

OVERWATCH®

VALKYRIE



A SHORT STORY BY MICHAEL CHU

VALKYRIE



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VALKYRIE

I wish I could remember the last thing my mother said to me before she walked out the door with my father on that morning all those years ago. It was cold and gray, and a stifling haze hung over everything, including my memories. That was the last time I saw my parents alive. They had been volunteering at a local hospital as we tried to cope with the aftermath of the devastating attacks on Switzerland when omnic forces swept through Europe during the Crisis. My parents were killed in an air strike there. We never allow ourselves to believe that the people we love will disappear, and we are rarely prepared to say goodbye when the time comes. In the days after, people assured me that the hurt would lessen with time, but even today, that pain comes back at the slightest reminder.

Like on days like these, while I have been working at the aid camp on the outskirts of Cairo. Every day the scope of the problems we face seems insurmountable. I'd been living in Egypt for the better part of the last two years, but it was just one of many homes since my tenure as the head of medical research for Overwatch ended. The damage to my professional reputation was such that I needed a change. I moved between Poland, South Korea, and Venezuela, where people only knew me as Dr. Angela Ziegler. Not Mercy. The projects that I had devoted almost a decade of my life to had either been scrapped, sold, or reassigned out of my control. My few friends in Overwatch had scattered.

I know that Lena has continued to help where she can, despite everything that's happened, and the risks. Reinhardt is traveling across Europe, dragging



poor Brigitte with him, while Sojourn keeps a low profile in Canada. And of course, Genji is always busy. The last I heard from him, he was heading home to find his brother. Torbjörn is probably the wisest of us all, returning to Gothenburg and Ingrid in retirement. But everywhere I went, I felt the echoes of Overwatch, and my own guilt over the problems we had left behind when it had all fallen apart. Which is what led me to Egypt. Overwatch was responsible for much of the country's suffering, and I needed to help repair it. But I had not received a warm welcome. Go home, they'd tell me. *You've done enough damage.*

The truth is that in their time of need, people still expect us to come to their aid, even as they curse us.

I didn't become a doctor to be thanked.

Jack Morrison looked good for a dead man. Death had not softened his square jaw nor hardened the guileless innocence that gave him the look of a Norman Rockwell painting come to life, despite the scars slashed across his face. I sensed that his greatest scars were in his head, despite the recent festering wound on his back. It was the latter of these injuries that had brought him to my mostly unfurnished apartment just off the Khan el-Khalili souk. When I pushed him for details, Morrison was typically taciturn. He'd always been a textbook example of a difficult patient.

"Stubbornness is the only thing with a chance of killing him," came the voice from the kitchen.

The voice's owner, Ana Amari, was rummaging through my kitchen cupboards for tea, making herself right at home. It seemed that Morrison hadn't been alone in miraculous recoveries: we'd all believed that Ana had been killed by a sniper's bullet in Poland, and yet here she was. She looked older and thinner, showing a slight frailty that for the first time in as long as I had known her made me think of her as mortal. She still possessed the statuesque posture of a military officer. That hardness had been tempered, and she displayed a new softness I didn't remember from before.

"I can try to run some tests, but I don't have the equipment I need here," I said, applying an anesthetic sealing spray to Jack's back. "This is an aid camp, not a genetics lab."

"Time isn't something we have a lot of," Morrison said dryly. "Just give me a few medkits. I'll make do."

"I'll see what I can scrounge up for you." I thought about the trio of biotic grenades he carried and the cartridge darts tucked into Amari's bandolier. Items stolen from Overwatch, or in the case of the darts, an adaptation of my technology that had been made without my approval. Just another example of how my time with Overwatch hadn't gone the way I had wanted. My irritation surprised me: I should have been happy to know that Jack and Ana were alive. But they were both

a very physical manifestation of something that I was trying to escape, and I could feel walls spring up between me and whatever they had brought with them.

I dug through the boxes of supplies that made up most of my living room furniture, finding mostly rolls of bandages, sealed bottles of antibiotics, and miscellaneous medical equipment. They wouldn't do much for Morrison's current situation. Overwatch's footprint had been so massive that even now, years after its disbandment, its echoes could be felt everywhere, from Egypt's crumbling infrastructure to the mundane familiarity of a light blue package of bandages. If I was being honest, escaping Overwatch had been at best an... optimistic goal.

