UNPLUGGED

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1476.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Fantasy Oppression / Bigotry
Category:	Nonbinary
Fandom:	Overwatch (Video Game)
Relationship:	Lynx Seventeen/Aleksandra "Zarya" Zaryanova
Characters:	Lynx Seventeen, Aleksandra "Zarya" Zaryanova
Additional Tags:	Developing Relationship, Rescue Mission, Denial Of Feelings
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-08 Words: 20,834 Chapters: 6/6

UNPLUGGED

by hanktalkin

Summary

Lynx doesn't expect to hear from her again.

Chapter 1

Lynx didn't imagine to hear from the soldier again. They expected the candypink Russian to disappear from their life and fade into the snowy night.

Metaphorical snow, of course. They actually saw Zarya off at the Numbani airport before she returned to the front, the two of them silent under the defeat of their shared mission. Her last words to them were, "you have done what you said what you would do. That is something."

Not exactly a thank you, but Lynx held the words with them like handful of delicate glass. Barbed but...sentimental.

And that was the end of that. Lynx never gave up on Sombra, but all leads had gone cold, and they found other projects to occupy the multitudes of months. People always needed things traced, and eventually the whirlwind tour and the two women (one a mystery and one not) faded from Lynx Seventeen's mind.

That was until they received a message.

It popped up on Lynx's work tablet, one that was annoyingly unsecured. They used it for picking up new jobs, and it was basically an abject bulletin board of various calls and complaints. Occasionally Lynx would find something interesting in all the junk, but mostly they just ignored anything that didn't have a price up front.

It was only when Lynx glanced at the sender that they paused. @**AZaryaNova**. There was no one else that could be, and Lynx forwarded it to their personal mail before their curiosity could make them do something stupid.

Within two days, Zarya was sitting on Lynx's couch, holding a cup of tea like she'd personally seen Lynx pour poison in it.

"You know," they told her as they turned off one of the nearby screens, "if you don't trust me by now, you've come a long way to sit in my living room in silence."

Zarya set down her pink teacup. It was just as well; it looked comically small in the Russian's large hands. "Trust is not necessary. I have worked without it before."

"That I'm aware of," Lynx remembered. When Zarya still didn't pick up her drink, they changed the subject. "Considering your message implied you wanted to keep this a relatively low profile visit, I am surprised you contacted me on an open channel."

Zarya frowned. Or grimaced was a better term. Maybe if she had a little of the orange tea she wouldn't be so bitter. "I could not contact you the same way as before. Katya-...*Volskaya* and I are no longer on terms."

That was concerning. Lynx wondered what Zarya had just gotten them. Oh well, it's not like they didn't already have a thousand and one enemies in Russia.

"I see. Then you probably shouldn't have your real name in the sending information."

"Oh," Zarya said. The soldier didn't fidget. Not once since Lynx had met her, which was strange for a human. Even Lynx was prone to twitching their ears, a tic that was especially pronounced when they when thinking. But Zarya just sat silently, her face locked in a noiseless staring match with a potted fichus. "I did...not know what else to do. I do not have many fr-allies outside of Russia. I was growing nervous, and perhaps slightly sleep deprived at the time."

Lynx tapped their fingers against a powered down keyboard. An admission of weakness. This really must have shaken the soldier.

"May I take a guess that the origin of your insomnia this big secret you supposedly could only tell me in person?"

"You may guess anything you like, omnic," Zarya replied acrimoniously. "Your thoughts do not concern me."

"Of course they don't. That's why you flew halfway across the world, sit on my couch, and refuse to drink my tea."

"Omnics don't drink tea," Zarya said stoutly. "You would not know how to make it well."

And, god damn it, Lynx had to laugh. Their amusement must have caught Zarya off guard, because she looked up at them like they had grown a third arm. Lynx shook their head at the strange visitor.

"Zarya. You are not the first human I've ever had in my home. Drink the tea."

Zarya looked like she was going to argue, but her complaint was stuffed inside a disgruntled frown instead. She picked up her teacup and had a sip.

"See?" Lynx asked.

Zarya's eyes widened. "It is...good."

That was some damn high praise. Lnyx twitched their ears, the only way they really had of smiling.

"Your couch is too soft though," Zarya said. As though saying something purely positive about an omnic would kill her.

"It has to be. My sensors aren't built for detecting subtle changes in texture. This is really the only way I can get comfortable."

"Oh," Zarya said again.

"So, now that we've established I make good tea: why did you come to me Zarya? What is this big secret you just could not sit on?"

Fiddling with her cup, Zarya didn't make eye contact. She took another sip, and then sighed in a way that highlighted ever tendon of stress in her neck. "I cannot tell you."

The flash of irritation came in immediately. "I know you said you did not trust me, but this is *ridiculous*. If you wanted to waste my time-"

"It's not just you!" Zarya said, crushing the teacup in her hand without even noticing. "I cannot tell *anyone*. No one in Russia would want it to be known, and no one outside will know what to do. *I* don't know what to do."

She looked down at her hand, as though only now noticing the pink ceramic imbedded in her skin. When she opened her fist, a dribble of blood fell on the carpet.

She looked up at Lynx. "If you knew something. Something that might change the world, or maybe already has...what would you do?"
Lynx looked her. A woman that looked powerless at the moment, despite still holding the small teacup she had so brutally murdered. Lynx had met many like her, those unwilling to believe an omnic was worth more than the metal they were printed on, and Lynx had never cared to convince them. But this woman had saved their life. And she hadn't done it out of guilt or pity, but because something in her was still willing to see the other side.

"I would find someone to help me," Lynx replied, voice as clear as they could make it.

Relief softened in the soldier's eyes. "And...once you found someone to help you...what would *they* do?"

Lynx stood, going over to collect their tablet. A couple of soft taps later, and they asked, "what do you know of Overwatch?"

Zarya's face was cautious, but not repelled. "I have heard of them. They have not made many friends in Russia."

"Neither have you," Lynx pointed out. They handed her the tablet, and she took it with her good hand. "They're an odd collection. And are sending out covert recruitment ads at the moment."

"They asked you?" Zarya raised her eyebrow over the screen.

Lynx nodded. "And, if I decide to show up one day, I'm sure they'll allow a plus one."

"I am not handing over what I found just for my personal security," Zarya said with disdain, trying to give the tablet back.

"You do not have to," Lynx said. "Not at first. But there are a lot people there who might have advice for you. Something I obviously, cannot give. Unless you were to tell me what exactly you discovered when you were on the front?"

She hesitated. For a brief instant, Lynx thought she might tell them why she'd come all this way. But then she shook her head, pursing her lips.

"No. I am sorry. Not until I am sure of what I know." Lynx didn't want to know what that meant. Zarya was now curling her fist against her stomach, trying to stop blood from dripping onto the carpet. She was doing a shitty job, but it's the thought that counts. "But Overwatch...this sounds like a good plan. If it will be safe and...give me time."

Lynx nodded. They left the livingroom, and Zarya must have assumed they were making arrangements or something because she was surprised when they returned with the first aid kit. Lynx knelt at the coffee table, and held out a hand for her palm. They thought she might refuse, but, after a blink, she let them take it, flinching slightly as they picked the bits of ceramic from her flesh.

What an odd day. What an odd woman. Lynx hadn't questioned her the first time she'd fallen into their life, but now they were two for two on reluctant partnership. She was the center of Lynx's curiosity now, more than Sombra ever was. And that couldn't entirely be blamed on this Deadly Secret she was supposedly carrying. There was more. And Lynx would have time to unravel.

They'd be working together for quite some time, after all.

Chapter 2

The heat of the shower was a familiar blessing. Zarya liked them hot, scalding the most desirable. They were a safe sort of pain, one that sated the cry for battle she heard constantly in her ears, but nothing that would give her permanent damage. She ate spicy food and snapped rubber bands against the inside of her wrist let the hot water fall between her shoulder blades; anything that would keep her in the reality of civilian life.

It was hard to believe it had been it'd only been three weeks.

The last time when she'd come from the front—again on an Numbani related adventure, ironically enough—her mind had been occupied, intent on the hunt. She wasn't a very good hunter, she'd proven in the end, but at least it had been close enough to being a soldier that she hadn't suffered. Now, in the intermittent days that had followed her arrival in the city, the hours of nothingness were getting to her.

She turned off the water, toweling off her hair and stepping though the hallway to her room. At first it had surprised her that the robot had showers in their home when they obviously didn't need any. Either the apartment had once been for human occupation and only been recently outfitted for omnics, or this city was so backwards it actually *expected* omnics and humans to cohabitate. Both options churned a kernel of disgust in her stomach.

The towel came away pink. She scowled at it—there was no good hair dye in Numbani, only knock-off brands and natural colors that couldn't compare to stuff she used to buy. Even on the front lines, she's been able to requisition Нексус. *Damn this city and damn Volskaya and damn-*

"Zaryanova. I was hoping to find you."

Zarya stiffened, the omnic who'd just passed through her thoughts now standing brazenly in front of her. She might have walked right into them if they hadn't spoken up.

"You are very bold to talk to me right now, robot," she said. "I am in a mood."

"Bold?" Their antenna twitched. "I'm not the one walking down the middle of the hallway without a towel on."

Zarya quickly looked down at herself, though she knew already they were right. In the army, she had gotten in the habit of going straight from showers to bunks. There was no privacy in her unit, not with people who she lived and died with every day. Yet another adjustment to civilian life she would have to make, and she felt a small thrill of embarrassment-

No, that was ridiculous. A naked human and a clothed human were all the same to an omnic. Maybe one was slightly easier to injure with knife or fist but that was all. She didn't care how Lnyx saw her.

And yet. And yetandyetandyetandyet...

"What did you want to speak with me about?" she asked firmly. Her hand rested on her hip, stance confident. Devoid of any shame she certainly didn't have.

"We should go out today. I have something I want to show you."

"What is it?" She furrowed her brow. "Does it pertain to our mission?"

"...In a way. Come on, get dressed. I'll explain on the bus."

Zarya opened her mouth to protest, but the omnic was already gone. With a shuffle, Zarya arrived in her room, somehow feeling more naked than she had before.

Despite their promise Lynx didn't explain as the two rode through the city. Instead, they responded to Zarya's probing by pointing out various local attractions, all on display as the bus seemed to meander forever through the glistening halls of Numbani.

She grunted conversationally in reply.

Zarya hadn't come here to see the sights. She had come here...well, she didn't really know why she'd come here actually.

When she'd shown up at Lynx's apartment, through a hastily negotiated invitation, she had no idea what the robot could do for her and the ghosts she was running from. But she knew that this scrappy plan (half-formed in the dead of night) would *have* to work. Simply because it was her only option left.

The idea of joining Overwatch had come so easily to them, it seemed ridiculous she hadn't it up on her own. But she hadn't gotten this far by underestimating omnics, and calmly accepted that hindsight was twenty-twenty.

Lynx Seventeen had saved her. Perhaps it was unfair that she kept exactly how close the danger was from her ally, but she had told them from the beginning she didn't trust them. The burden she bore was heavier than anything Olivia Colomar had whispered in her ear, and showing all her cards wasn't worth the risk. But, even though she kept them in the dark, Lynx had still saved her and asked for nothing in return.

She hadn't expected them to. Maybe because Katya had been the one paying them, or because they never seemed to need *anything* while they were traveling with Zarya, but the omnic existed in her mind as someone who did things simply because. *If they do not help me, I am lost.* And so they had.

She had based a decision of life or death on the good character of an omnic. What was the world coming to?

"This is our stop," Lynx told her.

She grunted again, following the omnic down while they paid for their bus fare.

The duo arrived at a small lounge positioned at ground floor. Live music hummed cheerily from inside, and Zarya could just make out the soft curves of red furniture before the establishment sunk too far into the earth. It was crowned overhead by apartment buildings, the architecture giving the impression that the lounge was being slowly squished underground.

“Are we meeting someone here?” Zarya guessed. It was as out of the way as anything.

Lynx was already down the stairs, and Zarya wrinkled her nose before going after them.

The hostess was an omnic, who Lynx spoke politely to and Zarya just as politely ignored. They were seated close to the band, a mix of humans and omnics playing a gentle thumping tune. Not something Zarya cared for, but it was better than the careful drone of the TV that was always on in Lynx’s apartment.

As Zarya looked around, she noticed the multitude of omnics in the crowd as well, mingling among the humans who sat on overstuffed seats. They pretended this was normal, just like every other human in this godforsaken city. *It is like they’re all acting natural specifically to annoy me.* Zarya let herself feel some spiteful satisfaction at the thought, only pushing it away when she realized the lounge basically represented the demographics of her current party.

