

Ghost isn't made for a life like this, sitting at his bland desk with his bland laptop in this bland fucking room, sending bland fucking emails. His leg bounces restlessly under the table, a bad habit he can't quite get rid of, and tries not to give into the temptation of peeling off the bit of dry skin hanging off his lip.

This day is getting on his fucking nerves. It's always like this, when he isn't deployed, at least when it stretches any longer than a week. It digs under his skin, a burrowing, awful creature, determined to make him squirm.

Ghost is made for combat; made for the peace of mind that comes with his finger on a trigger, for the pride of sliding the knife in just right, for the power of taking a man's life. Ghost is good at his job. *Brilliant* at his job, even. But sat at his desk — trapped between four, rapidly closing walls — combat feels more like a distant memory.

He clicks through his inbox by rote, thoughts on a slow spiral, nothing but the slow *click click click* of the mouse. Ghost's mind wanders almost desperately, fleeing the mind-numbing monotony, but all he finds is desert sand and blood trails; a skull in his hand, black pouring from its eyes; the distant sensation of paralysis. If he focuses, there's something right on the edge of his peripheral vision. A hazy mansion, barely more than a shadow on the horizon.

A quick knock on the door and it all crumbles to dust.

Ghost's head snaps up, the world rushing back in, except for the faint sensation of sand under his fingernails, gritty and persistent.

"Come in," Ghost barks, boxing up his irritation and putting it aside. He still has a job to do.

The door creaks open and Soap stands in the doorway, a stack of files in hand.

"Delivery from Price," he says with a well-worn smile.

Ghost doesn't know what to do with those sorts of smiles. Doesn't know how to admit that it thaws a heart he thought was long since dead.

It's a dangerous thought.

Ghost can't even say *why*. It's just a feeling that sits low in his gut, simmering over days, weeks, years until it springs out at random intervals, as they go through the repetitive cycle of Ghost forcing them from friends to strangers.

It's just- It just doesn't make *sense* for them to be friends. There's no reason for Soap to keep pushing with sly jokes and sunshine smiles. They barely see each other off the field, and yet Soap manages to maintain this illusion of always just being *there*. He drops off files that should be emailed, finds every single one of Ghost's ever-more-secretive smoking spots and bumps into him in the corridor a frankly disproportionate number of times. Ghost can't think of the last time Soap hasn't been popping up like their friendship is a bad game of whack-a-mole.

Most of the time, Ghost manages not to question it. Sometimes, he isn't so lucky.

Ghost goes to open his mouth, a dismissal dancing on his tongue, but Soap is already talking at a million miles an hour, dumping the files on Ghost's desk and taking a seat. He kicks his feet out, hands folded over his stomach as he sinks lower and lower on the chair, going on and on and *on*.

Usually, Ghost revels in this part, letting the words pass over him as he absently clears out his inbox. Right now, he just wants to be left alone.

"She won't shut up about Jamie," Soap groans, head rolling back. "And like, I get it, Amy's had a kid and that's great and all. And like he's *cute*, really fucking cute, she's not even wrong, but just... I honestly kind of thought that woman hated kids but now she's a gran she's all lovey-dovey, it's just fucking bizarre."

Soap twists his neck to look at Ghost, pouting. "Family's hard," he whines.

Ghost doesn't say anything to that.

"But, like, maybe that's just mine, you know. I mean, I know you said your family wasn't..." Soap hesitates, "... *great*." Understatement of the-

Wait, what.

"Oh shit, I didn't mean to... I didn't mean to bring anything up or anything." Soap is full-on panicking now.

Ghost thinks he might be too.

"Like, I just thought I'd talk about it- because you're an uncle- or like, I think you are, fuck, was I not supposed to bring that up either?" Soap's rambling, eyes widening. "I know you don't like talking about it but I just thought if it was just us I-" Soap snaps his mouth shut.

Ghost must be glaring something fierce.

“Ghost?” Soap asks, voice dropping to barely above a whisper.

Ghost doesn't know what to do. The words are stuck deep in his throat, lodged there like he's choking. Sweat pools under his mask, sticking the thin fabric to his skin, as he white-knuckles the mouse, desperately trying to breathe like a normal human being.

Then, finally, the words splutter out, hard and dark, meaner than he intends but lighter than is deserved, “Who the fuck told you about my family?”

Ghost feels sick. No, fuck, he feels... *God*, he feels like he could be dying. Is he dying? No, he knows what dying feels like and it isn't fucking this-

Soap's face is blank.

“What?”

“Who told you,” Ghost repeats, stressing each word carefully, tamping down all the panic and the rage and the fucking *feelings* until all that comes out is cold, hard threat.

“I don't get it,” Soap splutters.

“I think it's a fairly fucking obvious question, Sergeant,” Ghost spits. “Who told you?”

Soap's eyes go so wide they look like they're bulging from his skull. His mouth opens and shuts like a dying fish until finally he finds some semblance of sanity.

“Ghost, I- What? *You* did. You were talking about your nephew *last week*. Is this some fucking... weird hazing ritual?” Soap's sitting up straight now, something close to disgust written on his face.

Ghost's stomach drops. No, the whole fucking world drops. It flips and slides and opens up beneath him so the darkness can fucking *consume* him.

Everything, from that moment on, is just *wrong*.

“I didn't fucking tell you anything.” Ghost barely hears his own voice. He doesn't even know if he's spoken aloud.

Soap grits his teeth mulishly and plants himself like a rock. “Yes you fucking did,” he says, like they're a pair of bickering fucking children.

Ghost doesn't believe him, he *doesn't*, but something scrapes at his consciousness, a creeping anxiety that's getting louder and louder.

Ghost wants to be sick. He wants to puke all over Soap's goddamn boots as punishment; maybe he'll make him fucking clean it up too, just for the grim satisfaction of it.

Fuck, he should at least dismiss him. Get out of this fucking awful room to let Ghost die in peace. No, fuck, just get him out and get his head on straight. He's *fine*. This will all be some... stupid misunderstanding. Fuck, maybe Price told him and he's just remembering wrong. I mean, Ghost is going to kill Price if that's true but still.

"Did Price tell you?" He asks, desperate now.

"No! Jesus Christ, Ghost." Soap seems genuinely fed-up now. Ghost's heart pounds dangerously loud in his chest. "We sat in the pub last fucking week and talked about your brother and his kid. I don't know what the-"

"Which pub," Ghost interrupts.

