

## Home Again

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# Home Again

by [JusticeForMothra](#)

## Summary

Taking place directly after the Rise & Shine short, Mei is on her way to an old Overwatch Docking point in Antarctica, after leaving the Ecopoint with Snowball. A fierce storm on her heels leaves her only chance of survival up to whether she can make contact with Winston once she gets there. Meanwhile, Winston is trying his best to re-form Overwatch at Watchpoint Gibraltar, after sending the recall message out to all former agents. Only a few have answered, and he is now in the unforeseen position of Commander, trying not only to unite and protect the fractured organisation, but propel them into a new future.

A multi-POV story that more characters will join as it unfolds (all the characters currently in it will be tagged!)

# On Our Way

Unknown Location - Antarctica

"Snowball!"

The piercing wind almost swept Mei's voice away, but she managed to make herself heard. However, this did nothing to stop her companion from rushing away to investigate yet another dune of snow. She tried to catch him, but the little robot had flown up and over the small mountain before she could even move. He was out of her sight in seconds, and she sighed frustratedly.

"Snowball, we don't have time!" she called, trying to make him come back of his own will. It was true, they really didn't have time - the weather was worsening and it had been ever since they left the Ecopoint a week ago. They needed to hurry if they wanted any chance of getting to the Docking Bay where they could contact Winston. But Snowball poked his head over the top of the hill and beeped at her, disappearing afterward. Mei huffed, her usually cheery smile forming a hard line. Shaking her head and muttering in Mandarin, she began climbing the dune to see what Snowball thought was important enough to stop their journey for. The ascent gave her a few moments to think, something she hadn't gotten to do a lot of since they left - which she was beginning to realise, might not have been such a bad thing.

'Ten years,' she thought, inhaling the icy air. 'What happened? What was bad enough to shut down something as big as Overwatch?' she continued, her feet pounding into the snow harder than they needed to be. 'How did we get forgotten about for so long? How did everyone but me...'

A feeling as though she'd been knocked to the ground slammed into her at the final thought. Mei fought for breath, as it had been sucked out of her lungs, leaving her doubled over from the impact of the grief.

"All my friends..." she breathed, tears glistening morosely in her eyes. Mei had done her best not to think about the grisly discovery she'd made little over a week ago. Waking up from her cryostasis had been exciting - completely new findings and data awaited her, and she was longing to work through all of it. She knew she and her team would have their hands full with it all, but the challenge was breathtaking. Emerging from her pod, though tired with a passion, Mei couldn't wait to start her work again. She'd pottered around for a while, waiting for the appearance from her friends. In the meantime, her excitement couldn't be contained any longer - mug in hand, she'd pulled up what was supposed to be the new data. Instead, she was confronted with an error message. She began searching for the root of the error, when another one popped up. And another. Before she knew it, the entire projection was overflowing with messages of power-outages, severe temperature fluctuations, weather damage, system failures. Mei skimmed over the bombardment, trying to make sense of it all. She didn't know how that many things could have gone wrong in such a small amount of time - they hadn't been asleep long enough for this many malfunctions. Something felt wrong. She tried to access the Comms, but they were all offline as well. Delving deeper, she began trying

every kind of communication possible for the Ecopoint - and failing every one. Stepping back, completely stumped, and a sense of concern growing, a document loaded, garnering her attention. Her mug shattered to the concrete floor as she read it.

Overwatch Disbanded.

She dove for the computer, desperately searching for more information, and finding it. Her pulse quickened with every word she read, her eyes darting from article to article. Overwatch was finished. Her disbelief blinded her for a good few minutes, but when her vision cleared, she noticed something. The date of the very first article that had come up. Her brow furrowed as she re-read it multiple times.

Suddenly, Mei was going through every single piece she'd read to find their dates, her face draining of more colour with each one. It dawned on her slowly - they'd been here for ten years.

Her blood chilled. She turned to the computer, furiously closing pages in order to get to one in specific, and after what felt like hours, she finally pulled it up. The maintenance report of the Cryostasis pods. And the fears that had been festering inside her were confirmed, as she read that every pod except hers, had stopped running. She dove for the pods of her friends, refusing to believe what she'd just seen. Refusing to believe they'd been left to die. She wiped the condensation off the window of the first pod she got her hands on, pleading silently to anything willing to listen for her friends to still be alive. Nothing listened.

Mei gasped, a propelling wind snapping her from the memories, and back into the current situation. She pulled her cold hands from where they'd been resting, deep in the snow, and noticed tears she didn't know she'd shed beginning to freeze on her cheeks. Decidedly, she wiped them away, wiping away her turmoil with them.

'I can't give up now,' she thought firmly. Pushing her trauma back, her burning persistence returned, the only thing other than Snowball that had kept her alive since she woke up. Continuing up the snowy hill, she began to near the small peak, and could hear Snowball's rapid beeping. At this, she couldn't help but smile, needing to find some joy in such a bleak situation. Her previous frustration at her companion was now gone, replaced by the desire to keep pushing on. Besides, she knew that she had no right to be angry at Snowball for making them stop. She'd tasked him with the job of alerting her if he saw any unusual ecological specimens - Snowball just took this job a little too seriously.

With climbing being no harder for her than walking, she reached the top of the hill quickly. For a moment she couldn't spot Snowball, amidst the vast plains of glittering snow. A beep from her right made her turn, and she saw him a few metres from the bottom of the hill. It took Mei a moment to register what all the fuss had been about, but when she did, she understood why.

"Snowball, how did you find this?!" she cried, racing down to where he was hovering excitedly. Mei could barely contain her elation, albeit slight confusion. Because right there, in

the middle of the frozen wasteland, where the only other forms of life she'd seen were old fishbones from previous penguin feasts, was a tree.

# Back Home

## Chapter Summary

Back at the Watchpoint, Winston, accompanied by Tracer, is working hard after sending out the recall message. However, an unexpected surprise takes their day down a new path.

### Watchpoint, Gibraltar

The sun was setting gloriously over the abandoned station. Well, previously abandoned station - a week ago it had been lifeless, with one inhabitant, barely any activity, and no hope. Since then, and since a certain recall message went out, blood had started pumping through the Watchpoint once more. And other than Winston, that blood was very British, and very bubbly. Tracer had shown up at the Watchpoint not even three hours after he sent the message out, eyes blazing with pride, and her heart already dedicated to his cause.

Winston sat at his desk, fiddling with Lenas chronal accelerator. Recently, just before the recall, it had suffered some damage at the hands of a Talon agent - nothing, Winston was sure, worth worrying about, but it had been so long since he'd been able to check on it, he felt this long overdue.

Peering out his window, he watched the burning orange sun set over the crystal ocean. It brought a bitter-sweet smile to his lips. He thought he'd never get to see this view as a member of Overwatch again. But here he was.

"Winston?"

He almost crushed the device as Tracer's voice rang through the room. He turned in his chair to face his old friend, expecting to see her cheeky grin, but finding a look of anticipation and anxiety. "Somebody's here," she informed.

Winston was up in seconds, handing Tracer her accelerator and instructing her on how to use it after its tweaks, all while equipping his Tesla cannon. "Athena, pull up all the security footage on the outside of the perimeter," he called to the A.I. that helped him run things. However, silence followed his command, confusing him. "Athena?" he called once more, moving back to his desk, peering at her activity status. In this time, Tracer had dashed away to get her pistols, should a fight ensue. Athena had gone offline, and Winston knew he didn't have the time to try and fix that if somebody had found their way near the premises.

"I'm back! Found anything yet?" Tracer asked, appearing next to him once more. Winston shook his head and stared harder at the security footage he'd brought up himself. He couldn't see anything, and without Athena to help him scan the area, he wouldn't know who, or what,

had intruded. He began to worry, as the last time Athena went offline, though momentarily, was when he'd fought the Reaper.

"I just can't see anything outside the barriers, and without-"

"Outside the barriers?" Tracer cut him off, staring steadily out the window. Winston frowned.

"Yes, why?" he replied.

"I don't think looking outside the Watchpoint is gonna help you too much, big guy," she stated, pointing below them. The figure below was hulking, obscured by their even larger shadow - and heading straight toward the office.

"How did they get past the security?" Winston yelled, over the noise of his and Tracer's pounding footsteps as they ran to face the invader. "Who knows! We'll figure it out after we rumble!" Tracer called back. They burst through the automatic doors, Winston roaring as he leapt out and threw a barrier down over himself and Tracer. Her guns were poised and ready to attack, itching to be in another brawl. Her second most recent one had ended in tragedy, with the death of Mondatta at the hands of the Talon agent, Widowmaker. She'd been helpless to stop it, but she carried the weight of his death as if it her own doing. She needed to feel like a good guy again. However, as the mystery person looked up at them, she realised today wouldn't be the day of her redemption. And she thought, as she beamed, that she couldn't care less.

"Is this any way to greet your old friend?" Reinhardt asked, smiling widely at them both. Winston dropped his gun, as Tracer leapt onto her old strike team leader. "You came back," Winston laughed, overjoyed that someone other than Tracer had heard him. Reinhardt pulled him into a vice-like hug.

"I'm sorry I took so long! I had to bring a straggler with me!" he guffawed, looking behind him to another smaller figure that was coming up on the horizon. As both Winston and Tracer looked to see just what he was talking about, the second person jogged into view, and the familiarity of her face hit them both like a bullet. Her bubbly, yet challenging smile was something they'd both known before, but on a different person. Both had their suspicions as to who this was, but Tracer figured it out first as she laid her eyes on the tattoo on the girls shoulder - one of two cogs intertwined together.

"Long time no see you guys!" Brigitte chirped, hugging Tracer, while Winston watched on in disbelief. "Brigitte, you're here too?" Winston beamed, elated at the second member. "In the flesh!" she replied, smiling back.

"She forced me to bring her," Reinhardt whispered to Winston, who had no doubt that, even with Reinhardt's huge size, Brig had grown up a force to be reckoned with. Tracer, now back at her spot next to Winston, had tears of joy streaming down her cheeks at this sudden arrival. She never would have said it aloud, for fear of disheartening Winston even more, but she'd been so worried that nobody would come back - she'd kept her worries on this subject to herself, as she knew that it had been consuming Winston. He didn't need to hear her verbalise his deepest fears. But now, as she stood in front of Reinhardt and Brigitte, her anxiety dissipated slightly.

"How did you get in, Reinhardt?" Winston asked, oblivious to Tracer wiping her tears beside him, desperate to know how he'd slipped past Athena and all of the security systems. It's not that Reinhardt was dumb - he'd lead many a successful mission, and Winston was sure that, given the right teaching, their burly friend would be capable of many a cunning escape. But hacking the security system that Winston himself had been responsible for... well it just seemed a little out of Reinhardt's depth. Reinhardt, however, chortled, clapping Tracer on the shoulder at this question, sending her stumbling forward.

"You're a brilliant scientist, Winston, but sometimes less is more," he replied, looking around conspicuously. "How on Earth do you mean?" Tracer piped in, cocking an eyebrow. She knew as well as anyone that Winston didn't do things by halves, and in his eyes less was never more.

Reinhardt's good eye caught in the sun, and for a moment he looked like the careless crusader from a long time ago. "I used my old security code" he whispered, giggling like a child. Winston was dumbfounded, while Tracer joined the laughter. After a moment's disbelief, Winston let a smile of pure entertainment (and mild embarrassment) creep onto his face, unable to fight it. Reinhardt placed his hands on his hips and took in a gargantuan breath of air.

"It still smells the same," he commented wistfully, surveying the horizon. Tracer chuckled, wiping fresh tears from her eyes. Reinhardt noticed, and rubbed her shoulder, much more gently this time. It had been just as emotional a week ago, when Tracer came back to the Watchpoint for good. Her and Winston had been in touch since Overwatch disbanded, but not like this - not where they didn't have to hide, and look over their shoulders every few minutes. When she'd arrived, Winston had wept openly, something few had ever seen him do. Now, as they stood there, welcoming their friends, a familiar glimmer could be seen in all of their eyes - not just from the tears, but from a rekindled hope.

