the world is round, honey. keep running away, you'll end up right back where you started.

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1457.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Categories:	Femslash (F/F), Hetero (F/M), Poly/Ensemble
Fandom:	Overwatch (Video Game)
Relationship:	Triad - Reaper | Gabriel Reyes/Sombra | Olivia Colomar/Widowmaker | Amélie Lacroix
Characters:	Reaper | Gabriel Reyes, Sombra | Olivia Colomar, Widowmaker | Amélie Lacroix
Additional Tags:	Slow Burn, Trust Issues, Action & Romance
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-07 Words: 34,798 Chapters: 10/10

the world is round, honey. keep running away, you'll end up right back where you started.

by hanktalkin

Summary

At twenty-six years old, Sombra decided she wanted to join the most powerful terrorist organization in the world.

At twenty-seven years old, she decided she wanted to blow them up too.

Chapter 1

I talk a lot of high shit for someone who can't go three hours without keeling over from a lack of chewing gum. Yeah yeah, I know oral fixation is a sign of being passive and needy and blah bl-blah bla—shut up Freud. I'm not a headcase, it's just been a long-running habit to have a bit of gum between my teeth whenever I need to concentrate. Or I'm hungry. Or I get bored.

Okay so that covers about every waking minute.

Now, at the ripe old age of thirty, I make it a routine to always keep some one me. It's one of the advantages of adult life; when I was a little girl I kept a piece of gum for as long as I could, once piece lasting for three weeks when I figured I could stick it behind my ear while I slept. (Hey! You would be stingy too if you grew up jackshit poor.) Now that I'm older, stabler, and more criminally lucrative, I can afford to actually have more than one piece of candy on me at a time, and therefore indulge in fewer gross customs.

Or at least, that's the plan right up until I forget to restock.

"Would you stop doing that?" Reaper demands as we sit in the shadow of the uncompleted skyscraper. "It's making me want to kill something."

"It is?" I ask, flipping my wrist away from my mouth. "That's serious then, if I make our normally sweet and loving leader want to commit an act of *violence*."

The sound of Reaper grinding his teeth is audible behind his mask, and if I wasn't invested in my current activity I sure am now. Anything to get under his skin is like… triple motivation.

"Is she chewing her nails again?" Widowmaker asks in our ears, her voice a soft drawl that manages to be both intense and perpetually bored.

"*Yes*," Reaper hisses. "*Loudly*."

"Hey like you're one to talk," I object. "You're the one who's breathing is like a bag of cats being dragged through thirty-two exhaust pipes."

Reaper growls, and the sound that rumbles in his chest only goes to prove my point.

But Widow won't give up. "Are you sure you should be doing that, Sombra? Don't you need those nails to perform your job?" To anyone else it may sound like she couldn't care less what my answer is, but I know what she's angling for.

"My nails are made from pre-hardened nonsilicon metal oxide semiconductors," I say, popping them out of my mouth once again. "There's nothing a bit of human teeth can do to them." To annoy Reaper, I begin retracting them in and out of my gloves. "Besides, I'm *bored*, there's nothing to *do* and we've been waiting for the target to show for *hours*."

All fact. Talon, for whatever reason, has decided that Mondatta's assassination wasn't enough, and they want our squad to go hunt down who's next in line for the throne. That turned out to be Eloise Carmichael who, as far as I know, is barely managing to scrap together the leftover bits of omnic goodwill in King's Row. It's not going well for her, but if Talon thinks she's too much of a threat, then might as well do a bit more of their dirty laundry.

At least, I thought that right up until our stakeout hit the three-hour mark.

"You are a professional," Reaper tells me flatly. "Deal. With. It."

"I *am* dealing with it," I say, nibbling on the tips of my nails again. "And just because I'm a professional doesn't mean I'm not human. This is how I cope with *absolutely nothing* happening."

The clacking sound as I chew my fingers *is* pretty loud, but now that I'm involved in pushing Reaper's buttons there's not much that can stop me. I can feel him glaring at me through his bone-white faceplate.

"Fine," I relent. "What do *you* do when you're bored on a stakeout?"

"Nothing. I wait. Death doesn't get distracted."

To prove it, he stands absolutely still, and stares at the building across the street. I roll my eyes.

"Oh come on, you have to get bored sometime." I slide up against his side. "What is it Gabe? Some music? A good book?" A smile falls across my lips as an idea comes to me. "Watching hot vids on your communicator?"

"Sombra!" Reaper's voice spikes as he whips around on me.

I fall back, laughing, further tangling myself in the need to poke the bear. "Why so defensive, Gabe? I hit it on the nose?"

"You absolutely did-fucking-not." He's practically yelling, obviously using every speck of his willpower to keep his voice from carrying. It's not working to well, but I doubt anyone's going to come check out one screaming guy in an abandoned building. "And you fucking know it."

"Hey, no one's going to blame you for a little stress relief while on watch. No biggie." I grin and shrug, watching his hands clench and knowing he wants to strangle me a little.

"I can't believe I'm having this conversation," he says finally, pinching where the bridge of his nose would be.

"No judgment," I promise. "It's perfectly normal. I mean, what about you, *araña*? Ever rub one out while on a mission?"

"Yes," Widow replies instantly, completely deadpan. "In fact, I am masturbating right now."

And I just fucking lose it. Reaper has to shush me multiple times, going so far as to clamp a hand over my mouth to keep from drawing attention to our hiding spot. There are tears in my eyes, and several minutes later I'm still up against the wall laughing, only barely clearheaded enough to hear Reaper mutter, "why do you have to encourage her?"

In my mind's eye, I can see Widow's smirk, the familiar curve of her profile pressed to her scope as she says, "it's a living."

And, lo and behold, Carmichael chooses that instant to show up, cutting my recovery time short.

I push myself to my feet, still chuckling, and watch her make her way into the construction project. Reaper glares at me, as though silently telling me to pull myself together, before gliding silently after her. I don't need to be told twice though—something interesting is finally happening.

I'm silent, undetectable as I stealth inside. A quick crack at the nearest panel and the elevator is mine, Reaper and I clamoring in after the other one has already whisked Carmichael away. She's scheduled to have a quick meeting today with a local politician, getting her platform organized before a charity dinner tonight. Talon doesn't expect her to make it.

The doors swing open, and we roll out onto the half-completed floor. I can see the building we've been skulking in the past five hours, and scan my eyes over its many windows, wondering which one Widow is in. I know I won't find her, but pretending I see the glint of her sights out of the corner of my eye gives me a small notion of comfort.

When Reaper busts through the door of the meeting, guns blazing, seeing Carmichael's eyes widen is almost worth the wait. Almost.

Reaper tears through her limited security, my job being to bring down her two omnic guards. They're easy enough, and before I even get to draw my SMG the target is dead and the exposed floor is covered in blood. Carmichael's political correspondent—Gooberry? Gorby? I don't remember his name—is huddle against a stack of two-by-fours, shaking uncontrollably and staring in horror. I'm pretty sure he's wet himself.

Reaper walks over to him, places one finger against the mask, and says "shhhh."

Gorby gawks at him, still shaking, but he has a flash of limited understanding. He raises a finger to his own mouth and says "shhhh?"

Reaper nods. And then we're fucking out of there, jumping to the elevator while I bring us down. I only last a moment before breaking down again, supporting myself against the metal wall.

"Oh my god, did you see his face?" I laugh, clutching my side. "And the shush thing! Did you come up with that just then?"

Reaper doesn't say anything, but I can tell he's pleased with himself. Folding his arms, he drifts into satisfied silence.

“Widow,” I say into my earpiece, “you’re going to love what I’m about to tell you.”

“Oh, I saw,” she says right back, as cheerful as she ever is. “I had a wonderful view.”

“Ha! Right, right. Sorry you didn’t get to get in on the fun.”

The brief pause where a shrug might be. “I cannot expect to be the architect of every death, yes?”

I roll my eyes, and revel in the weirdness of my two teammates. On the trip back to base I memorize every detail of our mission, recording in memory like my brain is just another hard drive.

I commit it all because I’m the only one who knows it’s going to be our last.

That this time next week, most of people I’ve interacted with over the past three years of my life are going to be dead. That—at least at some point—I’m going to kill my only friends in the entire world.

Maybe I should start from the beginning.

Okay, not the *beginning* beginning, that will come later, but the beginning of the day is a start.

Reaper informed us this morning about a mission he’s leaving on. Solo. Widow, ever the duality, was so easy to read—she looked at him, struggling between a need to pursue Death like a loyal lapdog and a condition that demanded she follow his direct order.

I was much better at hiding my internal conflict.

Because when he said, “tonight, after the mission,” every nerve in my body called out in relief and I hated myself for it. Relief is useless, counterproductive, in fact. Reaper leaving on an unexpected mission tomorrow—a decision floated down from the higher ups to invariably save his life—will only cause me more pain in the long run.

Once he finds out what I’ve done, there’s no way he won’t hunt me down and kill me himself.

While he told us, he was adjusting his knee braces. There are ones on his back and wrists too, all part of a complex system that does a little to make his condition bearable. They’re models of modern technology. Gifts for his loyalty.

His debt to Talon.

There’s more to it of course, more personal history that isn’t recorded in wires or bytes. An emotional splooge that goes back long before the fall of Overwatch, and of course whatever Reaper’s worked up inside his own head. But I know the extent of his loyalty to Talon is enough that he wouldn’t look kindly on a certain hacker blowing this whole place to kingdom come.

I'm awake now, lying in bed and thinking how it all came to this. I'd joined up differently than most of their little foot soldiers, in a way that was both carefully orchestrated and a touch dramatic. A bit of info on Katya Volskaya Talon had been so desperately looking for appeared within Novocain's files one morning, no sign of entry on the code-locked brief case. There were no clues—just the information, and a small calling card.

Talon was very willing to be friends after that.

This was meant to be a brief stint. A chance to gain some information, make some connections. But instead, I've made a different kind of *friends*.

It's an inherent flaw in the human design that is Sombra. I've always told myself that I'm alone but not lonely, because I like being a big fat liar. Los Muertos…was nice. *Is* nice, when I come back home and indulge in some old contacts, but it's never the same, and you can really tell how being unable to make a friend until the age of nineteen shaped me. A lonely fucking childhood produced a lonely fucking girl and…damn if this team doesn't make me miss having people.

It wasn't supposed to. I mean, it's a damn *terrorist organization*, and I've been playing the part so well I've forgotten that my original goal was to gain as much as I could from this place and then leave it a bleeding, burning shell. Theoretically, I don't have to go through with that part of the plan but…I know what's in my best interests. Once Talon found out what I stole, they would go to the end of the Earth to make me pay.

I could hide. I'm very good at that. But in the end it'd just be another nuisance/obstacle/distraction from the bigger picture. The end goal. The thing that's bigger than all of us.

So now I'm here, staring at the ceiling, floor plan of the facility as clear as if I'd pulled it up on my hologram instead of my mind's eye. This place is the lifeblood, the beating center of Talon. But organizations aren't just places; that's why I need to destroy the brain too. Tomorrow the building will go up in smoke and their systems will go down in void and I'll be long gone from the rubble.

It took years of work to figure out a worm that will be able to bring down the mass of Talon intelligence in one go. It won't be complete (no virus is ever perfect) but any remaining semblance unity within the organization will be gone. It will either reform too weak to do anything, or might be forced to disperse all together.

There won't even be any people left.

Doomfist, O'Deorain, Widowmaker, Novocain, Korpal, Reaper, Maximilien, Fu, Vialli, Blackburn…

The other image I can conjure in my mind. It's a list of people that will be on base when the bombs go off, several dozen names consisting of every member of Talon with a worthwhile position. There's another list, the thousands of cannon fodder, and I browse through that one occasionally wondering if I should bother to memorize the names of all people I'm going to kill. The flimsy moral justifications for my actions stopped a long time ago, as did kidding

myself into thinking I'm ridding the world of evil. There's no point to it, no lasting effect to turning things black and white. There's just big picture and small picture.

Talon thinks small. I think big.

*Doomfist, O'Deorain, **Widowmaker**, Korpal, **Reaper**, Maximilien, Fu, Vialli…*

Things like Reaper's sudden relocation don't change the bigger picture. Minute variables. In the end, just one man can't bring Talon back to power in the time it would take to be a problem for me.

*Doomfist, O'Deorain, **Widowmaker**, Korpal, ~~**Reaper**~~, Maximilien, Fu…*

That's why I'm going to win. That's why I'm going to find out who runs the world, because I don't let small things stop me.

*Doomfist, **Widowmaker**, Maximilien…*

But a glitch in code can bring down the whole system.

Widowmaker…

My worm is dormant now. Asleep. God I wish I were too.

Morning. Time for work.

There's only one briefing today, and after I show, there's no one to miss me for the remainder of my mission. That's all I need to act normal for, one meeting, and then I'm home free.

I can't stop staring at her through the whole thing.

She's sitting as straight as always, absorbed with whatever the busybody-for-the-day is talking about. It's like she's magnetic, every angle she's poised at dragging my eyes toward her. When I see her it's hard not to remember how she usually is—on a mission, cool and detached but with that something that simmers just beneath. She's not always like that though. Some days she leaves the bareness of her own room to join me in on the third floor, sneaking in to Reaper's quarters and drawing his ire when he eventually finds us. But he's the owner of the only couch in the entire base, and I guess we just look too damn comfy sitting there in the cushions and watching his TV, because he always relents eventually.

Sometimes, he even joins us, chewing us out when we get inevitably popcorn between the cushions.

That and more, a dozen other memories, flood my brain while I'm looking at her. The meeting ends, the agents file out, and my blood is trying to eat my face alive. (I know what you're thinking: poor, stupid Sombra. Grows a heart, and realizes eleven years too late that she's in the wrong business for it. Well shut up because it's nothing I haven't told myself a million times already.) I've chosen my path, I'm not going to unchoose it, and I don't have room for regrets.

She hasn't left yet. She's there, staring down at a mission report, not noticing how I've been looking at her all morning. I could talk to her, get those last words I hadn't let myself have with Reaper. Or, I could turn, and make sure the worm gets a healthy breakfast.

I know which one will hurt less.

So I go, except I can't leave the base entirely when there's still things to do. When I first designed the worm, my initial plan was to hijack the full-organization self-destruct drive, blowing both the physical base and its information network to smithereens. (And yes, Talon has that. Like the lack of self-awareness to how closely they tango with supervillianry is enough to bring you to tears.) However, that purge requires unanimous approval on part of the counsel, or at least another two years of undetected code breaking by me, so I go with option B. I'm already pushing my luck here as it is, even if I didn't have other, grander plans.

The worm activates, seeping its way into systems and preparing to detonate. It's still undetectable, and will be until it's too late. Like I said, I don't need to kill Talon—just do enough damage to make it insignificant. Kick out its supports. Thin its numbers.

And not be one of those numbers when it goes off.

It's time to go, and as I walk through the corridors I don't think about what I'm leaving behind. The security. The way it feels when there's a presence at my side and a voice in my ear. I absolutely nope, don't, nu-uh, think about that, and instead check the time-

"Um," I say in the empty hallway because *um??????*

My connection to the worm puts detonation time at eighteen minutes.

This can't be fucking happening. I mean??? What?? How??? I gave myself at least an hour to get out but…fuck I've been working on that worm for over two years, something imperceptible must have changed in the time I'd been modifying it; the security was easier to break than I expected or-

Seventeen minutes.

Okay shit. I can figure out how I messed up later, for now I need to get down to my stashed motorbike and get the hell out of here before I'm killed by my own creation. It'll be enough time. It *will*.

So I fucking sprint down the hall like my life depends on it.

Sixteen minutes.

Because it does.

Thirteen minutes.

I don't care if I look suspicious now, all I'm thinking about is surviving to the next day-

Ten minutes.

And everything changes. My mind is blank, empty of any thought but panic, when I round the corner and slam directly into Widowmaker.

I bounce off her like a flea, falling on my ass while the sturdier woman looks down at me with one of those perfectly raised eyebrows. “Going somewhere, chérie?”

A second ago when my brain was shutting down is entirely preferable to now when my entire conscious is screaming with different thoughts. I need to leave, no more time to lie but now that she’s standing in front of me all I can think about is *her*. So maybe it’s that: the fact that my plans are shit and I might die and all logical thought is draining into my toes-

That’s what makes me do it. Wiping away all my plans with one stupid, impulsive action.

I grab her wrist and tell her, “run.”

What happens next shouldn’t. If Widow hesitates, or laughs, or in anyway acts in the way a normal person should, things won’t change, and the horrible premonition I suddenly have won’t come true. But Widow doesn’t recoil. Her eyes widen when she sees the state I’m in, and that precise little brain of hers does a million calculations to arrive the conclusion that something is *very wrong*. And when I say the word *run* with more conviction than I’ve ever said anything in my life, she does.

She obeys.

And we’re gone.

Suddenly the world is topsy-turvy because I’m dragging the sniper along behind me while non-existent explosions ring in my ear. We tear down into the basement, on the bike as I rev it, her arms wrapped around my chest before we speed out into the desert beyond.

The worm eats its way to the core. The self-destruct goes off.

Chapter 2

As the bike glides across dirt roads, I do what I do best: overanalyze everything until I'm trapped inside my own head.

What the fuck did I just do? Not the whole blowing up Talon part, that I've been making my peace with for quite a while, but, Sombra honey? Why the FUCK did you just scoop up Talon's single most dangerous agent and put her on your only escape vehicle? You stupid bitch?

God I hate myself. And yeah I'm panicking but you would be too if you had just thrown out three years worth of work over *sentimentality*—not only that, but I couldn't have picked a worse tagalong for my whimsical mercy.

(I can still remember the day we met, the sniper standing behind Reaper like the shadow's shadow, looking at me with disdainful eyes. I said something along the lines of, "ah the itsy-bitsy spider I've heard so much about. I'm glad we'll be working together~"

Widow stopped, looked me directly in the eye, and said, "I know more ways to kill you than you have teeth."

The next several seconds were spent covering the fact that I was trying very hard not to swallow loudly. I came up with a random quip to keep my cool, but I don't think it was a very clever one; by the end of the introductions Widow was smirking and Reaper looked like he was trying to keep something down.

Years later I would realize it was uncontrolled laughter.)

I've gotten over most of my initial (let's not call it fear. Let's just say…) wariness and formed a better relationship with Widow over the course of our partnership. However, the fact that we were on the same side was a crucial part of that, and I don't think it's a big leap to say that essential fulcrum is now in doubt.

Widow's clinging to me tightly, but her attention is behind us, her head turned toward the distant base. Her hand's squeezing one of my tits so hard it hurts, but I figure it's the least of what I deserve considering what I've done to her, so I suffer the drive in silence. My fear of her is tempered by pity—I've basically just erased all she's ever known. Talon's gone, and soon even the heat in our wake begins to fade.

The miles stretch on, and it takes all our gas to make it to night. Widow never stops looking back.

I pull up the safehouse, three miles out from the road, completely camouflaged into the bracken and desert scrub nestled here. My ass is sore from driving all day, and as I stretch I get my first glance at Widow. It's about what I expected: her eyes are blank, impassive, but not like when she's intentionally emotionless before a kill.

Now, there's no spark or predatory intelligence beneath it. She's simply crushed.

I pull the bike under a tarp to protect it from the elements before I begin to work on the security into the safehouse. To anyone who happened find the place without me, it'd look like just a door in the desert, completely equivocal to what lies below. But that's what Sombra's best at, isn't it? Three virtual locks and a password later and we're in, down into the temporary sanctuary.

Widow follows me in a haze. She sits down on a plastic chair as soon as the opportunity arises, but all I want to do is pace. I don't know how long until her shock wears off—or if she'll decide to come at me when it does—and I'm not much match for her in a fair fight. There are no weapons in the base save my own, but I've heard stories about assassins who can kill you with just a pen.

I'm going to need to be proactive.

The safehouse breathes of old tech and even older dust. Sand covers almost everything, from the chairs to the bodies of long-dead beetles stuffed in the corners, surrounding Widow as she sits with her head bowed. A flicker of the sink light glints off the silver disks embedded in her temples, the implants just visible beneath her pulled-back hair. They're for connecting her nervous system to her helmet, feeding her information through seven additional eyes while not overloading oh-so-human brain, but she doesn't have her helmet. Nor her gun, nor any venom for her mine. I've cut her off from everything, leaving her a sad, lonely woman sitting in my basement.