"The Rose and Crown. The pub we always fucking go to. Are you going to tell me you don't remember that either?" Soap drawls, raising an eyebrow.

Soap is being sarcastic but...

Ghost doesn't have a fucking clue about a Rose and Crown.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Soap shouts when the silence goes on too long. "This isn't funny." Then, finally, he pauses and looks at Ghost, like *properly* looks at Ghost, and suddenly all that frenzied anger is replaced with dawning worry. "Ghost, are you alright?"

"I-" Ghost doesn't have an end for that sentence.

"No, you've got to know the Crown," Soap says, though even he doesn't sound like he believes it. "That shitty pub by the train station? The one you can walk to if you're only slightly masochistic or blind drunk. It thinks it's got all these really fancy beers but they're actually just all shit and we all just get a Peroni?"

Spouting facts isn't making anything better but Soap just keeps going like somehow if he says just enough, Ghost will miraculously remember a place he's never been.

Ghost thinks about lying, about pasting on a neutral look and nodding alone, the sort of *ah, yes, I remember* look that might make this misery end. But...

He's never fucking been to a pub by a train station. He can't even remember the last time he went to *any* pub. Can't fucking remember the last time he left base for something that wasn't a mission and-

"Dismissed, Sergeant," he barks.

"...What?"

"I said, dismissed." He tries to add more emphasis but his voice falters half way. The burn of embarrassment is the final nail in the coffin.

"I-"

"Go," Ghost orders and when Soap *finally* stands up, he adds, desperately, "And if you ever mention my family again..."

The threat doesn't need to be said. Ghost is enough of one.

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir." Soap's feet snap together as he salutes, picture perfect, and all but marches to the door.

The door slam shuts and Ghost is left to... *think*, maybe, but he can't get anything through the blistering static in his head. His breaths come in staccato bursts. Fuck, at one point, Ghost isn't even sure he *is* breathing.

Time passes in skips and bursts, punctuated by swells of panic that threaten to drown him, until finally, *finally*, he can get his thoughts on lockdown.

There's only a few threads of logic to follow. What Soap says can't be true, Ghost would remember something like that, even if he was blind drunk. But the thing is, Soap wouldn't lie. It's why Ghost trusts him, one the field and off. And that trust extends to honesty as much as it does his life.

But if Soap is telling the truth...

That's a reality too terrifying to think about.

Ghost doesn't sleep.

Frankly, it's comical to think he would even try. Instead, he lays on his plastic, squeaky mattress and spirals. By the time the sun slips through the tiny slip of a window that sits high above his head, Ghost has managed to simultaneously convince himself that this is both an extended nightmare and a feverish delusion.

Sitting, dizzy, as he blinks slowly and tries to scavenge the energy to face the day, he thinks that maybe he should go to the med-bay. He's got time before he has to meet with Price about the developing situation in Indonesia. If he can prove this is just a fever then...

No, even as tired as he is, he could recognise the signs of a fever and apart from the pounding in his skull, he isn't hot, or even particularly cold; his breathing is even, if laboured; and he's devoid of muscle-aches or pain.

He's not a child who's going to go crying to his mummy because of a little confusion.

He's got two hours until he has to meet Price. All he has to do until then is... Wait.

And wait-

And wait.

Then he's at Price's door, all his nerves stores up in clenched fists, forcing the rest of his body into something neutral. It's times like this that he's excessively grateful for the mask.

He knocks twice in quick succession and swings the door open, strangely relieved to see Price surrounded by piles of paper files, looking a little stressed around the edges. His cigar case lies open but it's full, as if the temptation alone is enough relief for now.

"Lieutenant, good, I have an update." Price is as brusque as ever and Ghost is so grateful for the reprieve that he doesn't even have to pretend to focus. The exhaustion is ignorable; he's long since learnt to push through the bone-deep tiredness that haunts most solo-ops.

Price gets to the end of his spiel with an expectant look on his face and Ghost does his best to strategise but it's like yesterday's palava has taken over his higher functioning.

Price isn't a dumb man, nor a quiet one, so it's not surprising when he barks, "Out with it."

"Hm?" Ghost tries to deflect. "Out with what?"

"Whatever the hell means you can't focus on the debrief," Price says, eyes narrowed, and falls back into his chair.

Ghost stares. For too long, it seems. Enough to make Price worried, anyway. You can't exactly make Price uncomfortable — the man is the paragon of unflappable — but his moustache starts to twitch when his sixth sense catches onto something.

And Ghost is caught.

Ghost could deflect again but they'll only circle back around again. Price knows the game by now, and he doesn't let Ghost play it.

So Ghost just takes a second to breathe and asks, "Did I go to the pub last Friday?" It's brasher than he intends, an entirely inappropriate way to talk to a superior, but Price has never much cared for decorum, only respect.

Ghost can see the question on the tip of Price's tongue but it never comes. Instead, Price leans forward almost carefully, hands clasped and face inscrutable.

"What are you implying, Ghost?" His eyes settle on Ghost with an intensity that has his stomach doing flips. This is worse than Soap, somehow; he doesn't know how he thought it wouldn't be.

Price is the one man that can see right through him.

Price, after all, is the only one who's seen him at rock bottom.

"Nothing," he says, shaking his head, trying desperately to back out of this while he still can. "Sorry."

"It's clearly something," Price cuts in without sympathy. "Spit it out."

Ghost would follow Price to the end of the earth; when he gives an order, Ghost follows without question.

It's funny, he thinks, half hysterical, that people find *him* the terrifying one.

Biting the inside of his cheek, Ghost scrambles for the right words. "I had an... *interesting* chat with Soap yesterday."

"About?" Price asks impatiently.

"About my family." Ghost fights to keep his inflection steady, even as his heart rises into his throat.

The genuine look on Price's face answers one question, at least.

"He knows?" Price asks incredulously.

"I- He *shouldn't*," Ghost says and feels that all-too familiar tightness in his chest.

Price's face goes flat in an instant; whatever expression Ghost hopes to get off him, it's not that.

"Explain," Price demands.

Ghost can't sit still. Can barely fucking *think*. Fuck, he sort of wants to put a gun in his mouth and pull the trigger.

At the very least, he wants to be anywhere but here.

He wants to be safe.

He wants that fucking house on the hill.

He wants kindness.

He wants the luxury he could never afford as a kid and hasn't bothered with as an adult.

He wants-

He wants to not be here.

He wants *better*.