"Anyway! Look at us!" Winston laughed, picking up his gun. "Let's go inside, shall we?" he asked, leading the way to his office. Rapid talking broke out behind him from the other three, and he smiled at it. A rush of nostalgia flowed through him, and in that moment, he felt the way he had ten years ago. In that moment, he knew he would do anything to bring this feeling back for good. To bring Overwatch back for good.



# Rest

## Chapter Summary

Mei and Snowball try to rest as much as possible, as they near the hardest part of their journey.

### Unknown Location - Antarctica

A single fire illuminated the powdery snow surrounding it, its light casting lively shadows as the flames danced. Mei watched it merrily, the warmth helping relax her aching legs, and Snowball bringing a smile to her face as he built a snowman. Her tent, resistant to the harshest of weather, and the fiercest of colds, sat close to the fire also, warming up. She palmed the vials of sap in her hands. The discovery of the tree earlier that day had been astounding - Snowball had to drag her away from it as she'd already filled half the available sample tubes they were carrying.

"What was it doing out there?" she asked Snowball thoughtfully. He stopped pushing snow along the ground and beeped uncertainly. Mei looked back at the small beakers and frowned. Even though the discovery of the tree was astounding, and possibly world changing, it shouldn't have happened.

'It shouldn't have been able to grow' she thought. 'In this climate, this part of the world - it just shouldn't have been possible'

She looked into the fire, the heat of it assaulting her eyes. 'If the climate changed that much in those ten years ... then what about the rest of the world?'

Snowball squeaked from right beside Mei, and she turned suddenly. He motioned toward the lopsided, yet sweet snowman he'd made. She smiled widely, forgetting her concerns about what had become of the world since she was last in it.

"Well done Snowball, it's beautiful!" she praised, earning a proud beep.

The snowman had already begun to melt in such close proximity to the fire, which gave it a melancholy smile. This quickly reminded Mei of everything she'd been trying to escape for the last week. Horrors, ten years worth of horrors, had accumulated and crushed her all at once. She was still coming to grips with it all, but the trek had been a wonderful excuse to push it as far into the back of her mind as possible. She knew, however, that she'd eventually be forced to deal with it all.

'It's not healthy for me to be ignoring it all. If Angela knew, she'd be-'

A weak whimper escaped Mei's throat. Angela wouldn't know - Overwatch was gone. Not only was she grieving for the friends she knew she'd lost, but she was pining for the family she knew was no longer waiting for her. She didn't even know if they were still alive. 'But one is,' she reminded herself, determinedly. Battering her emotions back, she steeled herself. Winston was alive. Winston was waiting for her, and for everyone. Though it may not be what it was once, her family was still alive, even if it was just barely.

"Snowball," she said, her voice much stronger than she'd anticipated. Mei jolted back at this, and smiled at her friend. "Sorry," she apologised. "We should go to sleep. Tomorrow we're going to reach the Bay, but it's going to be a hard journey. We have to be rested."

Snowball let out a series of protestive beeps, and Mei nodded in acknowledgement. "I know it's a beautiful night, but we don't have a choice," she replied gently. Snowball gave another round of beeps. Mei smiled softly at him. "Tomorrow on our journey, we can look for clues about that tree we found," she coaxed. At this, Snowball paused. She could see him considering it, before giving a firm squeak to let her know he agreed, but he wasn't happy about it. And that was good enough for Mei. She clapped her gloved hands and began slotting the vials back in their casing. She knew she'd need to preserve them well if she was to study them back at home.

Snowball spun into the air and towards the tent. Once all the beakers were tucked away safely, Mei put the case in her backpack and took it into the tent as well. She zipped it up behind her, and felt the leftover heat from the fire gently seeping in. Snowball had already docked in his make-shift charging station. At night time it was more for show than functionality, as it was solar powered, and only worked during the day. But it seemed to comfort him, so she made no comments. Mei took off her large outerwear and huddled into her sleeping bag. She was much more washed out than she had been on previous nights. Though they had worked much harder on their journey that day. The snow was piling higher, and the weather was becoming nastier.

'But we'll make it tomorrow' she thought, relief coursing through her veins. Once they reached the Bay, she'd be able to contact Winston. Clearly it would be out of use, but if she could get the entire Ecopoint working again after ten years of damage, she had faith she could do it for the Bay. She knew she had no other choice.

With that thought, her eyes began to droop steadily. She managed one last goodnight to Snowball, before falling asleep to the sound of his peaceful reply.

Mei woke to an ungodly howling the next morning. She jolted upright, panicked and breathless, as she had every morning since getting out of hibernation. After a few moments of re-living that feeling of dread, she brought herself back down. Then she remembered what their mission for the day was, and whatever panic remained in her mind turned into pure excitement.

"Snowball! Wake up!" she whispered, throwing the sleeping bag off herself and leaping out of it. Snowball woke the same way she did, his alarmed beeping filling the tent before she calmed him down. "Come on, sleepy head! We're going home today!" she bubbled, Snowball

groggily removing himself from the dock. The violent howling outside picked up, and Mei felt the entire tent rumble. The weather had turned overnight. For a second this dampened her mood, as she knew it would be more difficult to reach the Bay with this kind of wind blowing. But only for a second, as Snowball beginning to zoom around perked her up. They worked quickly, packing the contents of the tent in no more than five minutes. The tent itself took a little longer in the wind, but they got it down and into Mei's pack in fifteen. When Mei stood from covering the remaining embers of the fire in snow, a gust of wind almost knocked her back down. Snowball quickly dashed behind her and steadied her.

"Thank you, Snowball. What would I do without you?" she giggled, adjusting her bag. Snowball was happy with this compliment, and Mei smiled. Looking to the horizon, she squinted to protect her eyes. The wind whipped snowflakes around her face, the freezing crystals stinging on impact. However, the wind was no match for the glorious sun, rising in front of them. Mei hoisted her pack and Snowball's charger onto her back, Snowball settling in to be charged. She took a lungful of icy air and smiled brightly.

"Snowball, we're almost home"

# Country Roads

## Chapter Summary

At the Watchpoint, Winston, Tracer, Brigitte and Reinhardt begin working to bring the place back up to functioning standards, while waiting (hoping) for more arrivals. And while it isn't exactly an arrival, they receive contact from an old, gun slinging friend.

### Watchpoint, Gibraltar

"So nobody else has replied yet?"

Brigitte's dark eyebrows knitted in confusion, with some frustration mingled in. Winston sighed and nodded.

"Not yet. Really, we should be thankful I could even put the message out. Had it been a year ago, it would have been suicide," he replied, thinking of the warnings Athena had given him the first time he thought to send out the recall. She'd been right, of course. And even now, it was putting people in danger. But there was never going to be a right time to do something like this - something illegal. Brigitte's heart stung briefly, for more than one reason. It hurt her that nobody had replied to Winston's call, bar herself, Tracer and Reinhardt. She knew that it wasn't always possible to make communication, and that there may be people on their way, but the fear that it would only ever be just them had rooted itself in the back of her mind. She'd never been a part of Overwatch, but Torbjorn had. She remembered how badly it broke him when the organisation was disbanded. And by that point, the people who were a part of it felt as much her own family as they were his, so it hurt her just as much as any of them that nobody else had come yet. And along those same lines as family, her heart carried another burden, one that she knew she couldn't tell to anyone for fear of sounding too childish to be here - but it hurt her that Torbjorn hadn't arrived.

"What's the matter, love?" Tracer asked, entering the large cafeteria they were seated in. She frowned at the melancholy that was playing on both Winston and Brigitte's faces. Brigitte waved the question away, stuffing her disappointment back down. "It's nothing, Lena. I was just thinking about everyone else," she replied.

Tracer sat beside her and sighed. There were only three of them inside the enormous room, only highlighting the loneliness that was plaguing the Watchpoint.

"I'm sure they're on their way, Brig," Tracer smiled, placing a hand on Brigitte's shoulder. The comfort was appreciated, and Brigitte smiled softly.

"Where's Reinhardt?" Winston asked suddenly, only just resurfacing from the blueprints he'd been studying meticulously for the last hour. "I saw him earlier, around the last training room, but I'm not too sure," Tracer replied, looking around for him.

"I've learned that it's best to leave him if he disappears. He does it for a reason" Brigitte explained, standing up. Winston nodded, turning back to his schematics, as Brigitte looked at Tracer.

"Speaking of those training rooms, while we were travelling here, I had to endure a lot of

Reinhardt's stories, and I wouldn't mind-"

"Race you there!" Tracer cut her off cheerily, blinking out of the room. Brigitte quickly raced after her, calling for her to stop cheating.

Winston chuckled, enjoying what little mayhem was already starting to bloom. Even though he was now alone in the canteen, he stayed in his spot. He was more than used to being alone - in fact, he'd become so accustomed to it of late, that he found himself struggling to get used to more than one person being around him again. And as he was re-learning what it meant to be part of a team once more, he found that a little bit of alone time went a long way.

So, Winston stayed, by himself, going over the blueprints for the Orcas, and trying to figure out what came next for their small vigilante group. He wasn't sure how long he'd been there, but an urgent beeping brought him crashing into reality. He was on his feet and ready to leave for his office in seconds before Athena spoke.

"There has been an alert to one of the Comms systems" she explained. Winston's ears pricked at this, and he raced for the communications control room. Part of him wasn't holding out full hope, as Athena had been slightly jumpy since accidentally being taken offline by Reinhardt yesterday. Once there, he slammed the door shut and surveyed the room. Nothing looked different - to his dismay, all of the Comms were still offline, other than Gibraltar itself. However, as he peered closer, he saw a tiny blue light beaming from one of the panels.

"Athena, can you bring up the old records for this ... specimen?" he finished, not exactly knowing what the blue light was. As one of the brightest scientists in Overwatch, maintaining the communication systems was never a major part of his job description, and although he'd become very acquainted with the devices over time, some of them had been dormant for so long, they'd escaped his memory.

Athena obliged, and data from years of use came into view. It took Winston only a few moments of skimming through it to realise what this light was. "Athena," he breathed, removing his glasses. "Who was the last known agent to be in possession of Echo?"

Silence settled for a brief second as Athena scanned multitudes of information for an answer. Winston felt faint hope rekindle inside him once more. Athena then spoke. "The last known Overwatch operative to have contact with Echo was Agent Jesse McCree"

Winston's eyes lit up

Echo's blue light glistened brightly among the grey of the other abandoned Comms, and Winston felt like he'd never seen anything more beautiful. This meant that McCree got the message. Just as Winston was beginning to try and trace Echo's whereabouts, Athena's voice cut through the air once more.

"Incoming transition"

It was then replaced by Tracer's. "Winston, you have a message up here!" she babbled joyfully. "And I think you're gonna wanna see it!"

This made Winston leave for his office

He was fairly sure he knew who the sudden caller was, as it was too much of a coincidence with the timing of Echo's resurfacing. The thought brought a tiny smile to his lips, as the logical side of him battled hard to try and make sure his hope didn't fly too close to the sun. As he approached the door of the office, and before he could even type his code in, the heavy door slid open and Tracer materialized behind it. "Hurry up!" she prompted, zipping in front of him. Winston huffed as he tried his best to keep up with her. It seemed that, sometimes, Tracer forgot about the size difference between herself and Winston. She often cajoled him to keep up with her, throwing aside the fact that she was a time-bending human asking this of a fully-grown gorilla.

After leaping up the stairs, Winston hastily halted inside his office. As he'd already guessed, Reinhardt and Brigitte were already inside and chatting away. Reinhardt was the first to notice him, grinning large and beckoning him over.

"What's going on?" Winston asked, still not knowing for sure who they were actually talking to. Reinhardt opened his mouth to answer, but before he could, a voice that had tired him endlessly in the old Overwatch days, spoke instead.

"Come on now, don't tell me you ain't figured it out yet?"

