Cheers.
Understand

Chapter Summary

There is nothing to talk about with those who weren't involved. There is no proverbial closet she should come out of. Fareeha is her friend, dare she say best friend, and Angela is very tired.

But what the hell else is new?

Chapter Notes

I'm not completely dead, I swear, just experiencing some real-time suffering. This ended in a pretty awkward place in my opinion but I had to split this chapter into two otherwise it would be too long and too ugh, so a direct follow up will be here Soon™.
You can also rip theatre nerd and repressed angered Fareeha Amari from my cold, dead oven mitts.

Cheers

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The conversation began over a steaming babka that Angela was rather proud of.

“You don't know who Patti LuPone is?!” Fareeha gaped, staring at the blonde in horror.

“Am I suppose to know who that is?” Angela asked, brushing some loose hair behind one ear as she carefully tapped the top of the cake to see how cool it was. Her finger came away with a few bits of streusel that she gladly licked off.

Fareeha gasped again, placing a hand on her chest. “I have never felt so insulted in my entire life! Patti LuPone is a legend!”

Angela’s eyebrow raised further and the soldier pat at her sleep pants in a fruitless attempt to find her phone. “Oh my god, you poor depraved child. We're watching her tonight; forget the kids movies.”

Angela leaned against the counter and yawned while asking, “Who is this legend? Is she like a politician or famous author?”

“She's a legendary, multi-award winning Broadway star from almost a century ago.”

Angela couldn't help but laugh. “I don't think I've ever seen you get more excited,” She said while swiping another taste of streusel, “and I don't think I'd ever peg you for a theatre nerd.”

Fareeha smirked and folded her arms over her chest. “Really? Well little did you know, you're looking at the number one star of every high school production, three college productions, and
eight local acting leagues.”

Her smirk grew and she added, “I also happen to hold record for being the highest chair in all-
region for both band and choir in Spring Coulee.”

The doctor smiled in returned as she replied. “I have no idea what any of that means but it sounds
like you're a huge nerd.”

“I am a huge nerd -- the biggest -- but you have no room to talk Ms 'I-Skipped-Seven-Grades'!”

Four grades not counting most of college... Angela thought to herself but shook it away with
another soft chuckle.

She eyed the babka again and couldn't stop the swell of pride in her chest.

It looked so damn good, and she made it all by herself. If she was honest, it was all Angela
wanted to talk about at the moment and yet...

“Okay wait, what's your favorite musical? This may or may not determine if this friendship can
continue.” Fareeha was beside her suddenly, practically glowing with excitement

Angela shrugged. “I don’t know, I was never really into musicals. My grandmother had a few
she'd watch occasionally but I could never get invested. I don't even remember the names.”

The Egyptian sighed, “You're killing me, Smalls.” She paused and eyed Angela carefully, “Please
tell me you get that reference.” A shake of the head and Fareeha was groaning, “What am I gonna
do with you?”

“Teaching me who Patti LuPone is and what the hell all-region is would be a good start.” Angela
quipped. She was unable to help herself anymore and reached for a knife, ready to cut into the
cake and stuff herself silly.

She was halted by a soft hand grabbing her wrist and pulling her towards the couch. “Fareeha the
babka—”

“Sweets can wait!” Fareeha made the blonde sit on the couch and turned to the holoscreen,
“Athena, I need a second opinion. Should we start with War Paint, Les Misérables, or Anything
Goes?”

“I'm afraid I have no knowledge of any of those titles. I'm sorry, Lieutenant Colonel Amari.”

Angela glanced back at where her treat rest on the kitchen counter in longing as Fareeha grumbled
to herself and began manually searching through archive after archive of films.

The babka sat on the counter lightly steaming, mocking her.

The urge to retrieve the cake grew and grew and Angela was about to ask if she could go get it
but was silenced by Fareeha's “A-ha!” of victory.

“We're starting with In The Heights.” She declared with a grin and added, “It's definitely one of
my favorites. Patti LuPone isn't in it but we'll get to her.”

The grin she wore was as infectious as always and Angela reached back to pull their usual fleece
blanket down to rest across her shoulders, patting the couch cushion beside her. Fareeha joined
her immediately, pulling the blanket to cover her own shoulders, scooting closer to Angela as she
did so.
She had to admit, it was quite the surprise when Angela found herself growing emotional with the music. The story sucked her in, the music beautiful and the dancing amazing. She also couldn't help but watch Fareeha closely during scenes or songs she insisted were the best ones.

As one ended another began, Fareeha filling her in with facts about each production and various actors in between musicals. Angela had to admit, it was highly interesting to listen to the woman and hear everything she knew.

It was far more interesting to watch how she would light up when Angela asked to know more.

The babka joined them at some point but Angela barely noticed over the loud finale of *Les Misérables*. She wiped tears from her eyes, Fareeha grinning at her and softly saying, “I know, right?”

Angela could feel her eyelids growing heavy half way through their fourth musical. She tucked her legs underneath herself and leaned to rest her head on Fareeha's shoulder to her chagrin.

“You can't fall asleep now,” The Egyptian shook her gently, “they're fixing to find out he's been lying the whole time.”

“I'll try to stay awake.” Angela promised with a yawn, relaxing further into Fareeha.

Surprisingly, she did manage to stay awake til the end. After the last note she declared herself done for the night and Fareeha pouted. “You can tell me about all-region in the morning.”

The two assumed their usual spots, Angela laying on her back, Fareeha tucked into her side with an arm slung around her waist. It was a little off-putting to not have a movie running in the background, silence filling the room around them in it's place.

Angela sighed and placed a hand on the small of Fareeha's back, letting her eyes close and her mind drift. Sleep had begun to tug her down into it's long spiral, sinking further and further into her skin and lazily sailing through her bones.

“I played the French Horn.”

She opened her eyes again and craned her neck to look at the woman laying with her.

Fareeha angled her head to look up at Angela and repeated, “In high school. I played the French Horn. I could play all of the instruments to some extent, but I preferred the French Horn. It's such a beautiful sound, it makes me think of the way clouds or waves swell.”

Angela was unsure of how to respond so she let the silence answer for her.

The mention of waves made her shiver involuntarily, the memory of water filling her lungs resurfacing harshly. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to push the feeling of impending doom back down, trying to think of anything else.

“*Les Parapluies de Cherbourg.*”

Fareeha raised up to look questioningly at Angela, “The what?”

Angela narrowed her brows slightly and repeated herself while adding, “One of the musicals my grandmother used to watch. It was a French. I remember watching it with her and thinking it was the most romantic thing I'd ever seen.”

“I never picked you for a romance type of gal,” Fareeha said while she lay back down, snuggling
further into Angela and exhal ing deeply, “but I guess my initial thought that you’d be into hard-
core death metal was a little too ridiculous, huh?”

She couldn't help but laugh. “I wouldn't say too ridiculous. I did go through a sort of goth phase
when I was in high school.”

“Please tell me you have pictures.”

“Only if you have pictures of you in a band uniform.”

“I made those uniforms look good, I'll have you know.” Angela giggled at the thought of Fareeha
in a bulky jacket and boxey hat. “Even then it was hard to hide all of these curves and muscles
under all that fabric.”

Fareeha flexed slightly and Angela couldn't help the blush that grew on her face.

Blushing around Fareeha had become a regular occurrence.

The taller woman had developed the habit of winking at her when she'd enter a room and it made
Angela's stomach shift in an unsettling manner. She also began noticing just how tall Fareeha was
or how nice her arms felt wrapped around her.

Muscles had never seemed enticing until they were Fareeha's. The few times Angela would catch
her leaving the gym the light would catch hard abs and well rounded biceps, leaving her with a
dry mouth.

The sly winks and minuscule flexes made Angela feel like she was going to melt into a puddle.
Whatever the feeling was, Fareeha seemed to know exactly what she was doing. And it quite
frankly pissed Angela off.

How the soldier had mastered the ability to make Angela feel so damn flustered was aggravating.
And the doctor would retaliate if she knew how. Lena pushed her to flirt back but Angela had
merely scoffed and harshly denied it was flirting.

It wasn't flirting. Fareeha was just being silly.

Angela's eyes opened and her heart skittered.

*Is it flirting?*

Perhaps she was reading too much into nothing, but she'd be lying if it didn't make her stop once
or twice a day and seriously ponder why she would feel so nervous around Fareeha all of a
sudden.

The only conclusion she came to was that it had been years since she had a friendship like this and
that she'd forgotten what it was like.

But if this is what a close friendship felt like why did she find herself growing short of breath
when Fareeha smiled at her?

They would compliment each other on occasion – as friends would, Angela assumed.

Receiving compliments wasn't anything new, but to hear it from Fareeha made them feel brand
new every time. The first time Fareeha told her she looked beautiful when laughing Angela
couldn't form coherent sentences for several minutes.
They definitely weren't normal, Angela's feelings. And she didn't want to directly speak to Fareeha about it because it felt so stupid.

She never felt like this around Jesse or Lena. She never felt like this around anyone before.

Surely she was just lacking some key piece of information that made the whole debacle sensible.

What it could be wasn't as easy to figure out as how to remove a tumor or stop a hemorrhaging brain. There wasn't a set answer with a set conclusion, hell she didn't even know if there could be something considered a variable.

She couldn't science her way out of this problem and it was eating her alive.

Whatever the hell it was.

The only person she confided in was Torbjörn, who would listen to her go on and on and nod along sagely.

He had been spending a lot of time with Fareeha as the two repaired her Raptora suit, which he admitted he was stalling in an attempt to spend more time with her.

“You think you're the only person who cares about her?” Torbjörn answered when Angela asked why. “I watched the lass grow from diapers to training bras; she's another one of my kids just like you. What happened to her in Illios, what happened to both of you...”

He had a far off look on his face, like he was seeing something that wasn't there. “I owe it to Ana to look after her. Owe it to you too, I suppose.”

He hadn't elaborated on that until a few days ago. It was the fourth time Angela had vented her frustrations about it all to him at length, and he waved her into silence and guffawed.

“Älskling, I'll put this as gently as I can: you have the emotional awareness of a dead fish.”

Angela frowned at this and he laughed again. “Do you care about her? Want her to be happy no matter what?”

A nod.

“Do you trust her with things you've never said to anyone else? And want her to trust you with things she's never said?”

Another nod, slightly slower, slightly hesitant.

Torbjörn set aside his hammer and took Angela's hand, giving it a small pat. “That's love, Angela.”

Her only response was a flustered mess of half English half German, face burning at the older man's proud smile.

“N-no!” She finally got out, rubbing her temples, “I barely know Fareeha, let alone I-love her!”

“Well, perhaps it's just my wishful thinking that it's love but at the very least it's an attraction.” Torbjörn hummed to himself and reached for his hammer again, “And don't sell yourself short, Goldilocks, you know her far past barely. Now, I remember how nosy my parents were when...”

Angela huffed and folded her arms across her chest, stewing in embarrassment as Torbjörn began the long and very detailed tale of how he met his wife.
It was far past annoying at this point.

Lena consistently wanted to talk about her sexuality and persisted that everything would be fine if she came out.

The younger woman would practically bounce around Angela in excitement at the thought. “‘S not like it’s 2030, Doc, no one’s gonna judge! Hell, over half the team is somewhere in the community!”

And now Torbjörn was hinting at the thought of it. It made Angela want to rip her hair out in frustration.

If she were gay, she would know. It was infuriating to constantly be pestered about information – very personal information – that was already set in stone.

Angela had only ever dated men. She had only ever been with men. She barely had any desire to date or be with men as it were. Dating or being with women never appealed to her before.

Dating and being with anyone never appealed to her.

And there were more important things to focus on. Her sexuality meant nothing compared to the lives she’s saved or lost. There was so much work to be done, too much work to be done, and very little time for much else.

Loneliness was a bitch, but having to constantly surround yourself with one person and be obligated to spend time with them was an even bigger bitch in the doctor’s opinion.

Independence was something Angela Ziegler valued over most other things. She needed to be alone to think and decompress. Relationships did nothing but heighten her already high stress levels and make her feel completely drained.

Which is why she valued her friendship with Fareeha greatly. No obligations, no awkward small talk, no spontaneous outings or dinner dates.

A linear schedule was one of the finer things in life, and a linear schedule that included someone to decompress with was better than the finest scotch.

It was perfect.

Fareeha understood that Angela didn’t always want to talk or reciprocate and accommodated her unspoken requests. The way Fareeha could comprehend what Angela meant with few words or any at all was such a blessing.

Some nights Angela just wanted to sit on the couch and stare at the wall, so Fareeha would fix her a cup of tea and sit with her.

Some nights Angela just wanted to cry and and shake with grief, so Fareeha would bundle her up with blankets and hold her.

Some nights Angela just wanted to be alone and feel sorry for herself, so Fareeha would turn a movie on for her and seat herself at the table with a book and mug of hot chocolate.

Angela didn’t have to talk about these things with Fareeha because she seemed to already know. And god almighty, Angela loved it.
But the alleged flirting, the consistent pestering, and Angela's own lack of comprehension of it all was just so goddamn maddening.

There is nothing to talk about with those who weren't involved. There is no proverbial closet she should come out of. Fareeha is her friend, dare she say best friend, and Angela is very tired.

*But what the hell else is new?*

When Fareeha mentioned marathoning as many musicals as possible to Angela over breakfast she hadn't expected Jesse of all people to jump into the conversation.

“Oh man,” He chuckled through a mouthful of toast, “I used to watch all kinda stuff with Reyes! Become a sorta tradition that 'round the holidays – when he'n'Jack weren't goin' back to the States – we'd spend New Years locked up in his room watchin' *Rent* for twenty-four hours straight!”

Fareeha narrowed her brows at this and slowly asked, “You knew I was a musical kid, why didn't you ever say anything?”

Jesse shrugged and pushed his grits around with a spoon. “Guess I never thought 'bout sharin' that side of me with anyone other than Reyes.”

