Citadel Diplomacy

by ErinPrimette

Summary

The results of the US Election of 2156 increase tension between the humans and the Citadel Council, pushing them to the brink of war. However, Robin Shepard and her friends seek to prevent such a war, so they set off to uncover any dirty secrets of their new president. Along the way, Shepard gets Commander Garrus Vakarian involved, only to realize they both have common ground.

Notes

Since this is my first Mass Effect fanfic, I thought I'd explore the idea of the First Contact War's events being inspired by the 2016 Election, given its results and the events that occurred from there. Luckily, I found someone who helped me out writing this fanfic, so
kudos to TutorVeritatis from DeviantArt.
This was the best chance she had to cast her vote, now that it was Election Day.

While Joker was busy taking a shower this morning, Robin Shepard took her time to brush her short brown hair before tying it into a half ponytail. She then put on her seashell hair clip and put on her seashell necklace before she set off to brew a batch of coffee in the kitchen. Once she got the coffee maker started, she turned on her datapad and scrolled to the news app. Once again, she found another article where the candidate she intended to vote against, Toby Dunn, still insisted that voter fraud was real. But, Robin didn't even know anyone who would commit such an astronomical crime. Other humans watching or reading news reacted similarly or vastly different. Many comments on the article patronized and glowered at the blowhard candidates' statement, believing them without checking their validity. Other comments stated counter evidence which caused many personal attacks and threats of rape and worse.

Agents of the salarian STG were tasked to watch and make risk assessments, ordered by several Dalatrass. Asari similarly worried but had a smaller group in support of the candidate. Turians leaned more so in the middle ground despite the xenophobia caused by the campaign.

Citadel non-council races had their own breakdowns of support, fear, or anger. A few prominent hanaar preachers spoke out against it. Volus entertained the thought of a freer open market but feared an isolation as well. Drell were mostly silent throughout, though a few entertained some direct action against the candidate, viewing the rhetoric as something evil. Even elcor made their opinions known with a few stating their displeasure.

In the meantime, Robin returned her focus to her coffee maker, even if it was halfway done. She took this chance to ransack the freezer for toaster scrambles. When she found a couple toaster scrambles filled with eggs, sausage and cheese, she popped them into the toaster. Seconds later, Joker arrived in the kitchen, his hair still wet from the shower.

"Smells good," Joker commented, "anything new?"

Robin turned her head in Joker's direction.

"Apparently, Mr. Dumnut hasn't given up lying yet," Robin explained.

"Toby has nuts? Never tried dumnuts, sounds bad."

Returning to the main room of their apartment, Joker seated himself on a barstool opposite the kitchen. He retrieved his own datapad, starting to scroll, ending up reading the funnies instead. Robin shook her head in disbelief before she checked on the coffee maker again.

"That's the nickname I made up for our opposing candidate," Robin clarified, her smile soft across her freckled face.

By now, the coffee maker finished, so Robin grabbed her favorite mug from the cabinet and poured herself some coffee. Joker poured himself coffee then cereal, eating while reading comics. Most days he didn't know what to do with himself without a ship to pilot, except when visiting a race. A few buddies of his in motorpool said when he bought a ride they'll modify it for extra performance. Robin grabbed the toaster scrambles and slabbled them onto her plate before she sat down and ate her
breakfast. During that time, she checked her message and found one from Kasumi:

[Shepard? After the Election, would you and Joker like to play Cards Against Humanity?]

Robin didn't respond, but Joker nodded in agreement, his mouth full of cereal. He had to drink coffee to wash it down. By the time they finished breakfast, they figured they should leave the apartment. Joker had been clamoring about driving, yet Robin still suggested taking her car.

"So, do you know who you're voting for today?" Joker asked.

"I'm pretty sure we would get busted if we announced our candidates out loud," Robin reminded.

Joker sighed as he scratched his head before slipping his cap on. They hopped into their car and Robin drove down the street, reading the lanes she was familiar with to turn at a few corners before they found the voting poll. There, they could see it was full almost to the point of bursting. Most of the parking space had been packed, so Robin and Joker had to settle in a parking spot at the far end. They reached the building, but they still had to wait in line for an hour before they reached a stand. To access the polls, they flashed their IDs to the staff because apparently, the state they lived in required an ID to vote which was unnecessary. Robin went first, so she read the list of candidates carefully. Using the stylus she picked up from its slot, she filled in the tick mark labelling the Coffee Party before selecting the candidates affiliated with it, including their presidential candidate Imogen Wallace. There weren't enough candidates to satisfy her vote, so she included some independent party candidates while deliberately avoiding the candidates of the Golf Party. Once she finished, she waited for Joker to cast his vote and meet up with her outside the building.

"So, are we done here?" Joker chirped.

"Let's hope the results don't end in bloodshed," Robin shrugged.

Robin and Joker hopped into their car and left the voting poll. They figured that they could go to the theater since they have yet to see the newest movie Joker had been clamoring to see for the past couple of months.

Later that evening, Kasumi invited Robin, Joker, Kaidan, Ashley and Jack over for the game of Cards Against Humanity. They were still nervous about the election, so they had the news on to keep themselves updated on the results. Still, it was a good distraction to come up with the most ridiculous answers from the questions the card provided, with the gang taking turns playing the card czar. Kasumi still kept her expression straight in the gameplay while Kaidan raided the fridge for any frozen pizzas. While he pulled one out and started heating it in the oven, Robin took interest in a headline announcing an update involving the first contact.

[...Whether or not who wins the election this year, the Citadel has agreed to hold a meeting one month after Inauguration...]

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and turned her attention to the deck of cards in her hand. Once she read the black card on display, she picked out one of her white cards and placed it on the table. While waiting, she rubbed her forehead, which caught Jack's attention.

"Hey, you ok, Robin?" Jack called over.

Shepard stiffened and shifted her gaze at Jack.

"I-I was just thinking," blurted Robin, "if we don't end up having a war, I thought I'd take you guys traveling through space."
Kaidan let out a scoff.

"Yeah, right," Kaidan objected, "we don't have that amount of credits to pull that off. You'll need to be rich or enlist in the Alliance to do that, remember?"

Robin folded her arms and furrowed her eyebrows.

"Well, thanks for killing the mood!"

Joker placed his card on the table, allowing Jack to read the choices.

"Let's see," Jack said, "I got 99 problems, but teaching a robot to love ain't one."

Ashley and Robin couldn't help but laugh at the option, but that didn't interrupt Jack while she continued.

"The Care Bear Stare ain't one," Jack continued, "the plot of a Michael Bay movie, a dwarf who won't leave you alone until you compare penis sizes, sexy pillow fights…"

Some of the entries elicited laughter out of the gang, but Jack recuperated long enough to confirm Kasumi's pick.

"Damn it," Kaidan grumbled, "I thought my Michael Bay choice was funny."

Joker placed his hand on Kaidan's shoulder.

"Hey, it'll be fine," Joker cooed in an attempt to console Kaidan, but the latter didn't seem impressed.

While Robin pulled out the next black card, Kaidan stood to his feet and stepped into the kitchen to fetch the pizza. Once the gang served themselves some pizza slices, they continued their game throughout the night.

But, by the time midnight drew closer, Ashley and Kaidan already cleaned up the mess while Robin still remained up to date with the political news. At that time, the others have crashed for the night. Kaidan knelt down and placed his hand on Robin's shoulder, catching her attention.

"What?"

"Don't stay up too late, ok?" Kaidan advised.

Robin shrugged and returned her attention to the news while Kaidan and Ashley searched for a place to sleep. While the Coffee Party seemed to take an early lead over the course of the night, but all of a sudden, Robin stiffened when she noticed the Golf Party took the lead and kept it.

This could be a nightmare in its beginning stages.

The following morning, after they fetched their breakfast bars from the pantry, Kaidan, Ashley and Jack left Kasumi's apartment, yet Robin was still asleep on the couch. Joker wanted to wake her up, but he had yet to come up with a way to do so. However…

"Don't disturb her," Kasumi warned Joker, "you hear?"

Joker stiffened from Kasumi's stinging words, but he didn't even move from his seat. Minutes later, he stood to his feet and stepped into the kitchen for a cup of coffee while Kasumi stepped into the living room. No one paid attention to how long she waited, but Robin soon stirred from her sleep.
"Guys?" Robin whispered, "sorry to disappoint you, but the Golf Party stacked the deck against us."

Kasumi placed her hand on Robin's forehead.

"We already knew," she replied.

Robin sat up on the couch before she yawned, stretching her arms to the side before tilting her head in Kasumi's direction.

"Where is everyone?" Robin asked.

Kasumi shook her head.

"They already left," she answered.

Robin was almost tempted to slump back into the couch, but the smell of still fresh coffee prevented that. Kasumi plopped on the couch by Robin and, cat-like, snuggled up against the girl. It's almost silly how cat like the woman could be. This is merely a brief hug to let Robin know she shared her disappointment, and also because the cat lady enjoyed hugs. She let go after a time then joined her friends for coffee.

"I'm kinda suspecting foul play last night," Robin assumed, "do you guys have any thoughts on that?"

"The Coffee's had a good lead going but it was gone so fast I couldn't believe it was entirely legitimate," Kasumi nodded.

Kasumi brought out her omni-tool and scrolled through the news feeds she used as reliable sources.

