

OVERWATCH 2



AS YOU ARE

A SHORT STORY BY JEN STACEY

OVERWATCH[®] 2

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AS YOU ARE

Seoul was hours behind them. Baptiste watched the familiar expanse of the ocean pass below.

Cassidy leaned forward, checked the screen one more time, and stood.

“Fareeha, you got this?”

Pharah looked up from another monitor, barely swiveling in her chair. “Yeah, we’re good. You gonna get some rest?”

“Thought I might give it a shot.”

“Just keep your door closed. Team might think we’re under fire with the way you snore.”

“With you at the wheel, I’ll be lucky to sleep at all.” Cassidy was bad at hiding his smile.

“Maybe I should try out those stunt maneuvers Lena used to show me . . .”

Cassidy looked ready for another round, but Pharah waved him off. “Go sleep. We’ll let you know if anything comes up. Right, Baptiste?”

Baptiste sat up at the mention of his name. These past few hours, as Pharah and Cassidy talked, Baptiste had mostly kept to himself. Sitting awkwardly beside their conversation, he had observed the closeness between them but never joined in. To suddenly be included caught him off guard.

“Yes, of course.” When his own words escaped him, Baptiste parroted Pharah’s: “We’ll let you know.”

Cassidy nodded and walked off, tossing his cloak behind him as he went. Pharah rolled her eyes at that; Baptiste appreciated his attempt at a dramatic exit.

A few moments of silence passed between them. Baptiste could see the corner of Pharah’s seat belt from where he sat. She must have been the only person on the dropship who was still strapped in. It occurred to him that she might be following some sort of protocol—one he should hold himself to—but he thought better of asking about it.

Baptiste had hoped that accepting Cassidy's offer in Romania would relieve some of the tension he'd felt in running from Talon for all these years. To his surprise, the edge remained. He was going to be a part of Overwatch—among heroes. But he wasn't like Pharah, who had always walked the same line, dedicated her life to protecting people. Baptiste knew that no matter how hard he tried to atone for what he had done, there would be those who'd judge him harshly for his time as a mercenary with Talon. It left him with a sinking feeling.

Pharah's curious gaze pulled him from his thoughts. She had turned her chair slightly toward his, as if prompting him to say something. Was he worrying over nothing? She seemed nice, anyway. He grasped for an observation to offer. "So. You and Cassidy?" he asked, trying to strike something up.

She looked confused, then concerned. "What do you mean by that?"

Baptiste reached one arm behind his head, rubbing at an old sore spot. "You know . . . you seem close. I thought you two might be—"

"Together?"

Her laughter caught him by surprise. It was clear and confident and made him feel a little more at ease. Maybe the same was true for her too; her entire body language seemed to change, and the seat belt strained against her as she doubled over. She had a nice smile. When she pushed her hair away from her face, her eyes were lit up.

"Ooh. Sorry, that, uh . . . that was a good one," Pharah said. She unbuckled her seat belt and let it slip behind her shoulder. "No, definitely not. Cole and I have known each other for a long time. He's like a brother to me. And besides, I'm a lesbian."

Pharah spoke with the ease of someone who had spent her whole life knowing who she was. She'd perfected the presentation of the words—offered them to Baptiste like a gift she knew he would accept. When he looked at her again, it was as if some piece of the puzzle had been filled in. Before he could respond, Pharah added, "I would have thought it was obvious. I'm not passing, am I?"

"No, not at all," Baptiste said quickly. "I just didn't want to assume. You two seem to know a lot about each other. I hope I didn't make you uncomfortable."

She raised an eyebrow, as if the thought of him making her uncomfortable was preposterous. "No, I'm fine. Just sorry to disappoint you."

"Oh, no . . . You seem wonderful, I just . . ." Baptiste trailed off, not sure how to proceed.

"Oh, you were asking about Cole?"

Baptiste met her gaze. There was a moment of recognition, and he chuckled.

"Well, I must admit he has a certain charm. I like a person who's sure of themself."

Pharah flashed a smile. She wove together her fingers and pulled her hands behind her head, leaning back in the pilot's chair. "Well, that's Cole. He wasn't always that way, but coming back to Overwatch, rounding up new recruits . . . He's at the end of a very long road. I'm actually kind of proud of him."

Baptiste nodded. "I get that sense. When he offered me a place in Overwatch, he told me they took a chance on him too."

He remembered the words clearly: *When no one thought there was any good in me*. Those were the words that had made Baptiste reach out to accept Cassidy's hand. He looked back out at the ocean—suddenly dark and endless. The sight of it flooded him with memories of Talon. He remembered the feeling of ash in his throat in Monte Cristi and the sound of Mauga's gunfire drowning out the waves in Port-de-Paix. The two boats, taken out of desperation, and the long nights on the water as he fled. Baptiste knew what he had done, all the mistakes he'd made. He had no illusions that people would be forgiving of that . . . but Cassidy was.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Pharah asked the question with genuine care, the same tone with which she'd spoken to Cassidy.

