

OVERWATCH®

**DEADLOCK
REBELS**

BY LINDSAY ELY

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CHAPTER 1

The thing about trouble was, once you got into its company, it was tricky getting out. You could try to avoid it, you could run from it, you could even fight it—which was, in the case of the Bonney brothers, exactly what Ashe had done—but it still had a way of finding you.

“I don’t even know what to say, Elizabeth.” There were crumbs in Sheriff Carson’s mustache. Only a few, but enough to draw her eye, distracting remnants of the man’s breakfast. “Am I ever gonna see the last of you?”

“I told you...” Ashe clenched her teeth, fingers worrying at her silk skirt. A few hours ago, it had been immaculate. Now it was wrinkled and stained with spots



of blood. Not hers, of course. "It was self-defense. *They* attacked *me*."

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

"Well," she locked eyes with him, "then they're liars as well as bullies."

But the sheriff didn't believe her. She could see it on his face, plain as the crumbs. Not that his skepticism about her innocence was unexpected.

The only surprise was how fast this day had managed to go from bad to worse.



It had started so good, too.

For once, Ashe woke with the sunrise, raring to go. Most days began with B.O.B., her family's robot butler, yanking the blankets off her five minutes before she needed to be out the door. An advanced, sentient omnic, B.O.B. had been by Ashe's side for as long as she could remember, acting as both a companion and a bodyguard. And, of course, making sure she got up for school in the morning. But she didn't need B.O.B.'s help today.

Because today was special. Today was graduation day. Not only did that mean she'd never have to set foot in the

suffocating halls of that tedious, soul-sucking academy again, it meant she'd get to see the look on Headmaster Wallach's weaselly face as he handed over the diploma he never thought she'd get.

The same looks she hoped to see on her parents' faces as she walked across the stage.

Ashe washed, dressed, and brushed her snowy hair until it shined. Then she took the steps of Lead Rose Manor, her family's ancestral home, two at a time as she went downstairs to the formal dining room, where her parents always ate breakfast.

But when she reached it, the room was empty. No steaming cups of coffee, no holovids projecting endless financial reports and sales figures, no parents.

Only a vase of stark white roses on the mahogany table, and a card leaned up against it.

Congratulations, Elizabeth! We're so proud of you!

Despite the warm words, Ashe turned cold as she read, the color leeching out of the room until it was as hueless as the roses.

We know we'd promised to be there today; however, an exciting business merger called us away at the last minute. But we're very proud of you, and hope you'll see this as a fresh start, a moment in which to leave behind the missteps and troubles of the past and finally embrace our family legacy.

They hadn't even taken time to sign the card.

Ashe frowned. "*We're very proud of you . . .*"

It read like a joke. A bad one. If they were so proud, why weren't they here? Why had they left her alone, *again*?

Family legacy. What a joke. Across the room, the portrait of her great-great-and-more-greats-grandmother Caledonia stared blankly down at her. It was Caledonia who'd created the Arbalest Arms Company, who'd built the foundation for the premier, high-tech arms dealer it was today. Not Ashe's parents, who preferred to rub elbows and chase deals with the executives of more powerful corporations—Helix, Vishkar, Hyde Global, and the rest—trading on a reputation whose success they had little to do with.

If anything, they'd gotten lucky. Arbalest had done good business for years as the makers of expensive, highly customized luxury rifles. But then the Omnic Crisis happened, and the military turned their attention to them. Arbalest's AA92 rifle became standard-issue for the army due to its higher capacity and higher muzzle velocity. With that contract, demand for their unique brand of rifles exploded. War was good for business.

Especially if it was far away.

Larger cities had been hit by the war, sure, but Bellerae, the community where they lived and where Arbalest was based, was secluded. Before the crisis, they'd never had

more than a dozen omnics to speak of. It had remained mostly untouched throughout the war, during which the company's factories kept up brisk production.

But now the crisis was over, thanks to Overwatch. Demand for weapons was down; already one Arbalest factory in Bellerae had closed. Ashe's parents were more interested in business deals made and executed thousands of miles away than in the community their company had kept thriving for generations. What kind of legacy was that?

Mounted below the painting was an heirloom Viper rifle, one of Arbalest's early creations, and the gun that had carved the company's place in the weapons market. Over a century old, the gun still looked new and shot straight. Innovation. Quality. That was the legacy Caledonia had strived for, never letting Arbalest lag behind, hiring the best and brightest minds she could find, and always making her workers feel valued—more like family than employees. Not that she was a pushover; it was said she made her employees call her Ms. Ashe, no matter how long they'd known her. Maybe it was meant to show respect. Or maybe she'd simply disliked Caledonia as much as Ashe disliked Elizabeth, also preferring to be called by her surname.

Ashe turned as a clunking tread approached. In the doorway of the dining room stood B.O.B., a tray balanced delicately between his massive metal hands. On it was her

favorite breakfast—waffles dripping with syrup and a big side of bacon, extra, extra crispy.

A sour taste rose in her throat. “Do I look hungry right now?” she snapped.

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

Unlike her parents.

“They could’ve at least said good-bye.” Her voice caught on the last word, and she tensed, as irritated with herself as she was with them. This wasn’t the first time her parents had left her alone with hardly a word, and it probably wouldn’t be the last. As far back as she could remember, there was only the sprawling, echoing solitude of the estate—especially during the years of B.O.B.’s absence—or else the tense veil

of her parents' disapproval for whatever mess she'd gotten into lately.

She twisted the card in her hands. So why was she so steamed?

Because today was supposed to be different. Her graduation had actually seemed to mean something to them. Maybe they'd only wanted to show, in public, that their daughter was more than a troublemaker. More than the girl who'd gotten caught trying to convince the academy's resident hacker to change all her grades to As, or caused the school to close for decontamination after showing off with her slingshot in the science lab. Or maybe, as Ashe had hoped, it was a reason for them to finally believe she was capable of doing something right. She'd sworn to graduate. And they'd promised to be there.

Fool that she was, Ashe had believed them.

On the table, the roses caught a ray of morning sun, lighting them up like a bead drawn on a target. That's what she wanted to make of their peace gesture right now—to set it in her sights and watch the gift explode in a spray of petals and crystal. If the Viper had been loaded, she might have.

Instead, Ashe dropped the card on the mantel and stomped toward the hall. As she brushed by B.O.B., he reached an arm out, stopping her.