Jack started picking through some of the supply crates, making a small pile next to him. "What are you doing here, Angela?"

"Trying to find some medkits," I shot back. "Like you asked."

"That's not what I mean." He was turning over a particularly expensive medical scanner in his hands quizzically. "What are you doing here in Cairo?"

"That's delicate." I glowered and snatched it from him, tossing it back into the box with a little thud that made me wince. I let out the breath I didn't realize I'd been holding. "There are people here who need help."

What was I doing here? I told myself it was to help. That there were people here who needed me. Egypt had too many problems and not enough people who were willing to help, with vultures preying at the edges of society. It wasn't as glamorous or exciting as my previous postings, but it was uncontroversial, and it was helpful.

"Surely a hospital or a lab at a university would be better suited to you," Ana said, having apparently found some tea leaves to her liking.

"As it turns out, being a prominent ex-Overwatch official isn't the sort of experience on your CV that people are looking for," I snapped. I took a deep breath. It was as though the years had never passed, and we were right in the heated arguments of the last time we'd all been together. "I'd prefer to keep a low profile. More than I can say about the two of you."

Jack scowled. “At least my enemies know that I’m coming for them.”

“Your enemies?” I asked incredulously. “The United States’ government, Germany’s largest bank, Helix Security. Did I miss anything?”

“LumériCo.” Jack had the temerity to sound proud of himself.

“And Mexico’s largest energy company. Which, incidentally, is run by their incredibly popular former president and universally loved *war hero*.” I sighed.

“Those enemies won’t do much for your reputation.”

“Collateral damage is an unavoidable part of war,” Morrison said matter-of-factly.

“You were always good at rationalizing things,” I said. I understood that in his former position, flexibility of thought was crucial to survival, but it seemed that trait had survived into his new life.

“I’m getting closer to finding the ones responsible. I’m getting closer to the truth.” The fervor that crept into his voice sounded like obsession.

“The truth,” I said flatly.

“The truth about what happened to Overwatch. About Talon. Switzerland. About everything. That’s my new mission.”

“It doesn’t seem that new. Other than the masks.”

“What would you have me do, then?” Jack snapped. “Fly to Gibraltar and join up with Winston? You think the same people who brought down Overwatch won’t take him down, too?”

Winston saw that the problems in the world were growing, and he saw Overwatch as the solution for everything. I don’t think Winston ever questioned why things had fallen apart. He loved it and needed it too much to see how it had damaged and changed us all. Being in that room with Jack and Ana only reinforced to me that we were all still broken. Doing the same thing as we had done in the past would only lead to another disaster. The world didn’t need that. Winston’s heart was in the right place, but that didn’t mean he was right.

“Let Winston play hero,” Jack said dismissively. “I’ll do what needs to be done. Reyes, Ogundimu, Maximilien, Vialli, Sombra, O’Deorain, and the rest of them.

They'll be dealt with."

Reyes. Just the mention of his name caused a shiver. I thought I'd buried all three of them: Morrison, Amari, Reyes, but their ghosts lived on.

"We were all responsible, Jack. Overwatch is gone. Your personal revenge won't change anything."

"Someone has to make them pay. I will get justice."

"Justice," I scoffed. I could see that the pain consumed him like an affliction. "If you keep this up, you will have proven to the world that Overwatch really did become the thing they feared. I wish you could see that."



When I first stepped into Morrison's corner office all those years ago, things were very different. I was bright-eyed and excited, fresh from my post as the head of surgery of the university hospital in Zurich. Initially, I thought I had walked into a museum exhibit. Scattered around the walls were photos of Morrison with various heads of state, pictures of the strike team, and memorabilia from his military career. There was a shelf of books—multi-volume sets of historical texts, including an ancient leather-bound edition of Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* and biographies of prominent generals, all neatly arranged against the side of the wall. There was a chess board on the sideboard, frozen mid-game, with a dog-eared copy of Bobby Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* set beside it. And sitting behind his large desk was Jack Morrison himself.