He blinks rapidly, trying to clear his head. That isn't- What the fuck is he even *thinking*. That's bullshit, that's not-

He wants to be on the field. He wants the blood rush and the fucking screaming. Fuck safety, that's for fucking pa-

"Ghost," Price grits out, moustache twitching.

"I-" Something seizes in his throat, like a hand is gripping his neck and for just a second, his heart hammers like it's real, like he's really going to choke and then it just- releases, abruptly and terrifyingly, into nothing.

*Don't do this.*

But he will, because Price is the one man he can't afford dishonesty with.

Ghost scrambles to keep up with the conversation. His thoughts are too scattered, he can barely remember the thread they're on but Price is looking at him and his stomach's dropping and-

Right. Soap.

"Soap says I told him." It manages to say both everything and absolutely nothing.

"When?" Price asks; this is starting to feel distinctly like an interrogation.

"Last week," Ghost admits, purposefully leaving out the where, when and why, like somehow delaying the inevitable might make it not happen at all.

"Details, Riley," Price sighs and the game is lost.

"He said I told him at the pub." Every word feels like a bullet to the chest.

"And you don't remember this," Price says; more a statement than a question.

"I..." The silence is damning.

"You drinking?" Price asks, even though they both know Ghost doesn't really drink. Not enough to get drunk, anyway.

*Wouldn't want to become that monster, would you.*

"I don't know," Ghost says, rapidly losing touch with reality. His eyes unfocus and his hands start to tingle.

"You don't remember anything?" Price asks. Ghost isn't really sure he's hearing the words anymore. There's just something...

“No, sir,” he says with a frown, eyes locked on the middle distance.

“You didn’t plan it beforehand? Do you remember getting there?” Is Price angry? He wouldn’t want him to be angry...

“No, sir,” he repeats.

“Are you getting things mixed up, jumbled? We can get you checked for a head wound-”

“I’m fine, sir,” he says. He would know if he had a head wound.

“Well, Soap could be getting mixed up himself. We all went in Kokshetau, if that’s what he meant.”

Ghost remembers Kokshetau, tagged onto the end of a pretty grueling mission just outside of Stepnogorsk a few weeks back. He even, vaguely, remembers going some place to drink.

Everything else is a terrifying, gaping black hole.

The fear must show.

“Ghost,” Price says, deadly serious now; something has shifted. This isn’t an interrogation anymore, this is his funeral.

“I... I...” The words aren’t coming. Every attempt to frame a sentence, leaves another black hole. They’re everywhere, suddenly, surrounding him. Just nothing, nothing and more fucking *nothing*.

It’s everywhere he looks.

He’s never had the best memory outside of his job, even he’ll admit, but this is... this is...

“Ghost, I need you to be exceedingly clear right now. *What do you remember?*” Ghost can feel Price’s eyes, digging into his skull, but they won’t find anything. There’s nothing fucking there.

Everything’s over. If this is... If Price knows... He’s not going to be allowed back on the field. Fuck, if someone came to him like this, he’d boot them out the door without a second thought, but he can’t- He can’t- He can’t-

Ghost stands up, chair screeching across the floor. He sways a little but rights himself desperately. He's got to look normal, good. He's got to keep-

"Sit down, Ghost," Price grits out.

"I- I can't- I should go," he stammers, blinking a dozen more times like that will somehow clear his vision.

"You are not leaving before I get some answers from you," Price warns.

Ghost takes a step back.

"Ghost." That's not a warning, it's a threat.

"I- You're looking too far into things. It's just been... It's been a bad... couple weeks... It's fine. It's all-" He takes an aborted step back. "I'm not compromised, sir."

"You seem bloody fucking compromised to me," Price says without a single ounce of humour.

"I'm not." Ghost tries to sound sure but it comes out barely above a whisper, a desperate plea.

Price pushes his knuckles into the table and leans forward. "This isn't about you or your pride now, Simon. This is about whether you're gonna killed under my fucking command, got it? If you aren't field ready-"

"I'm always field ready, sir." It's not even a lie.

"You can't fucking remember last week!" Price booms, one hand flying out like a scythe.

*Run.*

Ghost doesn't move.

*Beg.*

He looks Price in the eyes.

*Hide.*

"You've assumed-" Ghost attempts.

“I have not fucking assumed shit!” Price roars. “Be honest with me, Riley, *now*.”

“I *am*,” he says and he feels like a child again, frozen under his father’s glare, like a bug with its wings pinned.

“Don’t fucking lie to me,” Price growls.

*Agree. It’s the only way.*

“I wouldn’t,” he promises.

“Jesus fucking *Christ*,” Price shouts, flinging his hands in the air and taking a step back, staring at Ghost like he’s turned into a literal piece of shit stuck to his shoe.

Ghost barely notices.

“Are you even listening to me?” Price asks incredulously. “Because you’re acting like a sullen fucking teenager right now.”

He nods.

Da- Price says something. He’s still shouting. Ghost doesn’t even catch this one.

He nods.

It continues, but he can’t bring himself to reply, mouth open and catching flies.

*She always used to say-*

He nods.

He should say something. He can’t. Every time he opens his mouth, he makes this worse. He’s not Tommy, with sweet fucking words and puppy-dog eyes, a sickly smile planted on his ever bullshitting lips.

*Never could bullshit for the life of me, could I? Kids don’t really shut up if you come in with a black eye, and all the teachers do is stick you in another detention for ‘fighting’-*

Ghost thinks he’s going to puke.

Something touches him and he flinches back like a tortured dog.

*Don’t let him touch you. It’s game over if he touches you.*

But the hands keep coming, smothering him, and he can't tell if they're hitting him or squeezing him or which option is *worse* and-

And...

Between one blink and the next, the world has moved. He's on the floor now, legs tangled and Price crouched over him with a fear Ghost has never seen in him before.

"Simon? *Simon?*" Price begs, his voice artificially quiet, like they're hiding. Are they hiding? No, they were...

The mission debrief. Talking. Shouting-

Nothing.

His breathing picks up its pace to match the frantic beat of his heart.

Did he *pass out*? No, that would be- What the fuck is happening?

He thinks he's hyperventilating and-

He's back in the chair. Calmer now, somehow, which only gives way for the anxiety to come back-

"Regardless of the outcome, you're on leave until I say you're not, got it?" Price says matter of factly.

Ghost wants to ask but-

"Okay," he says instead, anything to get out of his room faster. Anything to make this end.