The music thronged, and a waiter came by and took her order. “Nkwobi,” she said shortly. “And a glass of water.”

Zarya tapped her manicured fingers on the table in beat with the music. Her mind already longed for something to occupy it with. These too-relaxed moments played tricks with her perception, making her feel like she was supposed to be doing something even though she knew she wasn’t. The meal would help at least. She could practically taste the spice baked into the cow’s leg.

“Why are we here Lynx?” she spoke.

“The lead bassist is a friend of mine,” Lynx said idly, indicating a human on stage. “She moved here from Cameroon with the intent of being a software engineer, and ended up falling in love with Numbani’s music scene.”

Zarya looked up at the bassist. She was beautiful sure, but didn’t look as intimidating as Zarya expected an Overwatch agent to be. “She’s who we’re meeting?”

“No,” Lynx shrugged. “I was simply making conversation.”

“Robot, if you do not-” Zarya began.

“Zaryanova,” Lynx cut her off. “You are drawing attention, which wouldn’t happen if you’d just enjoy yourself. Relax. And please stop eviscerating all of our napkins.”

Zarya looked down, just noticing the small mound of torn paper that had accumulated at her spot. She was more tense than she’d realized.

Gradually, she tried to follow Lynx's advice. She did breathing exercises, releasing tension in her shoulders and improving her posture. The last thing she wanted was attention in this place, whether it be hostile or not. Over the next fifteen minutes, she actually began to listen to the music, trying to blend in with the dozens of other patrons.

Is this what omnics and humans did together? After all, it's not like going out for lunch could satisfy all parties. She supposed she could ask Lynx, but conversation with the robot would only make her tense up again.

Her nkwobi came, and she reveled in the sting as she tore into it. The thrumming music seemed match the buzz in her lips and, god forbid, she actually started to enjoy herself.

By the time she'd finished her meal the band was taking their last bows, being met with a clatter of snaps and metal claps.

Zarya wiped her mouth with a napkin. "We're not meeting anyone, are we?"

Lynx tilted their head. "No, we are not."

"You said this pertained to the mission," Zarya frowned.

Lynx turned to her. They hadn't moved at all during the performance besides the faint twitch in their antenna to show they were listening. Now they directed every bit of their body language at the Russian, telling her, "you are the mission."

She knitted her brow. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that my current goal is to get you to join Overwatch. I have every motive to keep you healthy and occupied, and that includes getting out of the apartment every now and again. You were going absolutely crazy cooped up in there."

Zarya opened her mouth, but couldn't deny that in good conscience. Numbani intimidated her. It was constant reminder how far away from home she was.

"To stay alive you need to live a little," Lynx continued. "That includes leaving your home for things besides hair products."

"It is not my home," Zarya barked to cover up sharp embarrassment in her chest.

Lynx shrugged. "Even so. But like I said, the better condition you're in the better our chances are with Overwatch. Plus, if you kept doing all those push-ups, you would have put a hole right through my floor."

Zarya was pretty sure that last one was a joke, but Lynx had made their point. She sighed, rubbing he temples with her freshly cleaned hands.

"So this whole thing was to get me to have fun?" she asked, resigned.

"That depends. *Did* you have fun?"

Zarya thought. “I suppose.”

“Then yes. That was the whole thing.”

Zarya’s foot had barely touched the sidewalk outside the lounge when the sound of police sirens tore through the streets. She looked up, watching cars fly by and painting the above apartments red and blue.

She might have thought nothing of it—there’s always crime in a city— except for the fact that a thousand glass windows seemed to shatter at once.

Zarya ducked, but noise wasn’t from above them. It came from the direction the police were headed, near the downtown.

“What was that?” she said, ears still ringing from the noise.

“Trouble,” Lynx pointed out astutely.

“Right,” Zarya said, reaching for her handheld. “I’m going to find out what’s going on.”

“Don’t bother,” Lynx interrupted. “I’ve already hacked into several police communication lines.”

“Of course you have,” Zarya sighed.

“Your exasperation is noted, but superfluous. Come on, they’re heading toward the museum.”

They didn’t call a cab, the streets already packing up as the cycle of destruction spiraled outwards. Zarya and Lynx ran along crowded sidewalks, only guided by Lynx’s sense of direction. Or maybe an internal GPS. Zarya didn’t want to guess.

They reached the scene of the crime as police drew yellow tape around the Numbani Heritage Museum, its glass dome had been entirely shot out, closing the mystery of that god awful noise. Lynx had trouble pushing through the swarms of people, their only saving grace being the large Russian at their side. She shoved the way to the front, arriving directing in front of an officer.

“What has happened?” she asked immediately.

“The museum was robbed,” the officer explained for what was probably the hundredth time. “Now please, stay back. We need to make sure Doomfist doesn’t have any more people in there.”

“Doomfist?” Zarya asked, the name feeling vaguely familiar on her tongue.

“A former member of Talon,” Lynx said, the robot still at her elbow. “His glove was located inside museum. I told you that while we were on the bus.”

“Yes,” Zarya said. “But I was not listening.”

Motor’s whirred inside Lynx in an expression that was probably annoyance.

“Come on,” they told Zarya. “There’s nothing more we can do here.”

“But-” She wanted to go *in*. To *fight*. To stop sitting around here waiting and go to battle for once-

“*Zaryanova*.” Lynx’s voice was strong, more than she had ever heard from them. “He’s gone. There are reports of him boarding a helicopter almost a half an hour ago.”

The wave of passion that had consumed Zarya receded, leaving her just as agitated and hopeless as before. Her particle cannon was gone, far out of reach in deep storage, but she still felt the need to do *something*. Like the chance she’d been waiting for three weeks had just slipped through her fingers.

Softly, Lynx’s hand pressed against her shoulder. “He’s gone,” they repeated, “but it’s not over. If you come with me, we can still be of help.”

There was something else unsaid at the end of there. A *trust me*. A sentence that Zarya would reject if it were said aloud, but followed the omnic anyway.

They wanted her to find a quiet spot. She did; a narrow but clean alleyway where Zarya only had to stand at the end of to shoo nosey tourists away. Even as she cleared the hidey-hole as asked, she saw Lynx whipping out several devices from their jumpsuit.

She wondered if they ever washed that. They probably didn’t need to without any sweat glands, but still. It was the principle.

Lynx got to work. She didn’t know what they were doing and didn’t pretend to guess. Whatever it was it took most of the hour, constant tapping and clicking as the omnic sat on the ground in their circle of electronics.

Finally, they stood, approaching their temporary bouncer. “Okay. I’ve done about all I can.”

“Which was?” Zarya raised her eyebrow.

Lynx whirred, and then began to list. “First, I compiled all I could on the helicopter from fifty-seven different security cameras and twenty-three personal use cameras. I ran it through several manufacturers, found the most likely make and model, and forwarded my findings to the police. I checked all known sources to if the gauntlet could be tracked in any way, but turned up nothing. And, finally, I redirected all traffic away from the museum. Numbani infrastructure response time is *terrible*.”

“You did all that?” Zarya asked. “Impossible. It’s only been an hour.”

“I’m very good at what I do.”

“Hm,” was all Zarya allowed. “Fine then. But then, if you did all of this, why?”

“Besides the fact that this is my home and it helps people in need?”

“Yes,” she pressed.

Lynx’s antennae twitched. “Alright, if it keeps your opinion of omnics unchallenged, my motives weren’t entirely altruistic. I do this often, helping out where the bureaucracy of a city can’t get to the ones who need it most. I leave a calling card. It helps with my reputation.”

“So you are a…super hero of sorts?” Zarya mulled over the mental image. It fit. The omnic *did* tend to wear PJs while out and about.

Lynx put their hands on their hips. “I was going to say vigilante, but if that suits you.”

It did. And, despite yet another failure their duo had achieved, Zarya felt her burden lightened. It must have been all that omnic music rotting her brain.

“So…now what?” she asked them.

“We wait. Again. But I believe this time, we’ll get a much faster reply.”

It took less than a week. Zarya was coming from her room, planning to do a few push-ups in the living room where there was at least some space, and walked into a meeting already in progress.

“Zaryanova,” Lynx said from their spot on the couch. “Glad you’re here. Might I introduce Dr. Zhou, here on behalf of Overwatch.”

Zarya froze. The Overwatch agent was small and round, with a large pair of glasses that took up half her face. She rose to greet Zarya, a smile already glowing on her face.

“A pleasure to meet you Ms. Zaryanova!” she said as she shook Zarya’s hand. “But please, if we’re going to be working together, you can call me Mei.”

Zarya remembered herself halfway through the shake, and closed down hard. Maybe she was a bit too firm, because Mei’s adorable face scrunched with momentary discomfort. Zarya let go quickly.

“That is…so good to hear,” Zarya said, trying to remember what it was like to talk to people besides Lynx. “So we…have been officially accepted then?”

“Indeed we have,” Lynx said, standing. They reached down and cleaned Mei’s empty teacup. “Overwatch was impressed with our efforts during the Doomfist attack.”

Your efforts, Zarya thought, but kept it to herself.

Mei adjusted her glasses before holding her hands in front of her. “Of course, we had been in contact with Lynx Seventeen before, but we were having trouble negotiating your inclusion.” She rocked on the balls of her feet. “Personally, I would have taken you, but some questioned your former ties with Katya Volskaya.”

Zarya's chest tightened. "Katya and I are no longer friends." If Sombra's revelation hadn't severed their connections, then Katya's treatment of her after the fact had.

"I know that," Mei said, and her face was genuinely sympathetic. Despite herself, Zarya was already beginning to trust Dr. Zhou. "But others in the leadership had their doubts. However, thanks to your work during the attack, we now collectively believe you two are too valuable to lose."

Zarya glanced over at Lynx. All this time they had been saying Overwatch had been difficult to contact, when in reality it had been *Zarya* who was the wrench in the gears. The robot had lied to her. Unsurprising but…to spare her feelings?

Mei was still waiting for a response.

"Thank you," Zarya said, then cleared her throat. "For deciding we are worth the risk."

Mei laughed, and Lynx passed by with teacup in hand. Things were going to be…odd, to say the least.

Chapter 3

Placing her particle cannon on the dresser, Zarya turned to look around her new quarters. It was bare, undecorated, and probably wouldn't be for some time; she hadn't brought much with her in the way of personal effects, a habit born of both a military lifestyle and the past month couch-surfing in Lynx's apartment. The closest thing to a memento was her gun, which Katya could pry from her cold, dead hands.

Sentimentality was the only reason it was up here now, even when Overwatch had provided her with a weapons locker that was particularly roomy. Gibraltar had been built to service hundreds of operatives, and the space and resources leftover from Overwatch's heyday were more than sufficient for the few dozen members the organization had managed to attract. In her short time here, Zarya had already managed to get herself lost in the multitude of rooms that seemed to contain nothing but questions.

Running her hand over her gun one last time, Zarya left her room. She was grateful for any meeting if it meant she didn't have to contemplate her bare walls for long.

She followed the small set of instructions sent to her personal tablet. Left here, second floor of this building, two doors past the server rooms. Despite being promptly on time, two heads turned as she entered, the "meeting" smaller than she imagined.

"Finally," Soldier 76 grunted. "Let's get started."

Zarya was good at hiding her distaste of people who were supposed to be her superior officers. From their brief meeting when she'd arrived on base, the vigilante found every way to push her buttons, and she gathered from various sources that he was one of the people who had denied her recruitment in the first place.

"It is alright Soldier," Mei said, the only other person in the room. "I told her to come a little later. I wanted the two of us to discuss some of the changes in Lucheng's security before we started."

She shot a brief smile at Zarya. It was good to see a friendly face, especially with Soldier already stamping on Zarya's nerves. Why Overwatch had picked him up she couldn't imagine; she'd heard stories about Soldier's exploits while stationed in Siberia, and he sounded little more a wildcard with a grudge against Helix. The fact that he had climbed through Overwatch's hierarchy so quickly was a testament to how desperately the organization needed leadership.

Soldier scoffed, and turned to a board behind him.

"As you might have heard, Lucheng Interstellar is planning a mission to retake the lost lunar colony," he began, pulling up a picture of a steel skyscraper at night.

Zarya had heard no such thing, but it wasn't in her nature to interrupt a briefing.

“They’ve reported unrest in the area for the past few months, and more protests as launch date gets closer and closer.” Soldier continued to flip through slides. “Chinese-omnic relations have historically been amicable, and it’s suspicious that only now are tensions are on the rise. Someone may be instigating this as a front for a more concrete sabotage of Lucheng’s mission.”

“And even if it isn’t,” Mei added, “we should get to the bottom of this and help where we can.”

