

OVERWATCH®

WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND



A SHORT STORY BY ALYSSA WONG

WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND



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WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND

"Take a deep breath for me, auntie," Baptiste said. Madame Thebeau, in her early seventies and sharp as a needle, sat on the exam table, her feet hanging over the side in their plastic slippers. Baptiste listened to her breathing through the stethoscope pressed to her back. "All right, that's good."

"Did you find anything interesting, young man?" she said, stretching. When she met his gaze, she winked.

"Nothing unusual. Everything sounds like it's working properly." Baptiste folded the stethoscope and held out his hand to help her down from the table. He was dressed for the clinic today, wearing all white scrubs. "You'll get your labs back in a week or two. Dr. Mondésir will call you when they're in. Or should I ask her to call your nephew to let him know?"

"I have a cell phone. She can call me directly." Madame Thebeau stretched, her colorful bangles clattering around her wrists. She took Baptiste's hand and eased her way off the exam table and onto the linoleum floor. "So can you, for that matter. But I don't seem to have your number."

Baptiste led her out of the exam room and back into the hallway. "Well, unfortunately, I'm leaving town very soon, so I won't be able to handle your follow-up care. However, you'll be in Dr. Mondésir's very capable hands." He passed her to the harried-looking receptionist and ducked back into the hall.

The tiny clinic was bustling. A steady stream of patients had kept both exam rooms busy all day. Even though it was late in the afternoon, there were still several people waiting in the lobby, parked in plastic chairs. The walls were painted a cheery yellow, and the AC whirred noisily in the background.

Dr. Mondésir emerged from the second exam room, a pillar of calm amidst the storm. She held a clipboard in one hand. Her braided hair was done up in a bun, and she glanced at him through her glasses. "How did it go in there with Madame Thebeau?"

Baptiste leaned against the wall. "She seems healthy. Blood pressure in normal range, her lungs sound good, no problem with her reflexes. I put it all in her chart."

"Did she ask for your number?"

Baptiste sighed. "Yeah," he said.

Dr. Mondésir grinned, tucking her clipboard under her arm. "Called it. What did you tell her?"

"I told her the truth—that I was only in town for a couple of days, and that you'd handle her follow-up care." Baptiste glanced back into the lobby. Madame Thebeau was sitting serenely in a chair, playing a game on her phone while waiting for her nephew to pick her up. There was a cluster of teenagers sitting across from her, all on their phones too, and he wondered if they were playing together.

"Ah, but I don't have muscles like yours, Jean-Baptiste," said Dr. Mondésir, patting his bicep. The corner of her mouth quirked up into a smile. She headed for the reception desk, her white coat billowing behind her. "It's too bad you're leaving on Friday. This is the longest you've visited in years."

They'd grown up in the orphanage together, just outside of Port-de-Paix. She'd done well for herself and gone to medical school while Baptiste served in the Caribbean Coalition. Their childhood dream was to build a clinic for the folks in the neighborhood, and Baptiste had set aside a portion of his savings to make that dream come true. Even now, he still sent money back home whenever he could.

"You know I can't stay in one place for very long," said Baptiste. Not with Talon after me, went unsaid but not unheard. He followed her to the bookshelf behind the reception desk. This was where the clinic stored its records; Dr. Mondésir still believed in printing everything out, despite their digitized system. She was old-fashioned that way. "Need help reaching that?" he asked as she stretched up on her toes for something on the top shelf.

"Don't flatter yourself," she said, pulling down a red binder. Its spine was dated with the year, written in black permanent marker.

"Just offering to put these muscles to use," said Baptiste. He saw her flipping through the binder with a frown on her face. "Is something wrong?"

Dr. Mondésir glanced at the full waiting room and lowered her voice. "Can you check the supply cabinet for me?"

Baptiste looked down at the paper. It was an inventory list. He'd checked the supplies earlier in the day and he hadn't liked what he'd seen. Plastic bins that held only a few bottles, boxes of old samples. Too many empty shelves. "Sure thing. What do you need?" he asked.

"More of everything," she said under her breath, snapping the binder shut. She put it back on the shelf and began thumbing through the folders packed in beside it. "But at this point, I just need a current inventory. If you wouldn't mind..."

Baptiste laid a hand on her shoulder. "Roseline, what's going on?" he said quietly. "Is the clinic running out of money?"

"Times are tough, but the real problem is that Sainclair Pharmaceuticals keeps ratcheting up their prices. We could barely afford their medications before, but now it's almost impossible," she said. She rubbed the permanent furrow between her eyebrows. "It's criminal. We've even seen folks come in with complications because they're taking counterfeit pills, and who knows what's in those? But when your choices are suffering without medication or taking a chance on something that might help you..."

"That's no choice at all," Baptiste finished. He looked out into the reception room, at all the people patiently waiting to be seen. Being unable to help the people you cared about was agonizing. He'd learned that lesson early. "Is there any way I can help you?"

Dr. Mondésir smiled. She looked very tired. "Unless you've got a magic wand, I don't think so. People like Vernand Sainclair don't change. Not even when it's the wellbeing of his own people on the line."

"If Overwatch was still around, they'd drive him out of town," muttered the receptionist. He was young, barely more than a teenager, and looked almost as exhausted as Dr. Mondésir. Baptiste wondered how long the clinic had been struggling.

"Like I said, a magic wand," Dr. Mondésir said dryly.

One of the teens against the wall straightened up. "I heard Overwatch is back," she said. Her friends looked up, too. They'd grown up so fast while he was away. He remembered them running around the neighborhood, still in primary school, the last time he visited. Four years ago, right before he left Talon.

Baptiste leaned on the counter. "Is that so? And where did you hear that, Esther?"

Esther shrugged, glancing back down at her phone. "It's all over the net if you know where to look."

"You shouldn't believe everything you read online," Baptiste said with an easy grin. But he understood; he'd dreamed about Overwatch when he was a teenager, too. He had believed in shining heroes, like the ones on TV and recruitment posters, who kept the peace and protected people around the world.