Smug pride mixed with helpless relief surged through Winston, because he knew that voice - it was the one he'd been expecting. "I had a few ideas, Jesse," he replied, moving closer to the large screen. McCree chuckled as Winston took place between Tracer and Brigitte.

"How did you ever assume it was McCree?" Tracer asked, arching an eyebrow. "It was just some basic deduction, really," he answered, adjusting his glasses. His pride was cut down a few notches when the lights flickered. "And help from Athena," he added sheepishly, the lights going back to normal.

McCree's wholesome laughter filled the room, as he shook his head. "It sure is nice to see ain't nothin' much has changed," he commented. "My friend, when will you be joining us again?" Reinhardt asked, never one to beat around the bush. "I'm on my way right now, but I got some ... business, to attend to first," McCree replied, his eyes shifting beneath the wide brim of his hat. Nobody prompted any further explanation.

"Jesse, is Echo with you? And how did you manage to get into our video system?" Winston blurted. He was struggling to fight back the rest of his questions.

"Woah, hold your horses there. I can explain how I got the message workin' later. As for Echo, she's here. Just not completely,"

Before Winston could ask, McCree held up a small white chip with a tiny, blue light glowing from it. "But like I said, I got some things to do before I get back. And judgin' by the time," he trailed off and cast his gaze to the sun. Winston only just registered that he'd been outside the entire time. "Looks like I should be wrappin' up soon" he finished, smiling.

"Getting into more trouble?" Tracer asked, wishing she could join him.

"You know me, Lena, I'm always in trouble" McCree replied. He could tell she missed the thrill of a fight, he could hear the pining in her voice. But Tracer fought for reasons that

differed from his own sometimes. She fought to protect others, to protect humanity. He didn't think she'd necessarily want to take part in his next battle.

The sun beat harder on his neck, reminding him of the clock he was on.

"I hate to break this up folks, but I gotta go. My 'consort' ain't gonna be happy to see me in the first place - bein' late would just put more bees in her bonnet" he explained.

"McCree, whatever you're about to do, don't-"

"Let Echo get hurt, I know," McCree cut Winston off. "Don't worry too much about me either" he grumbled. Winstons face softened.

"When should we have your quarters ready by?" he asked, watching Jesses face brighten ever so slightly, hard as he tried to hide it.

"Soon, if this meetin' goes well. But before I come back, I'll call again. I can fill in the gaps about this whole mess then. Actually," he paused to look at the sun. "I'll talk to ya'll again tonight." he finished, nodding firmly. A faint chugging noise caught McCree's attention. His time would soon be up, and he wanted to eat beforehand.

"I'll get Echo and we'll talk later" his voice was harder now, and he tipped his hat down. "Don't get yourself killed, boy!" Reinhardt laughed, much too heartily for the seriousness of his words. However it disturbed no one, as this was Reinhardts way. McCree met his comment with a chuckle. How he hadn't died yet was beyond him - but he knew today was still not his day, and that much he knew for sure.

And with that, the image of the cowboy vanished, and the four heroes were left to their own devices once more.

"Well I can't believe that, out of anyone, it's Jesse that's with Echo," Tracer mused aloud. Winston hid a snort by coughing, a little too violently he realised, as he earned a concerned look from Brigitte.

"We really need a doctor around here. I'm starting to worry about the injuries that are coming our way," she stated. Everyone knew which doctor she was talking about.

"Let's just get our cowboy back. We won't need to worry about injuries until he's here anyway" Winston said, dismissing Brigitte's unspoken concern about Angela. He realised he needed to be more of a leader at the moment. He needed to distract them all from worries so that they could be at their best, should an emergency arise. Winston began to hurriedly try and find a kind of task for his comrades to do - his mind was in the middle of racing when movement caught his eye. Tracer was exiting via the stairs, with Brigitte in tow.

"Tracer, wait!" he called, brushing past Reinhardt as he tried to catch up. Both women stopped and turned, facing Winston. "What is it, big guy?" she asked, frowning concernedly. "Nothing ominous, I just wanted to see if you - either of you," he added, smiling awkwardly at Brigitte. "Wanted to help me out with the Comms? Now that they're getting more traffic they need to be updated"

"Sorry Winston, I'd love to help ya'. But I have to go call Emily. I promised I'd check in with

her. Besides, I'm no good with that sort of thing. I'd be a pain, and you know it." Tracer replied, offering her giant friend a gentle smile and a pat on the arm.

"That's alright. How about you Brigitte?" he asked, his confidence as their leader slipping further away. "Who better to help out than a Lindholm?" he finished, pushing his glasses up.

His hope brightened when Brigitte's eyes lit up, but dimmed just as quickly when she shook her head sadly. "My shield is completely destroyed. It had already taken a few beatings on the way here, before Lena added to the damage," she said, looking pointedly at Tracer, who giggled.

"You said you wanted to train!" she interjected.

"Anyways," Brigitte continued, rolling her eyes happily. "I really have to get it back up to scratch. Tomorrow though, I'm all yours"

Winston nodded and smiled after them both as they walked away. He understood. Of course he understood. But he couldn't help feeling the blow. 'I can't even rally them to do something like this. How am I supposed to lead an entire vigilante army?' he thought, anxiously adjusting his glasses once more, as he began descending the stairs.

'Winston!'

The rough call caught him off guard, making him jolt. Reinhardt was clunking down the stairs behind him. "These young kids don't know how to stay still anymore," he laughed, slinging a giant arm over Winston's equally giant shoulders. "I may not be as smart as you, but I'm sure this old dog can learn some new tricks" he finished, more softly than before. He could sense the distress behind Winston's eyes, and it pained him to see any of his friends upset.

Winston paused for a moment, allowing as many horror scenarios pass through his head of Reinhardt helping him. He wasn't the helper he'd been expecting, but the fact that he wanted to was good enough for Winston. He knew he was a capable enough teacher.

He grinned and nodded, and made his way down and back out into the Comms lab, with Reinhardt chewing his ear off. and mentally preparing himself for whatever was going to get broken in the coming hours.



# One Step Down, One to Go

## Chapter Summary

Battling through the devastating storm that's on it's way, Mei and Snowball finally make a big step in their mission to get home.

### Unknown Location - Antarctica

Mei was almost bowled over by a sudden, harsh gust of wind. It was icier now, as the brewing storm was now almost upon them. Now, when snowflakes landed on her faces, they stung instead of tickling. Wind whipped in every direction, sometimes all at once. Mei, however, never grew disoriented - she was her own ray of sunshine. She powered forth, pushing deeper into the elemental chaos, but a seed of worry began sprouting in her stomach. She could no longer see the sky, and she knew better than to get stuck out here in a storm.

She didn't let her worry show though, as Snowball was an emotional robot, and if he sensed her fear, he would turn into a basketcase. Yet another freezing gust sent Mei wobbling backwards. She managed to right herself, though she could feel her sunny disposition beginning to cloud over. Quickly, she began thinking of her old days at Overwatch to stop it from becoming like the storm she was entering.

The past ten years had become less of a painful subject for her to think about, and more of an anomaly she wanted to figure out. If she delved too far into it, however, she worried she wouldn't resurface. It was still very thin ice.

Deciding not to push her mental health at this critical stage of their journey, she thought only of the things she could cope with. Mostly happy memories of her time with the organisation, which had become her second home and family. She thought back to days spent being briefed on missions by Jack, getting checked up on by Angela before leaving, and nights spent either out under the stars, or at one of the Ecopoints.

The weather consistently worsened, and Mei didn't know how far she'd trekked when she snapped out of the memories. The clouds overhead had turned a ghostly grey, and the wind had ceased. Everything was still - nothing moved, nothing made a sound. She swallowed difficultly. The storm was almost there.

"Snowball, can you tell how far away-"

Fast beeping quickly silenced her, as Snowball dived from his place on her back to hover a few meters in front of her. She sped up after him, reaching the edge of the peak they were on. His frantic beeping confused her, but before Mei could calm him down and ask what was the

matter, she looked in the direction he was, and saw what he'd seen - they were both peering down at the abandoned Overwatch Docking Bay. Tears sprung to Mei's eyes.

"We made it," she breathed, letting them fall and warm her cheeks. She and Snowball were racing down the mountain as fast as they both could manage, and after a few minutes, were at the base and dashing for the decrepit building. The air was no longer still - between Snowballs crazed beeps and Meis ecstatic yelps, there was sound at last. It crackled with emotion.

Finally reaching the entrance, Mei took a deep breath. She turned and smiled a smile of the purest happiness there had ever been at Snowball.

"Let's go home."

# The Call

## Chapter Summary

Winston, Tracer, Reinhardt and Brigitte wait for McCree's call to confirm when he'll be arriving back with Echo. The call they receive, however, is much more than they'd been expecting.

### Watchpoint, Gibraltar

"Reinhardt, wait!"

An ungodly crash rang throughout the Comms lab, as Reinhardt accidentally smashed through the outer casing of an old sonar system. Winston cringed as his friend tried to stabilise the crumbling metal. Granted, the technology in the room was for wear, but he still had no idea how Reinhardt had managed to reduce it to a pulp with only one movement. Reinhardt looked over his shoulder to offer Winston an apologetic smile, and as frustrated as he was at the ever-growing list of things Reinhardt was breaking, he just couldn't find it in himself to stay angry.

"Here, let me help," he said gently, allowing Reinhardt to move out of the way.

"I'm sorry Winston - I suppose this kind of thing isn't in my skillset after all," Reinhardt replied. Winston saw the look of dejection on his face, and instantly waved the statement away. "That just means you have room to learn," he replied, busying himself with fixing the most recent break. In fact, he was so concentrated that he didn't notice the happiness quickly spread across Reinhardt's face, who beamed while wiping his brow. It had long since struck late afternoon in Gibraltar, and the air was oppressive - the Comms lab was also one of the smaller rooms in the base, amplifying the intense heat in the air.

Fifteen minutes had passed, and while Winston was still trying to repair the sonar, Reinhardt occupied himself with lightly dusting the older computers. However, Winston could sense his friends discomfort due to the heat - every few minutes Reinhardt would rub sweat from the back of his neck, or fan himself with his cleaning rag. The heat was getting to Winston also, who not only had his huge size to contend with, but as well as that, the fact that he was covered in fur. Eventually, Reinhardt's fidgeting became less fidgeting and more twitching, and Winston could bear it no more.

"Reinhardt, could you do me a favour and go up to my office? I need you to see how things are working up there now that I've tweaked so many things down here," he instructed.

Reinhardt nodded firmly, grateful to be given a job outside of the sauna the room was becoming.

"You have my word!" he stated diligently, before exiting the room. Winston shook his head, smiling - Reinhardt's crusader tendencies were never going to leave him. After the brief burst of fresh air supplied by the door opening, the room returned to stifling. Winston found it more bearable now however. Once again, he scolded himself for still desiring alone time after he'd sent out the recall - how could he still expect that luxury when he was the acting commander of Overwatch? He drew a large sigh and tried to go easier on himself. The sudden beeping of the sonar told him he'd done enough to restore it, while simultaneously snapping him out of his thoughts.

'I'm just thankful Reinhardt managed to catch himself. If he hadn't . . . well . . .'

His thoughts trailed off, remembering the multitudes of breakages that had occurred during Overwatch's glory days, due to Reinhardt. Standing up, Winston wiped his sweaty hands on his legs. It had become too hot in there for even him to concentrate. He knew the sonar would keep beeping as it reset itself, so he knew he had about two hours before he had to come back down and do the rest of the manual reset. As he headed for the door, he cast a hasty glance at Echo's activation light. A small breath of relief escaped him when he saw it was still aglow. He had full faith in McCree's ability to deliver Echo safely - it was just that McCree had a strong tendency to get reckless a lot of the time. But he was the only person who could help her now, so Winston knew he couldn't complain. 'Speaking of McCree,' he thought, opening the door. 'He should be calling soon.'