She looks up, eventually. She's processed enough to look me directly in the eyes and ask, "Sombra. Did you do this?"

I handcuff her.

It's a good thing Widow's so out of it, otherwise I'm sure I'd be dead before I could even try shit. But as it is, I slap the digitally locked cuffs on her, and am able to retreat alive with an expression that looks kind of like (-_-)

Widow looks down at her cuffs and says, "…I see."

After that it's…really, really awkward. I think about how it might have been more merciful to boot her off the bike as soon as we were out of the range of the blast—abandoned, yet alive. At least then I wouldn't have ended up showing her my base. Huh. Which I'd thought of that half an hour ago. Well, guess I'll just call that Giant-Ass Mistake #2.

The silence stretches on as Widow continues to look between me and the cuffs. With a tilt of her head, she says, "so what are you planning to do with me?"

"Do with you?" I blink, not in the least bit prepared for this conversation.

"I assume you don't need my services personally, otherwise you would have found some way go through Talon more easily," she continues. "What is it then? Selling me to the highest

bidder?”

I groan, rubbing my eyes and marveling how every decision I make is the exact wrong one. “No, I’m not- *dios bueno*Widow, I’m not going to fucking *sell*you.”

“Why not?” she asks, as though she’s asking why I don’t like cilantro instead of asking why I’m not a human trafficker. “I’m the greatest weapon to ever be created by Talon, the most deadly combination of neuron-development and genetic engineering ever conceived. What other reason could you have for kidnapping me?”

“Okay, first of all, I didn’t kidnap you,” I explain, putting my hands on my hips.

She raises an eyebrow. “Then am I free to go?”

I pinch the bridge of my nose and wave my other hand wildly at our underground bunker. “No, *obviously*not.”

“Can I contact any of my colleagues?”

“No.”

“Then can you at least take off these handcuffs?” She raises her wrists, causing the little sensors to beep wildly.

I think of pens being expertly driven through my windpipe. “…No.”

She lets her head tilt in a way that was both equal parts sarcasm and unsurprised disappointment. “I see. Defiantly not kidnapped then.”

I can tell the conversation is getting us nowhere. I whisper*honestly honey, if I could un-kidnap you I would,*in Spanish, before flying to the various screens on the walls. I know Widow doesn’t understand, and I don’t really want her to. There’s too much to explain, and the truth is only going to make her hate me more, so it’s better to let her just stew in her own conclusions.

“What are you doing?” Widow asks as I beginning dragging data out of the safehouse’s tech.

“Purging this place,” I say, already forgetting the whole *keep her in the dark*plan I made less than .2 seconds ago. “We’re not staying here long, so get ready to move soon *relájate*.”

“Where are we going?” Her voice is so plain. If I didn’t know what I know about her I’d almost say it was innocent.

“Away.”

And that’s all I say. I can’t let her go—not when she could lead Talon back here and possibly track me through the old equipment they’d find—and I can’t just leave her here. She may be subdued now, but I know that once she sets her mind to it, no prison I construct can hold her. Somewhere, in the dark part of my brain I don’t like to remember is there, I hear *there’s always another way to get rid of her.*

I shut it down immediately. (A little hypocritical, maybe. After all, I was 100% ready to murder her this morning, but if I wasn't able to leave her to her fate, what makes me think I can do the deed personally?) So instead I pack, grabbing what I need and arranging for another transport. Widow's cuffs come equipped with a scrambler, which should keep her from getting a signal out even if she *did*manage to find a communicator, as well as a shock feature I can activate just in case…things get out of hand.

When I'm ready, I turn to see her exactly as I left her. She's watching me, and her face is blank but I know how much betrayal must be going on just below the surface. I manage a smile that doesn't reach my eyes. "Come on *araña.* Don't you think it's about time you got out of the house?"

"Why do this, Sombra?" she asks me less than an hour after we touch down in Erbil.

I look up over my kebab and give it a small wave. "Why? Well, I won't lie to you: I have a weakness for the deep fry." I take a wonderfully juicy bite.

She doesn't humor me. She might never again. Instead she says, "you know what I meant."

I raise an eyebrow. "Do I?"

There's no inflection in her voice when she says, "why did you kill Talon?"

The accusation catches me. It turns me stiff, like she has the ability to reach into my chest and grab a hold of my still beating heart. (Maybe she can. I don't know how many tricks she's picked up from Reaper.) The way she says *kill*instead of *destroy*gets me, and I feel like I saw the conglomerate much differently than she did.

I shrug. "I didn't like what color they painted the cafeteria." The joke is weak, even by my standards, and Widow continues to gaze listlessly at me.

"Is that all?"

I can tell that, like many of my conversations with Widow, playing coy will get me nowhere. Reaper, if he gets annoyed enough, will eventually give up on trying to pry me open, but Widow has a well of determination deeper than the pits of Hades.

Rolling my eyes, I make a show of pretending not to care. "Listen Widow, the world's better off without Talon in it. I knew that coming in, and I knew that going out."

"So you planned to do this from the beginning?" she says and I mentally smack myself for letting that slip. When I don't respond she presses, "why join us then? Why pretend if you were only here to martyrize?"

And suddenly it seems like *us*doesn't refer to Talon at large. I can't look at her, nor hide behind my kebab (which is now down to a nibble,) and I wish the Earth would just swallow me up. I can't tell if Widow is genuinely hurt by my betrayal, or if she's just trying make me feel guilty, or *what*but it's working.

She steps forward and I instantly reach for my gun. Maybe was just an attempt to pleadingly touch much me but I can't be too sure—her face reveals nothing either way.

Instead she stops, and with the smallest hint of pain in her voice she asks, "was it always a lie?"

"No," I blurt, because dammit I'm back on my bullshit again. The alleyway is cramped, out of sight from the city streets so Widow would attract the least amount of suspicion. (A purple woman might draw *some*attention in a place like this, but a purple woman who also appears to be an unwilling hostage most certainly will.) The heat is suffocating, and I stumbled on to say, "no it wasn't- I mean at first but I…look I just needed some of Talon's intel. You guys were never meant to be part of the equation."

"Intel," Widow says. "…On what?"

"Nothing you need to know," I cut, and chastise myself. I was just weak enough to fall for her, to feel actual guilt, and now I'm unstable enough to start slipping up. Widow shouldn't know about that. Shouldn't know anything about the bigger picture. "Come on. We have another plane to catch."

She sense's she's lost me again, and follows me out again into the side streets.

After Erbil it's St. Petersburg, then Kyiv, then Bitola, never staying in a city for more than a day. I'm doing what I can to shake Talon's tail, so whenever they do decide to hunt me down they're going to have a whale of a time. In my mind, the mysterious organization wear's Reaper's face, and it's all too easy to imagine the demon hot on my heels as I prance around Eurasia.

In this weird sort of vision I've concocted for myself, he's coming after me in all his fury, doing all in his power to bring Widowmaker back. Of course, I know that's not true (as far as he knows, Widow died with all the others in the base explosion) but the mental image is enough to keep me up at night.

After a while, even that pretext is starting to sway under the burden of time. I've stopped running from Talon and started running because I don't know what to *do*. Widow hasn't tried to escape but I can't expect that to hold forever, and *I'll think of something*has turned into *let's just get to the next day*. I can't move on to the next stage in The Big Plan with her hanging around her neck, but every solution I come up with is a dead end. Not only do I *need*to move on but I *want*to move on, and short of killing my best friend the only choice I have is trying to go on with my mission with her along for the ride.

This whole time, Widow's been strangely…inquisitive. Usually she doesn't care what or why she's fighting, but now she just can't leave me alone about my ~motivations~

She also isn't as torn up about the loss of Talon as I thought she would be. Perhaps she's still in shock, but honestly she seems more perturbed that at the fact I almost killed her than that I destroyed her overseers.

…Although now that I say it like that, fair enough.

“If Reaper would not have gone on his mission, would you have killed him as well?” Widow asks at one point, as we arrive at a discrete location outside of Giza.

I sigh, wondering if I have enough energy to have another conversation like this. “You say that like he’s not going to die, *araña*,” I tell her as I push into our sanctuary for the night. It’s an old gas station, one that didn’t survive the transition to electric transportation. “When he figures out it was me, he’s going to come after me. One of us probably won’t survive the encounter.”

Widow doesn’t respond, and for a second I hope my morbidness has scared her into silence.

I’m never that lucky. “You are so sure of that?” she says after a moment.

I pop my back, pretending like I’m too preoccupied to answer. I never did explain to Widow that saving her was a stupid accident, and I think it’s best to let her go on believing she was all in the plan. It certainly seems to make her less likely to seek revenge.

She’s glaring at the back of my head. “What is so worth it to you that you would kill him for?”

I should’ve learned by now that stony silence is never a way to win these arguments. I sigh. “Look *araña,*you’re not getting any more out of me. We’re on a need to know basis, and you’re the last person who needs to know.”

She looks right back at me, and I find it hard not to falter under the spotlight of yellow eyes. Certainly lesser people have been cowed by the assassin.

Finally she relents, turning away. “I’m going to find a bathroom,” she says, signaling the end of the conversation.

“Knock yourself out,” I tell her, but she’s already gone.

I usually don’t like letting her out of my sight, but I’m tired of standing of awkwardly in the corner while she takes a leak, so sacrifices have to be made. Instead I dig around the turned-over shelves, foraging for snacks.

Widow takes a long time to get back, and she returns to find me chewing on a fifty-year-old chunk of Hubba Bubba. She makes a face of disgust.

As we bed down for the night, I know I’m going to make a decision soon. I watch Widow eat water chestnuts from a can and consider the worst possible scenario if I decided to bring her along. The data I’d gotten from Talon makes my next goal clear: Tibet, a long-forgotten Chinese research center that Talon had intelligence on but whose mysterious origins they never thought to dig deeper into. They’d never paid it any mind, but I’m not them. I know the signs.

We could make it there within the week, and it’d be remote. If I left Widow somewhere in the mountains it might be distant enough to keep her isolated-

“Sombra,” Widow cuts in, her small canned dinner left on the linoleum floor. “How long do you plan to keep doing this?”

I look away. “Go to sleep Widow.”

There’s one long pause followed by- “*No*.”

I blink, surprised by the sudden harshness in her voice. When I look up, there’s a fire I haven’t seen in days, igniting every muscle in a killer’s body. “Hey, I said to drop it-”

“No,” she repeats, and for once I shut up. “I am done with ‘dropping it’. I am done with your constant dodging and pretending like nothing means anything to you. I know you, and I know whatever is going on, it is something *I want an explanation for.*”

“I…” It’s more words than I’ve heard her speak all week, and it doesn’t take much to batter me into silence.

“Shut up,” she tells me. “Even if I am your prisoner I will not sit by without knowing why all of this happened. You show up in our lives, pretend to understand and then destroy the organization I’ve been with for almost a decade. So tell me Sombra.” Her eyes bore into mine. “What was worth killing us for?”

She’s sitting up, cross-legged, but body language twanging with fury. She hasn’t made a move toward me, but my mind flicks to the shockers in her wrists in a reflex of fear.

But it’s more than fear than makes me close my eyes. There’s genuine hurt in her voice now, one that’s protected by a shell of her own rage. If I had any doubts of her authenticity, they’re washed away in light of the facts: Widow’s never tried to leave me. Not because she’s given up, but because she hasn’t wanted to, because she doesn’t want to kill me any more than I want to kill her.

For the first time there’s actual remorse for what I tried to do at Talon, one that isn’t muddled in the self hatred of my “mistake.” I’ve taken the only good thing I’d found in years and tried to crush it underfoot. Why?

And yeah, I realize *why*is exactly what’s she’s asking too.

“I can’t tell you,” I say, because I’m incapable of saying *I’m sorry*.

Widow breathes through her nose. “Do it anyway.”

I open my eyes and look at her, at a loss. I’d been considering ditching her in Tibet but…no. No I wouldn’t be able to either. I’m still lying to myself after all this time, unable to admit another reason I haven’t left her behind: there might be a very small part of me that’s too weak to let go. She deserves something, after I’ve forced her to live long after what fate intended.

Plus, by the end of this she’ll either be on my side, or dead. I take a breath, and flex my nails.

“Okay,” I say as I stand. “Fine. I’m going to show you who runs the world.”

I sift, brining up everything I need to summarize the last decade of my work. I suddenly spin, showering the room with purple screens, all displaying the same image.

Widow gazes upwards, the symbols reflecting in her pupils and the disks on her temples. It's a stylized eye, black ink and accented with three dots both above and below, set against a red background that now fills the gas station with a hellish glow.

"I call them Iris," I say, waving a hand to the images. "When I was nineteen, I had a run-in with them, and they sent me this as a warning." I smirk tiredly. "I'm never good at listening to warnings."

"They are…like Talon?" Widow guesses, examining the images.

"No," I have to keep myself from laughing. "Compared to Iris, Talon might as well be a bunch of playground bullies. No offense."

There's a threat to the way she points her chin at me, and I choose to ignore it.

"I'm one of the few people who they've gone out of their way to un-subtly displace, all because at one point I'd gotten too close. I've been more careful now, finding ways that they can't track, and every day I get a little closer to the secret I almost stumbled upon eleven years ago."

I know my voice is starting to unravel with awe, but I can't help it. All these years I've been chasing Iris and I've never said their name aloud. All these secrets, kept in drives or my own mind, but never spoken—it's hard to vocalize it in a way that captures how massive the conspiracy is.

"Why did you join Talon then, if you were so busy hunting?" There's no accusation in Widow's voice, and the strain in my throat lessens just a little at that.

"I needed information. A lot of it. And once I was done I needed to make sure Talon didn't know *why* I'd needed it." It's a rather simplistic way of looking at it, but it will do for now.

I change the images to the data I'd taken from Talon, a small sampling of it. "They didn't know what to look for, but I do." I step over, sticking my finger against a satellite image of the Himalayan Mountains. "That's where I'll find the next clue. As long as they don't know I'm coming and torch the place first."

Widow stares, and I realize I'm breathing heavily. I carry on like that, unraveling and explaining as much as I can to someone who hasn't even begun to understand how connected everything is. I don't think about how I'm weakening myself, how if she goes back to Talon then I'm basically handing over a key to everything I've ever learned. Instead, the only thing that passes through my mind is how much lighter I feel.

Eventually I run out of things I can say that don't lead further down the rabbit-hole of data mining. Widow is still sitting there, processing.

“So yeah,” I say trying to keep my voice calm. “That’s why I tried to kill you.” I swallow. “…Sorry about that.”

She closes her eyes for just a moment. Then she looks up at me. “I see.”

I fidget, waiting to see if she’ll say anything more. But she doesn’t, instead freezing in silent contemplation. And, after all my explanations, I’m just so damn tired, that I crawl back into the small nest I’ve made for myself to feel days of jet lag hit me all at once.

Widow is still looking back up at where the floating images used to be. I feel the need to say something in closing, so I tell her, “and, uh, that’s where we’re heading tomorrow. So gets some sleep.”

That actually registers with her, and she lies down without a word. I still have sensors in her cuffs that will tell me if she tries to come at me during the night, but I have a feeling I won’t need them. I’ve pacified her, for now.

As I close my eyes I wonder yet again what I’ve gotten myself into.

We’re slow to leave Giza since Widow’s been dragging her feet all morning. (Okay, it’s not entirely her fault—I was the one that needed to shove my pockets with several pounds worth of gum.) I can barely look at her now, though from brief glances it seems like my revelation has hardly affected her at all. Maybe she doesn’t believe me. Maybe she thinks I’m crazy, or I’m just hiding more lies. God I wish she was right.

Unfortunately, because of all this, I’m not terribly attentive.

In the crowded streets of Giza, I shoulder our way through alleyways and dust, tripping over myself and everyone else until I round a corner and freeze. He’s there. Right in front of me, head to toe in black armor and looking very *very*pissed.

Reaper folds his arms across his chest. “Sombra. You better have a good fucking explanation for this.”

Chapter 3

My first instinct is to bolt.

After all, when has the great Sombra not run from a fight? But he's way too close, and even though his arms are folded and not on his guns, I know he could easily kill me where I stand. He hasn't though. Instead, he's tapping his foot like he's my dad catching me after curfew instead of my coworker catching me stealing his best friend.

At the thought I turn and look behind me. Widowmaker is still there, leaning against a stone wall and completely nonchalant. She's not even blocking the path really—her foot it tucked casually behind her other ankle and she could be knocked over by a breath of wind. But the effect is the same as though she were standing firm: I'm boxed in.

"I'm *waiting*," Reaper emphasizes.

He sure is. I think that maybe if I close my eyes and open them, this will all turn out to be a bad dream. I try it. It doesn't work. Damn.

"Gaaabee…" I say tossing open my arms invitingly. "Long time no see."

"Don't. Try. It." Each word is through gritted teeth, and the walls of the alleyway seem to lean in even closer.

I swallow. "Try what? I'm just happy to see you." A bold-faced lie. Happy he's alive, yes. But happy to see him, I am not.

But then again, he's not attacking. Doesn't seem to be out of touch with his anger. "You're in a lot of fucking trouble, and if I don't like what I hear in the next five minutes, you're going to be in a lot more."

"Pssh," I bat my hand at him nonchalantly. "You're overreacting."

"*Overreacting*?" Oh now I've fucking done it. "***Overreacting***? If anything I am *under reacting!* I have been looking for you two for a *week*, I didn't even know you were *alive* until last night!"

"Well that sound like your pr-" oh. That was…not at all what I was expecting. Does he really not know? That's impossible, he has to have *some*idea of what's going, why Widow's with me and not dead. I look behind me again. Widow just shrugs.

"You going to finish that?" Reaper demands, regarding my half-hanging sentence.

I don't know what to say anymore, but my eyes have stopped darting for a way to translocate out of the alley every half-second. The tension goes out of my shoulders. Fractionally.

Reaper sighs, and I guess that's good enough. "Come on, we can discuss this somewhere else."

And just like that my urge to flee goes down the drain. I know it's not the way out of this one, and leaving will actually make things worse, at least until I get all of this sorted out. I follow Reaper in a daze, at least until he stop abruptly.

"And take those off of her," he orders, pointing roughly at Widowmaker. "You're a real piece of work, you know that?"

Sheepishly—because somehow Reaper's made me feel embarrassed about this whole fucking thing—I step over to Widow. She puts up her wrists for my convenience, and I quickly tap open the layers on the digital lock.

She smirks, the first time I've seen her do so in weeks. "*Merci*." As soon as her hands are free she palmheels me directly in my jaw.

We follow Reaper through the streets, me nursing my sore mouth and Widow trailing casually behind me. It's a lot of twists and turns until we arrive at where Reaper's been holing himself up, a passage through the city that will be impossible to retrace. Something about his refuge itches the back of my mind, and the irritation persists until I finally remember there used to be an old Talon compound in the area. Heh. So close to the belly of the beast, and I hadn't even realized.

Of course the beast's belly is now empty and cramping, the dozen or so soldiers that were supposed to occupy it nowhere to be found.

He leads us in, a open room that looks briefly lived in. Maps coat the walls, and Talon's signature decorating style is seeped everywhere in the furniture. And by *signature decorating style* I mean *black, metal, and uncomfortable.*

Reaper kicks a chair out towards me. "Have a seat."

"Don't mind if I do," I say, sweeping it up with as much bravado as I can manage. He stands across from me, gloves pressed to the table. Widow lurks away.

"Now that you're…*comfortable*," he enunciates, watching as I prop my feet up on the table, "start from the beginning."

I don't actually know how. Not when I'm still unsure what Reaper already knows, or what exact story he believes. I start, "well, it all began in a little town outside of Dorado—we couldn't afford to have the birth at the hospital you see-"

Reaper's fist slams on the table, cutting me off with a jolt. I pull my legs back.

"*Dammit Sombra*." And he sounds…in pain. "Never a goddamned straight answer. What the hell is wrong with you? When exactly were you planning to contact me?"

My mouth hangs open at that, and my expression must tell the whole story.