He'd wanted to be like that, once. That was why he'd joined the Caribbean Coalition and become a medic. But Overwatch had never come to Haiti, and by the time the organization was disbanded, he had set those dreams quietly aside. There were many ways to help people, and not all were as easy as having your face on a poster.

"Esther, looks like you're next. Let's head to Exam Room A," said Baptiste. Esther rose, dusting off her shorts. There was an Overwatch symbol drawn on the strap of her bag in permanent marker. When she caught him looking at it, she covered it with her hand and looked away.



It was night by the time Baptiste left the clinic. He had insisted on staying until all the patients were taken care of. You're making me look bad, Dr. Mondésir remarked dryly, as if she wouldn't have worked until dawn on her own. It's good to have an extra set of hands.

This was where he felt best: hard at work, taking care of the folks in the neighborhood. He'd missed being home, he realized as he headed down the street. The bright sound of cicadas rattling their wings; the sticky, familiar summer air; the delicious scent of pork griot drifting from the food stalls on the street corners—all of it. Since leaving Haiti, and Talon, Baptiste had wandered the globe, never staying in one place for too long. But he always found his way back to Port-de-Paix.

This is the longest you've visited in years.



Sometimes he wished he could stay. But it was dangerous, both to him and to people like Rosaline and Madame Thebeau. The longer he lingered in one place, the easier he was to track down. And if Talon caught up to him, they wouldn't think twice about causing collateral damage.

"No use wasting the time I've got left," he said aloud, glancing up at the stars. The sky was a wide belt above the pale-walled buildings, and the moon shone bright, a sliver away from being full. "Especially not on such a nice night."

Baptiste headed to his favorite bar, a place called Lefort's. It was a popular local spot, and he had known the owner, Monsieur Lefort, since Baptiste was a kid. He was a cheerful, friendly man who used to give Baptiste and Roseline glasses of papaya juice on hot summer days. Lefort's was a place where people came to unwind.

But today something was wrong. Lefort's was nearly empty, despite the late hour. Only two people sat at the bar. The first was a giant, broad-shouldered man covered in tattoos. He was dressed like a tourist, in a tacky tropical shirt and a pair of sunglasses, and his dark hair had a streak of white running through it like a lightning strike.

"What do you call this thing?" he was saying to M. Lefort, who was trapped behind the counter. He held a brightly-colored cocktail with an orchid garnish, which looked tiny in his massive hand. The last time Baptiste had seen those hands, they had just crushed a man's throat through his combat armor. "It's delicious. No, seriously, it's great. Nguyen, what do you think?"

The other person at the bar, a thin, sharply-dressed Vietnamese man, glanced over his shoulder at Baptiste. A panama hat lay abandoned on the counter in front of him. "That took long enough," he said in a quiet voice. It was one that Baptiste had heard during every mission debrief, clinical and cold. "This had better be worth it, Mauga."

The giant man turned. When he saw Baptiste, a wide, easy grin spread across his face. "Hey, buddy," he said, and the hair on the back of Baptiste's neck stood up. "You didn't think you could outrun us forever, did you?"

Four Years Ago:

They arrived at Monte Cristi at dawn. The dropship descended over the beach, its blades chopping at the air. Inside, Baptiste sat shoulder to shoulder with the rest of his squad, his rifle over his knees. The motion rocked them back and forth, and the rumble of the carrier was as familiar as his heartbeat.

"You're cleared to land," said Nguyen. The analyst's voice filtered through Baptiste's earpiece, cold as frostbite.

"Hey, buddy. Thinking strange thoughts?" Mauga thumped Baptiste's shoulder and grinned. When he leaned in, the body armor on his wide frame creaked. The Talon insignia on his chest stood out in bright red. "I'm sure they're something you can't share in polite company, but this ain't polite company. What's going on in that head of yours?"

Baptiste grinned. "More than what's in yours."

Mauga laughed. "Don't get full of yourself. It's straight Shakespearean in here." He tapped his forehead.

Mauga liked to play the big, dumb brute. But he was sly and dangerous, which Baptiste appreciated. They'd met during their first days in Talon, and Baptiste had noticed him right away. It was hard not to; Mauga towered over the rest of the recruits, and he talked fast and loose, filling the air with his personality. He had a way of drawing strangers in like they were old friends.

Mauga had noticed him, too. He'd pulled Baptiste into his orbit, taking him under his wing. 'I feel like you get me, Baptiste,' Mauga had told him. 'Stick with me, and we'll climb straight to the top.' That had sounded good to Baptiste, and they'd been inseparable ever since. Now, when they were out in the field together, back to back, it felt like nothing could stop them.

"Attention!" shouted Captain Cuerva, their commanding officer. He paced down the tight walkway between the lines of troops. "The Playa Cartel have been encroaching on our territory. Our mission is to find and eliminate their leader, Daniel Fernández. Intelligence has located his safe house; we'll move in, extract him, and get out. Copy?"

"Copy!" Baptiste shouted back with the rest of the squad.

As they hovered over Monti Cristi, there was a sense of uneasiness that Baptiste couldn't shake. Everyone else was in good spirits, ready to snap back into laser focus when they touched down, but there was a hollowness to their laughter.

Or maybe he was imagining it. The last missions had been rough, and some had involved civilians. That had deeply troubled Baptiste. He had joined because he had nowhere else to go. After those last missions, he'd thought about leaving.

But he'd known better. The only way anyone left Talon was in a coffin.

The hover carrier landed on the sand with a dull thud. Baptiste jolted in his seat, gripping his weapon. The impact shoved him against Mauga's solid frame.

"All clear," Nguyen's voice crackled in his ear. "Move out."

The doors opened, and Captain Cuerva turned to face the beach. The small fishing town lay ahead, quiet and dark. No lights were on in the windows. "Let's move!"