“Shuttle leaves in twelve hours,” Soldier finished. “Get some rest.”

“We’re being deployed?” Zarya blurted, only to realize how obvious of a question that was. “I was not aware I would be taking on a mission so soon.”

“We’re short on hands,” Soldier said gruffly. “But if you think you’re not up to it *so soon*, I’m sure we can find someone else.”

The mockery in his voice almost made Zarya bite back something just as stinging, but she held her tongue. “No. I will be ready.”

“You better be.” Soldier walked past, contempt following him like a fog.

“Don’t mind him,” Mei said immediately, coming to stand at Zarya’s side. “He is just a naturally cranky man.”

It took the last bits of Zarya’s professionalism to not point out that was an understatement. “It is…frustrating to mistrusted over something I am no longer a part of.”

Mei gave her a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. “It will be alright, Zaryanova. When it comes down to a firefight, he’ll have your back. And that’s what’s important, right?”

Maybe Mei was right, but that didn’t chase away the bitter taste in Zarya’s mouth that the meeting had brought.

“And here’s our communications array,” Winston said, finishing the tour of Gibraltar’s facilities. “If I’m being honest, this is the main reason we wanted you here. I was able to set it up but…my expertise lies in electrical engineering and theoretical physics.”

“You say that like those go together like margaritas and sunny days,” Lynx joked, tilting their head at the scientist. “That’s quite an impressive range of skills.”

Winston coughed into his fist, embarrassed and slightly flattered. Lynx got the impression he didn’t interact with people much.

“Well…thank you.” Winston cleared his throat. “But it doesn’t quite cut it for system design. So. Do you think you’d be up to it?”

Lynx could already see thirty-seven ways to significantly reduce retransmission, but thought better than to say that aloud. “I think I would be.” They looked around Gibraltar’s science

facilities, a place that looked well lived-in thanks to one squatting gorilla. A tire swing hung from the ceiling, and various calculations ran the length of the outdated chalkboards on the walls. “Is it just you and I here or-?”

“Winston!” a feminine voice called from the top of the stairs. “I have something else I’d like to try.”

The two turned to see a blonde woman in a lab coat come down to the first level, causing her to stop when she noticed Lynx.

“Oh,” she said, startled. Then she repeated, “oh! You must be Lynx Seventeen. I completely forgot you and your friend were arriving today. I am Dr. Zeigler, pleased to meet you.” She extended a hand, which Lynx graciously took.

“Mercy is in here often too,” Winston explained. “Ever since she and Pharah brought back this artifact we liberated from Talon, she’s been obsessed with it.” He indicated a solid metal orb sitting on one the various display tables.

“I have not been *obsessed*,” Mercy said indignantly. She turned to Lynx. “Honestly, I’m barely in here. You’ll truthfully be seeing more of Lena than of me.”

“Lena…” Lynx mused. “That name rings a bell.”

“You’d probably remember her better if I called her Tracer,” Mercy laughed. “Our glorious poster child.”

“*The* Tracer? Well that’s wonderful that you’ve brought her back in,” Lynx said, joining Mercy’s laughter. “I’ll be sure to get her autograph when I see her.”

“Go right ahead. She certainly loves being reminded she’s a hero.” Mercy raised an eyebrow. “I assume you’re here to work with the watchpoint’s systems?”

Lynx nodded. “Certainly. And, if Overwatch is interested, I have other skills in hacking and related security.”

Mercy and Winston shared an awkward look. The doctor shifted on her feet before saying, “in…the old Overwatch, matters of espionage were usually left to Blackwatch.”

“You don’t currently have the resources to create a whole separate division for covert operations,” Lynx pointed out. “I’d merely do a some reconnaissance on potential threats to the organization.”

“Lynx,” Winston began hesitantly. “What we’re doing here isn’t exactly legal by any means, but espionage is something that might attract some…unwanted attention.”

Lynx wanted to press the issue further, to point out that their skills were far beyond simple system maintenance, but then remembered they were not here for themself. They put up their hands in a symbol of surrender. “I see I’ve made you uncomfortable. Don’t worry, I’ll be sure to keep my activities here to minimal noteworthiness.”

The relief was immediately apparent in their new coworkers, and they wondered how much was actual fear of being discovered and how much was just distaste for Lynx's profession.

"So," Mercy began, obviously eager to change the subject, "as long as we're doing introductions, I'd love to meet your friend."

Lynx was just beginning to say it'd be their pleasure when Winston interrupted.

"Actually, her team left about an hour ago for that Lijiang mission."

"What?" Lynx asked, antennae twitching. "They're sending her on a mission already?"

Winston nodded. "Mei and Soldier were waiting on a third for it, and no one else could be pulled away." He shifted, perhaps uncomfortable under Lynx's apparent surprise. "Did…she not tell you?"

"We have not seen each other since arriving," Lynx replied shrewdly, not actually answering the question. "I'm sure she's been very busy."

In fact, it would be shocking if Zarya *had* told Lynx anything, especially if she thought they didn't need to know. She was infuriatingly mum even when there *were* things Lynx needed to know. So then why did the idea of her leaving without saying goodbye throw them so off guard?

"Thank you very much for the tour," Lynx said, in what they hoped was a cheerful tone. "But I'd like to begin working on the communications array. There's so much to do."

The scientist and the doctor left them alone, as requested. But, even without the distraction, they found it frustratingly hard to concentrate when thoughts of a pink haired woman kept crossing their mind.

The night market bustled, the trio blending as they made their way through the twenty-four hour shopping district. There was no shortage of those with physical augmentations in a place like this, and the only thing that might make them stand out was the fact they were heavily armed. Well, Soldier and Zarya were. Mei's weapon was…less obvious.

The climatologist had explained it to Zarya as their shuttle took them halfway around the world; how it had been based on a prototype she made while trapped at one of Overwatch's ecopoints.

"Your story is fascinating," Zarya had said, leaning against one of the stable cots. "It is straight out of a fairy tale."

"What do you mean?" Mei asked, strapping her tank again now that she was done showing Zarya.

"A beautiful princess falls asleep, and no one can awaken her for a hundred years." Zarya cocked her head. "Fitting."

She could have sworn she saw Mei blush. “Well, substitute true love’s kiss for Winston’s message, and we’re pretty gosh darn close.”

Now, they moved through the streets, the princess followed by a knight and an avenger. There were humans and omnics alike in the market, and although they didn’t mingle quite so much as her temporary home, it still reminded her of Numbani.

“Perhaps the reason the robots are in revolt is because it is their natural state when faced with the problem of humanity,” Zarya muttered, mostly to herself.

To her surprise, Mei’s eyes went wide as she glanced over shoulder. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Zarya shrugged. “When they are kept separated, we are not so present in their minds that they remember we must be eliminated.” It seemed like such an obvious thing to her, that this forced mingling of peoples would only lead to discord. It happened all over the world, worst where society became tolerant of the robots continued existence. Russia’s way was bloody, but it certainly was the right way, even after all Zarya had learned.

Soldier and Mei exchanged a look. Or at least, she thought it was a look, the way Soldier’s visor obscured him making it hard to tell. “I take it you’re not a fan of omnics,” the vigilante said with half a snort.

“Of course not. I am Russian.” She looked between her two squadmates. Neither of their nations had seen the crisis the way Zarya’s motherland had; it was not unsurprising they could not see the truth as she could.

“But…” Mei stuttered. “You’re friends with Lynx.”

“We are not friends,” Zarya said reflexively. She shied suddenly from her own words, realizing she was only making the situation more confused. She clarified, “we are…allies. We trust each other to work together, but certainly not enough to be friends.” She also realized being friends with an omnic was impossible, but chose not to say it aloud.

They were stopped in the middle of the market now, people flowing around their squadron. Both Mei and Soldier looked decidedly uncomfortable.

“Well,” Soldier 76 said at last, “this mission keeps getting better and better.” He continued on their path, and the two women followed unenthusiastically at his heel.

Lijiang mellowed with day and then spilled into the next night, no culprits arising no matter who they shook down. Lucheng had been no help, their list of possible business rivals being implausible and also mostly unreachable. That only left here, a garden on the outskirts of Lijiang, where there last lead had supposedly burrowed.

“Tsai’s here somewhere,” Soldier said, eyeing the apartments as they crossed the bridge.

Tsai Su had been arrested three months ago for threatening members from several divisions of Lucheng. Recently out on bail, she was the only suspect they had at the moment.

“And if she is not here?” Zarya asked Soldier’s back.

It was Mei who answered. “Then we have to assume that it not the work out outside forces causing the unrest. If that is the case, then we should simply guard Lucheng, perhaps talk to leaders of the protests to get to the root of the problem.”

The idea caused Zarya’s lip to curl. “Why not leave, if there is no foul play?”

“Overwatch is a peace keeping force, first and foremost,” Mei said firmly. “So, we keep the peace.”

Her tone told that was the end of the discussion. Ever since the market she’d been remarkably cold to Zarya, a stark contrast to their precious interactions. Zarya couldn’t help but think it had something to do with her little speech yesterday.

Even if she wanted to better explain herself, their present conversation was cut short when Soldier held up his hand.

“…Do you hear that?” he said.

Zarya strained her ears. If she concentrated she could hear a faint beeping…

“BOMB!” she shouted, the warning coming only a second before the bridge exploded underneath them. The three rushed forward, landing on the other side just as the remains of the bridged crashed into the water below.

“From the other side!” Soldier shouted, pointing across the garden. “Three o’clock!”

Tsai stood on the opposite bridge, plasma rifle in one hand and a detonator in the other. Even at this distance, Zarya could see something wild and untamed in her eyes, a mania she had worn throughout her mug shots as well. It was much more terrifying now that it was in 3D and it’s owner was raising her rifle at them

“Duck and cover people!” Soldier was already pushing himself off his stomach, sprinting faster than anyone his age should have been able to.

Mei was slower, but got up just in time to shoot an ice wall from her blaster and block most of Tsai’s shots. “Run!” she yelled.

Zarya didn’t need to be told twice. They charged off after Soldier, making it to a small shed right on the edge of the roof. Just beyond the wall, she could hear Tsai screaming something in Chinese.

The wall crumbled as they got to the cover of the structure. Tsai seemed to take no heed of her own safety as she stood openly on the bridge while she held up her detonator. The only thing that made her move was when Soldier took a pot shot at her, finally forcing her toward the garden’s central tower.

“Athena, where’d she go?” Soldier demanded into his comm. “I need eyes!”

The reprieve was short lived when Zarya heard more beeping. “Get behind me!” she roared, spinning around and facing the bomb just in time.

Explosive energy fizzled off the barrier, swarming around her in a cocoon. She closed her eyes against the white blast that came from the doorway, feeling energy draw into the batteries on her back. When she opened them again, the way the squad had come was oliterated.

“This whole place is a trap!” Zarya snarled.

“Athena! Where is she?!” Soldier demanded again.

Athena’s voice rang in all of their ears. “I am sorry Soldier: 76. I am attempting to access apartment security. This may take several minutes.”

“We don’t have time for-” Zarya began.

She was abruptly cut off as the central tower began to shake.

Lynx idly removed a panel on one of Overwatch’s satellites, one of Winston’s designs that would hopefully make Gibraltar’s less susceptible to hardware failure. The first one had been sloppy, put together in Winston’s hasty attempt to reunify the organization, and was unsustainable by his own admission. This one was meant to work in tandem with the satellite already in orbit and increase its longevity, but Lynx had found so many flaws in the supposed upgrade that they—to borrow a human expression—were ready to tear their hair out.

Attaching a module of their own design, they poked the wires back into place and screwed in the panel. There, that should help with that terrible excuse for error detection. If they were being honest, Lynx would love to just green field it, but they knew that would waste time and also possibly hurt Winston’s feelings.

Lynx jumped down off the satellite, landing near the communication systems they always seemed to get sidetracked with. They were just reaching for a grease rag when a voice blared through the speakers.

“*We need immediate help, pinned down, unknown number explosives, we are at 63 Renmin Lu, Lijiang, need immediate eyes on-*”

But Lynx’s mind was already whirling as they recognized the voice.

Zarya.

They rushed forward, skittering to a stop in front of the comms, fingers flying as they tried to locate the signal. It was immediately apparent why they were hearing it in the first place; the squad was accessing Athena’s emergency channel, and now the AI was broadcasting it to whoever was able to help.

Smashing a final command, Lynx brought up the Lijiang squad's location. A roof's bird's eye view, security cameras, easily accessible if- but they weren't supposed to be hacking anything unnecessarily-

A shout from Zarya wiped away all hesitation. She screamed, presumably to the others, that the tower was coming down, and to take cover.