If I could see his face, I know his eyes would flicker. "…You weren't were you? God fucking…"

"She was afraid you'd kill her," Widow says, the first words she's spoken since I took her cuffs off.

I turn and glare. "Hey! I said he *might* kill me."

"Or you might kill him," Widow finishes.

"…Alright, yeah. Fine."

Tension coils and Reaper's shoulders, and for once I feel a prickle of fear I usually reserve for Widow. Sure they're both equally dangerous, but somehow knowing Reaper's past makes his shadow not stretch as long, at least in my eyes. That's why calling him *Gabe* has such an appeal; it forces the monster out into the light.

But now I'm not so sure it was a good idea to fool myself so wholly. The Reaper in front of me still has his claws.

"You want me to start from the beginning?" I say suddenly, because I know I'm running out of options. If I give my truths, they're more likely to give theirs. "Fine. I'll start from the beginning. For the past two years I've been designing a program to take down Talon's security. I blew up headquarters by hijacking the self-destruct systems-"

Reaper waves his hand dismissively. "I know headquarters was you. Widow told me all that in the call."

"Well if you already knew that then-" Then his words hit me. "…Wait. She *called* you?" I whip my head around to the assassin behind me. "How? I had a scrambler on you! Your hands were tied! How did you call him?"

Widowmaker shrugs. "Payphone."

I think I would prefer the whole getting stabbed with a pen. "P-payphone?" I sputter.

"There was one in the Seven Eleven we stopped at."

"*Dios mío*." A fucking *landline*?? That's how she'd evaded my security??? "I am…so ready to hit something."

It would be funny except for the fact that it's not funny. Not in any conceivable away. I put my head in my hands and let my nails sink into my scalp.

"…I think I have broken her," Widow said simply.

"Mmmph," I reply.

My miniature breakdown allows me a small amount of sympathy from my interrogators. That's good, since I really, *really* need it. For once in my life I don't have a single idea of

what to do—no blooming schemes, no half formed plans. All my contingencies allowed for unforeseen complications, not mistake after mistake of my own doing.

I think I've reached the point where I've run out of ways to improvise.

"Sombra," Reaper says, and is it my imagination, or his voice slightly softer than before. "I want to know what's going on."

I sigh, and drag my nails through my hair. "…What, exactly did Widow tell you on…'the call'?" I use some self-control not to glare at her while I say it. After all, I don't blame her for getting around me. In fact, it would be admirable if the way she accomplished it weren't so damn stupid.

Widow glares right back at me. Her cuffs are now retracted into a portable cube, which she casually tosses up and down while watching the interrogation.

Reaper pushes himself off the table a bit. "Well first, she let me know you were alive. Second, she said you'd kidnapped her, and that you were the one responsible for the attack."

"True and true," I allow. It surprises me a bit that he cares he cares that much about our wellbeing. Well, maybe he cares about Widow's wellbeing. Those two have always been close. "Though lets clear something up. I never meant to bring Widow with me, or to have you off base at the time. It was all a couple of weird-ass coincidences. That's why we're out of funds in the middle of Egypt—I'm at the end of my rope."

"Just a coincidence?" Reaper asks, sounding like he's raising an eyebrow. "Didn't know you believed in that shit."

I suddenly feel Widow's eyes boring into the back of my neck. It's uncomfortable to be me, especially when an ever-growing part of me is glad I didn't let her die. Still, it wouldn't be good to let either of *them* know that.

"Hey," I shrug. "After this week, I'm willing to be a believer." Reaper looks at me in a way that makes it clear he isn't. I change the subject. "From the fact that we're having a friendly chat and not a showdown, I'm guessing no hard feelings about Talon? Sorry for the trouble then, I needed them out of the way and I thought you *buenos amigos* would be a bit more upset."

There's a split second chill in the room, and Widow and Reaper share a Look™. I don't know what it's about before it's over, and Reaper's talking to me again.

"-explain later. For now, I still need your whole story, so if you're done wondering if you can trust us, spill."

Rubbing my temples, I ask, "can't Widow give you the rundown? She certainly was a fountain of knowledge last night."

"It should be from your mouth, Sombra," she says, but I don't look at her. Her voice is surprisingly gentle, like she totally didn't smack me in the face an hour ago. "Go on. Tell him

what you told me."

I swallow. I know where this is heading. But if I don't then she will, so for only the second time in my life, I begin to explain Iris. Reaper pulls himself up a chair halfway through, and it doesn't take an expert to see he's sucked in. I'm not as steady this time, what with double the audience, but I work through.

If you had asked me last month this is what I'd be doing, I'd have slapped your ass and called you a liar. But by some fucking miracle, Widow and Reaper aren't with Talon anymore, and neither and I, and in a bizarre fucking way it's just too good to be true. If I'd known they'd give it up I…well, things would be a lot different.

"And there you have it," I say, flicking off the holograms. "Pretty reasonable, right?"

"If giving up your entire life to go hunt down the illuminati is reasonable, then sure." Reaper rolls his shoulders. "Perfectly fucking understandable."

"You don't believe me," I say drily. Of course. Now I remember the other reason I've chosen not to tell people.

He shrugs. "I don't know what to believe. But if anyone is going to find, 'Iris', then it's going to be you. Assuming they exist."

My teeth grind together, and I feel a stab childlike annoyance. The sudden pang is surprising, even to me. I hadn't realized that was a sore spot.

"*Bueno, eso es bueno*. Just great. Glad we're all friends again." I smile with all my teeth.

Reaper looks like he's trying to decide if I'm being sarcastic or not. (Hint: I usually am.) Widow finally leaves her spot in the shadows to stand next to him, and I'm hit with a strange feeling of déjà vu, remembering a glossy image of introductions. I shake it off and continue to smile.

"Hmmm," Reaper says eventually. "…It's time we took a break." He looks over at Widow. "You need to recover from your 'whirlwind tour'."

"Hey, what about me?" I put in with fake indignation. "I was traveling just as much as her."

"Yeah. Because it was *your* tour."

That's the end of the discussion, and within minutes we're all finding places in the compound to be as far away from each other as possible. Well, I am. When I leave the room, Widow and Reaper are huddled together, speaking quietly. I don't know if it's just my imagination, but their hushed whispers sound tender, almost affectionate, and I catch a glimpse of Reaper gently touching Widow's elbow before I'm out the door.

I miscalculated. I miscalculated but I can't even take the energy to blame myself for it anymore. Too much too soon, all falling apart.

*It's okay, I can work through this,*I lie, and then find an abandoned bunkroom and collapse.

I only barely fight off a panic attack. This suck, suck, double sucks, the walls closing in at me like I'm at the bottom of a trash compactor. You thought I was bad when I was on the run? Being hunted is nothing compared to the panic of having a five-kilo bowling bawl chained to your leg.

It's with those thoughts that I jerk awake, not remembering when I hauled myself into one of the bunks.

There's blood on my hand from where I've chewed my nails until they bled. I slip my glove back on, and take stock of the past day, trying to plot my next move. But the claustrophobia is overpowering, and I end up sitting on the bed, holding my knees and realizing that every minute here is another chance for Talon to regroup and stop me. I stand.

I need to get away from them. I can't kill them, and I can't use them, so I need to leave. Now.

I'm wretched and crusty from a week without a wash, but I guess I just don't know how to stop running. There's nothing to pack, and within minutes I've made out of the bunks and toward freedom. Maybe I could see how stupid I am if I had a clear head, but that just so beyond my reach at this point it's laughable.

So it's a good thing Reaper's there to point it out for me.

"Out for a little walk in the moonlight?" he seethes, smoke disappearing off him. He's stone still, standing between me and where I want to go.

"….no….?"

He makes a very audible *uh-huh* sound.

Damn him for being as silent as a ghost. I'm nowhere near the exit to the compound—he's caught me before I've even begun.

"…Gabe? Can I ask you something?" I take his silence as permission. "Why aren't you trying to kill me?"

The noise he makes can only be described as a snort. "If you think I'm blindly loyal to Talon, you are *sorely*mistaken."

The equipment, the vendetta against Overwatch, the high-ranking leadership position…that should have been everything. Enough to get a clear understanding of how The Reaper ticks. There's something I've missed, something I've overlooked…

"It's her, isn't it?" I mutter. "The only reason you're not being a right bastard to me is because she asked you not to."

There's a brief moment of silence before Reaper bursts into that dark laughter he always does.

"What? What's so funny?" I demand.

The masks leers at me, condescendingly, like he's considering explaining to me but thinking I'd be to dumb to understand. "It's just nice to remember that sometimes you're just as human as the rest of us."

I don't know what he means but it can't be flattering. I say under my breath, "you're one to talk."

It doesn't dissuade him. "Let me ask you question Sombra. Why didn't you leave Widowmaker?"

"Logistics," I say instantly, the thing I've been telling myself for so long, ready at the tip of my tongue. "She might have been recovered by you or other Talon remnants. Made me easier to find."

There's a soft grumble. "Fine. Reasonable even. But why did you save her?"

And I hesitate. I've already come clean that I hadn't intended to but Reaper isn't prickling for revenge. Faced with it so bluntly, I have no answer.

He nods at my silence. "You know, if I thought Talon was a danger to Widow, I would have moved her. But they weren't. They didn't care that she's regained her memories, they only care if she suddenly had an emotional attachment to them."

The statement makes sense but for some reason…it blindsides me. And I suddenly realize why: Widow isn't the key because she asked, Widow's the key because *he cares about her more than he cares about Talon.*

I blink. He shrugs.

"Talon wasn't a threat to her. You aren't either. That's why I'm not being 'a right bastard' to you."

I shake my head. "That's it? You were…planning to leave Talon all along?"

"*Planning* is a strong word." He cocks his head, clearly enjoying having one up on me. "We have a line. One we agreed to use in case we both needed to go AWOL. Widow called and explained that you're a nosy little bitch, but that you're alright." I swear I can see something twinkle behind the mask. "But I already knew that."

"I don't…" Don't what? Don't understand? Don't know what to do? All of the above. "How'd it all get like this, Reaper?"

He shrugs again. "Fuck if I know. But I know I can only afford to be Vindictively Angry about so many things at one time." He begins to walk away, leaving me standing in the desert night. He looks back. "Sombra?"

"Yeah?" I ask weakly.

"Do you really need to find these people?"

Iris. He means Iris. “…More than anything.”

“…Widow wants to help you. And I go where she goes. So maybe put that through your self-inflated ego next time you try to do it alone.” And then he’s gone, ready to go hang upside-down and get some shut-eye.

Maybe he’s right. Maybe I should learn how to stop running.

Chapter 4

The research facility is larger in real life. I've only seen a small portion from the satellite images, and the rest is tucked safely within the mountain: secluded, out of view. It's had a long and rich history, starting with its creation by the Chinese government and prompt failure in terms of omnic research. After that, it drifted into the private sector, and traded hands over and over, no one realizing the value of a totally isolated base for less-than-legal-activates. That was, until it was acquired by Iris.

It's not owned by Iris of course—they're far, far too smart for that—but one of the dozen shell corporations that operate its menial activates. Maybe 'shell corporations' isn't a good descriptor either, since I'm sure that anyone who actually manages these places has no idea what's going on behind the scenes. Iris doesn't work from the top. They're a parasite.

"Is there a reason we're just standing around?" Reaper complains next to me. "Come on, or I'm going to freeze to death for real this time."

I watch him start toward the facility, trudging through the knee-deep snow. Pulling my scarf more firmly around myself, I shiver, the Himalayas taking a harsh bite out of my resolve.

That's not the only reason I'm jittery, though. Ever since Reaper stopped me in Giza a week ago, the strange support he and Widow have given me has been hard to manage. First off, because I'm still questioning Reaper's motives, (I mean, do you really think this international terrorist is going to go drop everything just to come on a extended espionage holiday with me? Not unless there's more going on here), and secondly because, even if it is genuine, it's adding up to all the wrong intentions. I feel like I don't deserve it, like he and Widow should have just let me run and continued to hate me from afar. But they don't hate me. They've told me so in their own…unique ways.

The other day, when convoy we'd paid to hitch a ride with got lost its traction, Reaper's arm was across my chest before I could fall into the seat next to me. Before that, while in the cargo hold of the plane, I'd woken from an uneasy nap to find Widowmaker's blanket draped around my shoulders.

I don't understand either of them. They way they're treating me may have been normal when we were all on a team together, but now that we're a couple of belligerently connected acquaintances, nothing seems to make sense anymore. Hell, I still don't even know why they're accompanying me here. (When we first set off I was to rattled to ask, and asking *now*would just be weird at this point.) Not that I'd get a straight answer anyway.

I usually give all my gift horses careful dental inspections, but this time, I'm just too tired.

Reaper's already made a nice trail to the facility by the time I follow him, taking the swath he's cut through the snow. At some point he turns around, and glares when he notices. "Really? That's why you've been stalling? Just to mooch off my slipstream?"

I smirk. "Hey, it's not like you're using it."

His implied eyeroll briefly lifts my spirits, but other than that the banter feels…forced. It's too strange pretending nothing's happened. To distract myself, I look behind at Widowmaker, the assassin slowly trailing behind us. She's wearing a large, blue, puffy coat, one that seems to swallow her slim body whole. It's only on at Reaper's insistence, after a several minute altercation between the two of them.

*I don't care if you can't feel anything,*he'd huffed at the time. *Just looking at you is making me cold. Put the damn thing on.*

That had been the end of that. I'm glad it ended in Reaper's favor, and not only because Widow now looks like a very large blueberry.

The three of us make it to the indent in the mountain, where snow ends and concrete begins. After that, it's still further until we touch against the first doors of Shíwǔ Gāo Research Center.

The locks are simple, decades out of date, and the mountains have loosened any physical barriers. Reaper breaks the second door with ease, wood splintering after being frozen for so long. It's a good thing this is only part of the façade (even super-secret bases need reception) since breaking something further in would probably result in a defensive shutdown.

"So…" Reaper says, turning in a careful circle to look at the arching concrete walls and minimalistic cubes that serve as the décor. "This is what you're looking for?"

"Dull right?" I ask. "Honestly I was expecting more monolithic screens and mustache twirling."

"Do you think this place will have answers?" Widowmaker cuts in, asking the same but more directly.

"I'm hoping." I step up to the first set of automatic doors, sliding in a universal keycard that shorts it out.

"Will we be facing any resistance?" Widowmaker idly taps against the assault rifle in her grip. It's not *her*gun, but it is *a*gun, one that will have to do until we can get another one up to her standards.

"This place hasn't been touched here in years," I tell her. Just then, we all hear a distant clattering, like a sheet of ice has finally decided to fall through the facility's roof. "…But you know the drill. Stay on your guard."

"I'm always on guard," she informs me. "I am so on my guard, I'm practically on your guard as well."

I help Reaper pry open the doors now that they're frozen shut, and shoot her a wry smile. "Thanks for that *araña.* Somebody has to."

The way she looks away like she's trying not to smile is awfully familiar. It curls a memory of a different mission, one identical to this one in every superficial sense; danger, a freezing

building, and the great unknown of what we'd be facing. That time they're hadn't been opposition, but that didn't mean the mission went smoothly—our extraction went down in a storm, leaving us stranded until Talon could send another helicopter.

It'd certainly been a unique experience, huddling together with a couple of murders who, at the time, were less than friendly. But being trapped with them had taught me some things, (that Reaper cracks his knuckles when he's anxious, that Widow isn't nearly as immune to the cold as she pretends to be.) The memory stings a little, reminding me what I've thrown away. Certainly they're being less-than-hostile to me now, but that doesn't mean all is forgiven. That, and the running fact that Reaper doesn't believe a word of what I say.

Deeper into the mountain, at least ten floors down, and I find something. Reaper swings out of the nonfunctional elevator shaft to find me kneeling on the ground, an ancient disk drive in my hands, connected to something somewhere. I follow it, a single cord dipping beneath the floor, and when I tear away the tile it reveals the backplane.

"Jackpot," I hiss.

I knew if I came to someplace this rich with secrets, I'd bound to find something left behind. Sure Iris is careful, but nobody's perfect, and it's harder to purge a whole facility than to fry a nineteen-year-old's hard drive.

My fingers flex, extracting data within seconds, the encryptions no match for the great and magnificent Sombra. A dozen images fly past and there's data, so much data, more than the human can understand in the half-second they appear. There's so much, there *must*be something useful in here. I can feel it.

"Great," Reaper grunts. "I hope you find something that makes you happy."

I ignore him.

"Do you hear that?" Widow asks, pulling Reaper's attention from where he's watching me.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see him glance around. "…Yeah. I do."

I hardly listen to them, watching as the backplane comes to life at my touch, purple lights flickering deep within. They blink, as though waking up after a long sleep.

"Sombra."

Bits and pieces flit my vision, and I try to comprehend them even though I know I can't. Something aches inside me, stronger than relief. Hope. *Vindication*.

"Sombra," Reaper growls. "The power's coming on…"

"I'm almost done…" I promise, barely aware as he's moving away into a darker corner of the room where a pair of shapes loom.

My concentration is divided between him and the hack in progress, the lights in the floor spreading like fire. It ignites one of the decorative cubes in front of him, coating it in array of

glowing seams.

“Sombra!”

“I know!” I shout as the room glows. “I’m almost d-”

At that instant, the backplane in front of me shorts, bursting into flame at the exact moment the cube in front of Reaper slams out a massive metal arm.

I leap back, sparks landing against my jacket, and Widow raises her gun at the omnic prying itself free from its dormant state. Another is already transforming out of hibernation, snapping upwards with a *thunk*and spinning its head on the three of us.

“Automated defenses!” I warn too late, and the second omnic raises its fist above Reaper.

One of Reaper’s shotguns was knocked away in the fall, but the other lifts and fires into the second omnic’s chest. It shudders, and he staggers to his feet in a cloud of smoke before his first attacker can get the better of him. Widow showers both omnics, and they fall down, sparking.

“*Shit!*” I say, as more lights course out of the room and down hallways, spreading like a disease.

“You just had to go poking, didn’t you?” Reaper asks. He reaches down and retrieves his lost shotgun.

“Yes, I did actually,” I fire back, but it’s no time to be picking a fight. “They’re going to be activating from everywhere! We need to get somewhere defensive.”

“The first floor,” Widow says immediately. “Plenty of vantage points.”

I want to point out that means less cover for us grounded folk, but we’re on the clock and I don’t have a better plan. Reaper nods, I sigh, and distant banging of old metal prompts us into a run. We’re up the elevator shaft in an instant, Reaper and I clinging to Widow as she repels us up to safety.

The whole shaft shakes, and we land back onto the first floor in a tangle of limbs. I’m up in a second, pulling Widow to her feet and whipping my head around for danger. No visuals, but the sound of hundred omnics activating rings clear through the base. We charge, retracing our steps so different by light, and I almost lead us wrong a few times as the sound of attack grows louder.

I pull my SMG, looking over my shoulder and shooting the team a grin. “Who’s ready to have some fun?”

Reaper says, “this isn’t what I’d call ‘fun’,” at the exact time Widow says, “me.”

He looks at her and shakes his head.

Then we're in the thick of it, whether we're ready or not. The omnics in the lobby have activated, and that's damn fucking genius to hide security drones inside innocuous *feng shui*. I mean, we didn't give all of these things a second thought, walking right past 'em! Now they're a bit harder not to notice, what with them shooting at us and all.

Some have rifles, others go straight for the punchy-punch, swinging giant fists if they manage to get within range. They're unlike any omnics I've ever seen, all with sharp edges leftover from their cube-geometry, and small heads that swivel like a ball joint.

"Good thing you short out just like any other," I say to one as I appear behind it and gun it down. "Otherwise I might actually be annoyed."

"Cut the chatter, Sombra!" Reaper blasts two drones, one with each arm. But he's yelling at no one, since I've already slipped away again, invisible.

The ranged drones fall as Widow and I pick them off one by one, the reception clearing by the minute. And, despite his insistence that this *isn't what he'd call fun*, I can hear Reaper laughing darkly as he cuts through the mindless bots.

Iris may be smart, but their omnics sure aren't.

There's a brief reprieve, the three of us bending over knees while we catch or breath in the cleared-out lobby. "Everyone still have all their limbs?" I ask, as cheerfully as I can manage.