“Well, if you want...” Fareeha started, nudging him with her foot under the table and bringing his eyes back to hers, “you're always welcome to join us. That is if Angela's fine with it.

The doctor was too busy shoveling oatmeal in her mouth to pay attention, jolting slightly when she realized the two were watching her. “Y-yeah!” She nodded and mumbled out, “Musicals, paying rent, good idea, Fareeha!”

With a laugh Fareeha gave Angela a pointed look and asked, “Does food just evaporate from your stomach as soon as it gets there? Because if memory serves, you ate an entire cake by yourself just a few hours ago.”

“You helped!” Angela poked Fareeha in the shoulder as she swallowed and continued, “And yes I go through food quickly, what of it?” She lowered her voice slightly and added, “I kind of have to...because of...you know...”

*Nanites.* Fareeha frowned and nodded in understanding.

Jesse munched on his grits, brows narrowed in thought as he pointed his spoon and declared, “Yeah I get'cha, Angie.”

The women both raised eyebrows, Angela's eyes widening slightly in panic. Jesse sniffed and pointed with his spoon again. “Periods.”

Fareeha couldn't stop her bark of laughter, nearly tipping her plate of turkey bacon and toast over as she banged her fist on the table harshly.

Angela's mouth was screwed shut in a half smile, her cheeks reddening as she kicked Jesse roughly under the table.

The cowboy couldn't help but giggle as well, taking the kick like a champ and continuing to eat his toast and grits.
Mornings like this were nice, something Fareeha had gladly gotten used to.

She'd spend the nights with Angela on the couch, trying to wish away the past and failing. Then she'd spend the mornings with Jesse at the table, eating breakfast and clowning around like a couple of kids.

Breakfast was made even better when they had an audience to their impromptu comedy show with Lena, Winston, and Reinhardt being the easiest to make laugh, but Lena was taking a few days to visit her girlfriend back in England, Winston had yet to come to breakfast – probably eating peanut butter and banana's in his lab – and Reinhardt had disappeared with Torbjörn to the armory with their food.

Which left the audience down to their number one critic, the good doctor herself.

Jesse would make playfully snide comments about the Swiss woman and her lack of humor while also trying ridiculously hard to get her to laugh. The fact that Fareeha could accomplish it with one well placed pun made her extremely smug.

Learning from the old team that making the medic laugh had always been a challenge stoked Fareeha’s ego to new heights.

And making Angela laugh was quickly becoming Fareeha's new favorite hobby.

The way she would get little wrinkles at the corners of her eyes when she laughed or the way she would cover her mouth in embarrassment upon snorting made Fareeha feel giddy. Angela could be void of any make-up, have the darkest crescents under her eyes, and look like she was ten seconds from passing out and still look like the most beautiful woman in the world when she giggled.

“So what time are we thinking?” Angela asked after wiping her mouth with a napkin.

Fareeha hummed in thought and rapped her knuckles against the table. “Well, I can cook us up something to eat around seven o'clock.” The blonde looked to already be drooling at the thought so Fareeha decided to add fuel to the fire. “I can also throw in a few batches of cookies if I'm feeling nice.”

“You're always feeling nice!” Angela said quickly, her look completely serious as she spoke. “I will bake three more babkas and not eat a single one if you make cookies.”

Fareeha laughed and rolled her eyes, “Okay okay, I get it, I'm making cookies. But you really shouldn't blatantly lie like that, Angela. You and I both know you'd inhale all three cakes plus the cookies in two minutes flat if unsupervised.”

Angela went back to her oatmeal a little pink in the face, muttering something about how Fareeha should hush or else. “I think I have half a bottle of wine hidden under my bed. Perhaps I too will feel generous enough to share.”

“Ya'know, I've got a pretty fine collection of whiskey I wouldn't mind sharing.” Jesse mentioned, quirking his eyebrows up.

The doctor groaned and set her spoon down. “I hate whiskey. It's just so…” She stuck her tongue out and made a face.

Jesse scoffed and made a face back. “Not all of us can afford the expensive wines and scotches to drown our sorrows in, Goldilocks. Besides, don't matter the taste. Matter's how quickly you can get piss drunk.”
Angela snorted and took a sip of her water. “I doubt the last thing we all want is to get shitfaced and cry about our feelings.”

The words made Fareeha tense.

Angela had never expressed a dislike of their deep conversations. Had she been lying just to save her feelings?

Fareeha knew she admitted almost every night that she felt better after laying her problems down to someone else and accepted Angela's nods and hugs as agreement.

Surely she would have said something if she didn't like their...engagement? Whatever you call it...

But Angela always reciprocated. She was always willing to talk or sit or just exist for a while with Fareeha. Did she feel guilting into spending time with her?

It is part of her job to listen to people talk about their problems...is she looking at it from a clinical perspective?

Fareeha couldn't help but begin to worry her lip, ignoring the back and forth conversation happening on either side of her.

Maybe I'm reading too much into it. Maybe I'm not reading enough into it. Does she really care or is she doing it out of obligation?

No, she cares. Angela's made it very clear she cares. But what if--

A foot nudged hers and Fareeha looked up to meet Angela's gaze. The blonde raised an eyebrow at her and made a small motion with her hands.

'Are you okay?'

Fareeha gave her a tiny nod of affirmation along with a quick smile. Out of a sense of duty or not, Fareeha was thankful that Angela knew when she needed to be brought out of her own head.

“Aww, don't wanna have a big group hug'n go in a circle while we talk 'bout our feelin's?” Jesse asked with a pout before giving the doctor a pointed smirk and wiggling his eyebrows, “Or maybe your usual, uh, therapy sessions are a little less PG than I imagine.”

He glanced at Fareeha for a moment and winked.

The Swiss woman's face flushed a vibrant red and Fareeha could feel her own ears burn. Bad time to come back into this conversation. Damn it, Jesse.

“N-No!” Angela quickly waved her hands around as she spoke rapidly, “We do nothing, for your information! It actually shouldn't be for your information because n-nothing happens and it's not a big deal! T-there is no information! We just talk and watch moves and eat things and do friend stuff!”

Jesse cackled. “Yeah, sure Ange, 'friend stuff'. Makes it sound better.” Fareeha gave the man a sharp look and he shrugged, “Don't go givin' me the mom look, just statin' my opinion 's'all.”

He stood from his seat and stretched with a groan, “So meet back in here 'round seven? Just lemme know if I gotta supply the popcorn.” Jesse picked up his plate, gave a two finger salute and left them.
Once he put away his dishes and exited the rec room Angela reached over and set her hand over Fareeha's.

“I...” She bit her lip and thought for a moment before starting over. “What Jesse said. What...everyone has been saying...does it bother you?”

Yes.

“Does it bother you?” Fareeha countered.

Angela frowned and Fareeha shrugged with a sigh, “Not really? I've always had a crowd of people gawking at me, wanting to get into my personal life so I guess I'm just used to it. Everyone always wanted to know what and who Ana Amari's daughter was doing.”

Angela hummed in agreement. “I know exactly what you mean. I think I get more questions about my love life than I do about my work.” She shrugged and let out a sort of nervous laugh, “I don't know why I even asked...”

The soldier frowned and pushed her plate away.

“You wouldn't ask if it didn't bother you. It's okay if it does, Angela. Even I can admit that it's... weird and annoying. I'll go find Jesse later and sock him in the shoulder and tell him to stuff it.”

The blonde smiled and stood from her seat. She collected both of their dishes and rested a hand on Fareeha's shoulder, giving her a light squeeze.

“Don't punch too hard, Liebling.”

Fareeha grinned in response and gave Angela a thumbs up.

As the doctor exited the rec room Fareeha deflated.

Leave it to Jesse to fuck it up even more.

Just go talk to her. She'll understand.

But what if she doesn't? Fareeha sat back in her seat and began cracking her knuckles as she thought. Angela's seen me at my worst, she knows me.

...But she hasn't and doesn't. I haven't completely blown up yet. God, I hope I never do in front of her.

Anger was an emotion all too familiar to Fareeha.

It seems that a majority of the time she's running off of nothing but steaming rage, waiting for it to reach it's boiling point. How she got to this point didn't matter anymore, why didn't matter either.

It was when that worried Fareeha.

Without fail she would reach the point of no return and implode either on herself with whatever was close enough to cause pain or on others with words that did nothing but ruin.

She had been forced into therapy after her mother's death, after Siwa, after she lost her legs, but the will to actually try wasn't there. Fareeha would go through the motions, shed a few tears here and there, and lie about the healthy habits she never planned on starting.

Therapist after therapist would insist that there was something she was still holding onto, the cause
of the anger. Despite the paperwork that said the conversations were confidential, something about talking of her life made Fareeha's skin crawl.

As a child she never suffered from the unchecked hate that filled her as an adult. Whatever the cause was happened later in life, and what happened later in her life seemed like the probable cause of it all.

Sure, life dealt her a shit hand. But that was just life. There was no use crying over spilled milk.

The little girl grew up alone, surrounded by heroes and left to stand in their shadows.

The teenager was taught to keep her mouth shut, lest she face the wrath of her mother from halfway across the world.

The young woman learned that dreams don't come true, how life is fleeting and unfair.

The woman now understands that sometimes it's better to be alone, that loneliness breeds the inability to hurt or hurt others.

And being alone was the cure to the anger.

When she was alone she couldn't hurt anyone except for herself and deep down Fareeha knew it was better that way.

Too many times she lashed out to those she were close to, too many times had she been left shaking and shuddering at the things she said. It was always words, never hands, that hurt others.

The only time she ever hit was when she slapped Jalal across the face for telling her she was being unreasonable.

Hurting from something invisible, angered by something nonexistent, Fareeha had done what she does best and erupted. The slap extinguished all of the anger in two seconds flat and replaced it with shame.

Fareeha knew she was unreasonable. She also knew he'd leave her and never come back, just like the rest.

But Jalal was different.

He didn't get angry and burn up like the others. He didn't yell back or even raise his voice in the slightest.

He just held her and let her cry. When she apologized later for his swollen cheek he merely shrugged it off.

“I've been hit harder and for worse reasons, Habibi.” Jalal said as he kissed her forehead. “And I'd rather you hurt me than hurt yourself.”

Fareeha cracked her knuckles one last time and stood quickly, blinking away tears. The last thing she wanted was to cry out in the open about something she didn't want to talk about.

Truthfully, she shouldn't be crying over Jalal anymore. It's been almost six years. Spilled milk, Fareeha, spilled milk.

Talking wasn't something she wanted to do anymore, so Fareeha set herself on a path to the armory.
Eleven hours to kill until she'd return to the kitchen and start cooking, eleven hours to cool her head.

If she were honest, baking now to cool her head seemed like the better option. Cooking helped Fareeha relax. It was a good outlet for the unbridled rage and let her lose herself in the sensory overload that came with it.

But there was no point in cooking meals and sweets that would only grow cold, so mindlessly polishing her rocket launcher for the umpteenth time this week was the better option. To be fair, she was only cleaning it so often because it was new and needed to be worn in.

The original launcher had been lost in Ilios, unable to be retrieved and resting at the bottom of the ocean. It was sad to see it go, but it also made Fareeha giddy to know that Torbjörn would make her a new one.

Just watching the man work made Fareeha geek out like a teenage girl. As annoying as his constant questions were, she still looked up to him and valued his opinion highly.

When he came to her with his tools and willingness to help her repair the Raptora suit she thought she was going to cry from sheer joy. After weeks of having to repeat herself she was ready to cry from sheer frustration.

The most frustrating thing was that Fareeha knew Torbjörn was doing it all on purpose but didn't know how to approach him about it.

As a child she gravitated towards the rest of the strike team, never interested in the Swede's work or abilities. As she grew and began university she regretted not being as close to him as she were to the others.

Being an engineering major and having a direct line to the world's greatest engineer was a godsend. But without a good reason to contact him outside of furthering her own academic goals felt dirty, so Fareeha never said anything.

Now it was a matter of what she didn't or wouldn't say. He was always so quiet compared to Fareeha's nonstop chatter.

Ever the fangirl, Fareeha couldn't hide her excitement whenever Torbjörn began drawing the schematics for her new launcher. Or when he asked her to help him buff out pieces of Reinhardt's armor.

Which is why Fareeha began grinning like an idiot as she entered the armory to both men loudly arguing.

“I sometimes wonder if all that armor slows your brain down.”

“Ja! And I sometimes wonder if your height is why you're always in a bad mood!”

Torbjörn stood on a step ladder, hammer in hand and scowl on his face as he turned from the impressive chest plate before him to give Reinhardt *thwak* across the back with the hammer.

Reinhardt dramatically held his back and reached to the sky, “Struck down by my own friend, how the tables turn! A betrayal that shakes the story to it's core! A hero becomes a villain, a friend becomes an enemy!”

He stole a glance at Fareeha in the doorway and placed a hand to his chest and passionately called, “But as the old fall, the young will rise from the ashes! Come to me, *Maus*, and finish the
tale of Reinhardt the Gallant!”

Torbjörn rolled his eyes and waved her off. “Don't encourage him. He's already testing my patience.”

Fareeha wanted to leave it, she really did. But the comical pout and puppy-dog eyes from the German man were too much.

So she crossed the room and selected a wrench, raising it high above her head and declaring, “The story of Reinhardt the Gallant will not end just yet! For I, Pharah the Just, will carry his unyielding will of courageousness and defeat the shadow from our pasts!”

The crusader cheered loudly and banged his fist on Torbjörn's work bench, sending all of it's contents bouncing to the floor. The look received from the Swede was enough to silence them but not stop the impish grins on their faces.

They both took to the floor to collect the tools, unable to stop or hide their giggles. “You're both incorrigible.” Torbjörn grunted as he resumed his work on the armor, adding over his shoulder, “I finished the tertiary plates for the wing on your bird suit. Needs to be adjusted to your liking.”

Fareeha set a collection of screwdriver heads back onto the work bench and turned to gaze at the suit in question.