"A lot of comments are calling foul, too. I bet you they'll find the popular vote was ours, but Golf got the electors," Kasumi continued.

Joker stiffened upon hearing Kasumi's little speech.

"Now I'm starting to get the creeps," he muttered.

Still, Robin lowered her head.

"I still don't think a war with the aliens is necessary," she said.

"It shouldn't be, have you seen pictures of them? Salarians are like salamanders," Kasumi replied, keeping a calm attitude, "turians, asari, really all of them are interesting. I really want to meet them."

Robin nodded in agreement.

"Me, too!" Robin chirped, "I would love to shake hands with the Turian Primarch!"

Of course, Kasumi had a thing for non-furry creatures, thus she took interest in anything with scales or whatever breathed through their skin. Once they finished their coffee, Robin and Joker took their car back to their apartment while Kasumi stepped through her apartment and reached the door to her office. A biometric sensor detected her presence, activating systems and starting her computer…a custom built optical solid state drive 360 aerogel display, with enough RAM to compete with military SI units. The unit's Interactive Synthetic Intelligence Avatar appeared atop a projection pedestal; also custom made, the figure dressed like a samurai but appeared to be a mixed race.

{ Good morning, Kasumi-san, what may I help you with today?}
She smirked and cracked her knuckles.

"Isiah-san, we have work to do."

Kasumi brought up her omni-tool and scrolled to the news feeds covering the results of the election.

"Have you uncovered anything else involving the new President-elect?" Kasumi asked.

Isiah nodded.

{ Presently I am breaching several low-level firewalls with modulating algorithms, but I will not spy into the information, merely leave a code which forwards any pertinent data into a cloud server which can be accessed publicly. A follow-up program will load the data onto multiple other public servers in several countries, before returning here. Presently I am sorting through financial records, a few have piqued the criteria for Stinking Pile of Shit.}

The data appeared on the display around Kasumi's head, she was now able to manipulate anything found within.

"Thank you," Kasumi smiled, "I'll look into it."

Over the course of the remainder of the year, Robin and her friends kept up to date on the aftermath of the election, which included cringing at hearing people loyal to the Golf Party calling liberals lazy crybabies. They even picked up news feeds of rising hate crimes against the Citadel Council races stationed on Earth, which sparked outrage from those affiliated with the Coffee Party apart from the Citadel.

When Christmas Eve drew closer, Robin and Kaidan met up at the local market. They could see some families browsing the stalls while some of the alien families kept vigilant for any bigots. Kaidan weighed two fruits in each hand, looking for defects of any kind. He seemed so engrossed in the act of judging it seemed like the fruits were on trial for their features, especially since he was planning to prepare Ashley's favorite fruit salad. Robin, on the other hand, browsed the herb shelf in search of the parsley Joker needed for what he could be whipping up in the kitchen. She didn't pay attention to a krogan youngling scurrying after its favorite toy as it rolled down the hall.

Without warning, somebody tripped the krogan youngling. It started crying, and people laughed. The mother came barreling through the crowd pushing people aside. Unfortunately, plenty were getting this on video with omni-tools or old smart phones. The mother lifted her child, holding them protectively, and roared at the offenders.

Robin snapped out of her thoughts upon hearing the commotion.

"Huh?" she blurted.

Robin tilted her head and spotted the krogan mother holding her child in a protective stance. The commotion also stirred Kaidan from his thoughts.

"Crap!" exclaimed Kaidan.

Kaidan set down the fruits but not immediately going over to aid.

"Should we help? I mean, a krogan is a krogan after all, they’re not pushovers. Especially one who is a mother, due to the difficulties their people live with…"
Someone else answered that question. A figure around Shepard's height, a male, sidled up to the krogan mother, spoke to her and calmed both mother and child. This gave Robin and Kaidan a sense of relief.

"I still can't believe there are idiots out there who would do that!" Robin commented.

The intervention of the stranger seemed to enrage the hecklers. One threw a bottle of large proportions, filled with liquid, but the man caught it without his hands. An aura appeared around him like a mirage. It intensified, and the bottle began to crack, shatter, and crumble into dust.

The biotic let his field go and stared down the group of thugs. They left, after throwing slurs of "psychic freak" and "alien lover".

The man bid the mother a farewell, then walked away in the direction of Alenko and Robin. When close enough they could see he was in the military, a tattoo bearing a unit mark, and a title.

Vanguard.

After this brief glance, Kaidan scratched his head.

"I wonder what his issues are," Kaidan muttered to himself.

Robin shook her head.

"I wouldn't put it that way," she replied, "we'd better get what we need and go pay up."

Once the crowd dispersed, Robin and Kaidan continued shopping for some groceries, hoping they would have enough what Ashley and Joker needed for tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Here's my picture of Robin Shepard and Garrus Vakarian: Robin and Commander Vakarian
Chaotic Riot

That video of the marketplace incident made headlines on major news outlets, with liberals praising the biotic soldier for shielding and protecting a victim, ignoring the fact she was krogan and could have easily torn the hecklers to pieces, and conservatives lambasting him for siding with an alien over humans, threatening a crowd of onlookers with dangerous telekinetic powers. The most annoying were those who claimed his execution as a traitor and some wanted to lynch him as a freak.

The next morning, a statement from the Department of the Army is released, basically the military covering their asses but in no way stating the man's name or their opinion on the matter.

At the Citadel, a turian commander shared a beverage with one of his associates, an expert on the Protheans who he consulted with on several cases involving stolen artifacts.

"I found...an interesting article last night," Liara pulled out her omni-tool.

The turian in question, Garrus, paused after he finished his sip. Liara pulled out the news feed from her omni-tool and showed him the article.

"If there were any hate crimes going on since the election," Liara said, "I'm guessing someone is trying to intervene."

"I'm sure we have someone keeping an eye on the situation," Garrus shrugged.

Garrus leaned back in his chair in a way that suggested that he wanted to change the subject. Liara scrolled through the news feed in her omni-tool to find something that would excite the crew, even if it was just for a day. Maybe they could investigate some sort of illegal smuggling ring somewhere in the galaxy? Liara had some luck when she received a message requesting an investigation of disappearing vorcha younglings.

"Garrus, I think we have something to look into," she reported.

Garrus peered over his shoulder and read the news feed Liara found.

"Well, I guess that is something I can check out," commented Garrus.

Once he finished his beverage, Garrus stood from the stool and Liara followed him out of the cafe.

For the moment, as the transition team of Toby Dunn was being formed as the current seated officials began to make preparations for departure, there seemed to be a lull in dramatic events...which was exactly as planned, a peaceful time shattered by trauma was precisely what the shadows behind the marionettes wanted. The Illusive Man watched through his screen while seated in his office, grinning in delight upon the progress. The silence broke when he heard Miranda step into the office.

"So, Miss Lawson," he said, "how are the preparations coming along?"

Miranda pulled up a news feed from her omni-tool.

"Many of the Dunn supporters are growing proud of their new president," Miranda reported, "Dunn's opposers, on the other hand, are fearing a rise of fascism in the making."

The Illusive Man nodded in approval.
"Good, good," he instructed, "now prepare for our next phase."

Agents of Cerberus stirred unrest among protests, causing fights and arrests, escalating their actions until, finally, someone bombed a pro-human group headquarters and blamed aliens. The tale was even spun to make the essentially neo-Nazi asshole out to be saviors of all humans. These events would escalate from the end of the presidential term through the transition, culminating in two months after the inauguration. If the Illusive Man could carry out his plan, he would soon have the galaxy's resources to exploit.

Robin and her friends, on the other hand, weren't thrilled with these incidents.

Kasumi met up with Robin in the planetarium. When they sat down by the fountain, Kasumi scanned their surroundings in search of anyone suspicious. In Robin's perspective, no one appeared to have a suspicious background. Until then, they waited for Kaidan, Ashley, Joker and Jack to show up before they could discuss a plan in secret...something that could put a stop to the imminent war.

Jack was nervous, everything she'd hoped for had gone to shit and all was now in shambles. If she didn't have friends like these, her situation might either be depression or joining some group which would land her in jail for something. She's not made good choices in the past.

Going to meet with Cat and Bobbi, Jack stayed close to Ashley and Kaidan. With thoughts filled in their minds, they kept wandering through the planetarium until they spotted Kasumi and Robin at the fountain.

"Hey! Robin!" Kaidan called out.

Robin turned her head towards Kaidan and spotted Ashley and Jack alongside him, so she waved back. This allowed Jack, Kaidan and Ashley to approach the girls.

"Say, where's Joker?" asked Ashley.

Kasumi shrugged.

"He's getting some drinks," Robin explained.

Due to the planetarium putting on a showing of Citadel race homeworld, members of a protest were also arriving at this time. Jack sat next to Robin took a deep breath. All of this unease pushed her near anxiety. Robin placed her hand on Jack's shoulder and gave her a gentle smile.

"It's ok," she said, "we'll get through this. We just need to find the string pullers, that's all."

Moments later, Joker returned with the drinks in a portable carrier. While he handed out the drinks to his friends, Jack's eyes widened in shock when she spotted bigoted protesters in black jumpsuits and shaved heads waving their flags. Their leader marched forth while spouting offensive slurs with his goons chanting:

"No aliens on Earth! Kill 'em all!"