"I saw your paper. Excellent. It gave me an idea," he said. He was referring to my recently published paper on nanobiotic healing. I believed that it had the potential to completely revolutionize the way that medical care was given, not just in the examination room, but also throughout the entire structure of the medical profession. It was hard to be patient, and I'd believed that Overwatch offered me the opportunity to rapidly get my ideas out there in a way no other organization could.



“You read my paper?” I asked incredulously at the thought of him poring over an extremely technical research paper that most graduate students would need time to digest.

“I think I got the gist of it,” Jack chuckled. I spared him the embarrassment of grilling him further, after all, he was offering me the keys to the kingdom.

“I do try to keep the abstracts very readable,” I smiled.

“Angela, I want you to join Overwatch as our head of medical research. With our resources, we can help you develop your nanobiotic technology. Imagine how everyone’s lives will change. You could improve the life expectancy of every person around the world.”

I had imagined. With some advances in artificial intelligence, and with a serious manufacturing behind it, biotic technology could be spread around the world. The barrier to medical care would lower, and perhaps even the amount of time people needed to spend. It would open new paradigms in care. And Morrison was promising to do this for me.

“Money, resources, personnel. I know that you’re the kind of person who wants to do things your own way, and you could. You call the shots. You make the rules.”

“I could use a new postdoc, commander,” I said. “Have any lying around?”

“You’d be surprised what I can rustle up,” Morrison said as he looked out

the window at the courtyard below. An orderly grid of blue-armored peacekeepers made their way across the lawn. “I have more than enough soldiers. What I need are thinkers. Dreamers. People who want to make the world a better place. You could be on the cusp of a breakthrough that could change the lives of every living person on the planet. I want to make that a reality and take away all the roadblocks so you can focus on revolutionizing your field.”

It was an amazing offer; it sounded perfect. But I heard the voice in my head whenever something sounded too good to be true. “*All tär inte guld som glimmar,*” was one of Torbjörn’s favorite phrases. *All that glitters is not gold.* I questioned everything. It was a habit I had always had, even when I was a child, but my education and perhaps my proximity to Torbjörn had sharpened it. It was mostly to my benefit—it helped me to do the science—but it did give people a certain prickly opinion of me. “It’s a generous offer. But I do have some reservations,” I said.

“Try me.”

“I want to focus on the civilian and peacetime applications of my work. I don’t want to create ways for Overwatch commanders to send people into danger.”

Morrison steepled his fingers. “The Omnic Crisis has been over for over ten years. Overwatch was built to win the war, but they’ve given me a new mission now: to make the world a better place. We’ve invested in research in biology, chemistry, infrastructure, climatology—every scientific endeavor that can better peoples’ lives. I want you to be a part of this. You could be responsible for one of the biggest shifts in human life since the creation of the omnics.”

When I looked at Morrison, with his military regulation haircut and his medals and commendations, all I could see was a soldier. Even his posture said so. It was like I could see the threads that had been strung through him that pulled him to attention: threads spun by a lifetime of military molding. A soldier with the gift of believing in his orders. If I had the chance to make a difference in the world, a real difference, didn’t I owe it to do anything in my power to make it a reality? But I had known Morrison for a long time, and he had done much good, and he had good

people working for him who looked up to him and respected him. I had no doubt he believed what he said. And more than that, I wanted to believe what he said.

“I know what your values are, Angela. I’ve known you for years. It would be a privilege for you to help us with our mission,” Morrison said. “No more grant applications, no more haggling for new equipment. Whatever you want. You have my word.”

“Postdocs?” I smiled.

“As many as you need.”



I had fallen asleep at my desk when I was jolted awake by an explosion. It felt as though the ground itself sighed, and then several smaller impacts caused the windows to rattle in their frames. The lights flickered. I could feel the bass drum rumble of thunder in the distance. But as anyone who has lived through war knows, there is weather, and there is war. I quickly dressed: I had lived in Cairo long enough to know what came after the sounds of thunder. We’d have to get the camp ready to receive patients.

