



OVERWATCH 2

HEROES ASCENDANT
LOST GHOSTS

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Fourteen years old and filled with rage, Fareeha crossed her arms and looked away from the holo-screen. Ana hadn't spoken to her daughter in weeks, and already the call had become tense. "I didn't mean to sound so harsh, habibti."

Fareeha wouldn't meet her eyes. "This is what I want to do with my life. I get to decide that."

"You can find a new dream—you're so young," Ana sighed. "Why would you want to join Overwatch?"

Fareeha gave her reasons, but Ana wasn't listening. All she wanted was a better life for her daughter. Ana should have just heard her out, or at least paid attention to the tone, the urgency in Fareeha's voice. Maybe then she would have heard it: the desperation for a connection.

"The Crisis is over," Ana cut in. "You don't have to fight! You can be anything you want to be—I gave everything so you could have that."

Fareeha's tone rose as she launched into a new round of arguments. They didn't speak again for two more months, and Ana never heard more of her daughter's dreams.

Ana peered through the scope of her rifle at the woman below, helpless, surrounded by Null Sector warbots. Red hair fraying from a bun and a navy suit indicated that she'd been in the middle of a workday when the attack began. Invasions, war, any kind of violence just interrupts your life and

NEVER HESITATE AND NEVER LOOK AWAY— RULES OF WARFARE FROM WHAT SEEMED LIKE A LIFETIME AGO.

has not even the slightest care for what you do afterward. Thoughts fired rapidly, one after another. How long had Red been displaced, desperately seeking refuge? Was she separated from her family? Did she leave a pet at home, thinking it was just another day and she would return after work? Was her home destroyed, her family lost?

Jack had insisted that they move between the shadows and occupy spaces that were partially destroyed. They were leaving one of those buildings when Ana spotted Red from the fifth-floor window. Standing barefoot in the streets with her hands raised, a sign that she meant no harm. This scene had become all too familiar for Ana.

Will there ever be peace? she wondered as she crouched in a nest of shattered glass and dispatched the warbots in the street. The sound of gunfire jolted the red-haired woman from her terror, and she scurried away, screaming the kind of terrified primal scream that had kept Ana up the first time she'd heard it in a war zone.

Never hesitate and never look away—rules of warfare from what seemed like a lifetime ago. Ana didn't look away until the woman disappeared between two buildings and Jack touched her on the shoulder.

"She's good. We can go now."

Ana knew that Jack was talking about Red, but Ana's mind called back to Fareeha. After their brief reunion in Cairo, Ana had longed to hear any kind of positive update about her daughter.

Then, a wink of hope. They had been passing through a ruined diner when they saw it. Electricity flickering on and off, there was even still smoke coming from some of the rooms. Ana wasn't paying attention to the diner or to Jack; she was too focused on ensuring they were not followed. It was another old rule from basic: *cover your team at all costs.*

"Take a look at this," Jack grunted, leading Ana through a wide crack in the wall.

The crevice opened into an abandoned kitchen. It told the story of a breakfast service rudely interrupted: A carton of eggs overturned with its contents spilled and long dried out, a weirdly resilient spatula perfectly balanced in a pan, and tables and countertops peppered with shattered crockery. Over the bar a newsclip was playing on the holo vid: Busan, by the look of it, though the

***IT WAS LIKE THE SETUP TO A JOKE: TWO GHOSTS
WALK INTO A CITY WHERE BOTH OF THEM LIVED AND
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COMEDIC ABOUT A GHOST CHASING THE PAST.***

news ticker said the footage was from some time ago, earlier in the attack. The reporter was speaking Korean, but the word *Overwatch* was very clear.

Ha! Ana held back a smile as she saw Cassidy's familiar hat passing through the scene. *He did it*, she thought. *He followed my bread crumbs.* His team of new agents were fighting in sync alongside the Korean military, pushing back a swarm of Null Sector forces. The drone footage was shaky and cut out just as a woman with a rocket launcher appeared in the left-hand corner of the screen.

Fareeha!

"She's good. You did good," Jack said, putting a hand on her shoulder. He so seldom smiled these days, amid their grim work, but the warmth on his face was genuine—he knew what this meant to her. Ana wanted to watch it again, to see her daughter swoop in and join the team.