Baptiste stood, and Mauga stood with him. "Whatever you're worrying about, don't. Get in, get it done, and get paid," Mauga said, only loud enough for Baptiste to hear. He hefted his pair of machine guns, each as tall as a full-grown man, like they weighed nothing. The coolant tanks on his back gleamed in the scant light. He raised his voice, letting it carry across the dropship. "Now, who's ready to have some fun?"



"Let me buy you a drink," said Mauga. He sat on Baptiste's right at the bar, crowding him with his bulk. Nguyen sat on his other side, watching with cool, expressionless eyes. "Oh man, you want one of these? They're amazing."

"What are you doing here?" Baptiste said quietly. From here, he could count the exits to the bar: the windows along the walls; the back exit through the kitchen; the front door; all of them an eternity away.

"Well, as you can see, I'm enjoying the sun and fresh ocean breeze," said Mauga, gesturing at his shirt. It was covered in ugly parrots with terrible yellow eyes. "It reminds me of home. Talon HQ is so dreary; it's nice to get out of Rome every now and again."

"You're rarely at HQ," Nguyen said tartly. "And we're not here to sightsee, nor to socialize."

Mauga shrugged. "I'm making the most out of our work trip. You see what I'm up against, Baptiste? I got him a hat, but he won't wear it."

Nguyen looked at the panama hat on the bar top like it was the filthiest thing he'd ever seen. There was a pink sunburned stripe across his nose.

Mauga slung a massive arm around Baptiste's shoulder, knocking the wind out of him. "Anyway, we just happened to be in town for a job, and I thought, 'Hey, you know who I haven't seen in ages? Baptiste! Maybe he'd like to get a drink with us, for old times' sake.'"

There was no such thing as coincidence when it came to Mauga or Nguyen. Baptiste had spent four years evading Talon's notice; they would have had to go out of their way to find him. This had Mauga's fingerprints all over it. "Get to the point," Baptiste said sharply.

Mauga reached over the bar and helped himself to a bottle of rum and a handful of glasses. M. Lefort had vanished into the back, probably for the better. "Don't be so cold. I haven't seen you since Monte Cristi." He glanced down at Baptiste, and his eyes burned.

Monte Cristi. The screams, the smoke, the houses on fire. Running, his lungs aching, knowing he needed to get out—

"Guess it's been a while," said Baptiste, resting his elbows on the countertop. His heart hammered in his chest.

"Four years, and you never even wrote. That hurts me, buddy, deep inside." He thumped himself on the chest hard enough that Baptiste winced. "What were you doing all this time? Breaking hearts? Traveling the world? Actually, don't tell me. We'll have lots of time on the way back to Talon HQ."

"I'm not going with you," said Baptiste.

"That wasn't a request," Nguyen said. His voice cut through the air like a knife.

Mauga sighed. "Sweet as always. What our mutual friend here means is that you can try to fight this, but we all know how that'll turn out. And if something happened to you, who'd be around to save your clinic? You've gotta think about the big picture here, Baptiste. All you have to do is cooperate and help us with a job, and I'm sure everything else will work out just fine."

Mauga's arm was heavy around his shoulder. It probably weighed as much as a small person. There was no way that Baptiste could make a break for an exit without Mauga knocking him flat. He could feel his options narrowing, falling away like dead leaves. There had to be a way out, if he could just find it. "What's the job?" Baptiste said.

Mauga grinned, long and sly. It was a look that Baptiste recognized—the one that meant that Mauga thought he'd won. "You're familiar with Sainclair Pharmaceuticals. They're the ones supplying your clinic, yeah?"

The clinic and every other medical institution in Haiti, thought Baptiste.

"They would be, if anyone could afford their prices," said Nguyen on Baptiste's other side. He slid one of the glasses in front of Baptiste. From anyone else, the gesture would be courteous. From Nguyen, it felt like a threat. "It's shortsighted. When you have a monopoly, you control the market. But raise your prices too high and there will be no one left to buy."

Mauga raised his glass, toasting them both. "Vernand Sainclair is a bad man, like the rest of us. But the difference is, he's gotten squirrely recently and isn't paying Talon what he owes. He's raking in money hand over fist, stealing from your people and ours. So we're going to pay him a visit and remind him who he owes his success to."

Roseline had said that it would take a magic wand to change Vernand Sainclair's mind, and the clinic desperately needed medicine and supplies. Baptiste wasn't a magic wand, but... "Lean on him a little. Turn up the pressure," he said slowly.

Mauga grinned. "I knew you'd see it my way. We figured he might be more receptive to someone from the area. Someone familiar. Play it right, and I'm sure he'd be happy to give your clinic whatever you want."



Baptiste took a sip of rum and weighed his options. He'd never met Sainclair in person, but he was also from Port-de-Paix. This could be his one chance to negotiate for everything the clinic needed. But then, he knew Mauga and Nguyen too well to trust them even a single bit.

They'd gotten the jump on him; they knew where he'd be and laid in wait. They also knew about the clinic, so even if he managed to cut and run, Roseline and the others would be in danger. He might be able to handle Nguyen in a one-on-one fight, but Mauga was like a demon. Taking them both at the same time was out of the question.

Baptiste hesitated. Then he raised his glass and clinked it against Mauga's, his stomach churning. "You're not giving me much of a choice. But if that's how it's going to be, I'm in. What's your plan?"

Nguyen passed over an unmarked envelope. "The details are in here. Don't open it until you reach a secure location. Burn it after you read it," he said.

When Baptiste reached out to take it, Nguyen held onto it for a moment. They locked eyes. "I didn't agree to your involvement, Augustin. I told Mauga that we needed someone reliable, but he was insistent. Make it worth my time." Nguyen let go and settled back into his seat.

Baptiste tucked the envelope into his pocket and filed that bit of information away for later. "So what happens after the mission?" he said. To us? To this?

After all, the only way to leave Talon was in a coffin.

