

Vigil

by meiri/Creatorial

4440 words

posted on AO3 at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/22805911> on the 20th of February 2020.

Rating:

Mature

Warnings:

Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Category:

M/M

Fandom:

Metal Gear

Relationship:

Otacon/Solid Snake

Character:

Hal "Otacon" Emmerich

Solid Snake | Old Snake

Sunny Emmerich

a bit of Raiden for the soul

Additional Tags:

Angst

Angst with a Happy Ending

Grief/Mourning

Pining

Unrequited Love, Or Is It?

Fix-It of Sorts

Metal Gear Rising is acknowledged. i'll say that.

Fever Dreams, Technically?

Sickfic, a bit?

unreality, but watch out!

Trying To Forget Your Vanished Unrequited Love By Questionable Life Choices

Suggestive Themes

Implied Past Hook-ups

Mentions of canon character death

*this has mention of the Inevitable Follow-Up of MGS4
but not tagging as major character death because... well ;-)
t!;dr i saw what MGS4 had for me i cried about it and now i refuse to keep it that way
what is canon. a miserable little pile of pixels.
can't tag much because it would be Spoiling... you know what to do ;-)
also rating is solid between a strong T and light M so don't expect Sauce i just want to be safe*

Summary

Snake is dead.

Snake is dead, the accelerated aging having claimed him, and Otacon can't say he didn't expect it.

But between expecting and being prepared to handle the aftermath lays a deep dark sea he cannot quite find his footing in, and navigating alone has led him to quite a few bad decisions and slipping in and out of too many sleeps.

(i know this sounds REALLY painful but trust me, i don't want to make you suffer while reading it because i couldn't get myself to make me suffer while writing. it ends up very soft. maybe the balance leans even more on the soft side despite this summary? i know what i'm about and it's suffering THEN tenderness.)

Chapters: 2

Nightwatch

Chapter Notes

this entire thing sparked from a conversation between Raiden and Sunny in Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, more or less transposed in this fic. can you guess i cried over it? i cried over it.

Maverick's conversation logs security wasn't optimal, and even though Raiden had since resigned, their unofficial support of him made it so anyone with a bit of skill could access his, as well all of the members', codec history.

Not that Otacon knew that.

... Not that Otacon was *supposed* to know that.

He missed snooping around. He missed detective work. He missed...

He let his head fall in his arms and listened again. The firewall didn't seem to even notice the saved conversation being booted a third time.

He skipped over a hint of Raiden's voice and Sunny's followed, distorted by the file compression, in the hollow of his headphones:

"He likes to go on about how nobody would ever be happy with him long-term, but it doesn't seem like he has too much trouble keeping busy on Saturday nights..."

Otacon dropped his head lower.

"... If you know what I mean."

He winced at the somber undertones plaguing her usually cheerful voice—maybe he was imagining things. Maybe he was imagining things again.

"Yeah, well, believe it or not, he was a huge geek back when he was younger!" Raiden's voice, playful almost.

"Maybe... but even so, he's still a nice guy. I doubt he was ever that lonely."

Otacon felt his heart sink in his guts with a pinch.

Hearing it still hurt.

Hearing it still hurt.

Raiden went on about how much he changed once he hit thirty, how he got more attractive. He didn't mind the word, not even coming from Raiden, he just wished it... well. He didn't like to think about it anymore.

"... He still has this really bad habit of keeping the ladies at arm's length."

Otacon rubbed the length of his weary face with the palm of his hand.

He loved Sunny. He loved Sunny like his own daughter—probably because, after years of fucking around in nameless administrative buildings, he had finally gotten her to be so—but she was... too clever. Too aware.

"I really wish he'd pick someone and settle down already..."

And the stories about "keeping the ladies at arm's length" yet "keeping busy" on Saturday nights didn't make him look good, now did they.

He just hoped Raiden wouldn't think much more of it and mind his own damn business.

Toying with the insides of Maverick's data processing security helped him keep his mind off a lot of things roaming his head, feral horses starved for any attention he could spare.