"Good." Price lets out a breath but it looks anything but relaxed. "I'll send you the details of who I find as soon as I can. In the meantime..." He looks Ghost pointedly up and down, "Try to relax."

— [redacted] —

It doesn't take long for Ghost to understand. The dossier he gets is thin, but Price's options for *a fucking therapist* are limited given that it's only taken him about two weeks.

Seeing it all written out in plain english is enough for Ghost to lose his breakfast five days running. After that, he stops trying altogether.

The details of his pseudo-parole are sparse but damning. Due to the confusing status of his military position and that current unavailability of a military pension, Price has — somewhat surprisingly — allowed him to stay on base until it's sorted.

Bureaucracy like that... It could take months.

It's a kindness as much as it's utterly, disastrously cruel.

The folder brings some memories back up to the surface, scraping and clawing their way out of the untimely grave, scattered but relatively clear, a little dissonant when he tries to focus too hard but *there* at least.

He somewhat remembers getting off the floor, Price's confusion — worry, maybe, but Ghost isn't optimistic — and some sort of conversation about the future of his career that he was in no headspace for. Ghost is more than a little certain Price just didn't know how to talk about anything else after that fucking disaster.

Ghost takes comfort in the memories, disjointed as they are. Their existence disproves... other theories, about what's happening. They're there, he knows they're there, it's just a matter of unearthing them.

When he wakes up in the middle of the night for the eighth time screaming, he stops digging.

Whatever he uncovered, he doesn't remember; he knows it's best left buried.

*Some things just aren't meant to be seen.*

Which makes it so much worse that he's been officially ordered to see a woman who doesn't look old enough to be here, who's no doubt going to pry into his psyche with fun questions like 'how was your childhood' and 'did it feel bad when daddy hit you?'

Ghost is having absolutely none of it.

Dr Grace Jones, 28-years-old supposedly, doesn't seem to notice in the slightest. With her cherubic blonde curls and a polka dot dress, she looks better suited to be on TV than in the dank office they've given her for the sake of this meeting.

Ghost could, literally, crush her.

Probably not what you're supposed to think upon seeing your therapist for the first time, he thinks wryly.

But, she's only here because Price asked her to be; the only one available on such short notice. A therapist of an old friend of Price's, supposedly, though Ghost can't really imagine her much younger than this. He's half tempted to ask for her driver's license.

She gives an opening spiel that reads like a villain monologue with an equally posh accent to match. Ghost puts no effort into listening, staring out the tiny window on his left, rain splattering into a muddy ditch from bleak grey skies.

It hasn't stopped pissing it down for a week now. Feels fitting.

"But that's enough about me," she finishes with, smoothing down her dress and drawing Ghost's eyes back into the room. She pastes on a kind smile and turns her attention to him. Ghost wishes she wouldn't.

"I want your view on why you're here today," she explains, the only tiny tell of anxiety the constant smoothing of her thumb against her palm.

Ghost shrugs, forcing his eyes back to the window, following the miles of green fields that look like they go on for eternity. They don't. Ghost has tested their limits in all directions.

"I'm fine," he adds when she just keeps waiting.

Grace sighs and clasps her hands together. She's pristine, too pristine to be here. Fuck knows how she began to specialise in military cases; she looks completely untouched by war. Her hands are smooth, her nails perfectly manicured, and her hair isn't even tied back.

Ghost honestly doesn't know the last time he saw a woman without her hair tied back.

"Would you rather know what I've been told?" She prompts, trying to catch his eyes and failing.

“Sure,” he capitulates.

“Well,” she says, grabbing a file on her left and flicking it open but her eyes don’t even touch it. Ghost is unimpressed by the dramatics. “It says here that you are having possible memory issues.”

“Not really,” he replies, petulant enough to feel like a child. He doesn’t even know what he’s trying to do. If he drives her off, he’s certain Price has ten more lined up until he gives up entirely and throws him in the insane asylum.

Ghost knows a better option when he sees one.

Reflex is a bitter beast to beat, though. He’s not even entirely sure he’s in control of his mouth right now. Denials pours out of him habitually.

She sighs again, heavier this time like her nerves are already fried. Ghost has a feeling this one isn’t going to last long.

He feels her eyes bore into the side of his head and the silent *one, two, three* she must count before she leans back, chair squeaking, and starts to monologue again.

“I’m going to be as upfront as I can be here, Simon.” He doesn’t flinch, he *doesn’t*. “The behaviours you displayed in front of your superior were worrying to say the least. There is no chance of you being let back into service until the root cause is identified and overcome. You being honest with me right now is the quickest way to get back out there.”

She looks at him carefully, trying to read his expression, but he knows she’ll find nothing. The mask is there for a reason.

“Nothing’s wrong.” He’s lying and he doesn’t even know *why*. This is so fucking stupid and he can’t-

“*Simon*,” she warns, eyes flaring with something that might be anger, but just look ill-suited on a sweet face.

“Don’t call me that,” he spits. It’s unbearable. Once is too much but twice somehow feels like a crime. His cheeks flame red, burning against the fabric of his mask, but that name is a lie. It’s not his, not anymore.

“Okay,” she agrees easily; too easily.

Ghost finally looks at her, staring her down. For the first time today, she doesn't seem cowed.

"What would you like to be called then?" She asks.

"Most people call me Ghost," he says.

"And do you like that?" She asks, without judgement, or even really any tone at all. The ball is his.

"Sure." He doesn't think about it a whole lot but yeah, fuck it, Ghost is as good as anything. Certainly accurate, isn't it.

"Okay then, Ghost. Let's return to the issue at hand." It's a weak attempt at getting them back on track. Ghost isn't going to fall for it.

"I don't see the issue at all," he argues.

"You're being facetious," she deadpans with a dark look.

"And you're prying," he retorts.

"Ghost, that's my *job*," she sighs and, well, she's got him there. Doesn't mean he has to like it, though.

"Look, can't you just sign me off?" He asks. Or he tries to. It sounds a bit more like begging. But frankly, Ghost is desperate now. He'd rip his own fucking skin off if it meant she let this go.

He just wants to go back to work. That's *it*.

*But we never get what we want, do we?*

"Ghost." Great, the look is back. "I'm not signing you off unless you speak to me."

"So what I'm hearing is that you'll sign me off if I just tell you some shit?" He asks, smirking.

"You're being facetious again," she warns, "but sure. Tell me something and we can move forward." That's not what he asked for, but it's close enough.