Team. She and Jack once had a team, knew what it was to work together, to think as one but move independently, to *trust*. Something like the fine line between the Tahtib dance and the stick-fighting martial art it was born from. *Winston loved this kind of sentimental nonsense—*

Ana shook her head, wincing when her nostalgia was interrupted by a feeling that was less pleasant: *regret*. One might mistake the mission she and Jack found themselves on for heroism, but Ana knew better. She used to be captain, and Jack, the strike commander of *Overwatch*. At some point they'd become symbols: their faces plastered on recruitment posters, children's cartoons, on the receiving end of too many letters from people who'd been rescued by their agency. They'd protected humanity through the Omnic Crisis and had given their very lives to the cause . . . but it wasn't enough. The world was still broken, still needed heroes. And everything they'd built had crumbled, whether that end was hastened by their own hand, or by Talon, or by someone else entirely.

Now they fought where they could, made a difference where they could, but *good* did not drive them. Vengeance was leading Jack, and compassion for an old friend was leading Ana. Jack felt

that he was getting closer to finding out what or who had brought Overwatch down. Ana helped him make headway: this new informant he was talking to seemed to have good information, and the source had promised something even bigger to prove the quality of their intel. That was what had brought them back to Zurich, a place neither of them had seen for many years.

It was like the setup to a joke: Two ghosts walk into a city where both of them lived and one of them died. She'd never had a great sense of humor, but there was something darkly comedic about a ghost chasing the past. She had worked in Zurich for many years but never really thought of it as home. *Home* would always be Cairo, where her mother, Fareeha, and Sam (until he left) waited patiently for her to return. She always did . . . until the day that Ana broke one of her rules and hesitated. She was taken out by a Talon sniper in Poland—Amélie—someone she'd known, trusted, more than once tried to save. Her bullet found its mark, and Ana had laid in a coma under a stranger's name for years. Presumed KIA, she had died a hero with full honors, blissfully spared the downfall of Overwatch.

But Jack wasn't. He was there until its final moments, when Gabrielle Adawe's dream of an international peacekeeping force went up in smoke, along with Overwatch's Swiss Headquarters.

Lost ghosts, that's what Jack called them. Although, they were not really ghosts anymore. Cole, Fareeha, and Gabe knew she wasn't dead. *Talon, too, must be aware of my resurrection; which explains why they chased us through Cairo, Istanbul, Budapest . . .*

Jack and Ana walked in an extended silence until Ana finally asked the question she was hoping Jack would have already answered. He was being stubborn—but that was his nature.

"What are we getting up to tonight?" She swallowed hard because she could tell from his face that they were headed into an unsavory situation. One mind, independent bodies.

"According to our informant, Talon is taking someone out."

Ana narrowed her eyes at him in the gathering dark. "Who?"

"I don't know, but we are on our way to getting the time and place."

"Jack." Ana stopped walking; Jack walked a few steps ahead of her and turned. She could be stubborn too. "I can't help you if you don't tell me what the plan is. I'm on *your* side, you know."

There was an anger and pain that Jack was carrying with him. Ana felt sometimes it was too deep to heal. She was at his six, keeping him alive and focused, because of how deeply she cared for him—decades of friendship, a witness to the sacrifices each had made to build a better world, but also to the joy and refuge Overwatch represented to them. The world knew the agency for its heroes, but Ana and Jack knew it for Cassidy's office pranks, Mirembé's baby shower, Singh's mother's cooking, Vivian's dry humor . . . There was trust, solidarity, understanding in all they'd been through. Jack was determined to find out who was responsible for the fall of Overwatch—the

old Overwatch, *their* Overwatch. It was good to see him so determined, but anger made even the best soldiers sloppy.

"My informant didn't give me the name. They left it somewhere for me to find." He opened his mouth to continue, but Ana put up a hand.

"So, we're walking into an ambush." She sat down at what was left of a bus stop. "I'm not taking another step until you tell me where we are going." Ana saw mischief in Jack's eyes, and she would have jokingly punched his arm if not for the pain in her knuckles.

"Come on, Ana, where's your optimism?"

"I buried it twenty years ago, when you let me eat those questionable kebabs in Hyderabad."

That, at least, got half a smile from him.

"The intel is high priority. They couldn't risk transmitting it online, so it's been left at a drop point."