Mauga smiled, the weight of his arm heavy on Baptiste's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, buddy," he said. He reached into his pocket and left a wad of cash on the counter. Baptiste didn't have to count it to know that their drinks for the night, and possibly the next week, were covered.

The analyst left first, rising from his seat and slipping into the dark like a shadow. Mauga lingered in the doorway, a mountain of a man bathed in dim, orange light. Mosquitos buzzed around the string lights hanging from the rafters.

"See you tomorrow, bright and early," he said, and vanished into the night.



Everything was on fire. Baptiste stumbled through the flames, scanning for the enemy. He could barely see. The town was a war zone, and Talon soldiers moved through the smoke like wraiths, their red helmets gleaming. Houses burned around him, their roofs collapsing inward. All he could hear was gunfire and the screaming of civilians.

The mission had gone according to plan at first. They'd dropped in and made their way into the Playa Cartel's hideout with little issue. But when they made it to Fernández's safe room, they found that he was gone.

Captain Cuerva had ordered them to tear the town apart until they located the target. So they'd gone, breaking down doors and screaming for people to get out. All they found were terrified civilians, and Baptiste had thought the mission was a wash. Frustrated, he'd stepped outside to survey the area.

That was when Talon aircraft swooped in and opened fire on the town.

Monte Cristi was a shelled-out wreck. Baptiste had been caught in the first blast and thrown back into the house. His helmet was damaged, and he wrestled it off. When he got to his feet, he found the family who lived there trapped under debris. He struggled to free them and usher them to safety, but when he got to the street, he realized that the whole neighborhood was gone. While he was distracted, the family scattered.

"What's going on?" he shouted into his headset. "We have civilians caught in the crossfire!"

Captain Cuerva's voice came online. "As you are, Lieutenant Augustin."

"But sir—"

"We have to set an example for these Playa Cartel scum. If they won't give us Fernández, they'll suffer the consequences."

Baptiste caught sight of something glittering. His squad mates were building a pile of looted goods in the middle of the street. Valuables stacked on one another, heaps of clothing. People's possessions and family heirlooms, jammed together into crates. A cluster of his squad mates dug through the mass, claiming items for themselves. Private Doubleday raked his hands through the jewelry and Mazzei pelted him with antique coins. Another private, Pacanowsky, tossed fistfuls of two thousand-peso bills into the air, where they rained down on the rest of the squad. They were laughing like they were having fun.

The air smelled like burning.

There was a sharp movement to Baptiste's right. He whipped his rifle up, aiming at what had caught his attention. It was hard to see amidst the smoke, but a small shape was walking toward him.

"Get back!" he shouted, pushing through the blaze.

The figure stopped, and Baptiste saw that it was a young girl in a torn dress. She stared up at him with bright, angry eyes, a rock clenched in her fist. He could see himself reflected in those eyes, an unknown soldier who had destroyed her home.

Baptiste stepped back, the point of his rifle dipping down. He turned and ran through the smoke and debris, the sound of screaming following him.



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**WHAT YOU
LEFT BEHIND**



Baptiste woke, gasping and sweating. He fumbled for his phone, almost dropping it on the floor of his hotel room. The glowing numbers on the screen read 04:03 AM.

The dream lingered in his mind. He could still smell the scent of burning houses.

He pulled a box out from under his bed, lifting the lid. Inside was a set of sleek white combat armor and a scarf stitched with a medic's insignia. He laid out his boots, running his hands over their heavy metal frames. Each boot was equipped with an exoskeleton that allowed him greater mobility. Baptiste pressed gently on one to make sure it was still operable, and the joints let out a soft, affirming hiss. It had been a while since he'd worn this outfit, but the weight of the armor settled easily onto his shoulders, familiar as an old friend.

Baptiste packed quickly and slung his gear over his shoulder. Before he left, Baptiste pulled out a lighter. He touched the tip of the letter to the flame and watched the Talon insignia in the corner curl, crumple, and turn to ash.



Vernand Sainclair's mansion sat on a beautiful, sprawling plot of land. It rose three stories from the ground, a stately building with pointed rooftops, elegant balconies, and ornate trim. To Baptiste, the white-painted Victorian in the midday sun looked like something out of a fairy tale.

"Did you know that this used to be a historic hotel?" said Mauga, flipping through his guidebook. He took up the entire backseat of the car, and his two giant guns rested on the floor in front of him. His heavy Talon combat armor clattered as they drove up to the front gates. His ugly, parrot-print shirt was gone, but the sunglasses stayed. "Before that, it belonged to a famous family of politicians, but they all died in horrible ways. It's definitely haunted."

"Stay focused," Nguyen said sharply. He wore the same dark suit and tie, all impeccable lines. Baptiste sat in the passenger seat beside him, dressed in his white combat armor, his helmet lying on his lap. "I scheduled an appointment, so Sainclair is expecting us. We walk in, get what we want, and walk out. Simple as that."

Baptiste glanced at him. "It's unusual to see you in the field," he said.

"Sometimes you have to take care of business yourself," said Nguyen. He stopped at the gates and held up a badge in front of the sensors. There was a beep, and then the gates creaked open.

As they were led into the mansion, Baptiste noticed that something felt off. Nguyen's brief had mentioned that Vernand's security forces were part Talon, part private military contractors. But there were no Talon soldiers in sight. Nguyen walked ahead with their guide, and Baptiste and Mauga brought up the rear. Baptiste glanced at Mauga, who nodded slightly.

Their guide opened a heavy set of doors, revealing rows of bookshelves. A half-dozen armed guards waited inside the library, but there was no sign of Vernand Sainclair.

Quick as lightning, Mauga stepped in front of Nguyen, activating an energy shield. Baptiste covered the rear, rifle up as the doors slammed shut behind them. The guards raised their weapons, but the first shot was Nguyen's, from a sidearm that Baptiste hadn't even seen him draw. One man went down without a sound.