Kaidan furrowed his eyes and folded his arms.

"This is ridiculous," he muttered.

Joker gave Kaidan a confused stare.

"Aren't you thirsty?"
Sighing, Kaidan plucked his drink from the tray. Kasumi, on the other hand, spotted a woman in a Cerberus uniform standing on the balcony of the second floor and overseeing the protest.

"Miranda," Kasumi muttered to herself.

The Cerberus agent peered down upon the crowds with a cold calculating stare. She spotted a familiar face, but for some reason she chose to ignore it. She tapped on her com-link.

"Anger the crowds," she whispered into her com-link.

Miranda turned to leave, but little did she know, Kasumi scanned her with her visor. Over the course of several minutes, the racist protests grew louder along with more trolling of left-wing supporters. Not long after, fists started flying, which drew the attention of law enforcement officers as the rioters started grabbing whatever objects they could use as weapons against the aliens in the planetarium. Robin, on the other hand, wasn't wanting to leave without a fight.

"Guys," Robin called to her friends, "I think the aliens here need help. You up for it?"

Jack punched her palm like a Morgan, popping her neck. Kaidan nodded, his eyes flickering with flames. Kasumi and Ashley both nodded. They all stood to their feet as their eyes locked onto the protest. This was the time to get serious.

The outskirts of the riot held many of the hecklers and alien baiters who tried to goad people into fights. They shouted invectives and slurs, claiming they will rape women if they have the working parts, kill babies, and other stupid shit, just to get aliens to fight.

The core of the rioting group held those who threw objects at people, broke windows, injured people, and made a mess of the situation for all victims and people who fought back. The rioters bunched closely together to guard their core while the biggest, burliest, meanest, nastiest members stood on the outside as shields and battering rams, absolute juggernauts of physical strength.

Their attempted victims had varying degrees of responses. Turians and krogans wanted to fight, salarians tried to protect themselves and others, and asari attempted to shield the non-humans with biotics. Not all stood idly by but most were aware that the circumstances of this riot was specifically designed to get a response, the best of which was to do nothing…which was harder than many assumed it would be.

In the midst of the chaos, Robin stood alongside the turians in the protest and extended her palm forward, much to the rioters' disgust.

"Guys," she called out, "that's enough! There's no need to make everything worse!"

"Shut the fuck up!" snarled a rioter.

A rioter threw a glass bottle at Robin, but she caught it before it could hit her and she tossed it aside, letting it roll away on the floor.

Kasumi joined up with the asari, ready to help them fend off the instigators. Kaidan and Ashley joined up with the salarians while Jack stood alongside the krogans, throwing a punch at a rioter. As for Joker, he scurried through the protest, protecting himself with his arms while he waved his arm in an attempt to get everyone's attention.

"Guys, cut it out already!" Joker called out, "why can't we just have some slushies?!"

Despite Joker's persistence, no one really listened.
One turian among the onlookers stood in his long, simple robe, with prayer beads in one taloned hand. He appeared to be old and wore the scars of war but he seemed to radiate peace. He stood beside Robin and nodded to her before continuing his previous actions.

An asari matron welcomed Kasumi among the group while Kaidan and Ashley were greeted by an elder salarian.

Most of the krogans didn't know how to react to Jack joining them. Some made jokes while others sneered but with the threatening group of humans wanting a fight, they didn't complain about who's a friend.

Joker had been pushed and roughed around in the midst of the crowd. Despite this, he staggered back to his feet. Even with their help, Robin had the suspicion this wouldn't be over in an instant. One instigator pulled out a smoke bomb and threw it at the krogans. The bomb emitted caustic gases that caused the krogans to cover their nostrils and eyes. Robin suspected if the protest grew worse, it would soon reach intergalactic news.

This was especially when Commander Vakarian happened to be in a port nearby, and when he received word of the riot, he suspected the rioters were breaking the law. Without warning, Garrus deployed his soldiers to aid local law enforcement. They rushed down the street, outfitted for riot control, coming up behind the rightwing nuts. Electrified cords shot from modified rifles, which wrapped assailants in bindings and stunned them into submission. In a few seconds, half of the rioters were brought down while locals protected civilians.

Vakarian, in his commander's uniform armor, was at the forefront with a stun stick, which he wielded more like a sword in the hand of a skilled skirmisher. Three skinheads tried to take him at once, two went down with a leg swipe, and the third on the ground convulsing.

Robin shielded two turian adolescents with her back turned on the right-wing rioter that tossed a smoke bomb at them before it emitted the gas, so she squeezed her eyes shut. The brother and sister, both 13 years, huddled underneath her shielding body. They held their breath and waited until the gas dissipated in a couple minutes.

"ALIEN LOVING WHORE!" shouted one asshole, about to swing a heavy bat atop Robin's back.

Said asshole was brought down by an electro-bolo, leaving him convulsing on the ground. Commander Vakarian appeared and stood near the human shielding the turians. While Robin opened her eyes, the turian commander nodded at her.

"Thank you," he said through his helmet.

Without saying anything further, Garrus set off to pursue the fleeing rioters. Robin released the turian adolescents from her arms and gave them a gentle smile.

"Ok, let's go find your parents," Robin advised.

Luckily, Robin found the adolescent turians' parents nearby. With the rioters dispersed, parents and children reunited. With Commander Vakarian's aide, the law enforcement subdued and arrested the rioters, even if the incident would've raised tension between the humans and the Citadel races.

While everyone started recovering from the chaos, Robin found Kaidan, Jack, Joker, Kasumi and Ashley outside the planetarium.

"Guys!" she called out, "you doing ok?"
Robin sprinted up to her friends, which caught their attention. Kaidan bore a few bruises along with Ashley, Jack appeared to be fine, but since she came in contact with the gas, Robin suspected otherwise. Kasumi had Joker's arm over her shoulder to keep him standing despite his sore legs.

"We'll be fine," Kaidan assured Robin.

Robin shook her head in disbelief. The violence she witnessed almost overwhelmed her mind.

"Do these guys even plan to attack the aliens all of a sudden?" Joker blurted.

"I doubt it," Robin answered.

Robin stepped over to Jack and placed her hand on her shoulder, checking for any unusual symptoms.

"Who would even start such a riot?" Kaidan muttered.

Kasumi pulled out her omni-tool and showed Robin and their friends a picture of Miranda.

"We have a way to find out," Kasumi answered.

Once the riot reached the headlines, the right-wing media and the idiot-in-chief demanded that the rioters be released into human custody. They even went so far as to deny that the rioters in question started this mess.

This riot was only the beginning.
Business Infiltrators

With Kaidan, Joker, Ashley and Jack continuing with their jobs until their next objective, Robin and Kasumi spent the next couple days searching for Miranda Lawson's information on the network. Robin was especially eager to help since she hasn't earned enough money to pay for her next set of classes for the upcoming semester. They found dead ends or nowhere-to-go leads. There were enough images of Miranda Lawson being spotted around the world but never enough to pin her down. She was nearly as elusive as her boss, except whoever was in charge had no images of themselves to track down. On top of being secretive, Cerberus used businesses as fronts to keep a low profile, a steady income all routed through banks and laundering until it was clean as a whistle. There seemed to be no way to find an insertion point.

At that point, Robin had been wishing she'd find someone to help.

While she was scrolling through her emails, she found a new message with no return address nor any identifying information. When Robin opened up the message, she watched a high-def video of Miranda Lawson meeting with the CEO of a large company. In the video, they spoke to each other and made deals, only to have Kasumi walk in and notice the video. Before the video could play any further, Kasumi turned it off without warning.

"I-I was watching that," Robin blurted.

"Do you mind playing the first bit over?" Kasumi requested.

Robin gave Kasumi a confused stare in a moment of silence before she shrugged.

"I guess," Robin replied, "who do you think sent this? Some sort of insider?"

"I couldn't say," Kasumi shrugged, "there's nothing to trace. If it didn't have identifying features, I'd say it could be manipulated."

Kasumi proceeded to save the video to an OSD with a heavy encryption. Robin took this chance to search further through the email for any more contents inside. To her disappointment, she couldn't find anything else apart from the video. With the sender's line remaining blank, she could conclude this was beyond the skills of techs yet a skilled enough person could conceal themselves this way. While Kasumi played back the video, she grimaced when she saw Miranda stripping her uniform which could only mean one thing, so she shut off the video.

"Is that why…" Robin started.

"I don't know what's worse," Kasumi interrupted, "Miranda using her body as a bargaining tool or her instigating these riots."

Robin couldn't help but shrug.

"I'm not sure if her methods of persuading the companies in question are that necessary."

Either way, they had a lead now. The CEO in the video was Xavier Tillerson, executive of a major company which made circuitry and assembled parts for civilian vessels. Now all they had to do was to find the company's headquarters and find a way to infiltrate it.

Luckily, they found the headquarters nearby in their city and Joker found an advertisement announcing that they were hiring technicians. But to his dismay, their new term was for people to do
monotonous work all day, as if it seemed to bore him. To add insult to injury, the company was well known for thoroughness in hiring. To get to the information they needed, Robin and her friends had to pick at least one among the group to fulfill such requirements. That night, Robin, Kasumi and Joker had Kaidan, Jack and Ashley meet at Robin's apartment to discuss the plan.