Ana put her head in her hands. "Where, Jack?"

"You're not gonna like it."

He was right; she did not like it. Jack was huddled outside a mausoleum, furiously scanning the inscriptions of various burial chambers, where supposedly MARIA CHERISHED MOTHER, SISTER, AND CAT LOVER was interred, along with the encrypted data drive of Jack's informant.

Ana was leaning against a gargoyle on the roof of another tomb set farther back, atop the hillside of the cemetery, watching Jack through her scope.

Ana swept her crosshairs over the space while Jack ran like a much younger man to another mausoleum. *Funny, what makes him happy*, she thought. As Jack was jiggling a capstone loose—he must've found the right Maria—Ana spotted a small Null Sector squadron marching toward Jack's position from the street above. Instinct and adrenaline kicked in; she took a deep breath and held it. Ana dispatched the warbot that was nearing Jack's position, then took out the one beside it as it searched for their attacker. She squeezed her trigger, aiming for the third warbot just as a fourth appeared and opened fire on her.

Dammit. She slid down the pitched roof of the tomb, hearing a shout of pain in her earpiece. She chanced a peek and saw Jack, bloodied, leaning weakly against the wall of crypt plates. Careless.

Ana dispatched the other two warbots and abandoned her cover to get to Jack. When she finally reached him, he was still struggling to catch his breath, his whole body racked by a spluttering cough.

"Come now, Jack," Ana said, trying to find the source of the bleed. "A cemetery is no place to

***“COME NOW, JACK,” ANA SAID,
TRYING TO FIND THE SOURCE OF THE BLEED.
“A CEMETERY IS NO PLACE TO DIE.”***

die.” Ana put a bloody hand on Jack’s lips, her heartbeat like a drum in her ears. She focused on the laceration and the bloody bubbles coming from Jack’s chest. Had they hit a lung? For a long time Ana could do basic medical, the kind all military personnel were required to learn. Stop a bleed, keep them awake, wait for the medical evacuation team, if you can move the injured stay out of sight. Jack let out a scream as she injected nanobiotics into the wound. Jack never used to need any kind of patching up; he healed faster than anyone she had ever met, save Gabe. Probably why he always rushed into danger: he knew he could bounce back. Ana looked at the scars on his chest and wondered how long it would take for his wound to heal. She pressed gauze over the wound and held her hand there.

The pair sat next to Maria, in silence for what seemed like an hour. Jack’s breathing finally returned to normal. Ana pulled a thermos out of her backpack and handed it to her friend. He took it, opened the top, and sniffed it before taking a long swig of the tea Ana insisted on carrying with her.

“Don’t keep me in suspense. What’s the information you almost died for?”

“An address and time.”

“And we can trust the information?”

“We’ve trusted the source up to this point. I’d like to see this one through, stop this hit.” Jack tried to get up.

Ana stood and extended him a hand. Jack was clutching his still-tender left side. Ana wanted to tell him to slow down, but she asked a question instead. “What will you do when all this is over?”

Jack looked down. “We’re soldiers, Ana. War’s never over.”

Fareeha was seven years old, her voice shaking over an encrypted video call. “Come home. I’m scared, Mama.”

Wanting to do the thing and actually doing the thing, that is where Ana was.

After weeks of nonstop omnic attacks, there would be a quiet night when it felt like the machines were regrouping. It was those quiet nights where, if Ana closed her eyes, she could pretend they were a bunch of misfits who were out camping together. Gabriel was convinced that the strike team had become immune to the rush of adrenaline, that their so-called quiet nights weren't that quiet at all, since they had become accustomed to a certain level of combat.

"Let us hope not," Reinhardt would answer. "Our sniper needs adrenaline to focus."

Ana was huddled in a Ståltäcke tent—back then it was just another innovation Torbjörn had brought with him, something the engineers had dreamed up in Gothenburg. A compact shelter that could travel well and withstand combat.

Jack had been doing push-ups when she walked past him—the operation was still rudimentary. "Tell Fareeha I'm already on my five hundredth push-up."

Ana chuckled. "Shame the devil, and stop lying, Jack."