The hail of enemy gunfire rattled against Mauga's shield, but it held fast. Baptiste incapacitated the two guards closest to him with a series of expert shots. He turned and caught the third before they could rush around the shield. Nguyen shot another, then took aim at the last guard standing.

"Hold up—leave that one alive," said Mauga, and Nguyen nodded, adjusting his wrist. His bullet tore through the man's upper leg, and the guard howled and crumpled to the ground. Mauga deactivated his shield and lumbered forward, grabbing the man and slamming him up against a bookshelf. One massive hand went around his neck, pinning him in the air.

"So much for the welcome wagon," said Baptiste, lowering his gun. His heart pounded hard in his chest. The library was a mess. "Let me guess. This wasn't part of your perfect little plan, was it?"

Nguyen holstered his weapon. "It was a possibility," he said flatly. He looked deeply irritated that something had gone wrong, and that gave Baptiste a secret sense of satisfaction. "I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this. Our other forces are probably dead."

"Say, where's your boss?" Mauga said conversationally to the guard he had pinned against the wall. The man choked. "Oh, sorry. I didn't hear you. Let me ask again." He tightened his grip around his throat.

He was enjoying this. These were the moments when the friendly, fast-talking mask slipped, and Baptiste could see the killer beneath. Mauga was both, and more dangerous for it. Only one person had been able to talk him down in this state, and that was Baptiste.

Baptiste came over, resting his forearm on the wall. "Ease up a little. I think he's trying to tell us," he said. He kept his voice light, focusing on Mauga. He'd always been able to rein him in with patience and careful words, but it had been years, and Mauga was stronger than ever.

Mauga whirled on him, his eyes burning with violence, nothing familiar or safe on his face. For a moment, Baptiste felt a real jolt of fear. And then Mauga smiled, relaxing his grip. The guard gasped for air. "My bad. Now, friend. Where is Sainclair? He's the one we want, not you."

"His office... top floor," the man croaked.

"Thanks, buddy," Mauga said cheerfully, squeezing hard. The man slid motionless to the carpet.

"Why is it always the top floor?" Baptiste muttered. They'd done extractions like this all the time when he and Mauga had been squad mates. He'd slipped back into familiar patterns, acting on habit and muscle memory, before he'd been able to think about it. Even during the interrogation.

"Good job there, Baptiste," said Mauga, clapping a hand on Baptiste's shoulder. He looked proud. "It's like you never left."

That's what I'm afraid of, Baptiste thought, looking at the fallen men scattered across the library floor. He glanced down at his gun. It had been too easy to become the old Baptiste. He'd spent so many years breaking himself of his old habits, and it felt like they'd grown back up overnight, twice as strong as before. Was it Mauga's influence, or was it something in himself that he couldn't kill?

Nguyen retrieved a slim data pad and displayed a holographic blueprint of the mansion. "We'll have to fight our way through. Luckily, the way up is straightforward. Just take the main stairs."

"There's no way around?" asked Baptiste, scanning the blueprint.

"I didn't come here to scale balconies," Nguyen said. "They're alerted to our presence already. We need to move swiftly and decisively. Use whatever cover we can, and don't take stupid risks."

"Me? Never," said Mauga, sliding his giant guns from their back holsters.

Baptiste studied the blueprint, hunting for anything that looked out of the ordinary. A secret passage, a hidden door... Nothing stood out to him, but that didn't mean it didn't exist.

Men like Vernand Sainclair always had a way out.

"What is it, Baptiste?" Mauga said, looking at him. "You see something?"

Baptiste tore his eyes away from the blueprint and shrugged. "Nothing interesting," he said. "We should get moving before reinforcements arrive."

"Brilliant," said Nguyen, stepping over the bodies on the carpet.



They fought their way up the main stairwell, up past the decorated columns and imported stone statues. Bullets shredded the ornate bannisters. Mauga's shield protected them, and they pushed steadily upward. Baptiste and Mauga moved in tandem, with the practiced ease of soldiers used to fighting together. It had been years, but it came back quickly, as natural as breathing.

"I missed you, you know," Mauga called over the roar of gunfire. He was enjoying every moment of the battle, relishing the adrenaline. Baptiste could feel that same rush in his veins, too. "All those years you were on the run, and we could have been doing this instead. Don't tell me you didn't miss it, too."

Had he? More than he was willing to admit. He'd spent so many years running, and this felt right—not being part of Talon, but having a place where he belonged, with a dependable team at his back. That was what he'd found when he joined the Caribbean Coalition, and later with Mauga and their squad. Taking care of people centered him, made him feel whole.

But Talon was different. What they asked him to do ate away at his soul. In the end, he'd left for a reason, and he couldn't forget that.

"Watch your back," he shouted instead, taking down a mercenary who'd been about to shoot Mauga.

"That's your job!" Mauga laughed. His gun tore a path through the guards swarming the top of the staircase, and they ducked for cover. He was in his element, wild and unleashed. He'd been like this on their missions, a hurricane of a man.

With you at my back, we can do anything, he'd told Baptiste once. You're the best medic in Talon. You keep me alive, and I'll protect you. No one stands a chance.

Sainclair's office lay at the end of a long hallway on the third floor. Large portraits hung on the walls, glaring balefully down at them. The wallpaper was hideous.

Baptiste stepped forward quietly, nodding at Mauga. Nguyen stayed close to the opposite wall. Mauga grinned and rammed the door with his shoulder, banging it open.

The office was as opulently furnished as the rest of the house, with a huge stained-glass skylight overhead that cast colored shapes across the carpet. Vernand Sainclair stood behind his desk, a revolver in his shaking hands. He was a handsome man in a deep burgundy suit, decked out in gold jewelry. The pallor of sweat on his face ruined the overall effect. "I know why you're here," he said, his voice steady. "And I know what it looks like. But I swear, I'm loyal to Talon."

"Well, color me convinced," said Mauga, hefting one of his giant guns and activating his shield. He smirked, long and dangerous.