"So how long before this hiring season is over?" asked Joker.

Kasumi read the requirements of the position.

"Three days," Kasumi answered, "applicants need at least two years of electrical and computer engineering, with work experience. They also need to follow instructions to the letter."

Joker leaned back with a beer in his hand.

"Sounds like typical corporate fascists," he commented.

"As if there aren't any other corporates doing the same thing," Kaidan remarked, folding his arms.

"But we aren't just giving up our own values just to get a position in such a company, right?" Robin reminded.

Everyone nodded in unison.

"I'll start work on fake ID's and set up an interview. Who wants to volunteer for the job?" Kasumi glanced around at her friends.

After a moment of silence, Robin raised her hand.

"Kaidan and I'll pose for the interview," Robin offered, "and whoever is capable of sneaking around and stealing files is welcome to do so."

Kasumi nodded in agreement.

"Then what should we do?" Jack reminded, gesturing to herself, Joker and Ashley.

"If a distraction is needed to steal something, we need someone to raise a little hell. Otherwise, it's just waiting," Kasumi shrugged.

Jack grinned and stood to her feet.

"In that case," she declared, placing her fist on her chest, "leave the distraction part to me!"

"Great!" chirped Robin, "but how are we going to convince the company that we're qualified for the job?"

Kaidan placed his hand on Robin's shoulder.

"I could brief you on the basics of tech support, if that would help," Kaidan offered.

Robin gave Kaidan a warm smile.

"Thanks," she said.

Everyone decided to order pizza and sleep at Kasumi's place that night, not just because in two days they will need to attempt getting two friends into a job for a company with illegal backers but also they need to stay long enough for Kasumi to finish her work on their ID's. The little hacker got to
work with headphones on with her favorite anime music playing. She's a shameless otaku and proud of it.

Robin and friends watched favorite shows while munching on a local favorite, before falling asleep with blankets on the couches and chairs in the living room.

Kasumi worked all night to get her work done, finally finishing around 7 am. She left these on the coffee table with a note.

(Kai, Bobbi, these are your ID's with backstory, also the number for a friend who specializes in making people look different than their usual. Talk to them and you won't recognize yourselves.)

The backstories detailed Kaidan as being "Soren Cardinal" a tech major from MIT with a graduates in computer science and engineering. Robin was "Amanda Torres", a self taught computer whiz with a knack for coding. There were even fake articles about both of them for credibility.

After reading the IDs, Robin read the number before she contacted the number in question with her omni-tool. She arranged an appointment with a hairstylist before she and Kaidan collected their IDs.

"We really should get going," Robin said.

Robin led Kaidan out of the apartment before hopping into Kaidan's car. They drove through the city until they found the hair salon. Once they parked their car, Kaidan and Robin disembarked and stepped into the hair salon, stopping at the receptionist desk.

"Hello," the receptionist said, "are you two here for your hair appointment?"

Robin nodded.

"Is there some way we could change hairstyles temporarily?" she asked.

"What are your names, first, please?" requested the receptionist, "I need to get them in our book."

The salon had pink colors…light pink and bright lights almost too hard to look at, with enough hair product smell in the air to set on fire. In addition to the stereotypical Barbie look and smell, it also gave an expensive vibe. Robin and Kaidan flashed their fake IDs, allowing the receptionist to record the names.

"Right this way, please."

The receptionist escorted the two into a back room, a private salon. The woman sitting within, waiting, stood to greet them as the receptionist left.

"Ms. Torres, Mr. Cardinal, I'll be attending to your prosthetics today," she smiled.

Upon cue, Robin and Kaidan took their seats. The cosmeticians applied layers of adhesive latex to Shepard's and Alenko's faces. This process took three hours; when complete, the two literally could not recognize themselves.

Robin now had a broader face with blonde hair. Alenko had a longer face with a beard.

Even their voices were altered with stimulators creating deeper or higher tones, giving Robin a deeper bass and Kaiden a higher pitch.

Last but not least, they were provided synthetic gloves with real blood, able to fool most scanners.
They have also outfitted themselves with body modifying clothes, creating an optical illusion rather a physical one. Alenko appeared slimmer and shorter, while Shepard appeared taller and…rounder.

Once the work was finished, Robin narrowed her eyes at Kaidan. He nodded, understanding he should know better than to laugh at her disguise.

Kasumi sent a text message to Robin.

\textit{(Finished? Show us how you look so we know 'who' to look for.)}

While Kaidan set off to pay at the register, Robin snapped pictures of herself and Kaidan and sent the pictures to Kasumi, waiting for a response. Minutes later, Kasumi responded with a gif. Three black guys throwing their heads back laughing heartily.

\textit{(Now just come home, the mask needs to set. You two need to get used to your voices, and 'study' ahead of your test.)}

Smiling, Robin led Kaidan out of the hair salon and so far, no one gave them suspicious stares. Once they returned to Kasumi's apartment, they found some notes Kasumi left behind on a pair of desks, so they spent a while cramming like high school students studying for an exam. During that time, Jack and Ashley were playing a video game in the living room. While Kasumi listened to her favorite tunes on the couch, Joker spent some time keeping himself up to date on news feeds with his omni-tool.

By six thirty, Kaidan called for a break. This time, real dinner was in the middle of making rather than take-outs since five and it would be until seven before it was ready. He rubbed his eyes, which were the only part of his face not covered by prosthetics.

"I think we'll be okay tomorrow," the new voice sounded higher pitched, still requiring time to get accustomed.

Robin couldn't help but laugh, except she stopped seconds later as she still had yet to adjust to the new voice she was equipped with. Soon, Kasumi called them over, so they stepped into the dining room and joined everyone else for a meal of a hearty stew with dumplings and vegetables. After dinner, Robin and Kaidan returned to studying for tomorrow until it was nine thirty, when they decided to call it a night.

The following morning, Robin woke up at six and sauntered over to Kaidan's bed to wake him up. They stepped into the kitchen to join the others for breakfast. After they finished breakfast and prepared themselves for the upcoming interview, Robin and Kaidan hopped into the car and drove through the city with Joker, Kasumi, Jack and Ashley following them in another car. Once they arrived at the company, Robin and Kaidan stepped inside, only to find around a hundred applicants waiting in anticipation for their interview. While they searched for a couple seats, Joker, Kasumi, Ashley and Jack waited outside the building for a signal to begin the next phase of their plan. However, Robin and Kaidan's omni-tools lost their extranet signal, so they couldn't send a signal. It wasn't long before the hiring process began, with each applicant rising from their seats and stepping through the door to take a test, answering specific industry standard question.

Despite this disadvantage, Joker checked the time, confirming that noon correlated to the hiring process. Once he gave his thumbs up and winked, Kasumi and Jack hopped out of the car and circled the building, searching for a way to sneak inside.

Obviously, someone had made efforts against such clear, and cliché, means of entrance, so it
wouldn't be easy to gain access to the building. Sure, there may be a sewer which carried out waste and utilities, but it still wasn't an easy point of entry. Once Kasumi and Jack found a lid leading to the sewer, Kasumi checked her inventory. She had enough computer hack tools to break into a military-grade security system, and she had a full cloaking charge and her latest security scrambler installed. As for Jack, she had been working out for the mission. They managed to remove the lid and slip into the sewer and luckily, no one caught a glimpse of the break-in. It didn't smell too bad but the layout was complicated. Obviously, again, someone extremely annoying who watched too many movies had created a labyrinth specifically to confuse intruders. The utility lines, however, ran straight to the building. Still, Kasumi led Jack through the sewer, keeping a map handy to help them navigate through such a complex labyrinth.

Meanwhile, Robin and Kaidan were called in, so they stepped out of the lobby and into the room to take the test. Kaidan felt like he was back in tech school. Robin, on the other hand, was determined to pass the test so she and Kaidan could trick the CEO into exposing Miranda's secrets. They completed the test in one hour, and all applicants put their tactile pens down. Next were the rapid fire interviews, five minutes with a recruiter to show off skills. Each applicant had been given a series of test issues to solve. Kaidan found this easier than doing the test, as he's often leaned towards puzzles, of a sort. Figuring out computer issues were easier for him. Still, their omni-tools were disabled, plus he and Robin were on separate areas of the test floor so there's no help for either of them. It was not that he needed it but he worried for her.

The first of the series, five in total, were easy but they grew in difficulty. Robin anticipated this possibility, but considering the studying she went through all day, she had enough confidence. Even then, it took her a little while to answer the difficult question, not that it took up too much of her time. Despite the difficulty of such obstacles, Kaidan and Robin passed this test, so now they had the chance to interview the CEO himself. Robin waited outside the door until Kaidan emerged.

"You ready?" Robin asked.

"I guess," Kaidan nodded.

They strolled into the hall until they reached the door to the CEO's office. Since they made the final candidates for the application, they were allowed into the office of the CEO, Xavier Tillerson. He sat at his desk with an impressive display of trophies and awards on each wall. Standing next to his desk was Miranda Lawson, who held a binder to her chest and gave Robin and Kaidan a blank stare.

"Have a seat," she instructed.

Upon cue, Robin and Kaidan sat down in the seats provided for them.