Fareeha was not in a particularly talkative mood, so Ana told her about Jack's push-ups. "Why is he always doing push-ups?" she asked, masking a giggle. But Ana could see her daughter's happiness evaporate when an explosion went off. It was in the distance, a good kilometer or so. Ana could hide injuries and manipulate light in a video call, but the sounds of combat were less easily hidden. "What's that?"

"It's just an explo—"

"Is it the omnics, Mama? Are they gonna get you?"

Ana could have lied, but Fareeha would have seen right through it.

Gabriel ran into the tent to let her know he was going to take care of it. "Heading out with a small team. Stay. We'll be back in no time. Probably some stragglers that lost their hive."

Fareeha was watching her mother's face intently. "Who was that?"

"It was Gabriel. We will be fine."

"How do you know?" Her daughter, too smart, always with the follow-up question nobody wanted to answer.

"They make themselves heard long before you can see them, the omnics." Fear is a great strategy. Fear brings doubt and doubt turns humans into easy targets. During Ana's first few nights of combat, she didn't sleep. The others fell asleep easily, but Ana needed to figure out how to quiet the fear. It was almost two weeks later when the answer came to her.

"Fareeha, did you hear another explosion?"

Her daughter just stared at the screen, hugging her legs to her chest.

"The time between explosions is important because it tells you how many omnics there are and how far away they are. At least, that's how I've figured out the attack patterns lately."

***IF HER DAUGHTER COULD NOT SLEEP,
NEITHER WOULD ANA. NOT UNTIL FAREEHA
COULD SLEEP IN A PEACEFUL WORLD.***

"Like thunder?"

Ana knew she would get it.

"Yes."

Fareeha's shoulders relaxed a little, but Ana could tell she was about to throw another question at her.

"Are the omnic's going to attack us here?"

Ana didn't remember how the call ended, but it was then that she decided Fareeha would never feel fear like that again.

Gabriel was surprised when he realized that Ana had left base to join the night raid he was leading. If her daughter could not sleep, neither would Ana. Not until Fareeha could sleep in a peaceful world.

The sun had long set when they neared their destination. They were far from the city (and the grave that had given them secrets) now, deep in the suburbs where the Null Sector invasion hadn't yet touched. The citizens here were still under a shelter-in-place order. *From one ambush to another.*

Ana scowled. "I don't like this. It's a residential area, too many civilians. Do we have a plan?" Night missions used to be her favorite, but she couldn't shake the feeling that Jack was keeping something from her. She didn't like entering an op without a full briefing, but Jack insisted that they were running out of time and couldn't afford the hours it would take to regroup, rest, and strategize.

"Same as always: find a good vantage point," Jack said. "I'll scout below, see if I can shake loose any Talon operatives. Stay on the comms and cover me when I go in."

"So we have half a plan. I suppose it will do," she whispered as she picked up her bag, slung it over her back, and started running.

A sleek, modern home lay below, nestled in a wooded hillside. *Who lives in this house?* It looked like a glass cube with warm light coming from a few lit rooms. Maybe it was the sniper in her, but there was no way Ana would ever live in a house like that. She'd learned long ago that windows are just invitations to an enemy.

She slipped into an abandoned property forty meters from the house, where she could stay concealed and get a better view, but also move in quick if Jack did something reckless.

"Glass house? I'm making it easy for you." Jack laughed on comms as she ran up the stairs.

Breathe. Focus. Null Sector invasion, a cemetery ambush, and a Talon hit in one day? Maybe nothing has changed from the old days.

Jack grunted. "Ana, are you in position? What do you see?"

A woman and a child, asleep in front of a holoscreen in the living room. The woman was holding the child, who was sleeping on her lap. Ana held her breath. *Focus. Exhale.* Faint yellow light coming from a bedroom and kitchen. The other two rooms she could see from her position were dark.

"Jack, there is a family in there."

"I'm almost in position. Where?"

"Living room."

Before she could turn on her thermal scope, she noticed Talon troopers stirring in the yard, so easy to spot with their flashy laser optics.

Never hesitate and never look away. Ana exhaled and continued sweeping her scope around the perimeter.

"Troopers at three o'clock, moving in. I've got you covered. Find a way inside . . . *fast.*"

She watched Jack move from his position, but a second set of troopers had already begun to intercept.

"There is another small group ahead of you—six troopers, ten clicks."

"I've got it," he said. The faint rattle of gunfire followed his words.