The Raptora never failed to look impressive, even missing a few plates and panels and scratched to shit. It stood suspended in energy field, rotating slowly and catching the light at every angle.

The wing in question was grey as opposed to the rest of the suit's ultramarine hue and shone brighter, likely freshly polished.

As she approached it she couldn't help but observe it aloud. “Are these engravings or are they forge seams that need to be buffed out?” The field felt warm around her fingers as Fareeha reached in and traced the patterns, the suit's rotation halting at her touch.

“I engraved them.” Torbjörn’s voice echoed as he stuck his head down into the chest piece with a small light. “The suit's state of the art but lacking in creativity. Figured if I were going to do work on it I should leave my own personal touch.”

The markings were eerily familiar to Fareeha, the gentle swoops and curves all leading to a point on the back of the suit that didn't seem to exist. As she retraced them back to the tip of the wing it dawned on her what the small rounds and turns were.

The hand that wasn't touching the suit came to lightly rest on the tattoo under her eye in understanding, tracing the ink's arch in sync with the warm metal’s.

Reinhardt lumbered to her side with a broad smile on his face. “I gave him the idea.” He tapped the scar on his left eye thoughtfully, “I must confess, I think yours is much cooler.”

Fareeha dropped her hands and returned his smile. Her gaze returned to the suit and she unwittingly mentioned, “I don't know what mom would hate more, the tattoo or the suit.”

As soon as she said it she clenched her fists and prepared herself for the worst.

Reinhardt had always been close to her mother, how close Fareeha didn't know and frankly didn't want to know. She approached him with the same sense of awe as Torbjörn but forgot all the while that despite being her childhood hero, he was also one of his mother’s best friends.
The first thing he had done upon their reunion was give a bleary eyed smile and tell her, “You're the spitting image of your mother, Fareeha.

It expelled all the excitement she had to see him again and knew that her half-hearted 'thank you' didn't go unnoticed.

Maybe it was wishful thinking that when she accepted the recall everyone would gladly welcome the younger Amari onto the team for her own achievements.

Sure, it was impressive to have a little over a decade of military experience and two years of leading a squad of her own. But the truly impressive feat was how little it meant when Ana Amari was your mother.

And Fareeha knew she shouldn't blame everyone for it. The only person on the team who spent time with her alone was Jesse, everyone else saw her as the very quiet child of a very boisterous woman.

Well, she had spent time with Reinhardt when she was younger, before Jesse came into her life. It made meeting him again so much sweet, as well as his words so much harder to swallow.

She was still a little girl in his eyes, not a solider.

The crusader introduced himself in full armor as he exited a dropship. Ana held Fareeha on her hip and told her that the man enjoyed watching the recordings of Fareeha's dance recitals.

A much younger Reinhardt Wilhelm removed his helmet, shook his long hair free, and knelt to one knee before the Amari's with a toothy grin.

“It is an honor to meet you, my lady!” He said with a bow of the head, “Allow me to personally thank you and compliment you for your lovely dances!”

Fareeha tried to hide behind her mother's hair, face red and ears ringing from his loud voice.

Ana tossed her hair away and made Fareeha stand, nudging her towards the knight. “Go on, habibti. Introduce yourself.”

And so she placed her small hand in his impossibly large one and puffed her chest out in an attempt to seem bigger. “I'm Fareeha Amari!” She declared loudly, setting her jaw and furrowing her brow. “I'm eight years old and I'm gonna be the world's greatest hero!”

Reinhardt laughed, startling the girl with his roar and giving her hand a firm shake. “Wunderbar! I look forward to the day when I pass my title to you, Mäuschen!”

Fareeha would instantly latch onto Reinhardt from then on. He told the best stories, made the best jokes, and never turned down a piggy back ride.

He was every child's dream.

The type of man to never say no or shy away from answering the hard questions, Reinhardt taught Fareeha to embrace the moment and look for a light among the dark.

It hurt to think about, but Reinhardt was more a father to her than her real dad.

Her father would join her mother after Fareeha turned twelve in never being home. As a former military officer turned honorary diplomat for the Canadian Omnic Coalition he would be taken all over the country and occasionally all over the world for important talks and meetings.
Fareeha already knew not to believe it when her mother would tell her she’d be home for a birthday, holiday or award assembly, so accepting the fact that her father would no longer be there didn’t hurt.

The only time it did hurt, Reinhardt was there to remind her to smile through it.

The only person to accept the invitation and not break his promise of attending was her knight in shining armor, Reinhardt the Gallant.

Fareeha graduated high school with honors and the class rank of five out of six-hundred and two. After throwing her cap she retook her seat in the gymnasium and watched everyone around her disperse to their families.

Watching how parents openly wept at the sight of their child holding something as measly as a high school diploma made Fareeha's heart ache painfully. It made the measly high school diploma she held feel like pure gold.

A hand on her shoulder turned her head to Reinhardt's own openly weeping face and Fareeha found herself struggling to delay her own tears.

“I'm so proud of you, schatz.” He bent down and pulled her into a warm hug while saying, “My tiny maus has grown up right before my eyes, and I wish with all my might that she would show this old man her beautiful smile on this beautiful day.”

And Fareeha did, tears gleaming on her cheeks and heart shattered.

She would always be his number one fan, always be his tiny maus, and always be his favorite little girl.

He would always make time for her, but he could never understand.

And so once again she stood with him, heart squeezing tightly and tears forming in her eyes at the hurt that filled her head to toe.

“I think she'd hate the awful scowl on your face much more.” The German man said with a booming laugh. “Smile more, Mäuschen! The day is too young and I am too old to be frowning! Unless you're Torbjörn – then you're always frowning!”

The exasperated sigh behind them combined with the grin Reinhardt wore brought a smile to Fareeha's face.

But maybe he didn't have to understand. There was someone who did understand, who always understood her.

Reinhardt would always make time for her, and Angela would always understand.

“Thanks, Reinhardt.”

He returned to his seat beside Torbjörn and began one of his long winded tales Fareeha was sure she and Torbjörn had both heard at least a thousand times before but neither would point out.

Fareeha pulled a folding chair up to sit across from him after retrieving the rocket launcher from it's case near the Raptora suit, selecting a rag and heavily used tin of polish from the work bench and settling in for at least a good two hours worth of story-telling.

*I'll talk to Angela later, maybe Reinhardt too.*
Or maybe I won't. Spilled milk, Fareeha, spilled milk.

Chapter End Notes

My Tumblr
“How did the movie end, by the way? Did they wait for each other and get married?”

No.

“Yes.”

...and there has been another attack in the delta limits. No causalities this time, thank god, but fourteen were injured.

Angela sighed into her steepled fingers and narrowed her brows as she digested the information.

The man on the screen rubbed at the stubble on his chin and offered, “I could halt the envoys for a week and see if the attacks stop. Or send people on foot instead of in caravans. Maybe then...”

“We can't stop sending people in, it's a top priority area.” Angela leaned on her elbows and lowered her hands from her face to tap them on her desk. “If we send them in on foot it's easier for them to be gunned down and it would take too long to move equipment back and forth.”

She hummed in thought and quickly brought up a separate page of information to reread over.

“Dr. Alzufari was injured in the last attack, nothing serious I see.”

Angela removed her glasses and rubbed the corners of her eyes as she spoke, “If she's willing to take her team back into the area follow her lead with ours. We can't stop helping the people trapped there. If worst comes to worst, I will return to my position.”

“As much as I'd love to have you back here, Dr. Ziegler, you're needed more in Zurich.” He grimly smiled and added, “How are things back at the hospital? Is everything back to normal yet?”

Lying wasn't something Angela wanted to do. But lying got her here, lying put her here, so lie she must.

“Everyone is still on edge after the terrorist threats, but they stopped rolling in once I announced I had returned.” Angela chuckled and shook her head, “It's almost as if they're afraid of me. Do tell me, Jean, am I really that scary?”

Jean laughed. “The scariest, Doctor! Hell hath no fury like a woman with little sleep!” His smile faded slightly and he added, “I miss having you here. You always had the right answer or best solution. I...I really don't think I'm cut out for this – not after you.”

She was stiff as she spoke, a serious look on her face. “Jean, I wouldn't have entrusted you with this if I didn't believe in you. I've watched you since the beginning do nothing but pour your heart and soul into this work.”

He couldn't meet her gaze but she could see the moisture in his eyes as she continued. “Don't
compare yourself to me and don't you dare think this project isn't as much yours as it is mine. You've worked hard for this, you...”

_The hand on her head surprised her, the whole motion making her jump back in fear. Of what she wasn't sure._

“You shouldn't second guess yourself. You've worked hard to get here, same as the rest of us. And that's the thing: you're one of us now, remember that.”

_Gabriel's lips spread into a wide grin and Angela could feel her eyes tearing at how comforting the sight was._

“You're gonna change the world some day. I believe in you, kid.”

“You're going to do great things, Jean. I believe wholeheartedly in you.”

Jean wiped at his eyes and nodded quickly. “T-thank you, Doctor. That means a lot to me...truly.”

He straightened up and squared his shoulders, “I'll let Dr. Alzufari make the call and follow her lead. As for the next supply shipments, I'll make sure everything is accounted for and that we don't come up short. Til next time, Dr. Ziegler.”

“Good-bye, Jean. I wish you the best of luck.”

The second the video call ended Angela deflated into her chair.

She never should have left the zone, never should have left behind her mess.

In truth, she did believe Jean could fill her shoes and take care of things in her stead. But the fact that he was only having to rise up was because she wasn't back in Zurich, but in Gibraltar instead made the shame cut deep.

Angela had nothing but his undivided loyalty and trust and she was abusing it horrendously. And it wasn't just Jean. The hospital thought she was still in the crisis zone and the crisis zone thought she was back in the hospital.

Lying to both and trying to keep appearances was taxing, but she had to. This was her fault and she must pay accordingly.

_But when will the lies stop?_

It was chilling to have the dark voice return, to listen to it whisper in her ear and force her mind to race at the thoughts it put there.

_You're lying to the people who trust you the most after all. How long have you been lying? Think back, was it during school or did it start at the hospital? God, you can't even remember when you started pretending, can you?_

She stood and walked stiffly to the coffee machine she was 'borrowing' from the rec room to pour herself another mug. The aroma was pleasant and comforting, the taste rich and soothing. It was a distraction, a much needed distraction.

_Don’t distract yourself, asshole, focus on the problem! You're lying to everyone! Do you even know how to tell the truth anymore? Do you even know what truth is anymore? Tell the truth for once in your pathetic life!_
Angela frowned as she stared into the mug of her coffee.

Tell the truth about what?

About where she was, about Overwatch? No good could come from it, Winston would be arrested for activating the recall, hell they would all be arrested for accepting it. Their lives would be ruined if anyone knew.

What about the lives you’ve already ruined? What about the people you lied about to save your own skin? Have you forgotten about Gabriel, about what you did?

Her hands gripped the mug with white-knuckles. How could she ever forget Gabriel?

When she found him, found what was left of him, it broke something in her. Angela couldn’t bear to look at the bits and pieces of the man who would go out of his way to make her feel like she belonged.

He didn’t deserve the fate he received, before or after his death.

Angela did everything, everything within her power to save him. She was so sure she could save him. She had done it once before, to an agent who lost too much blood from a missing limb.

How exactly she had done it was and still is slightly lost to her, but she managed to bring him back. And if anyone deserved to come back from death, it was the man who looked it in the face daily.

Overwatch needed Gabriel, even if the world said it actually needed Jack. Whatever happened at the Swiss base had to be a horrible accident, she was sure. It had to be.

Overwatch was Gabriel, in Angela’s eyes. He shaped the organization into what the world saw it as, a place of heroes. It was all his legacy.

And she watched it fall apart like she watched his body fall apart.

You tore his body apart. You made it fall apart.

You ripped his skin apart and consumed the flesh beneath, gorged yourself in the blood and gore of a great man.

Something went wrong. Horribly wrong.

Something went wrong with you. You’re horribly wrong.

Just admit that it’s addicting, the ability to decide a person’s fate. You’re an animal who thinks the best way to help people is to taint them with your sickness. Tear your own skin apart and bleed out on the floor just like Ga-

Her phone beeped at her and brought her away from the thoughts. A quick glance at the screen revealed a message from Fareeha.

‘Just finished the mahshi and about to start the baklava. Don’t make me come get you, I’ll burn the food and then we’ll both be pissed.’

Angela pocketed her phone and sipped her coffee, grimacing at how cold it was. How long had she been standing here?

Too long. You’re wasting time. God, what good can you actually do? Don’t bothering thinking up
The walk from the med bay to the rec room was a blur to Angela and by the time she reached the small room a heavy ache had formed behind her forehead.

Fareeha stood before the stove with Jesse glued to her side, a hand trying to reach in the pan for whatever she was cooking.

“I swear to god above if you stick your hand in my pan one more time I'm going to beat you with your own arm.” Fareeha shoved him away, her expression deathly serious.

Jesse giggled like a child and started to reach again only to be stopped by a swift slap on the hand with a steaming spatula. “Aww c'mon, Reba. Just wantin' a lil taste is all.”

The Egyptian woman rolled her eyes and bumped him with her hip while saying, “Don't even get me started with you, Joel. Angela will kill you if you get your grubby hands all over the dessert first.”

“Well speak of the angel and she will appear.” Jesse snorted, throwing a grin at Angela and waving her over. “Quit standin' in the doorway like a vampire and come help me pester 'Reeha about supper!”

Angela ran her fingers lightly over the door frame, the image of Fareeha clutching at it tightly the first night they met in the room flashing through her mind.

The wild and unfocused look in her eyes as she stay hunched into the frame, shuddering with every breath made something beneath the doctor's skin itch. The way Fareeha had moved about the room and spoke was something akin to that of an injured and caged animal.

No, not an animal. Something inhuman, something that reminded her of-

“Angela?”

She jolted at her name, fingernails digging into the cold metal frame as she stared wide eyed at Fareeha. The woman cocked an eyebrow at her and slowly asked, “Are you okay? You looked like you were spacing out.”