Helped him keep his mind off a lot of things.

Helped him keep his mind off.

He put the monitor on standby, brought his three mugs to the sink and headed out without a coat.

The other guy's name started with a D, maybe followed by an A, it was getting harder to ignore.

The house was beautifully empty, the lights off, and Otacon guided his guest in between unsteady steps. His idea of their path kept being interrupted by the kisses they shared, and multiple times he had to rely on his grip on his companion's shirt to not gracelessly dip backward.

The man wasn't bad-looking, by any means, but Otacon liked it better when the light stayed off.

As he pushed him, a little more than patient, onto the properly made bed, the not-quite-stranger whispered Otacon's name into his mouth—the real one, the one he had given him: Hal had dropped the habit of introducing himself with his nickname a few years prior—and Hal froze.

His name sounded foreign, sounded fog under the man's tongue, sounded off by just enough to make Hal's throat close as a whimper escaped his lips, and he started to shake.

"Ah— hey, hey," his guest called, a hint of alarm bubbling up to the surface of his calm voice.

Otacon's hands had tensed where they gripped the other man's shirt, his cheeks turned pale. Reading into his panic, the man-whose-name-started-with-a-D-maybe-a-Da carefully took hold of his hands, untwining them from the fabric, and pushed them down to Otacon's sides.

"God, *fuck*," Otacon blabbed, his lips trembling, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, this isn't what you—"

He couldn't finish his sentence, breath cut short. His chest heaved, feeling tighter with each inhale, and soon all that could slip past his lips were wheezing, choked gasps—he found himself being gently but firmly pushed against his pillows as he started sobbing.

"I'm so sorry," he repeated, "I know you really wish you were gone right about now."

He tried to joke it off but his attempt at a smile distorted his face in a pained, agonizing grimace.

"I've had worse hookups," his guest replied, sounding way more casual, jolly and sympathetic than Otacon thought he deserved. "You okay?"

As Otacon tried to push himself up, Da-something promptly shoved him back onto the cushions. He had very blue eyes and Hal felt his guts twist and turn like restless eels under his flesh.

"Answer me, dude. You gonna be okay? Not going to throw yourself out of the window if I leave?"

Hal managed a croaky, hiccupy laugh.

"I'll be fine. Sorry for this whole..." He gestured weakly at the penumbra around them. "Disaster."

As he writhed between the cold sheets, trying to avoid his guest's gaze—too piercing, too blue, too much—his thoughts were interrupted; he winced again at the voice.

"There's someone you can't get out of your head, huh?"

He didn't reply. He gazed off, and as his eyes started to fidget, he cried some more.

He hated being read so easily. He hated feeling like a book left open and that he couldn't manage to keep close. He hated people being able to read his entrails, anthropomancy performed against his will over the wailing mess he was.

His guest nodded. He didn't need an answer.

"I'll go now," he said, his softened voice easier for Otacon to hear. "Thanks for the drink. Do you need me to lock the door behind me?"

"Locks automatically," Otacon replied. "Just pull it firmly."

He almost regretted having forgotten the man's name when he got up, hazardously but full of good intentions adjusting the blanket over Otacon's legs.

"And take *care* of yourself, dude!" he insisted, voice almost playful.

Hal could have almost laughed.

He disappeared through the door, picked up his coat, slipped out of the apartment. The lock clicked in place.

Hal's face fell in a scream, the ligaments of his jaw burning as he began to howl. And he howled, he howled, he howled until his face was soaked and sticky with tears and his body gave out under the stress—he passed out, still sobbing.

He woke up too weak to sit up. His limp, trembling arms struggled to raise to his face and he felt like his face had sunk to the floor through his pillow, cold and wet with tears. It took him a full minute to push himself on his elbows, heavy chest embedding him into the misery-shaped dent in the mattress. As he blinked, his lids parted with the sticky, sickly sound of lashes bound together by salt and water—when he was finally able to focus his gaze, there was a silhouette leaning against the doorframe.

