



# OVERWATCH® DEADLOCK REBELS



CHAPTER 1

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The thing about trouble was, once you got into its company, it was tricky getting out. You could try to avoid it, you could run from it, you could even fight it—which was, in the case of the Bonney brothers, exactly what Ashe had done—but it still had a way of finding you. “I don’t even know what to say, Elizabeth.”

There were crumbs in Sheriff Carson’s mustache. Only a few, but enough to draw her eye, distracting remnants of the man’s breakfast. “Am I ever gonna see the last of you?”

“I told you ...”

Ashe clenched her teeth, fingers worrying at her silk skirt. A few hours ago, it had been immaculate. Now it was wrinkled and stained with spots of blood. Not hers, of course. “It was self-defense. They attacked me.”

The sheriff sighed, loosening a few of the crumbs and sending them plunging to the screen displaying Ashe’s record. “That’s not what those boys say.”

“Well,”

she locked eyes with him, “then they’re liars as well as bullies.”

But the sheriff didn’t believe her. She could see it on his face, plain as the crumbs. Not that his skepticism about her innocence was unexpected. The only surprise was how fast this day had managed to go from bad to worse. It had started so good, too. For once, Ashe woke with the sunrise, raring to go. Most days began with B.O.B., her family’s robot butler, yanking the blankets off her five minutes before she needed to be out the door. An advanced, sentient omnic, B.O.B. had been by Ashe’s side for as long as she could remember, acting as both a companion and a bodyguard. And, of course, making sure she got up for school in the morning. But she didn’t need B.O.B.’s help today. Because today was special. Today was graduation day. Not only did that mean she’d never have to set foot in the suffocating halls of that tedious, soul-sucking academy again, it meant she’d get

to see the look on Headmaster Wallach's weaselly face as he handed over the diploma he never thought she'd get. The same looks she hoped to see on her parents' faces as she walked across the stage. Ashe washed, dressed, and brushed her snowy hair until it shined. Then she took the steps of Lead Rose Manor, her family's ancestral home, two at a time as she went downstairs to the formal dining room, where her parents always ate breakfast. But when she reached it, the room was empty. No steaming cups of coffee, no holovids projecting endless financial reports and sales figures, no parents. Only a vase of stark white roses on the mahogany table, and a card leaned up against it. Congratulations, Elizabeth! We're so proud of you! Despite the warm words, Ashe turned cold as she read, the color leeching out of the room until it was as hueless as the roses. We know we'd promised to be there today; however, an exciting business merger called us away at the last minute. But we're very proud of you, and hope you'll see this as a fresh start, a moment in which to leave behind the missteps and troubles of the past and finally embrace our family legacy. They hadn't even taken time to sign the card. Ashe frowned. "We're very proud of you ..."

It read like a joke. A bad one. If they were so proud, why weren't they here? Why had they left her alone, again? Family legacy. What a joke. Across the room, the portrait of her great-great-and-more-greats-grandmother Caledonia stared blankly down at her. It was Caledonia who'd created the Arbalest Arms Company, who'd built the foundation for the premier, high-tech arms dealer it was today. Not Ashe's parents, who preferred to rub elbows and chase deals with the executives of more powerful corporations— Helix, Vishkar, Hyde Global, and the rest—trading on a reputation whose success they had little to do with. If anything, they'd gotten lucky. Arbalest had done good business for years as the makers of expensive, highly customized luxury rifles. But then the Omnic Crisis happened, and the military turned their attention to them. Arbalest's AA92 rifle became standard-issue for the army due to its higher capacity and higher muzzle velocity. With that contract, demand for their unique brand of rifles exploded. War was good for business. Especially if it was far away. Larger cities had been hit by the war, sure, but Bellerae, the community where they lived and where Arbalest was based, was secluded. Before the crisis, they'd never had more than a dozen omnics to speak of. It had remained mostly untouched throughout the war, during which the company's factories kept up brisk production. But now the crisis was over, thanks to Overwatch. Demand for weapons was down; already one Arbalest factory in Bellerae had closed. Ashe's parents were more interested in business deals made and executed thousands of miles away than in the community their company had kept thriving for generations. What kind of legacy was that? Mounted below the painting was an heirloom Viper rifle, one of Arbalest's early creations, and the gun that had carved the company's place in the weapons market. Over a century old, the gun still looked new and shot straight. Innovation. Quality. That was the legacy Caledonia had strived for, never letting Arbalest lag behind, hiring the best and brightest minds she could find, and always making her workers feel valued—more like family than employees. Not that she was a pushover; it was said she made her employees call her Ms. Ashe, no matter how long they'd known her. Maybe it was meant to show respect. Or maybe she'd simply disliked Caledonia as much as Ashe disliked Elizabeth, also preferring to be called by her surname. Ashe turned as a clunking tread approached. In the doorway of the dining room stood B.O.B., a tray balanced delicately between his massive metal hands. On it was her favorite breakfast—waffles dripping with syrup and a big side of bacon, extra, extra crispy. A sour taste rose in her throat. "Do I look hungry right now?"