“Yes, of course.” Angela quickly said, forcing herself into motion and approaching the table to look at the spread of food laid out. “Don't you think this is a little bit...much?”

Her meek question was met with twin looks of confusion.

Jesse started towards her with a hand raised, “Now you hold your horses for just a sec, are you sure you're feelin' alright?” His outstretched hand moved her bangs aside and pressed against her forehead, the cowboy humming in thought.

“Yain't hot, don't look clammy or sick.” He craned his neck to Fareeha and asked, “You sure this is Goldilocks and not an impostor? 'Cuz the Angie I know wouldn't ask if too much food was too much.”

Angela smacked the man's hand away and folded her arms with a huff. “I'm not complaining! I'm just thinking practically! This is a lot of food for three people.” She eyed a baking pan carefully and slowly asked, “Nothing has pork in it, right?”

Fareeha laughed and turned the stove off, turning to fully face the blonde with hands on her hips. “Angela, you're Jewish and I'm Muslim. I can promise you that there is no pork anywhere to be
Face pink and ears burning Angela pulled a chair out and sat down, muttering to herself as she did so. She took in their casual appearance, both in jeans and t-shirts, and tugged at her neatly pressed pants and white button up anxiously.

Jesse took the seat across from her and was practically vibrating as he reached for a fork and plate.

With another swift slap with the spatula Fareeha stopped him mid-reach. “Have you no self control? The kefta isn't ready yet and the wine hasn't even been opened. Be a good man-child and open the wine Angela brought earlier. I might let you eat dessert with dinner if you do.”

Jesse groaned loudly as he stood from his chair, “Whatever you say, mom.” He moved past her to the fridge and tossed over his shoulder, “Ya'know, you remind me more and more of Ana every day. Got the same tone of voice and scary look in your eyes.”

Angela noticed the tightness that overtook Fareeha's body at the gunslinger's words and stretched her arm out to give her hand in offering.

Fingers slowly wrapped together and Angela gave a light squeeze, a silent message.

'I'm here. It's okay. You are you.'

Fareeha squeezed back and moved a little closer, unable to meet the Swiss woman's eyes but asking quietly, “Are you alright? Be honest with me, Angela. You seem distant.”

“I'm just...”

A monster.

“...thinking about work.”

Fareeha didn't seem convinced but didn't push. Their hands unwound and their eyes met briefly, another silent message.

'You can always talk to me, you know that. When your ready, I'm here.'

Jesse swiveled on his foot, brandishing the bottle of wine Angela knew she was going to regret giving up. He grinned and pulled at the cork while announcing, “Ladies and cowboy, lets get this show on the road!”

As the loud POP echoed across the room Angela forced herself to smile.

Don't think about it. Don't remember it. Just lie to yourself like you lie to everyone else. Just lie and breathe. That's all a demon like you needs.

“...I'm just saying, maybe next time save some for the rest of us.” Jesse said with a glare towards Angela.

The blonde couldn't stop her laughter as she sank further into the couch, glass of wine in hand.

Dinner was the best food Angela had had in what felt like years. Well, it probably was the best food she had had in years. Living off of take away or microwave dinners would make toasted
bread look like a gourmet meal.

All in all, Angela could feel her appreciation for Fareeha growing as they ate.

And one full meal, two baklava's, and four glasses of wine later, Angela felt like she was on top of the world.

Whatever she had been overthinking earlier didn't mean jack shit when Fareeha started baking cookies.

The whole rec room smelled like heaven, the strong scent of vanilla and chocolate drifting through the air as lazily as a summer breeze. A comfortable heat rested over the room, emanating from the oven where it became slightly less bearable.

The holoscreen before the couch was paused right at the beginning of the opening credits of Les Parapluies de Cherbourg. The coffee table housed the now empty bottle of wine, two similarly dry glasses, and the last two remaining baklavas Angela was trying to sneak.

McCree tipped back his sweating bottle of beer and lost his hat in the process, swearing and trying to retrieve it before Angela could steal it – again.

He once again proved to be too slow, the hat resting half on the blonde's head backwards. Angela laughed at his exasperated expression again and dissolved into a fit of giggles when he swiped the hat back.

“Light weight.” He muttered before taking another swig of his beer.

“Smelly jerk.” Angela countered and scoffed at the look he gave her, “It's smelly. The hat. You're smelly.”

Fareeha walked around and stood in front of the holoscreen, bearing a large plate of steaming cookies in one hand and a small bowl in the other. Greedy hands immediately reached for the cookies and the woman quickly moved the plate away.

“They're still too hot to eat! God, you two are the worst...” Fareeha set the plate down and handed the bowl out instead, “Here, curb your enthusiasm and endless appetite.”

Further inspection revealed that the bowl contained bits of cookie dough, slightly warm and very moist. Angela immediately abandoned her wine glass and the baklava on the coffee table in favor of the bowl.

“I love you.” She said upon scarfing down a fingerful of dough.

With a snort Fareeha took a seat on the couch and said, “You only love me for my cooking skills and ability to reach the top shelf.”

Angela offered the bowl to Jesse and he grimaced. “Can't see how ya'll can eat that stuff.”

“You don't like cookie dough?” Fareeha asked incredulously while reaching into the bowl.

The cowboy shook his head, “Nope. Tastes good, but it feels just...” He stuck his tongue out and shook his head rapidly.

“Americans are weird.” Angela scoffed. “You'll eat everything with ketchup or barbecue sauce but won't eat cookie dough?”
Jesse sat forward and held a finger up, “Now hang on a minute, we don't eat everythin’--”

“And you call football 'soccer',” Fareeha added, “and drink tea with a pound of sugar in it. Not to mention your politicians--”

“Or healthcare system, mein Gott!”

The man wore an expression of mild irritation as he asked, “You done?”

The women exchanged looks for a long moment before nodding.

The three settled in finally and began the movie, Angela now hoarding the cookie dough to herself as Fareeha watched the opening credits in awe.

“They're just names, Fareeha.” Angela pointed out, “The film hasn't even actually started yet.”

The woman quickly hushed her and went back to intensely watching the screen, mouth slightly open. “This music is beautiful. I can already tell I'm going to enjoy the score.”

As the opening credits ended Jesse asked at top volume, “So when do they all start fuckin’ and dyin’?”

He was quickly hushed by the two and sighed to himself, bringing his beer back to his lips.

They weren't even ten minutes into the movie before the cowboy stood, stretched, and declared, “Well, I'm out of beer. I think it's time for whiskey.”

Angela narrowed her brows at him as he moved. “You're really already bored? I mean, this film is pretty shit, but this early?”

“Can you really blame me?” He stacked two cookies quickly and started towards the door while adding sarcastically, “Hope I don't miss anythin' too important. Like more names or fancy dancin'.”

When he was out of the room Fareeha brought the plate into her lap and offered Angela a cookie. “Penny, or in this case, cookie for your thoughts?”

Cookie in hand and mouth, Angela tucked her legs under herself and draped an arm across the back of the couch with a deep sigh through the nose. “Just wondering how long it's been since I last watched this film. I had to be before I started secondary school.”

“Why's that?” Fareeha asked through a full mouth of cookie.

Angela kept her eyes trained on the bright colours on the screen as she lifted another cookie to her mouth and said, “My grandmother passed sometime during my fifth year. Großvati never liked to get out her things, so I never watched it again.”

With a solemn nod Fareeha gave a small chuckle, “Dad never wanted to go through Mom's stuff either. Not that she had much left of it at his place when she died. I've got most of it stored away in her house in Cairo.”

She paused and pursed her lips. “I suppose it's my house now. But I don't like staying there, it's too quiet...it doesn't feel like home.”

A twinge in Angela's stomach made her sit up a little straighter and she bit her lip in guilt.
Sobering up wasn’t something she wanted right now. Being sober would remind her of whatever she was thinking of before and during dinner. She thought for a moment before deciding to open her mouth again.

“You know, with how well you bake I’m surprised you never thought of opening a bakery.”

Fareeha laughed and scooted the plate into Angela’s lap so she could stretch. “Yeah, imagine me standing behind a glass counter in a cute little apron asking how many donuts you want. Impossibly tall, heavily muscled, military trained woman decorating cakes for children’s birthday parties.”

“And I,” Angela spoke as she finished off her second cookie, “will raise goats and sell cheese in a remote village upon the Swiss Alps. I’ll be something of the banished witch who everyone whispers about and fears.”

“Oh yes, because you’re so scary, Angela.” The woman said with a quirked eyebrow. She then added, “I know this is my first time watching, but it seems like we’re talking through some important plot right now.”

The doctor rolled her eyes and selected another cookie. “It’s a romance, the plot is what you think it is. They love each other, but oh no they can’t be together! Watch them whine about it for the next two hours!”

Fareeha asked with a grin, “You seem really bitter, too bitter to be eating all these sweets right now.”

Angela’s expression immediately fell flat as Fareeha pressed her lips together and raised both eyebrows.

With a voice cracking with laughter the Egyptian woman quietly said, “I’m not meaning to sugarcoat anything, just saying that you don’t seem too gum-ho about romance movies. You butter not be a sourpuss all night.”

“Have you got it all out of your system or is there another one you need to get off your chest?”

Lips trembling in mirth, Fareeha slowly asked, “Do they not appreciate puns like these in Sweet-zerland?”

The blonde snorted and couldn’t hold back her own chortle. “I think that’s the worst one you’ve made yet,” Angela then admitted quickly, “but I think that’s my favorite one so far.”

Fareeha reclined into the couch and reached for a cookie in victory, fist pumping in the air and a cheer following it. “I knew I could get you to like at least one of my puns.

Angela rolled her eyes but let her smile remain. A sip of her wine returned the pleasant buzz to her senses and she swiftly took a larger gulp to further the sensation.

Alcohol was a fantastic solution.

“But in all seriousness, I have no idea what the hell is happening right now. Is she marrying the old guy or the young guy?”

“There’s only one Guy, and he’s about to get drafted to war. Geneviève's mother wants her to marry Roland but she wants to marry Guy.”

“Wait, his name is actually Guy? What the hell kind of name is Guy? Also he’s getting drafted?
“Oh hush and just listen, this is a good scene.” Angela lightly smacked Fareeha's shoulder, lowering her voice to whisper over the bright music, “One of my favorites actually. And it's the title theme you're so enthralled by.”

This instantly quieted the woman. Her playful expression was gone as she leaned forward, enraptured by the melody once more. Angela couldn't help but watch her more than the movie itself, a warmth blossoming in her chest at the wonder on Fareeha's face.

A hand gripped the blonde's thigh suddenly and the Egyptian woman pointed at the screen with childlike glee, “There! The French Horns! Did you hear them? Right there! That melody line--god that's awesome.”

“Yeah...” Angela half-heartedly agreed, her ears burning and her breath catching. Fareeha barely released Angela's thigh, leaving her hand and it's comforting weight.

“*Je ne peux jamais vivre sans toi.*” Angela whispered along with the song.

Fareeha raised an eyebrow at her and she felt her cheeks flush slightly. “It means 'I can't live without you', that's the name of this song. It can also be translated to 'I will wait for you'. It's all very...passionate.”

The couple on screen held each other close, proclaiming their love and inabilities to live without each other. Something about it made Angela's heart flutter, made Angela long for something of the same caliber.

She had had lovers who promised nothing but faithfulness and love despite distance apart, but in her experience it typically led to a falling out much like at the end of the film. It was usually her fault.

But to have that moment of nothing but utter adoration and false promises, oh how it made her long to have someone to hold her close. She couldn't help but inch closer to the woman beside her, suddenly feeling a strange pang on loneliness in the pit of her stomach.

It was odd, Angela was normally never so emotional. If anything, her emotions were always much more subdued. They had to be with her line of work.

Whatever was swirling in her stomach and rising to her chest made her nervous. It wasn't...normal.

Maybe alcohol wasn't a fantastic solution.

The scene was over as quickly as it began, leading to Fareeha groaning and slumping heavily into the couch cushions. “Why can't the movie just be that theme over and over again? It's just so-- it makes you feel like you could just-- it's so beautiful.”

The doctor couldn't help but laugh at the pitiful expression the woman beside her wore. “Oh it's not the greatest thing in the whole movie. I think if you actually bothered to pay attention to the story you'd enjoy it as much as you're enjoying the score.”

Fareeha rolled her eyes dramatically and gave Angela an over exaggerated pout, “But its so boring! Think about it Angela, you didn't exactly sell the movie very well and you did admit it's a little bit shit. At least one of us is paying attention to the masterful string section.”

“So what if the movie is a little bit shit? It's a romance, it's suppose to be shit!” Angela jokingly
argued.

“Not to mention that this is,” Fareeha paused, furrowing her brow and counted on her fingers before waving them in the air as if in victory, “one hundred and twelve years old, and you expect me not to be bored out of my mind?”

“The visual and sound quality is awful, the subtitles fade in and out so unless you're semi-fluent in French you are basically screwed—”

“Or you could just pay attention and read faster than a first grade level.” Fareeha gave a scandalized gasp, taking the plate of cookies away from Angela and setting them as far from her as possible.

“I bake my cookies with my family's secret recipe that's been passed down from generation to generation and this is how you repay me?”

She turned her nose in the air and folded her arms across her chest, “I have to say Angela, I feel betrayed and rather insulted. How very dare you, highly decorated doctor and Nobel prize winning scientist, insult my intelligence.”

Angela couldn’t help but laugh, covering her mouth with a hand as Fareeha continued, eating the attention up. “I’ll have you know I graduated with honors from my high school and could tie my own shoes at age four, so take that, Ziegler!”

The blonde's laughter and grown harder and she accidentally snorted, slapping both hands over her mouth and causing the other woman to grin ear to ear. “You did it again—”

“Don't draw attention to it!” Angela choked out, wiping tears from her eyes, “You heard nothing!”