"I have reviewed your scores, satisfactory, but now we get to the important question," Xavier said, sitting back in his chair like a king upon one gilt throne, "I want one thing from anyone who works for this company and that is to be better than anyone else. If you think for a moment those tests were hard, believe me they are child's play compared to what you will need to do in order for your job to be secure."

Lawson passed a sheaf of papers to Xavier.

"I had a look into your backgrounds, very impressive."

"Thank you, sir," Kaidan replied.

"A shame it is all fake," Xavier sneered.
He threw the file into the garbage bin.

"Miss Lawson here can spot faked documents easily," Xavier continued, "so tell me who you are and what you were planning to do."

Robin and Kaidan shuddered in an instant. Still, their masks seemed to have worked at the moment.

In the sewers, Jack's and Kasumi's omni-tools lost extranet connection, impressive they lasted so long. Now blind, they might as well do something.

Kasumi found a junction box for the mainframe.

"All right, I might be able to get in here and cause some trouble. After that, we can…go crazy I guess."

Jack nodded in agreement.

"I'm all for stirring up crazy shit," she proclaimed, placing her fist on her chest.

Kasumi hacked into mainframe, dumping a lot of garbage data into the system and causing a massive slow down of all operations, from computers and high-end processes, to elevators and basic functions. As the entire structure was wirelessly controlled or monitored, and despite its well-maintained security, everything came to a near standstill. This was particularly perturbing to employees in the bathrooms…

Tillerson glanced around as the lights dimmed and his computer showed warning messages. He turned a switch, restoring functionality to his office.

"I believe that is the work of Kasumi Goto," Miranda Lawson spoke finally, staring hard at the two before her, "and these…are Kaidan Alenko and Robin Shepard. Nice masks by the way."

Kaidan and Robin felt chills sent down their spine.

"H-How did you know about us?" Robin stammered.

Miranda shrugged.

"I can spot cosmetic prosthetics, and this blackout," Lawson brought up her omni-tool, "you'll be happy to know nothing will happen so long as you leave and never return, and cease all attempts in the future. Cerberus will be monitoring you from here on out."

While Kasumi was in the Mainframe she was unable to find anything on Cerberus. At least, not in this system.

"The CEO must have an independent server, I can't find anything usable in this system," she commented.

Jack let out a sigh.

"Do you think finding another way in will help us out?" Jack suggested.

Kasumi shook her head.

"We've been gone too long," she replied, "either Bobby and Kai are out now or everything's gone to shit."
Tillerson stood but for some reason, new alarms went off. Fire alarms, smoke, bio/chemical, everything. The entire system went haywire as the building was forced into a full evacuation. Sprinklers in the office turned on, dousing Lawson, Tillerson, Shepard, and Alenko. The latter's omni-tool chimed. A message read:

*Plant this bug on the CEO's computer then run.*

With Tillerson and Lawson distracted, Kaidan scurried over to the computer. He tapped his omni-tool onto the computer screen. Seconds later, an electrical discharge finished the task he had been given. This allowed Kaidan and Robin's omni-tools to download the confidential files from the computer. With their work finished, they sprinted out of the office and down the hall, taking a few flights of stairs to reach the first floor while the sirens still blared throughout the building. There was controlled mass panic as everyone in the building evacuates. All employees, and a few of the interviewees waiting to meet the boss walked with stiff, nervous actions, barely holding on to panic. So many alarms going off at once unnerved everyone.

Kasumi and Jack ran as fast as possible out of the sewers. Once they made it outside, they saw Kaidan and Robin emerge from the building and sprinting for the car, so Kasumi and Jack followed suit. They all hopped inside and after buckling up, Robin and Kaidan started removing the prosthetics.

"Joker," demanded Jack, "get us out of here!"

The prosthetics felt so much like skin it's damn near unpleasant to remove them, like peeling a blister full of liquid. Nodding in agreement, Joker turned on the ignition and drove out of the parking lot.

Once they arrived at Kasumi's apartment, they reviewed the data. Unfortunately, most of it has clearly been removed by someone else, whoever sent that message and helped. What was remaining, however, was definitely worth a big scandal. Not just embarrassing but actually damaging, and somewhat disturbing.

"So, that means…" Ashley gasped.

"The new President Toby Dunn is picking administrators conspiring with Cerberus," Robin commented, "how long will it take before he learns it's a bad idea?"

Jack scratched her head.

"Anything else?" Joker asked.

Kasumi gestured everyone to read the files. It turned out Xavier Tillerson had been selling off contracts for his company to contractors who used vorcha laborers, paying them extremely low wages and poor living conditions by most standards. The fact Tillerson was being considered for a position of Secretary for Dunn, this would besmirch the new President and any chance of this appointee ever getting that lofty position.

Yet still, whatever information was removed from the stolen server is in the hands of someone else, and who that might be is unclear.

"It's not the earth shattering discovery we wanted but it'll hit Dump's credibility, what hasn't been hit already, and Tillerson won't get the job," Alenko said.

Everyone felt a little dejected, though.

"Still," Robin shrugged, "has anyone thought of what Cerberus has been planning while these
"What are you planning on doing now?"

"Probably making the next blockbuster hit which is really bad but all the critics call it good," Joker shot that one-liner across the hull.

Feeling low, Kasumi started writing.

"Take it easy tonight, guys, I need to be an introvert right now."

Joker drove everyone home, then ordered pizza for himself and Robin before starting a show they both enjoyed in the living room. After such a stressful day, it felt good to take a break. However, Robin had the nasty reminder in her head of Miranda's warning. She and her friends will have to outsmart Cerberus if they were to stop the war.

In the meantime, a Quarian leaned her back against the wall. Tali'Zorah read the information Kasumi downloaded and stiffened at the contents.

"It seems…we're getting close to Cerberus's objective," Tali muttered to herself.
Cerberus Objective

Once morning set in, Kasumi woke up to the sound of a ping from her omni-tool. She tapped on it, only to find another message with no sender.

[Do you want to implicate Cerberus?]

Kasumi noted simple yes or no options at the end of the message, so she tapped yes after reading it for a couple seconds. Moments later, another message popped up, providing information to infiltrate a Cerberus base, assuming the identities of two officers with contacts for supplies and more advanced disguises, all of which she managed to download. Satisfied with the instructions, Kasumi got out of bed for the day. She'll have to pick one of her friends for this objective.

In the meantime, Kaidan and Ashley went jogging to burn out their disappointment with muscle fatigue. Jack had been playing biotiball with some of the kids she had been tutoring. As for Robin and Joker, they stopped at the nearby coffee shop. Joker nursed his coffee with slow movements, dejected. Not that he was completely let down; the Tillerson Affair, as it's being called, was becoming the most popular thing to talk about by everyone, from news anchors to coffee drinkers. They had created a storm and the Dunce would be riding it in a ship of falsehoods and idiocy. In Robin's mind, it may have been a small victory, but at least it gave her a sense of hope while she took a bite out of her egg biscuit sandwich. Even so, she still had to remind herself she had to keep moving forward. She must admit she would wonder why people would vote for Toby Dunn in the first place.

"You doing ok?" asked Joker.

Joker sighed as he took a sip.

"I-I'm doing ok," Robin assured Joker with a gentle smile.

She was nearly finished with her breakfast when Robin got a text in her omni-tool, so she opened it.

[Back alley, five minutes. Tell Joker you have a sudden urgent need, can't explain. - K]

Robin noticed the accompanying cat face…Kasumi's signature. She glanced around the coffee shop for a couple seconds before she finished up her breakfast and stood from her seat.

"Hey," Joker interrupted, "where are you going?"

Robin froze and turned her head at Joker.

"Uh, it's something a little personal," Robin blurted, "don't wait for me, ok?"

"O-Ok," Joker nodded.

Robin stepped out of the coffee shop and wandered along the sidewalk in the city. It took her a short while to find the back alley, where Kasumi waited for her while mounted on a motorcycle, a custom model from her boyfriend Keiji. She nodded while tossing Robin a helmet.

"Let's go," she said.

After Robin put on the helmet, she hopped on the motorcycle and held onto Kasumi from behind.

"Are we going somewhere?" Robin asked.
Kasumi gunned the engine which roared to life. She pulled a 180 degree turn which took them to the opposite street. They took back alleys and side streets to avoid main thoroughfares. What she had been doing was avoiding any sort of monitoring systems, including traffic cams. While holding on, Robin glanced around her surroundings, even if the scenery appeared to blur. They stopped some miles away from their departure.

"Here," Kasumi said.

Kasumi sent Robin the message from this morning, allowing her to read it.

"This isn't some front company," Kasumi explained, "this is how to get into Cerberus and hit them right in their danglebags."

Robin nodded in agreement.

"Did that mysterious sender give that message?" Robin asked.

"Yeah," Kasumi nodded, "but getting in means…joining Cerberus."

Robin shuddered within an instant.

"I don't want to do it alone," Kasumi continued, "but I don't want to bring everyone along, just you and me."

"But," Robin clamored, "this is just temporary, right?"

Kasumi shrugged.

"We only have enough to get in," she explained, "not get what we want. So, I'm guessing it will take however long it takes."

Kasumi turned off the engine before she and Robin hopped off the motorcycle.

"So how long are we talking, exactly?" Robin asked.

Kasumi shook her head.

"This is so big and dangerous I have no idea how long it should take," she clarified.