There was no mistaking it; from the shape of the shoulders, the muscular slope of the trapezii, the strength of the forearms, thighs, hands—peeking behind the crossed arms— to the scar licking the side of the face, ran by streaks of light, even in the blue penumbra of his bedroom, Otacon couldn't have possibly confused him for anyone else.

“Snake...!”

The name slipped past his lips, more air than voice. He couldn't breathe.

“I talked to the guy,” a voice rose from the hazy figure, deep, gravelly, familiar in the most excruciating way. “He seemed nice. Are you okay?”

Otacon's mouth hung open, chest heaving erratically as he inaudibly gasped—no air got to his lungs and he curled on himself.

Snake (because it was him, it was, truly, fully, in all the smallest details Hal could see when he took strides toward him) saw his distress and joined him, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“You look like you're having a rough time. Otacon, is everything okay?” He asked, hand reaching for Otacon's cheek.

Feeling the palm against his tacky, damp skin, Hal grabbed the wrist presented to him—and clung in a tight, desperate hold. His fingers dug against the ligaments that ran from palm to arm, into a scar guarded on each side by faded stitch marks, into fragilized, but still strong, skin.

He started sobbing again. His lungs were empty and the lack of air had him whine and whimper, voice a pained, struggling whistle, and Snake started rubbing a reassuring thumb over his cheek—with each stroke he moved more tears, his palm and wrist growing damp as Otacon cried.

“Snake,” he called, “Snake, *Snake* —”

He couldn't let go of his wrist, and when his other hand grabbed the neck of Snake's shirt, he took it as an invitation to climb on the bed.

David nudged Hal's thighs open with his own, for no other reason than he wanted to, and needed somewhere to settle comfortably. Hal complied, mouth agape, eyes a bit too eager for the wreck he was.

God, he swore internally, *what wouldn't I give to not be a fucking mess right now*.

But he was, and his head was growing hot with something like dizziness, or maybe exhaustion from having cried so much, or maybe even a fever that was pitching up his spine. It wasn't quite helped when David leaned in, his weight over Otacon making him melt into the mattress, and kissed him.

Hal forgot how to exist for a spare second.

He grabbed Snake's shoulders, the seams of his shirt splitting under his hands as he pulled the man to him as if his life depended on it.

The kiss was a mess as well.

Otacon couldn't breathe through his stuffy nose and every so often hiccuped a salty, trembling sob that Snake drank off his lips; he clung to him, to his strong, capable back like it could infuse life back into his lungs, he kicked his legs open wider so Snake could meld into his hips, stomach, thorax. He wished their chests would embrace each other, their ribs would merge, would kiss even with all the fractures and weaknesses of their bones, form one cage for their two hearts.

"God, I miss you," Hal whimpered. "I miss you, I miss you, I miss you, I miss—"

Snake kissed him again. His lips felt numb from screaming but he kissed back (GOD he kissed back), hungry and drunk on David's mouth, on the low chuckles he blessed his with, on the faint scent of smoke that still followed him.

"I should have told you earlier," Hal choked up, hands gripping Snake's biceps until they bruised, "I should have told you earlier and I was a fucking coward, I should have, I should have..."

The words poured out, an agonizing litany that Snake collected at the brim of his lips. Hal said he loved him until his voice gave out, and even then kept mouthing the words. His nose bumped into the scarred cheek, his hands quivered and shook through the thinning gray hair.

"Do you want to sleep?" Snake eventually asked, Hal's erratic panting washing over his mouth.

Hal shook his head.

"You should really sleep. You're exhausted."

Hal shook his head harder and tears galloped down his cheeks.

No. God, please no.

He shook and shook until his neck felt like it would snap. He didn't want to sleep. He couldn't sleep.

Snake cradled him, rocking him slowly. He kept shaking his head. His grip on David tightened until his arms grew painful and weak, pins and needles writhing over his marrow. Ultimately, exhaustion whacked him in the face in a breathless second and he collapsed, a whine dying on his lips.

He woke up alone.

The door was closed, dawn was near.

He rose to his elbows. The cold of the room stung his cheeks where salt had dried off.