Searching frantically and counting how many rounds Jack was firing, Ana tried to find him near the kitchen window and caught a light floating around by his ear.

"Get down!"

Jack ducked and rolled behind a planter, and a Talon trooper fell a few meters behind where Jack was standing. *Useless armor.*

"You're fast, Ana."

"You got slow. I've got your six. Watch out for the ones ahead."

Two silhouettes scurried from the couch, one toward Jack's position—*No!*

Ana was loath to give away her position, but there wasn't a better alternative. She loaded her rifle with stun rounds and fired, dispatching half the unit. The remaining troopers were looking up toward where the gunfire had come from. *I'm not safe up here. Need to move.* Ana turned back to the woman in the kitchen, who had retrieved a handgun, her child now gone from the room. Ana fired another round this time, hitting a glass of wine on the counter. The woman looked up at Ana's position in shocked recognition. The blonde hair and earnest face, it was like stepping into the past.

"Mirembe," she breathed.

It can't be!

She was older, but that silhouette, the way she held her rifle firm, unflappable? It was her.

"It's Mirembe. Jack, Talon is targeting Mirembe."

All she could hear was Jack's breathing while she searched for a new vantage, but none were ideal. There were troopers coming out from the bushes and two breaking into a skylight from the roof. Mirembe headed from the kitchen and up the stairs. Ana rose and slung her rifle over her shoulder.

"There's about twenty of them down here," Ana heard Jack say while reloading. There was only one thing to do—even as it went against all their rules.

"Jack, I'm coming. You hold them off—I've found a way into the house. Meet me inside!"

Climbing up the bedroom balcony, all Ana kept thinking about was the child inside. The child who was possibly Mirembe's. A Talon trooper spotted Ana and was aiming for her; she saw the laser before she saw the trooper. With a rifle in one hand, she looked straight to where the laser was coming from, aimed, shot, heard a *thud*, and broke the bedroom window.

"So, this is how I find out you're alive?" Mirembe asked as soon as Ana swung into the bedroom. The furniture was sleek and modern but spaced strategically to make the place feel open. Ana counted all the places where Mirembe could, and probably was, storing weapons.

"Would you rather I stay dead?" Ana said, looking around for the little boy. "He's safe?" she mouthed.

Mirembe nodded and mouthed back, "Panic room." She flashed Ana a hand signal, held up three fingers, and then pointed to the door of her en suite bathroom. Ana lifted her rifle and looked at the closet to her left.

"I'm inside." Jack's voice crackled in Ana's ear; he was out of breath. "Clearing the ground floor." The sound of gunfire downstairs indicated that Jack had his hands full.

"Ready?" Ana whispered. At that, she hefted her rifle and Mirembe steadied herself as three troopers ran out of the bathroom toward her. *Two bodies, one mind.* Mirembe and Ana ducked in

***“KWEKU, I WANT YOU TO MEET THE PEOPLE
WHO CAME TO HELP US TONIGHT.”***

***THE LITTLE BOY LOOKED UP AT JACK AND THEN AT ANA;
HE THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN ASKED,
“ARE THESE YOUR FRIENDS, THE HEROES?”***

and out of cover as they cleared the bathroom and moved into the passage, where a swarm of troopers were rushing up the stairs.

Focus. Mirembe was one of the last people Ana saw before she “died” in Poland. *Three shots to the right of the chair in the hallway.* Her husband had been dying of cancer, and Ana often thought about how her old friend was doing, how *all* her people were doing. Had Kimiko’s middle daughter passed algebra? Did Singh’s mother still make that wonderful crusty bakarkhani?

Mirembe nudged Ana and shot a trooper who had gotten a little too close for comfort. *Breathe.* They cleared their way down the hall and were running down the stairs when they discovered Jack leaning against the banister.

Ana glanced from Jack to Mirembe, and the ringing in her ears stopped. They surveyed the destruction in silence. “Guess it’s time to move again,” Mirembe said with a shrug as she walked upstairs. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

She returned carrying a little boy bundled in a dinosaur blanket, wearing a holoivid visor. Mirembe looked calm as she approached them, but Ana could see the tension in her fingers as she clutched the boy to her body. In her hands was a fear Ana knew well. Mirembe put him down and took off the headset.

“Kweku, I want you to meet the people who came to help us tonight.”