They once again began drowning out the movie with their laughter and conversation, but at this point who truly cared?

“I won't speak of your inability to read at a first-grade level if you don't mention that I just snorted like a wild boar.”

Fareeha selected another cookie from the plate and split it in two, handing the larger half to Angela and sighing in happiness, “I think it's a little too late for you, Ange. But since you asked so nicely, these lips are sealed.”

The Swiss woman accepted the cookie and had to stop herself from cramming the whole thing in her mouth at once like she had all previously.

“Oh shit we're missing more of the good parts!” Fareeha exclaimed, craning to get the remote and backing the movie up. She had a few false starts but finally began the movie again right as the music began swelling.

“You didn't start it at the beginning of the scene—” Angela was quickly shushed by a finger to her lips, Fareeha’s eyes never leaving the screen.

She gave up, breaking off a piece of her cookie and chewing on it thoughtfully as the music grew louder and more intense. It was beautiful, the crescendo followed by a symbol crash sending chills up Angela's arms.

As soon as it ended she grabbed the remote from Fareeha’s grasp while declaring, “I'm starting the scene over so that we're not beginning at the big emotional climax.”
With the scene officially restarted the two settled in once more, watching the scene for the second time and receiving the same chills.

“One more time.” Fareeha whispered as she took the remote again. Angela couldn't help but roll her eyes at her antics, a motion Fareeha didn't miss.

“Close your eyes this time, try and listen to just the flutes. Once you find them, try and listen to just the strings. Then the trumpets, then the French Horns – they have a counter melody.”

Eyes closed, Angela sighed and listened closely to the music as instructed.

The flutes were easy to find – or was that the strings? – a light and airy aria that seemed to glide gently over the other instruments.

While out of order, she could hear the French Horns better than the trumpets, and she found herself surprised to hear the counter melody Fareeha was talking about.

With the crescendo came with trumpets, loud and brash.

As it all began to die out, a new breed of chills caressed the back of Angela's neck.

“Did you hear it?” Fareeha asked in a hushed voice, eyes never leaving the screen.

“Yes.” Angela responded in a similarly soft voice. She glanced at Fareeha and motioned to the remote, “One more time?” She was happily obliged, the scene beginning again.

This time her eyes stayed open, watching Fareeha's face closely.

Her expression was so calm, her eyes so bright. Her lips were barely parted, her fingertips tapping slowly with each hit. She looked so peaceful, so concentrated, so free.

The swirling in her stomach had returned with a vengeance. Angela's heart rapidly beat, her eyes unable to leave Fareeha's face. It felt like she had been staring for hours, but the music that danced around the two carried on.

The voices of the two characters had vanished and all Angela could hear were the French Horns. All she could see was Fareeha and she studied the woman's face carefully.

The way her nose curved and sloped, how thick her lower lashes were, the sharpness in her cheek bones, the fullness of her lips...

Fareeha is gorgeous.

It was a revelation that made Angela feel like such a fucking idiot. How had she not seen it before? She had always just been Fareeha to Angela, but it suddenly felt like she was seeing her for the first time.

Heat rose from her stomach to her chest and cheeks. Angela had never felt like this before. It was such an intense feeling, it made her heart race impossibly fast and her mouth grow dry. Gott, ich bin verdammt dumm.

The warmth Angela was feeling in her chest exploded when brown eyes met blue. It spread across her face and to her toes, it made her feel lighter than air. The two stared at each other as the music grew, neither moving.

But they were moving.
When did we get so close?

Angela could feel Fareeha's soft breathing on her lips, entranced by the burnt umber color that stained the inner ring of her irises.

“Is this okay?” She breathed out the question with a curious look in those dark eyes.

A small nod, almost nonexistent.

The music seemed so loud, seemed to flow and twist around the two as their lips met.

It was gentle, unsure. Angela stared up into Fareeha's wide gaze with half-lidded eyes, a fear growing in the back of her mind.

*What are you doing you idiot! This isn't right! She doesn't--*

Fareeha's hand on Angela's thigh began rubbing a small circle and all fears dispelled as the woman kissed her back in ardor.

In turn, the doctor brought a hand to Fareeha's shoulder and gripped it firmly to assure she was there, that this was real.

Their eyes slowly closed, the kiss becoming more empowered by the music cresting to it's end.

The hand on Angela's thigh moved to her waist to pull her closer. The hand on Fareeha's shoulder moved to cup the back of her neck, fingers threading through her thick hair.

Her lips were *so* soft.

Angela could faintly taste chocolate.

Their noses bumped together as Fareeha leaned closer into the kiss. It had quickly lost all hesitation as they broke for a moment to breathe before feverishly sinking back into the raw heat.

It felt like she would catch fire any second now, maybe she had. It was like she had been set aflame and was burning down to ash.

Angela’s heart was thundering in her ears and she could feel her fingers trembling as they gripped at the roots of Fareeha's hair tightly.

As soon as one line was crossed they dove over another.

The soft moan Fareeha released when Angela accidentally tugged on her hair sent a bolt of molten lava straight through the doctor's belly. Angela couldn't help her gasp of surprise at the careful slide of a tongue on her lower lip.

*Gott,* Angela quickly became aware of her own soft moans and didn't try to silence them, *is this how it's suppose to feel?*

The kisses she had shared prior felt like fuck all. Those kisses had either lacked intimacy or made her want to brush her teeth afterwards. Angela had never been a very physical lover, never had the urge to indulge sexually past a certain need for touch and relaxation.

But this was *heavenly.*

How Fareeha could make her feel so overwhelmed with just a few kisses was astounding. Not
only that, but how she could coax the seemingly nonexistent arousal from Angela was slightly chilling but oh so welcome.

A silent prayer to make this moment last died with the footsteps Angela could hear.

She cracked her eyes slightly and was drawn immediately to the figure in the doorway.

To Jesse as he stepped into the room and quickly back-peddled out.

She stared in horror, freezing slightly. Fareeha noticed and began pulling away when something loud hit the floor just outside the door.

The women broke apart instantly, each taking a separate side of the couch and turning away from the other in horror.

_Fuck me...what did we do?_

Angela dug her fingernails into the arm of the couch and tried to cool her scorching flesh.

Jesse cursed loudly and reentered the rec room cradling a few metal flasks.

“Dropped the whiskey.” He waved one flask before setting it on the coffee table and taking the now open seat between the two.

Angela’s face was still burning as Jesse poured each of them a glass, glancing at her for just a moment. “So...” He ignored his glass and took a generous drink straight from the flask, “what'd I miss?”

“Guy's going off to war.” Fareeha mumbled as she stuffed a cookie into her mouth while simultaneously trying to even her breathing.

The cowboy snorted and seemed to ignore it. “That's how it always seems to go. Suppose I missed the big'n'romantic good-bye scene too huh?”

“...Did you want to see it?” Angela slowly asked, willing her heart to stop pounding. She couldn't seem to catch her breath and the knot behind her forehead was beginning to form again.

He shook his head and drained the flask, tossing it to the coffee table and picking up his glass. “Nah. Not a big romance kinda fella.” His eyes met Angela's again and he narrowed his brows slightly, “You alright, Goldilocks?”

Angela nodded quickly despite her chest tightening painfully.

_Not now_, She screamed at herself, _please not now!_ All of the previous warmth she felt had been replaced by an intense chill she couldn't shake. She willed herself to focus on the movie.

She should have known this would happen. It was already one of _those_ days, she already had warning signs that she chose to ignore.

Truly, she brought it upon herself, but she wanted to have this nice evening with Fareeha and Jesse. Panic attacks be damned, Angela would spend time in the company of her friends.

Silently trying to hide her struggle was working until the tips of her fingers began to grow numb and her throat began closing.

She needed to leave, she needed to _get out_. But the door was past Jesse and Fareeha and Angela couldn't force her legs to do anything but twitch, couldn't tear her eyes off a spot on the wall
behind the holoscreen.

She couldn't move.

Her head was pounding and growing lighter by the second. She needed to breathe. *Just fucking breathe! Torbjörn*— the medicine he made her get! *In my room... fuck fuck fuck!*

“Angela?” *Fareeha.* The woman's voice, the concern that it held, gave her the air she lacked.

The blonde sucked in air quickly, acutely aware of the tears sliding down her face. Numbed fingers tried to wipe them away but she was shaking too much to do anything more then smear them.

Warm hands were on her arms immediately, bringing feeling back to her mute body. “I'm sorry.” Angela choked out, unable to stop the flood of tears that crested down her cheeks.

“Get her to the med-bay; I'm going to find Torbjörn.” Fareeha's tone was no longer concerned but clipped and even like she was giving an order to a line of soldiers.

Jesse's arms stayed around Angela as he moved to crouch beside her. “C'mon, Angie, lets get you up'n outta here.” He sounded as smooth and calm as always but his face was frozen in terror.

Angela let herself be lifted off the couch. One arm was slung across the man's shoulders and he steered them towards the hallway. Angela couldn't stop herself from sobbing and couldn't bring her limbs to move as Jesse practically dragged her into the hall and down the corridor.

“Hey hey hey, it's okay, Angie, it's okay.” Jesse's voice was growing increasingly uneasy. He drew a gasp from her when he gently swung her forward and caught her under the knees, cradling her to his chest.

She covered her face with her hands in a pitiful attempt to hide herself from the man. Angela didn't want Jesse to see her like this. She didn't want anyone to see her like this.

*Fareeha.*

“F-f...” She choked out.

Jesse shifted her weight slightly and whispered, “I know, I know. It's okay, you're okay. We're almost there.”

He didn't understand what she meant and it made her heart constrict painfully.

Angela *needed* Fareeha.

Fareeha would understand her, she always understood her.

She needed the other woman to hold her and whisper comforting words in her ear. She needed her to wipe away her tears and grant Angela the ability to feel again. She needed Fareeha to bring warmth back into her frozen limbs and remind her that she wasn't alone.

*You're not alone. Jesse is here. You're not alone, you're okay.* She forced herself to suck in a breath and winced at the pain it brought to her chest. She felt hollow.

The med-bay was cold when they entered but Angela barely noticed.

She could feel sweat forming on the back of her neck and was acutely aware of how shaky she
was. That's some feeling returned, focus on the rest now.

A twitch of the fingers, still numb but responsive nonetheless.

A fat tear rolling down her cheek, incredibly warm compared to her flesh.

A deep breath in, a deep breath out.

Repeat.

“Here ya go, Angie.” Jesse grunted with effort as he squatted low to the ground and carefully slid her onto her plush office chair. He tossed his hat on the desk and rested his flesh hand on her knee, squeezing lightly, “You here with me, Goldilocks?”

She nodded once and the guilt hit her at full force. “I ruined our movie night.” Her whimper turned into another sob and Angela found herself sucking in a few needy gulps of air in between.

Jesse gave her a lame smile and chuckled, “Darlin', there will always be other nights.”

Angela gave him a small smile between her gasps for air but it quickly faded. Her heart was pounding again and her chest began burning. This time she couldn't stop breathing, painfully wheezing and grasping at her chest as if she could rip the hyperventilation out of herself.

Light headed and dizzy, Angela dug her nails into the front of her blouse and let her vision fade. She could hear Jesse's voice but couldn't make out what he was saying, it was all white noise.

However long Angela spent hanging between lucidity and unconsciousness was lost to her. It felt like she was fading in and out of existence. Occasionally her vision would return to her to give her a blurry view of Jesse's panicked face before blinding her again.

The darkness she seemed to float in was comforting in an alien sense. It felt surreal, like she was dreaming. And maybe I am. The small voice in her head that remained lucid reminded her, I probably passed out.

The darkness didn't mute sound but distorted it instead. Jesse's voice gnarled into itself and his speech garbled.

Her mind provided her with one clear sound: French Horns. The melody from the musical was playing over and over again in her mind.

If anything, the music was keeping her sane. Sane, but not free from fear.

A worry had set in as she sank deeper into the darkness. Would she see it again? Angela hadn't had an attack as intense as this since the first mission. Angela hadn't seen Mercy since the last intense attack.

The doppelganger hadn't returned since it's initial appearance but Angela knew it was only a matter of time until she reached that point again. Sometimes Angela thought she saw the eyes when turning corners or glancing in the mirror. There would always be nothing but open air.

The fear had crept in and boiled harshly in her stomach. She wanted out. She wanted this to stop.

And in a second's notice, it did.

Angela was back, sitting in her office chair in the med-bay, Jesse's alarmed voice and face clear as day. “A-Angie?” He asked quickly, “You hearin' me?”
The bubbling in her stomach rapidly rose and she leaned forward and motioned to the trash can beside her desk. “B-bin!” She managed to get out.

Jesse was quick to grab it and place it under her chin just in time for vomit to burst from her mouth and both nostrils.

It burned horribly and tasted even worse. The combination of alcohol and sweets coming back up at this force made Angela swear off both things instantly.

She rested her cheek heavily on the rim of the trash bin and let thick strands of disgustingly coloured drool leak from her mouth as she tried to ignore the smell when she inhaled. A quick and poorly judged glance into the bin brought more bile to the back of her throat and Angela didn't try to fight it.

As she heaved and hacked into the trash can, Jesse had taken to rubbing her back and muttering assurances between his own gagging.

“I-it's alright, just...” He turned his head and coughed harshly, his voice strained, “...j-just let it all out.”

Angela would laugh at his commitment if she could.

After she had expelled nearly everything she had, Jesse unwound his serape and held it out to her with a very mixed expression on his face.

A look from him to the cloth and he shook his head, stopping himself from gagging again before saying in defeat, “Just take it.”

She tried to keep the mess to one small corner of the blanket as she wiped her face. “I'll go get some water.” Jesse stood up and motioned to the floor, “You can just...toss it down there.”

As the cowboy crossed the small office space to the sink that stood in the far corner, the door slid open. Torbjörn rushed to Angela and frowned deeply at the scene.

“I-I'm sorry.” Angela whispered again as the guilt returned. Torbjörn scoffed at her words and brought the trash can back into the floor before taking her hands in his.