"Widow's missing four of them," Reaper says, and it takes me a good six seconds before I realize holy fuck he's making a *joke*.

I snort with laughter, barely managing to snort out, "holy crap Gabe, did you just-?"

He shrugs. "I have, on occasion, been known to be 'funny'." I only laugh harder, and Widowmaker finally catches on with an offended *uhg*.

The windows surrounding the lobby rattle. We sober up.

"The rest of them will be here any minute," Reaper warns. "Are we leaving?"

The question wasn't exactly directed at me, but I can feel Widow's eyes as we wait for an answer.

"…There's going to be more information in this place. I can feel it." I hesitate. "Besides, we don't know for sure they won't follow us out of the building, and we'll be in an even worse position if we do."

Reaper faces me, studying me for a moment, weighing the best course of action. Then he nods, drawing his guns again. "Alright ladies. Lets lock it down."

Somehow, him agreeing with me ignites a small ball of guilt in my chest. He's trusting me when maybe he shouldn't, when even I don't know if my judgment is skewed. Am I going to get the three of us killed over needless curiosity? But kicking the anthill and running isn't a better idea, we're going to have to deal with it anyway so-

I don’t know what’s logical and what’s excuses, but they all chase each other around in my mind, but a distant rumble means the time for decisions is up. Widow sheds her coat and hooks up to the concrete arches above us, and we prepare for the next wave.

A moment. A creaking moment where Reaper stands, I hide, and Widow aims-

And the elevator doors slam open.

Too bad these things can climb, otherwise we might have been saved a lot of trouble. As it stands, we’re in a world of shit, more of the giant omnics clamoring up to face us than there should be. I eat shit when a fist accidently catches my still-invisible body and flings me against a wall. Distantly, I can hear someone calling my name, but my ears are still ringing from the impact.

Then, a dozen robotic heads turn to me, and I mumble to myself, “*mierda*.”

I roll, dodging another fist just in time, raising my arm in an attempt to hack my attacker. I’m too slow, and I’m forced to doge again as a fist slams down.

For a second I’m worried that I’m not going to be able to get back on my feet, but Widow finally delivers on the cover fire, and it’s just enough time to slip away. Surviving the initial push is hardly something to be proud of though, when omnics are still pouring from the elevator.

A repeat of our first fight, Reaper doing the heaviest lifting, and a majority of the bots go down. Thing turns quickly though, when we hear a buzzing coming from the shaft.

“What is-?” Widow begins, but we have our answer.

Drones begin sweeping up and out, flying little omnics that look like mosquitoes if mosquitoes were the size of parakeets. I freak, batting one away before it bring its syringe-like face too close to my personhood.

More of the little cretins fly out, swarming us. Reaper is thankfully immune to the stabby bits, but I’m not so lucky; I hack a rifle-wielding omnic and gun down two more, only to feel a jab in my shoulder blade. The buzzers are weak, but sheer numbers grind us down, and even with how many I’m shooting I feel two more stabs before the fight is over.

I catch a glance of the swarm antagonizing Widow in the arches above, and try not to think about what these little shits are putting into us.

The waves keep coming. All floors converging on us and eventually…they start to slow. We thin them out little by little, leaving us as some awesome badasses that were able to weather the storm. As long as there aren’t any more surprises. I hold my breath-

But the buzzers seem to be the last of what Shíwǔ Gāo has to offer. Reaper blasts the head off the only remaining omnic, and Widow finishes her long fought aerial battle. For my part, I lean the reception desk and try to feel where the little bastard nicked my shoulder.

Reaper spots me. “Status, Sombra?” he grunts as he comes over.

“Four out of four limbs, sir,” I report, rolling my arm to see if I can detect any pain. A sound of a grappling hook, and Widow descends gracefully next to me. “How about you, *araña*? Those things get you?”

“One,” she says, indicating a spot just above her hip where her jacket is ripped. “Other than that, no losses.”

“That’s…good.”

Is it just me, or is everything a little…slow? I don’t know if it’s from the buzzers, or I’m having a nocebo because I’m incorrectly attributing the exhaustion. Either way, it couldn’t hurt to find what those damn bugs were carrying.

“Let me check these babies out,” I say, staggering over to one of the fallen omnics. I hope the soreness in my shoulder is just my imagination.

“What are you doing?” Reaper asks, hovering over.

“Analyzing.”

I run a glove over the buzzer’s face, its syringe smashed and coating the floor in some substance. I won’t be able to do a full tox screen without the proper equipment, but can at least determine if it’s a threat.

A soft beep, and sigh with relief. “Bad news: this stuff’s a extremely potent nerve agent. Good news: it’s like five years expired.”

Reaper looks between me and Widow. “…So if poison expires, does it become more deadly or less?”

“Less,” Widow says, ever the venom expert. “At most, Sombra and I are going to feel drained, her more than I.”

Even as she says it, I feel lethargy sinking into my muscles, radiating from the points of impact. I sway, and Widow slips an arm around my shoulders.

“Dammit,” Reaper mutters, irritation masking concern. “Just fucking…sit down for a while. We can hole up here until it wears off.”

We do. Or try to. We’re starting to walk toward a pair of waiting chairs when suddenly the guiding weight on my shoulder becomes crushing. Suddenly, Widow’s entire body is leaning on me, surprising us both. I try to catch us, and fail miserably.

“Uhg, Widow, what the hell-?” I ask, trying to wiggle out from under her.

Reaper’s over us faster than I can blink. “Sombra! I thought you said this shit wasn’t dangerous!”

“It shouldn’t be!” I feel mostly fine, but when I roll Widow off me, I can tell she definitely is not.

“I don’t…” she mutters, beads of sweat rolling at her forehead, even in the freezing room.

“What the hell is wrong with her?” Reaper demands, as I try to get her to the ground safely.

“I don’t know, do I look like a doctor?” I prop Widow up. “It must be…damn it must have to do with her stupid heart thing.” The heart thing, the brain thing…a lot of fucked up stuff Talon’s put in her.

Widow, still lucid, looks up at us. “That is…not outside the realm of possibility.”

“Dammit…” Reaper mutters, claw clutching the back of his hood.

Widow’s condition significantly lowers her ability to take a hit, and if her whole cardiovascular system is messed up, there’s no telling what a bit of poison can do.

“We need to take her somewhere,” I speak faster than I can think. “A…a facility or something, someone who knows how to handle this.” But Talon’s gone, as is anyone who had experience with Widowmaker…and we’re so far removed…

Reapers just sitting there staring at Widow why she quietly mutters something. I don’t know if she’s actually talking to him, or she’s loosing her grip.

“Gabe!” I snap at him. “Any ideas here would be appreciated!”

I think he’s frozen. To me, he just looks like he’s locked in place, not knowing how to respond to the look she’s giving him. I’m about to yell at him again when he finally turns to me.

“I know somewhere we can take her.”

“Well, where is it?” I say, trying to keep the desperation out of my voice.

Reaper’s just sitting there, floundering as he’s trying to resolve his inner conflict and pissing me off because Widow might be *dying*and all he can do is stall.

Then he coughs it up. “I have a fr…I guy who used to work for me. He lives around here.”

At first I don’t know what he’s talking about. My growing panic makes it hard for me to search through the mental catalogue of all of my coworker’s pasts.

“…You mean Shimada?”

“Yeah. Last I heard he was in Nepal. He’s literally the closest person we have right now.”

I look down at Widow, who still seems to be holding onto the conversation. She nods.

I ask, “do you think he’ll help?”

“Maybe. First I’ll have to explain to him I’m alive, though.”

I look between Widow and Reaper, and wish the toxin in my shoulder wouldn’t make my brain so sluggish. But if we do nothing and Widow dies…

“Dammit. Make the call. Let’s see if the cyborg picks up.”

Chapter 5

You wouldn't expect a monastery to have a private helicopter, but wadda ya know?

I'm standing with Reaper outside when it lands, spitting snow and whipping my hair against my face. The weatherproof doors slide open, revealing the ex-Blackwatch agent as he glows in the half-light.

"…Reyes," he says, as though he still can't quite believe it.

"Genji," Reaper nods. "You're looking very…green."

"Is that how you are choosing to begin this?" I would say Genji snaps it, but everything about his tone is perfectly neutral. If you didn't know any better, you'd never guess that this guy was meeting his former mentor whom he'd thought dead for half a decade.

"What do you *want* me to say?" Reaper says gruffly. "'By the way, I've been alive this whole time, sorry I didn't call?'"

"It would be a start." Genji's faceplate glares, somehow, and Reaper snorts. "The only reason I am here despite your flimsy explanations is your supposed need for medical attention."

The helicopter finally whirrs down, and the omnic pilot gets out. Another one, presumably a paramedic, appears behind Genji, and he gives them a nod.

"Assuming you weren't lying about that just orchestrate a reunion…?" he prompts stiffly, and Reaper grunts.

"She's inside."

And finally the tension breaks enough that Genji and his omnic buddies move. Reaper and I follow them inside, through the lobby that had been wisely cleared of omnic body parts. Still, Genji casts a look around as he helps lift Widow onto the stretcher.

"…What have you gotten yourself into, Reyes?"

"I ask myself that every day," Reaper says. His mask turns to me ever so slightly. I whistle and try to fade into the background.

The uncomfortable electricity between the two men lasts the entire time it takes to get Widow to the chopper. And the takeoff. And the ride back to wherever-the-hell Genji sprung up from. I spend it sitting near Widow, watching as she falls into an uneasy sleep and resisting the urge to brush a strand of black hair that's fallen into her face. By the time we're cresting mountaintops I'm literally dying from the nuclear radiation that's just *pouring* off the former Blackwatch agents.

We land in Nepal, and Widow is immediately whisked away, prompting both relief and a new sort of anxiety. I don't follow, but I can't stand another minute between Genji and Reaper either, so instead I roam the monastery in solitude. At first, I'm surprised that the omnics are letting me just wander free, but I remind myself that the monks have no reason to see us in suspicion. I'd like to keep it that way. Even we aren't with Talon anymore, the whole "wanted murders" thing probably won't go over well with a bunch of pacifists. Plus, I'm pretty sure Widow's enemies among the omnics would be plentiful if they realized she was the one who offed Mondatta.

Snow glitters and swells, catching the morning's light. I can see the sun rising in between the windows, turning the sky an ambrosia pink. It settles in squares and against my skin, though no warmth is able to penetrate the wind.

The corridors are long, and mostly empty. The few omnics I see aren't speaking any human language, opting instead for the little pings over private networks, to which an outsider has no clue except the faint feeling they're being left out of a joke. Giant golden statues line the paths, all floating precariously. I would *not* like to be around if those anti-grav fields ever lose power.

After a winding while I've found myself in the central chamber. I guess you can't call it an altar really, since I'm pretty sure Buddhism doesn't do the whole transforming blood thing. Or I guess…not Buddhism? I don't know—I never really paid attention to omnic religion. I only need to hear the phrase "pass into the Iris," to get some heebie-jo-jeebies.

There's a small bench, inset into the wall and facing down the mountain. I don't really realize what I'm doing until I've pulled open my data files and am thumbing through them, reassuring myself with their presence now that I finally find myself alone. I was able to sneak back into Shíwǔ Gāo (after the nerve agent wore off, of course) and scrub the place clean before Genji showed, but here wasn't much more that I hadn't gotten from my initial scan. At least the side-trip gave me a little peace of mind.

"Miss?"

The question snaps me back to reality—I immediately panic-close tabs like I'm a fourteen-year-old boy when he hears his mother come home—but when I get a hold of myself it's not some suburban woman in her mid forties, but another omnic, waiting patiently near the side of the bench.

"*Hola*, Sparky," I grin, completely innocently. "How can I help you?"

"Your friend is stable, if you'd like to see her."

I draw in air through my teeth. Do I? Tough question, since I know going and standing over Widow's sick bed isn't going to make her wake up any faster. And looking at her might just make me depressed. And honestly the more I stay away from the monks, the less chances they have to make guesses about me.

"Sure," the words fall out of my mouth. "Why not?"

Back through the corridors, and although the stone halls are mostly open to the elements, they're cleared of snow. Either the wind is kind to the architecture, or the monks do a pretty nifty job of keeping it clean. The monk finally takes me somewhere that could be considered "inside," and the heat radiating from a central lamp reminds what it's like to not be freezing my ass off.

I stop taking off my coat mid-zip.

Widow's there, sleeping on a covered pallet and breathing steadily, but above her is something my mind can only process as *magic* . There's a little ball, a sphere of beautiful golden light, hovering over her like how I always imagined faeries would look. The sphere is tethered to her, a bare bulb hanging from a single wire, only in a world where gravity pulls it skyward.

"What." I stare at the sphere. The sphere stares back.

"Greetings, I was just-"

"Ahhh!" I shout, leaping away from the sudden voice. I'd been so absorbed with Widow's soul floating out her body, I hadn't noticed the omnic sitting in the corner of the room.

He glides forward. "I am sorry, I did not mean to startle you."

"No yeah. It's uh,,,,Fine." I place a hand over my heart and try to shove it back in my chest. "Just a little on edge. So um…" I look between the omnic and Widow. "Mind explaining… the thing?"

I gesture at The Orb.

"Ah, yes. Do not worry, it is perfectly harmless." To show it, he moves his hand slightly, and The Orb sways over Widow. "Gabriel Reyes was interested in it too, but I assure that though my methods esoteric, they are not used without precaution."

"…I see." So The Orb is his doing. I've heard of nanotech like this before, but never used quite so…homebrew. Now that it's not so menacing, I slip into my Meeting New People smile. "Whatever works up here, you know~?" I fall into a chair placed conveniently next to Widow's pallet. "You the temple medic, then?"

"Indeed. I am Zenyatta." He gives a slight bow. "And, I do not think anyone has said this to you yet, but the Shambali welcome you."

"Shambali!" I snap my fingers. "That was it. I knew it was something musical."

Despite not having a face, Zenyatta looks amused. As he walks(?) over toward Widow's head, he says, "your friend is quite the case. There is some extensive genetic modification, and I am working on removing the toxin from her since her body seems incapable of doing it on its own."

A sour look crosses my lips, one that I can't fight down. I usually try not to think about what they've done to Widow, what they've…*made* her. Personally, she seems at peace with who

she is now, but that doesn't mean I'm entirely comfortable with it. My own modifications are one thing, but extensive physical reconditioning after *mental* reconditioning never sits quite right. Uhg, this is why I don't dwell it. After all, if she'd never gone through it all, we wouldn't have met, right?

Whatever. Selfish way to think about it or no, at least I'm better than those *pendejos* . They made her so strong, yet so breakable—a person that can shatter at the slightest touch. The amount of times she'd had to be wheeled into the infirmary numbered in the dozens, and that was just as long as I've known her.

It makes me wonder how much longer Talon planned to get some use out of her before throwing her out like a broken toy.

I feel a hand on my own. "Do not worry, my friend. She is in good care. In time, we will be able to wake her up again."

"Pshh," I wave, trying my best to sound nonchalant. "I believe you doc. Besides, she's been through worse."

Zenyatta tilts his head at me. "There is no need to suppress your worry, my friend. It is only natural to be anxious over the future of those you love."

I snort. "Love is a strong word. I'd go with…Fond acquaintanceship."

Why do I feel like he's humoring me when he looks at me like that? "I saw you and Gabriel Reyes both, when you were departing from the helicopter. People express their love differently. Some worry themselves to death over those they care about, others distance themselves, afraid of losing what they have."

Gently pulling my hand away, I tell him, "alright doc, you've made your point."

A small robotic hum replies, but he leaves me alone after that. I still spend another few minutes with Widow, just making sure The Orb isn't some eldritch eye of deceit, and thinking Zenyatta probs shouldn't make assumptions on people he's just met.

I mean? Feelings? Gross.

"You and Genji done having your heart to heart?" I ask Reaper when I find him, lurking in a village further down the mountain. "I assume that's what you were doing this whole time."

Reaper huffs like the grumpy baby he is, sinking further into the shadows. "…Something like that."

"You're going to have to offer up a little more insight *búho*," I say, pacing casually around him. "Unless you want me to go ask the cyborg himself~?"

Reaper grunts, and I can tell it's with barely restrained exasperation that he doesn't rub his temples. "He's…tolerating us. I've told him enough that he's not pestering me anymore, but things aren't exactly peachy."

“Eh, to be expected. You haven’t let slip where we’ve come from, I hope?” Wouldn’t be good for word of Talon’s destruction to come through the grapevine and have the Shambali put two and two together.

“No,” he affirms. “Not that. But bits and pieces of the truth, enough to keep him off my back.” *And Widow in his care*, but he leaves the last part unsaid.

Together, we look over the morning bustle of the Nepal village, people going about their every day lives. None of them are fleeing anywhere, or uncovering some giant conspiracy—if the world ends, they’ll be the last to know. I think when I was younger, I used to be jealous of folks like that. Now I just think it’s sad.

“This whole reunion make you reconsider your list?” I ask him offhand as a woman lays down some fresh bread at a stall. “I mean, considering you haven’t tried to make a murder-pass as of yet.”

Reaper seethes, agitated smoke rolling of him. “I’m…putting a pause on the list. For the moment.” It feels like he’s eyeing me. “Your little escapade is going to take up a lot of my Designated Revenge Time.”

“Sorry about that,” I say, not sorry at all. “But when this is all done, at least he’s right here. Easy access.”

At first, I think that I’ve ended the conversation. Reaper goes back to watching the bread-seller, and I stick a bit of gum in my mouth.

“Genji,” Reaper says, suddenly picking up on the conversation again, “was…never on the list. Blackwatch, not Overwatch.”

I *hmm*. Not as I’d guessed, but not all together surprising either. He’s always had a spot for his team. At one point, he even convinced himself that McCree could be persuaded our way when the going got tough. When he first called Genji (after a brief shouting match where we couldn’t get the signal out and were both too dumb to realize Widow’s scrambler was still on) the way he’d talked into the phone had almost sounded…resigned. I hope that in the ever changing mish-mosh that is Gabe’s loyalties, Widow and I get the fond nostalgia that he’s allotted for Genji and McCree, instead of getting tossed in the Morrison bin.

After he’s stewed in his self-imposed mission a bit longer, I remind him of my own. “It might be good to get out of here for a while. Arouse less suspicion. We don’t have to dodge questions if we’re not here to be asked.”

He looks over to where I’ve fitted myself against his side. “You’ve got somewhere in mind.” Not a question.

“I’ve been looking through the data I got from the center. Another target.” Not a good one. Barely a lead, and I’ll need a long time to sort through the terabytes of data I’ve collected from Talon, but it’s a good enough excuse for now. “How do you feel about a little detour to Australia?”

"…Let me go buy some sunglasses."

I knew he wouldn't need much convincing. No matter how worried he is about Widow, he's just as anxious about this place as I am.

I blow a bright pink bubble. He's the closest thing I have to someone I can trust, which is both sad and unwise. But what are you gunna do? "Nice. Hazmat suit while you're at it, though."

The monks, after some…persuading, are willing to loan us a transport craft that can get us to Australia and back with minimal amount of radiation poisoning. Genji, bless his heart, tried to finagle us into telling him what we're doing in the world's armpit. Reaper quickly breaks him of that, and I think the argument eventually comes down to that we're not going to drop off the face of the Earth as long as Widow's still here in pacifist-prison. That, and I slipped the monks a cool 3K to use their shit while Genji wasn't looking, so they were more than happy to pressure to him to give up his line of questioning. I wonder what they're going to use the money for. Probably another giant floating statue.

I catch Reaper with his mask off, just before we go. My mental autopilot takes me Widow's room—refusing to acknowledge how cheesy a 'just-in-case goodbye' is—only to find he has the same idea. He's sitting near the head of her now cot, watching her chest rise and fall with an expression I can't quite place. That might be because his face is hardly human, let alone readable.

The mass of scar tissue seems sway even as I look at it, the mouth full of more teeth than should be possible. I've caught glimpses of it enough times that it doesn't catch me off my guard, but it still manages to be unsettling.

"Ready to go, Gabe?" I ask, making myself known with the fizzle of my camouflage.