"No. Not today, anyway." Baptiste let out a long exhale. He hadn't realized how high the pain, the memory of those moments, had risen in his chest—that he had forgotten to breathe.

"Take whatever time you need. I'm just glad Cole convinced you to join us."

"As am I. He certainly knows how to make an impression."

"Yeah, that sounds like Cole." Pharah shook her head. "It's funny. I haven't seen him in years, but he walks back into my life and suddenly everything's as it used to be. And now, headed back to Gibraltar . . . Hard to believe."

Baptiste recalled the Overwatch personnel files he'd taken from Talon. Fareeha Amari, daughter of Ana Amari. Baptiste had read her mother's profile and seen mentions of Fareeha as well. Never an Overwatch agent herself, but always considered an asset. Working in Cairo as part of Helix. "You've been around Overwatch your whole life. You must know everyone already. Anyone you're looking forward to seeing again?"

Pharah seemed preoccupied. "Oh, I don't know everyone—Zarya and Hana are new to me. I'm sure there are others too."

"Do you know Dr. Ziegler? Or . . . Mercy, I guess, was her call sign."

"Angela? Yeah. About as long as I've known Cole," she said, looking a bit wistful again.

There was something about the way she said her name—not Dr. Ziegler, but *Angela*—that touched him. "I worked with her once, in Venezuela," he began. "I was tracking her when I ran into Cole. Last known location was Cairo, but by the time I got there, well . . . I'm sure you saw the news about Paris."

"I did." A slight smile crossed her face. "But I spent some time with her in Cairo too."

Baptiste raised an eyebrow. "Does she know you're headed to Gibraltar?"

"No. But she didn't tell me she was joining the team in Paris either, so I guess we're both full of surprises." Pharah looked down, and Baptiste struggled to read her. Was that disappointment?

"Were you hoping for more?"

Pharah lifted her gaze to meet his. "What do you mean?"

"Were you expecting her to say goodbye?"

Pharah looked away again, deep in thought. "No," she said eventually. "I guess not."

She paused again, and Baptiste resisted the urge to say something. His impulse was to make her feel better, but he could tell she was still thinking.

"Angela's feelings about Overwatch are . . . complicated. Knowing her, she probably wasn't sure she'd answer the recall until she was already there."

"Oh. Well, uh . . ." Baptiste sensed there was more going on, but he didn't want to press her. He scrambled for a way to change the subject. "I'm sure you'll catch up once we get to Gibraltar." He leaned over, glancing at the screen in front of her. "Not long now, Pharah."

She looked up at him suddenly, a bit of a frown on her face. Baptiste wondered if he had said something wrong, but then her expression softened. She stood up, put her hand on his shoulder, and smiled.

"Hey." Her hand was steady, and Baptiste felt a wave of calm pass over him. "Call me Fareeha, all right?"

He met her gaze and mirrored her smile. "All right. Thank you."

She pulled her hand away and shrugged. "Don't thank me—I was about to ask you to take over."

Baptiste's concern must have been visible because Fareeha quickly clarified.

"Don't worry, I'll send Hana up here to keep you company. She's probably the better pilot anyway. I just need to lie down for a bit."

"Of course," Baptiste said with a sharp nod, as if accepting an order. "Go get some rest."

Fareeha moved to leave the cockpit, then paused in the entryway. "Can you do me a favor?"

Baptiste straightened, ready for her instruction.

"I know it isn't easy, but . . . try to relax, okay?" She stepped down from the cockpit, then turned completely to meet his gaze. "We're in this together."

Baptiste thought of how long he had been alone. He thought of all the ways he was not like her, and all the ways he had been a disappointment to the ones he had fought to protect. For all the good that Fareeha had done with Helix, Baptiste had strayed far from that path while working for Talon. Now with Overwatch, standing by Fareeha's side . . . he still didn't know if he deserved redemption. But why fight this?

He wasn't ready to tell her all he'd done. Even if, looking at her now, he felt sure she wouldn't care.

So Baptiste searched instead for all the ways they were the same, everything that had brought them together, on the right side of this conflict. He saw her confidence and was surprised to find it brought back a little of his own. Before he knew it, he was responding with a slow nod. "Yeah. Together."

Fareeha smiled, tossed back an imaginary cloak with a smirk, and walked to the rear of the ship. For the first time since Busan, Baptiste was alone. There was a clear view of the ocean outside the window. Isolated from the wind, relaxed in his chair, it suddenly reminded him more of sunlit afternoons on the beach, drinking Lefort's ji papay, than all the times he'd run away.

Baptiste closed his eyes. The steady hum of the monitors turned into the buzz of summer air. He let his feet dangle off the memory of a dock, swaying as if carried by the tide. The dropship continued its flight, and Baptiste—comforted by the knowledge that someone else would soon join him at the helm—let his thoughts drift toward the future.