Lynx opened a two-way channel. "Zaryanova." Words and actions came easily, the ability to multitask effortless for an omnic, and they were already almost into security.

"Lynx?" It was odd to be called by their name, so used to being referred to as 'robot.' Zarya must truly be under a lot of stress.

"Expecting someone else?" Lynx still found it in them to joke. But then the moment was gone, fading as they hear the sound of crashing over the line. "Give me a rundown of the situation."

Zarya didn't hesitate. She was a soldier after all. "We pursued a suspect to rooftop garden, she's set the place with various explosives. We are now in pursuit. She is armed and dangerous."

Lynx had found the files, presumably what Soldier had entered, and the room flashed as they gained access to the apartment complex's security. A dozen different images, different angles, processing before their eyes as they began a plan. As an extra measure, they also accessed the camera in Soldier's visor, and a larger than life image of Zarya appeared before them.

She looked hardened. It was the expression she wore before they entered Sombra's lair—when she was focused on her goal and wouldn't let anything stand in her way—but also tinged with a hint of worry Lynx might have missed if they hadn't been living with her for a month. The stress wasn't getting to her, but she was in danger and she knew it.

Something stirred in Lynx's chest. Not literally of course, but all of a sudden they knew there was no way they would let her fall here.

The last of the supports on the central tower exploded in smoke, and Lynx could see Tsai standing out of sight of the three pinned down agents. They tightened their fists on the edge of the console.

"Go right! Now!"

When Lynx's voice had first sparked in Zarya's ear, it was like a claw tearing through a thin haze of cloud and illuminating the world before her. It was the sheer absurdity of it, this voice that was so out of place it shocked her back into reality.

It was only the lingering surprise that caused her to hesitate, but then she barked, "you heard the robot! Move!"

The creak of wood followed them as they charged across the still remaining bridge. With a crash, the tower slammed behind them, destroying the building they'd been in only seconds before.

Already, more instructions poured in through her ear. "She's across the pond, it looks like she's arming another one."

Zarya thought she spotted movement, something vaguely human shaped. "This way!"

Mei and Soldier followed her again, thankfully on the same page of Lynx's messages. The squad stormed the apartments, following Tsai's illusive trail. The corridors twisted and turned, and she swore she saw the edges of a coat tail-

There! Heading for the back doors.

Before she could set foot outside once again, Lynx said in her ear, "upstairs. Now. Leave the doors for the other two."

"But…" she began. She had just *seen* Tsai, a second ago, if she diverged now-

"Zaryanova," Lynx said, their voice calm despite the ringing as the garden exploded around her. "Trust me."

She sucked in air, the familiar leather of her armor holding tight to her chest, locking her lungs inside. She exhaled, and nodded.

"Keep going," she told her squad. "I'll catch up."

With that she was gone, up the stairs and following Lynx's hurried instructions. She didn't know how they were doing this; there certainly couldn't be *that* many cameras, and yet if felt like the omnic was with her every step of the way. She arrived at the second floor of one the apartments, and balked. There was Tsai, looking as surprised to see Zarya as Zarya was to see her.

She didn't know how Tsai had gotten up here, and didn't get the chance to ask. Tsai spun around, looking to hop to the next roof, and Zarya decided it was to stop this madwoman in her tracks.

"Огонь по готовности!" she shouted, launching graviton surge at the wall between the gap.

Tsai screamed, caught in the swirl of purple, frozen midair as she kicked out widely. It held her just in time for Mei and Soldier to arrive, and the scientist wasted no in raising her blaster. A shard of ice imbedded itself in Tsai's forearm, pinning it to the wall behind her and causing Tsai to scream harder. She dropped the detonator.

With a roll forward, Soldier caught it, and graviton dissipated.

Tsai wailed pitifully, now hanging to the wall by only her arm. The pain was enough for her to loosen her other hand, allowing Zarya to lean over the edge and pull her weapon from her grasp.

“Well,” Soldier said, tossing the detonator up and catching it. “That was certainly dramatic.”

“Says mister tuck and roll,” Zarya spat.

“Hey. It got the job done.”

Zarya decided she really didn’t like him. Tsai groaned.

Reaching over, Zarya ripped the shard from Tsai’s arm, grabbing the defeated woman like a sack of potatoes. She leaped to the ground, captive over her shoulder and looking between her partners.

“What now?” Zarya said, cocking her head at unconscious Tsai, who apparently had a very weak threshold for pain.

“Now,” Mei said, cleaning off her glasses, “it appears we have a lead.”

They arrived back at Gibraltar, Tsai in tow. In a legal sense, they had technically kidnapped her, since the PAP and Lucheng would both want her if they knew what she’d done. But Overwatch needed her more, especially since they believed this conspiracy went a lot deeper than just one woman.

Once their prisoner was safely secured and the briefing over, Zarya went wandering around the watchpoint, aimlessly looking inside rooms and finding most empty. She didn’t know what she was looking for until she discovered Lynx working on what looked to be a gigantic battery.

At the sound of her footsteps, they perked their ears, setting down their tools as they turned around. “Zaryanova. I thought you might be stopping by.”

“Really? I didn’t.” But the words didn’t come out with their usual sting. She blamed the lack of oomph on jet lag.

Lynx didn’t seem to notice. When she said nothing more, they went back to work, fiddling with what could only be another one of their assorted gadgets. Zarya, for her part, watched them work, casting her eyes about the room in various locations.

That was one good thing about the omnic: they didn’t talk unnecessarily. Even when the two had been on the hunt for Sombra she’d noticed it, how most of their conversations had been brief and direct, that the silence between them was never awkward. Hostile, yes. Sometimes. But other times it was just quiet, like she felt she could just be still every once and a while and no one would try to poke her into meaningless small talk.

Maybe it wasn’t in an omnic’s social code for rapport. Or…maybe Lynx shared her need to recharge every now and again.

“Thank you,” she said unexpectedly, surprising everyone including herself. When Lynx looked up, she felt the need to clarify, “for saving our lives.”

“Of course,” they said, setting down their tools once again. “I had the means to do so and, as you might imagine, it’s now part of my job.”

Zarya nodded, not knowing what she had been expecting. Perhaps an acknowledgement that she’d once done the same for them, but that suddenly seemed very conceited.

“I must know,” she said, still, for some reason, talking. “When we were running, how did you know the inside of all those buildings? There were no cameras there.”

“I was able to locate a floor plan of the building, archived in its construction files.”

They tilted her head, and Zarya couldn’t help but be impressed. She remembered how fast they’d sorted through those cameras on Numbani, doing what an entire police force might do in a day. Now she could add this to the growing proof of the hacker’s skills. Underestimation after underestimation.

“It wasn’t easy, but I thought it would be useful. And it was. I imagined what I would do if I had a large supply of explosives, and realized where she was luring you. The second story was the best workaround.” They twiddled their optical screwdriver in their hand, an odd tell. Pausing, they looked directly at Zarya when they said, “thank you for trusting me.”

Zarya opened her mouth, but didn’t know what to say. Sure she had let the omnic direct her to the safest route, but didn’t mean she *trusted* in the present and ongoing tense.

Lynx misinterpreted. They thought this somehow made them friends, but it’s not like that could happen without Zarya knowing, right?

“I am…” she began.

Right?

“You are a good partner,” she blurted. She didn’t wait to see Lynx look taken aback. “It was good that you helped us on our mission. I understand that Overwatch has requested your services in technical support but…I think you would be invaluable as a dispatcher.”

One of Lynx’s ears cocked to the side. Zarya wasn’t any good at reading omnic expressions but were they…amused?

“And is the squad asking? Or just you?”

Zarya took a steadying breath. “Just me.” She put forward her hand. “You are good at what you do, omnic. I have come to respect that. Respect it enough to admit I have mistrusted you.”

Even those words and an extended hand made Zarya’s insides cringe. This was practically treason, what she had judged Katya so hard for in the beginning. And yet…even if she knew it to be wrong, denying the fact that she now placed her confidence in an omnic would do her no good.

Lynx gave an audible laugh. They took her hand and said, “well then. I’ll consider this a small victory.”

Zarya’s face immediately darkened. “You’re not keeping score between us now, are you omnic?”

“No. Unless you consider us both earning points.” They chuckled again. “One victory came when you saved me from Sombra. Another when you contacted me at my home. Now again, I feel as though a small battle has been won. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Zarya withdrew her hand, her face forcefully neutral. “If I didn’t know any better robot, I would say you were trying to get me to like you.”

She could have sworn the peace lights were twinkling at her. “Why Zaryanova. You *are* observant, aren’t you?”

Chapter 4

The change, Lynx would later think, started with a story.

“And then, the barrier drops, right when he fires rocket.” Zarya curled both her hands into a ball, then threw them outward, accompanying the motion with a verbal *WOOSH*. “Right in his face! Ah, you should have seen it omnic, he went flying like little cartoon.”

Lynx tried to control themself, but between the overdramatic hand gestures and the expression on Zarya’s face, they couldn’t help the thrumming laugh that managed to squeak out. “You…are a *terrible* influence on me Zaryanova,” they said in-between snorts. “We should not be so flippant about our fellow agents unfortunate,” (hilarious), “accident.”

“Pah,” Zarya waved her hand, leaning against one of the lab’s various tool tables. “Soldier 76 will be fine. Mercy says he will be out of ward within week.”

“That woman certainly is a miracle worker,” Lynx nodded, tapping a screwdriver in their hand—a forgotten remnant of their work before Zarya had interrrupted them. “Though I doubt you would be particularly heartbroken if 76 didn’t return for some while.”

Zarya’s jovial expression darkened, back into its usual glower. “No. I would not.”

“What *is*your problem with our vigilante friend?” Lynx asked, giving up on their project leaning against the table. “It’s telling that the only time you’ll talk about him is when he’s shot his own foot. So to speak.”

“*I*am not one with problem,” she huffed. “*He* has problem with me. Soldier thinks I am still working for Volskaya, or at least have sympathies. It is annoying to be mistrusted for something I am no longer part of.”

“Hmmm.” Lynx cocked a solitary ear at her. “So he holds you accountable for a group you belong to, instead of judging you on your own merits. How *horrible* for you.”

Zarya’s mouth hung open, but only briefly as a flurry of indignation took its place.

“I am not-” she sputtered. “Omnics have been- It’s *not the same*-” But still, despite years of resentment beat into her, Zarya couldn’t deny it forever. Her shoulders sagged. “I…*fine*. I see your point, omnic.”

“Lynx,” Lynx corrected her for the first time. “If we are going to work on this whole *respecting each other*thing, it’s best to not refer to each other as our species.”

“*Species*,” Zarya scoffed, but then caught the look Lynx was giving her. She put her hands up. “All right om- Lynx. I will try things your way.”

“If moderate decency is *my way*, then I’m honored to take the mantel.”

Zarya looked like she wanted to officiate this with a handshake again, but Lynx wisely didn't give her an opening. If she had her way, they'd sign an armistice agreement every time they did a mission together. Instead, they handed her a flashlight.

"Here. As long as you're feeling charitable, you might as well help me recalibrate our local operating system." They picked up their tools again, prying off a microchip from its board.

Zarya sighed, but held it up anyway. "The things I do for a bit of sanity."

It could be said that things went well after that. Their rapport had come a long way from Numbani, back when Zarya crashed in Lynx's apartment and ate more stacks of dumplings than Lynx knew existed. (Seriously, before that point Lynx had no idea how much food humans consumed in a single week, and months later still wasn't sure if that was *all* humans or just Zarya's impressive aptitude for devouring.) Now, barely stomached tolerance had morphed into actual fondness.

The mysterious secret that had brought Zarya to Lynx, whatever it was, must have faded in her mind since arriving at Overwatch, as she no longer pestered Lynx for advice. Now that they were here in the heart of her best shot, it was a waiting game, seeing how long Zarya would take before deciding to let someone help her. In the meantime, she adopted Overwatch's goals as enthusiastically as if they were her own: applying herself to order and justice and all that. Lynx supposed they shouldn't be surprised. She was once military after all, taking orders from the top as the word of god. Old habits die hard.

Now she had followed Tsai's (painfully extracted) information across the planet once again, leaving Lynx in charge of logistics and the giant communications system in their lab. After three false starts that lead to empty warehouses, her team had finally located the supplier, smashing the unprepared operation into the ground. Lynx zoomed in a camera, catching Zarya's face as it glowed with victory.

"Well done strike team," Lynx said, picking up Athena's favorite phrase. "No further heat signatures detected in your location. All threats neutralized."

"Thank you, Lynx," Zarya nodded, her lips moving in time with the radio feed. "The suggestion about the Koi pond proved very useful."