It closed slowly behind him, and he turned his back on the room, happy to be out of it even just for a little while. He made his way up and out into the dazzling afternoon heat, not at all surprised that it was cooler under the sun than it was in that god forsaken room. 'I really need to get a better cooling system set up in there,' he thought. His mind traveled as he lumbered to his office to wait for McCree's call.

Finally in the cool air of the circular room, he sat at his desk and opened a jar of peanut butter. Eyeing it hungrily, he was excited to finally eat, not remembering the last time he'd done so that day. Just as he was about to scoop some out, however, the computers in front of him rang out the sorely missed sound of an incoming message. He placed the jar aside, mildly disappointed that his snack would have to wait. Swiftly he got past his personal security system to answer the call.

"McCree, I'm glad you managed to get back in contact," he started, placing the jar back in the small fridge next to him. He got no answer. Hearing nothing but static, he looked up at the projection. He frowned confusedly when he could see nothing of the cowboy on it, and just robotic bursts of grey and white.

"Jesse? You aren't coming through, can you hear me?" Winston asked. This time, he heard a snippet of reply, but it was too garbled by the connection for him to decipher. "One of the twoers might have come down again," he murmured to himself. He also knew that whatever technology McCree was using to get in contact wasn't state-of-the-art, so he should have expected a bad connection.

'But he was so clear earlier,' Winston pondered, clicking away at his keyboard to try and find the root of the issue. "Just hold on Jesse, I'll try and work this out," he reassured, pushing his glasses up his nose and diving into the guts of their transmission. As he did, he heard McCree's voice start to break through. This took some of the strain off, but he still had to figure out what was happening, as the man sounded ridiculously warped and off-pitch. As serious as Winston was, he knew wouldn't be able to stay straight-faced during an entire debrief of that voice.

"Hello?" came the voice, finally discernable.

"I can hear you Jesse, just let me figure out what's causing-"

"Hello? Is anyone there? Winston?"

His head snapped up. That wasn't McCree's voice. It didn't sound high-pitched because of the connection - it sounded like that because it was a female voice. He quickly looked up at the hologram, and through the resonating static, made out a person.

"Who are you?" he asked firmly. Whoever this was, they knew who he was, and they knew how to get into the Overwatch transmission system. There were a few tense moments of static before Winston got any response.

"Can you hear me?" she asked.

"Yes, I can - tell me who-"

"They aren't responding," she cut him off. Clearly, he thought, the transmission was only coming through on his end. "Can you get my pack, Snowball?"

'No,' Winston thought

He stared as intensely as he could at the hologram, trying to make out what he thought was happening. But there was no way. He knew what he thought simply couldn't be. She cleared her throat, Winston not daring to breathe.

"Winston. It's Mei,"

At that moment, and for that moment only, the static cleared completely. Her image was crystal clear - it was her.

"I have so much to tell you, and so much to ask, but I don't have the time right now, so I'll get straight to the point. A week ago, I woke up from my cryostasis - it was the artificial sleep we all went into, to outlast the storm that was approaching us. When I woke up..."

Mei paused. Her words snagged on the lump in her throat. But she didn't know how much longer the connection would last. She swallowed difficultly, and forced the tears that had begun to threaten, back into submission.

"When I woke up, every other pod had malfunctioned. My team had passed on. I was the only one left, and I soon after realised it had been ten years since we went into that sleep, and

that currently, Overwatch is non-existent"

The words stung both Winston and Mei equally. He listened, waited with bated breath every time Mei spoke.

"But one week ago, when I was alone at the Ecopoint, when I had only just managed to get the systems back online - thanks to Snowball," she continued, smiling briefly at a beeping noise offscreen. "I got your message, Winston. I knew that I had to come back, that you would be my only way home. Snowball and I have trekked for the last week to get to the docking bay so that I might contact you. So,"

Mei drew a deep breath, and Winston held his.

"Winston. Ana. Jack. Whoever sees this message. I'm at the bay now. We made it here, but there's a storm about to hit and I don't know if we'll survive," she explained. A seriousness unlike any she'd ever experienced settled on her face.

"If you're seeing this, we need you. We need your help,"

"Athena," Winston breathed, not taking his eyes off the hologram, even for a second. "Is this message coming through on the live feed?"

A brief silence fell, only broken by the worsening static in the background.

"Yes, this communication is coming to you live from docking station 016J..."

Athena rattled off the details, but Winston tuned out. That was all he needed to know. He turned his full attention back to Mei.

"We want to rejoin Overwatch and keep helping people. We will keep helping. But we have no way of getting any further from here. I'm sorry, but you're the only ones who can save us,"

By now, Mei was having to yell over the howling wind outside. Quickly, a thunderous crash took her attention.

"Mei? Mei, can you hear me?" Winston called, finally finding his voice again. Whatever had fallen had interrupted the signal further, and her image became little more than a crackly blur.

"I have no more time, I'm sorry!" she yelled. After that, another, louder crash sounded, followed by a bone-chilling scream and frantic beeping.

The signal then cut out.

Winston exploded to life, breathless as he slammed a giant fist on the intercom button.

"All agents of Overwatch!" he bellowed into the speaker. His voice was strong, but there was no mistaking the shakiness around the edges. "Report to my office immediately. This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill,"

The next words sparked a feeling he'd long since forgotten.

"We have a mission."

Within two minutes, Brigitte, Reinhardt and Tracer had all entered the room, with mixes of determination and confusion on their faces.

"Winston, what's happening?" Tracer asked, anxiously watching the giant ape.

"I just received a live transmission from our docking point in Antarctica," he explained while typing passwords into the lockout systems. "It was from Mei. She's alive."

Tracer's eyes widened until they could no more. While Reinhardt's jaw fell open.

"Winston, the Ecopoint that Mei was stationed at malfunctioned! There's no way she could be..."

Tracer was almost angry. Nobody knew for sure what had happened at the Antarctic Ecopoint, but they all knew something had gone horrifically wrong. The last contact they'd had with it was ten years ago, when they'd received the message that the inhabitants were going into cryosleep until the storm was over. Since then, nothing. She knew there was no way it should be possible.

"I know it sounds impossible - I thought I was hallucinating from the heat when it came through. But we need to save her," Winston stated. "We didn't reform Overwatch to pick and choose who we help and when we help them - we help anyone who needs us, even if it seems like a pipe-dream that they're alive. We're Overwatch,"

This statement was enough to distinguish any doubts that his three teammates had. They came back for a reason, and that was it. "Follow me, I'll brief you all on the way to the hangar."

Winston led the way out of his office hurriedly. As he and his team moved, he explained Mei's situation with as much detail as she'd been able to provide. He told them about her journey, warned them about the storm they'd be entering, and as he did this, communicated with Athena to get the hangar ready for deployment.

"Now," he began, as they entered the large warehouse. "You're going to need to be careful. None of you are trained specifically for the conditions you're going to be entering. You're all going to need these," he explained handing them each a thick undersuit each. As everyone turned away for each other's privacy, Winston kept explaining.

"This isn't going to be an easy mission. Our systems haven't been used practically for years, and neither have our aircrafts. I've kept them all as up to scratch as possible, but you're all going to need to be prepared for a bumpy ride,"

Tracer signalled that everyone was newly dressed, and they all turned around to face one another again. Winston handed them all miniscule trackers, and Tracer and Reinhardt both

planted them behind their ears. Brigitte, however, had no idea what was sitting in her hand or what to do with it.

"Here love, let me help you with that," Tracer offered kindly, seeing the confusion on Brigitte's face and remembering her own first mission. Brigitte sighed in relief as Tracer clipped the small device behind her ear and gave her a thumbs up. "Suits you" she winked.

Winston walked them towards the largest aircraft in the room. It's sturdy wings spread widely on either side of it, and it shined even in the artificial light of the hangar.

"You'll be taking the Manta. Tracer, you'll be piloting, and I know you've not had any experience with a craft like this, but-"

Tracer was already opening the huge door on the side of the Manta and climbing in. "Ye of so little faith! Trust me Winston, I'm the only pilot to ever survive teleportation flight!" she called from inside.

"And who's that thanks to," Winston muttered, turning to Reinhardt. The large machine growled to life behind them and a faint whooping followed it. "Reinhardt, I'm putting you in charge once you deploy. Get everyone in and out safely," he added, Reinhardt nodding.

"You can trust me." Reinhardt replied firmly. He was completely serious, and Winston's worries were eased slightly. Though Reinhardt was a goose a lot of the time, on missions he was a hardened vet.

"I know I can. And Brigitte,"

Winston Looked at the smaller figure next to Reinhardt, and though she was trying valiantly to hide it, he could see the mild shivering of her body.

"I'm putting you in charge of support. You're our only healer, and I have full faith in you to stabilise and return Mei, as well as your teammates," he said, softening his tone slightly to try and calm her. Brigitte met his eyes, and the determination on her face shocked him slightly. "I won't let you down, Winston" she stated, steeling herself. Reinhardt patted her shoulder proudly, and began to move towards the now fully awake and rumbling Manta.

"Are you going to be alright?" Winston asked Brigitte, as she hadn't moved an inch. She jumped slightly before nodding. "You know, if you want to feel a little better about your first mission, ask Tracer about hers. She'll go on about it for so long that you'll be back here before she even finished" he whispered, smiling gently. This brought a sudden chuckle to Brigitte's lips, before she loosened up slightly.

"I think I'll do that. Thank you, Winston" she said, quickly giving the ape a hug before rushing towards the Manta. Reinhardt slid the big door down after her, and Winston watched as Tracer began flipping switches giddily in the cockpit. Athena opened the hangar doors, revealing the now dusky sky outside. The ocean lapped lazily against the cliffs they were stationed on, and Winston quickly hurried back to his office to give them the green light.



"Manta 1, do you read me?" he asked, sliding into his chair and furiously typing as he waited for reply. "We copy, Winston. Give me the signal and we're ready to fly," came Tracer's reply. He checked all their systems, scanning every monitor for any kind of problems. Everything seemed fine. He knew what he had to do.

"Agents, you are clear to go. Good luck."

"We'll be right back," Tracer replied smugly, before switching off the comms for takeoff. After a few moments, Winston saw the Manta hovering in the sky over the hangar from his window. A second of gut-wrenching anxiety filled him as he thought of the worst. But then, just as he was about to break into an emergency transmission, it began to turn for the direction they were headed, and just like that, it was flying away.

As much as it was a sight he wanted to watch forever, he knew he had as much work to do as the team. He began pulling up old maps of the docking bay Mei was currently at, to find them the safest way in and out.

"Hold on, Mei. Just hold on."

# The Frozen Blaze

## Chapter Summary

Mei suffers inexplicable injuries after the storm at the Bay, while contemplating all she's gone through and what's to come.

## Chapter Notes

I just wanted to let you know, there are heavy themes of injury and death in this chapter, so please be aware if that's not something you like to hear about/triggers you <3

“Snowball...?”

Mei’s whisper was raspy, broken. It sent a searing pain down her throat, which was bone-dry. She tried to call out again, but her voice gave out, creating no more than a crushed whimper. It was not a surprise to her that she’d gotten no response from her companion – even with his advanced sensors he wouldn’t have been able to detect a noise that muted – however, her panic about his wellbeing grew nonetheless.

Mei knew she needed to assess how much damage had been done. She knew that, at the minimum, she wouldn’t be able to get anything up and running again for the next 24 hours, but she didn’t have that kind of time. Scorching tears of frustration began to pool down her cheeks. Her and Snowball had done it – they’d come this far and reached their goal. With Mei’s limited knowledge of communicational technology, and some of Snowball’s battery, she’d coaxed life back into the building’s systems. As she’d managed to make fleeting contact with Gibraltar’s comms, the Bay had begun to bear the full brunt of the storm. Mei tired hard to make sure she was heard, but through the ferocious wind and needle-like rain, she wasn’t sure if she’d succeeded or not. All she knew for sure, was that nobody had answered.