The only response I get is a beleaguered sigh. The pause stretches on and is just threatening to become awkward when Reaper sighs a second time and flips his mask down. Subconsciously, it's a comfort. Not because his condition is particularly horrific, but because I've long ago come to think of the bleached owl-mask as his "real" face.

"Lets blow this place."

I don't realize how huge a relief it is to be gone from the temple until we're 1500ft up and we're chipping the corner of India. The two of us are bad at hiding it, what with the way we melt into the seats, our bodies taking more space as the distance grows. (And that's metaphorical only in my case.)

We shouldn't have left Widow as a bargaining chip. The only reason she's *good* as a bargaining chip is because anyone who talks with Reaper for more than five minutes can see that she's his Achilles heel. Which is a very, very bad thing for a people like him to have. It's his problem, and my problem by extension, but I wonder where the hell it all went wrong that it became one. After all, he wasn't this doting before Talon blew-

Oh. Right. That might have something to do with him suddenly developing separation anxiety.

My bad.

It's not something we can really work on now though, not when she's out of it. Maybe when she wakes up, we can have a nice long chat about keeping our personal lives secret from people who might not be so friendly when the wind blows differently.

We're only three hours in when I turn to Reaper, asking if he'll pass some of the in-flight peanuts, and get an alarming *PING* in response.

"What the hell was that?" he asks, sitting straight up in alarm.

Another PING comes from the dashboard, and I'm a half-second faster than him getting into the cockpit. "Um…not good is what it is." Two more pings and our little green dot is surrounded by a bunch of red dots on the radar. "We've got incoming! Four aircraft on our left!"

Reaper has just enough time to say, "Sombra you better not be-" before a rocket cracks into the side of the transport.

We're tossed into the opposite wall, and I catch a brief glimpse outside the window of the black planes launching the assault. Where the hell did they come from? And who the fuck did we piss off?

All questions that aren't going to get answers as the transport shudders with another impact.

"Dammit!" Reaper shouts, scrambling to his feet. "Launch what we have! Aim for the center of the formation!"

"It's a fucking transport craft, Reaper! It doesn't have any*guns*!"

Another rocket knocks me off my feet, sending me crashing into dozens of bags of tiny pretzels. That is apparently the limit of Reaper's tolerance for my shenanigans, because he grabs the craft's controls and overrides the autopilot.

"I'm taking us down!" he yells. While he does, I look up and see another missile streak past our window.

"Can't go ten minutes…" I mutter as we race toward the jungle below us.

We're in worse than freefall, green absorbing the view, and I strap myself into the closest seat with wild hands. I realize I don't actually know what kind of pilot experience Reaper has, if I should trust that he knows what he's doing, but it's too late to doubt. We land. Hard.

Metal tears, ripping the cabin with awful screams as we break the dozen or so innocent trees in our path. I can tell when we stop more by sound than by feel, mainly because my brain's still rolling with unwanted inertia.

Now hanging from the ceiling by several exhausted seatbelts, I call, “when you said, ‘take us down,’ I didn’t think you meant like *that*.”

A pool of black smoke seeps out of the cockpit. Somehow, it still manages to look annoyed.

Reaper yanks me out of the seat instead of letting me unbuckle myself, but there’s no time to yell at him since just then the other crafts arrive overhead. We stumble out our mostly-trashed transport, I fizzling into nothingness and Reaper turning back into goo.

The boom of rockets crashing into our former transport just makes me run faster, the heat on my back reminding me of a certain base explosion. Only there’s no Widow this time, just a shadow I follow like my life depends on it, who trusts me to keep up and probably won’t slow if I do. The aircrafts hesitate above us, a pack of vultures not sure if the kill is fully dead and they’re alright to feed—it’s only when my lungs are beginning to burn with exhaustion and second hand smoke that the first plane drops down to investigate.

“As soon as they’re spread out, we’ll eliminate them,” Reaper says, rematerializing for the first time. “The terrain’s at our advantage. Purple Doppelganger should work out well.”

“Alright, but who *are* they?” I wheeze, glaring at the smoke seeping through the trees. “Indian government?”

Reaper doesn’t reply, (Heh. REAPly.) but I guess I wasn’t expecting him to. Instead, he begins to retrace our steps, the both of us fanning out to surround the craft as it lands near our own hunk of burning wreckage. I don’t think I’m getting that safety deposit back.

We wait. And wait.

But it becomes obvious as the black-clad assailants poke the undergrowth that they’re the only craft that’s going to be landing, the other three not kind enough to let us finish them off easily. It puts a dent in our plan, but Reaper and I can’t exactly reconvene at the moment to come up with a better one, so I have to sit on my thumbs and wait for his signal.

He doesn’t make me wait long.

He delivers a shot to the base of a man’s spine, creating a bloody scream that draws the attention of the whole forest. He can eliminate all of them like that with so many places to hide, but that won’t get us anywhere unless I get the other planes to get down here.

“East side!” one of them calls, thankfully one close to me. “Redirect, I want two pinning him against the wreck while the rest of the squad pulls in.”

Aaaaannnddd…that’s enough. I snap my recorder off, de-stealth, and empty my entire clip into the back of talky-guy’s head. The others fire on me, but I translocate back out immediately, appearing under some ferns and getting to work.

Reaper finds me three minutes and eighteen seconds later, legs folded and chewing a brand new stick of gum while I tap on my holo-screen.

“Are you done yet?” he demands. He’s leaking from his shoulder, fluid that one might mistake for blood if it wasn’t so disturbingly watery.

“Almost-” And I snap on the connection. It’s not perfect, but my little project might enough to fool those in the other crafts if I’ve done my job correctly. As my line to our assailants opens, I begin to play a message.

“Multiple hostiles still present. Several causalities, requesting backup.” The synthesized voice is an exact replica of the man I’d killed minutes ago. I did the best I could with such a short clip, but with just enough “static,” the people on the other side just might fall for it. They sure have the previous 6.5 times we’ve used Purple Doppelganger.

There’s a tense moment of silence when…

“…Acknowledged. We’ll come down for cleanup.”

The rest is pretty standard. It helps that I’m helping shooting now, and each crew goes down craft by craft as they land and their communication is subsequently cut off. Most of them don’t even know what hit them.

“Well,” I say, once Reaper’s killed the last remaining pilot, “this was quite the vacation. Next time lets go somewhere more beach-y.” I stretch, taking stock of the cockpit we’ve found ourselves in.

Reaper’s silent, staring at the woman whose head he’s just blown off. I’ve never seen him contemplative after a kill, and the sight unnerves me enough that I skirt around the chair to see what he’s so transfixed on. It takes a moment of sorting through blood and Kevlar to realize he’s not looking at *her,*but her uniform.

The Talon insignia is stitched into her left pocket.

“*What,*” I mutter, the shock overpowering my ability to form a decent question. “How is…?”

Reaper looks up, and I can swear his eyes are meeting mine. “Now might be a good time to tell you that Doomfist is still alive.”

Chapter 6

“How the fuck could you not tell me Doomfist is still out there??” I demand over Reaper’s shoulder, gripping the back of the pilot’s—now his—seat. He makes a show of putting a finger in the “ear” facing me.

The plane jostles slightly. There’s no autopilot in Talon’s crafts, and Reaper taking one hand off the rudder is enough to make the whole thing shudder, inadvertently punishing me for my back-seat-piloting.

“How did he even survive? Did he sneak out on a super-secret mission too?” I demand, but don’t wait for a reply. “This could throw off *everything*. If he starts sending people after me that could put my investigation *years*behind schedule.”

“Three ships full of foot soldiers,” Reaper says snidely. “Poor you.”

“Still doesn’t explain how he got away.”

“Well I’d love to have told you, but I guess I’m not in the habit of giving information to people who ***blow up my base.***”

The sudden change in his voice is almost scary, something it shouldn’t be anymore now that I’ve learned how his bite compares to his bark. But I step to the side, but he doesn’t move, though, and I’m left staring at the back of his chair.

“Besides,” he says after a minute of nothing but the grind of the engine in the vacuum-sealed room, “when we first met up I was still on Talon’s clock. Still…reading the atmosphere.”

Well fuck, *that*certainly makes sense now that I know Talon’s up and running. The pieces fall together, that old nightmare tap-dancing forward from the back of my mind: Reaper hunting us from the moment he’d gotten word, armed with Talon’s apparently still sufficient resources. I should have known it wouldn’t be that easy getting The Reaper’s forgiveness-

But he still fought Talon. So then were does that put us? Obviously we’re still on the same side for now but…He’s not letting go of the fact that I almost murdered Widowmaker and the only other person he might consider a friend.

So he doesn’t trust me. Maybe that’s warranted, but I’m still going to be bitter about it.

“Why are we even heading back to Nepal?” I grumble, if only to be belligerent. “If this plane is tracked we’ll be leading them right back to-” I cut just short of saying *her*. “…The temple.”

“It’s a known quantity,” the voice drips out from behind the captain’s seat.

I slump into one of the emergency boosters. “How’s that going to help with anything?”

“Maybe if you *stopped throwing a tantrum for five minutes*, you might think to ask *how did they find us in the first place?*”

Mouth open, I pause, nothing intelligent about to come out.

Reaper stares at the ocean racing under us. “They knew exactly where we were. Where *you*were. A fully-outfitted Talon squadron doesn’t just happen on their prime suspect in the middle of the sky.”

I’m tired of feeling dumb, and wrest control over his train of thought. “And the only people who knew where we were…”

“Were back in Nepal,” Reaper finishes.

“Are you saying someone sold us out?”

“I’m saying it’s a possibility.”

Unease grips me, and dozens of tiny cuttlefish eggs hatch in my stomach and spill into my body. When I thought we were walking through halls surrounded by possible enemies, I was more thinking in the abstract *I’m a bad girl and everybody’s against me*sort of way, not that any one of those peaceful little monks might try to shank me. I pull out a stick of Juicy Fruit.

The ride back to the Himalayas takes infinitely longer than the trip out. By the time we get there, the floor is covered with little yellow boxes and I’m just about ready to rip out the flight controls and fling them out the window. Not that I show it. I’m a picture of cool.

“Don’t land on the pad.” My nails sink so hard into Reaper’s chair I have to yank to get them out. “If we show up in a Talon craft there’s going to be questions.”

Reaper nods, setting us down on the cliffs outside the Shambali temple. The way inside is a trek, but we’re good at this, and make out way in with discretion intact.

We split, me to find Widow and Reaper…well. He has his own way of getting intel.

Retracing my steps, I find where I last saw Widow, the heatlamps now casting a warm glow as the sun escapes over the mountain’s edge, stone coming to life under orange fingers. My breath comes out slow when I see she’s still where I left her, dressed now in clean robes, fingers trailing carelessly on the ground. Silently, I step over to her, placing her arm back across her chest.

“I did not realize you would be back so soon.”

I jerk, getting off my knees and my hand twitching for my SMG. The reflex stops, but I still let my mind swing into full Analyze mode when I catch Zenyatta in front of me.

“Well I didn’t realize you were still floatin’ around,” I say, trying to make my smile reach my eyes.

“I cannot venture too far,” he says, nodding shallowly at the ball of nanotech. “Line of sight, you understand.”

I most certainly do not, but I don’t let that or the unease in my chest change my expression. The omnic’s previously friendly demeanor seems unnerving now, and I was I was better reading omnic nonverbal cues. Its all bits and static, but with a proper tuning device you can just pick up what they think they can hide.

The Shambali have every reason to hate Widowmaker. To hate us. If one them wanted to get even…

“I did not notice the temple’s aircraft returning. Is everything well?”

“We ran into a teensy bit of trouble on the way out,” I say. If he didn’t already know. Does he? The way he just floats there, sandwiching me between him and his magic ball of death is setting of more warning flags by the second.

“Is that so?” His hands lay perfectly still in his lap. “I am sorry to hear that. I hope you and Gabriel Reyes were not harmed.”

He looks unarmed. Looks. I don’t know what other skills he might be hiding, and suddenly it strikes me very plainly that there’s more to this omnic than just a doctor. I grin, teeth and all, and cock an eyebrow. “Of course,” a casual hand in the air, “after all, I’m sure you have no reason to want us to kick it.”

“…” There. Silence. And then- “Ah. I see. You are referring to the fact that your friend killed my brother.”

I narrow my eyes, attuning to the change in the room.

“I see my bluntness surprises you.” His head follows me passively. “Yes, I have known that for quite some time now. Come. I feel as though we have much to discuss.”

He turns, and begins floating to a step above the room, still within view of the sleeping assassin. This definitely has all the outward appearances of A Trap, but I’m not dumb enough to think that declining the offer is going to get me out of this. If Zenyatta really does have something in mind, he wouldn’t hang it all on the unknown of me following him. I join him on the dais.

Zenyatta…pours us some tea? And not just me, but a small cup of the steaming green stuff for him as well, set down on a square table barely off the floor.

“These are Genji’s,” he explains, casting a hand over the set. “He comes to visit me here often, since I usually do not travel far. It is…a joke between us.”

With that, he sits, sticking his legs underneath the table. I follow suit, my compliance carefully held and ready to be ripped away at any moment. For good measure, I stick a nail in the tea and run a quick tox screen.

“I shall start from the beginning. When Agent Widowmaker of Talon was brought to me, I recognized her from the reports on my brother’s death. There are only so many humans that match her description.” He holds his cup like he could take a drink if the whim so came to him. His lights meet my eyes. “If you are cautious of me because of this, it is not without basis. Upon seeing her for the first time, I wanted to kill her.”

If I hadn’t been strung as a bow, I might have dropped my drink. It’s not in my nature to be quiet, but I struggle into it, not wanting to disturb what is truing out to be I dare say is some rather important information.

“Of course, I knew that was not the way. Revenge is not a path that can be walked without loosing your way.”

I smile pleasantly. “Heh. Well, you’re better than most then.”

He sets his cup down, gently turning it in a circle. For the first time, his attention seems to be somewhere else. “I do not think I am. Anger is natural. Pain is natural. It is only when we blindly act on these feelings that we define who we are.”

“…And…” I try, “…You’re not going to, then?”

A whirring noise. “No. I made a choice not to harm someone whose life has been entrusted to me. When she awakes, I hope she too will take the kinder path.” He looks up at me again. “You three worked for Talon, did you not?”

I consider, chewing the inside of my cheek. But shit if I’m this far in… “Yeah. We did.”

“But no longer?”

I make sure to fit every genuine bit of frustration into my voice. “Yeah. Not anymore.”

A nod. “As I thought. You seem very wary of us, friend of Gabriel Reyes. Genji and I were able to uncover much of what you have been hiding, and yet have still allowed you amnesty here among us. I hope that presents to you how your faith in us is handled.”

I drink, because the analysis came back negative and the rolling in my stomach is finally starting to slow. Carefully, I ask, “so…just you and Genji know?”

“Indeed. Though if trouble arises with my brothers and sisters, I ask that you let me speak with them first.”

Maybe having someone tell you they almost killed your best friend shouldn’t make you trust them more, but its hard not to respect someone who has life and death in their hands and still chooses mercy. And hey, most of favorite people are murders, so I’m really not one to split hairs over that anymore.

“It may be a little late for that,” I admit. When he quirks his head in alarm, I push on. “Gabe and I only made it a few hours out before we were attacked. Talon forces. Very cranky.”

“And you think someone here revealed your location?”

Giving an affirmative *hmmm*, I drink some more. The tea is surprisingly good.

Zenyatta is silent for a while, weighing what I've told him. Considering we seem to be making progress here, I really hope Reaper isn't running around busting heads without my supervision.

Eventually Zenyatta, lifts his chin, saying, "I do not think anyone here would willingly commune with an active terrorist organization. Why you were attacked, I cannot say, but…I may know something that could be of interest."

He rises, and I follow him back down to the ward. (Not before draining my tea first, though.) He guides me to Widow's head, where he stops. "While tending to her, I found something within her implants. The usual neuro-connectors, but also several different tracking devices located within her body. It occurs to me now that they may have been placed there without her knowledge."

From the word "tracking" my blood turns cold. A million and one superfluous requests flood my mind, all of them bad. Trackers. They could be tracing us here. But then why only now? I'm stuck on that thought until my eyes catch the small wooden table where Widow's personal affects are neatly stacked, stepping up and grabbing the small cube Widow was so fond of toying with.

Her scrambler.

Zenyatta places his hands along her temples, fingers brushing against silver disks. "It does not answer your question, but it does deepen the mystery." He glances to where I'm staring at the cube, looking like I just found a viper underneath my doorstep. "Speaking of mysteries, I never did catch your name."

I blink at him. An omnic, and enemy. I run though my extensive list of fake names, trying to find on that would be appropriately disarming, before deciding fuck it.

"Sombra," I say. "And thanks Sparky. For what you're doing."

"Do not thank me yet, Sombra. I believe our troubles are only just beginning."

Zenyatta won't let me scrub her. I need to purge the tracking devices from her systems, but he's insistent that she's had enough people operating on her body without her consent. He won't budge, so I'm left to wander the halls of Nepal, grabbing at the edges of a theory and trying to put it all together.

The scrambler balls tightly in my fist, half forgotten, as I figure everything that's gotten us here. I have an idea, but I want to be *sure*, want to be *right*, because if I'm missing some stupid obvious detail then things might be even worse than I thought.

My hypothesis solidifies, and I arrive at my decision. It's a good thing too, because at that moment I also arrive at Reaper.

"*Uff*," he hisses, which he has no right to since *I'm* the one who got thrown to the floor.

"I really gotta stop doing that," I mutter as I rub my ass and get to my feet.

"Sombra." He's all business. "What's your status? Did you locate Widowmaker?"

"Yeah um." I don't feel good about how this conversation is about to go. "About that. Can I talk to you for a minute?" My voice is much higher than it should be, and he notices. Still, he lets me drag him aside, spilling out into an open balcony as the village glitters under us. "It's not any of the monks. Hold on to your feathers *cárabo*, 'cuz it's both better and a lot uglier."

I fill him in on what Zenyatta told me, showing the little grey cube that'd accidently been saving our lives over the past few weeks.

"-And it's only ever been off for a few minutes at most," I finish. "That's why they weren't able to find her. Why *you*weren't able to find her."

"I didn't know anything about this," he snaps, mistaking my assurance for an accusation. Unfortunately, I believe him. I'd been half-hoping that once I jogged his memory he'd come clean about the whole thing and it'd be mystery solved, but no, I'm never that lucky.

"I know boss." It's a testament to how bad things are that my voice is monotone. "But we still have a problem here."

He shakes his head. "I don't get it. If she was the one with trackers, why did they find *us*instead of coming here?"

I roll my shoulders. I'd hoped I could do this the easy way, approaching the subject as subtly as possible by starting with the scrambler. But he's not getting it, and I bite the inside of my cheek.

"Gabe." He seethes. Okay, bad start. "Gabe, the trackers were in her implants. Things Talon gave to her." He stares at me, the *get on with it*felt and not heard, which pisses me off since I'm trying to do this for *his*sake. "…And there's one other person I know with Talon implants."

The mask is burnt orange in the light of the heatlamps, concealing shock as the realization sinks in. "Sombra, you better not be-"

"The scrambler only has a certain range," I cut him off. "If there were trackers on you too, that signal would have started broadcasting loud and clear as soon as we left the temple."

I hold my breath. This is why I needed to be sure before I acted on my hunch, because although *I*figured it out, it's going to be a lot more painful for him to arrive at the same conclusion. He was supposed to be Talon leadership for Christ's sake! Above all their bullshit. Where Widow and I were constantly under threat of being deemed disposable, Reaper was always there to mitigate our mistakes. If even he's just another cog in their machine then…

"*Shit*," he hisses.

“I don’t know for sure,” I tell him. “But I can check. And if I find anything then…well. I’ll take care of it.”

The mask glares at me. It’s a lot: one to believe me that he might be bugged, another to allow me to fiddle around with his insides when I’m the last person he should trust. I hold my breath, waiting to see whether my fly-by-night-ness outweighs Talon’s.

But finally, Reaper sighs, his fists unclenching as he resigns himself to the humiliation. “Fine. Let’s just…Can we…?”

“C’mon.”

I lead him through the temple, finally stumbling on some place secluded enough that I can assemble what I need for a purge. The Shambali aren’t really big on the whole “privacy” thing, with nothing but open arches and tile floors even in the deadass of winter. But the small sitting room will do, mats and scented oils perfect for calming down a very agitated man.