she snapped. The omnic simply blinked at her and placed the tray on the table. Immediately, Ashe felt a pang of guilt. B.O.B. hadn't done anything wrong. In fact, he'd been the only dependable part of her life. Except, of course, during the war, when he'd disappeared. Like all omnics, he disappeared during the Omnic Crisis. Years passed, during which Ashe thought she'd never see the butler again. It had surprised her how much she missed the omnic when he was gone. Then, after the war had ended, he returned to Lead Rose, newly sentient and ... different in ways Ashe never entirely understood. But he was still the companion she remembered. And he'd stuck by her side ever since. Unlike her parents.

"They could've at least said good-bye."

Her voice caught on the last word, and she tensed, as irritated with herself as she was with them. This wasn't the first time her parents had left her alone with hardly a word, and it probably wouldn't be the last. As far back as she could remember, there was only the sprawling, echoing solitude of the estate—especially during the years of B.O.B.'s absence—or else the tense veil of her parents' disapproval for whatever mess she'd gotten into lately. She twisted the card in her hands. So why was she so steamed? Because today was supposed to be different. Her graduation had actually seemed to mean something to them. Maybe they'd only wanted to show, in public, that their daughter was more than a troublemaker. More than the girl who'd gotten caught trying to convince the academy's resident hacker to change all her grades to As, or caused the school to close for decontamination after showing off with her slingshot in the science lab. Or maybe, as Ashe had hoped, it was a reason for them to finally believe she was capable of doing something right. She'd sworn to graduate. And they'd promised to be there. Fool that she was, Ashe had believed them. On the table, the roses caught a ray of morning sun, lighting them up like a bead drawn on a target. That's what she wanted to make of their peace gesture right now—to set it in her sights and watch the gift explode in a spray of petals and crystal. If the Viper had been loaded, she might have. Instead, Ashe dropped the card on the mantel and stomped toward the hall. As she brushed by B.O.B., he reached an arm out, stopping her. Ashe sighed. "Don't worry, I'm still going to the stupid ceremony!"

B.O.B. cocked his head.

"No, don't get the car. I'd rather walk ... alone."

The omnic held up a hand in warning.

"I know, I know. That's not allowed."

But Ashe didn't feel inclined to follow any rules right now. "But before we leave, can you go find my gold bracelet? You know, the one my parents sent for my birthday last year? I forgot to put it on."

B.O.B. turned obediently, heading upstairs. Normally, the butler would escort her to the school. But right now, Ashe wasn't in the mood for company. Which meant distracting B.O.B. with a little white lie. By the time he realized the bracelet was nowhere to be found in her room (Ashe's mother had borrowed it months ago and never given it back), she'd be long gone. Ashe took the path to town that followed along the river. As hoped, it was deserted, save for some ducks and the occasional police surveillance drone. But despite the quiet solitude, her mood remained sour. And it wasn't as if she could call up a friend to commiserate with. Her status as the daughter of the powerful Ashe family had kept her peers at a distance for most of her life. More recently, the closing of an Arbalest factory had resulted in a number of her classmates' families losing jobs. For a few of them, casual avoidance had given way to active dislike, leading to more schoolyard scraps than she could remember. The graduation ceremony, and her escape from the academy, couldn't come fast enough. Still, beneath the ornamental stands of terraformed trees running along the water's edge she could breathe a little easier. Forget, for a moment, the stifling loneliness of the estate and pretend that she was somewhere—and someone—else entirely.