The little boy looked up at Jack and then at Ana; he thought for a moment and then asked, “Are these your friends, the heroes?”

"Why do you have to go to Overwatch, Mama? Are you in trouble?" Fareeha was walking on her tiptoes along a wall that stood as high as her six-year-old frame, and Ana was walking next to her. Her daughter was always a multitasker—chewing and running, reading and singing, solving sums while practicing her pirouettes, and asking complicated questions while pretending to be a tight-rope walker. Ana wanted to tie Fareeha's hair up, but she didn't want to get in the way of the game.

No, they want me to work for them.

"Doing what?" Fareeha asked, reaching for her mother's hand when she wobbled.

Ana held her hand and didn't let go. "I'll be doing this"—she gave the little hand a squeeze—"making sure you're safe."

"From the omnic?"

If only it had been that simple. How long did it take to end a war? What unforeseen dangers would that bring with it? Even if they could end this war, the world could not be so easily fixed, and they would eventually be tasked with making the world safe. Peacekeepers, that was what Overwatch was going to become, though Ana didn't know it at the time.

"Yes, and that means that I have to go far away."

Fareeha nodded, and Ana knew a difficult question would follow.

"Is it dangerous?"

No one else had dared to ask the question aloud. Not even Sam. They all knew it was, but hearing her daughter say the words made Ana pause.

"Yes, but sometimes we have to face scary things."

Fareeha stopped and jumped off the wall.

"So . . . you're going to be a hero?"

The word hero surprised Ana; she was one of Egypt's top snipers and a seasoned soldier. It was all duty for her. She didn't feel heroic at all.

The authorities had been alerted and were on their way to clean up the scene and give Mirembe a security detail. Kweku had fallen asleep on his mother as Jack led them to a safer location. Ana had put her jacket over the boy, even though it was a nice night with an occasional warm breeze. As they settled into an abandoned supermarket a block away, Mirembe looked like she could use a good night's rest and a cup of tea.

"You know, I remember the day I got the recall," Mirembe said. "Kweku was trying to show me something in one of his games, and I missed it, watching Winston's message." She stared off into

I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN SOON?" MIREMBE WAS SEARCHING ANA FOR SOMETHING. HOPE, MAYBE, OR REASSURANCE. "YOU WON'T DIE ON US AGAIN, WILL YOU?"

"WHO, US?" JACK SAID WITH A GRIN. "COUPLE OF OLD SOLDIERS? NOT LIKELY."

the night sky, the scattered fires of Zurich in the distance. "Hard to believe Talon is still targeting us, amid all the Null Sector chaos too."

"Feels like nothing has changed," Jack said, bitter.

"Maybe," Mirembe said. "But I haven't changed all that much either. I still feel that call sometimes. Especially now, to make the world better for my boy, to make it safe." She adjusted her hold, cradling Kweku against her. "I would imagine that's why Talon targeted me. If I'm feeling it, there must be others thinking of answering Winston's message."

"Would you do it?" Ana asked.

She sighed. "Losing Kweku's dad has . . . complicated things. The oversight board has been checking in aggressively with all of us since the recall went out. Kimiko said the same. Vivian, too, although . . ."

Jack cleared his throat.

"I heard she was out in Toronto," Ana said, ignoring him.

Mirembe smiled at them. "Seeing Vivian fighting in the field again, it made me wonder if there might be a future for me to get back out there. If after all this, they might ease those restrictions." She sighed. "Who knows? Maybe we'll all be back in Gibraltar soon. I saw Fareeha in the footage of Busan, you know. You must be—"

Mirembe's phone chimed with an alert.

Ana snuck a glance at the screen. "They're close?"

"A few blocks away. Just enough time for you both to get clear. I'll see you again soon?" Mirembe was searching Ana for something. Hope, maybe, or reassurance. "You won't die on us again, will you?"

"Who, us?" Jack said with a grin. "Couple of old soldiers? Not likely."

Ana took Mirembe's hand and squeezed it gently, by way of goodbye. She didn't want to mention Jack's mission and his informant; it was all too complicated. Being the good intelligence operative she was, Mirembe filled in the pieces she thought were apparent: Jack and Ana must be back with Overwatch. That's how they knew Talon was coming, how they knew to intercept them and save her.