He hesitates. I don’t know if its because he’s not used to taking his armor off or if its because he’s afraid of what we’ll find. Either way, it takes me a minute to get all my tools in order, and I go as slowly as I can for his sake.

He doesn’t seem any more at ease by the time I’m ready. I pat the cloth-covered floor in front of me.

Reaper grunts, but starts, slowly pulling off his amour piece by piece. I’m surprised, but then I’m surprised I’m surprised, and I fiddle with the pair of pliers in front of me. Maybe I expected it to be harder? After all, I don’t think he’s taken the full thing off all at once since the pain began. I do my best not to stare, and fail. The rest of him is sort of like his face—distorted and constantly moving, little bits in places they maybe shouldn’t be. But sometimes its calm, and I can just start to see where the shape of normal skin used to be.

But before long he’s ready, in some sort of undershirt and shorts, though its hard to tell where fabric begins and he ends. Pretending like I’m not averting my eyes, I start with the braces themselves. Knee, then back, then ankle. He grunts as I pick the first one up and haul it into my lap. I wonder if he’s hurting without it. Probably.

After the braces it’s the implants, the places where the tech fit snugly into his body. It’s a miracle of modern medical technology that they can last with the slimy stew of his body coursing around them, but I don’t take the time to marvel. I don’t think it’d be appropriate considering what we’re doing here.

I don’t betray myself as I work, wanting to save it until the end when I can make an accurate report but…

I find them. And not just trackers, but control devices: nano-shockers, hormone suppressors…Things I’d expect to be jammed in Widow’s body.

“Something’s wrong, isn’t it?”

My hand is against his shoulder blade, and I jerk a little at his voice. I'm a bit ashamed I'm so obvious he can tell even with his back turned. I withdraw my hand and—maybe is conscious maybe it's not—but he tenses at the loss. Hesitantly, I place it back, and he relaxes.

The rest of the scrub is like that, me gently half touching, half rubbing Reaper's back until I'm sure every inch of his tech is clean of Talon. When I finish, I set the extra pieces aside and give him my report in a low voice.

"Shit," he repeats, and I agree with the sentiment.

"Do you…" I don't really know how to handle this situation. Emotions are a lot easier when you're faking them. "Do you want to talk?"

He grunts. Then shifts so we're sitting side by side, casting a reluctant glance at his pile of armor.

"Not about this." His voice is pained, and I catch him eyeing the braces. The effort of existing without them for the past hour must have been hell if he's worn down enough to let me see.

"You can put it back on now," I assure him. "It's all clean."

But he shakes his head anyway. "Not…not right now."

"Okay."

I don't know what to do now. I've just reached the extent of my skills, and comforting undead ghosts isn't part of my usual job description. But I remember the slight easing when I touched his back, and think hey, can't hurt to try again. Hesitantly, I reach out, settling on taking the hand closest to me and giving a slight squeeze.

A billow of smoke rolls off him as he sighs. I let him sit against me in silence and try not to let our shitty situation cave in. Thankfully, Reaper was lying about not having more to say on the subject.

"He didn't tell me. Even when we were the only two people left he didn't tell me a goddamned thing." And I know who he's talking about now. "When I finally met up with him, he told me what'd you done and…shit, I was so ready to believe him." He blinks at me slowly, half paying attention. For a second, I swear he has two sets of pupils. "He wants you dead you know. Badly."

"He can join the club," I shrug. Something about the lack of mask changes Reaper's voice. Not just so it's no longer muffled, but it's looser now, not the stiff emo-ness I've come to know.

"Oh I'm sure he'd love to." There's almost a joke in there. "But I haven't had contact with him since Giza. I figured if Widow was still alive, then I wanted to hear your side of the story first."

"Thanks for that Gabe. I always love having the chance to talk my way out of things."

He smiles. It’s frightening almost, seeing a smile I’ve known was happening, but never had to actually confront before. It splits his face, a cruel parody of what a person’s amusement should look like.

“Doomfist was the closest thing to code of ethics that Talon had,” Reaper goes on. “He knew about Widow. That she was changing. Not back into what she was before but…” He clears his throat. “She’s been gaining attachments.”

That much I’d guessed, but it’s different having Reaper confirm my suspicions. “And he was alright with that?”

“…No. Not alright.” Reaper flexes his hands, something he’d do like he’s missing his claws. “He was going to keep quiet about it to the rest of the counsel, but he wanted us to *fix*it. That’s when Widow and I started planning to skip town.”

“Didn’t you say last week that *planning*was a strong word?” I raise an eyebrow at him. “You weren’t *lying*to me, were you Gabe?”

“Pot, this is kettle. Kettle, this is pot.” I chuckle, and he smiles again as he turns his head forward. Still, he shoots me a look out the corner of his eye. “You know, Widow wanted to include you in that little scheme at first.”

A flutter of surprise washes over me, but I hide it with a curious, “‘at first?’”

“I was in the process of talking her out of it,” Reaper says. “We were getting close to picking a solid date, when you expedited that process for us.”

I look away sheepishly. “Right. Sorry again.”

For the first time, my apology isn’t met a sharp glare and the silent treatment. Reaper just looks at me sadly and says, “I’m not the one you need to be worried about, Sombra.” He closes his eyes and says, “we all have a lot to make up for.”

I tighten my grip around his hand. It’s odd, trying to hold something that’s simultaneously trying to wiggle from your grasp but isn’t quite solid. And yet, just like everything I’ve done with this team, I manage.

Chapter 7

“You know, he’s a lot different than when he was at Blackwatch,” Reaper mutters half an hour later. By now he’s put the armor back on—whether because he’s overcome his disgust or because the pain won out, I’m not sure. Knowing Gabe, probably the former.

“Hm?” I ask, lifting my head a little.

“Genji,” he says because, yeah, *that*was the part that needed clarifying. I don’t grill him on it though, since sitting here for so long has made me stiff and woozy. Reaper goes on, “He’s… content now. Not as angry. Ironic, looking at us both.”

I shrug. “This place must have done him some good. He and the medic do seem to be all buddy-buddy.”

“Well, Genji did always have a fondness for doctors.” We lapse back into silence, but I know by now that Reaper never starts a conversation unless he has a purpose. Sure enough, a minute later he says, “…have you thought that maybe you should lay low for a while?”

“Thought about it? Yes. Actually want to give up? Not a chance.”

Reaper grumbles. “Look, I’ve seen Doomfist since Talon. After you destroyed what he saw as the world’s one shot at ‘advancement,’ there’s no way he won’t chase you until the ends of the Earth to bring you down.”

“What, *now*you’re worried for my safety?” I scoff.

“I’ve stuck a lot on the line for you,” he says. “And like it or not, I’m mixed up in your stupid quest. What I’m saying is there are tactical advantages to setting up shop here in Nepal—we don’t exactly have a lot of allies at the moment, and we’re going to need every advantage we can get against Talon.”

In a moment of rare reservation, I actually consider it. It’s been a long time since I’ve really had a headquarters; even at Talon, we were always hopping from base to base, mission to mission. If I’m being honest, I settled into the people, not the place. But before I reach a solid conclusion, a messenger appears on one of the meditation room’s two entryways; an omnic with a horizontal fold in their faceplate.

It’s the one who got me the first time, (do they really make the same guy run all their errands here?) and they say, “Sombra, Gabriel Reyes, I’m pleased inform you that your friend is awake. Tekhartha Zenyatta has sent for you.”

My heart skips a beat, which isn’t helped when I jump up and all the blood rushes to my head. I immediately begin towards the messenger, but look back to see Reaper is still on the floor.

“You go ahead,” he says when I raise an eyebrow at him. “I’ll…be there eventually.”

I would argue the point, but my anticipation to see Widow overrides it. I leave Reaper to his brooding, and power walk all the way to the medical ward.

The messenger drops me off with a curt nod, and I stop outside the ward, apparently one of the few places in the monastery with an actual door. But, despite the fact the she's only a few feet away, I pause when I hear voices on the other side of the ward's lone barrier. Maybe it's the anxiety. Maybe you can't teach a cat not to hiss. Either way, I slide against the wood and listen in.

"…I have killed more than you know." Widow. Soft and…sad? "Your faith is misplaced."

"I understand." Zenyatta. I didn't think that far ahead the last time I left them alone, more focused on bugs crawling inside of my other best friend, but now it occurs to me this conversation could go very badly. My already jittery heart rate picks up another couple beats per minute.

"You say this, but your tone tells otherwise." There's something prim in Widow's voice that I've never heard before, and it takes me a second to realize she actually sounds tired. Not surprising considering what she's been through, but the realization is uncomfortable. Widow never shows when she's feeling weak. At least not to me.

"I may not know what all you have done, but I know that there is much more you can do. There can be peace, my friend. Believe me on that. And I ask that you think on what I have said."

Apparently that's the end of the conversation, something I don't clue into until Zenyatta is grabbing the other side of the door. Thankfully, as a professional eavesdropper, I'm well practiced in the art of slipping into stealth and pretending I was never there.

I backtrack a few steps, reappear, and greet Zenyatta with a cheerful, "*hola*Sparky. Your company hasn't gotten you feeling blue, I hope?"

"Sombra, a pleasure. I am glad you arrived first. I believe she will want to see you now." His voice is warm, no clue that I'd already started spying on him again. Once I'm within the ward, he closes the door with a pleasant, "I will give you two some privacy."

Widow's up, alert. There's no trace of her earlier ailment now, the exhaustion I'd heard from beyond the door wiped as soon as I crossed the threshold. If there were any evidence, it would be the indigo under her eyes and sweaty mess that's become of her hair.

"Hey there, *amiga*," I say not unkindly.

She stares black. Okay, wasn't expecting the silent treatment. I wonder if I've done something to get me in trouble.

I try again. "So. He tell you what he found while you were down 'n out?"

"Yes. A matter most urgent. It's imprudent that you are not tending to it already."

I roll my eyes. "Straight to business as always, *araña*. No time for girl talk?"

“This girl wants to talk without her location being broadcasted for any longer than it has to be.”

Smirking, I come to rest beside her on the pallet. In all my dithering I did at least remember to bring my tools, and it’s not before I have her in front of me, relinquishing control once again as I start digging into her skull.

It’s exactly what I expected. Same trackers, same behavior modifiers; the surprise is diminished both because it’s what I’ve found on Reaper, and because deep down I always knew something like this was here. The bugs come out with a fight, threatening to start shutting Widow’s bodily functions down all the while, but I didn’t get to where I am by not knowing how to counter some rudimentary self-recycling code. Widow’s inanimate the whole time, and I’m left with a back full of black hair to stair at while the last of my tools power down.

“It is done then?” she asks me.

I’m not sure what she’s hoping to hear, but I might as well go with the truth. “Yeah. They’re all out. You’re home free.”

“Hm,” she grunts. “I thought I was home free the day Talon went up in flames.”

Clicking my tongue, I scold her, “I *knew*you couldn’t be that upset about that!” Absently, I reach forward, gliding my nails gently through the knots in her hair. She gives a brief hiss when I catch a snag, but relaxes when I get the worst of it undone. “Should have told me how much you hated that place. I could have helped, you know.”

“I wanted to.” Her shoulder blades slide with each deep breath, the bones in her visible even underneath the robe. With a turn of her head, she just barely acknowledges me, the sharpness of her profile glowing in the candlelight. “You have been speaking with Reaper, then?”

“A little.” I pick at another knot, thinking this is probably the worst I’ve ever seen of Widow’s hair. Justified, considering how long since we’ve had a shower or a decent nights sleep. Even *I’m*starting to feel effects the effects of our escape, my eyeshadow old and cracking and wings long since wiped away. “He said he tried to keep me out of it.”

“Mm,” she hums. “He was right, you know. It is unwise to trust you.”

“Yeah. And yet for some reason people still keep doing it.”

We lapse into silence, me fighting the monster and slowly winning. It’s grossly intimate is what it is, like the nights when we’d share a bottle of wine between us and just sit in silence, sucking up all the clean air in Reaper’s quarters. Widow was never one for talking but…those nights I knew were as close as she would get to friendship.

“How long?” I ask, slipping a strand behind her temple, the silver disks still glaring at me menacingly. “How long has it been going on?”

“Since the attachments?” She uses Reaper’s word. Or maybe he was using hers. “I cannot say. Maybe forever. Perhaps ever since the day they killed Amélie Lacroix, something has been slowly struggling out of the person she used be. But…I do know the day I first realized it. It was Yamoussoukro, mission four seventeen. One year ago.”

I remember. How could I not? We’d almost died, Reaper and I, trapped under the collapsed building with our communications cut out and Talon’s plan gone terribly wrong. It was my fist look into how dispensable I was, and that I might not have gotten out at all if Reaper wasn’t there with me.

“It was…” She starts again. “I realized, in that moment, that if both of you were to perish…I had no reason to go back.”

My hand pauses at her neck, her words sinking in. I never thought about what that day might have done to her, what it must have been like on the outside, able to do nothing. I guess I assumed she wouldn’t give a damn.

“At first, I considered submitting myself for immediate reconditioning. But then…I spoke with Reaper instead. The rest I am sure you can guess.”

Her strands are all straight now—silky if not clean. With careful folds, I begin to layer them over each other, small braids springing to existence while we rehearse our usual companionable silence.

“Widow?” I ask, the question coming from the room itself rather than actually putting any forethought into it. “What were you and the Shambali talking about before I came in?”

She doesn’t ask why, or blame me for sticking my nose where it doesn’t belong. Instead, she says, “I simply told him that I have no place.”

I don’t press further. I think I’ve done enough at this point.

When the braids are done, I get off the pallet, aching as I unfold my legs from their crossed position. Ah, if only to be young again, where I could spend days in criss-cross-applesauce instead of cramping after only a few hours. Even if I wasn’t done, Zenyatta is back, heralding Reaper behind him.

I wave Zenyatta off when he motions me to stay, saying, “ah don’t worry about me. Patients only get one visitor at a time, right?”

Zenyatta makes no comment, and Reaper ignores me entirely, favoring to sulk at the edges of the room while he stares unabashedly at Widow. I shrug and make my exit.

It only takes a minute of (very sore) walking to realize I’ve forgotten my tools back in the ward. Not looking forward to the Very Uncomfortable energy that was building when I left, I shrug, slipping into stealth and resolving to just pop in and out.

What I see when I get back stops everything else.

I don’t recognize what I’m looking at first. What my eyes are sending to my brain just doesn’t compute, the sight so beyond the realm of possibility that my invisible foot is just hanging in the air like a goddamned cartoon.

Zenyatta is nowhere to be seen, but Widow is exactly where I left her, Reaper standing next to the pallet. His mask is pushed up and…there’s no way not to see what’s going on. They’re kissing. Her hands are on the sides of his face, purple skin meeting void as one of his hands comes to rest on his shoulder.

They’re blind to everything in the world, don’t notice at the sharp intake of breath that comes from the middle of dead air.

I turn heel and run.

I don’t know how to explain the sudden bottomless feeling in my stomach, the gut reaction that watching Widow and Reaper kiss shouldn’t be giving me. It shouldn’t make me feel like this, this awful, pulsing, thing that’s just burning inside me like flash paper lit from the center. I forget everything, just keep walking until the monastery is a blur, the world getting louder all the while.

Chapter 8

You're probably having a good fucking laugh right now, aren't you? Yeah well yuck it up. One of us has to, and it certainly isn't me.

I spend an indeterminate time wandering aimlessly in the monastery, thinking the twisting in my stomach is going to get better, but only making it worse with my pacing. It's obvious, to you and to me, but the part of my brain that usually sorts out What The Fuck Sombra Is Feeling Right Now seems to have gone on holiday. I'm paranoid and angry and ~~sad, so fucking sad~~all at once, but I don't have the emotional maturity to take step backwards and realize *why*. Why did seeing that hurt so much? Why am I so- *uhg*.

So yeah, keep on laughing from way up there. Point at poor, stupid Sombra, who can't even figure out she's jealous.

I find what can only be described as a broom closest for candle enthusiasts and throw myself in, slamming the door behind me. My back presses against the wall as I slide down, but I don't give myself the relief of screaming into the darkness. I don't even allow my nails to sink into scalp for more than a second before I remind myself *no. This is* not*how I want to handle this.*

With a spark of purple energy, I open my hologram, and launch myself into the work that's kept me sane for the past eleven years. Numbers fly past, but they don't connect like they usually do. The data from Shíwǔ Gāo might as well be Widow's shitty poetry for all the sense it makes, and the thought springs the purple woman to the front of my mind like I've been hit in the head with a Frisbee. Nothing makes sense, because why would I be *jealous*? Who would I even be jealous *of*? Why do I feel like Widow and Reaper broke into my home and took a shit inside my shampoo bottle?

Nothing is working. Trying to locate Iris just reminds me of Talon instead, how they're growing into bigger threat by the minute. In a sudden twang of paranoia, I wonder if they have trackers on me too. Sure I never let those *pendajos*near my implants, but I was there for three years…If I ever let my guard down for even a second…

Twitching, I bring up my implant logistics. Pointless. Any bug wouldn't be detectable by internal systems. My anxiety spikes higher, and but the ones that'd I trust to do a physical check of my implants are two people I very much don't want to see right now. In fact, I'd like to get as far away from them as humanly possible.

I stand, the purple in the dark room flickering back into nothing. It's burned my retinas enough that stepping out into the diffused light of the monastery makes me blink in discomfort, wandering around like Bambi in a snowstorm. But it's time to go. I don't have a logical thought to that goal, but I know it as certain as I know my own skin. I have to get out of here, if only to make the aching in my stomach stop—and when I do I don't know if I'm coming back.

So if that sounds familiar, you can probably guess what happens next.

But it's not Reaper that stops me this time. Nor Widow, nor even Zenyatta. Instead, the exit I happen to choose takes me over the monastery grounds, snowdrifts blowing under moonlight, catching in stones so serenely placed. Meditating among the white and silver is Genji, his back to me, his hands on his knees.

My toes are covered in a mesh that should leave my footsteps completely silent, yet my approach alerts him anyway. Damn cybernetics. Must have given him super hearing while she was messing around in there.

"You look very distraught for a woman whose friend has just come back from the brink of death." The mask in profile is odd—I'm used to Reaper's, but his has a very distinct style to it, and by comparison Genji looks…blank.

I shrug. "It's a look I'm trying out. A girl can only be so incredibly fashionable before it starts to wear thin."

He'd hard to read. More than Reaper, more than even Zenyatta. He could be looking at me with indifference or smiling at my joke—either way I wouldn't know. He pats the ground beside him. "Join me. If anyone is in need of some inner peace, it is you."

I could go. There's nothing stopping me from turning tail and continuing on my way. But the offer is open, and something social convention is harder get over than any brick wall.

"Thank you. It can become lonely out here, some nights," he says as I sit, clearing the stone tiles of snow.

"Well, then you picked the right company. I have an A in 'Friendliness and Approachability' on *Rate My Professor*." My voice carefully casual in the night wind.

"Is that so?" he says, disbelieving. "And how exactly did you come to be on a site for teachers of higher learning?"

"Same way I became an officially ordained minister in Venezuela," I say, wiggling my fingers.

I think he finds that funny. It's hard to tell, but the subtle shift in his shoulder could be a silent laugh, one chosen not to be filtered through his voice channel. We lapse into silence, unwelcome and overpowering. At least while we were having a good banter, I forgot about the pit in my stomach and the yawning paranoia at my back. Plus, the stone we're sitting on is sucking all my body heat out through my ass.

I'm just considering telling him I need to get a move on, when he speaks again. "When I first came here, I did not think there was any hope for me. I succumbed to belief that I would live the rest of my life as I was: a monster. Without home."

The snow is so white is almost makes Genji grey by comparison, the drifts that have settled on his shoulder in his midnight vigil like bunches of magic dandruff. He reaches out, scooping a handful of snow from the garden beside him. It doesn't melt in his palm, not like

it would in a human's or a well-heated omnic's. Instead, it gets into the valleys between the metal, sticking to him like old memories.

He lets the snow blow from his palm. "But the Shambali are patient. Perhaps more patient than I deserve."

"Huh," I grunt. "I know that feeling."