Not long after, Morrison and Ana appeared in the doorway like two wraiths in the darkness. Their familiar faces had been replaced with their masks, their only expressions an illuminated line of red and one diamond of blue.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“There’s been an attack on the Anubis facility. We need to go. Now.” Morrison’s voice was distorted through some mechanism in his mask that covered his mouth. It manipulated his voice, taking out whatever humanity was left.

“Helix will get the situation under control. You’ll only get caught in the crossfire.”

“It’s Talon,” Jack said. I knew that tone. There was no convincing him otherwise.

“Angela, there are people out there caught in the crossfire. They need help that Helix cannot give them,” Ana interrupted my protests. “Are you going to come with us?”

I knew better than anyone the state of emergency care in Cairo. The last attacks had left a swath of destruction, with large parts of the city still trying to recover. I still had people in my camps who had been displaced or injured in the last breakout. Helix was a peacekeeping force, but in my mind, they were little better than mercenaries. They were paid to protect the interests of the government, not its people: an unsurprising replacement for Overwatch. I should stay at the camp. I should get everything in order and prepare to triage an influx of people. I knew what I should do.

“I’m coming.”

I kept the Valkyrie suit in one large packing crate. The biometric locks snapped open with a satisfying *thunk*. I laid the pieces out: the breastplate, the communications and scanning visor, the biotic charges, the propulsion system, and the staff. Each in their specific, molded-foam padding for transit. Each unused for some time. As I ran my hand over the white breastplate to lift it from the foam padding, I could still feel the signs of damage from my time in the field: scratches, dents, and reminders of how dangerous it had all been. I affixed the clasps, and as the power turned on, it molded to me. The hand grips on the staff had been indented into the shape of my hands where I had clutched it in desperate situations. The headset and processing unit was the lifeblood of it all, the nervous system that provided me with the information I needed.

It all still fit, but I’d forgotten just how heavy the suit was.



There are things you cannot understand until you fly. Flight had opened new perspectives for all of us on the strike team. Lena had been a pilot, and Winston

had even traveled from the moon in his spaceship. I remembered how astronauts would say that their entire view of life changed when they saw the earth from space. But none of them had flown like I had.

Below me, Cairo unfurled to the horizon, a green city fading to brown after a decade of loss. New agritech installations along the Nile were starting to bring the river back to life. Along its banks were solar panels and massive battery farms that stored more energy than the country knew how to use. Civilization had flourished from the waters of the river, and even I did not believe that its current situation could be permanent. Standing sentinel above the rest of the city were the pyramids that would last until time immemorial.

In the shadow of those pyramids, a battlefield.

The three of us made our way to the site of the attack. Helix Security units were in a pitched battle with the Talon troops. Those black and red dropships that loomed like birds of prey. Above, I could see the jets of their armored Raptora units being deployed. I didn't worry about them: their medics would look after them. But I winced at the destruction caused by the rockets being fired into the melee. Below me, the two old soldiers shadowed their way through the dimmed streets. Even in his red and blue jacket, Morrison was hard to detect, which surprised me. It was strange to see him like that. He never relied on subterfuge before. If it weren't for the scanning equipment of the Valkyrie, he'd surely be invisible to me.

But then battles are always a blur to me. The offensive attacks, the positioning, the tactics. I tune them to a low buzz in my mind. I leave that to the others. I have to focus on the task at hand: saving lives. Civilians were trying to evacuate the area. My heads-up display was dotted with the life signatures of people in the area—a loud, insistent mess that I had to make sense of. I isolated Jack and Ana as they exchanged fire with the hulking Talon soldiers.

I never wanted to be Mercy. It was something that was thrust upon me. The Valkyrie suit was to prove a point: that my technology worked. But I knew how other people saw me. How my teammates wanted me shoulder to shoulder with them.

And so, little by little, Dr. Ziegler withdrew, and Mercy took her place.

Morrison dove in with abandon while Ana watched from above. Talon soldiers with their red and white masks were everywhere, pinning down the Helix soldiers in blue. Suddenly, a series of explosions tore through the night, and my eyes fixated on a dark mass, darker than night. A black figure emerged from it. A hailstorm of gunfire exploded from its center, and the two old soldiers raced for cover, out of my sight.