Before she’d been able to give her coordinates, in case someone found her message, for anyone who might be able to save her, one of the colossal pillars that bore a significant amount of the building’s structural integrity, began to crack below the force of the wind that had burst its way inside through broken windows and doors. Mei heard the fracture of the decade-old cement, but her attention was divided – she was still perilously trying to get any kind of contact back from the Watchpoint.

A few seconds later, she felt the air around her begin to shift in a way that no amount of wind could conjure. It clicked swiftly what was about to happen, but it was already too late.

Looking up, Mei had just enough time to hear her own disembodied scream as the beam came barreling towards her.

She was now awake, and pinned down by chunks of smashed concrete. She knew both her legs were broken, but she dared not look down. Mei feared if she knew the extent of her injuries, the last embers of her motivation would be snuffed out. She clearly hadn't been out for very long, as she could still feel the adrenaline pumping through her, dulling the pain coming from just about every part of her body.

But with all the new problems she now had to face, the injuries she was yet to uncover, through all of this, only one thought stuck in her mind – and it had more power than anything else.

‘Winston wasn't there,’

She'd never felt defeat like this. She had come so close, only for her only hope to be ripped away just as she reached it. This was cruel, merciless, hateful. Mei knew she should stand up and find Snowball, find a way to reconnect the computers and try again. In her heart she knew if she gave up, that was it. She wouldn't last the night.

But her heart was tired. It had carried her from the Ecopoint to her current situation, all while bearing the anguish of her lost friends, the guilt of being the only survivor, and the hope of being found. It had been cracked open and gutted, then haphazardly stuck back together again with whatever endurance Mei had left. It had nothing left to give.

‘I can keep going,’ she insisted, desperately trying to rid herself of this overwhelming dread. Ignoring the growing pain in her abdomen and legs, she tried to pry herself away from the wreckage, only to feel the monstrous pain of multiple cracked ribs. She wailed, the sound echoing, almost like something out there wanted to make fun of how alone she was. Warmth spread across the surface level of her stomach, and rose coloured splotches began to ink themselves through her heavy overcoat. Mei collapsed back into her spot, breath beginning to get slower. The blood seeping across her torso was hot, but for once in her life, she was cold.

Looking up as she lay back, she noticed that a portion of the roof had caved in, and she could see the night sky. Mei smiled weakly, remembering all the times she'd witnessed this gorgeous gift of nature while on field missions with her team. It never got old. Now that the storm had passed, the Arctic stars were visible, and they seemed to be more dazzling tonight than she could ever remember.

"I wish Snowball could see this," she breathed to herself, feeling her lungs rattle as she tried to inhale. She knew what was coming - it was the thing she'd felt creeping at her heels ever since she left the Ecopoint, the thing that had consumed her friends, but left her alone for reasons she would never understand. She'd tried to leave the death behind her, trekking as far away from it as she could, thinking she could leave it to freeze in an Arctic storm. But now,

as she lay watching the stars dance celestially, she came to terms with it. Death had wanted to play cat and mouse with her, and it won. Mei was ready.

Though it hurt, she took another large breath, proving to her demise that it couldn't have her yet - she would stay alive for as much longer as she could. One of the stars above caught her attention, and she used what little energy she had left to focus on it. It was bright, that was for sure, brighter than any of the others. Mei couldn't recall seeing this star before, but in her state she knew that her astronomical knowledge probably wasn't what it normally was. Tilting her head as much as possible, she scrutinised it further, becoming more acutely aware of its intense gleam. It was almost as if it was becoming brighter. A faint whirring noise filled Mei's ears, and what she thought was a star she now knew couldn't be - it was descending right above her. It was blinding as it became bigger, and something stirred in Mei's chest.

'Am I hallucinating? Surely I haven't lost that much blood yet, but maybe I hit my head too hard. Or maybe... what if they did hear me?'

The intensity of the light suddenly became too much for Mei, and she shut her eyes. The whirring became slightly louder, and abruptly, she felt the light that had been piercing even her closed eyes disappear. She opened them back up, and just like that it was gone. And the excitement of it all had taken the last out of Mei - she dropped to the floor, hard, her vision bending in ways she didn't think were possible. The exhaustion she felt was otherworldly, and her breathing more laboured than ever. But as her consciousness left her for the second time that night, something felt different. That feeling in her chest, it felt familiar - it felt hot.

# Search and Rescue

## Chapter Summary

Reinhardt, Tracer and Brigitte battle their own demons on the mission to rescue Mei.

The Manta cut silently through the night air, making an astounding lack of noise considering the years of idleness it had endured. The inside of the aircraft was just as quiet, however this silence was booming. The beginning of the trip had been buzzing, as Reinhardt briefed the team on how their evacuation mission would unfold, what their duties were and most importantly, how they were going to get Mei safely back home. His plan was simple, the way he liked it - get in and out as fast as possible. The bad weather had passed, but none of them knew the terrain well enough to judge their safety after such a storm, despite Tracer joking that London in winter seemed pretty similar. Reinhardt had allocated each of them specific duties that were crucial to the success and ease of their mission - Tracer was to find somewhere easily accessible and close to the dock to land the Manta. They needed to be able to bring Mei back to it as smoothly as they could. Once they'd landed, Tracer was to keep the aircraft hot while Reinhardt paved a safe way into the dock. They didn't know what kind of wreckage to expect, but judging by what little information Winston was able to give them, they'd need as much of his brute strength as they could get. Once inside the dock their immediate task was to find Mei. Again, they had no idea what kind of condition she'd be in, and this was where the plan became murky. Brigitte needed to stabilise her enough to move her out of the building and all the way back into the Manta. Reinhardt had been on many a dangerous mission with the eldest Lindholm daughter before, and as battered as he ended up, she'd managed to return him to working condition. But this wasn't a typical "fight first, hurt later" kind of task. This was delicate and confronting, and not the kind of thing Brigitte had been exposed to regularly enough. If Mei's condition was bad, if she needed critical care and that burden was left up to Brigitte...

Reinhardt shook his head. The silence of the ship had become too much for him, and letting his mind wander was not something he liked to indulge in often. Hoisting himself off the cold bench he'd been sitting on, he looked towards the front of the craft aiming to catch a glimpse of Tracer. He knew they were nearing the dock, and if the inky black sky was any indication, they were getting closer by the second.

"How much longer?" he called, sensing Brigitte jump nearby at the sudden clap of his voice. Tracer's head poked through the opening of the cockpit and she called "Shouldn't you have gone to the toilet before we left?". Reinhardt grinned, always welcoming a moment of levity in situations like this. It was over in a moment however, as Tracer's voice rang out again, nowhere as easygoing this time around.

"Give it another 10 minutes and we'll be ready to land,"

Reinhardt nodded solemnly and watched Tracer refocus on piloting. He took no offense the jokes she cracked - she'd always been like that, seemingly finding either the best or worst time to try and get a laugh or two. But he knew it was her way of getting through everything they had to get through, and he was similar in a way. People coped differently, and he'd always accepted that. He'd always been the first person to shut down any mean-spirited talk about the way she carried herself back in the day, and nobody ever fought him on it. Because when it came down to it, she was one of the most sincere people he'd ever had the pleasure of meeting, and the honour of fighting beside.

"Hello?"

Quickly Reinhardt snapped out of his reminiscing and looked down at Brigitte, standing cross-armed in front of him. She looked at him as if waiting for an answer. "Did you say something?" he asked, trying to escape her frustration with a small smile. She sighed tiredly, arms falling to her sides.

"I was asking if you were okay. You seemed very lost in thought," she explained. "I'm the team leader, I believe it is my job to check on you," Reinhardt replied gallantly, noticing how tight her jaw was set. He placed himself back down on the long bench that stretched the distance of the ship and patted the spot next to him. Brigitte sat, straight as a rod. He frowned - he knew why she was anxious, but it was still a shock to see her like this. Things didn't normally phase her - she was stubborn and sharp which reminded him all too much of her father. She looked down.

"I'm... okay," she began. Reinhardt tilted his head to be more at her level, inviting her to keep going. She didn't face him, and he didn't expect her to. "It's just... we've been through a lot. I've patched you up more times than I can remember, and I'm used to it. I know how to help in that way, I know how to protect and I know how to engage. But this is different," she trailed off. Reinhardt nodded, knowing what she was getting at. She let out a long breath of air before continuing.

"If she- if Mei is hurt, hurt badly, I just... I don't know how much I can help."

Reinhardt sat back, looking out the window on the other side of the plane. It was unfair what they were asking of her. He knew that, and he knew they all knew it. She had nowhere near the field experience for a task like this, so critical and so quickly able to go wrong. They'd been in many brawls before, it wasn't her level of skill he worried about. He knew fine well what she was capable of - but she was not a doctor, and that's what Mei needed. If the growing feeling of dread in his stomach was anything to go by, she'd need more than just one doctor.

"Ideally," he began, looking back at Brigitte. "This wouldn't be up to you. I'm sorry that it is,". Her head snapped towards him, eyes wide with outrage.

"I'm not complaining-"

"I'm not saying you are," Reinhardt cut in, gently chuckling. He placed a large hand on her shoulder and smiled warmly, albeit wearily. "But you must believe in yourself more. You

haven't just been "patching me up", you've brought me back from the brink of death. Multiple times,"

"Five minutes guys," Tracer called. He thought for a moment, before continuing. "Whatever we encounter down there, you're prepared for. I know you are. Whatever you can and can't do, you will not fail. Because truthfully," he looked conspiratorially at Brigitte. "I don't think you know the meaning of the word."

She mulled this over for a moment, before returning his gaze. In her eyes was that familiar determination, and he felt more at ease. Mostly because he'd helped Brigitte steel herself again, and slightly because he'd managed to say the right thing. If anyone was more infamous for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time than Tracer, it was him. But as he watched Brigitte stand and begin double checking all the supplies she'd be carrying to the dock, he knew his leadership skills hadn't worn off just yet. He stood next and reached for his armour, relishing the cool touch he'd come to love after all these years. Time and time again Brigitte had goaded him to let her create him something new, entirely from scratch, and time and time again he'd refused. This armour was a part of him. It had protected him at his worst and supported him at his best. It carried the weight of sorrow with it, something that grounded him when his bravado began to get the better of him. And it held the constant promise of what the future could hold - and how hard it was worth fighting for.

"I've got eyes on the dock!" Tracer yelled. Brigitte and Reinhardt both rushed into the cockpit. That dread in Reinhardt's stomach began to pump into his bloodstream. Brigitte gasped. "It's not looking good," Tracer muttered, hovering the Manta high above the wrecked building below. "But I know where we can land."

Suddenly she jerked the steering and the plane responded immediately, almost sending Brigitte and Reinhardt flying. "I'd strap in if I were you two," she instructed, her nimble fingers flicking multitudes of switches one after the other. "It might not be a clean landing."

The passengers hastily followed her orders and secured themselves to the benches. Tracer swiftly brought the aircraft lower to the icy ground below them, and even inside the Manta the temperature dropped. It was freezing. Brigitte's mind began to flood with every single thing she'd have to contend with when she found Mei. On top of whatever injuries she'd sustained, there was the added threat the temperature posed. She swallowed once and gripped the bench. 'She needs me. I won't let her down.'

With a stroke of luck, and Tracer's unmatched piloting skill, the Manta landed with ease. At Reinhardt's request she opened the large hangar door, and a feral gust of ice blew inside. Just not strong enough to permeate their protective gear, but it had the potential to wreak havoc if they were out there too long. Tracer hopped out of the pilot's seat and dashed towards the opening door.

"Are you sure you don't need me out there?" she asked, hungrily looking out into the frozen landscape. She wanted, no, needed to help. And sitting here, waiting to fly them back to Gibraltar just didn't feel like enough. Reinhardt approached her and peered out into the darkness as well. "You don't have to be everything for everyone," he replied suddenly, a much deeper response than either of them had been expecting. Tracer's gaze fell to the floor momentarily. He quickly cleared his throat and she looked at him. "Besides, what are we

going to do if our star pilot loses her fingers to frostbite?" he bellowed, earning a smile that crinkled Tracer's eyes. A cut off sigh left her mouth, before she turned to face him and feigned a salute. "I will lose no fingers, Captain!"