The Swede carefully pulled her to her feet and wrapped an arm around her waist to steady her. “Lets get you to bed, Älskling.” Jesse turned towards them with a paper cup of water and Torbjörn cut him off, “Go and wash your shawl, pojke. We'll take it from here.”

Jesse passed the water into Angela's shaky hands. “If you need anythin', you know how to find me.”

Angela could feel herself relax as soon as she entered her room and the door to the med-bay closed. Torbjörn brought her to her bed and left for a few moments to retrieve something from her bathroom.

When he returned, he checked the labels on two bottles, popped the cap off one and shook out two capsules. She swallowed them and emptied the cup in seconds, coughing harshly and groaning at the nausea that returned.

“You haven't been taking them.” Torbjörn said bluntly as he set the two pill bottles on the bedside table.

Shaky hands wiped stray tears and snot away as Angela tried to find an excuse.
But there was none.

She hadn't been taking her medication regularly. A part of her didn't want to. *Why should I get to have peaceful dreams or good moods after everything I've done?*

A prosthetic hand took her own and squeezed lightly. Angela met Torbjörn's gaze remorsefully as he spoke quietly.

“You can't give up when you've only just started. You have to try, Angela. Please.”

Angela's throat tightened and she rapidly blinked away new tears, nodding once in understanding.

There was a knock on the door and Torbjörn moved across the room to open it.

Fareeha stood in the hallway shifting from foot to foot, expression a mix of concern and agitation.

Torbjörn whispered something to Fareeha and gave Angela one final look before shifting to address them both, “If you need me, and I doubt you will, I'll be in my room.”

The door closed behind the soldier and the two stared at each other in silence.

Angela remained still as Fareeha gradually approached her. The bed dipped beside her as Fareeha sat, placing a hand beside Angela's just a few inches from touching.

*Don't touch her, The voice whispered, you'll taint her. Poison her.*

Angela couldn't even feel her hand anymore, her entire body felt like it was made of wood. It felt like at any second her skin would flake off and leave behind dust to be scattered to the air. Her head was heavy, her chest was hollow, and her limbs were dead.

*If only you were actually dead. None of this would have happened if you were. It would be better if your body faded into nothing, if you were obliterated into darkness.*

*You shouldn't be alive, you shouldn't have lived, you shouldn't brea--*

Fareeha's hand embraced Angela's and brought warmth back to it, returned life to the appendage.

“I'm here.”

The tears that slid down Angela's face were as warm as Fareeha's hand.

Her voice didn't sound like her own. It sounded like the cruel whispers that filled her head, that called for her to lie.

But she wouldn't lie, not to Fareeha. *Never* to Fareeha.

“I know.”

When Torbjörn told her the medication would make Angela loopy, Fareeha hadn't expected it to happen instantly or to this degree.

In the time it took for Fareeha to turn off the lights, take off her bra, and help Angela out of her pants the blonde had lost nearly all ability to speak English.
“I don’t know what you're asking me, Angela.” Fareeha repeated.

Angela shifted against Fareeha’s side and sat up to look at her in the darkness to ask again. “Wann landen die Flüge?”

Fareeha strained to try and think of what the question could be or what an acceptable answer would be, and as she was about to offer something Angela gently shook her shoulder.

“Fareeha?”

The woman immediately sat up at the tone Angela used, hands reaching out and taking the doctor's to squeeze them lightly. “I'm here, Angela.”

With a sigh, Angela lay her head on Fareeha's shoulder and pressed her nose into her neck. Fareeha released her hands to wrap her arms around the woman and was immediately hugged back.

They stay linked together for a long time before Angela raised her head to look into Fareeha's eyes. In the dim light Fareeha could make out the gleaming streaks of tears that rolled down Angela's cheeks and brought a hand up to wipe them away.

“You're okay, Angela. I'm here. You're safe.” Fareeha whispered as she pushed a few loose hairs behind her ear.

Angela’s hand followed Fareeha's to her hair and tugged her tie out, tossing it behind herself and placing her hand over the soldier's. The movement was sluggish and her eyes were drooping heavily.

Fareeha could feel her face warming at the motion and had a feeling she knew where this was going. She opened her mouth to try and put the brakes on but was stopped when Angela spoke first.

Her voice was low and her accent thick as she murmured. “Ich vertraue dir so sehr. I...”

Compared to her previous movement speed, Fareeha was caught off guard when Angela closed the distance between them and kissed her lightly.

“Du bist schön.” Angela said against her lips, pecking her again before saying, “Beautiful...Fareeha, du bist wunderschön.”

She couldn't help the shiver that raced down her spine at the look Angela gave her between gentle kisses, her heart pounding in her ears and hands trembling slightly. Fareeha wanted nothing more than to pull Angela closer and kiss her like they had in the rec room.

The bliss and heat of the kiss had lingered on Fareeha and threatened to consume her once more. The rational part of her brain told her to kiss the woman back with the same zeal as before, to continue where they left off and make up for the lost time.

It was so easy to fall back into the motions. There were so many people Fareeha had held close and kissed with every fiber of compassion in her being. But each embrace and each kiss only made them vanish sooner.

Nameless, faceless men and women received all of her affections for a fleeting moment before they took said affections and promptly never saw Fareeha again. And that feeling was a painful addiction.
Her mother never stayed, taught her to never stay, so she didn't.

Those that had chased after her were left in the dust and it was better that way. It was better if Fareeha could pretend that the hasty 'I love yous' and nights of ecstasy filled the hollow space in her chest.

And that's why when the actual rational part of her brain began spinning Fareeha felt disgust in the pit of her stomach.

*She's high on medication and drunk. You're tipsy. You have to be better than this, damn it. Angela deserves better.*

And so the blonde was pushed away by the shoulders, her head bobbing forward to try and kiss Fareeha again only to be stopped by another push.

“No.” Fareeha said with a hard frown on her face. “You're not yourself right now. You need to sleep.”

“M'not tired.” Angela slurred.

Hands reached out to lightly brush Fareeha's sides and Angela hunched inward, forehead falling on Fareeha's shoulder. She sat still for a few moments before turning quickly and practically throwing herself off the bed.

“Ange-”

“Toilet!” The doctor gasped quickly. She made it to the bathroom door when she began harshly gagging into the palm of her hand.

Fareeha dove after Angela and made it just in time to sweep her hair back before she began retching into the commode.

She took a knee beside Angela and placed a hand on her lower back to begin rubbing against her spine. Angela was shaking from how harshly she would vomit, hands taking a white-knuckled grip on the sides of the toilet and toes scrunching tightly.

They moved from the toilet to the sink, Fareeha never leaving Angela's side as the blonde began furiously scrubbing her teeth.

She seemed steadier than before. Her eyes weren't as glassy and her hands stopped shaking harshly. The one thing that remained, that was never a surprise or a change, was how exhausted Angela looked.

Once they were settled back in bed, Angela pulled away from Fareeha and curled into herself.

Her voice was muffled but Fareeha could make out what she was saying.

“You have nothing to be sorry for, Angela.” The woman sank deeper under the sheets in shame at this. Fareeha rolled over to lay against her back, bringing an arm around her torso and tugging her closer, “Come here.”

Angela obeyed and unfurled herself, melting into Fareeha's touch and leaning her head back to tuck it under the soldier's chin.

They lay together in silence and let their breathing even out, eyelids growing heavy and minds drifting. Fareeha was on the cusp of sleep when Angela spoke again.
“I'm confused.”

*Thank god, English.*

“About what?”

“Everything.”

She couldn't help but laugh at this.

“Well, I'm afraid I'm not nearly smart enough to explain everything. But I'll give it a shot.”

Angela shifted against Fareeha and placed a hand over her face, her voice slow and sheepish as she asked, “Am I gay? I-I mean...do I seem like I – it's just we...”

She paused before saying in a rush, “I've never felt like this before. With anyone. Like, ever. You make me feel different. *Es ist gut anders,* good, but I'm not...*fuck ich bin verwirrt.*”

Fareeha went rigid as Angela spoke.

Her mind was running a mile a minute and her heart was trying to beat it to whatever finish line lay ahead.

“I...” She let herself trail off while trying to find something to say.

God, she wished this conversation was happening when Angela wasn't as high as a kite. Or when she herself wasn't slightly drunk.

The only thing Fareeha truly wanted in the moment was to make the Swiss woman feel better. This was a loaded question, and thinking back to previous conversations the topic seemed to be something Angela avoided talking about.

The fact that she outright asked Fareeha, even when not completely in her right mind, made something warm bloom in Fareeha's chest.

Angela trusted her enough to ask something like this. She was at her most vulnerable but still trusted Fareeha to such a great extent.

It felt so stupid to be happy at the notion after everything they've been through.

They had almost died together. Angela actually did for a moment and she did it for Fareeha. But the fact that she trusted her enough to discuss her sexuality was what made Fareeha's heart skip a few beats.

And she'd never felt like this before. Fareeha made her feel different, a good different.

Even if the words were slightly run together and slurred, they made Fareeha feel lighter than air. *Could she care about me more than I thought? As much as I care about her? God...*

“I can't answer that for you.” She settled on. “That's something you've got to decide for yourself. You're you, nothing more or less. If you think you might be gay, then okay. You're still Angela.”

“How did you know?”

Fareeha couldn't help her nervous laughter. “I told you before, remember? I was in school...”
Angela shifted against Fareeha, worming her way out from under the sheets and splaying an arm above her head. “I don’t remember.” She groaned long and loud before rolling over and giving Fareeha a small push while complaining, “Es ist heiß; geh weg.”

They moved apart, Angela lay atop the sheets and spread her limbs out as far as possible while Fareeha tried to take up as little space as possible.

It looked like the woman was asleep, laying nearly the span of the whole bed flat on her back with her chest slowly rising and falling.

Fareeha sat up slowly to try and not disturb the woman. Her motions were careful and gradual as she pushed the sheets off her legs and began removing her jeans. Once off and placed on the floor, Fareeha began gently disconnecting her prosthetics and let them slide off the bed beside her pants.

“Deine Beine sind weg!”

She jumped as Angela was suddenly at her side, mouth agape and fingers pointing to her stumps. “Sie...legs! Woher?!”

Fareeha quickly grabbed the sheets and pulled them over herself, face flushed and fingers twitching. “They've always been gone, Angela! Go back to sleep!”

Angela flopped back onto the bed and muttered something about her back that Fareeha assumed was her meaning the ports for her wings. As she settled back in and went still again, Fareeha relaxed slightly.

Inebriated or not, Fareeha wasn't ready to show Angela her legs. She had seen her stumps and the metal surrounding them, but had yet to see what Fareeha tried to hide above them.

Fingers gently traced the crisscross jumble of scars that littered her thighs. Each nick ended and began with a new one. Some were more jagged than others. Years of practice perfected the mark to a rugged line of puckered skin.

Shame built in Fareeha's throat and she forced herself to bring her hands under a pillow, away from the scars.

It was always 'just one more, then no more'.

There were always more.

More marks, more reasons, more shame.

*Angela trusts you. You can trust her.*

But would she understand?

Angela understood how Fareeha felt: the hopelessness, the loneliness, and helplessness.

If she could understand how Fareeha dealt with those feelings was another story. If Fareeha was willing to take the leap to find out if Angela could understand wasn't something she wanted to think about.

Not to mention that this whole night was leaving Fareeha feeling so lost.

She loved Angela – *no, don't think that far* – she was attracted to Angela. Very much so. So much so that she ignored the fact that Angela was intoxicated and kissed her back.
It shouldn't have happened. She just got so caught up in the moment. The music, the movie, how beautiful Angela looked...it was a mistake.

Fareeha knew better. This was suppose to be different, if this were to become anything. And god, she wanted it to become something.

She wanted to kiss Angela again, wanted to always take care of her when she had a panic attack, wanted to show her the scars she had obtained from years of solitude and self-loathing.

She wanted to love Angela and never let her go.

The sheets shifted slightly as Angela rolled into Fareeha's side. An arm lay gently over her chest as the blonde snuggled into her shoulder and began softly snoring in her ear.

As Fareeha closed her eyes, she let her mind return to the rec room and the movie that was probably about to end. The melody glided through her head along with the message the song brought.

'Je vais vous attendre.'

When Angela woke to silence she knew something was wrong.

There was no beeping alarm, no email alerts, no reminders from Athena.

Just silence.

She sat up and tried to push her hair out of her face to no avail, yawning all the while. A quick glance at the small alarm clock on her beside table made her stomach twist tightly.

How the hell had she slept until noon?!

Angela threw the sheets off herself and started to get out of bed when she realized her state of dress.

Still in her white button down, a few buttons undone and revealing the nude bra she also still wore underneath. Her pants she could feel beneath her socked feet on the floor. What the hell happened?

It returned to her in quick flashes – eating dinner – laughing with Jesse, wine in hand – eating cookies with Fareeha and watching –

Fareeha.

Her gaze rested upon the woman sleeping beside her, pillow tucked between her head and bicep and brow furrowed. Angela sank back into the bed and reached over to brush hair from Fareeha's face.

She's still wearing her hair beads. I must have fallen asleep during the movie and she must have fallen asleep putting me to bed...

Angela smiled as she tucked her legs back under the sheets and began fiddling with the golden adornments. “You're too sweet, Fareeha.” She whispered while carefully removing the beads and
placing them on her bedside table.

Just as she tugged the last piece off, Fareeha scrunched her face together and moaned lowly. A hand swiped up to bat Angela's away and the doctor's smile grew. “Guten Morgen, Fareeha.”

An eye cracked open and Fareeha exhaled deeply through the nose, shifting to push herself up into a stretch.

Comfortable silence hung in the air as Angela waited for the woman to finish waking up. Fareeha yawned in her hand, pulled her shirt up to scratch her stomach, and stared with glossy eyes at Angela for a while before narrowing her brow and asking.

“Are you okay?”