“What is that?” I breathed.

“Gabriel.”

I winced from the intensity of Jack’s voice in my ear. A dozen questions tried to shoulder their way into my attention, but right now, I had to push them away.

“That’s not our concern, Morrison. We have people to save.”

“That’s your job, doctor. This is ours.” And our link went silent.

I watched as the two of them were swallowed by the choking haze, with Morrison dashing out in front, and Ana warily covering his back.

He was right, though. I couldn’t worry about them while I had a job to do.

Talon had no concern for innocent life, or civilians, or property damage, and the Helix Security forces, little more than mercenaries, weren’t much better. Rockets sailed through the air, and buildings were destroyed. People fled the area in terror.

My heads-up display was insistent: there were life signs somewhere below me, but it was almost impossible to see. Acting on faith, I dove down through the billowing plumes of smoke. It tore at my eyes, but slowly the contact lenses filtered it out. A flash of pale color drew my gaze through the layers of haze and dust. Engaging the Valkyrie’s maneuvering system, I flew straight for it, trying to keep the point fixed in my mind as I plunged through the miasma. As I plummeted down and the smoke slowly thinned, I caught it again: the shape of a young girl with a white tee-shirt and dark brown hair. She reminded me of so many children from the past. Battles were the same everywhere: soldiers fought for survival, victory, and glory;

but innocent people were trampled beneath their booted feet.

The girl waved her arms as she saw me, desperately trying to get my attention. I made a rapid descent through the smoke and touched down amid the rubble of the building's top floors.

"Don't move," I said. "Is your leg stuck?"

She nodded. She was resigned, exhausted, and looked up at me desperately for help.

Such scenes had scarred my childhood. Families were torn apart as people tried to escape the devastation. I remembered city blocks being destroyed in surprise nighttime raids. We couldn't see the moon or the stars, just the sinister blinking red lights and dark shapes that somehow seemed darker than the night sky overhead and were quickly blotted out by bright white explosions. There was no time to escape to the shelters. You had to find cover wherever you could, if you could. The sound was deafening. The smoke was suffocating. The fear was overwhelming.

"I'm going to clear this out of the way, okay? Just give me a moment." I tried my best to reassure her.

She nodded again, her eyes as big as saucers.

I started pulling the large bricks of concrete that the girl was half-buried beneath. It would have been nice to have some help. Winston, or Reinhardt, or Sojourn, or Genji would have been perfect for the task. I remembered Venezuela, where we'd dug people out from the aftermath of the massive storm. There was no way I could have dealt with the rocks back then if not for the power of the Valkyrie suit.

"You're—" she started, recognition in her eyes. Her posture had shifted, and I put a hand on her shoulder to keep her from moving too quickly. I didn't want any excitement and adrenaline to make the situation worse.

"Going to help you," I finished for her. I grunted as I pulled back another slab of wall and flung it to the side. "I wish Reinhardt was here."



“Reinhardt?”

“My friend,” I said. “Big, strong. Never stops talking.” My wings flared out as I pulled back hard on the last, heavy slab of concrete. I helped the girl to her feet. Her face was marked with soot and ash with faint lines of tears running in a river through.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Hanan,” she said timidly.

“Let me do a scan,” I told her. She looked uncertain but remained still as a statue as the light blue wave washed over her from the Valkyrie’s handheld scanning module. Nothing broken. It seemed like she would be okay. There were some cuts and abrasions, and she was bleeding from a few of those, but that should be easy enough to deal with.

I picked up the staff and knelt at her side. As I activated the biotic stream, a faint golden glow emanated from the staff and then surrounded Hanan, slowly radiating like sunshine. Small motes of light, like dust glittering in the air freckled as it landed on Hanan’s skin. Her eyes brightened and then she flinched like she had just held her arm too close to a fire. “It might be a little hot,” I said. “Let me know if it’s too much.”

She nodded and watched on with amazement as her wounds knit closed. “It’s like magic,” she said.