Reinhardt was swept into the memory of her first ever strike mission in London all that time ago. She really hadn't changed. More faintly he heard Tracer add "Please bring her back." He nodded firmly and watched her fly back into the cockpit to check on the plane's systems. Brigitte had made her way over, and the both of them stood in silence for a moment. The night sky above them sparkled, as did the ground below them. In any other situation it would have been a sight to behold.

"Are you ready?" Reinhardt asked. Brigitte adjusted the large pack on her back. "Born ready." He grinned, the familiar adrenaline rush beginning to combat the fear in his body, and the thrill of his next sentence igniting his senses.

"Overwatch strike team!" he boomed, not even the sub-zero wind being a match for his voice. "Search and rescue."



# An Endless Horizon

## Chapter Summary

Brigitte and Reinhardt find more destruction than expected on their way to rescue Mei, and doubt for the mission begins to nip at their heels.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The trip was easier than both Reinhardt and Brigitte expected, and reaching the Dock only took a mere ten minutes on foot. Neither of them spoke much along the way, saving their breath for warning each other of oncoming obstacles or the odd ditch here and there. It wasn't until they got to the peak, towering over the demolished building, that conversation began again.

Reinhardt looked at the way down, then back at where they were standing. "We're going to have to climb all the way back up here," he whined.

"Unbelievable," Brigitte sighed, moving to start descending the snowy hill. Reinhardt's arm shot out in front of her, pushing a pained gasp from her mouth. Before she could protest, he pointed to the ground she was about to walk on. "With the storm that just hit this place, you need to be careful where you step. The last thing we need is an avalanche" he explained.

Brigitte shook her head in surprise. "I'm amazed you know so much about snow," she commented, following the new path Reinhardt began to take. "I was posted in many icy places! Have I ever told you-"

She quickly cut him off and told him to focus. Now was not the time for a fairytale retelling of one of his past missions. Well, that and she just could not bear to hear one more of his stories. They continued to climb down the slope and as the Dock came more into view, the extent of the damage presented itself. Half the roof had been torn off, the other half collapsed in. Pieces of cement were scattered everywhere like they weighed nothing. Reinhardt's face soured - he wasn't sure how anyone could survive this.

"We need to hurry," he said suddenly. The edge in his voice was strong, so Brigitte nodded and picked up the pace. They found themselves on flat ground after a few minutes, broken glass cracking under every step they took. More debris obstructed their path now that they were right in front of the destruction, and the hope of finding an easy way in was beginning fade.

"I don't suppose the front doors are still standing?" Brigitte huffed as she climbed over a bent staircase. It had been torn and flung outside the building, now gnarled and crooked among the snow. Reinhardt lifted himself after her, and landed with a loud thud. "Wishful thinking," was his response as he carried onward. She watched as he lifted half a metal beam out of their way, allowing her to slip past it and letting it slam to the side after him. They'd cleared a

decent enough pathway back to the base of the hill, and once they were over that there wasn't much stopping them from a quick return to the ship.

"There!"

Brigitte pointed to a large broken window around the side of the building, big enough for them to climb in and out of. They sped towards it, adrenaline beginning to pump harder than ever - they had a way in.

"Be careful when you go through, it's probably not the most stable in there" Brigitte instructed as Reinhardt steadied himself at the entrance. The building went underground, meaning even though they were at base level, there was still the chance one of them could fall through the floor and end up below. "I'm always careful!" he puffed out, stepping through. Brigitte snorted.

She ducked under the empty frame and stepped on the glass that it used to hold. A rushed gasp caught her attention and she whipped towards where it came from. Her eyes widened as she met the point that Reinhardt's gaze was glued to. This structure had once been 10 stories high. It was now a hollow rectangle with barely any floors left and even more destruction to search through.

"Now we know what all that cement was from," Reinhardt breathed, looking up into the empty space. The night sky loomed through the torn up roof. An endless horizon was one of the only things that dwarfed him, which seemed to trigger the dread he'd been holding back so tightly. It was foreign to him, feeling this hopeless. This mission shouldn't have been any more or less important than the others they'd tackled over the years - but it was. This was Overwatch. Their first mission back after so long, and it already felt like they were fighting a lost battle. The doubt began to grow, malignant and slithering through his body. Maybe he and Brigitte shouldn't have come back.

Maybe he wasn't cut out for this anymore. The thought rattled him down to the bone, and he felt tiny inside that armour of his.

"Reinhardt," Brigitte called. He tore his gaze from the sky above. "Don't let it shake you," she advised. In her eyes he caught a fleeting glimpse of the same fear that had him glued to the ground. But unlike his, Brigitte's was running to cower from her might. Amidst the carnage surrounding them, she didn't stare at the sky, but straight ahead. Her yellow armour gleamed, lit by the moon, and served as a fierce reminder of what they were here for. Every single one of them volunteered, every day, to fight the darkest moments life had to offer and be an endless source of light out of them. That's what Overwatch did, and he'd always been proud to serve that cause. Reinhardt looked down at his own armour, shining in the same light. A small smile whispered across his face, but it was enough to cage the dread once more. Later was the time to deal with it. For now, he had a rescue mission to lead.

On a deep exhale, Reinhardt regarded Brigitte. "We need to expand our search now that we're inside" he instructed. Readily she followed as he explained the plan. Originally, when he thought the inside of the building was one level, it was going to be easier - get in, find Mei and leave. But now that they were there and saw that it went above and below ground, things were a bit more complicated.

"How did you not know what an Overwatch funded AND owned building looked like?" Brigitte asked incredulously. Reinhardt sputtered.

"I was never stationed here! How should I have known?" he argued. He was met with raised eyebrows. "Weren't you a Strike Commander?"

With no genuine response, he hastily moved the conversation back to their strategy. Considering the top levels of the building were all but gone, it was safe to say Mei wasn't up there. They needed to clear the ground floor they were on before traversing into the basement floors below. In the sturdy pack Brigitte carried was grappling equipment, and they were lucky for it because the ground floor was cleared quickly and there was no sight of Mei. With the precision only a team of years together could have, they set Brigitte up to descend upon the darkness beneath them. Reinhardt anchored her to the safety of the ground and watched as she nimbly found her place on the first basement floor. Among the bitter darkness, Brigitte switched on a blinding searchlight strapped to her head.

"Wow," she uttered. The room was huge, and other than the pieces of flooring from the above landing, it was almost untouched. Rows of lab equipment, computers, screens she didn't even recognise the look of. It was all still there.

"Are you okay down there?" Reinhardt called, much louder than necessary. She winced before looking up. "I'm alright!"

The search commenced, and Brigitte slowly moved around, unsure about the integrity of the ground she walked on. And since Reinhardt had no clue about the building they were in, for all she knew there could be one or one hundred floors beneath her. And she didn't fancy falling through any of them. As the minutes ticked by, she got into a rhythm - lift cement, search through rubble, mark off a section, repeat. Reinhardt was becoming antsy at not being in the middle of the action. His shouts for updates were coming few and fast between, and Brigitte's responses were becoming increasingly frustrated. She'd began to move forward to another portion of the room when rock caught her eye. Trying to still tread lightly, her eyes darted towards a pile of rubble she hadn't gotten to yet. It was on the other side of the office, and squinting to see further than the torch illuminated she could make out that there was a huge crack leading up to the ground floor above it. Her breath quickened and she waited, joints taut and ready to spring into action at any moment. A small clatter bellowed in the silence.

"I hear something!" Brigitte yelled. Her body exploded into movement, uncaring of the weak floor beneath her. Reinhardt crouched immediately to allow more rope down. Brigitte sprinted until her toes touched the sharp mound, and locked her hand gear into place. It wouldn't be enough to stop her from getting hurt entirely, but it would do the job. Her fingers quickly found the first large slab of cement and heaved it away. Dust particles flew wildly in her line of sight as she continued pulling pieces of junk away. "Reinhardt! Over here!"

He unclipped the rope and watched it snake away the moment it touched the room below him. Following the sounds of Brigitte's digging, he found himself able to look down at her from a large hole tucked away where a staircase once was. She threw the rope he'd dropped back up to him and he refastened it to his armour. The image of her copper hair flashed in and

out of view as her torch moved with her. The blood pounding in his ears helped ground him as he frantically fought the urge to climb down and help her himself.

Seemingly at the crescendo of their search, as the sound of rocks breaking, laboured breathing and wind howling all pooled together, something happened. "Hold on," he heard Brigitte call. Suddenly all movement ceased and the moments passed silently. Reinhardt strained to see anything, desperately waiting for any kind of noise. Fighting to listen over the sound of his own heartbeat, he kept silent. No noise came. The wind began to pick up again and rattled the debris around him. It was enough to make Reinhardt begin to yell once, and then a second time when Brigitte didn't hear him, for her to climb out from there and reassess. And it was almost so strong he didn't hear her raw reply.

"I found her!"

## Chapter End Notes

Another chapter, hooray!! I've been working on this one since I last updated, but it threw me for a bit of a loop if I'm honest. I just couldn't figure out where I wanted it to go and how I wanted to say what I was trying to say. I also changed it a bunch of times which didn't help! It was definitely struggle street, but it's done, and I really hope you like it! Apologies if it feels a bit different from the other chapters, or isn't up to the same standard as them! I've also been taking time to enjoy all the new OW2 content we've been getting and trying the betas! See you on the next update! <3

# The Mission Below

## Chapter Summary

Brigitte battles below the surface of the destroyed Docking Bay in order to free Mei.

## Chapter Notes

I just wanted to put a quick little question here to see what anyone thinks - apart from this story, which is massive and will definitely take some time to introduce more and more characters, would anyone be interested in some shorter stories that have to do with other OW characters? I'll still update this one, but I would love the chance to write about different characters sooner rather than wait for them to enter this one! Let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

~ Mentions of blood and injuries, please be aware if you're not okay with that kind of content! ~

Red. It had never been a particular favourite colour of Brigitte's. She didn't like it and she didn't dislike it. It was neutral to her. But of all the red things in the world she could think of, for a long time after that night, red had boiled down to one meaning - blood.

She hadn't noticed her chest heaving, hadn't heard the alarming rattle in her breath as she desperately tried to claim clean air among the muck that flew around her. Rocks, rubble, shrapnel, it all soared wildly as she dug into the mound. Her flashlight beamed off the dust in the air, every now and again making her question whether she could see movement in her peripherals. It was madness. But like a hound, no matter the distraction, her vision was tunneled. She kept digging.

"Mei?" she bellowed. "Can you hear me?"

Though the mountain of debris was slowly becoming a hill, Brigitte still had no visual confirmation of Mei being there. Persistent doubt flickered at the edges of her mind, lazy waves lapping at her train of thought.

'What if she's not here?'

'What if I'm wrong?'

'What if we didn't make it in time?'

"Argh!"

Her own voice took her by surprise - the pained grunt that had fought its way through her mouth wasn't one she'd intended. It had taken longer than she expected, but her reckless digging had caught up with her. Crimson pooled out of her right hand, painting its way down

her armoured wrist. Pausing her frenzy for a second, she assessed the damage. A gash, smack bang in the centre of her dominant hand. The chunk of cement responsible had clattered to the ground, evidence of its crime fresh and red along its rough edges.

"Are you alright?" came the inevitable call. Peering upwards, she could just barely make out Reinhardt's face. She knew there was no point in worrying him, not when they were so close to their goal. "I'm all good!" she replied, flashing a thumbs up with her unscathed hand. No reply. In Wilhelm, that meant suspicion. But she had no time to reassure him. Her cut handgear was repositioned to, at the least, cover her wound, and she went back to work.

"Mei!" she yelled once more. "It's Brigitte Lindholm, Torbjorn's daughter! I'm here with Reinhardt and we're going to get you out!"