"Stop it Zaryanova," Lynx said. "If you're not careful, people will get the impression you like having me along."

"What travesty that would be," she replied, though Lynx could see her smile through their monitor. Strangely enough, McCree also smiled, though Lynx couldn't imagine why.

"Athena will ready your return transport," Lynx informed the team dutifully. "I'll see you all then."

"Be seeing you, Lynx Seventeen," Zarya said, right before the communications cut out. The goodbye was oddly uplifting, and Lynx slid away from their console with a spring in their step.

Now that work was done they could get back to…more work. There was always something to do in an illegal peacekeeping operation: communications to manage, backdoors to check, security to enforce. One of Lynx's favorite pastimes was trying to break into Overwatch's systems, just to see what damage a particularly good hacker with limited resources could get up to; it was the programming equivalent of playing chess with yourself. But they'd just had a go at that yesterday, and doubted it'd actually prove to be challenging right now.

Instead, Lynx browsed through alerts from their watchdogs, seeing if there were any new threats out there in the world that they'd need to prepare Overwatch for. Often, they wondered what Overwatch would do without them. The reformed organization was not short on brilliant minds, but most of the scientific team had skills that could be charitably described as "hardware." Torbjörn's designs were the founding principals of modern omnic construction, yet watching the man try to operate a holo-vid was like seeing a bird attack its own reflection.

No, no, unimportant…The watchdogs were bringing back nothing good except…

Lynx's ears stood straight up. Could that be…no, they couldn't have stumbled upon her after all these months…

But as Lynx picked through the report, their initial suspicious couldn't be denied. It was her, *Sombra*, back at it again when one of her exploits just so happened to fall into Lynx's lap. She'd wholly dropped off the map after Lynx had met her in person for the first time, too careful to let herself be discovered again, but apparently that woman could only resist the temptation for so long. Sooner or later she had to get back to work. And judging by the reports from the national bank of Nigeria, it was broaching on the sooner.

It would only take a little digging, a few scans to find the money trail…

Lynx's finger hung over the *open* button. It would be so easy to get back into old habits… but their promise to Winston hung heavy in the back of their mind. They'd vowed not to hack (or at least not to hack anything that wasn't their own systems) in order to keep notoriety away from the fledgling organization, and they couldn't think of anything more dangerous than the attention of the once Olivia Colomar.

But still, wasn't it better to find and put a stop to her before she became too bold? If anything, they were preemptively preparing Overwatch for her next assault, which counted as "defensive hacking" right? The arguments spun around in Lynx's mind until-

"Ah, Lynx. Can I have a moment of your time?"

With a snap, Lynx looked up to see Mei standing in the bay doors, a small wave accompanying her presence. Their ears pressed flat against their skull, a pointless attempt to suppress their misdeeds unless Mei happened to be a mind reader. Lynx tucked their tablet away ~~guiltily~~quickly, and rose to meet her.

"Of course, the solar panels," they recalled. "I'm sorry, they completely slipped my mind. Though to be honest, I didn't expect you back so soon."

Mei's shy smile flicked to one of surprise as they bustled past, stopping only when they reached the mass of wires that had accumulated on Mei's commission. Sure it'd only been here since yesterday, but what could Lynx say? They were a busy omnic.

"I can't say I've made much progress," Lynx said as they picked the panels clean. "But I can show you the few adjustments I've made if you're interested."

"Oh I…oh." When Lynx turned their head, Mei was blushing for some reason. "Sorry, I wasn't talking about those at all, actually. I was just here on a social call."

"…Ah. I'm sorry to have assumed." Lynx put the wires back where they found them and faced her. "I'd be happy to chat, if that is what you'd like."

Often Winston would join them while they were working, since this used to be his lab before moving closer to Torbjörn's facilities. He was good company, if a bit socially reserved at times. But Mei was a rarity, a newcomer, and Lynx kept that in mind as they pretended to go back to work.

"How have you been, Dr. Zhou?" they said, picking up their tablet and randomly tapping buttons. They hoped it was convincing.

"I have been well. We had a good mission recently, despite Soldier 76's accident." Mei looked around, as though trying to find somewhere to sit. The silence stretched on between them, and Lynx struggled to find something that would fill the lapse in the conversation. Thankfully, Mei came to the rescue. "Lynx, can I ask you a personal question?"

They set down their tablet again in surprise. "I…suppose? Why wouldn't you be able to?"

"I…" Mei flushed darker. "I don't know. It is not a big deal, just something that's been on my mind and…well…I guess I should just ask. Do you know if Aleksandra is seeing anyone?"

"…Zaryanova? *Seeing*anyone?" Whatever Lynx thought Mei would ask, it certainly wasn't that. "…Not to my knowledge, no."

It wasn't clear if that was the answer Mei was looking for, since she just continued to wring her hands. The thought was just so outlandish: *Zaryanova*and *Dating*were not two concepts that so much as glanced at each other.

"Ah," Mei mumbled. "I see. Thank you Lynx."

"I must know though," they probed, "why ask me?"

Mei adjusted her glasses with one hand, finally making a bit of eye contact. "Well I thought you would be the one to know, if anyone. You two are so close, after all."

Were they? Certainly Zarya had other friends on the base like Mei and…

……Hmm. That was odd, Lynx honestly couldn't think of anyone Zarya talked to as much as she did with them. They shook their head. "Dr. Zhou, are you…*interested* in Zaryanova?"

“I…might be.” As though the ever increasing blush in her face didn’t give it away.

And for some absurd reason, the confession overpowered Lynx’s thought process. So many things were weird at the moment, because now they not only had to formulate the idea of a romantic Zarya, but a romantic Zarya in relation to *Mei*. The thought seemed…*off*somehow, like Zarya was cheating on a significant other that Lynx had just admitted didn’t exist. They found themself irritated that Mei had presented this trove of oddness before them.

“If I could ask you another question,” Mei said linking her ungloved hands together. “Do you think she might be interested in me?”

It was moments like this that Lynx was incredibly glad humans couldn’t read omnic facial expressions. If any other omnic were in the room, they would know that Lynx was doing the equivalent of dropping their jaw to the floor.

“If she talks about me at all or anything,” Mei prattled on, not knowing what to make of Lynx’s silence. “Just something to give me a clue?”

Lynx tried to snap themself out of their shock. After all, it wasn’t *that*surprising that Zarya and Mei would fall in with one another, right? They were always out on missions together, two battle-savvy women that could watch each other’s backs in ways Lynx never could. And Mei was so sweet; Zarya would be a fool not to enjoy her company.

“I don’t know for sure…” Lynx found themself saying.

In fact, the *real*crime was why they weren’t together already. Yes that was it! That was why this whole train of thought was so unbearably uncomfortable.

They approached Mei suddenly, putting a hand on her shoulder. “I do not know if Zarya returns your feeling yet Dr. Zhou, but I do believe that you two would make a fantastic couple.”

Mei blinked, obviously thrown off by Lynx’s sudden enthusiasm. “You do?”

“Yes.” And Lynx said it with such conviction that they believed it themself. “I think you should tell her how you feel. If she has any sense, she will definitely consider your proposal.”

Things went from zero to sixty real quick, but Lynx’s words sunk in and Mei grinned with relief. “You have no idea how good it is to hear you say that. And I-I will! Tell her that is.”

The smile Mei shot them made their internal sensors warm, glad that they’d gotten their head out of the clouds and actually helped their friend. This was better. They’d gotten their inner thoughts back on track.

So then why did they still feel so terrible?

The triumphant return of the latest strike team was met with a party.

There were *hors d'oeuvre*, decorations, plenty of booze for the humans, and even some organic oil for Lynx. The oil was actually from Zenyatta's stash, harder and more potant than anything Lynx was used to—who knew the innocuous little monk could actually down the stuff like an indisposed rock star? He and Genji were nowhere to be found at the moment, leave the supplies all to Lynx as they sat in their wonderfully comfortable beanbag chair.

The drink and the chair made them about ready to sink right out of existence. The party thrummed along around them, easy conversation flitting in the circle of other beanbags, and turning out surprisingly pleasant. It was a bit more low key than Lynx would have expected from a post-mission shindig, what with the military officialness of the old Overwatch stripped away, but apparently once that was gone the only thing left were people that converted old armories into swanky lounges.

"To one less problem," Zarya said, raising a glass that probably had a higher proof than the rest of the circle combined.

"To one less problem!" Pharah agreed before anyone else could chime in. Despite being only an hour into the party, the captain had already become so drunk that she'd gone up and preformed some impromptu karaoke. Despite the presence of an actual mike. Or music.

As the rest of the team toasted, Zarya smiled over her glass at Pharah. Lynx could read the thought *lightweight* on her face as clear as day.

Mei was only treating herself to some sparking water, and still looked rather pink. "I watched the tapes from the mission Zarya," she said hastily, as though afraid she'd lose her chance to get a word in. "That gravitational wormhole was very impressive."

Lynx suppressed a chuckle as they watched Zarya puff up, always a sucker for flattery. "Ah, that was nothing. You should see me when I have a half-dozen laser shooting down at me, then I charge my Graviton Surge faster than you say *ty mertvaya zhalkaya veshch'*."

"Maybe not before I could, but probably before I would," Lynx said.

Pharah laughed a little too loudly, and Zarya smirked slightly (even if it was accompanied by an eye roll.)

"Life on the front does not sound like it was to pleasant for you, Zarya," Mei said suddenly, *awkwardly*. "Do you have anyone back home?"

Oh no, she wasn't bringing that up *now*, was she? Lynx looked between Mei and Zarya, feeling that if Mei's awkward stumbling block of a segue was any indication, this conversation would not be going well.

"Hmm," Zarya said, no indication that the question had offended. "Friends? None close. Comrades yes, those I would love to see by my side here if Russia did not need them and I was not…"

There it was. All it took was a little reminder for the beginnings of a frown to form on Zarya's face.

Mei seemed to realize her mistake. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bring up. I was um…trying to ask if you were *with* anyone…”

Lynx considered asking Mei if she wanted a shovel.

Zarya’s forehead crinkled with discomfort. Thankfully Pharah, bless her, was acutely unaware of the mood in the room, piped up, “not unless fucking robots counts!”

The tension broke in Zarya’s shoulders with a snort. “Yes, I suppose I did ‘fuck up’ plenty of omnics, as some of you would say.”

Pharah took a swig. “You know-” She hiccupped. “You know, back in Egypt I actually had a guy on my squad who was dating an omnic.”

“Really?” Zarya mused. “Certainly a sex toy would be cheaper at that point, don’t you think?”

She and Pharah laughed uproariously.

Lynx’s hand tightened around their bottle.

Mei looked between Zarya and Lynx, mortification collecting on her face ever since the words fucking robots entered the conversation. “Aleksandra you can’t just *say* that.”

“Why not?” Zarya blinked with genuine confusion.

“Because-”

“No Dr. Zhou,” Lynx said slowly. “I’d like to hear what Zaryanova has to say on the subject.”

Zarya glanced between Mei and Lynx like they’d started speaking an entirely different language. “On *what* subject?”

Lynx’s felt pins all over their body. “On *omnics*, Zaryanova. What exactly do think is involved in a relationship between an omnic and a human?”

“Er…” Zarya looked over at Pharah, who was now blissfully distracted by the slowly spinning ceiling fan. “Something lewd, then? I do not understand, you wish me to describe it?”

“Is that all? You only imagine such a thing where an omnic is there for a humans sexual gratification?”

There was a test there. Zarya knew it, but as that dawned on her she also realized she had no clue as to the correct answer. “What…else would it be for?”

Lynx rose.

Throughout the whole ordeal Mei’s hands had slowly been rising, eventually coming to clamp over her face. As though she could stop the words coming out of Zarya’s mouth by

covering her own. Now she was in Lynx's position: watching a train wreck unfold and being powerless to stop it.

Lynx turn and left.

They could hear Mei calling after them—Zarya made no noise, too stunned by their exit to stop them as they stalked from the suffocating party. They didn't think about what the rest of the team's reaction would be, didn't think about how they were interpreted.

The only thing they cared about was the anger that threatened to shake loose every bolt in their body until they were nothing left but scraps.

Chapter 5

Dammit, Lynx buzzed nonverbally, a pitch only Athena would be able to hear. They tossed the delicate screwdriver down, snapped in their thoughtless hands as they'd let their seething temper steal another one of their tools.

(They were no fighter, but even a civilian omnic acquires a certain amount of grip strength at some point. It was only a few years after they were constructed—in their "youth" as Zarya jokingly called it ~~no, no they weren't thinking about her right now~~—that they'd shelled out for some improvements in the realm of physical self sufficiency. It was a particularly chilling job; dangling off the edge of a Numbani skyscraper while unable to pull themself back up was not an experience they wanted to repeat.)