“Science,” I said with a smile. “Much better than magic. Have you ever heard

of nanobiotics?”

“Is it like... little machines?” She made a little motion like there was a cloud of flies.

“Not quite,” I said, feeling the momentary pang of disappointment that a technology that could have revolutionized healing around the world was basically unknown to most. But there were more important things. “I’ll explain it to you. But first we need to go to safety.”

“We can’t leave yet!” Hanan said. “My brother is stuck inside. We have to help him! Everyone else left. They wouldn’t wait.” Gunfire still rang out in the streets. The heavy sounds of mortars boomed, punctuated by the grating thrum of automatic weapons. The situation was still extremely dangerous, and I didn’t want Hanan exposed for any longer than she had to be. “Please.”

There was no way I could leave him behind. I tried to find him using the Valkyrie’s scanner, but the electrical interference made it hard to make radar or visual identifications. “I can’t leave you here, so you’ll have to come with me.”

Hanan nodded. The building we were in had been hit multiple times. I shouldered my way through the entry, and we set off down the stairs. As we descended into the building, smoke poured up. I tore a bit of fabric from my skirt and made her a makeshift mask. Alarms were ringing and shouting, and flashing lights still illuminated the area. As we exited the stairwell into the hallway, the ground creaked. We made our way through the hallways, and as I got closer, I was able to detect another life sign. A heavy door separated us from it. I put my shoulder into the door and wedged it open.

Inside the room was an older boy in a red shirt and yellow scarf, slumped on the ground. His arm was bent unnaturally, and I suspected it was fractured. He seemed to be fading in and out of consciousness.

“Is that you, Hanan?” he asked, but his eyes were unfocused, looking somewhere up at the ceiling as he heard our approaching footsteps.

Hanan dashed in front of me and ran to his side, choked back a sob, fearing

the worst. “Yes, it’s me. I brought help.”

“That’s right,” I said, kneeling at his side. “We’re going to get you out of here.” I was worried he was going into shock. I couldn’t move him until he had been patched up a little. A little stream of biotic healing would hold him for the moment, like Hanan, he was briefly surrounded by the golden glow of the stream, but slowly it almost seemed as though his entire chest was glowing with radiance. Little by little, his breathing was easier. I turned back to Hanan.

“Alright. We are going to get your brother out of here,” I said.

Hanan nodded. Her brother was looking at me, his eyes wild with terror.

“How are you feeling?” I asked as I scanned him using the Valkyrie’s sonar imaging. The trick was to keep him talking, keep him focused on anything other than his condition.

“It hurts,” he coughed. As his eyes met mine, they opened wide with surprise of realization. “You’re Mercy. I’ve seen you in pictures.”

“That’s right.” It didn’t bother me. I knew that in times like this, Mercy was useful. Now, it would give Hanan’s brother something to hold onto. “So, don’t worry, I’ll get you out of here.”

“My parents don’t like you very much.” He sounded embarrassed.

“Maybe when you see them later, you’ll put in a good word for me?” I smiled.

His facial expression changed, like he was afraid he’d said something to offend me. “Of course!” he said earnestly, nodding, but even that small bit of effort seemed to cause him a great deal of pain.

“Okay, here’s the situation. We need to get you out of this building. Do you think you can walk?”

“I think, maybe?”

“Okay, that’s not a problem,” I said. “We’re going to take it nice and slow. Hanan and I are going to be right here with you.”

I heard the telltale sound of an incoming mortar. “GET DOWN!” I shouted and I grabbed her and dove back to Hanan’s brother, covering them both as best I

could with my body and the outstretched wings of the Valkyrie. The wall exploded outwards, sending concrete and glass flying across the room to crash against my armor.

Debris rained from the ceiling and hammered down against me. I staggered down, all the protective padding and shielding of the suit bearing the brunt of the impact. When it finally stopped, I stood up, silently reminding myself to thank Torbjörn for all the work he'd done in crafting the suit's armor. "Is everyone alright?"