Sainclair pulled the trigger twice. The bullets ricocheted off the shield, shattering the panels of the giant French windows overlooking the grounds.

Baptiste glanced at the windows, then back at Sainclair. "Bad idea," he informed Sainclair, shaking his head.

Nguyen stalked forward, Mauga covering him with the shield. "You sent us into a trap. You murdered the forces we stationed here for your protection," he snarled. Nguyen yanked the gun from Sainclair's grasp and slammed it onto the desk. "I even set up an appointment. And yet you continue to inconvenience us. Give me one reason why I shouldn't put a bullet through your head right now."

"I have information you need!" Sainclair said, the words falling quickly from his mouth. "Don't shoot me. I'm just going to pick up this data pad and show you what's on it." He reached slowly for the data pad lying on the desk.

Baptiste kept his gun trained on Sainclair, tracking his movements. Sainclair glanced at the revolver once, but he didn't try to grab it from Nguyen. Instead, he activated the data pad and tapped on a file. A golden hologram of the earth popped up, rotating gently in the air. Then, a series of bright points of light began to glitter across the globe. As the earth turned, photo portraits popped up over the points of light.

No, Baptiste realized. Not portraits. Those were dossiers.

An unfamiliar voice came online. "Agents, Overwatch needs you. The world needs us now, more than ever. Are you with me?"

"I got this message three days ago," Sainclair said. The hologram painted his face in golden light. "It's a recall sent to every former Overwatch agent. Someone's trying to get the organization back together."

"You were Overwatch?" Baptiste said, stunned. He'd never met one before. All the dreams he'd had as a teenager, the recruitment poster he hung above his bed at the orphanage, the secret hope that somehow, someday, Overwatch would come in and make everything better. And now one of his childhood heroes stood before him, a man willing to throttle his country to turn a profit and betray his organization to spare his own life.

"I was never in the field. I was just a handler, like you," Sainclair nodded at Nguyen. "Overwatch always took me for granted. That organization was poisoned from the very start, and the longer I was there, the more I could see that it was slowly rotting from the inside out."

"So you thought you'd help it along?" Baptiste demanded. No organization was perfect; he knew that personally, and well. But Overwatch was supposed to stand for something better: a vision of a world that could exist, rather than the one that did.

Sainclair regarded him with contempt. "I don't think a Talon agent has any right to judge me. At least your people recognized my worth. By the time the U.N. disbanded Overwatch, I'd fed Talon enough information to keep you busy for years and I'd been handsomely compensated for my troubles."

Mauga slid Baptiste a knowing look. Hadn't they all joined for the money, or because they had nowhere else to go?

But Sainclair was different. He'd had choices. And then he chose to stand by as Overwatch burned, with a match in his hand. Now, he gestured at the lavishly furnished office. "Working for Talon gave me something that Overwatch never could. And now I have exclusive information to offer you."

Nguyen reached out and spun the globe. Overwatch agents' names and vital information flickered in the air as it rotated. "The thing is," said Nguyen, watching the agents' faces spin past, "You're assuming we don't have access to any of this information. Or that you're the only ex-Overwatch on our payroll."

Sainclair went pale.

"There really are no good people left," Mauga sighed, unholstering his second gun. "What did I tell you, Baptiste?"

Mauga had said that to him before, once. And maybe, just maybe, he was right.

Sainclair backed up a step, running into his desk chair. Mauga glanced at Baptiste, a sly smile spreading across his face. "All right. Who wants to do the honors? How about you, buddy? Prove to Nguyen that I was right about you."

Nguyen raised an eyebrow at Baptiste. He was watching. They all were, waiting to see what he would do.

Baptiste walked toward Sainclair, advancing behind the desk. "I know what you deserve," he said quietly, raising his rifle. Sainclair's desperate face hovered in the crosshairs, his pleas falling on uncaring ears.

One shot, and so many wrongs would be righted. Sainclair had done so much damage, and refused to help so many people in need. He was the reason the clinic struggled to stock medicine, and why the neighborhood suffered without treatment. But would a bullet in his head fix any of that? Baptiste had never been able to execute a man in cold blood, even when he was in Talon. It would be more than was a step back into the life he'd promised he'd left. It would be a step beyond the point of no return.

And it was a step he wasn't willing to take.

Baptiste's hand closed over the flashbang on his belt. There was a moment where Nguyen's eyes widened, realizing what he was about to do. Baptiste threw the flashbang down, and a blinding flash of light filled the room, followed by a deafening explosion. Any sound that Nguyen and Mauga made was swallowed up.

Baptiste grabbed the data pad off the desk in one hand and shoved it into his jacket. He seized Sainclair around the middle, ignoring the man's startled shout. "Hold on tight," Baptiste said, and activated his boots' exoskeletons. The frames clicked into place and propelled them upward as Baptiste jumped, headed for the stained-glass skylight overhead. He raised his arm, shielding his face.

There was a gunshot, and pain tore through his left arm. He almost lost his grip on Sainclair. He didn't have to look to know who had fired that shot, and that he was lucky to have survived. Together, Baptiste and

Sainclair crashed through the skylight. They landed on the roof in a shower of broken, colorful glass, tumbling across the tiles. From here, the thick grove of trees behind Sainclair's mansion spread out like a promise.

No time to rest. Baptiste tightened his grip on Sainclair and leaped from the roof, heading for the trees. A split second later, the roof blew to pieces in a hail of gunfire. Baptiste landed amidst the trees, crashing through branches on his way down. Sainclair began to demand something, but Baptiste clamped a hand over his mouth. "Not a word," he whispered. When Sainclair nodded, wide-eyed, Baptiste chanced a glance back.

Mauga stood in the full-length window, scanning the canopy of trees. All of the glass panes were blown out, shattered by the bullets from his massive guns. "Baptiste," he called. "Buddy, I just want to talk." His eyes rested briefly on the patch of cover that shielded Baptiste, and Baptiste held his breath. It was the longest moment of his life.