They leaned against a workbench, forcing themself to quit lest they break all of their equipment. They were *pissed*, more than they ever had been in their life, and every time they let their mind wander it plodded its way back to *her* and the absolute *obliviousness* of her. The complete lack of self-awareness was what was most revealing; Zarya believed her little derision undoubtingly, unlike the half-hearted Russian rhetoric she occasionally spouted. Even her more well articulated beliefs—philosophies which appeared to be a thoughtful construction built on various life experiences—tended to be less extreme, and could sometimes even be badgered into incorporating another perspective. But all that was pointless. Zarya was, at her core, a bigot, and Lynx felt like an idiot for ever thinking otherwise.

Grabbing their tablet, they mashed through different applications, looking for *any* kind of distraction. Ever since they'd stormed up to their lab they'd been furiously going at it, trying to work through the anger just like it was just another impenetrable firewall. How dare she. How, Dare, *She*. All those conversations and she barely had the respect to think of Lynx as a person, no matter how much patience they'd plied to her thick human skull. She'd made a fool of them, and they were sick of it.

Somehow, even when their first meeting still left her calling them *it*, only now did they feel ashamed.

That thought sent a whole new wave of fire through them, and they jabbed the screen so hard it threatened to crack. *Blasted*Zarya and her stupid secrets, dragging them here to this *stupid* organization, where they couldn't even-

They paused.

Their hand hung over a report, one they hadn't opened in over a month. One they had opened exactly once. The robbery at the Bank of Nigeria.

Sombra. The woman they weren't supposed to be tracking.

With a burning in their fingers, they hit *open*.

Zarya stuffed her hands in her pockets. “I will go in later. They should get a hold of themself first.”

Mei, not a usually a woman of short temper, pursed her lips together. “Aleksandra, you should have gone in two hours ago. Go speak with them.” And since it was coming from Mei, that was equivalent to *you better get your sorry behind in there, otherwise I’ll freeze it and drag it in myself*. She leveled a meaningful look at Zarya.

“Ah, fine, I will do this. Though it would be better to wait until they cooled off.”

In truth, it’d been plenty of time to wait and then some, and a Zarya left to her own devices might have apologized when hell froze over. However, if even the usually appeasing doctor was getting on her case, then maybe this was her best course of action. Maybe. Mostly she just didn’t want to look Lynx in the eye until this whole thing blowed over.

Before she could have another crisis of faith, Mei pressed her palm against the DNA lock and gave a stern shove to Zarya’s back. Zarya sighed, but walked inside the lab, turning to get the last word in only for the door to slide back into place. *Chert poberi. Alone with the enemy.*

Which, granted, wasn’t fair, but Zarya was spectacularly out of her element. She didn’t enjoy feeling like she’d done something *wrong*, and especially didn’t like not knowing what it was. No, that wasn’t quite right either. She *knew* what was wrong…she just didn’t understand it.

“Hello Zaryanova.” Lynx didn’t look up from the screen they were typing on as she approached their attended desk.

Zarya hunched further into her hoodie despite the Mediterranean heat. A subconscious need to make herself smaller.

“Lynx Seventeen.” She stopped after that. She hadn’t exactly formulated a plan of what to say while she was convincing herself she shouldn’t have to.

They were standing, facing her, yet she might as well have been a particularly unimportant lamp. She cleared her throat, but they didn’t look up.

“You left the party early,” she tried.

“As observant as ever, Zaryanova.” The words didn’t have the ring of fondness they usually did. Unsurprisingly.

“You did not give me a chance to say anything. Was not so bad, I only meant that such things are not normal. This was not a personal attack.”

Lynx’s ears stuck straight out from their skull, as though they were trying to balance an invisible book on their head. She’d never them do that before. It was a tad alarming.

Sensing the apology was getting away from her, she stumbled over her words, the omnic still silent as they tapped mercilessly on a keypad. “What I said was er…sensitive. I am sorry you were offended.”

There was a sudden, searing hesitation that speared through the room that made her sure the robot was going to throw another fit but, to her surprise, they ended their silence with, “that is good to hear.”

“Really?” Was that all it took? With such an out-of-character fit they’d thrown, she’d expected to be chewed out at least a little. Usually the two of them would get through an argument with yelling and the eventual ceding of ground. (Always on Zarya’s part. The omnic was an infinite well of good counterpoints.) Never had she’d seen her friend act like this before, and she thought they’d at least get in a few more jabs at her. “You are not mad at me?”

They didn’t answer. Behind them, a screen flickered.

“Well, then we will at least go back to being partners, yes?”

“Yes.” For the first time, they lifted the jut of their bronzed chin and looked directly at her. “I wouldn’t dream of compromising our professionalism.”

Something about that didn’t ring entirely true, but Zarya would willfully ignore it if it meant they were no longer angry with her. That was all she had really wanted. “Ah. Good. Be seeing you then.” With no graceful way to exit, Zarya simply nodded and left, grateful *that* was over with.

“Vesna svodit lyubogo s uma. Led - i on nachal,” Zarya chuckled to herself as she hauled the attempted-escapee out of the frozen lake. She shoved him in the general direction of the pier’s security camera. “Smile for the camera, friend.”

“Well done Strike Team,” Lynx’s voice belayed over the comm. “I’ll reconnect with you at the shuttle.”

Zarya’s smile faded. She’d mainly said that for Lynx’s benefit with no one else here was likely to get her little joke, but their voice was monotonous, no hint of the usual enthusiasm she’d come to expect. Maybe it was crazy thinking she could tell tonal inflections in a synthesized voice, but she’d come to believe a lot of crazy thing after becoming friends with Lynx.

Because they *were* friends, right?

She mulled over that question as they subdued their Talon captive, and kept mulling all the way back to Gibraltar. Things between had been…not well ever since the party. Or The Party, as it had become known in Zarya’s mind. Certainly they could not keep ignoring her forever, could they?

“You did apologize to them, right?” Mei asked when she mentioned it in a fit of disgruntled whining. The doctor was only person she actually spoke to on a regular basis anymore, now that the friend who’d brought her here had become so distant.

“Of course I did!” Zarya exacerbated, almost spilling her Oolong. “I went in, said hello, was very humble.”

Mei *hmm*ed over her own tea. “And how did that go?”

“Well…” Zarya tried to think back. “I said that my words were insensitive. Or maybe that the topic was sensitive? Anyway, then I said I was sorry they took offense and they told me things would be very OK.”

“Wait-” Mei said. “Did you tell them you were sorry *that* they were offended or did you say you were sorry you offended them?”

“Er…” The barrage of questions wasn’t helping settle Zarya’s mind, especially when she had tried to wipe the humiliating experience from her mind. “The first one?”

Mei groaned. “*Aleksandra*.”

“What? Does it make a difference?”

“Aleksandra, you need to make a proper apology.” Mei was standing up and doing that ushering motion that somehow Zarya always had to go along with. “Go do it *now*, and show that you know what you did wrong.”

“But-” But Zarya *didn’t* know what she did wrong. On face value, yes, she understood that Lynx wouldn’t like omnics being compared to sex toys, but certainly she’d said much worse things at this point. Right?

She couldn’t make the right words to vocalize her concerns as Mei guided her down the hallway, and she once again found herself in the entry to Lynx’s lab. They turned their head to her passively.

“*Privet* Lynx,” she managed to say, trying regain confidence. “I wanted to…eh…” *Come on now, it can’t be that hard to figure out what they want to hear.*“It has come to my attention that you are still displeased with me. Which means you lied to me before. I wish you had not done that.”

Their ears flicked straight back, a glare if Zarya ever saw one.

“I should restate my apology. Better this time.” She was butting up against the impasse, the edge in the world of her mind where she didn’t know what to say after it. “And I-…I would like to, but I really don’t know what I did *wrong*.”

Lynx let out a bitter snort, so sharp it startled her. “I have no doubt about that.”

“What has made you so sensitive Lynx Seventeen? Hm? You are just fine when I say we all need different things, but as soon as it becomes *biological* you run away.” She could feel it: the subtle shift in her temper that was turning her accusatory. It wasn’t a path she wanted to turn down, but now that she was going there was no way to stop her. “Are you so sensitive that the littlest bit of messy human talk has turned you coward?”

Their fists clenched. Zarya felt a brief thrill as she saw she'd hit a nerve. Or fuse. Whatever.

"Zaryanova, I say this with the most conviction I have every said any one sentence: you are a complete and utter troglodyte." Zarya snapped her head back in surprise. "Did it *ever* cross your mind—while you were ruminating on your obviously heartfelt and well-thought apology—that omnics *might* consider things such things as intimacy and romance not so differently than humans?"

"I…Oh." Once again she felt shame creeping onto her cheeks. "I didn't think…"

"Of course you didn't. Because, at your core, you lack empathy when it isn't born of some misguided attempt at heroics." They punched numbers into their desk harder than was strictly necessary. "I once found you very interesting Zarya. But now I think I know who you are, and I no longer believe I wish to discover more."

She grimaced. In some ways omnics were too alien for her comfort…but other times they were just to damn similar.

"I am…sorry Lynx. I should not have been so…" She tried to reconcile both her past mistakes and the temper she'd lost just moments ago. "I really am very sorry." It was as genuine as she could possibly make it.

Lynx sighed. "Just…just go Zarya. Please."

Zarya didn't know what to do, wasn't sure if that meant Lynx was giving up on her, but was too afraid she would make things worse if she stayed. So she took hold of the command, and slinked out of the laboratory with her tail between her legs. She'd brought the reconciliation as far as she could take it—now she saw nothing left to do but give Lynx their space. Hopefully they'd speak to her again. Hopefully.

"And these will work at less than one-hundred and eighty degree angles?" Mei said, trying to fill the silence.

"Down to one hundred, yes," Lynx replied, not looking up. They'd long ago found that they didn't have to hide their activities from Mei; the numbers on the screen were meaningless to her. Whether they were improving Overwatch's systems or on the hunt their violet-clad rival, it made no difference. "Will that be all?"

"Yes. Thank you for getting this done for me so quickly." Mei clumsily lifted the solar panels into her arms and began her march out.

In truth, it had taken six weeks longer than the time actually required to re-adjust the panels, but Mei didn't need to know that. They were a very busy omnic. It wasn't anyone's business why.

They waved absently as she departed, their mind distracted. What was Sombra doing in Cambodia? If they could just dig a little deeper…"Good day Dr. Zhou. Tell Zaryanova I said hello."

Mei stopped mid-stride. She looked like she'd taken a bite out of a lemon, as though she might pucker up so small she'd pop right out of existence. Lynx lifted their head and cocked an ear at her.

"Are you two…speaking again?" she asked hesitantly. Stars, she could be so awkward when she took the time to be.

"No. Just extending pleasantries." Things had only cooled between Lynx and Zarya since her second (somehow even worse) apology. Lynx had meant to be angry, to come back at her with something equally hurtful when they'd tore into her, but in the end they'd just wound up depressed. They missed her, even when they couldn't shake the sting of her words. "You two have been spending so much time together now, I assumed you would be seeing her at some point."

Mei adjusted her glasses with one hand while gripping the panels with the other. "I…suppose we are," she flushed.

"Good, I'm happy for you."

Somehow, her flush darkened. "Oh no we're not…we're not together. I just meant she's just spending a lot more time with me now that…she's not…with you."

Maybe she left a paper trail this time… "Dr. Zhou," Lynx said, absently. "Don't tell me you *still* haven't confessed to her? I've seen you stare down Talon mechs twice your size without flinching, and you're scared of little old Zaryanova?"

"Ahaha, no." Mei scratched the back of her neck. "I did confess. Aleksandra just does not feel the same way."

Lynx was halfway to another well-aimed tease when what Mei said hit their possessors. They straightened up. "I-…what??"

"She said she was flattered," Mei went on, clearly uncomfortable. "Just that it wouldn't… well…you know how it is sometimes."

That was *not*what they were expecting. "Why would she tell you that? She *clearly*has feelings for you."

"…I don't know." Mei said. "I guess I was wrong about that. I think all that was just in my head." She laughed sadly

"It most certainly was *not*. What is *wrong* with that woman?" They'd come to accept that as readily as the fact that Winston was overly optimistic, or that McCree spent far too much time on his hair. This was how things were, and Zarya always found a way to ruin it. There she was, yet again, belittling everyone who might consider her an ally. "I'm going to go give her a piece of my mind."