Robin stiffened, yet she followed Kasumi into the building. Once inside, Kasumi checked her omni-tool to confirm where they should go. They were directed to a parlor, similar to the one Robin and Kaidan used to get their prosthetics. In this place, however, there was no pink. In fact, they soon find out it appeared to be an underground cosmetic modification center, using nanites to change a face by adding material atop bone, modifying skin tone. These were illegal due to the fact it bordered on genetic alterations of the kind outlawed by consensus of the Alliance and Citadel species.

It seemed quite Doctor Frankenstein when Kasumi and Robin were sitting in their chairs when suddenly locking clamps appeared around ankles, wrists, waist, shoulders, and forehead, eliciting a startled yelp out of Robin.

"Hey, what's the meaning of this?!" demanded Robin.

A technician covered in scary tattoos approached with a big needle. He swabbed the crook of Robin's arm then eased the needle in. Robin hissed in pain while he did the same to Kasumi, then proceeded to a monitoring station. The change felt…extremely unpleasant. She couldn't move her limbs to see the change happening in front of her eyes, but she could most certainly feel it. They
heard ticking and beeping of an aerogel display as the process continued. The least Robin could do was glance at the technician in charge of the ordeal. However, he was nowhere to be found.

Once two minutes passed, the process completed and their restraints unlocked. Kasumi and Robin glanced at each other, noticing that they both resembled different people. Once the technician left, Kasumi received another message from her omni-tool:

[With your prosthetics complete, arrive at this address at the specified time.]

Kasumi read the address, but even if it was distant, they had enough time. She stood from her chair and led Robin out of the parlor, exiting the building and heading towards the motorcycle. For all Robin knew, it would take a few hours to get to this destination but it felt like being in outer space.

"Somehow I feel like I should've packed a toothbrush," Robin shrugged as she put on her helmet, "or something?"

Once again, Robin noticed her voice changed under the prosthetics.

"To be honest," Kasumi admitted, shaking her head, "I don't know if we'll be staying for the night."

Once they hopped onto the motorcycle, they rode the length of their journey on electricity transmitted into the motorcycle via microwave radiation which was considered harmless to organics, and it converted into power within the bike itself. It may not be as fast as fuel but it would make the trip. It took a long while before they arrived at another corporate building, taller than the last one if not surrounded by private military personnel. Whoever they were supposed to be, they allowed Robin and Kasumi through the gate on sight. This seemed odd to Robin since the personnel weren't in Alliance uniforms. Kasumi found a place to park her motorcycle before she and Robin disembarked.

"Is this supposed to be Cerberus?" Robin whispered.

Kasumi shrugged. She opened her omni-tool and tapped on the hack app, allowing access into the building. Upon entry, Kasumi received another message.

{Find the humans you are impersonating. Take their IDs and uniforms.}

The message brought up two files on Cerberus personnel...one officer and one scientist. Kasumi and Robin shared glances, realizing that they both resemble the personnel in question. Robin scanned her surroundings for anyone who might be patrolling the area.

"Now where do you think they would be hiding?" Robin pondered.

They wandered through the corridor until they found a directory in a terminal. Robin and Kasumi carefully scanned the directory in search for their targets. Kasumi found her target in the lab. Robin found her target near the Special Projects access. She tilted her head in Kasumi's direction.

"So," Robin whispered, "should we split up?"

Kasumi shared a program from her omni-tool with Robin's, and when she read the description, she learned she could give it an electrical discharge by activating it.

"I suggest you hit them hard enough," Kasumi advised.

Robin nodded in agreement before she and Kasumi went in different directions, Robin having a sense of direction to the Special Projects section. Along the way, Robin and Kasumi each located their targets and took cover for a brief moment, waiting for a chance to strike. Moments later, they
activated the electrical discharge on their omni-tools and punched their targets hard, giving them an electric shock that knocked them unconscious. Robin and Kasumi took this chance to steal their IDs and uniforms before they continued forth.

Kasumi had an easier time finding the security master station as she could access the office with no trouble. With an old man sleeping inside and the office locked but with lights on, Kasumi knocked on the door instead of sneaking in. This prompted the security chief to answer the door.

"Doctor," she asked with irritation, "is there something you need?"

Kasumi resisted the temptation to smirk.

"May I come in?" Kasumi requested.

The chief hesitated, her face giving an annoyed expression. She let the assumed doctor in, her back opening the door wider. Once Kasumi made it inside, the chief had her back turned as the door closed.

"I think I forgot something," Kasumi explained in a calm tone, "in one of the labs, I think."

The chief placed her hand on the handprint scanner, opening the terminal.

"You go on ahead, ma'am," the chief said.

Upon cue, Kasumi continued forth through the corridor that led to the lab.

Robin descended three flights of stairs to reach two security barriers with human guards that had blond hair and blue eyes. She stiffened, unsure of how to get past them without clearance. Still, she carefully approached the guards, catching their attention.

"Oh, boss?" one of the guards paused.

"Uh, yeah," Robin stammered, going along with the comment.

The guards took a step aside.

"You go on ahead," the other guard offered as he placed his hand on the handprint scanner.

The two security barriers opened in an instant.

"Thank you," Robin couldn't help but smile as she sauntered past the guards.

The guards and chief who inadvertently aided Kasumi and Robin were both confused by their off behavior, the security chief especially. This particular doctor had an arrogance and attitude which always got on their nerves. Both decided to ignore it, they weren't paid to have suspicions, just to protect the eggheads.

Both Robin and Kasumi received another message in their omni-tool:

*Find a terminal with classified access, enter this spyware.*

They both noticed a file attached to their message, yet they stared in confusion. Still, Kasumi and Robin both searched their destined rooms until they found the terminals the message specified. To access the terminal, they placed their hands on the handprint readers while leaning forward to allow the retinal scanner to scan their eyes. The terminals granted access, so they connected their omni-tools and waited for four seconds before the spyware program finished uploading into the two
terminals. However, the instant the process was complete, alarms blared. The noise and system overloads led to a complete breakdown of all systems. Kasumi and Robin scurried out of the rooms and searched for an escape route. However, people would be getting in the way, so they pushed past the rushing crowd before they finally met up near the entrance. With the chaos that ensued, they managed to sneak out of the building, but they received no further instruction.

"T-That's all?" Robin blurted.

Kasumi checked her omni-tool, only to notice it downloaded confidential files from Cerberus in the process.

"We should leave," Kasumi suggested.

After Kasumi turned off her omni-tool, she and Robin hopped onto the motorcycle and rode away from the building. However, they noticed the main gate had been barred, but Kasumi spotted a nearby object that could serve as a ramp. Once Kasumi covered enough distance, she shifted her motorcycle to full throttle and accelerated towards the ramp. Using the ramp as leverage, the motorcycle jumped over the wall. It landed hard but they kept themselves secured on the seat, covering enough distance with speed for Kasumi to turn off the gasoline engine. Electrical would give them stealth capability. She kept the engine gunned full speed. Thankfully, the Cerberus base had been filled with enough confusion it did not send out ships to search for two people acting suspicious.

Satisfied with the getaway, Kasumi rode through back alleys to avoid surveillance cameras, and it wasn't long before they reached Robin's apartment. By then, Robin could start feeling the effects of the advanced prosthetics wearing off. Once Kasumi and Robin headed inside, they took turns in the bathroom. After they relieved themselves, they met up in the living room while Joker was in the middle of watching his favorite show. Robin and Kasumi read through the files they downloaded, only to notice what data they collected was more embarrassing and damaging to Dunn and now Cerberus, including the use of children from colonies and poor nations as subjects for soldier enhancement programs. Still, they found nothing about war.

"Yeah, that's really fucked up," Robin commented, "will that be enough to prevent the war in the first place?"

Joker overheard the comment and glanced over Robin's shoulder to read the contents.

"At least it would cause a big shitstorm to hopefully make the idea of war too dumb," Joker suggested.

Kasumi and Robin tilted their heads in Joker's direction.

"I hope so, too," smiled Robin, "right?"

Nodding in agreement, Kasumi and Robin started uploading everything they obtained to major news media and public servers with bots to spread the information.

Little did they know, when Miranda picked up the news of the Cerberus facility going haywire, she suspected something was up.
Escaping Death

Over the course of a couple of days, the information leaked online started an uproar among humans and alien races. When President Toby Dunn heard of this, he couldn't control his anger and summoned all his supporters to a rally, making an announcement that whoever disclosed the information should be killed on sight. With approval from the Illusive Man, Miranda ordered an investigation of this alleged crime. It didn't take long for her to come to one particular finding involving Robin Shepard along with her friends.

The Citadel Council wasn't impressed with this incident either, so one day, they sent Commander Garrus Vakarian a message requesting his presence. He made his way to the Citadel Tower, taking an elevator in the Presidium before meandering through a few corridors until he stepped through the door to the Council Chambers. Ahead, representatives from different council races stood waiting for him, including Tevos, Valern and Sparatus. He kept his spine straight and eyes forward, anticipating whatever they might want to tell him.

"I got your message," Garrus said, "so what do you need?"

Tevos showed Garrus a datapad, detailing the recent incident on Earth. Reading this, his mandibles flexed. Once he made a glance at Shepard's profile, he found himself recognizing her from the riot.