Nguyen approached, shouting something that Baptiste couldn't make out. He looked furious, rumpled. They stared each other down for a moment, and then Nguyen holstered his gun and disappeared from view.

"You're only making this worse for yourself," Mauga said, his voice floating down from the window. He turned away from the window, and Baptiste slipped away into the undergrowth, Sainclair following behind him.



Baptiste's lungs ached from the smoke. He crouched over the edge of a fishing boat, untying its mooring rope. The docks were quiet, but the orange glow of flames in the distance glimmered on the water.

"Don't tell me you're leaving already," said a familiar voice, and Baptiste froze. "The party's just getting started."

Mauga stood at the other end of the dock, his helmet off. His armor was scorched and bullet-dented. His face was sooty, but he wore a wide, white grin. His guns were aimed at Baptiste, and behind him, Monte Cristi burned.

Baptiste stood, slow and careful. "I'm not going back there," he said. "Cuerva said there would be no civilian casualties."

Mauga shook his head. "And you were naïve enough to believe him? Look around, Baptiste. This is what we do." He spread his arms. "Remember Makati? Or that time in Singapore? Or did you conveniently forget how those went down, too?"

"Cuerva told us that those missions were on the level," Baptiste said weakly. He'd known the truth, even then. But he hadn't wanted to believe it. And from the look on Mauga's face, he knew that, too.

"Of course he did. And of course they weren't. But who cares? We're in too deep, Baptiste." For a moment, all his bravado dropped away. It was just the two of them, no audience, standing beside the water. When he spoke, it was quiet. "There are no good people. Not you, not me. All we can do is have fun while we've got the chance."

None of this was fun. The killing, the looting, any of it. All Baptiste felt was a sickening sense of horror.

Mauga walked down the dock toward him. Baptiste drew his gun, aiming it at Mauga, who stopped in his tracks. "I'm not going back there," he repeated. "You'll have to kill me first."

Neither of them spoke; for a long moment, the only sounds were the roar of the waves and the faint, dull crackle of flames. Baptiste's earpiece buzzed, and from the way Mauga cocked his head, he was hearing the same message.

"Lieutenant Augustin, come in!" snapped Captain Cuerva. "Mauga, have you found him yet?"

Baptiste's heart hammered in his chest. Even if he got off the first shot—and he didn't want to shoot Mauga—he couldn't fight off the rest of his squad. If Mauga gave him away, that was it. He was as good as dead.

Mauga held Baptiste's gaze for a long moment. Finally, he reached up, touching his headset. "No sign of him here, Captain," he drawled. "I'll head back. Copy."

"Copy that," said Cuerva, and the line went quiet.

Mauga lowered his weapons. "I know you're not going to shoot me, Baptiste," he said. "You can put your rifle away."

Baptiste didn't lower his gun. "Why did you do that?" he asked.

Mauga shrugged. "I like you, Baptiste. There's something special about you. And I didn't feel like dragging your body all the way back there because you're damn heavy." He stretched. "Now get going. Just remember—you owe me. Call me when you're ready to come home."

Baptiste backed up, keeping Mauga in sight. True to his word, the man didn't move to stop him. "Thank you," he said quietly. He didn't know whether Mauga heard it, and he didn't stay to find out. He started the motor and pulled away from the dock, leaving Mauga standing by the water.



By the time Baptiste made it to the wharf, he'd lost his pursuers. Sainclair's security force didn't know the city like he did, and neither did Mauga or Nguyen. At least Sainclair had stopped fighting him once he realized that Baptiste was his best chance at getting out of the situation alive.

Baptiste slipped into a warehouse, and Sainclair stumbled in behind him. Baptiste's shoulder ached where Nguyen had shot him, and he'd used his scarf to fashion a makeshift bandage for the wound. Baptiste picked his way through the crates of coffee and mangoes until he got to a blue barrel nestled in the back. He removed the top and scooped up the bag he'd stashed early that morning, hours before he met up with Mauga and Nguyen.

He left Sainclair hidden behind a couple of large shipping containers, clutching a bottle of water. "Here's the deal," Baptiste said, resting one foot on a nearby crate. "I'm going to send someone to retrieve you in a couple of hours, when all of this has blown over. They'll help you get out of town. In return, you're going to supply every clinic in the country with whatever they need, free of charge. Sound good?"

Sainclair was ashen. He didn't seem to be registering anything Baptiste was saying. A sudden brush with death does that to a man, Baptiste thought dryly.

Baptiste snapped his fingers in front of Sainclair's face, and Sainclair jumped. "Hey. You still with me?"

Sainclair found his voice. "Whatever you want. Just get me out of here alive."

Baptiste shrugged. "That part's up to you. I'd like to think you're a man of your word, but if you don't hold up your end of the bargain, I'll let Talon know where to find you instead."

As Baptiste turned to go, Sainclair raised his voice. "Why didn't you kill me back there?" he asked.

Baptiste paused. "You weren't worth it," he said, and slipped out of the warehouse.

There was a number of commercial fishing vessels docked at the wharf, bobbing gently with the movement of the tides. Crates of cargo were stacked nearby, waiting to be loaded in. Baptiste made a beeline for the private vessels, picking one at the end of a line of fusion-energy charging stations. These boats hovered just above the water, emitting a low hum.

"Well, this looks familiar," said a voice behind him. Mauga walked down the pier, the sun catching on his armor. He held his guns like they weighed nothing. There was an edge to his voice, one that Baptiste recognized as that post-combat adrenaline rush. "I let you go once, Baptiste. You know I can't do it a second time."

Baptiste regarded him. His own body hummed with restless, alert energy. "Where's Nguyen?"

Mauga shrugged. "Who knows? Probably back at the mansion, dealing with the mess. Disappointed with everyone around him, as usual. I keep telling him that his face is going to get stuck like that." He raised his gun, and Baptiste dove for cover. Bullets showered the concrete, tearing into the crates nearby. Mangoes spilled out, splattering Baptiste as he crouched behind a shipping container.