"Well, well, what kind of early bird do we have here?"

Ashe stopped, her calm immediately gone. She turned, already knowing who she'd find trailing her: Jodie and Jimmy Bonney. A year behind her in the academy, there was no one in Belleræ who hated Ashe and her family more than these two. Both their parents had worked at Arbalest for decades, only to be unceremoniously dismissed when the factory shut down.

“Why, Jodie.”

Jimmy chuckled. “I do believe that’s the rare scarlet-eyed peacock. Strange; usually this bird is accompanied by a big, clunky butler-bot.”

Great. These two goons were the last thing she needed. “Run along, boys. I’m not in the mood.”

“No need to be tart,”

said Jodie, trading a mischievous grin with his brother that Ashe didn’t like. They might be younger than her, but they were a lot bigger. “After all, you’re graduating today, aren’t you? Congratulations! But tell us the truth: How much did your parents donate to make that happen?”

Ashe bristled, but kept her stare cool. “Don’t know. Probably a heck of a lot less than it would take to get Headmaster Wallach to pass the headscratching, paste eating pair of you.”

The Bonneys’ faces darkened in unison.

“You think you’re so clever,”

Jimmy sneered. “Having a fortune doesn’t mean you get to talk down to us.”

Ashe’s blood warmed, flush with rising adrenaline. “Oh, boys”

—she gave them a mockingly patient smile—“I could be poor as dirt and still talk circles ’round you.”

It was the wrong thing to say, and yet, she couldn’t stop herself. She was brimming with frustration, and if the Bonneys were foolish enough to set themselves in her path, so be it. Jodie’s voice took on a sharp edge. “Poor as dirt, huh?”

He reached down and pulled up a clump of soil. “We could give you a taste of that, couldn’t we, Jimmy? Let’s make this peacock a little less pretty for her party.”

Ashe straightened, still smiling. Two against one? Not the worst odds she’d had. Jimmy charged forward, attempting to grab her, but he was slow in more ways than one. Ashe danced out of reach, kicking him as she did. Jimmy yelped as her foot connected with his shin, sending him sprawling in the grass. A hand clamped onto her forearm. Jodie—quicker than his brother—yanked her toward him, trying to subdue her with a bear hug. But she dropped at the last moment, driving a shoulder into his gut. He gasped and lurched back, the wind knocked out of him. Nearby, Jimmy scrambled to his feet, face red with humiliation.

“You done?”

Ashe spat. “I ain’t got all day, y’know.”

With a roar, Jimmy advanced again, fists flying. She ducked one punch, then another—wild haymaker swings that would have rattled her gears if they’d landed. But Ashe knew how to dodge a punch. And how to throw one. She waited for an opening, then— Her fist jabbed out, catching him in the mouth. Jimmy went to his knees, blood pouring over his lips.

“You—”



It was Jodie who spoke, the words low and icy. “Now we’re gonna make you a lot less pretty.”

Suddenly, silver flashed in his hand. A knife. Ashe took a nervous step back. Maybe it had been a mistake to bait the boys like she had. There was brawling, and then there was this. But Jodie left no time for de-escalation, or reason. Eyes glossy with anger, he lunged. She sidestepped, grabbing at the wrist holding the weapon while simultaneously throwing an elbow up. It found his nose with a satisfying crunch. As Jodie joined his brother on the ground, the knife slipped from his fingers. Ashe snatched it up, brandishing it as she backed away from the pair. That’s when the sirens started. A pair of Belleræ police hoverbikes appeared, lights flashing. Realizing one of the passing police drones must have caught sight of the scuf fle, Ashe turned, but a third police officer was already behind her.