Angela snorted and pulled her legs up and crossed them at the knees while she spoke. “Why wouldn't I be? Did I pass out during the movie?”

Fareeha's eyes widened in alarm and she quickly asked, “Do you not remember what happened?”

“What happened?” Angela's smile was gone and replaced with a deep frown.

Eye contact was immediately broken as Fareeha hesitantly spoke. “You...had a panic attack. We got you your medication and to bed and I stayed to make sure you were alright.” With a timid look she asked again, “Do you really not remember what happened?”

The blonde brought her hands to her forehead and closed her eyes in thought. “I don't...”

Her memory was still fragmented, but a few more details returned to her as she concentrated.

Jesse leaving to get the whiskey – listening to the different instruments – the ki--

Oh fuck.

“Oh fuck.” Angela gasped, hands falling to cover her mouth in dismay.

“Yeah...” Fareeha trailed off, cheeks a light pink and eyes finding interest in the sheets.

Angela sat rigid while her heart tried to hammer it's way out of her chest and her mind rushed to find something to say.

Apologize for it, tell her you're sorry and regret everything – but what if I did something else? There are still gaps that need to be filled and god knows what I could have done--

But I don't regret it...

“I...fuck.” She whispered out, letting her hands fall into her lap and her eyes scrunch shut.

Fareeha laughed and it startled her.

Why was she laughing? This wasn't funny...what the hell is so funny about this?

The Egyptian woman began nervously tugging at the tangles in her thick hair while saying, “It's not a big deal. It was just a kiss and we were both pretty drunk. It happens sometimes, ya'know?”

Angela's eyes went huge while she asked. “Normal? Kissing your friends while drunk is normal?”

“Well not like sharing food or hair brushes normal,” Fareeha quickly spluttered, face now glowing
scarlet, “but it...wouldn't be the first time.”

She then quickly waved her hands and added, “Sometimes me and my friends would go out drinking and give each other little kisses just for fun or whatever, I-I don't know – we were weird – but it's not a big deal if you don't think about it!”

The silence was no longer comfortable and instead hung heavily between the two.

What a fucking way to start the day.

Angela let herself collapse onto the bed and covered her face with her hands again.

*Say something, damn it. Stop thinking so hard and just saying something.*

*She said it was normal, maybe it is. You've never known what normal is anyway. Don't question it just accept it and move on.*

Heat rushed from her chest up to her face as more memory returned. A finger lightly pressed against her lips as she remembered how soft Fareeha's lips had been against her own.

With a sneaking glance, Angela took in the other woman's appearance and let herself flush further.

Hair a mess, shirt wrinkled, shadowy edges under her eyes. But her eyes were focused, still observing the sheets intensely and brows tugged together slightly as she frowned.

Blue eyes traced the tattoo, following it's swoop to stare at Fareeha's physique again. *Gott, she's beautiful.*

“You're--” Angela stopped herself quickly from voicing the thought. Fareeha met her gaze and the blonde immediately recovered from her stutter.

“You're too kind, Fareeha. Truly. Thank you.” She sat up and began fiddling with her hair as she spoke, “I...feel I haven't said that enough. Or perhaps I just don't know how to say it properly. But I do know that I...”

*Care for you a great deal more than you and I both know.*

“...admire you very much.”

The Egyptian woman chuckled. “You don't have to say anything, Angela. It's what friends do.” She looked away again and quietly said, “I...admire you very much too, and I'm glad you trust me to the degree you do.”

Angela sat up once more and placed her hand beside Fareeha's. Their pinky fingers brushed lightly and slowly linked together as she spoke, “I know I've said it before but you can trust me as well, Fareeha. I know you don't like to talk about yourself very much, but I feel like you let me talk too much sometimes.”

Fareeha was quiet, finger limp around Angela's.

The silence was comfortable once more.

“How did the movie end, by the way? Did they wait for each other and get married?”

*No.*

“*Yes.*”
Stop lying.

Tell her the truth. How can you be so hypocritical? How can you want her to trust you when you
don’t trust her enough to tell her?

But tell her what?

How quiet the nights were after a failed surgery? How unimaginable it was to have a family again
only to lose it again? The hollowness she felt now and always?

Why subject Fareeha to these torments when she herself was dealing with her own? Why should
Angela burden her with the information that more than once the doctor's wondered what it would
be like to not wake up in the morning?

They had both lost everything again and again, why does she need to constantly remind Fareeha
of that? Of how horrible their lives are?

What kind of hellish truth is it to tell someone suffering so much that there is no way to remedy it?
That there is no cure for this kind of sickness?

Death is the cure. But you won’t let people even have that, will you?

Angela could tell Fareeha about the few soldiers she managed to bring back. She could tell her of
the times she herself was sure she had died only to wake up spitting up blood and aching all over.

She could tell her how angry it made her to know that she was thirty years too late to save the only
two people she could barely remember.

Something stuck in Angela's throat at the thought.

But even if she could return to that time, could some how save her parents, was it truly possible?
She brought back people missing limbs, broken bodies, and torn tissues, but what if their body
was completely destroyed?

It would be like Gabriel all over again.

Gabriel, with his harsh glares and kind smiles.

Gabriel, with his thick, staining blood and chunked, smelling flesh.

He wouldn't stop screaming.

Every time a scream, a beg for reprieve. Every time a shuddering death, a moment’s peace before
being thrust back into agony.

You're a fucking monster! Tell her! Tell her the fucking truth!

She couldn't. How could Fareeha even begin to comprehend how--

Tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the
truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the truth tell her the--

“Fareeha?”

She hummed in response. Angela let her own finger grow limp, carefully sliding her hand away.
“Do you think people are born cruel? That perhaps it's fate or god's design that someone becomes evil?”

“No.” The soldier's hand came to rested atop the doctor's as she replied, “I think people are born afraid, and fear breeds cruelty. But if we can learn to stop being afraid of the things we can't yet understand, we can stop being cruel.”

She shifted herself slightly and quickly pulled the sheets back into her lap when they moved. Fareeha paused and hesitated for a moment before meeting Angela's gaze and whispering, “I want to show you something. But I'm afraid.”

Angela stared into Fareeha's eyes and gave her hand a light squeeze. “You have nothing to be afraid of, Fareeha.”

*You have everything to be afraid of.*

“I want to talk to you about myself. About...everything. But I'm...terrified.” Her movements wavered and she gripped the sheets tightly in her fist. “I-I want to trust you as much as you trust me. I don't want to hide...”

“You don't have anything to prove, Fareeha. You mustn't force yourself to do anything you aren't comfortable with--”

The sheets moved and Angela could feel the moment her body went brittle.

Fareeha wouldn't meet her gaze anymore.

Her mind was racing as her eyes raked over the scars.

There were so many of them. A motley of lines, some thick and some thin, blended together. Some were in rows, could clearly be from the same set. The more faded the scar the more jagged, and the more jagged the less cleanly made cuts.

Most were old, that much Angela was certain of, but that didn't stop her from focusing on the few lines that weren't as settled.

She wanted to be angry, to raise her voice and ask what the hell she was thinking. The trained professional in her wanted to scream and scold for such behaviors.

She also wanted to burst into tears because the woman she liked to pretend was untouchable was in fact not. The scared woman in her wanted to embrace and hide her from the horrors of the world.

Angela tore her eyes from the scars and back to Fareeha's face, to the tears that were forming in her brown eyes. She brought a hand to the woman's cheek and gently turned her face to lock gazes.

There were no words. Nothing could be said for how either were feeling.

The blonde swept a tear away with her thumb and gently urged Fareeha into her arms.

They both rest back on the bed, Fareeha's head atop Angela's collarbone as she let quiet sobs shake her body. Angela held the woman tightly as she stared at the ceiling and tried to stop her nonstop thoughts.

*I can't say anything to her. I can't tell her the truth. I can't tell her about Gabriel.*
She's fragmented and struggling. I'm unraveling into a monster. I won't contaminate her.

“You aren't angry?” Fareeha's voice was small.

Angela let her eyes close as she replied, “Why would I be angry, Fareeha; How could I be? You're hurting. I couldn't ever be angry at you for that.”

"I only wish I could have prevented this.” She bent her head to look down at the soldier and slowly inched closer, “I wish I could make you stop hurting. I want to try, however I can. If you'll let me.”

Her lips gently brushed against Fareeha's forehead and Angela scooted down to meet her face to face, wiping her tears with a steady hand. Their noses brushed lightly against each other and Fareeha’s eyes fluttered shut.

Angela wanted to kiss her. She wanted to kiss her and the scars that lay upon her body.

But the whispers of contamination remained.

She wouldn't do that to her. Fareeha could know the truth, but it will remove all the warmth and comfort that they shared. Was she ready to be without it again, ready to be alone again?

Tell her...

“Fareeha?”

...the truth.

“There is something that I have to tell you as well.”

Brown eyes met blue. “What is it?”

“I-it's...about Gabriel...and something I did...”

A slight frown. “What is it?”

“I...”

...am so sorry.

Chapter End Notes

Things aren't going very well for me. I have more ideas and want to continue this. I'm uncertain of when I'll post again.

I'm sorry.
How had it come to this?
'Don't think about it. You know exactly how.'

Written in 110 minutes. Not very pleased with it. Next chapter will be longer.

“You feelin' alright, love?”

The bag swung lightly on it's chain, free from the attacks for the moment. A water bottle was lifted and Fareeha emptied it in seconds. The last few droplets were shook into her hair before it was tossed aside.

Fists raised once more, she took her stance and began striking the bag again. Each hit left a resounding *thunk* echoing through the empty room.

Almost empty room.

“I only ask 'cause you seem quiet.” Lena pulled her ankles so that she was now leaning backwards, watching Fareeha work from her upside down perspective. “Not that it's a bad thing, but blimey 'Reeha, you haven't come to breakfast in a few days!”

Fareeha could feel her already thin patience dissolving.

Four days.

Nonstop uneasy glances, whispers that stopped as soon as she entered the room, looks that conveyed a mixture of worry and sympathy.

And it was pissing her the fuck off.

She wanted nothing more than to yell at them all to fuck off. To either storm off every time they cut conversations about her short or confront them and demand they speak their goddamn minds.

It was becoming increasingly harder to keep her anger in check.

The punching bag, with all of it's worn spots and it's rusted chain, had quickly become her sole place of solace for said anger.

But it was doing little for her now.

Lena stood and put her hands on her hips while asking, “Are you just plannin' on ignoring everyone? Me? Because I came before Reinhardt did. He's tryin' to find some way to talk to
you...but can't.”

Fareeha punched harder. She didn't need their concern. She needed them to shut up.

“And Jesse keeps knocking on the med-bay door, but Doc won't open.” Lena took a few timid steps forward and rubbed her bicep slowly, “It's not any of our business, but you we're real close, yeah?”

Stop talking, Lena. Just stop talking before I do something we'll both regret.

Another hard hit, the bag groaning audibly as another quickly followed. Fareeha could feel her knuckles beginning to bruise but didn't care. Something was about to give, be it the bag or her mouth.

“Well, we're wonderin' if something happened. You two went from being arse over tits for each other to actin' like moody tweens. What gives? You don't have to spill all the beans but your lover's quarrel is makin' it weird for the rest of us!”

It took approximately four seconds for Fareeha to put her fist through the punching bag.

Another three seconds for her to rip her hand free and hit the side of the bag again, sending sand cascading across the floor.

In two seconds she spun on her foot to loom over the ex-pilot.

One second was all it took for said ex-pilot to blink across the room in fear.

Fareeha was shaking and roaring before she had burst the punching bag.

“Can you shut the fuck up for five seconds?! Can any of you?!”

Lena's back stayed pressed against the wall as Fareeha closed the distance between them and forced her to shrink down.

“Fareeha--”

“No! You are done talking! It's my turn to talk!” Her chest was heaving, each inhale bringing with it will to scream louder. “And you can tell this to everyone else who can't keep their goddamn opinions to themselves!”

“Fareeha I'm sorry--”

Her arm moved before she realized it and it made Fareeha's heart freeze.

The taller woman bent her neck down to growl in the Brit's face harshly. “Everyone can either shut the fuck up and move on, or bring their concerns to me directly. I've had it with this shit. And if I walk into a room one more time and have to look at your sorry expressions, I won't miss.”

The chronal accelerator let out a soft whine and gradually grew brighter. Fareeha narrowed her brows at the machine and it's light blinded her for a few seconds, the air around her sinking into itself and a strange warped sound emanating from the device.

When Fareeha opened her eyes again Lena was no longer hunched down between her and the wall but instead back by the punching bag. Fareeha turned on her heel and the shorter woman's hands immediately shot up and she backpeddled further away.
“I...” Lena looked from Fareeha to the bag to the wall and back to Fareeha. Her expression remained a mixture of fear and hurt as she slowly backed out of the room. “I'm sorry, Fareeha. I'll...leave you to it...”

Her foot crossed over the threshold of the door and she blinked off down the hallway, taking with her the only sound in the room.

No, it wasn't completely silent. Fareeha's ragged breathing filled the room as she let herself lean against the wall. She tried to wipe the sweat off her top lip but ended up hissing at the pain in her hand.

Swelling had already spread to her entire hand, her fingers growing stiff and numb at the tips while her knuckles throbbed with her rapid heartbeat. The knuckles of her index and middle fingers were sunken in slightly, the skin around the area an angry and vibrant red and the pain the most severe.

Fareea stared at her injured hand and let the realization of what she just did cut into her like a knife.

The one thing she never wanted to do to anyone, she did. She reached that damned point again and burst into a fit of rage. But she took a swing this time. She could have hit Lena, and god if she had...

A rush of nausea overcame her at the thought.

It wasn't suppose to be like this. Fareeha wasn't suppose to be like this. She had to be better. She had to.

And how could she even begin to apologize to Lena, to explain to her anything?

_Hey, sorry I nearly broke your nose and yelled in your face! I've just got a lot of pent up emotion and no outlet for any of it due to the fact that I've been forced to be what people need me to be instead of what they want me to be! I'll buy you a beer later!