Reinhardt's eyes stayed glued to her. Every muscle in his body seared as he fought valiantly against his desperation to help Brigitte dig. He could see the blood and though he was no doctor, he'd seen his fair share of it spilled. He knew when it was fresh. Her coughing had become more persistent over the passing minutes, coming from deeper in her lungs each time. Whatever the outcome of this mission, he knew Brigitte would need medical help back at Gibraltar. He just didn't know who would be able to give it to her.

Sweat coated Brigitte's face, stinging her eyes and gifting her a second skin made of dust. She blinked viciously every couple of seconds, desperate for a tear to wash all the muck away, even for a moment. Her biceps sizzled, pulsing with every rock she lifted. The doubt in her mind was now mixing into a dangerous cocktail with the growing fatigue in her body. She hadn't noticed dropping to her knees, as she began to scoop larger base pieces away.

'Just keep moving, Brig. You can't stop moving.'

The sounds of this room had become a pattern to her now. Shushed grunts as she hefted debris off the pile. Cement shattering after being tossed aside. Metal scraping, marking up the already destroyed floor. A chant to keep her on track with every movement. Grunt, shatter, scrape. Grunt, shatter, scrape. Grunt, shatter, scrape, beep.

Beep?

Brigitte sputtered hair out of her mouth as her ponytail splayed across her face. Her head had whipped to the side so quickly she was sure she needed to add it to her growing list of ailments. But none of that even remotely concerned her right now. Right now, what concerned her was the large hard-drive she'd just thrown - or rather, what she thought had been a large hard-drive. She never prized herself as a computer person, and the only use she'd ever found for a hard-drive was downloading her dad's old engineering tapes to embarrass him with. All of that mixed with the wretched darkness of the room meant she really didn't have much of an idea what she was chucking around down there.

"Why did you stop?" Reinhardt called down, not at all trying to hide the concern in his voice.

"I think..." Brigitte began, kneeling towards the scuffed lump on the floor. A small, red line blinked on its side. "I think I found a robot?"

"A robot?" he responded, crouching towards the hole. "Why would-"

Beeeeep...

The soft, scared sound was enough. It hit him like a bullet - he'd heard that noise before, many times before. It had followed Mei everywhere back in the day. He used to think it would follow her to the end of the Earth if she needed. And it seems like it had.

"Snowball?" he prompted. His head poked through into the room below, eyes adjusting to the air quality. Brigitte's eyebrows furrowed, looking back and forth between her friend and the blinking light. Her mouth opened to ask what the hell he was talking about, but the words died on her tongue. Four fast beeps responded to Reinhardt. Brigitte turned back to look at the machine, gasping as she did. A pair of wide, pixelated eyes had opened in the darkness,

staring up at them triumphantly. Reinhardt's laughter crackled through the air as Brigitte swiftly lifted the little robot into her arms. Under the light on her head, she noticed the blue and white build, stoking foggy memories. She'd seen pictures of Mei with this robot. "Reinhardt, take him!" she yelled, lifting Snowball above her head. Rapid beeping responded to her request, but just as quickly died out into quiet static. 'The battery is dead - that must have been what the red light was about' she thought, pummeling back into the pile. Reignited by the find, she became a blur of strength. Reinhardt worked surprisingly nimbly to fasten Snowball to his back, all the while on high alert. Now certain that Mei was trapped in the rubble Brigitte fought through, it was a matter of moments before they knew what they were dealing with. Seconds ticked down as the pile grew smaller and smaller. Reinhardt white-knuckled the rope connected to Brigitte, waiting for the call. Brigitte had to move more carefully now, unable to just tear pieces away on a whim.

"I still can't see her!" she cried, the torment finally breaking her defenses. Reinhardt flinched at the waver in her voice. "Keep searching! She must be there!" he called, his own breath now becoming shaky. They had Snowball - Mei had to be there. The tear Brigitte had been desperate for earlier finally made its appearance, marking a clear path down her grimy face. 'You know what you're doing!' she thought, bitterly swatting at her wet cheek. 'Why can't you find her?? Stop being such a baby!'

All at once, as she prepared for her throbbing hand to meet brick once more, it didn't. It touched fabric.

For a moment she froze. She feared any movement, anything at all, would anger fate. She only allowed motion to her eyes, which gingerly peeked at whatever was below her. They landed on Mei's face - pale, injured and sunken. But it was her.

Brigitte leaned in, pressing her ear under Mei's nose, and waiting. The hammering of her heart was gone. The blood thumping in her ears was silent. All her body wanted, all she needed, was to hear a breath. "Come on, Mei, come on," she muttered, quelling the growing panic as she began to see proof of Mei's unseen injuries. Ominous dark spots had dried beneath them, all varying shades of red. The volcanic burn in Brigitte's arms had been doused with frozen blood, as Brigitte did all she could, helplessly waiting for Mei to move. She would move. She HAD to move. Gently, she pressed two fingers against Mei's neck. Reinhardt had realised what was happening by now, but said nothing. He remained agonisingly unmoving, watching Brigitte check for any signs that Mei was still-

Warmth. Brigitte stared, inches from Mei's face, desperate to believe what she'd just felt. And then it happened again. Warm - weak, but warm breath tickled her nose. The frostbitten skin beneath her fingers jumped, showing off the heartbeat that was still fighting against all odds. All Brigitte wanted, she'd just gotten - Mei was alive.

"I've got a pulse!" she bellowed, kicking back into gear. Reinhardt's cheering spurred her on, beckoning her into the home stretch. Their mission was nowhere near done, as they still had to safely relocate Mei back to Gibraltar and then begin the effort to stabilise and recover her. But for now, Brigitte was getting out of this room, this unassuming lab in the middle of a glacial desert that had become her own personal hell.

The mountain was little more than a few stray bricks now, thanks to Brigitte's herculean effort. Mei was in full view, and while she wasn't looking good, she was still breathing - that's really all they could ask for. Reinhardt had an old stretcher waiting above ground, one with a winged sigil embroidered on either side. His memories of its designer were many, and fond. She was a pillar of Overwatch - and he'd spent more than enough time wondering why she hadn't answered the recall.

"Mei, if you can hear me, I need you to prepare for me to move you," he heard Brigitte instruct. No response followed, as she continued to hook sturdy ropes in various spots along Mei's thick jacket.

"She's not conscious?" Reinhardt called, preparing the stretcher. "No, she's not responding to anything," Brigitte replied, sitting back. Her work was done, and a jungle of cables and pulleys cocooned Mei. "She's ready!"

Reinhardt positioned himself over the pit as Brigitte threw up the ropes connected to Mei. Each one was secured to his rigid armour, a spiderweb forming around his huge frame. He tugged each one, much harder than necessary, but hard enough to be sure they wouldn't snag or unclip. After everything had been attached, he double checked that Snowball hadn't come loose. The little robot had stayed put, resting peacefully against his large back. "Ready when you are!"

While Reinhardt was working to finish setting up their miniature extraction system, Brigitte had undertaken the delicate job of moving Mei away from the place she'd been pinned. She needed to be able to lift her the majority of the way through the hole - the pulleys were only there to help for the metre or two that neither her nor Reinhardt could reach. Carefully, she slid an arm beneath the small of Mei's back, taking time to inch her closer. Time was of the essence, but there was no logic in moving her too hurriedly and injuring her further. About a minute passed and Mei was resting on Brigitte's lap. She did her best to ignore the pained expression on her unconscious face, focusing only on beginning the lift. Steadily she stood, lifting their friend with practiced ease. The air, once dancing with dust, was settling, and Brigitte tried her hardest to shield Mei's face from getting dirty. Reinhardt was in place, already lightly pulling the network of ropes to aid Brigitte's effort. She continued raising Mei, getting closer to the point of letting go.

"Alright," she called, holding the smaller woman over her head. "Are you ready?"

"I'm always ready!"

Brigitte huffed out a chuckle. Normally Reinhardt acting... well, like Reinhardt, would have annoyed her to no end, especially in a situation like this. She realised that by now she should have come to expect the unexpected, and instead his ceaseless exuberance bolstered her. The weight of Mei's body tenderly left her hands, and she gazed upwards to observe what she could no longer help. The night sky shimmered above, still, as the wind had stopped its assault. Moonlight gleamed off Reinhardt's armour, casting shadows in every direction. They moved with him as he pulled Mei, and for just a little while, silence wrapped itself around them all.

Reinhardt slowly pulled Mei onto the ground floor, softly laying her on their stretcher.

Quickly he helped Brigitte grapple out of the ditch, before she pulled a large metallic sheet from her pack and threw it over Mei. Reinhardt radioed Tracer while she worked to keep Mei safe.

"Please give me good news," crackled Tracer's immediate response. He smiled weakly, adrenaline beginning to dissipate. "Mission successful. We're transporting Mei to you now,"

"Please have that ship in the air the second we get there," Brigitte added from the ground. "I never want to be back here again."

Tracer's sigh was audible, as was the relief in her next sentence. "Roger that, we'll be off the ice faster than Reinhardt can slip on it," she declared, faint switch-flicking coming through the speaker. Reinhardt began to protest, continuing to do so while he and Brigitte lifted either end of the gurney. Their trek back to the Manta was a blur, marked by the occasional stop to check on Mei, and conversation slurred by exhaustion. Neither of them could quite place a finger on why this mission had been so brutal. Maybe because it was the first they'd



completed as Overwatch again? Or because of their connection to the victim? Regardless of the fact that they'd both seen battles much fiercer than this, their bodies were wrecked. The Manta was fired up as they approached, the door opening intuitively on their arrival. The snow beneath them beamed, reflecting the lights covering the ship. Brigitte never thought she'd be so happy to smell the hideous recycled air as she inhaled deeply. 'And no dust!' she thought. She and Reinhardt placed the stretcher on a medical bench in the back of the plane, and Tracer zipped over. Her eyes widened for a moment, taking in the state of her friend. "Oh, Mei," she whispered, gingerly placing a rosy hand on Mei's pale one. Brigitte hadn't seen Tracer sad many times. It was heartbreaking. "Don't worry," she said quietly, garnering Tracer's attention. "She'll be okay. I'll make sure she is."

Tracer smiled, leaving Mei's side. She embraced Brigitte, hugging her tightly. "We'll make sure she is."

With a final glance at Mei, she moved swiftly to the cockpit, bringing the engine to life. Brigitte and Reinhardt sat on either side of the bench, ready for takeoff. He watched as Brigitte stared at the floor, similarly to how she had on the way there. Though now with a much different set of thoughts on her mind. He couldn't make this kind of experience less painful, he knew that. It was something she had to work through, and find her own ways of dealing with. But he could sure as hell give her a break from it, even just for the trip home. "Did I ever tell you about the time your father and I almost died in his laboratory?" he asked, leaning forward.

Her lips twitched upwards. "Yes."

"Well, it was a Thursday morning- or was it Friday? No, it must have been a Friday, because I remember..."

## Chapter End Notes

Another chapter, hooray! This one took a while, so I tried my best to make it a bit longer so it was worth the wait! I'm excited to finally be out of this scenario and heading back to interact with the other characters. I feel like they work best when they get to bounce off one another! I really hope you like this chapter, it is a bit dark so I apologise for that! I'm really looking forward to slowly introducing more characters, still not super sure if I want to stick to the canon of who answered the recall first or not, but I'll figure it out! Anyway, again thank you so much for sticking around to keep reading this, and I really hope you like the new chapter! See you soon, and if it's not before the holidays, have a wonderful holiday season and a safe, happy new year! <3

# A Cowboys Plan

## Chapter Summary

While desperately walking back into town with Echo, Cole recounts his day while trying to figure out the next step.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Do you think next time we could find someplace a little closer?" Cole's ragged panting was almost lost to the barren breeze of a desert evening. He'd already been through such a mentally and physically draining day, all he wanted was to eat and get clean. Both at once if he had to. Instead, he was traipsing through an endless sea of crushed rock and sand.

"That resturaunt looked to have been in violation of several health codes," Echo replied. Normally Cole revelled in her informative tone, enjoying the knowledge she had to offer.