"We believe the person's responsible are in grave danger, most likely from Cerberus and the human leadership. They will be labeled as traitors, but their efforts have given us a look into what Cerberus plans to do," Sparatus explained.

The Councilor stood straight.

"Retrieve the group responsible and bring them here quickly, Commander Vakarian."

Garrus saluted sharply and left.

With an objective confirmed, Garrus made his way out of the Citadel Tower and back to the Presidium. When he stepped out of the elevator, he spotted Tali'Zorah waiting for him, so he gestured her to approach him.

"Tali, do you have the means to contact Shepard or one of her acquaintances?" Garrus asked.

"Yes," nodded Tali.

"Then I'll need your help," Garrus requested.

Nodding in agreement, Tali prepared a message to send to Kasumi while she and Garrus wandered through the Citadel. They arrived at the dock and boarded Vakarian's ship. The turian commander meandered through the ship and made his way to the bridge.

Robin hoped she would be able to sleep in this morning. She didn't get the chance when her omni-tool kept beeping early in the morning, so she forced herself awake to check the message:

{You need to leave Earth immediately, or you're going to die.}

Groaning, Robin stumbled out of bed and trudged towards the window to peek outside. Strange, she couldn't find any chaos at the moment, so what could this message entail? The least she could do was
fix her hairstyle and change into a tank top and cargo shorts before stepping out into the living room, only to notice Kasumi, Kaidan, Ashley, Jack and Joker watching the news.

"Guys?" Robin called out, "what's going on?"

Robin spotted a screen with the header "Traitor", much to everyone's horror.

"Shit, shit, shit," Joker muttered, "I didn't even get to eat yet!"

"Are they…going to kill us?" Ashley whimpered.

Robin gasped in shock upon understanding the situation, shortly after she started hearing sirens from a distance.

"No way!" Robin exclaimed.

Without warning, she sprinted back into her room and packed her basic essentials into her bag and slipped on her boots before she met up with everyone outside the apartment.

"Everyone get in my car!" Joker suggested.

Joker, Robin, Kaidan, Kasumi, Jack and Ashley hopped into the car, the keys in Joker's hands while he turned on the ignition.

"Where should we go?" asked Kaidan.

"Probably somewhere far away, I think," Kasumi muttered.

Joker moved the car out of the driveway and started speeding through the road. Police patrols and other black clad vehicles nearly had them cornered.

"HANG ON!" Joker shouted.

Joker floored the gas pedal and the engine roared. Thankfully, he chose a car with a narrow enough body to fit through tight spaces. Coming out the other side, he turned sharply right then roared down the road, taking side streets and alleyways and using a police scanner to stay ahead of the feds. Unfortunately, not everyone was using that frequency.

Miranda Lawson observed from above, coordinating her own forces to arrest Goto and her friends.

With Joker evading law enforcements, Robin peered out the window as the scenery appeared to blur. She even turned her gaze to her friends.

"How could this have happened?" stammered Ashley, "I'm scared!"

Kaidan placed his arm around Ashley's shoulder.

"We're going to be fine," Kaidan assured Ashley, "trust me!"

Due to Joker preferring older model vehicles to newer ones, and his habit of tinkering, this car had no computer to hack, no way to remotely shut it down. It also used tubing and coolant which kept fuel and fluids from overheating, useful when law enforcement and bad guys used thermal weapons to disable a vehicle by overheating the system. Best of all, however, was its ability to produce a lot of power or be nimble. Joker chose to be nimble on the back alleys and narrow streets but to get out of the city, he would need to take the freeway. It would leave them exposed, but it would allow his baby to perform at her best.
"Guys, anything you can do to slow them down would be great," Joker requested, "Kas, you still have that Overload thing on your tool?"

Kasumi nodded and flashed her omni-tool.

"Leave it to me," Kasumi declared.

An unmarked black interceptor, with enough horsepower to chase down Joker's car, approached; Kasumi's first victim as she tapped on her omni-tool to overload the vehicle in question.

Joker took a sudden left, heading for the freeway. He didn't plan to stay on long, just enough to give distance and confuse the cops. Kasumi spotted another interceptor and set off to overload it through her omni-tool. During that time, Robin spotted a turian ship entering the planet's atmosphere and heading for the freeway. No one else in the car seemed to notice enough to ask questions, so she suspected it might be a simple coincidence.

The turian ship caused an uproar across the Alliance as a violation of sovereignty...a foreign vessel entering human space, unauthorized, and unknown, with the capability of decimating a city by itself! Outrageous, but the next events were said by others to be one of the most awesome chase scenes ever.

The ship dropped a vehicle, which landed atop one of the interceptors, crushing it, then rolled off and chased after the vehicles. Unloading a cannon, it fired a 125 mm depleted uranium round, which shredded the unmarked black car. Somehow this mini-tank got close enough to protect the fleeing vehicle.

The ship meanwhile blasted gunships and air pursuit vehicles out of the sky, determining which are law enforcement and which are Cerberus. It made a smooth approach, dropping its back cargo bay door open with millimeters to spare from the road.

Joker noticed all the commotion, but he kept his eyes on the road.

"This is getting weird," he commented, "should we take cover under these alien vehicles?"

Robin shook her head in disbelief.

"Anyone could be trying to kill us, for all I know," Robin remarked.

To Robin's left, a Cerberus vehicle locked onto Joker's car, ready to launch a rocket as Miranda prepared to descend the helicopter to the ground. The mini-tank shot that interceptor down, then turned its gun on the vehicle Lawson was conveniently in, which maneuvered it aside for now.

A vid call came on Robin's omni-tool and when she tapped on it, a quarian appeared on the screen.

{Robin Shepard? This is Tali'Zorah nar Rayya, and I work with Garrus Vakarian. That is his ship, and he was ordered by the Citadel Council to bring you and your friends out of harm's way. Now please, GET ON THE SHIP! If that doesn't convince you, I was the one helping you through this.}

Robin stared in disbelief before turning her head at Joker.

"What's the meaning of this?" she blurted.

"Tali and I," Kasumi admitted, "we made a long distance friendship some time ago."

Jack shrugged. Once the car was at a close proximity to the turian ship in question, Joker stopped the
vehicle and killed the engine. Robin, Joker, Kaidan, Ashley and Kasumi disembarked the car and sprinted until they were just a couple feet closer to the ship's ramp. While they took some time to catch their breath, Miranda ordered Cerberus vehicles and law enforcement vehicles to intercept them, hoping to arrest them before they could get away. All of a sudden, Garrus emerged from the ship wielding a machine gun. Its design mounted onto a bracket arm attached to the back of his armor for support. He spun it up to speed, ready to unleash hell in hot rounds. Brushing past the human misfits, he took a stance against the Cerberus and human police forces.

One turian and a big gun against many guns.

Robin and her friends couldn't help but stare in disbelief as the turian commander's actions caused the forces to pause in their tracks. Before the conflict could escalate, the helicopter landed on the ground and Miranda emerged from the helicopter, marching towards the front of the forces.

"Robin Shepard," Miranda called out, "come away from the ship and put your hands behind your head!"

The Cerberus forces aimed their guns at Robin and her friends. But, that turned out to be a bad move as Garrus stepped in between Robin and Miranda.

"I'll make something clear to all of you," Garrus warned, unseen devices amplifying his voice, "I hold a krogan designed turian manufactured anti-ship weapon. It delivers a power comparable to a tactical nuclear warhead's destructive ability or it can fire one million rounds of armor piercing explosive warheads. The latter is what I hold, custom designed by me. This ship's barriers are the best in the galaxy. No one may even pass through if they are outside while the shields are engaged."

The turian commander glared at Miranda.

"Human police officers," he continued, "you are not bound to serve a man so disgraceful as the one leading you, so leave now. As for Cerberus…"

Without warning, Garrus pulled the trigger and unleashed a volley, its roar intimidating the Cerberus officers and the loud noise forcing Robin and her friends to cover their ears. The volley shredded the helicopter in seconds to the point it collapsed into broken pieces, with barely any time for reactions.

For Robin and her friends, they could only stare in shock and awe. For all they could know, Vakarian clearly shouldn't be messed with. After giving Miranda a nod, he tilted his head in Robin's direction. For some reason, she could now recognize him.

"Wait a minute," Robin muttered, "you're that turian that stopped that rioter from bludgeoning me to death."

Garrus didn't say anything, but he reached down and grabbed Robin's wrist before he pulled her to her feet. Upon cue, several more squad members swarmed out of the ship and aided Kaidan, Ashley, Kasumi, Joker and Jack to their feet, much to their confusion. Garrus turned towards the ship while keeping his grip on Robin's wrist.

"Come with me," he instructed.

Garrus gestured his squad to escort Kaidan, Kasumi, Ashley, Jack and Joker aboard the ship with him and Robin following suit. Once they were aboard, Garrus sent a message through his omni-tool to the pilots to prepare for takeoff, the hatch sealing itself shut.

"Hey," Joker called out, "is there a place we can rest?"
Garrus shook his head. He escorted them to his quarters, motioning Robin and her friends inside before he closed the door behind him. Once he sent a message to the pilot to set a course for the Citadel, he stared down the human misfits.

"I remember all of you from that riot. How do you go from a riot to infiltrating a Cerberus base?" Garrus glared at Robin, "who are you people?"