"Fine," he grits out and scours his mind for a place to start. He could say something positive but who is he kidding, his life is a clusterfuck.

Where do you even begin? His shitty fucking childhood? A miserable young adulthood? Joining the army, Roba, *after* Roba, Price, the 141, fucking *last week*?

“What do you want to know?” He finally asks.

“Anything at all. But why don’t we start with the reason you’re here.” She’s fucking cornered him now.

“Fine. I don’t remember one fucking outing, that’s it. It just... spooked me, was all.” Each word feels like swallowing a knife, the lie lying thick on his tongue, but he holds steadfast.

“In what way did it spook you?” She asks, looking for all intents and purposes like she’s back in control. Ghost scrambles for something to match but something dangerous starts to rise in its stead: a hope that maybe, just maybe, she might have an answer for him.

“I don’t know, just did,” he says but his heart starts to thunder in his chest.

“What do you feel now?” She pries.

*Bitch.*

“I don’t know,” he says.

“Then explain the bodily sensations,” she tries.

“I don’t know,” he doubles down but his heart only pounds faster, heavier, thudding it’s way out of his chest with vicious intent. Somewhere, deep down, he thinks that maybe he should tell her the truth but-

*The truth is a dangerous thing.*

“Is your heart racing? Do your lungs feel tight?” She asks, eyes wide.

Yes, he thinks.

“I don’t know.”

He finds that maybe he doesn’t anymore.

“Okay,” Grace says, performatively calm but her voice is high and tight. “Why don’t we just... sit here for a little while. Give you some time.”

They do.

She even waits the whole hour.

Ghost doesn't utter another word.

— [redacted] —

Another week of daily, useless therapy sessions pass in total monotony. Ghost evades everyone artfully; shifts are switched surreptitiously, dining times moved to out of hours, and most trips outside are taken in the dead of night. He's taken to doing what minimal training he can be arsed with in his room.

He doesn't dare show his face beyond what is necessary, though he knows the rumour mill churns regardless. It always does.

More than ever, he is a real ghost, haunting the 141's halls. Whatever routes he thought he had out of this are gone. The walls are closing in and he can only see one exit sign. But giving in is as good as signing his death warrant; that one last bit that turns his leave from prolonged to indefinite.

He could get fucking *discharged* for this shit. For this absolute fucking *bullshit*.

The anger fuels him. It keeps his mouth shut as Grace devolves into stronger and stronger tactics, all but taking a crowbar to him to try and pry something, *anything*, out of him.

She's said something to Price. But Price knows the value of secrets; he doesn't push, other than the regrettably disgruntled looks sent his way.

Something has to break eventually.

Ghost won't let it be him.

— [redacted] —

His memory haunts him.

The more he probes it, the more the hole opens up. Suddenly the blank spots are everywhere, trailing after him with vicious tenacity. It's hard to find them but they're *there*, he knows they are.

But it's hard to find something you've never lived without.

He becomes a manic-paranoid freak, writing down his days religiously to try and track where and when he is. Bullet pointed, military-efficient, time-stamped and to the point; his life documented with frightening accuracy. Easier now that he has so much time on his hands.

But even that starts to trick him. Entries he doesn't remember writing, hours of empty space, followed by sudden bouts of activity. His handwriting seems to slant oddly at points and he seems intent on switching between writing his fours with and without a gap.

None of this looks good.

In fact, it looks fucking awful.

Ghost can't lie to himself much longer.

— [redacted] —

Ghost attempts to do his morning workouts and gives up halfway through. There's no fucking point anymore. It's not like it focuses him or any of that bullshit. Without the adrenaline, doing another sit up just feels like a strange form of torture.

Will he wilt now? His diet consists of dry, late-night sandwiches and plain cereal, and every day he's doing less and less to keep his physique. Ghost doesn't even know what he'll be without his bulk. It's not like he can lose any of his height but he's relied on his size for so long.

*No one hurts the big guys.*

He shakes his head and gets to his feet, wasting time clearly the non-existent mess in his room. He makes another entry in his small, moleskine notebook, cramped with mission debriefs in tiny, scratchy handwriting and Soap's occasional doodles. Then he waits.

Time passes indistinguishably.

He makes another entry; there's nothing to report.

He goes to his meeting with Grace. He says nothing. She stares at him. He still says nothing.

He returns. He waits. He makes another entry. He sits on the edge of his bed and watches the clock go round.

Three hours later, someone knocks on the door. And it is three hours, the clocks now at four o'clock. Ghost peers down at the journal. Last entry was two hours ago.

He doesn't remember writing it.

"Ghost? Are you in there?"

Soap. Of course it's Soap.

He wonders whether he should just tell him to fuck off. There's a vile anger lingering in his chest, waiting to be unleashed but he doesn't even know if he has the energy to release it.

"Look, I'm gonna take a guess and say you *are* and you're just ignoring me and- Look," Soap sighs and there's a thud against the door like he's putting his weight against it. Ghost wants to open it just to watch him fall over. It's that sort of day.

"I know I fucked up, okay?" Soap sighs, slightly muffled by the door.

Oh Jesus Christ, he's not doing this where people can hear.

He flings the door open and smiles a little when Soap stumbles, even if he manages to catch himself in the doorway, looking up at Ghost with those damn deer eyes of his.

The anger doesn't feel so easy to reach anymore.

"Soap," he deadpans, doing his best to look unruffled.

"Hey, LT," Soap says with a tilted, embarrassed smile. "Been a while," he adds as he straightens up.

Ghost ignores the small talk and slams the door behind him, standing in front of it like he's a prison guard in his own room. It feels strange to have Soap in here, looking greedily at what he can find. There isn't much. Ghost has had too much time to organise the too few possessions he has.

"So," Ghost begins, tilting his head a little. He's pitifully glad he didn't take his mask off after getting back from Grace's office, even if it's starting to feel clammy against his skin.

"Uh, yeah, right." Soap fumbles for words, eyes wide. "I just... I heard from Price that you'd..."

"Spit it out," Ghost demands. He's not in the mood for obfuscation.

"I heard about the whole med-leave situation." By the look on his face, Ghost thinks he'd heard a whole lot more than that.

He finds he doesn't have the energy to care.

He shrugs. "Okay."

"Right," Soap says, drawing out the *i* just a little too long. "Um, well, I just thought... if you needed anything, I'm here, alright. Like, I can... you know... Whatever you need, I'm your man." He jabs his chest with his thumb before he seems to realise how much of an idiot that makes him look and forces his hands back to his sides, replacing it with the same lopsided smile.