“Don’t move!”

The deputy dismounted, rifle trained on her. Ashe swore, and dropped the knife. So much for getting to graduation.

“My deputies found you holding a weapon,”

continued Sheriff Carson, scowling, “and both those boys bleeding, swearing you attacked them.”

“I know how it looks.”

Ashe practically sugarcoated the words, smiling as innocently as she could manage. It wasn’t easy, not while thinking about strangling the Bonneys for their lies. “If you would let me—”

“Enough!”

The sheriff slammed his fist on the desk. “It’s always some excuse with you, Elizabeth. You think you can do what you please, and then use your last name like a shield.”

Ashe scoffed. “That isn’t tr—”

“Well, not this time,”

he spat. “Get up!”

“What?”

He grabbed her arm and hauled her to her feet. “Hey!”

“Maybe if you have some time to reflect, you’ll learn a little humility.”

The sheriff dragged her out of the office and down the hall to a musty, dimly lit part of the station she’d never seen before. The jail cells.

“Oh, come on, Sheriff,”

pleaded Ashe. “This is completely unnecessary. Call B.O.B. He’ll be here in a jiffy—”

“Oh, I know.”

Sheriff Carson unlocked one of the cells and shoved her in, a satisfied little smirk tugging up one side of his mouth. “Your parents’ money to the rescue again, and no one to say ‘boo’ about it because they own half the town. Well, this time I’m in no rush. And you’re underage, which means you can’t post bail on your own. So, I’ll get to that call ... eventually. But not until you finally get a look at the inside of a cell.”

The door slammed shut.

“Wait, please—”

Ashe tried, and failed, to stay calm as he strode away. “Dammit, Sheriff, you get back here!”

But he ignored her. Ashe wilted as he disappeared, hanging on to the bars of the cell. The sheriff wasn’t going to listen. He never listened. Like everyone else in this godforsaken town—her parents included—he’d already decided who Ashe was ... who she was always going to be. A spoiled heiress. A troublemaker. A threat to their pride. And it didn’t matter if she thought different.

“Huh ...”

A voice came from behind her. “You’ve got an awful lot of grit for a rich girl.”

She twisted toward the sound. “Excuse me?”

One cell over, a lanky form reclined, feet up on the bench set into the wall, a hat pulled low over his face. “A rich girl. Gotta be, with that swanky outfit.”

His voice was deep, smooth.

“Mind your own business.”

He snickered. “What made you fancy a look inside a jail cell?”

Ashe narrowed her eyes. “I didn’t fancy a damn thing. I don’t belong here.”

The hat pushed up, revealing a young man with a ready smirk and piercing brown eyes, one of which was bruised and swollen. “Funny. Me neither.”

“Oh, really?”

Ashe scoffed. “That shiner indicates otherwise.”

“This?”

The young man sat up, fingers raised to the bruise. “Friend of mine had a little ... misunderstanding with another farmhand. I stepped in to settle it.”

“Can’t help but notice you’re alone in there.”

A shrug. “He’s had a few too many run-ins with the law already.”

Her annoyance turned to surprise. “You—you took a beating and an arrest for him? That sounds awful generous. And more than a little stupid.”

“Like I said, Julian’s a friend. Don’t have a lot of those to spare.”

The young man stood with a slow, sinewy stretch. “What about you? How’d you get thrown in here?”

“Same story,”

Ashe replied carefully, reconsidering him. He couldn’t have been older than she was—maybe younger, even, though there was an air about him that told her he’d seen more than his share of the world already.

“A misunderstanding.”

“Then I guess we’ve got something in common”

—he approached the wall of bars that separated their cells and stuck a hand through—“Miss ... ?”

She hesitated, but only for a moment. The thing about trouble was, once you were familiar with it, it was easy to spot. And next to the Bonney brothers, this boy looked like a friendly puppy. She took his hand and shook. “Call me Ashe. And you are?”

“Name’s Jesse.”

His grin widened further. “Jesse McCree.”