There was no response, so I had to look for myself. The display on the suit was down. As I stood, I heard a cracking sound as one of the wings creaked. Broken. I felt battered, and the physical exertion was starting to take its toll on me. Hanan looked up at me, curled up defensively, her eyes wide and terrified. Her brother wasn't moving—the shock of the blast had been too much, and he'd passed out. It was hard to see outside. It was as though we'd been entombed deep underground. The systems on the Valkyrie were offline. It seemed, for all intents and purposes, we were trapped.

A cold sweat came over me. It was almost as though the walls were closing in on us. Is this what my parents felt in their last moments when the hospital was bombed? Were they together? Did they even know what was happening to them? I hoped for their sake, they didn't. We couldn't wait this one out, the building was groaning as though it was in its death throes. The fires might burn through as well. Asphyxiation. Crushing. Another explosion.

There was only one way out for us.

I strapped the staff to my back and lifted the boy into my arms, moving slowly towards the exit. "Follow me, Hanan. And be careful." I navigated through one hallway, then the next, shouldering over the gaps in the floor. Finally, we neared the main entrance, but another series of explosions wracked the building, and I could hear the strain in the walls. I called out to Hanan, "Run! Run for the door!"

The building was going to come down.

I carried Hanan's brothers in my arms, and I felt guilty that I didn't know his

name. I ran across the uneven ground, jumping across the gaps, but I wasn't going to make it. The wall was collapsing; the building was collapsing; the world around me was collapsing. My mind raced for possible escapes and found none. Sometimes it made things simple when there were no complicated solutions to choose from. All I could do was try to save the ones in my care.

I threw myself over Hanan's brother as the entire building came down around me, crashing into my back and pushing me to the floor.

The world went dark.

When it brightened again, I heard a voice calling out to me. A large weight seemed to lift. Beneath me, Hanan's brother... What was his name? The Valkyrie suit insisted that he was fine. As fine as could be.

"Hanan," I called out in a daze but heard no response.

Coughing, I rose slowly, as debris crumbled off my back. A strong arm gripped mine. It was Morrison. With the mask off, he seemed human again. Jack's face was covered in dust and soot, except for a patch where his mask had been, and his jacket seemed to have a few more holes in it.

"Angela. We need to get out of here," he said.

"The girl," I coughed out.

"I have her," came Ana's voice from the haze. Ana was scanning the area, prowling like a stalking cat. "It's time to go."



The rest of the day passed in a blur of activity, admitting a river of patients who had been caught in the crossfire, including police, Helix agents, and first responders. There weren't enough doctors, beds, or time to devote to them all. By the end of the day I was exhausted, numb, and surviving solely on coffee.

By the time I finally took a break, the sun had sunk past the horizon and a nighttime chill had settled over the camp. Jack and Ana came in to see me. The

masks were gone, but their memory was still imprinted on my mind.

“Where will you go next?” I asked them. They each had a large bag with them.

“Gabriel was here. We have to follow him,” Jack said.

There hadn’t even been time to process what I had seen on the battlefield or to consider what it all meant. “He survived?” I asked, immediately struck by the absurdity. But then I winced. There had been too much death today.

“Old soldiers are hard to kill,” Jack sighed. “Gabriel led the attack. We need to follow the trail before it goes cold. Somewhere in Europe, it seems like. It was where we had been heading before we took a detour here. Maybe see some old friends.”

“Well, good luck out there. I hope you find... whatever it is you’re looking for,” I said.

“You could come with us. We could still use your help.” The way Morrison said it, I could tell that even he didn’t think there was much chance I would accept.

“I can’t stay here, but I can’t go with you either.” I shook my head. “We’re heading in different directions.”

“Time will tell,” Morrison nodded. “Good luck, Angela. And thanks for the medkits.” He grinned and gave me a mock salute as he departed, slinging his pack over his shoulder. Ana lingered a few moments longer and the pair of us watched him as he set off.

“We’re all fighting the same battles,” she said, placing her hand on my shoulder.

“We’ve *never* fought the same battles, Ana,” I said. “I don’t even like battles.”

“Maybe not, but we’re all still fighting. Jack might not be as idealistic as he once was, but he’s just as bullheaded as ever.” Ana sighed. “The more things pass us by, the more we want to hold on to them.”