"Okay," he repeats, voice flat.

Soap just stares at him. This is the point where he's supposed to leave, the point where this godforsaken conversation can finally end, but he's making no effort to leave and now they're both just fucking *standing here and-*

Soap's face drops, his shoulders tense and suddenly that horrible energy between them becomes a thousand times worse.

"I didn't mean for this to happen," Soap says softly, eyes wide and mouth droopy like he's a sad fucking puppy and Ghost wants to-

*No.*

The anger fades like it's been leashed and yanked, ripped from his body in a heartbeat, leaving him unsteady on his feet. He sways a little, or maybe that's just

in his head, and looks at Soap's pathetic look and wants to feel the rising tide of hurt but only finds emptiness. A dark, soulless emptiness.

Whatever energy he had left dies with the rest of it.

"I know," he says, and maybe it sounds comforting, maybe it sounds downright rude but Ghost doesn't have enough in him left to care.

He feels three steps outside his body and ready to shut the door.

"If I knew it would lead to this..." Soap tries.

Ghost lets out a humorless laugh; too quiet to be anything more than a huff, really.

"Doesn't matter," Ghost sighs and looks at anything but Soap. Then, with a bittersweet twist to his lips, adds, "Now you can finally get that promotion."

Soap's face twists into something equally bitter.

"Don't say that," he spits.

"Why not? The spot is open." Ghost arches an eyebrow and manages a fleeting few seconds of eye contact before he has to look away again. He doesn't even know why he's pushing this. He'd rather die than lose his position and if fucking Soap — mid-twenties, bolshy and a bit of a bastard — then...

It just feels like another knife in the open wound.

"You'll be back." Soap says it like a promise. He's delusional.

His brain shutters for a moment before he blinks back to life, a piece of logic slotting into place that he'd desperately wanted to keep away. And he wants to laugh, scream and maybe punch God for the sheer *shitness* of this situation. Because, well, he's not coming back, is he?

No. That would be *delusional*.

A strange, distant part of him wants to cry. Because he *needs* this. Needs it like his brother needed to be doped up a dozen times a day. An addiction, a poison, the rot he can't live without. Withdrawal will kill him, he thinks, he *knows*.

But he's been left with no other choice. It's cold turkey, right from the start.

"Sure," he says, lies rolling onto lies rolling onto lies.

“I just...” Soap sighs through gritted teeth. “Whatever’s wrong with you, I hope... I hope it gets better.” It’s a childish hope in his eyes, one that will die in time, like a child’s hope always does.

“I’ll be fine,” he lies. More fucking *lies*.

Soap just smiles, a small bitter thing, and that’s the only answer he needs.

— [redacted] —

Ghost might be having a panic attack.

Grace is talking, smiling, going on and on and *on* like they’ve done this a dozen times before. She’s talking like she’s made a breakthrough, like Ghost has finally let the walls crumble and is ready to give into this farce.

He sits there, eyes wide, heart thudding against his chest, the steady beat of a war drum, the march towards the end.

“So,” Grace finishes with, red-lipsticked smile smudged at the edges, like blood seeping out of a dead man’s mouth. “I think we should really elaborate on the feelings of fear. I think if we work on that first, it could really open up a lot of the other areas you may be struggling in.”

Ghost hasn’t told her anything. He hasn’t said anything about fear. He hasn’t opened his fucking mouth once.

He’s faced starkly with his own powerlessness, the futility of *weeks* of silence. The futility of everything in the face of this ghost lingering over his shoulder. A ghost that seems to be stealing his memories, swiping swathes of it away and filling the time with incomprehensible *shit*.

“I-” He slams his mouth shut. Why had he even opened it in the first place?

“Ghost?” Grace asks. She seems worried now, eyebrows drawn inward, head a little tilted. Subtle, but cloying all the same.

“When...” Why’s he fucking talking? He doesn’t want to be fucking- “When the fuck did we talk about fear?”

Grace's mouth makes a perfect *oh*.

The ghost, he thinks, steals the rest away.

— [redacted] —

"It's not going to hold," he begs.

"Then you will make it." The monster shuffles its papers. It doesn't even bother to look up at him.

"And what would that make me?" He asks, voice rising as the anger swells. His perfected calm is cracking. None of this is going to fucking hold much longer.

Finally, the monster looks up, white eyes gleaming in the darkness.

"It would make you a man doing the right thing," it promises.

— [redacted] —

Grace keeps clicking her pen. Ghost has half a mind to snatch it off her and snap it in half, just to get the noise to stop. He doesn't. He keeps staring at the window, watching a spider inch its way up the pane.

"This back and forth is getting boring," she says, eyes squinting like she wants to be glaring but realises she probably shouldn't.

"What back and forth?" He dares to ask. It's about the only way to get him to say anything; answer questions with more questions. Be a facetious cunt wherever you can. Play the game.

Because it has to be a game.

"The back and forth where you decide you're in one minute and out the next." Grace shuts her eyes and takes a deep breath before boring them into his. "This process only works if you want it to work. I need you with me on this, Ghost. I need you to *try*."

The begging is a little pathetic.

He doesn't think about the back and forth he's not involved in.

Ghost says nothing. Grace sighs again. The cycle repeats.

It keeps on fucking repeating.

— [redacted] —

"Tell him that he's being childish," the monster says, perfectly poised, voice crisp.

"That's not going to *work*," he says.

The monster is not patient. The monster is not kind. The monster gives him a *look*.

"Then you will have failed all of us. Try again," it demands.

— [redacted] —

This shit is fucking easy.

Even better, Sam fucking hates it.

"So, are you going to speak today?" Grace asks with all the put-upon of a fed-up mother.

He just pastes on a smile, the effect somewhat ruined by the mask even he doesn't dare remove, and says, "Sure," in his best mimicry of the cunt that ruins their life.

"Right," Grace says, clearly confused. She always seems confused; her fault she isn't good enough at her job to figure this out. It's staring her right in the face.

And even he's not enough of an idiot to just say it out loud.

“Well, if you’re willing to talk today, I thought we might just talk a little about your team today.” She shoots him a small smile and James manages that perfect cross between at-rest and glowering that the cunt performs so well.

“Alright. Why?” He asks.

“Seeing how you connect with others is important, and it seems your team here is the people you are in contact with most. Unless you’d like to speak about friends you have outside work?” She says it like she knows he has none.

She’s right.