Normally.

Trudging behind her obviously effortless gliding, he rubbed his forehead. The ocean of sweat he felt should have disgusted him, but by this point in his life, it didn't. Maybe that was worse.

"You can hardly call it a resturaunt," he muttered, pointlessly swatting one of seemingly thousands of mosquitoes surrounding him. For a moment Echo stopped moving, the silent hum of her mechanics dissipating. "Perhaps we would have been faster if you hadn't engaged with the Deadlock Gang?" she proposed. Cole's face scrunched until he was unrecognisable. Before he could argue, she continued. "It did seem to be an excersise in futility. They've certainly moved past your abandonment."

"An exercise in-" he began to splutter. "Were you always this mean?"

"I'm sorry. Did I hurt your feelings?" she asked quizzically. Cole turned slightly, as if it would hide his bruised ego. Echo knew just as well as anyone close to him, how hard he tried to hide his feelings behind that charming Western exterior.

"I maintain that my leavin' was the worst thing that coulda happened to them," he mumbled.

"You didn't exactly leave them, Cole," she chuckled airily, unable to read the room. Or the desert. "Gabriel Reyes-"

"Yeah, I remember," Cole interrupted. The firm undertone stopped Echo. She'd heard it before, but never directed at her. It seemed that her systems were buzzing much more than

expected upon reawakening, and she was struggling with understanding Cole's mood, alongside coping with the overwhelming surge of new information. Her internal systems had all come online at once and were constantly updating and downloading whatever it was she'd missed since her last interaction with the outside world.

She also knew that hunger had an aggravating effect on humans.

"I apologise for suggesting we go elsewhere for you to eat," she offered, sleek wings lowering slightly.

Cole sighed. Guilt immediately shackled him in place beside her.

'She's just tryin' to help you. Asshole.'

It had been a long day. His plans were upheaved almost as soon as they'd started. His schedule revolved around a simple idea, which was exactly the way he liked it. No bells and whistles, nothing fancy. Just him, the work, and getting it done. Which in this case was waking up, finding Echo and going home. If he was lucky, getting a little rumble in with whatever had become of the Deadlock Gang, and calling it a day. That was all he'd intended on. He had solid intel, a gorgeous arid sunrise, and the wind at his heels. Enough to put a smile on even the most outlawed cowboys face.

But as it turns out, his intel on Echo was a little more solid than he'd expected.

With a tall shadow cast by the vivacious morning sun, he'd started to make his way out of the small, sandy town near Route 66. Without warning, an obnoxious trill filled his head. Wincing, he clicked the small earpiece hidden by the shaggy mop under his hat.

"You really need a haircut," came the immediate jab. Used to his innermost thoughts being public information to his caller, he bit the urge to argue and continued on his trail. "It's on my to-do list. What can I do for you?" he asked, approaching an old car yard.

"It's not what you can do for me, pal," she snickered. "It's what I'm about to do for you,"

"Woah, hey, hold on now," Cole sputtered. Information from his pal didn't come cheap, and he wasn't exactly coloured green right now. "Don't go tellin' me nothin I didn't ask to hear,"

"Don't be so stingy! I'm offering it to you," she replied. Through his earpiece could be heard the faintest clicking as she undoubtedly worked on another job.

"Yeah, right," he scoffed, locating the owner of the junkyard. They'd been in business before, so Cole simply handed over the abnormally large wad of cash that had been weighing him down. The weathered old man assessed it, before pocketing the money. A brief nod at Cole assured him he could take whatever he wanted. With a tip of his hat and a 'thank you kindly', Cole was perusing his options. "When have you ever offered me anything?"

"I like to think I give you good advice, and that's always free," she replied earnestly. "Like that time I told you to get a haircut,"

"Well, whatever you're sellin', I ain't buyin'. I already owe you enough," Cole reiterated. "I'm only trying to look out for you," she continued. "You have so few friends, I thought you'd want to hear from an old one."

The hand he'd been trailing along an old motorcycle froze. Cole looked up, knowing she was watching from whatever security cameras were nearby. The invasion of privacy was nothing new, but her eyes could be felt well and truly now.

"There we go," she smirked.

He knew better than to give her such a visible reaction. He knew that she'd manipulate whatever it was she wanted out of him if she realised he was interested. But she was right - Cole didn't have many friends. At least not anymore. "Now are you willing to talk?"

"You..." Cole breathed. A slight blur began to filter through his vision. He didn't even have confirmation that he knew who she was talking about. It could have been anyone - she could have been playing a dirty trick. It wouldn't have been the first time she'd used his own information against him, just for her own fun. But knowing who she knew, who she had ties to - what other friends could she be talking about?

"Wow, I never thought I'd see the cowboy speechless," she commented, feigning shock. "Do I really take your breath away?"

"Sombra, what do you know?" Cole snapped. The handlebar below resisted his tightening grip. "Jeez, relax," she drawled. A moment passed, and Cole could have sworn he'd heard her chuckle.

"I just saw an interesting video this morning, that's all. Do you think all gorillas are so nervous, or just the ones from space?"

Even though she insisted she was helping him out of kindness, Cole wasn't stupid. He knew this favour would come back to bite him one day. In all honesty though, he didn't care. This was information worth being in debt for. The rest of the conversation was over in an instant, and Cole was left with what had once been an encrypted video, a communication line, and a day that was officially out of his hands.

"I'm sorry, Echo," he apologised. "It's been a much more interesting day than I sure as hell planned. Ain't right of me to take it out on you at all though," He looked up at Echo, floating gently in place. A weak smile crossed his weary face. "Can you forgive me for bein' so prickly?"

"Of course, Cole," she replied instantaneously. "Even cowboys need to rest."

He chuckled, removing his hat briefly. The air was starting to cool, and it caressed his sweaty body so sweetly. "Even cowboys need to rest," he repeated. "But cowboys also need to eat, and since you didn't want me doin' so at the diner, you got any other suggestions?"

"I didn't want you to get sick," she hummed. "And I also believe you were not welcome there,"

"Who, me?" Cole asked, eyebrows raised. Echo shook her head, ignoring the sarcasm. "My scanners aren't up to date," she began. "But we're close to the town. There will be establishments there."

Cole did a double take. There was no way they'd already walked that far. But sure enough, fruitlessly peering along the purple horizon, it seemed they had almost reached their goal. Renewed with the promise of dinner and a shower, the aching blisters in his boots began to soothe. "Well I'll be," he muttered. "Looks like I didn't need that old thing after all,"

"Weren't you quite devastated when you had to leave the motorcycle behind?" Echo asked. Cole frowned. "I was... a little emotional," he mumbled.

That damn bike... It had long since been left for dead in the sandy wasteland. He had been so certain it was a surefire winner. This time, he'd picked a good one, he just knew it. When Echo had expressed her concern about its ability to run, Cole valiantly responded along the lines of "I might go around the world on this old thing".

"I don't think you should name your motorcycle, Cole," Echo had warned. "Why not? You don't like Darla?" he'd asked

"Humans who name possessions often become more attached to them than if they hadn't. I don't believe that motorcycle is worth becoming attached to," she explained, grimacing as Cole bounced in the seat.

"Don't worry, darlin', I'll write you letters when I'm on the road," he'd crooned. Within a few minutes, his trusty metal steed was spewing black smoke, and his globetrotting hopes were smothered by the fumes. He'd been conned by that little old man. Again.

With nothing to do but leaving the bike to its boiling grave, the walk began again, suddenly accompanied by a broken heart and a long lecture about the evils of littering.

Now, on the home stretch, the rumbling in his stomach had become an alarming crackle, and remembering his bitter loss only exasperated the pain. "Remind me never to buy anythin' from that old junkyard again," he grumbled, picking up the pace once more. The distant lights of the town began to close in, trying desperately to mirror the brilliant night sky.

"Perhaps you should learn to fly?" Echo smiled, faintly picking up on the location of a bar nearby.

Cole snorted.

"I'll ask for an upgrade next time my arm's gettin' worked on."

Cole stood on the precariously small balcony his room offered. The town had all but entirely drifted to sleep, with only the lights from a few stray houses reminding the world they still existed. He wasn't sure what time it was, only that it was late. Even after his melodramatic complaining over dinner, groaning about having to take even one more step, sleep played cat and mouse with him. But if ever there was a night for insomnia, it was that one. Silence whispered throughout the air, cut occasionally by the distant, earthen sounds of an age-old

desert. Engulfed by the twilight, he breathed in deep. The air was an icy, polar opposite to what it would become once the sun made its return. But for now, the moon watched Cole as Cole watched the moon.

Echo was no more than a slumped shadow on the couch inside. Her deep recharge cycle had been going for hours and would continue until the next day. The cables draped over her were less than sophisticated, especially for a creation of her calibre, but they did the job. In the middle of nowhere that's all either of them could ask for.

While he ate earlier, and Echo watched on wistfully, he explained the call he'd had with Winston that day. Immediately a barrage of questions hit his ears, but with food finally in his system, he welcomed them. A few more minutes of conversation passed, before Echo another question.

"So, are we going back now?"

Cole paused for a moment. The tingle at the base of his skull made it harder to concentrate. Maybe downing a glass of whiskey before eating wasn't as bright an idea as he thought. Consciously he drank some water, hoping to dilute the buzz. Regardless, he made eye contact for the answer.

"I don't entirely know yet. I need to make a call tonight, once we're situated for the evening. But we'll have a new adventure ahead in the mornin'"

The withered holo-pad sat beside him on the balcony rail. It had most definitely seen better days. Gingerly he worked through the protection systems, making easy work of multiple firewalls. Not out of his own tech knowledge, although he did boast what he considered to be a pretty impressive internet know-how. But this was an old, decommissioned Overwatch holo-pad. It had taken months worth of work to crack it open in the first place, work which he certainly hadn't done alone. He knew it was worth his while to at least memorise how to work it on his own, lest he continue racking up debt with Sombra.

When the screen lit up, he stopped. Although he'd spoken to Winston earlier, it was while he was riding the glorious coattails of adrenaline. Now there was no adrenaline, there was no upcoming fight, no mission to be completed. Just him. One lone ranger beneath the infinite night sky. Once he made this call, there was no going back. He'd be opening the door to memories he'd long since banished.

With a quick surge of confidence, he tapped in the link. A blue hologram materialised out of the pad, floating above his hand. A few seconds passed and no answer. Cole fidgeted. He reached for the cigar he'd left untouched earlier. He had no idea what to do if Winston didn't answer. He hadn't planned past this.

He needed this.

Just as he fumbled to light the pungent stick, a small orange logo flashed into his line of sight. Just as fast as it appeared, it was replaced with the much too up close image of a hard at work space gorilla. And Cole couldn't have been happier.

"You do know how to turn this thing on, don't ya?" he laughed. Winston jumped slightly before backing up. He'd answered on autopilot, but seeing Cole brought him back to Earth. A bright smile contradicted the worry lines gripping his dark eyes. Cole blew a sigh through his nose.

"It's good to see you, Winston,"

## Chapter End Notes

It's simply so late while I'm finishing this chapter, but it's done! I had so much fun finally getting to write about characters that aren't the four I've been stuck with for the past however many chapters! I really hope you enjoy this chapter, ignore any grammatical or spelling mistakes, my brain is melted but I wanted to get this posted so bad! I hope I did Cole, Sombra and Echo justice, they have such fun personalities I was anxious about capturing them! I also hope you're all having fun with OW2, I will proudly admit I finished Loverwatch in about 20 minutes and ate it UP. Anyway, enjoy the chapter and if you have any feedback please feel free to let me know!! Have a great day/night and stay safe! <3 <3

P.S. I'm also super sorry about the formatting, AO3 is really weird on my pc and I have to manually type in the line breaks and all that jazz, so as a hater of blocky writing I apologise profusely if any of this is super stuck together, or paragraphs/sentences look weird! I'll try and post from an updated browser for the next chapter and see if that helps!

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