Turning to me again, he disturbs the snow on his shoulders. It takes to the breeze. "What you have is beautiful, Sombra. Such harmony between people does not come around often in a person's life."

"No offense Shimada, but if you think we're harmonious, you know less about what you're talking about than you think."

"I know someone who is running away from their heart when I see it." He ignores my light snort. Instead, he grabs another handful of snow and lets it blow down into the valley. "Something must be let go of. Greif. Guilt. Shame. But do not think you have let everything else that is good go with them."

I want to tell him that its not that simple, that the shame and the guilt and the blah blah bla blah bla is all tied up too tightly to try to just get what I want out of it. But I'm suddenly just so tired, I don't think I can leave this seat, let alone try to sort out everything for someone else. He doesn't even know what I'm so pissed about, he's just trying to be some Cool Cyborg Dude, so full of wisdom like his sensei. But then he turns away suddenly, as though I'm not even there anymore.

"There is beauty everywhere. But that does not make it disposable."

He casts his gaze down the mountain, and I follow, landing at the little village nested below. Its glow is warm and orange, a bright speck in a world of bleakness.

I'm so tired. The urge to run is gone. In fact, I don't think I ever want to move from this spot again.

We sit out there, despite the fact that my legs have gone numb and my teeth chatter before the hour is out. Genji notices before I do, and he guides me back inside with little resistance. He finds me a room, one I think might be his, and leaves me there without another word. I pass out with thoughts blowing through me like so many snowflakes.

The next morning…I try to get it together a little.

I find somewhere to take a shower. I reapply my face. I do everything I can to return to some level of functionality, all the while talking myself down from running like a frightened jackrabbit. It takes well into the afternoon, but as I file my nails (my real ones, not my useful ones) I'm finally ready to think this through.

My implants might be hacked. The possibility is remote, but I know I won't be able to go forward without knowing for sure. One problem. One good solution. I go to find Widow.

This time, when I hear her and Zenyatta from outside the room, I don't stop to listen. Pushing in, I find them speaking quietly together: her sitting on the pallet and him floating a few feet away.

"Hey guys," I say, and hope I'm not as loud as I sound. "Am I interrupting something?"

"Always," Widow says, without missing a beat.

"Is there something you need, Sombra?" Zenyatta asks me, patiently avoiding our familiar snipes.

"I was just hoping to borrow Widowmaker for a moment, if you can spare her."

"Of course," he nods. He floats toward the door, but not before giving her hand a soft pat. I file that away for later.

When he's gone, I sit, crossing my legs in an attempt at casual confidence. "I'm going to cut to the chase, *araña*." Because dithering about will only make me lose my nerve. "You and Reaper both had bugs in your implants. I might have some in mine too. And I can't check them myself."

She pauses. And then… "What do you need me to do?"

That's it then. No finagling, no sizing me up. Nothing comes without a price but sometimes I feel like I've already paid it; I've placed confidence in Widow, and now she's returning the favor.

"You're gunna need to scrub me, but I can walk you through it." I stand, and find where they stashed my tools after I flew the coop yesterday. Everything's there in working order, and I lay them out for Widow. "It's like making a cake: turns out fine as long as you follow the recipe."

Widow wrinkles her nose. "I have always been a terrible cook." It's…cute.

"You'll do fine," I smile, boosting her confidence as well as my own. "And uh,,, thanks *amiga*."

She responds with a quiet *mm*, and watches as I turn and peel my shirt off. The implant trails along my spine, connecting my nervous system to my gear and effectively extending my philology beyond its god-given means. In that way, it's not too different than Widow's own.

"What am I looking for?" she asks my bare back.

So I tell her. Taking her step by step, I feel her hands poking around what's effectively my internal organs, combing them for any signs of Talon tampering. It's definitely an exposed sensation. Even if Widow's the person I trust most in the world, that's a very low bar, and

*anyone*would be uncomfortable with the prospect of surgery preformed on top of a mountain in the middle of nowhere. I feel a new appreciation for what Reaper and Widow let me do.

Thinking about Reaper makes my gut clench. Widow notices, but I assure her it's nothing she's doing. Instead, I ask, "so you and Gabe work out a plan for after this?"

She tenses. It must because of what I saw yesterday, their reunion just as fresh in her mind as it is in mine. I don't know why I'm asking—do I expect her to just spill everything right here and now? There's a chance it I guess, but I'm not going about this the right way at all.

"I thought you were the one captaining this voyage," she says after some hesitation.

I suppress a sigh. What I really want to ask is *how*. Has this been going on ever since Amélie started kicking around again? Or is this whole Making Out With My Teammate a recent development? So many things I want to know but not sure how to voice, and a lump that forms in my throat whenever I try. My own heartache doesn't fit with the narrative; maybe I'm just afraid that now that they have each other, they won't need me. I'm a distant third wheel, the part of the ~Talon Trio~ that came around too late and is never going to quite fit back in. That fear has to be what's burning me from the inside.

(I don't bring myself to consider another option.)

"There," she says, bringing me out of my stupor. "It was clean, Sombra. I did not find anything."

My first instinct is to ask if she's sure, putting a nice renewal on my own paranoia. But I've made her go through every double and triple checks, everything I would have done if I were doing it myself. She's right. I'm clean.

I turn, letting the first strands of relief creep into me. "Thanks again," I tell her, now facing her completely. "Not that they'd ever get past me, but it's good to know." I give her a wink.

"More comforting than you think."

There's an odd note in her voice. I raise my eyebrow and ask, "…*uh-huh*?"

"…You were always outside their control. It was something that was hard not to be jealous of."

Widow's eyes never leave mine as she says it, and I swallow involuntarily. There's something intense in her gaze…sadness…longing maybe.

She keeps going. "Meeting you was my first taste of freedom."

It's only now that I realize that were *really fucking close*to each other right now. I can feel her breath, still gross from fighting off her sickness…see the deep bruises under her eyes in intimate detail. My own skin feels hot, and I suddenly remember very clearly that *I'm not wearing a shirt*. Her hand is resting inches from mine, a small screwdriver clutched in her fingers, forgotten carelessly among the fabric. There's rhythm, an offbeat that hums between us and I swear I see her move-

I jump back. The vigor in the room crackles and breaks, leaving me standing next to the pallet with an awkward chuckle. “Well, that’s um…good to hear.”

Widow’s face is completely expressionless, not even a register of surprise when I sprung away from her. Could I have imagined that? I swear she was leaning in to-

As I struggle to come up with a witty line to exit on, the monastery fills with the slowly rising whine of an increasing klaxon.

*Now*Widow blinks in alarm. The two of us share a look, gazing at either exit, trying to determine where the whistle is coming from. Zenyatta doesn’t make us wait long. He opens the eastern door—with more speed than I’ve ever seen him possess—and tells us, “I suggest you retreat to some place more fortified. The monastery is under attack.”

Chapter 9

Trying to shepherd us somewhere safe goes about as well for Zenyatta as you'd expect.

He has trouble keeping up with us as we barrel through the temple, on the hunt for what we're facing. There's the sound of helicopters now underneath the alarm, accented by the chatter of the occasional Shambali.

"Widowmaker, I *strongly* suggest that you do not attempt extraneous movement for the next three to seven days, considering your condition," he calls from behind us.

"Hey, she's doing better than you at the moment," I point out.

Widow casts a (perhaps sympathetic) look at our trailing third, but still directs her attention at me for the most pressing matters. "Where is my gun?"

"We'll get you one," I assure her, sticking my finger in my ear and trying to contact Reaper through the comms. I'm brutally reminded of Widow's scrambler as a line of static shorts in my ear. "Dammit! We'll have to find *búho* the old fashion way."

"He can take care of himself," Widow says, "what we need right now is-"

The monastery shakes. A banner falls from the ceiling, catching in the ass-load of candles that litter the chamber we're currently in. I slide, skittering like a Looney Toon as I try not run face-first into the flaming band of fabric that now blocks our path.

Like the skinniest firefighter I've ever seen, Genji leaps from the nearest archway, skewering the banner with his sword and throwing it into the pit below. He sheaths his sword, apparently since jumping out of shadows and saving people from malevolent blankets is no biggie.

"…That was almost unfortunate," he notes. "Are you three alright?"

"Hey, thanks to you." I cast a look down the void to our left. "Yeesh, talk about non-OSHA compliance."

"Thank you…Genji…you have…impeccable…timing," Zenyatta wheezes as he finally catches up with us. Okay, I *have*to be imagining that; robots can't run out of breath.

Seeing us all accounted for, Genji gives a grateful nod. I think. It might just be a nod perfectly-neutral-acknowledgement. Genji calls over his shoulder, "Reyes! I found them!"

It doesn't take long for Reaper to materialize from the shadows above, the same way Genji had come. His entrance might have even been badass if I hadn't just seen a man stab fire with a sword.

“Have you ever noticed that bad things always happen when we split up?” I muse to the rapt attention of my party.

“Good things do not tend to happen when we are together, either,” Widow says.

That’s Reaper’s cue to grab an extra gun off his back and toss it her. She catches the rifle with an appreciative grunt, quickly checking the stock and ammo supply.

I raise an eyebrow at Reaper. “You raid the armory on the way over here? Didn’t know this place had one.”

“From the ship we brought down,” he clarifies. “Before the latest wave started firing.”

“Uhg,” I groan. “Don’t remind me. Who the hell is even attacking us this time?”

“Who do you think?” Reaper snorts.

“I mean *I know*,” I tell him, waving my hand dismissively, “but how did they find us? We’ve disabled everything…” With another groan, I pinch my forehead. “They must have followed the signal into the dead zone. Probably didn’t take them long to scout the area and find this is the only place of note.”

“No matter how they found us,” Genji cuts in, “they will not live long enough to harm anyone here.” He gazes at the rest of us. “Are you with me?”

Widow examines her gun one more time, finding it to her satisfaction. Reaper looks up to where the sound of helicopters are still whirring, grunts and gives a nod.

“Eh,” I say. “Why not?”

There’s fighting out in the shrine. The five of us approach from the north side, planning to join the fray and force a retreat (invoking Talon protocol 2795A, as Reaper so helpfully reminds us.) At first I was a little skeptical of letting Zenyatta join us—the omnic looks like he could barely hold a teacup without collapsing—but he assured me he was far from defenseless. As we arrive at the scene, I can see what he means.

Shitty little robot monks are kicking Talon ass. Steel balls going 150kph go whipping left and right, smashing into architecture and human tissue alike. Even as Genji drops off into the chaos below, a soldier is thrown into the wall at his left, her skull done in by An Orb that’s a lot more terrifying than the one I used to worry about.

“I thought you guys were pacifists!” I shout to be heard over the screaming.

“These people have invaded our home…” Zenyatta says, his necklace of orbs spinning to life.

“…And removed the chance of compromise,” Genji finishes, drawing his blade. With that he charges, his movements so fast I can barely see the silver blur as it cascades through at least four enforcers.

“Dang,” I say to Reaper. “I may be going out on a limb here but, I think attacking this temple may have seriously touched a nerve.”

Maybe it’s because they don’t know to give a well-formed Talon attack a healthy amount of respect, but the monks rip through the assault like it’s their birthday piñata. I barely have time to hack a heavy assault before a nearby omnic guns it down, her opportunity for a piffy one-liner boiling down to, *find peace in the Iris*. Yeesh. Talk about nutjobs.

“How you doing up there, *araña*?” I call to Widow, perched on the shrine and raining hell on high.

“Better if I had something more practical to wear,” she points out. Not looking away, she kills the enemy sniper with a crack, and watches her fall to the ground. “*Amateur*.”

“Practical?” I laugh. “How is a bunch of robes any less practical than walking around in a sexy purple gimp suit?”

“It is a *leotard*,” she growls, and oooo I’ve got her! “It is light and form fitting and *does not flap about whenever I move!*” As she says it, the robe does get a little more tangled in her leg.

I roll my eyes. “It’s a cat suit *chica*. You look like a scantily clad superhero.”

“*It is for* ***easier range of motion***.”

She sounds like she’s about to come down and smack me. I grin, Reaper sighs. It’s always nice to remember she does have *one* button I can push.

Genji jumps over the railing where Reaper and I are crouched, “reloading” between the bouts of gunfire beyond our cover. He looks between me, Widow, and Reaper before saying to Gabe, “you let them get away with much more bickering than Jesse and I ever did.”

“Look,” Reaper growls, “this is the *only* ongoing argument they’ve had for the past three years, and they’ve *never* roped me into it. I’d like to keep it that way.”

I have a feeling that if we weren’t in the middle of a firefight, Genji would shake his head.

The fight itself doesn’t even take that much longer anyways, what with Genji carving through his enemies like they’re Christmas turkey. The sound of the retreat isn’t audible to us, but it must go through the comms since the last remaining operatives start to pull out with their tails between their legs.

Genji is about to finish off an injured assassin, when Reaper stops him. “Wait. She’s a lieutenant. She’ll know things the others won’t.”

I swear I can feel Genji’s eyes narrow through his helmet. “We will *not* be torturing anyone, Reyes.”

“Relax, I’m just going to ask her a few questions.” I don’t know if Genji believes him fully, but he doesn’t stop as Reaper pushes past him and crouches in font of his victim. “***Hi there***.” Oh good. He’s using his Scary Voice.

Half of her mask is smashed in; probably won't be seeing out of that eye ever again, if she even survives her numerous other injuries. The blades attached to her elbows are snapped off, and she's struggling to breath between coughs. She's completely at his mercy. And yet, when she catches sight of him, all she does is laugh.

Reaper isn't as amused. He leans in further. "***Let's cut to the chase. You know who I am. Talk to me before I hand you over to the tin cans.***"

A string of giggles is her reply. I've always found that assassins to be creepy, but I at least tried to keep my distance from them. Holding a conversation with one is just plain counter-productive.

Reaper must think so too, because he turns his hand to smoke and plunges it inside her chest. The assassin gasps, the not-quite-pain of having something incorporeal floating inside your body. "***That all? Come on, I'm sure Akande has something to say to me.***"

The assassin writhes. Out of the corner of my eye I see Genji move, but before I can plan to intercept him, the assassin says, "not…you."

That surprises Reaper right out of his shtick. "What do you mean 'not me?'"

"…Not you….*her*." The assassin lifts her finger and points it, shaking, at me. Then she giggles again. Maybe it's not even intentional for her, just a nervous tick.

"Just me?" I say, raising my hand to my chest innocently. "Not even a 'fuck you Gabe' to our mutual friend?"

"You…" Her voice is jittering now, fading fast. "You…h…*key*."

My immediate reaction is pat down all my pockets to see if I have a key on me somewhere. I'm about to ask her what the hell she means before she shudders on last time, head lolling to the side.

"Useless," Reaper mutters, rising to his feet. "Cryptic bullshit. The assassins are always out of their goddamned minds."

"The process can be grueling," Widow agrees, landing from the shrine's roof with a soft puff of snow. "Some are not built to survive it."

I catch sight of Genji. He's staring at the assassin, expression unreadable as always, but I have a feeling he's a bit more than unsettled. Before I can try to sooth his ruffled feathers, he turns sharply, saying, "I hope that was worth it."

He marches off, joining the small ring of casualties closer to the shrine. Zenyatta's already among them, tending to omnics with bullet wounds and dents in their exoskeletons. The yellow ball of light floats between them, stitching metal as easily as it mended skin. Something about watching them, the gentle serenity, the *community* that they're trying to hold together…it makes me glad we helped, even if only a little.

But that's not the only thing we're responsible for. I turn to Widow and Reaper, my resolve strengthening. "Hey, Gabe. Remember when you asked me if I should stay here and put in some roots?"

Healing smoke twitches at the sides of his mask. "Yeah?"

"I think we should do the exact opposite of that."

He bows his head momentarily, and I can imagine him narrowing his eyes in understanding.

Widow isn't far behind. "You want to end Doomfist."

I breath in. And out. In and out. Be brave Sombra; for once in your life face this mess you've made. "Look. I tried to take down Talon once, but I messed up big. I was sloppy, and it's cost me 'n everyone else. I fucked up taking them down…" I look at the two people in front of me. "…In more ways than one."

Because finishing what I started is going to be ugly and painful. I've let the wound fester, but I know that *this*is what's important, letting myself keep a team when I finally get back on the hunt. *Fuck*my own stupid, confused feelings. This is worth getting over them for. This is worth going back and fixing old mistakes.

"I think it's time I clean up some loose ends," I finish.

I look between Widow and Reaper, holding my breath despite myself. Widow is staring at me intensely, like I'm about to shed my sincere facade and say *just kidding! It was really me, (Sombra!), the whole time!* But for once I *do* mean it, goddamn it. Can't a girl do a complete one-eighty on all her goals/morals without getting the stink-eye?

Reaper…Reaper just sighs. Less surprised, less pissed, less everything than Widow seems to be. I guess being gone for a day did leave her out of quite a few changes to interpersonal dynamics.

"I know where he was last," Reaper admits finally. I let the air back into my lungs. "But, he knows that I know, so it's a lose-lose situation."

I'm about to cut in a *well if it were a win-win we'd be heading to Las Vegas* but Widow, bless her ever-patient heart, humors him. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

Some glowers can corrode metal and rot souls. His is one of them. "Because either he's already gotten the hell out of dodge…or he's expecting us."

Ümụ Bebi Developments situates itself halfway between Oyo and Ibadan, wishing to be forgotten, and doing a pretty good job of it. It's 304,800 square meters of fortified nightmares, crawling with troopers and black transport craft, the last bastion of Talon's living operations. Or one would assume so. But that assumption cost me last time, and the perennial fear churns in the back or my mind that even if we win gloriously tonight and angels sing from the heavens, somehow it won't be the end of it.

I shake myself, surveying the red-roofed compound in the twilight, knowing that a pessimistic attitude never got me anywhere. I try to bring myself to the present, remembering that as soon as I give the go ahead, our little team will be splitting up once again. Depressing, considering our other goodbye wasn't long ago.

We left the monastery worse than we found it, although with luck that's the last damage we'll do.

"It would be wise to tell me where you are going," Genji said as we readied to board our craft out of there. (*Adio*sanother three thousand dollars. :/) "I should know where to find your bodies, at the least."

"You could always come with us you know," I said, lazily flexing my nails. "After what you did to those *pendajos*? We could use the extra support."

A snort. "I think I will pass on your suicide mission."

"Eh," I said, "worth a shot."

"Forget about us, Genji," Reaper warned. "You're all better off that way."

Genji looked like he was about to protest, but relented the last second. I didn't begrudge him for staying—that place is his place, and they were all doing just fine until we showed up.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Zenyatta and Widow quietly talking, his hands resting over hers. It was serene.

And serene was where we left it, forgoing the mountains and heading on a straight shot for Nigeria, days later stepping out onto the streets of Oyo. It took another two sunsets to formulate a plan, one that worked to all three of our satisfactions, before we finally settled outside of Ụmụ Bebi one chilly July night. The summer heat leaves quickly here.

Even with every sign pointing to a final confrontation, only Reaper and I are going forward, leaving Widow behind once again. Just like we always do.

Okay that's a bit melodramatic, but the thought of abandoning her while we meet Doomfist feels like it's just begging for something to go wrong. That's all it is though, a feeling. In reality, she'll be with us the whole time, watching us from her vantage point, providing valuable intel over our (finally) working comms. If anything, she's the person least in danger in all of this but…

My shoulders slump as I watch the guards change rotation. That's my cue. Can't put it off any longer.

I slide down to where Reaper and Widow and hiding, my appearance the only signal they need. It looks like they were sharing an intimate moment before I landed in the bushes, and for a second I break to consider What Exactly I Feel about that. I settle on…acceptance. Whatever makes then happy should make me happy too, but *should*and *do*are too far apart right now. "Not hysterical" will have to do.

“You ready to roll, Gabe?” I ask him. He nods, rising to a knee and preparing to move out. That leaves me with Widow, and god I wish I had the tact to say something profound right now.

She takes the responsibility. “Go on, Sombra. Set us free.”

I nod, and give a smile that should look halfway genuine. She doesn’t smile back, but I swear her eyes soften.