“We can talk about the team,” he says, trying to sound casual and only just missing the mark.

“Okay then.” She picks up her pen and starts twirling it around her fingers with a surprising amount of dexterity. He’s pretty sure he can do that, just with a knife.

“What would you say your relationship is like with the people here?” She asks.

“Fine,” he says. It might even be the truth. His relationship with the people on base is... complicated. Messy. As everything in their life is.

“Care to elaborate?” She asks and starts flicking the pen between two fingers in a steady *tch tch tch* that is entirely too distracting for such a small sound.

He shrugs.

“Okay. How about we talk about some of your team individually,” she diverts.

“How about Price? You two are close in age, close enough in rank and it seems like you trust each other.” She’s digging in such a painfully obvious way that it makes James want to shut up and get out, but that would make him just as bad as the interfering cunt.

He’s got to be *better*.

“Sure,” he says and realises how fucking uncertain he sounds. “No, I mean... He’s my Captain.”

It’s reductive, but maybe the only honest thing he can say. Price is many things to them but it always comes back to that. Captain. Whoever they are, whatever they’re doing, Price will always be their Captain.

There's a steadiness to that. Probably why they've stuck with him so long. No one else has been so lucky.

"What does that mean to you? Captain," she asks.

"It means..." There's no way this doesn't sound corny. "He's there, you know. Even when I was at my worst, he was there." Dragged them from their grave. Not quite far enough to live, but maybe enough to survive, even he can admit that, as much as he hates to.

"Sounds like he's a big support for you," she agrees.

"Sure," he says, because vitriol feels unnecessary, even if the lie weighs heavy on his shoulders.

"Is there anyone else you would say is a main source of support?" She looks expectant, like there's an obvious answer, but he isn't sure there really is. Maybe the others would say differently, though.

"I support myself," he says instead, shifting uncomfortably in this too small chair. Not for the first time, he damns their height. Wouldn't hurt to lose a few pounds too.

"Everyone needs somebody," she sighs, pity laid on a little too thick. It's pathetic.

"I haven't needed anybody for a long time," he says, letting the intensity radiate all too easily.

She stares at him for what feels like hours but can't be more than a couple of seconds, meeting intensity with the same righteous fury that Price has always given him. Meeting fire with fire. Grace is getting the hang of this.

"I've learnt not to need anyone," he adds, because he has. Him and the rest of them, each in their own ways.

"It's not too late to learn," Grace says.

He just gives her a lilting, almost cruel smile.

"Sure. If you say so."

“Maybe...” he tells the monster, slowly, cautiously. “Maybe we can make this work?”

The monster just stares at him.

“No. We can’t,” the monster spits, its eyes a swirling mass of black shadows, impenetrable, empty and infinite. “Try again.”

— [redacted] —

“Is today another quiet day?” Grace asks.

That’s how she’s started putting it. Quiet days and loud days. Ghost can’t imagine he’s ever particularly loud but he’s not going to fight her on it.

He’s especially not going to tell her he only remembers the quiet days.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” she sighs and gets out her notebook to start scribbling. Ghost doesn’t even think she’s writing notes. He wouldn’t be surprised if she’s just doodling to waste time; these sessions *are* getting increasingly boring.

The silence lasts a good twenty minutes this time before she puts down the pen, frowning like something’s crossed her mind.

“Can we talk about Soap?” She asks and then laughs at herself with a minute shake of her head. “Well, I’m certainly not going to push you to talk. I just... want to pose some things to you, something to think about later.”

As long as he doesn’t have to speak, he doesn’t fucking care what she does.

“We talked about Price the other day but I actually want to talk about Soap,” she says. Ghost withholds the urge to flinch.

She sighs and clasps her hands on the desk. It feels familiar, in a strange, distant sort of way; familiar enough to make his stomach drop.

“I think, from what I can gather, that Soap is your closest support. And please, do correct me if I’m wrong,” she says and waits just a beat that’s left unfilled. Ghost

doesn't know whether it's confirmation or stubbornness. "But I think that... It doesn't seem like you trust many people, Ghost. But you and everyone else seem to always circle back to one person that you *do*."

"I don't see how this is relevant," he says and silently damns himself for giving in.

"It's relevant because something is *wrong*, Ghost. And it's clear that you don't trust me to be your support, but someone has to be. This 'lone wolf' attitude of yours..." She shakes her head and Ghost struggles to fill in the missing gaps.

"I just want to say, if I can't be the one you can talk to, then maybe he is," she says and lets it hang in the air between them, a drawn bowstring, a target painted on his chest.

But the arrow never flies.

"That's it?" He asks, somewhat incredulous.

"That's it," she agrees.

"Your solution is... talk to Soap," he reiterates, confused.

She rolls her eyes and finally lets her posture relax. "I'm not saying that's the *solution*. These sorts of things don't have a neat and tidy solution. But it's a starting point." She quirks an eyebrow and shoots him a smile.

It's disarming. Unexpected, honestly, and it suddenly crosses his mind that if not for the whole therapist schtick, she might actually be quite nice.

For the first time, he might just see her as someone more than the bitch in the chair.

"Fine. Yeah. Sure. Doctor's orders, or whatever," he says and stands up. "I think I'm done for the day."

"Of course," she says and for the first time, it's not said with a heavy dose of vitriol. "Have a good evening, Ghost."

"Yeah... You too..."

There's a flaw in her logic. A crater, really, or maybe a whole goddamn tear in the earth.

For whatever she — or anyone fucking else — says, Ghost doesn't trust anyone.

Ghost doesn't have friends.

Friends are for... *people*, maybe. Real people. People who don't know the best way to kill a man, people who don't wear a goddamn skull mask as a warning, people who... who...

People who aren't ghosts. Literal or otherwise.

— [redacted] —

Ghost doesn't seek Soap out. He doesn't need to. Frankly, even after giving in, he doesn't *want* to.

But Soap is a persistent twat who hasn't once in his life just *let something go*.

Soap ambushes him on the return trek from Grace's office a few days after 'the friend talk' or whatever the fuck you'd call it, smiling like a madman, skip-jumping his way to keep up with Ghost's relentless pace. Long legs come in handy for getting the fuck away from people, it's probably the only good thing this godforsaken body can do now.

"Ghost, hey, slow down for a second." The edge of irritation doesn't seem to diminish Soap's overall perkiness. A shame.

Ghost does not, under any circumstances, slow down.