“He can’t fight the past. He has to know that.”

“I think Jack will always find something to fight. He needs it.” Ana’s eye narrowed. “Our generation’s war *is* over. Every generation has one. Why do we

fight? For blood, for money, for king and country, for justice, for what we believe in. It's not always on the battlefield. Some wars last for decades, but ours was over in an instant. Gabriel built our team to save humanity, but he couldn't rebuild afterwards. Adawe and the others thought Morrison was the one who could. He looked the part, after all. The war hero. Compassionate, brave, confident, political. But at the end of the day: a soldier. And all soldiers only know one way to live. We aren't meant to change the world, just to save it."

"That's why the rest of us were there," I said.

Ana nodded sadly. "We never knew how to let the ones who followed us take up the struggle. We aren't made for peace. After this," Ana motioned to the eyepatch, "I thought I would have a quiet retirement. And here I am. You, Lena, Sojourn, and the others see things in a different way. I think I finally understand a little. All I have ever wanted was to leave something behind that could inspire others to follow."

"So why not go back with Winston? Jack's revenge isn't your responsibility."

"Idealism is for the young, Angela," she said. "Try not to judge us too harshly. Once people call you a hero, it's hard to put the mantle down." She smiled sadly. There was nothing left to say. Eventually, she patted my shoulder gently, and then she was gone, too, swallowed by the darkness.

I had never been good at goodbyes, despite my life being filled with them, both said and unsaid. The unsaid ones were the most common, and the ones that haunted me the most. Now that I had a second chance to say goodbye to them, I couldn't find the words. I'd said farewell at their graves, and that felt more final than seeing them leave now. I didn't think that I would see them again.



"Good job out there, Mercy," Mahmoud said as I pushed back the flap of the large tent that had become our makeshift reception and patient intake desk. He

barely looked up from his screen to greet me, rapidly typing away as he was busy with his work.

“Don’t start that,” I said.

“Sorry,” Mahmoud said, looking slightly chastened, though he had a stupid grin on his face. “You know I’ve been waiting months to call you that.”

“I hope you enjoyed it.” I sighed. “Can you tell me what happened with the children I brought in?”

Mahmoud tapped a few keys. “They are still waiting to be picked up.”

That surprised me. “Do their parents know?” I looked down at my watch and realized it was much later than I had thought. “It’s been hours.”

Mahmoud looked as though he didn’t want to answer my question.

Oh.

Mahmoud finally said, “Their parents were both killed. We’re trying to locate the next of kin.”

One time, I was that girl who waited for her parents to return. I still remembered the voice of the police officer who came to tell me, but I didn’t remember his face at all.

“Dr. Ziegler?” Mahmoud asked. “Are you alright?”

I realized that my finger had moved up to wipe away a tear from the corner of my eye, underneath my glasses. “Just tired.”

“You did a good job out there. Those kids would never have made it if you hadn’t found them and gotten them out of that building.”

“Someone had to,” I mumbled as I excused myself, suddenly feeling the stuffy confines of the tent.

As dusk fell across the Giza plateau, the rows of the treatment tents, arranged in their grid with military precision, their white canvas reflecting the last remainders of dusty light, looked like a new annex of mastabas that had somehow survived the millennia of wind and sun and time without effect. The ancient Egyptians who inhabited the neighboring tombs had given much in life and more in death in the

pursuit of life eternal, to no avail. In a gap between two tents, I watched Hanan and her brother. Her brother was lying down on a coat, while Hanan, was sitting at his side, trying to raise his spirits.

Ana's words came back to me. For the past few years, I had thought perhaps that my fight had ended in failure. When I thought back to when I was in Morrison's office, and I had first decided to join Overwatch, I wasn't sure if I could ever be that optimistic again. But I knew that the fire that burned then still burned inside me now. The struggle, the doubt, and the controversy had worn away that vast reserve of heroism I once possessed. Perhaps I thought that it was something that once spent, could not return. But we all must face our everyday challenges and crises. From time to time, our will to fight is worn down, but it will always return. As I watched Hanan spread her arms like wings, I knew that my battle was not over.

Heroes never die.







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