We’re gone before I can make it stretch unnaturally longer, waiting at least a couple seconds before activating communications. Y’know. To not look desperate. We roll in silently, and Reaper wraps an arm the guard I was so preoccupied with before. A distinct, choked struggle and he’s silenced—our first martyr in the long line of victims leading to the highest floor of Ụmụ Bebi. Because of course he’s up at the top in his Super Secure Lair; no one joins Talon without being a little Extra™.

“I’m in,” Widow says in our ears, not a minute after Reaper and I breached the inner courtyard. “I have you in my sights.”

I peer against the backdrop of starry sky, spotting the watchtower we agreed Widow would infiltrate. She should have a good view from there, able to watch our backs as we finagle our way through.

Before I even finish the thought, her voice follows it up with, “one guard, approaching on your six. Their arrival is imminent.”

Reaper and I both tense, and I whip around to where Widow spied them to see nothing. That only makes my alarm grow, my finger slipping to the trigger of my SMG-

Piff!

The soft hiss of a suppressor, and a body falls from the floor above us as literally squashes me beneath it.

“Oof,” I mutter, shoving it off me with a grunt. “Wow. Thank you so much *araña.* Really making things easier.”

“Any time.” I can hear the corner of her mouth turn slightly upward.

“Can you stop being smarmy for ten minutes?” Reaper asks me. “We’re trying to be stealthy here.”

“Ooo, *smarmy*. That’s a new one. I like it.”

“Well good,” he says, peeking around a corner and making sure no one’s here to accidently pick up on our squabble. “Because that’s what the both of you are turning into when you’re not making goo-goo eyes at each other.”

If I had been walking I would have tripped over my own two feet and then some, crashing into a horrified halt. Instead, I do the verbal equivalent, spluttering out several variations of

“*huh????*”

It’s enough to make Reaper look over at me and give a disbelieving snort, like my dawning dread is a fucking act.

“What? Are you talking about?” I ask, trying to bring the pitch of my voice down to casual disinterest.

“There is no need to feign ignorance, Sombra,” Widow (oh so helpfully) decides to chime in my ear. “I have already told him how you tried to kiss me.”

If I was tongue tied before it’s nothing on my state now. “What?? I never- that didn’t-….***you*** *tried to kiss* ***me****!!!*” I glare at the empty space before me, like I can accuse Widow’s transient ghost or something.

Reaper shushes me, his focus so allegedly on the mission that he seems to be rolling his eyes instead of freaking the fuck out.

“We will call it a mutual interest,” Widow belies. I want to argue further but what do you even say to that? *Your advances gave me a small crisis and almost made me leave the both of you in the middle of the night*? Widow senses my apprehension. “You seem adverse to the topic, Sombra. Have your feelings changed?”

I groan rubbing my face in my hands, wishing we were somewhere less out in the open and Widow couldn’t look down her scope and see the embarrassment on my cheeks. But Reaper still hasn’t given the go ahead and I’m ass-deep in a compound that hates every cell in my body. “Do you really think now’s the best time to be discussing this?” I try weakly.

No answer.

But.

Reaper turns from where he’s been keeping a lookout and stares directly at me. I can’t even *begin*to imagine what *he*thinks of me, but I can picture the look of contained frustration as he grabs my arm. I blink in surprise, and let myself be pulled aside: still not out of the sniper tower’s sight, but closer to the protection of the building. An uncomfortable air radiates off the Reaper, and not just the usual smoky stuff. No, the shifting on his feet makes him seem genuinely unsure, as shitty at saying the right thing as I usually am.

“Look Sombra,” he says, and oh boy I’m in for it. But he goes on, “this whole thing is fucked up. Not from when you blew Talon sky high, but even before that, from the moment we all met. It wasn’t the start to a story that gets a happy ending.”

And wow, I don’t know if I’ve ever heard him be this…eloquent? He must have been thinking about this ever since Widow tattled on me, and is taking it better a whole lot better than I did. It reminds of how Not Angry he was when he us in Giza, how no matter how well I think I have him figured out, he still surprises me. The claw on my arm feels better when I think about it like that. Almost comforting.

“We’re not people who do this,” he keeps going. “People who end up caring. People who stop our damn mission to make fucking…*confessions*.” On the word I have to look away, my face getting warmer than it already is. “But we’re going to see Doomfist any minute now, I have no idea how this is all going to go down. So screw confessions—but we have to admit that we’re like this. We’re weird and fucked up, and everything we do together is going to be weird and fucked up, so we might as well get over it.”

I stop shifting on my feet nervously, and look up at him the way I did I saw him without the mask for the first time. It’s him, same old Gabe, but even as something as a little acknowledgement can change everything.

When he lets go of my arm, the comfort is replaced by something else, a swelling feeling that makes my throat go dry. I don’t know how Reaper’s going to react when we get to the top of this place, not with so many emotions running high and surrounded by the organization he’s devoted to life to for half a decade. But none of that matters right now. This is my team. I’ve chosen this.

It was one, stupid, impulsive decision that lead me down this road, and now I make another. I grab Reaper by the sides of his face and pull him down, aiming a kiss haphazardly on the mask. It’s cold and solid but it’s *good*, and it only takes Widow chuckling in my ear to know that it was the right thing to do. Reaper, for his part, is just stunned, and is right up until I let him go.

It might have been have been a perfect moment, something befitting what might be our last. But, unfortunately, I forgot to seal this morning, so when I pull back there’s a bright purple lipstick stain on the side of his face.

The fear and the joy and the batshit insanity of the day bubbles up all at once, and I laugh so hard I cry.

Chapter 10

“Wait,” he tells me outside Doomfist’s door.

I obey, the golf ball in my throat refusing to go down, no matter how many plastic smiles I force onto my face. There’s no one here but Reaper, yet the actress never stops does she?

Reaper glides forward, materializing in front of the keypad.*Tap tap tap tap*. Each claw drums with deliberation, and one held breath later the door hisses.

“He didn’t bother changing the locks,” he tells me.

We stare at each other for a moment, but the anticipation is killing me and I fizzle out of existence if only to escape his gaze. A speck of purple smudge still lingers at the corner of his mask. A funny thing to notice at a time like this; our plan of patchwork compromise starts as soon as he walks in that door. He takes a breath, bracing, and turns into the lion’s den.

Doomfist is facing away from the door when we enter, letting me slide further into shadows even as Reaper makes himself known. The former leader look almost…non-threatening (or as least as non-threatening as a man wielding a giant giga-fist can be.) Maybe I was subconsciously expecting him to be sitting in a chair stroking a white cat but nah, that’s not his style. He’s direct. To the point.

Efficient.

“It is considered polite to knock.” He’s standing, looking at the desk in front of him. It’s filled with holograms, little battles that work themselves out under his watch. He doesn’t even bother to look over his shoulder.

“What can I say,” Reaper growls. “They don’t teach you manners in black ops.”

Doomfist turns around, his eyes flicking across the blackness of the room and he *see*sme. I don’t know how but he does, even camouflage can’t hide me because there’s no way in hell he doesn’t know I’m here. The expression is plastered stiff—his face never betrays the calculations happening just beneath the surface. Instead, he wears the gauntlet effortlessly on one arm, the muscle and intelligence combining into something provocative yet terrifying.

Okay Sombra. Tone down your fear boner.

Instead I try to patch in Widow, only to find her channel is blocked. Damn, there must be some kind of RF field or something keeping us radio silent, trapping us here with our final boss. The loss of her almost hurts worse than the ever-growing golf ball.

“I assume you wanted to talk,” Reaper says, causing Doomfist’s eyes to flick off me and onto him. “Otherwise it wouldn’t have been so easy to get here.”

“Perhaps I did want to talk,” Doomfist says. “Once.”

“Was this right before the first time you sent people to kill me? Or the second?”

A smile crosses Doomfist’s face, but not the one he sports at meetings, or when our team has come back with a particularly good report. No, this one doesn’t reach his eyes: it’s pained, bitter.

“Do not lecture me, Reaper.” His voice harshens. “You have come here for the same thing. You left the last ashes of Talon for her and claim *I* betrayed you?”

“Sombra’s not important right now.” Reaper folds his arms across his chest.

“No?” A raised eyebrow, and Doomfist’s theatrics at least are buying me time, allowing me to slip around behind him. “And where *is* our mutual friend, then? For all your supposed ‘talk’, you could have smuggled her into this very room.”

The oxygen sticks in my lungs, my foot halfway in the air until Reaper says, “I left her with Widow. I can handle you alone.”

Doomfist laughs. His head is thrown back, each shaking bellow as contemplates the idea of Reaper facing thinking he could take him on. Every shake makes me feel vulnerable in the small room, like his voice is pressing me up against the rounded walls until I’m forced to look at him and only him. I don’t dare think that he’s let his guard down though, not with his un-gloved hand still resting carefully on the desk. The only light in the room is above him, no widows or detail to distract from the center of attention.

Finally he drop his head and grins.

Reaper actually looks kind of offended. “Fine. If you didn’t want to talk, why is your security so jackshit?”

Doomfist casts an arm around the room. “What were you expecting, Reaper? This is all we have left. She took it, all of it, along with humanity’s hope.” That’s when I catch something, underneath all his bravado and false smiles: despair. Even though this man would kill me without prejudice, it still sucks a little bit. I never thought Doomfist would be the one to give up. “What made you leave us, Reaper? You believed in what Talon was.”

No he didn’t, I want to scream. *Those things you stuck in him made him believe in your psychotic cause.* I don’t know if that’s accurate or not, if Reaper would still be the man he is today without those devices, but the accusation rings true in my mind. I sneak further into the room.

Reaper says nothing.

Doomfist’s eyes narrow in snide realization. “It was for her, was it not?” And this time, I’m not the *her* he’s talking about. “All for her. And you told me you were not turning sentimental.” He shakes his head, taking his weight off the desk and standing to his full height. “She cannot live out there for long, Reaper. You know that. If you both returned, our doctors would handle her, and our goals would be inline once again. What do you say, hm? You forget I tried to kill you, you forget you tried to kill me.” He laughs, and I see the old

Doomfist shining through. “That is the way Talon has always worked, after all. Together, we can all rebuild.”

“Rebuild?” Reaper scoffs. “And how do you plan on doing that?”

There’s no change in tone when Doomfist says, “Sombra is the key.”

The key. On reflex, my hand twitches to my pocket.

“The key?” Reaper asks, just as doubtful as I am.

“Sombra stole from us. She still has it,” Doomfist says. “Talon was never the people. It is the knowledge that matters, our plans. If we can get it back, we can start again.”

Something about hearing my own astute fears parroted back to me rings a hollowness in my gut.

“…And what happens to Sombra when we do?”

My eyes widen, watching Reaper from over Doomfist’s shoulder. Is he really *negotiating* this? The shock threatens to spill over, force something sharp out of my mouth.

Doomfist stops. I would say hesitates, but everything he does is so precise, that this pause is meant to be exactly where it is. “Some crimes are too great to go unpunished.”

And it’s then that I realize what it’s come down to. Reaper has me on a silver platter, strung out long enough that it’s come down to a choice between me and Widow. And I know, too, which one of us he’s always going to pick.

But still. Every time I think I know everything-

“I’m sorry Akande,” Reaper says, his voice clipped with lost chances. “But I’m not handing her over.”

The rush of bubbling relief almost makes itself into a sound. I sag further into the wall, shoulders drooping.

“…I see.” He begins to pace around the other side of the desk, and I remind myself that my opportunity is coming soon. “Everyone gets one chance Reaper. Only one.”

I ready myself.

And then he turn and slams.

With speed that would make a cobra blink, I’m pinned to the wall with his regular fist, air squeezed from my throat by pure human strength. It’s a good thing for me as well as him—Reaper’s guns are out in an instant, and Doomfist needs the gauntlet to deflect the incoming shots.

My hands fly up, dropping my SMG and my translocator, sinking pre-hardened nonsilicon metal oxide semiconductors into flesh. Breaking skin doesn't do a damn thing though, and a thread of panic shoots up me even as Reaper closes in. I open my mouth in warning, too late, because as soon as Reaper's within five feet of us- ***WHAM!***

Doomfist spins, releasing me and throwing his full force into the gauntlet's punch. Reaper goes flying into the opposite wall, a knock that would kill any normal man if said man couldn't turn to smoke upon contact with drywall.

Distracted. He's distracted. I scramble for my gun, rolling away as soon as my fingers glance across the familiar trigger. Raising it seems to take eons, and as I lift my head I see that he's already leaped toward me, his fist raised in another aerial slam. I only barely dodge it, the tile floor shattering behind me, and try again to force a hail of bullets into Doomfist's exposed body.

At least some of them catch, but not enough, because he doesn't slow at all. Reaper's still getting up and suddenly Doomfist is above me again.

A grab. A struggle.

There's one brief second where I think I can get free before the gauntlet crushes me like a grape, but then the world goes topsy-turvy and I'm in between Reaper and Doomfist while the former points his gun right at my chest.

He's so close. He could blast Doomfist apart from here.

If only I wansn't in the way.

You're probably thinking I'm handling this pretty well. You're proud that I followed Reaper into this room, that I've tried everything that I can to fix what I broke. Well, then I'll let you in on a secret my dear listener: I'm absolutely fucking terrified. I don't want to die. If I had my way, I never would. But in this moment when my gun arm is pinned between mine and Doomfist's bodies, my other hand scrabbling helplessly at the arm around my neck, I don't know if what is about to happen will leave me alive at the end of it.

But the show goes on.

"Is this what you have chosen Reyes?" Doomfist pulls my head back. "*This?*"

"…"

I lock eyes with Reaper—the black indentations connecting us together, in one brief moment of understanding.

His head tilts to Doomfist's face. "Yes."

He fires. I translocate. Doomfist's chest fills with the double blast.

I think I black out momentarily, regaining air in my lungs and touching where bruises are already forming along my neck. Doomfist's a few meters away, but that doesn't matter anymore. He's not getting back up.

My coughing draws Reaper's attention, but he doesn't come over. Instead he just stares over the body, perhaps less certain about Doomfist's termination than I am.

I get off my knees, scooping up the translocator that saved my life. "Good baby. Mamá loves you," I manage to squeeze out hoarsely. I gently rub the thing against my cheek because apparently adrenaline withdrawal makes me Like That™.

When I manage to wander over to Reaper, I blink down at Doomfist. I think I get it. It is hard to look away.

"I'm sorry you had to do that," I tell him, the single light flickering where it hadn't before. "I know he was your…friend."

Reaper snorts. It's hard to tell if there's a catch in his voice. "Yeah, that's the word." Despite that, he does lean down to close Doomfist's eyes. His hand pauses over the gauntlet, and he snorts again. "Any interest in being the next Doomfist?"

"Ha. I'll pass. I'm sure some up-and-coming young *pendajo*will get their hands on it eventually."

When Reaper doesn't reply, I wander over to Doomfist's desk, his last conversation weighing heavily on my mind. *Some key I am. Just one that unlocks people's deaths.* But whether by divine luck or some thought-based interface, I realize I'm not too far off the mark. The screen in the center of the desk is on, open to the last program Doomfist used.

"Hey boss," I call over to the man in mourning. "You might want to see this."

That finally breaks Reaper out of it, and he follows me over to the console. I tap softly, bringing up more of what I was looking for.

"It's the remains of Talon's intelligence network," I say, tracing the fractured web my worm left behind. "It's not much, but it's there."

"We knew that already," he mutters.

"Yeah but." *Tap-ti-ti-tap*. "This is the highest level of clearance. He could do whatever he wanted with it." I flex my nails along the desk. "There's…a protocol in Talon systems. A digital self-destruct if you will. I couldn't use it though: it requires an unbreakable sequence that only activates when the Council gives unanimous approval."

"And?"

I turn to him, a morbid grin at the corner of my cheek. "*And*…guess who just became the only member of the Talon Council?"

His shoulders slide as the understanding rolls in. “Well. That’s something gone right for once.” He looks at the screen, not quite believing it. “So what do I do?”

“I assume there’s a biometric scan, and then voice verification. After that…up to you.”

For a minute, I’m not sure he’s going to do it. Maybe I’d be angry with him, if I wasn’t so damn tired. But then he pulls his glove off, finger by finger, and lets the little needle on the console prick him.

“***Counsil authorization verified. Hello Reaper***.”

“System…” he says, voice faltering for just a moment. “…Terminate.”

“***What would you like to terminate, Reaper?***”

“Everything.”

Walking out into the Nigerian air feels unreal, like when I stumble into the kitchen after an all-nighter spent pouring over a particularly juicy piece of code. The world seems sticky, an entire universe in slow motion, Reaper and I at the center of it.

“…ome…pl…your status? Do you copy?” Widow’s voice ekes into my ear little by little, and every bit of tension I didn’t know I was holding flows out at once.

I press my finger to my com. “Yeah, I got you Widow. I copy.” It comes out soft and breathless.

“*Sombra*.” I’ve never heard her say her name like that, and it makes my heart swell uncomfortably large. But her relief is short lived, switching gears into a new panic. “Reaper-?”

“-Is fine,” I finish for her. “We’re both fine.” But I pause, the tightness in my throat still grating my bruises. “…Doomfist is dead.”

“…*Deja que se haga*.”

Her voice is even, and for once I think to be glad I made it out for her sake instead of mine. It couldn’t have been easy out here waiting, not with mission 417 coming uncomfortably close to a reboot.

I place a hand on Reaper’s shoulder as he takes the final step out of the dark room and tell him, “she’s coming to us.”

As the first rays of sun break over Ümụ Bebi, we can just see the small fleck of her body arcing over rooftops. She fires her hook a second time, then a third, over and over until finally she reels herself in, our friendly neighborhood spiderwoman coming to congratulate us.

"*Nice*," I inform her. I could be talking about her sick three-point landing or that we (miraculously) not only survived our mission, but completed it. It's a mystery even to me.

She nods, her eyes has over each of us, something foreign etched across her expression. I don't know if it's her version of affection, or it's simply *I am glad you two are not dead* glare, but either way I know she's happy to see us.

At first I think we've done it. The only thing left to do is stand here on the balcony outside the elevators and watch the sunrise, a new day leaving blue spots on my vision. But Widow is drawn, her attention not on the sky or the remaining Talon agents milling about below us, but instead finding me in her sights.

"Why are you looking at me like-?" I don't get a chance to finish, since Widow steps forward and kisses me sharply on the mouth.

And (of course) poor, stupid Sombra just stands there like a fucking dumbass. No reaction, no *anything*, just looks like she's been fucking hit by lighting: eyes glossy and unfocused while a crazy-hot chick macks across her face.

God how do I ever manage to get anyone to like me?

Widow pulls back, leaving me not much more animated than I was a moment ago. I snap myself out of it and stare at her, admittedly a little slack jawed. Then I look at Reaper, his body language casually interested, then back to Widow again. I do this until I give myself whiplash.

"So??" I blink, the crises of killing my former boss and then being made out with compiling into a pretty wild morning. "Is that it then? Are we like a?? Thing now? Because you two can be pretty obtuse when it comes to feelings and that says a lot coming from me but it really is impossible to tell if you're flirting or want to murder me or-"

"Sombra," Reaper tells me.

"Yeah?" I ask meekly.

"You really need to stop talking so much."

"…Got it."

And that's that. Widow slides closer to me and *holy shit is she actually holding my hand?* Did I somehow get warped into a cheesy romantic flick where my hardboiled partner suddenly extends me some fleeting human contact? My suspicions are confirmed that I have indeed been teleported to a parallel dimension when Reaper approaches on our left and puts an arm around her our shoulders, pinning me in the middle.

I exhale. Breathe Sombra, breathe.

"So…what now?" I say, red earth below us springing to life.

There’s no answer at first, everyone else just as washed out as me. But then Widow hums, and says, “I would like to return to the Shambali, if that is possible. I feel as though I could learn much from there.”

I don’t ask what she’s expecting to learn. I remember Zenyatta, the way she seemed to hang on every word of his *peace* and *forgiveness* and blah bla blah blah. But I don’t begrudge her that: she could use a little healing.

“Sounds good to me,” I tell her. Reaper grunts in acknowledgement.

There’s nothing really more to say, so we just stand there, me in the middle and not yet ready to move on. I’ve got my work, they’ve got theirs…But we also have time. That is, after all, the difference between chasing and running away.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!