Well. I need to get up .

Needed to ping Sunny, just to see if her monitors over at Solis were in stable condition.

He got up. His face flushed with a fever like a heatwave, and he went tumbling backward under the headache that stabbed the side of his head. He felt his stomach sink between his lungs, shriveling up, pinching his organs. His already poor vision went black as his knees hit the floor. It didn't even hurt.

Eve

Before even opening his eyes, he knew he was in his bed. *Back* in his bed, precisely.

How...? Who?

Well, the mattress was familiar, yet strangely... off. The blanket, as well, lacked softness, prickled ever so slightly, but Otacon couldn't bring himself to find it strange. In fact, *this* felt less strange than the previous bed, blanket, claustrophobic air. A warm light filtered through his closed eyelids but something cold still clung to his back, reptilian and sick—he needed a few more seconds to realize it was his own sweat, which he was drenched in, and which rolled in heavy, round drops from his forehead.

He managed to twitch his eyes open and winced at the familiar sound of lashes stuck together from crying too long. The ceiling was wood, ran across by bountiful and strong beams. Disorienting but so, so familiar in a way that made fear creep up on him.

He almost yelped when Snake appeared in his field of vision and his heart leaped to his mouth, almost spilling past his lips as he could taste its erratic, metallic thrumming.

“Finally awake?” His familiar, playful voice rang to Otacon's buzzing ears.

Not again. Please, not again .

The fever was pulsating steady under the thin skin of his temples and he knew what was going on at that minute—he was delirious.

The mattress dipped under Snake's weight as he sat next to him and a muffled yowl escaped his cracked lips when one of the man's hand came to cover his forehead. Otacon's stomach twisted and turned. *No more, please, no more .*

“I didn't know if you'd be awake for dinner or not. Sunny is out there watching over the fishing lines. Do you think you'll be hungry enough to eat with us?”

Otacon didn't answer, half because his voice had buried itself somewhere near his unstable heartbeat and refused to come out, half out of the fear that speaking would make this moment vanish. He struggled to even *see* Snake, his face a haze pierced by muted blue eyes. Dread climbed his already cold spine with its frozen arachnid legs as he wondered how much of the man near him was real.

Seeing his partner's lips mouth a word that he couldn't voice, Snake brushed a few loose locks out of his eyes and offered a low, soft chuckle.

"Alright, you need some more rest. The fever has gone down a bit but you still looked completely dazed."

His hand caressed Hal's temple and Hal felt himself wrecked by a shudder, a sudden craving which had him press his face into Snake's palm, a prayer carved into his aching chest.

And with that, Snake left the bed, a placid smile on his lips as he exited the room. Otacon's throat tightened with each step David took and eventually his airway felt crushed and torn, the name he wanted to call and his whimpered pleas wrung out of his throat—he tried to rise from the mattress and reach for Snake but his weight was anchored to the pool of sweat left under his back, his arm not even strong enough to flail. Snake closed the door behind him, careful and slow. The latch bolt clicked back in its place and Hal tried to call David's name again but nothing left his lips other than a flat, toneless lament that slipped like spit past his dry, cracked lips.

He begged his eyes to stay open.

He begged his eyes to stay open.

He felt himself progressively sink to the floor, swallowed by the sickly cold mattress. He tried to grab into the blanket that weighted over his chest, heavy enough to be Atlas' burden under which each of his bones bent, slowly suffocating him.

The fever was liquifying his ligaments and tendons and he watched as his hands struggled and failed to grab onto anything substantial.

Please stay awake. Please stay awake.

He didn't know what would be of him when he'd wake up again.

He didn't *want* to know what would be of him when he'd wake up again.

Snake Snake Snake Snake Snake David Dave...

He couldn't say it. He struggled to even breathe.

When he forced his eyes closed to dispel the fever from his dazed gaze, he felt himself losing his grip and, in a dreadful, panicked second in which he heard himself choke out a low, terrified whine, he was asleep again.

He breathed out a febrile puff, voice distorted in a sob, and jolted up—or at least, as "up" as his weakened body would let him.