Mei's mouth fell open into a perfect O. They'd thoroughly stunned her, enough that they were halfway out the door before she could manage, "w-wait! You don't have to do that

Lynx-”

“Oh I most certainly do.” Zaryanova had precious few people who liked her, they wouldn’t see her squander another one.

~~And other reasons. Status quos. Things they were not emotionally ready to revisit. They’d reached the correct conclusion and weren’t willing to submit.~~

Somewhere in there march down the halls of Gibraltar, Mei’s protests faded behind them. Either she had given up in the face of their determination, or their powerwalking skills could not be surpassed. That or Mei simply refused to ditch her solar panels.

“Zaryanova!” The door slammed inwards, smacking against a Russian war poster. Zarya, on her bed, jumped. “What is the meaning of this?”

The room was sparse, barely touched since the day she’d moved in. The only sign of occupancy were some passport stickers attached to the bed frame, and a picture of Vasily Aleksyev hung above the bed. Zarya, surrounded by her minimal personal affects, stared blankly at Lynx. “I have…no idea what you mean?”

“Your rejection of Dr. Zhou,” Lynx bristled to explain. What else would they be talking about? “Why did you tell her that you were not interested?”

Zarya—apparently in the middle of cleaning her gun—pushed the particle cannon off of her. “…What?” Her brow furrowed. “I do not see how that is any of your business.”

“It is my business because it happens to hurt someone I consider a friend.” They threw their had back in the general direction of the lab. “Now. Explain yourself.”

“Because I…am not interested?” Zarya rubbed her shoulder. “Mei is a good friend but she isn’t…someone who I want to be with. Romantically. Shouldn’t that be enough?”

No, it wasn’t. Lynx had invested a lot into this chain of thought, and they weren’t breaking it now.

“Why are like this?” they demanded. “No one is ever good enough for you, are they? You use people Zarya, but you never have it in you to feel anything back. It’s despicable.”

“I-!” Zarya stood and took one giant stride over to them. “I am done with this! I never know what you mean anymore, why you are so mad at me over some things and not others. I cannot understand anything when you talk in metaphors instead of telling me what is wrong!”

The worst thing was, Lynx *didn’t* know what was wrong. They didn’t know why this, of all things, was their breaking point.

But it was. They jammed their finger into her chest. “The only reason I ever came to Overwatch was because of you and your ‘world-ending secret,’ and look how quickly that disappeared. But you know what? It does not matter.” They took a step back. “Because I am done with both of you.”

They left, abandoning Zarya she stood in the middle of her miserable room.

They needed to get off base. Now. There was a town, not to far from here, *Los*- something or other. That would do. It would have to do. They needed someplace to clear their head without suffering this train wreck any longer.

The town had proved quiet, still. Barely fifty humans, all living together less than six miles from the world's most renowned former peace-keeping organization. It was almost funny.

They left the convince store and sighed inwardly as they glanced across the bay. The road to Gibraltar stared back at them, tempting home in the last rays of sunlight, reminding them that they couldn't just skip town no matter how rough things. It wouldn't be fun to go back, but the walk down the coast had helped them calm down a bit, and they thought they could face Zarya again and put their thoughts together. Mei, the party…it was all part of it, but their new realization made them think that maybe there was no neat resolution to all of this.

Tucking their receipt into their bag they started off on the way home. Shadows grew longer, and their ears twitched at the sound of wildlife mingling with ocean waves. A shrew stepping out for the night. The roar of an Iberian lynx in the middle of its hunt. The sound of footsteps…

Lynx paused, cocking their head over their shoulder. There was no sign of anyone. For miles. And as the last bits of sun disappeared behind the hills, they realize that were completely and utterly alone.

There were still footsteps.

As dawn stuck down the mountainous path, the wind blew gently, ruffling a plastic bag full of tea and peanut butter.

So careless! People really shouldn't litter. ★~(◠‿◕✿)

Chapter 6

Maybe *this* time when she walked past the laboratory, things would be different. It wasn't a conscious thought, it never was, but the unrealized prerogative kept Zarya coming back to the empty space long after she knew Lynx wouldn't be coming home.

News of their dramatic exit from Overwatch had reached every corner of Gibraltar within a matter of hours, and although no one, save for a few snide comments from 76, would blame her openly for the loss of one of Overwatch's greatest assets, she still felt their absence like a grim shawl around her shoulders. They'd taken nothing with when they'd left, just their passcard to get back into the facility, as though they'd gone for a quick walk instead of out of Zarya's life forever. Despite that, all of their work was out of Overwatch's reach. Records were hard-locked on every device from the communications array to their personal tablet, and even Winston hadn't been able to crack open whatever Lynx Seventeen had been working on before they left. So: the hanger was left abandoned, and Zarya walked around it like its second ghost.

"Any new communications?" Zarya asked the empty room, where she knew Athena was listening.

"You have no new messages, Agent Zarya," Athena confirmed.

Zarya sighed, sitting upon the closest bench. Of course there wasn't. And if there were, she would be the *last* person Lynx would want to speak to when she'd chased them away in the first place. Ever since they'd gone she thought about how *stupid* she'd been, how pig-headed of a person she must be to ignore all the warning signs. Because when all was said and done, they'd come to Overwatch because of her.

Now I think I know who you are, and I no longer believe I wish to discover more. Lynx's last words to her rattled around in her head, and she couldn't hold back the bile when she realized Lynx no longer cared for her. She had taken for granted that they would always be their for her, that their friendship was a given when she'd hardly done anything to earn it. She hadn't respected them as a person, not fully, and she realized that now. Lynx had been waiting for her to step up and she'd failed.

The shame that she'd disappointed them had only grown since they'd left. She *wanted* to do it all again, she *wanted* to be the person they thought she could be. Someone who was deserving of them.

At that thought, her throat constricted. That wasn't something you were supposed to think of a friend. Their absence had left a hole in her life that shouldn't have been as gaping as it was, and with growing dread as she sat beneath a creaking and unfinished communications array, the loss of the missed chance tore into her like a ripped out IV.

Zarya shot up, but there was nothing to do. The realization was just as useless as her guilt, and it set the whole room in a different tinge.

“Shit,” she groaned to herself. A bubble of energy threatened to explode out of her, but she had no idea what to do with it. No, no this couldn’t be the end. She *had* to try again, she needed another chance.

In a fit of desperation, she grabbed the nearest discarded tablet, knocking over a signed photograph of Tracer on the desk in her rush, and began tapping randomly on its interface. Distantly she reasoned that if she could contact them through their own profile, they wouldn’t dismiss her messages out of hand. But, as she began to slide haphazardly through the screens, a small-texted report appeared in front of her eyes.

“Athena,” she called, not taking her eyes off the tablet. “What is this? Were not Seventeen’s files locked down?”

“That is one of their documents from a personal initiative,” Athena replied instantly, as though she had calculated Zarya’s question before it even left her tongue. “It is not locked for you.”

“Not for me?” Zarya’s brow knit together, attention split between the AI and the words that glazed her eyes. “Why?”

“Lynx Seventeen created a back door for these files. In the event they were no longer able to access them, they wanted you to be able to see their work. The reasoning they gave was that this pertains to your common interest.”

“You didn’t tell Winston about this.” Zarya found her voice rising.

“The protocols they set were to withhold this information until it became relevant. In other words, I could only tell you when asked.”

But Zarya had forgotten Athena now. Because now she was reading, first for five minutes, then ten, then twenty as she absorbed every single file Lynx had been collecting before they disappeared, and her blood boiled until she was ready to tear off someone’s skin.

“Call a meeting,” she said as she clutched the small device in her hand. “This time, she went too far. This time, I’m not letting her get away.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“I’ve never known her to be anything *but* serious,” Mei muttered over her coffee.

Zarya slammed the tablet down on the table, at which everyone jumped. The scant heads of Overwatch leadership looked around at each other with bleary eyes, few of them on a standardized sleep schedule with the organization stretched so thin. They suffered from jet lag, stress, and now Aleksandra Zaryanova as she demanded they drop everything and return to where it all began.

Began for her, that is. For them, it was asking to fly half a world away on conjecture and half-formed evidence.

“We must stop her,” Zarya said, pointing at the grainy photo on the tablet’s screen, the gentle half-heart of purple hair some how mocking her from beyond the glass. “She is a menace, a public threat. If Lynx Seventeen is still alive can you even imagine what someone like her could do to-”

Zarya suddenly found she couldn’t finish that thought.

There was no response, just a hush as the exhausted faces looked on. Someone cleared their throat.

“We *did* ask Lynx not to get involved in hacking again,” Dr. Zeigler said gently from Zarya’s left.

She jerked her arm away. “Are you saying they deserve this?”

“We’re saying that even if you’re right about this,” Soldier said with a voice that clearly left out an *and I’m not even sure you are*, “then they knew the risks when they started digging up dirt on a nigh untouchable makes-her-enemies-never-exist techno-ghost, and we don’t exactly have the resources to from a fucking rescue mission.”

Zarya felt a ball of hot betrayal building in her throat. From Soldier she had expected it, but from the others… She looked from Zeigler to Winston, who wouldn’t meet her gaze even though he and Lynx were *friends* for Christ’s sake. Finally she looked at Mei, eyes dark rimmed yet worried, lost in thought as the steam in her mug fogged her glasses.

No one would listen to her. No one would help. Her shoulders slouched.

“Please,” she said, a crack forming on the last syllable. “I know…I know I have not made myself popular. I know I have not repaid the trust shown me and I…chased them away.” Her voice wavered. “But do not do this for me. Do this for them. They have saved the life of every person in this room at least once and if there is even a *chance* we could do the same for them, then we must try.”

She remembered a frightened city, a pajama’d vigilante in the midst of chaos.

“It is what heroes do.”

She met each of their eyes again. Mercy, Mei, Winston. One by one they looked at her, then turned their gaze upon Soldier 76.

His visor was expressionless, but she could swear she heard the grind of teeth beneath that mask, as though something she said had finally rattled something loose. He began, “none of us *want* to leave them, but-”

“Jack,” Winston said softly. Soldier looked at him in surprise. “Overwatch is our family,” he continued. “This is what we do.”

For a second, Zarya thought that Soldier would turn, a dismissal despite everything. But, the silence hung heavy between the five ex-patriots, the only movement the occasional shimmer of Sombra’s face on the tablet screen. Then, finally, Soldier’s shoulders sagged.

“Well. I guess we do.” He rubbed his brow into a pinch.

“A mission into unknown territory with little to no chance of success,” Zeigler said thoughtfully.

Soldier cracked his neck. “Just like old times.”

“So,” Zarya said, as they boarded the transport craft. “Jack, hm?”

Soldier let out a long sigh.

The metal steps of Lumerico glittered into the sky, so much more threatening now that it towered above her instead of keeping malevolent watch over the city. Sombra *had* to be here, she just had to. Lynx’s notes put the likelihood at 63%, but that *Had To* was for Zarya, not reality, not when the chance Sombra had moved grew more likely the older the data got, or that if the lead was dead end there was no one else who knew Sombra like Lynx did. No one would ever get closer, not unless Zarya could find another random little girl who just so happened to know where the greatest hacker in the world was hiding.

“We’re coming,” she muttered. Then, to someone else entirely, “we’ll find you.”

Which was the last thing she said before Pharah landed on the outside of the building and set off the alarms.

Soldier swore. “What the hell is that?! This place has been abandoned for months.”

It had, ever since Lumerico had decided to cut its losses in Dorado and flee from its declining reputation. But, apparently, that was the case no longer.

“Maybe they hold a skeleton crew,” Zarya said, her eyes never leaving the giant metal monstrosity as it basked itself in red. “Or maybe, someone we know has turned these systems to her own benefit. Come, there is no use sneaking anymore.”

She barreled in, the flimsily locked doors bowing to a few blasts from her particle canon. Above her, she could hear Pharah repeatedly apologizing, to the effect of a muffled echo for her comms. The atrium inside was enormous, and although she couldn’t see any automated defensives, something was *definitely* happening in the concave of its walls.

Winston and Soldier sprinted in behind her, with Mercy and Pharah sliding in through a side door just in time to see the spectacle unfold. The inverted lighting rod in the ceiling was beginning to spark.

“That can’t be good,” Winston noted.

The sparks gathered at its end, balling into a bright, florescent purple.

“Subtle,” Zarya said drily, before the lightning rod shot a bolt directly in the center of the assembled agents.

They flung themselves in all directions, the more limber members managing into a tuck and roll, and the ones with the power of rocket ship landing in a heap. “Scatter!” Soldier yelled as they got to their feet. Other arcs of lighting were beginning to form on the ceiling, and within the second, another one had struck the floor. Soon the entirety of Lumerico was alive with the storm, leaving Zarya to dodge as random bolts rained down upon her.