He's not in the fucking mood for this right now. He's had two hours of sleep, no food and another hour of staring into space whilst Grace glared at him. Now is not the fucking time.

Worse than any of it, his back has been giving him relentless shit recently which is making him feel miserably old and he sort of just wants to go lie in bed and

wallow in the fact that he's rapidly approaching his forties with little to nothing to show for it.

"Ghost, come on, please, just slow down for like a moment, will you. This won't take long," Soap pleads, his awkward half-skip becoming closer to a jog as Ghost picks up the pace.

Ghost makes it all the way to the entrance to the barracks before Soap gets the brilliant idea to dart ahead and blockade the door with his irritatingly wide body. The temptation to just throw him out the way is strong but with his current lack of sleep, food and general strength, he's honestly not sure he'd succeed.

Soap pastes on an awkward smile and tries to look normal with his arms still outstretched to span the whole door.

"What is it," Ghost deadpans, pushing all his remaining energy into glaring Soap into pieces.

Soap's face drops and something seems to dawn on him.

"Well, um, I just- I just wanted to check that you were doing alright?" He certainly doesn't seem sure of that.

"Right," Ghost says and doesn't lessen up on any of the intensity.

"So... You are doing alright?" Soap asks, his attempts to return his smile twisting into a pained grimace.

Ghost just sighs.

"Get out of my way, Soap," he says, mustering the last reserves of his calm.

Soap frowns and then sets his jaw stubbornly because the bastard has never lost an argument in his life, apparently. God knows how his sisters fucking coped.

"It's a simple question," Soap says.

"Are you... picking a fight with me?" Ghost asks incredulously.

"No," Soap says, so mulish he might as well just throw the first punch already.

"You're picking a fight with me over whether I'm alright?" Ghost checks, the fine string of his temper fraying into fragile, incredibly breakable threads.

“I just want you to answer one simple question!” Soap shouts and Ghost-

Ghost snaps.

He grips Soap’s upper-arm in a vice-like grip and wrenches him from the door with strength he didn’t even know he had and storms past him, leading a warpath towards his room.

Soap wouldn’t follow if he knew what was good for him.

He doesn’t, never has. Fucking *twat*.

Soap starts to fucking *run*, which means Ghost has to fucking run as well, both of them blundering down the empty hallways in a show that would have Price reconsidering both of their positions.

Ghost reaches his room only a few seconds before Soap but doesn’t have the time to slam and lock the door before Soap is bodying his way into the room, barely out of breath and looking murderous.

“You are acting like a *child*,” Ghost hisses, through his own mild panting. Fuck, he needs to workout again. Life genuinely could not be more shit.

“If I’m acting like one then so are you!” Soap shouts and takes a step forward, craning his neck a little to look Ghost right in the eyes. He opens his mouth like he’s about to go off again but he snaps it shut suddenly, slapping his hand over his mouth and giggling like a child.

Ghost gapes at him.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Ghost asks as Soap fails to suppress the way his body is shaking.

Once upon a time, he might have cracked a joke here. Maybe he would laugh too, play along. Soap has this uncanny ability to make Ghost feel a hell of a lot younger, lighter in ways that he’d never even felt at Soap’s age.

But Ghost doesn’t.

“Get the fuck out of my room, Soap,” he orders.

Soap’s laughter stops.

“Oh, *come on*,” Soap groans. “Are you really going to fight me on this?”

“Yes. Now get out,” Ghost spits and turns his back, ignoring the way the back of his neck prickles.

“Ghost-”

“Oh my *god*, Soap. What don’t you get?” Ghost shouts, spinning on the balls of his feet and stalking towards Soap like a predator who’s found its prey. “I don’t want your fucking pity. I don’t want this *banal facade* of care. What’s it for anyway? Are you just brown-nosing your way into a promotion? Because we both know it’s not going to fucking work.”

Soap turns to stone. Any strand of visible kindness left leaves in between one heartbeat and the next.

“You think I’m doing this for a promotion?” Soap asks slowly, carefully, barely above a whisper.

Ghost doesn’t know what he thinks. Ghost doesn’t even fucking know what he’s saying. They’re just words, dribbling out of his mouth. Any poison to flush away the disease.

The silence is damning.

“I can’t fucking believe you,” Soap whispers. “We are a *team*. You fucking said that!” His voice crescendos, finger jabbing at Ghost’s chest.

“Not anymore,” Ghost says quietly.

Soap doesn’t seem to care for volume anymore.

“Oh *fuck you*. So now we’re not a team just because it’s fucking convenient for you? You’re a goddamn *psycho!*” He screeches.

Ghost doesn’t have anything to say to that. It’s probably true. His empathy got burned out of him a long time ago.

Still, he smiles. If Soap is going to be like this, then so will Ghost. Fight fire with fire.

“Oh, *I’m* the psycho? Says the one who fucking broke into my room to scream at me because I wouldn’t fucking answer some fucking small talk!” Ghost shouts.

“I am trying to be fucking nice!” Soap shouts louder. They’ll be lucky if they’re not overheard at this point but Ghost doesn’t even care. His vision is red, his blood

fire and the only thing stopping him from decking Soap is the already flimsy hold he has on his current housing situation.

“Then stop!” Ghost roars.

In an instant, it’s like the world freezes and Ghost is thrown out of his own experience, hazy and confused, a single moment lasting eternity. But with it comes clarity, an understanding of what he needs to do.

*Ghosts don't have friends.*

Whatever this is, it’s got to end. Him and Soap. Him and this fucking false pretense of friendship.

*Ghosts can't have friends.*

“Why are you being like this?” Soap asks, a degree of innocence in his eyes. An innocence that Ghost has no choice but to crush.

*I'm not real.*

“Leave,” Ghost orders, “or I’ll make you leave.”

*None of this is real.*

“This isn’t like you,” Soap says, eyes wide as he shakes his head. “I know you’re better than this.”

*None of this can be real.*

Ghost shakes his head and peers down at Soap, almost with pity.

“You don’t know me at all,” he says. “You don’t know the first fucking thing about me. I don’t need your ‘kindness’ or your pity or anything else you’ve decided I need. I am not your friend, I am not your anything, and I need you to leave me the fuck *alone*.”

“Fuck you,” Soap spits, but he does take a step towards the door. “*Fuck you*,” he repeats and rips open the door. Hand still on the knob, he turns to look over his shoulder. “I don’t even fucking recognise you.”

Before Ghost can ask what the fuck he means by that, he’s gone.