The fever, he thought as his confused, tear-misted eyes gradually focused, hadn't disappeared. His consciousness slowly dawned—to the same sweat-stained bed, to the same irregular, dark wood floors, to a light a lively, healthy orange as the afternoon sun filtered through the red curtains.

Snake walked into the cabin, careful to not make too much noise cleaning his boots against the doormat. His eyes met Hal's and, realizing his partner was awake, David's lips curled fondly. Otacon blinked. The fever was slowly fading.

"Do you feel any better?" Snake asked as he sat on the edge of the bed, his hand rummaging through Otacon's hair before meeting his forehead, inspecting the intensity of its warmth.

Hal looked at him—he was goddamn blurry, of course, and the fever seemed to have robbed Otacon of some more of his remaining eyesight, but he could still see, ornamenting Snake's face, a smile restful and kind, a warm twinkle in the icy blue of his eyes. A wrinkle, not deep enough to be old, at the corner of his lips. A handful of gray hairs tucked behind his ear.

Counting them brought back to Otacon's mind his desperate, limping trip to Debrin, begging him on his fucking knees to help find a way to stop Snake's accelerated aging, pain wracking his chest as they collided head-on. He had barely met the guy and he was already a sobbing mess on his carpet, body convulsing as anguish threatened to make him throw up.

Debrin had taken—or so he thought, he almost hoped—pity of the mess he was. With each new injection, Debrin assured him that the composition of the nanomachines was altered in the hopes of stopping the progression of FOXDIE, which was more or less literally eating away at Snake, picking up speed with each passing day.

Eventually, Snake had found himself bedridden. His breath was a rattling, struggling huff, having stopped smoking a few months earlier not enough to grant him better lungs as FOXDIE made its nest in his cells. Otacon held his hand, held *onto* his hand, clung to the prominent bones and protruding veins. He almost feared he would break Snake's enfeebled bones but Snake held him back, his gray eyes wide, open to the ceiling. Fearful, almost.

Raiden would pay them a visit, sometimes. He didn't look as bothered to be there as Otacon thought he truly was. His cybernetic enhancement clicked and ticked, metal against metal, as he paced around, sometimes pulling a seat to keep them company.

Otacon would look at him a lot. His left eye had been damaged enough to warrant a patch-like prosthetic over the socket and, under the weight of his new body, he had aged—not much, really, just enough for his young face to morph and mature.

It was all so familiar. So sweetly, sickly, painfully familiar.

Raiden would tell a mindless Otacon about this PMC with a name sounding too much like "despair" for him to lend a careful ear. Before he would leave, Raiden would sympathetically place a hand on his shoulder, sometimes gripping him just a bit. His hand was heavy. So, so heavy.

Eventually, the seventh generation of nanomachines rolled around. They were injected right at the base of Snake's neck—by Otacon, Snake having grown too weak to hold anything, and Debrin wishing to leave a cautious space between the man and himself.

From what Otacon could gather, the nanomachines absorbed those already parasitizing Snake's enervated organism, like a fetus consuming its twin in the womb.

One day, Snake woke up. His rustling pulled his partner out of his own sleep as he had laid, too exhausted to walk away, over Snake's chest. Otacon met eyes more sky than ice, and when Snake spoke, his voice sounded cleared—not by much, by any stretch of the imagination, just enough for Otacon to pick it up, just enough to make his throat tighten in a sob that bubbled up behind his tongue.

"I'd say I want a smoke, but I don't want to disappoint you."

Hal's mouth fell open in an exaggerated, unhinged scream. Joy slapped him across the face so hard that he forgot to breathe and he burst into tears, loud wailing muffled as he threw himself over a confused, slightly dazed David. A large, if unsteady hand came to pat the back of his weak head. He felt his chest flutter as Snake chuckled under his weight.

David blossomed like a field let loose to the wildflowers and grass after years of its soil left bare and dry.