Fareeha kept herself pressed against the wall as she made her way out of the gym, ignoring the still spewing punching bag.

The halls were quiet as she walked. Her feet carried her aimlessly towards an unknown goal and she couldn't bring herself to care where they took her. The hollowness in her chest had rapidly spread across her entire body, sans her throbbing hand. It grounded her in a sense, stopped the unnatural feeling of brittleness that coated her skin.

_How had it come to this?

_Don't think about it. You know exactly how.

Fareeha felt like her body and mind had been muted. She was walking towards something but unsure of what. It was an odd feeling, the want of an order from someone to tell her what to do. She was a mindless, brainless body again, so who was going to give her a gun and tell her who or what to shoot?

The pain in her hand had grown and pulled her away from those thoughts and to a new one. She knew where she was going.

The med-bay door had never looked so cold and sterile before.
“I went to collect more supplies, more power cells for the converters, but when I returned the body was gone. The only thing left was a thick layer of dust.”

Angela still had her back to the soldier, still facing her desk with an unnatural rigidity.

“I believe that after so many attempts at restarting the cells in his body, they deteriorated into nothing.”

Fareeha’s entire body shook as she sobbed into the palm of her hand. She couldn’t remove her eyes from the floor, couldn’t force them shut or staunch the tears streaming down her face. They were burning, she had gone too long without blinking.

“I told them the body was too badly damaged to have an open casket. He didn’t have any family left who questioned it. It was buried empty.”

And she mourned it. Fareeha had spent hours crying over an empty grave. Crying over her godfather, over Gabriel.

She couldn’t ask why. Angela had already answered that question. She couldn’t ask how either, and she wished she didn’t know every detail.

But the thought of an empty coffin, an empty grave, brought forth a question that made her want to vomit.

“T-tell me.” She gasped out, still unable to lift her gaze. Angela shifted in the corner of her eye to face her and Fareeha could feel her stomach boiling. “My m-mother...did you...?”

It hit harder as she said the words and she forced herself to look up and into the blue eyes that watched her. The doctor looked too calm given the situation, her expression flat and unreadable. It made the hurt and anger fester and rise to her chest.

Fareeha choked out her question again, each word laced with venom, “Did you do this to my mother?”

Angela never broke eye contact.

“No.”

She laughed without realizing, was shaking harder than before now. It wasn’t horror or anguish that made her shake, but a pure and unadulterated hate.

“I don’t fucking believe you.” Fareeha laughed again and pushed her hair back, “How can I?! After what you just told me you--”

She stood suddenly and yelled at the doctor. “How could you do that to him?! He was your friend! What the fuck were you thinking!”

Her mind was reeling as she recalled more of the details, surging forward and letting her voice
rise. “He asked you to stop! He begged you! And you didn't! Why the fuck would you do that?! You admitted that you knew you couldn't bring him back but you did it anyway!”

“You lied! You lied to me, to Gabriel's family, to Reinhardt and Torbjörn, Lena and Winston and Jesse--”

Fareeha lunged forward and pinned Angela to her desk by her shoulders, slamming her down harshly. Her tears dripped down onto the doctor's neck and desk as she asked through clenched teeth, “Does Jesse even know?”

“No. You're the only person who knows.”

She choked on another sob, pushing herself off the doctor and turning to grip the counter tightly with both hands. Fareeha lowered her forehead to the cool hardwood counter top and allowed herself a moment to weep.

Heels clicked across the tile floor and a presence stood at her side. Fareeha cracked her eyes open to stare through her hair at the woman now beside her.

“Fareeha I'm--”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Angela finally showed emotion as Fareehah rose to her fullest height and contorted her face into a snarl. “You're a monster,” Fareeha spoke lowly, “and I can't believe I ever...” She let herself trail off as her anger morphed into betrayal.

The hurt on Angela's face almost made Fareeha feel sorry for her. She looked like she had just been struck in the face, or like she had just realized what exactly she did to Gabriel.

"I'm not..." Angela gasped out, hands trembling as she lightly touched Fareeha's shoulders and whispered in a rush, "I'm so sorry, Fareeha, I never wanted to do this -- to Gabriel or you or anyone. Please, I'm not-- please don't..."

Fareeha jolted away from her touch like it would burn her and started towards the door.

“Fareeha-”

“Don't. Just...just don't.”

Her room was too quiet, too void of anything, but that's what made it her sanctuary.

The door closed and she let herself sink into the floor, staring up at the ceiling with her injured hand on her chest.

Fareeha let herself lay there and gasp, let tears slide down her temples and her body numb from the pain that filled her chest.

She was alone again. She had no one again.

How long she spent on the floor couldn't have been measured by time. It felt like she had only been lying for seconds, but when she sat up and found her phone it told the time to be eight o'clock.

With the push of a button the phone's screen expanded into a larger interface, three ellipses hovering in a small line as it bridged a connection.
The screen flickered white before something shuffled and it revealed an older man. His thin glasses rested low on his nose, his greying hair brushed neatly back and matched with the nice red sweater he wore.

His lips quirked up into a wide smile and he jokingly said, “Well how about that, the great Captain Pharah is the first to call – for once. To what do I owe the pleasure of being graced with a call from her highness?”

Fareeha let her phone fall out of her hand and clatter to the floor as a harsh sob ripped through her body, all playfulness gone from his voice as he frantically called her name.

“What's going on? Fareeha? You're worrying me, sweet pea. What's the matter?”

“D-dad…” Fareeha choked out, lifting the phone again and shuffling herself against the wall. She wiped at her tears and sniffled as she tried to even her voice out, “I'm fine. I just...missed you.”

Her father's gaze met her own and he pushed a stack of papers out of his way and propped his elbows on his desk. “I missed you too, Fareeha. Do you want to talk or do you want me to ramble?”

“Can you just ramble? Please…”

“Of course; anything for you, sweet pea.” He removed his glasses and let out a deep laugh, “You're going to be angry with me, but I got another fishing pole this weekend.”

Fareeha let herself smile at her father's voice and could feel her body slowly begin to relax. The silence was remedied with his comforting baritone of a voice. Her room felt less empty with him on the screen.

She wasn't alone. For the moment, at least.

“Last one, I swear! I couldn't pass it up, it's vintage and in need of some work but it's a beauty! You'll have to give it a go next time you visit…”

Five o'clock on the dot, the knocking returned.

“Goldi...c'mon 'nd open the door now. Please.”

Four days.

Persistent knocks, requests and questions muffled by the door, silence in between.

And they wouldn't leave her be.

She wanted nothing more than to tell them to stop. To let the door slide open and beg them to leave or even say a single word at all.

But there was nothing.

Angela would sit in her chair and stare at the clock, the wall, or drift in and out of fitful sleep.

She knew she was a mess. She knew she needed to get out of the goddamn chair and do something, do anything.
Every time she started to rise from her seat, it slammed her full force in the chest like it had just happened.

Fareeha deserved to know the truth as much as she deserved to be angry. Angela knew what she did was so far past a certain line that words couldn't even begin to describe.

As the amalgamation of shame and guilt struck her in the chest she couldn't stop thinking of the way Fareeha looked at her when she told her about Gabriel.

The voice in the back of her head got what it wanted. Fareeha now knew she was a monster and Angela could agree that she shouldn't be breathing.

It was hypocritical, really. Angela was locked away, allowing herself to wallow in self pity while wishing Fareeha would come speak to her.

_Self pity or self awareness? Fareeha won't speak to me because I'm a monster, she said it herself. Why should she even come to me? I deserve to be alone for what I've done..._

But Jesse wouldn't stop knocking at the door.

“I ain't leaving until you open this door!” His knocks grew harder until he was practically beating the door down. “Damn it, Angela! We're worried about you! You haven't come out of your cave in days and Fareeha won't speak to nobody!”

Part of her wanted to yell back that it was better that she not leave 'her cave' but the lethargy that controlled her body only allowed her to close her eyes.

“Fine! Keep bein' a moody heifer! But you could at least eat the food I'm cookin' and bringin'! Gotta eat somethin'...”

Food wasn't high on her list of priorities right now. What exactly her list of priorities was she wasn't sure, but eating didn't matter.

Angela let her eyes laze open to stare at her blank computer screen, the untouched paperwork on her desk, and the box of tools that needed to be opened on the counter.

_Just get up, you piece of garbage. Get up! Move! Fucking move!_

Her knees almost gave out as she stood from her chair. Her entire body was quaking slightly as she gradually made her way to the middle of the room.

_Yeah, now what genius?_

Something under the counter caught the light and gleamed brightly, drawing her eye immediately. The journey to said object was a trial in itself, and once in the floor Angela wasn't sure if she could get back up.

Her hand gripped the thing, small and smooth like the pedicle in a vertebra. The golden hair bead reflected light straight into her eye and made her grimace away from it.

Fareeha must have dropped it at some point. She should return--

_No, Angela tightened her grip around the bead and gently beat her head against the counter, she doesn't want to see me._

Angela wanted to see her.
She wanted to run to her and collapse at her feet, beg for forgiveness and try to explain herself better. Fareeha needed to know that she thought she was doing her best, that she genuinely thought that she could have saved Gabriel.

The knowledge that she in fact couldn't hadn't made itself known until he was too far gone, not quite human and not quite homunculus. He was in a strange place, a sort of purgatory between being reborn and being erased that Angela had to try and bring him back from the in-between state.

But being delivered from that place had removed him from existence. And it haunted Angela every time she closed her eyes, now more than ever.

She had failed, and failure was an ugly thing.

Most importantly, she failed Fareeha. She wanted the woman to trust her and for a while she did.

Fareeha had just made the leap to trust her with the knowledge of her self-harming habits. Angela made the leap to trust her with the knowledge of her greatest failure. But the doctor had fallen flat on her face from it, as she fully expected to.

Truly, she shouldn't feel so fragmented. Angela knew what the reaction would be, especially once all of the details were laid out.

There was one detail that hadn't even pertained to Gabriel's death that stayed present at the front of her mind.

“So the nanites that exist inside you,” Fareeha began while draping herself across the chair before Angela's desk, “you said that they heal everything, right? Like scratches, bruises, broken bones?”

Angela stole a glance at the woman from over her shoulder before returning to her task of fixing them coffee, “Yes that’s correct. Why do you ask?”

Fareeha watched her carefully and nodded when Angela held up a small plastic container of sugar. “I guess I’m curious is all. It took you a week to heal from Illios, right? How long would it take to heal from larger wounds?”

“It would depend on the type of wound I think.” Angela handed the soldier her steaming mug and hummed in thought over her own for a moment. “The punctures from the wings weren’t as bad as they sounded, only five inches vertically and three horizontally. Not to mention that it was the ‘inferior’ fibers of the trapezius that were damaged so-”

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“Do you think you could regrow limbs?”

Angela paused at this and frowned, Fareeha not meeting her gaze as she sipped her coffee. “Are you asking from natural curiosity or have an ulterior motive?” She asked slowly, unable to keep her gaze from drifting to the soldier's legs.

Fareeha chuckled and caught the blonde's gaze again. “I’m not asking you to magically grow me a new set of legs. I was just wondering. It took you a week to grow muscles, tissues, and skin back. How long do you think it would take to regrow a bone, if it's even possible?”

“I’m..honestly not sure. It's an interesting idea, but there is no safe way of testing it.”

She hadn't been safe when trying to save Gabriel. Recklessness provided her with results, but was
it her carelessness that caused failure?

A dark thought entered her brain as she pondered this, one that should have chilled her blood but sadly didn't.

Was it really a failure if it provided her with results?

It had always been her job, her duty to test limits and tear down walls. Angela was born to defy the impossible and find a way to make it possible. She was praised for her ability to.

So she didn't get the results she wanted, at least she got results. There had to be a reason why she was still breathing, a reason why she was left to continue living in the place of so many others.

Whatever that reason was, Angela owed it to those who died because of her to keep going.

She owed it to Gabriel, to Jack and Ana, to her parents. She owed it to Fareeha to understand exactly how the monster Angela Ziegler became functioned and thought.

Her body was finished trembling as she rose from her position in the floor, hair bead in one hand and the other reaching for the box of tools.

It had been timed once before, when the nanites were first introduced to her body. Four seconds after making an incision the blood would begin clotting, three seconds after clotting the skin would regrow and leave behind a hairline crack.

All of this would only happen if she stayed perfectly still, let her mind be clear and free of any outside thoughts or stress. It made the nanites function slower while in combat significantly, but they would still perform their duties within a small time limit.

But regrowing a bone, while being increasingly more painful to remove initially, would take much longer no matter the situation.

Angela dug in the box for only a few minutes before finding what she needed and prepared an area on the counter.

An overhead lamp to provide ample lighting, a cluster of thick gauze and blue underpads stuck in place, a selection of scalpels along with a very impressive bone saw, and a tourniquet.

The golden ornament was placed aside in favor of a thin scalpel. The silence that filled the room was suffocating.

Is it really suffocating if you're unsure you're breathing anymore?

It was no different from the quiet nights she spent in her hospital, or in a conflict zone. Angela wasted away in isolation for years. Now the only difference was that she realized how painful that loneliness was.

She was alone again. She had forced those closest to her away again.

There was no time to waste on tears, so she blinked them away. There was so much work to be done.

“Medical log, title, 'a theory'. Nanites are capable of healing wounds both trivial and severe, but have been done via conductors and inserted into the body to be extracted later. A theory: what are the limits to the nanites that are hosted in a body, and how much recovery are they capable of?”
The scalpel cut just above the first knuckle on her right thumb and Angela winced at the sharp sting before reaching for the bone saw. There were no qualms about proceeding without a numbing agent.

“Athena.”

“Yes, Doctor Ziegler?”

The biting teeth of the instrument dug into the open wound, preventing it from closing up while sending a reverberating pain through her whole arm. She didn't wince this time.

It was just her and the silence. A monster and it's faithful companion.

“I need you to time something.”

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