"Tell Winston I said hi, and if . . ." She trailed off, then found her resolve. "If he can get us all out from under the UN . . . I think he'd see a lot of familiar faces in Gibraltar."

Ana smiled. "We'll do a perimeter sweep on our way out."

Ana closed the door gently behind her, but as she followed Jack once again into the cover of darkness, she paused. She had known Jack long enough to sense he was still withholding some information from her. They walked in silence for a few minutes. Ana didn't want to push until they were out of earshot.

"Out with it, Jack. There's more, isn't there?"

Ana watched as he wrestled with whether he should share whatever he was hiding.

"Do me the courtesy of not treating me like a hired gun and a fool. We have been through too much together."

Jack pulled something out of his pocket and held out his hand: the data drive.

This is not good.

"My informant didn't just give me an address. This drive provides the user a secure back door into an active set of Talon project files. Mission briefings, schedules, and a list of names. I had no way of knowing whether the information was any good, so I asked for proof. Mirembe was the first name on the schedule . . . she was the proof."

Jack didn't look at Ana as he spoke.

"Talon has a nearly complete list of Overwatch agents' last known locations . . . from when they infiltrated Watchpoint: Gibraltar. They've been executing hits for two years now."

Ana felt a bitter taste in her mouth. She'd heard that rumor—had even mentioned it to Cassidy when she saw him in Cairo.

"This is going to lead me to more information. It means my informant knows what Talon is up to."

Ana wasn't sure if it was her voice that she heard next; it seemed to come from far away. "You must be joking."

***“JACK. WE LOST A LOT TO THE PAST,
BUT THESE PEOPLE . . . I MADE A VOW TO PROTECT THEM.”***

***SHE PASSED BACK THE DATA DRIVE AND EXHALED.
“WE ARE ALIVE, JACK. WE ARE NOT GHOSTS.”***

Jack stopped walking, turned to face her. “Ana?”

“Jack. These are *our people*. They’ve been dying, ambushed, assassinated, for years.” At the look on his face, she continued. “Who is the next name on the list? Winston has a new team. We can let him know; he can help.”

Jack was already shaking his head. “The minute you involve a larger operation, you’re going to arouse suspicion. My informant—”

“What would have happened tonight, had we not been there? They dispatched thirty-eight troopers. Mirembe would not have survived, her son—” Ana felt heat rise from her neck to her cheeks, stopped herself.

Jack said nothing.

“Give me the drive.” He didn’t argue as she downloaded the data. The names came up, and she felt a cold chill seeing the familiar faces, names crossed off in red.

“Jack. We lost a lot to the past, but these people . . . I made a vow to protect them.”

She passed back the data drive and exhaled. “We are alive, Jack. We are not *ghosts*. Why are you still fighting the past?”

The look in his eyes was far off, but he came back to her for a moment, to meet her gaze. When he spoke, it was barely more than a whisper. “You’ve always wanted to make the world a better place. For Sam, for Fareeha. You went the extra mile for them. For me,” he paused, lost in thought. “The past is all I’ve got.”

“Please be careful, Jack.” There was a lot unsaid in that plea, but Ana trusted that he knew what she was trying to say.

“Let me take care of the people I love, my way. I won’t rest until I find the people who made this list . . . and the ones who wanted the end of Overwatch.”

Ana felt a grief welling up inside her. Even when they had separated on tough missions, she always knew she would see him again. This time, she was less sure, and he knew it too. They were fighting different wars.

"Please, take care of yourself."

Jack only nodded.

Ana watched him disappear into the night.

"Goodbye, old friend."

Ana realized she was wrong when she'd told Fareeha she had saved the world for her. The truth was that the world would always need saving. That was the greatest illusion of *Overwatch*: that peace was attainable. In truth, there would always be those who threatened stability, who sought to take advantage of good people.

Fareeha had seen it even then, as a child. Now she was the hero others looked to—that *Ana* looked to. Devoid of hope as she believed herself to be there, standing in the dark alone, with fire on the horizon, Ana felt closer to her daughter in that moment. This was something they shared: a mission of peace, of saving the ones they loved. And if Ana couldn't do it from her side, she would do it from afar, wherever it called to her. She would find the people on that list and protect them. It was, at least, one wrong she could right in this dimming world.

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