Even with the nanomachines reversing their predecessors' deleterious process—a *miracle*, Otacon had thought, something he wouldn't have even *dared* to dream of—Snake still looked slightly older than he was, but Otacon didn't care. He couldn't care.

Snake didn't pick up smoking again. A wrinkle anchored itself at the corner of his mouth, some more at the corners of his eyes, but it didn't matter. It couldn't matter.

He still had his damn lumbago, and every time he complained about it, Hal drank his voice in, inebriated on his tone, on being able to hear him again.

He would, um, probably have to tell him about this sometime.

Otacon blinked out of his memories and sharply rolled on his side. He threw his arms—as best as he could, fever protesting his sudden movement with a pang of headache—around Snake's waist, pulling him close and himself closer, his weary head washing ashore Snake's strong thighs. David brushed a light hand, ever so slightly deformed by calluses, through Hal's soaked locks.

"Nightmare again?" he asked.

Otacon audibly swallowed and his grip around his partner's waist tightened.

"Dreamed of something sad."

Snake mindlessly petted his hair for a few minutes, listening to his breathing speed and slow, grow heavy with sorrow that David banished with a sweep of the palm. Eventually, when Hal's body had gone limp, tension and fear having been sweated or caressed out of his limbs and spine, David bent over his restless head, and pressed a kiss to his temple thrumming with a troubled heartbeat.

"You need to stop thinking about so many horrible things, they keep following you when you sleep. You deserve better than that."

"We."

Snake cocked an eyebrow.

"Mmh?"

" We deserve better."

He watched Otacon attempt to roll on his back to look at him and fail, trapped by his own (perfectly justified, mind you) desire to keep his arms around Snake.

David brushed Hal's illness-reddened cheek with the back of cool fingers, still smelling faintly of lakeside soil and pine tree. They stayed in silence for a while. Outside, Sunny was chirping after a migratory bird. The distant sound of a fish splashing in and out of the calm waters echoed to Otacon's ears, almost in perfect synch with the low, deep hammering of Snake's heart behind his ribs, against which Otacon was motionlessly listening.

Hal drifted in and out of sleep three, four, five more times. Fear would wake him by snapping its rotten teeth near his marrow, making his breath hitch in panic, the seconds before consciousness came a lonely, cold blue haze he feared he would stay stuck in.

And yet, every time he emerged, Snake was still towering him, arms guarding his sides, watching him as he twisted and turned in his superficial sleep. At some point between two blinks, Sunny had decided she wanted to lay on the wooden floors next to the puppies. She blinked back at him. Emerging from the shallow depths of sleep, still disoriented and apneic, Hal eventually anchored in wakefulness, pulling himself on his arms. Sudden dread washed over him as he realized Snake had left his side.

Then his head peeked through the door. The cold evening air came waltzing in, unexpected but not bothersome guest, through the gap.

"If you're feeling any better," Snake offered, "care to join me outside? Grab a coat, this sure as hell isn't spring yet, but the sunset looks incredible."

And as to emphasize his point, he pushed the door fully open.

Hal wrapped himself in the heavy blanket, determined to not drop it for a coat, and fever-wobbled to David's side.

It was so damn cold. The mountains surrounding the lake were still coated in snow the same way Otacon was coated in sheep wool. The water gleamed yellow with the setting sun.

Snake playfully counted two gray hairs in Otacon's disheveled mane and welcomed his still ever-so-slightly feverish hand in his.

"Stop thinking about so many horrible things," David repeated, voice getting lost as he hummed into Hal's messy hair. "You deserve better than that."

Hal went in for a cheeky, playful elbow in the ribs and ended up hurting himself, presumably pulling a muscle from having stayed in bed all day.

David still laughed.

They took place in the folding chairs Snake had a habit of keeping in front of the cabin, Hal scooting over to attempt to lay his head on his partner's shoulder, which ended up being satisfactorily successful.

"*We* deserve better," David added after silence had set and the sky had turned just a little bit more gold.

Hal nodded solemnly, more glad that he had remembered his incoherent rambling from earlier than anything.

He meant it.

And he knew Dave did too.