Baptiste gripped his rifle tight. Mauga meant business. "I thought you wanted to take me back to Talon alive," he shouted.

"I do," said Mauga. The fire was back in his voice, that same promise of violence. "But it sounds like you need a little more convincing. We can still do this the right way."

"Never thought I'd hear you say that," said Baptiste. He chanced a peek out from behind the shipping container. Another rain of bullets chased him back. His heart hammered in his chest as he counted his remaining ammunition. A lot less than what Mauga had, apparently.

"By the way, I heard what happened to Captain Cuerva and the boys. That's a real shame," Mauga called out. His footsteps echoed closer, thudding along the pier.

Their old squad had made the mistake of coming after Baptiste one by one. He'd left Cuerva for last.

"Is it?" Baptiste panted, his back pressed to the container.

There was a loud metal click as Mauga reloaded, feeding a new belt into his guns. "Nah, I never liked him."

Baptiste swore as more bullets tore up the concrete nearby. Shells clattered to the ground around him. There was no way to get to a boat from here, and time was running short; Sainclair's forces would catch up any minute.

A round, flat shape dug into his back, and he shifted his bag over his shoulder. Wait. He opened it and dug inside, retrieving a disc-shaped device. It was something he'd been working on for months, and it was still just a prototype, but maybe...

"Don't shoot!" Baptiste shouted. "I'm coming out there!" He extended his arm out in the open, holding his breath. No bullets followed, so he slowly edged out from behind the shipping container.

Mauga waited a few yards away, sunglasses on. His weapons were still aimed straight at Baptiste. The ocean breeze blew through his hair and he grinned that wide, wide grin. "Finally come to your senses, buddy?"

"Not really," said Baptiste, whipping his rifle out from behind the shipping container. He threw the disc into the air and unloaded his clip into the fusion-energy charging station beside Mauga.

The resulting explosion shattered the air. The middle of the pier was blown into the air, chunks of concrete raining into the bay. Some crashed into the decks of nearby boats, capsizing them. Seagulls scattered overhead, shrieking.

When the smoke cleared, Mauga was gone. Baptiste lay on one end of the pier, battered but breathing. The prototype device hummed in the air, emitting a protective field of energy around him. It was the only thing that had kept him alive.

"Good to know that works," he wheezed, pressing a button on top. The device powered down, and the ring of energy dissipated. He collected the disc and hobbled toward one of the remaining vessels, a luxury yacht docked at the far end of the pier. It had *The Sainclair* painted across its stern in bold, flowing script.

It was easy to cut through the rope and yank the charging cord out, and easier to hotwire the engine. As Baptiste took the wheel, he looked over his shoulder. The wharf was empty, no Mauga or mercenary troops in sight.

"So much for a vacation," he muttered. The yacht pulled away from the pier and out to sea, guided by his expert hand.



Baptiste made it an hour away from Port-de-Paix before he allowed himself to relax. The yacht's motor hummed as the vessel cut through the water. The ocean stretched out all around him, an endless expanse of blue. The sea breeze smelled like freedom.

He peeled off his combat armor and hauled his med kit out of his bag. He was in bad shape, but he'd live. "Still got it," he said to himself, fishing in the kit for sutures. "Just like that time in Makati."

As Baptiste raided the refrigerator aboard Sainclair's yacht, he felt his phone buzz. Surprised, he checked it and realized that he had signal. Baptiste sat down, holding his phone and trying to figure out what to say to Roseline. She'd find out what happened to Sainclair soon, if word hadn't reached her already. He had so much he wanted to say to her, but little of it was safe; Talon would be monitoring her correspondence, hoping to track him down. He couldn't tell her when he was coming home or where he was going.

Finally, he typed out a message and hit send.

Hey, Ros. I left Sainclair in a warehouse on the docks. He promised to supply the clinic for free in exchange for a plane ticket out of town. Send someone to make the trade. If he gives you trouble, remind him that we had a deal.

Baptiste hesitated, then sent one more.

Be careful, okay?

Hopefully Talon wouldn't come after her and the others. Baptiste blinked away memories of Monte Cristi in flames. No, it was more likely that they'd keep the clinic under surveillance and lie in wait, hoping that he'd come back to check on it. It would be a long time before it was safe to return.

Baptiste thought of Mauga and the explosion-scorched pier. There had been no sign of him, but knowing Mauga, he was probably still alive. Maybe it was unwise, but Baptiste secretly hoped that he was.

Baptiste turned on Sainclair's data pad and the holographic globe popped up, followed by the profiles of the Overwatch agents. Their real names, their call signs, their vital stats. He turned the globe with one finger, reading the files. He spotted a familiar face hovering over the Middle East: a blonde woman he had met at a humanitarian aid site in Venezuela. They had worked together for almost a week before he'd had to move on. There was something about her calm, steady demeanor and self-assurance that reminded him of Roseline. Her Overwatch file read: MERCY. Agent ID: 3945_46. Real Name: Dr. Angela Ziegler. Status: Inactive.

He remembered Mercy from the recruitment posters. But the Overwatch agent rising above the battlefield on golden wings seemed so different from Dr. Ziegler, performing triage on suffering people and sweating in a makeshift tent clinic. If she was a former Overwatch agent, then surely she'd gotten the recall, too.

Baptiste tapped the glowing dot marking her last known position on the map. He'd thought that Overwatch was dead, but maybe it wasn't. If Talon was coming for Dr. Ziegler, then she had a right to know. He'd need help tracking her down, but luckily, he knew just who to ask.

Baptiste opened an encrypted app on his phone, entered the password, and hit the call button on the bottom of the screen. It only rang twice before a familiar voice came through the speaker. "Hey, mijo. It's been a while."

"Hey, Sombra," he said, looking at Dr. Ziegler's profile. "Can you do me a favor?"

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THE END







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