Her immediate instinct was to evacuate the building, but the first strike had separated her from the door leaving her only choice to clamber for cover.

“We’ll try to disable it!” Winston shouted over the non-stop **CRACK-CRACK-CRACK** of the bolts. With that, he leaped into the air, his jetpack giving him what he needed to reach the tower, Mercy and Pharah ascending after him.

“D’you ever think about how it’s bullshit we’re the only ones who can’t fly?” Soldier asked as he watched them go.

“It really is such bullshit,” Zarya agreed.

With that, the two grounded agents charged headfirst into the shooting gallery, dodging bolts with such rhythm it became a dance. Zarya absorbed the strike where she could, but it was so fast and frequent it may as well have been luck. They were getting so close to the opposite side of the facility, the open doors of their research facility just visible-

When a dash of electric purple struck Soldier 76.

The resulting explosion sent him flying, and Zarya’s mind froze, unable to make the flight-or-flight calculation for that crucial second as he rolled to a stop. But she herself was still a soldier. She had fought, and she had lost, and she did not leave her fellows behind. Without missing another beat she changed trajectory, grabbing the prone Soldier by his collar and began hauling him to safety. She nearly took a strike herself, but managed to drag her stunned companion into cover.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” he said when she finally got him in an alcove halfway between the door and their destination.

He said that, but sparks were glinting off his gear and visor, and his voice sounded fried. He fumbled in his coat, hands uncharacteristically shaky, and tossed a biotic field to the ground. A sigh escaped him as the yellow pooled on the charred floor.

Burns Zarya hadn’t even realized she had began heal over as she crouched next to the Soldier. After a moment, he told her, “…I need a minute. I can’t run like this, not until they turn that thing off.”

Zarya faltered. A moment ago she had committed to never leaving a man behind…

“…Go,” he said. “Before she gets away.” The unlit visor stared at her, somehow determined behind that dim maroon. She set her teeth and nodded.

And then she was gone, back to pirouetting through the storm as she caught glimpses of the rest of the squad above. She paid them no mind. Now, there was no goal but the one in front of her, no others to calculate for, nothing but pure determination to drive her. She reached the opposite wall and did not stop, finding the first staircase and pounding up it.

Sombra was here. There was no doubt now. Zarya would find her and *make* her reveal where she was holding Lynx, and if she try to *lie* and say they were dead or anything like that-

Well. Then Zarya would make her wish Overwatch let her kill prisoners.

She ascended, ignoring the burn in her lungs and the particle cannon's weight on her shoulders. The electric storm was still audible through the walls, a constant companion as she charged upwards on marble steps. Whenever one floor would end she would blitz through the crash bar, swiveling her head and never slowing as she searched for any sign of Sombra, hoping against hope that she would busy packing her gear instead of already gone. Her frantic searching came to a crashing halt as she threw herself against the topmost fire door of the complex only to find it stuck.

Zarya wasted no thought. She pointed the business end of her canon against the door and incinerated it.

Her nerves and equipment still sung with the charge gathered on the ground floor, and with a quick activation of her personal shield, she blasted it outward into a crater of warped metal. She charged through the doorway into Sombra's domain.

There was no doubt it was hers, the screens displaying her blinking logo and the inset LEDs replaced with neon purple. Furniture was strewn about, beanbag chairs and those circular kinds that were elevated above the ground on metal struts, and in it all-

"Hello Zaryanova."

"*Lynx!?!?*" And in it all was Lynx Seventeen, sitting on a couch reading a newspaper. A *paper* newspaper, the yellowed pages open before them as they looked up at her with complete stillness. A second couch back separated the two of them, but from what she could tell they looked unharmed, and for the most part at ease. She glanced side to side at the apparent hominess of the room. "You are…not kidnapped then?"

"Oh I am most assuredly kidnapped," they said, flicking their ears back slightly. "Or I suppose, *was* kidnapped until you opened that door a few seconds ago. Thank you for that."

"Lynx, what is going on?" She felt a prickle on the back of her neck. "Never mind, we'll talk later. Let us get out of here, Sombra could be back at any moment."

You know what happens when you speak of the devil-

Zarya turned and shot her.

Sombra shorted out in a fizzle of purple, reappearing behind Zarya and saying, didn't think it'd be that easy did you-

Zarya shot her again.

Teleporting and few inches above the refrigerator and landing on it with a *huff*, Sombra complained, I'm getting the worst case of déjà vu.

"Zaryanova," Lynx cut in. They stood, folding the paper on an end table made of other newspapers. "I would suggest you hear her out. She has been waiting to talk to you for a very long time. I would know. She hasn't shut up about it."

Sombra crouched over the edge of the fridge and smirked. Zarya was weighing whether to shoot her a third time before checking Lynx in the corner of her eye before quickly shifting her attention back. "You…want to talk to *me*?" she asked of the smug mug staring down at her. "*Why*?"

Sombra hopped down, and padded toward Zarya despite the way the soldier tightened her grip on her gun. Not so much a *why* as a *what about*. But since you're asking, I just thought chatting wouldn't be fun unless you came to find me yourself.

"You…" Zarya narrowed her eyes. "You seized a person from their life and home just so you could ***chat***?"

Wasn't the only reason. Probably would've found a different way about it if Peter Rabbit here hadn't gone snooping around in my garden. She casually indicated Lynx, who had now appeared at Zarya's side. Their ears flicked downward as Sombra finished, thought they needed to be knocked down a peg.

Sombra began to circle around them and Zarya reflexively put herself between her friend and what her mind could only register as *predator*. Sombra's expression was back in that of detached control, apparently over whatever annoyance she felt toward her two guests. Zarya glared.

Despite everything, Lynx's shoulder pressed against hers felt warm, radiating comfort just from their being, and she couldn't help but ask out of the corner off her mouth, "are you alright, Seventeen?"

"Yes unfortunately." They sounded tired. "Though I almost wish there had been some torture involved. It would have been less boring."

And somehow, that familiar tone sent a wave of relief through her. Enough that she felt she could turn and face the their apparently perpetual agitator. "Speak, Sombra. I will give you six minutes."

So short! Sombra, jeered. Why six?

"Six minutes is the time a Bastion unit can reach full mobile artillery configuration. Any useful report can be given in that time. Five minutes, fifty."

Sombra waved her hand. Fine, don't need that long anyway. And I hardly need to talk anyway, not when *you're* the one who needs answers.

“Plainly, Sombra. If that is even something you can do.”

She grinned, the sly smile reaching all the way to her eyes. You know who runs the world, don’t you Aleksandra?

Every vertebra in Zarya’s spine straightened. “You…” Sombra knew. She knew about the war, the roots of it all. Zarya felt a wave of disgust well up inside her. Of course she knew. Of course. “I don’t.”

The grin was just about to split Sombra’s face. But you’d like to.

Zarya stared down, her own eyes dry and aching from the lack of sleep, and she found she didn’t know the answer to that.

She may have kept staring for the remaining four minutes and thirty seconds if an artificial throat-clear hadn’t been made behind her. “Would anyone care to fill *me* in on what I can only assume is a world ending secret?” Lynx asked.

“I…” Zarya looked to Sombra, but the hacker didn’t look like she was about to volunteer any explanation. “When I was back at the front I…discovered something.” She felt her throat closing. It wouldn’t do to say what that discovery had cost, not if she wanted to hold herself through it all. “I found that…we are being played. There is something orchestrating this war.”

She looked between Lynx and Sombra, the former with their ears straight back and the latter egging her on. She took a steadying breath.

“And not just this war, *all* wars. Someone or…*something* is directing major events on this planet to wherever it wants them to go.” Lynx looked about to speak, but she cut them off. “I have no idea who, or what their goal is, but if you had seen what I had seen you would say the same.”

They were quiet for a moment, and for a moment, she regretted that she hadn’t told them the first time she’d wandered into their apartment. But, then she remembered the spiral she’d taken those first few weeks after her discovery, the orders from every branch for her to keep quiet on what she had found…and again she was glad she had spared them that for at least some time.

And what are you gunna do about it?

Zarya looked back to Sombra. The words were stuck in her throat, the pure strangeness of this making it difficult to ask her question. “I don’t know,” she admitted. Then, mockingly, she added, “I came to you for answers didn’t I?”

There was now a twinkle in Sombra’s eye. But instead of saying anything, she turned on her heel, scooped something off a desk, and tossed it at Lynx. The omnic, still reeling, barely caught it in time, and fumbled it for a few seconds before gripping it tightly in their left hand.

“And what is this?” they asked, holding it up for examination.

That, Sombra said, is answers. What I've gathered on them, or at least what I'm willing to share. With a wink, she added, I'm sure you can parse it out, Seventeen. As for the pair of you, I think you know what to do with that.

"What?" Zarya said, blinking at the small teal and pink USB in Lynx's hands. "Just…come forward with this?"

Sombra laughed. There was a rumble in the building. You guys will figure it out.

Suddenly, the rumbled became an earsplitting shriek, the groaning tear of something immense and metal coming loose.

Sombra paced away. Over her shoulder, she tossed a, sounds like your friends have finally got the security system down. I'd skedaddle if I were you. This place isn't structured to last very long without it. And then, with a gentle push she opened a thirtieth story window, and jumped.

For a moment, Zarya considered running after her. She stared out the place where she had made her escape, shutters banging slightly as though they'd merely been rustled by a light breeze. Furious that she had let Sombra get away *again*, she almost didn't hear the sound of a giant step sliding loose of Lumerico.

It wasn't until something gently touched her hand that she looked down.

"Zaryanova," Lynx said, tugging her away. "We need to go."

She caught the glow of their peace lights in her eyes, and for a moment was still stunned to inaction. But then they tugged, and she followed, and the two of them were fleeing the crumbling building.

Zarya bent over her knees, missing as Lumerico gave one final groan and folded like a house of cards. God. If Overwatch were somehow implicated in this, Soldier was going to kill her.

She pushed herself to her feet and wiped a sheet of sweat off her brow. She'd seen the others safely exit from the other side of the building, but she hadn't felt the need to radio them just yet. Instead, she looked sideways at Lynx, who was bobbling the USB back and forth in thought.

"Thank you for coming to rescue me," they said, snapping it up suddenly in one hand. "Though you did take your sweet time."

Her mouth hung open. In all the scenarios she had imagined, in the fantasies she played where she got to take it all back, some part of her genuinely believed she would never get the chance. "We thought you had left," she blurted.

Their ears perked up in surprise.

"I thought you had left me and I…I would have deserved it." She moved, jerkily, so she could stand in front of them and see the night lights of Dorado frame their outline. "I was

awful to you. I did not respect you. I am…" English failed her, so she did likewise. "*I am impossibly sorry. I liked that you found me worthwhile and I took it for granted that you always would. I had secrets and they interested you and so I just…treated you like you were a commodity instead of my greatest friend. I hope you can forgive me. And maybe…come home?*"

She hadn't meant to spill that last part. Lynx hadn't yet granted their forgiveness and already she was asking things of them.

They tilted their head. "*That is an apology,*" they responded, too, in Russian. "*And I'll count the whole rescue as the good deed. What about a promise to do better in the future?*"

Zarya didn't think she'd nodded this vigorously since she was ten years old. "*I promise. I will never make that mistake again.*"

"*Then I forgive you, and your stupid mouth*." They stepped closer to her. "*There. Was that really so hard? I swear Zarya, you are as stubborn as the stone you're made from.*"

She felt as though the massive weight that had been crushing her since Lynx's disappearance was suddenly gone, like barbell pressing down on her chest until her spotter came to her rescue. She wanted to say so, but found she couldn't find the words again. Instead, she blinked, realizing how close they were in the midst of the city's lights. Lynx lightly took her hand once again.

"*You know,*" they said idly, as though it were the most normal thing in the world, "*you're being uncharacteristically hard on yourself. Your secrets weren't the* ***only*** *thing I found interesting about you.*"

Suddenly her face felt very warm. "You…I…" she blustered.

"Oh don't be so surprised Zaryanova!" They waved their free hand. "We're well past such emotional vulnerabilities. I have seen you naked after all."

On that, she full on sputtered, and gave them a shove. They just held on, and pulled her back in with a chuckle. They were laughing at her! After all this! But before the *how dare you* could rise out, they pressed their forehead against hers, and the agitation went out of her. Despite it all, despite Sombra and the secrets and the lies, this felt right, and let out a breath as she pressed back.

It might have been perfect. Then, over the comms, Soldier said, "guess we'll come back in a few minutes. Love birds need some privacy."

Zarya groaned and ignored Lynx's suppressed giggle. "I hate this fucking team."

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!