Ashley fidgeted and stammered nervously, unsure of what to say while Jack clenched her fists. Joker buried his face into his hands to hide his embarrassment while Robin brought her hand closer to her chest.

"We voted for Imogen Wallace since she proved to dedicate herself to make peace with you guys," Robin explained, trying to maintain her posture, "but then that idiot Dunn became president and we're worried he would escalate the whole thing to war. I thought if we got involved in some way, we would prevent the war in the first place and save countless civilizations in the galaxy."

"Uh-huh…and now you're fugitives. Explain how you make that sort of leap," Garrus demanded in clipped tones.

His door opened and a Quarian walked in, catching his attention.

"That was me, sir."

"Of course it was you," Garrus facepalmed.

Encouraging Kasumi to leave one chair, the turian commander sat down, allowing Kasumi and Tali to face each other without distracting the others.

"This may be just the provocation to the war you tried preventing," Garrus continued, "if what I'm getting from the Council is accurate, this was impossible to avoid no matter what you do."

Robin cringed. If war was inevitable, then it might be possible that Toby Dunn would reap the benefits should the humans win this unnecessary war. Kaidan shook his head in disbelief.

"Well, I guess that means the galaxy is screwed," he commented.

Robin furrowed her eyes at Kaidan.

"We can't just give up now," she insisted, "if we really can't prevent the war, then can't we just reduce the casualties?"

Garrus stared into Robin's face, giving off an irritated expression as his mandibles flexed.

"War is its own monster, consuming people whether they fight or not. In a full scale conflict, everyone living is involved, even children," he warned her, "no one escapes war and no one is unaffected by it. Either it's avoided entirely or your people and mine will be killing each other soon."

Robin couldn't help but cringe. When she lived through the day the humans first contacted the Citadel, she dreamed of exploring worlds beyond her own. Seeing these races going to war was almost unbearable for her. She may not have noticed it, panic started to build up in her breath, which Garrus somehow noticed. He backed away without warning.

"What you've done has likely accelerated their plans so they'll try something big and drastic to get public support, but soon something immense will occur," Garrus implied, "it will result in numerous casualties, and we will be blamed for it."
Garrus turned to leave, the door opening for him and allowing Tali to step outside.

"I don't see how this will not end with bloodshed," he concluded.

"But I," Robin protested, "I only wanted to help. I can't bear to let anyone die. Should I have just done nothing and let Mr. Dunn get away with what he wants?"

Garrus shook his head.

"There was no right or wrong here," he clarified, "because it all ends the same way."

Garrus heard a ping, so he checked his omni-tool and read its latest message.

"I'll have to get you set up in some housing, the Council has to convene for other matters," Garrus concluded.

Garrus accessed the internal extranet connection and linked in Robin and her friends' omni-tools to receive incoming traffic.

News outlets from both liberal and conservative sides boiled with breaking news headlines while their inboxes flooded with messages from their family members.

"Damn," Jack commented, "looks like we were in a no-win scenario all along."

"Who cares?" Joker groaned, "I'm still starving!"

Garrus couldn't help but snort at Joker's comment.

"That fool in your leaders' seat closed the human embassy on the Citadel but there are still humans living there, so you might find a place to eat."

Garrus checked his omni-tool again.

"It won't take long before we arrive."

Garrus left his quarters, leaving Robin and her friends behind before he closed the door.
Garrus wandered through the corridor before he arrived at the bridge. Peering at the map in front of him, he confirmed it would take a while to reach the Citadel, now that he had the human misfits in custody. However, once they reached the Charon Relay to Arcturus, they received one nasty warning.

"Commander," reported a pilot, "we're receiving an incoming transmission."

Garrus couldn't help but sigh. This was just great.

"Let me speak with them."

Garrus answered the transmission through the terminal.

{Commander Vakarian,} a human demanded over the transmission, {you must stop all activities and prepare for boarding.}

Garrus shook his head.

"I have orders from the Council to take the responsible humans into custody," he objected, "any action from your idiot leader will result in further conflicts."

{I don't care what the Citadel says!} the human caller insisted over the transmission, {Robin Shepard and her accomplices are terrorists and President Dunn has insisted you will hand them over to be prosecuted!}

Garrus stood tall while he folded his arms, refusing to give into Toby Dunn's demands.

Somebody managed to catch his rant about the 'traitors and bird friends'. Later, it would get on major outlets. In the meantime the situation had been so tense, bringing out the best and worst attitudes of people. Far Righters wanted the traitors and aliens to be killed, moderates were afraid of these and decided it's safer to lean more with the left. Far Leftists wanted to throw out all of the Rightists as the real traitors. Moderates on that side leaned more to the right, not wanting to throw out everyone for disagreeing.

Still, after listening to the human caller's unreasonable rants, Garrus ended the transmission, not wanting to delay the Council's orders.

"All right, we should keep moving," Garrus advised.

The pilots maneuvered the ship into the Mass Relay and the ship jumped across space. A Cerberus stealth ship followed in their wake, so close it caught the same bolt of energy enveloping the turian ship. It magnetically attached and rode through the Relay. It took only a while before the turian ship entered the Arcturus system. To his dismay, he noticed many Alliance ships waiting on the other side, commanding officers wanting to detain or let the turians go.

"Damn it," he growled.

Garrus clenched his fists, suspecting this wouldn't be an easy trip anymore. A message from the Alliance's Admiral of the Navy is received by the comm officer, who forwarded it to Vakarian's terminal.
The Admiral was a veteran with many decorations, turian-like in strategy and competent. Right now they appeared stone-faced and reserved.

"Commander Vakarian."

"Admiral Churchill," Garrus responded.

"We have an impasse at this point. I am ordered to stop you from taking the individuals in your custody, and you are ordered to protect and bring them to the Citadel," the Admiral stated.

"Yes Admiral, I understand the situation and what either outcome may lead to," Garrus replied.

"I am familiar with your reputation. I know this is not your first run-in with hard obstacles, but never before against this many," the Admiral nodded.

"Yes, Admiral," Garrus held no tone of voice, merely a flat sound of acknowledgement.

The Admiral remained silent, waiting for some kind of action.

"I do not see an easy solution, Admiral, in any circumstance this leads to a few good outcomes with many bad possibilities," Garrus proclaimed, "all I may say is if you believe these people are true traitors to humanity, then by all means come at my ship and take them back. Or…their efforts will open a wellspring of revolt against deceitful, powerful groups who desire dominance and power."

The Admiral didn't respond.

"I pray to all of the Spirits our decisions today will be remembered well," Garrus closed the comm, "helm, all ahead full."

"All ahead full, aye sir!"

The crew jumped to action and Garrus gripped the railing before him.

"Now, let's run that gauntlet."

In a matter of moments, the turian ship began to accelerate. At top speed, the ship would make the distance between relays in two minutes, with extra fuel being forced into the engines for the extra boost.

None of the Alliance ships tried to stop them. By the time Vakarian's ship reached the relay, it soon enveloped the ship, sending it away at relative speed. With the ship en route to the Citadel, Garrus sighed in relief. Still, he suspected that Cerberus and whatever right-wing fanatics will try to get to Shepard and her friends. For that matter, he will have to find some way to ensure they had protection from these maniacs. The ship relayed out of Arcturus. It would only be a matter of time until they reached the Citadel, or so they thought.

In the shuttle adhered to the turian vessel through magnets, Kai Leng waited for his move.

Garrus figured that maybe he should check on their human captives, so he stepped out of the bridge.

In the meantime, the human guests were ok, even if they were disappointed, being out of their depth with what was going on.

Kai Leng opened a hatch of the shuttle, placing a drill to cut through the hull of the ship. It triggered a hull breach alarm, so he needed to move quickly.
When Robin heard the siren, she glanced at the ceiling and balled her fists while Ashley panicked and buried herself in Kaidan's embrace.

"What the hell's going on?" Jack demanded.

"I think we got a problem," Robin muttered.

All crew took weapons from underneath their stations, then returned to their duties as patrols searched the decks.

Using a full-light-spectrum camouflage, Leng blended into the surroundings. He needed to work fast before the charge died or he overheated. He searched the ship, hoping to find Robin and her friends in wherever they're being held. Kai Leng stopped at the door to Commander Vakarian's quarters. Using a hacking program, he opened the door in seconds, eliciting startled yelps out of Robin and her friends.

"N-Not good!" Joker squeaked.

Entering with the menacing grace of a demon, Kai Leng unsheathed two daggers.

"The Illusive Man sends his regards," he declared.

Kaidan charged at Leng while preparing his fist, but the assassin dodged the punch before he tripped him, knocking him unconscious as if in a single movement.

"Kaidan!" Ashley panicked.

Ashley started to back away from Kai Leng, so Joker pulled her into a protective embrace while Kasumi and Jack charged at the assassin. Kasumi attempted to hack Kai Leng's defenses through her omni-tool, but it backfired when he overloaded it to the point it stunned her. Jack moved in to kick the assassin, but he knocked her foot aside and slammed his fist into a pressure point on Jack's body which disabled her ability to produce ME fields. With each hit from his hand, he knocked Kasumi out of her breath and with a blow to Jack's head, she fell unconscious. Unfortunately, his adrenaline high prevented him from getting out in time, but he had no intention of escaping and he didn't want to get caught yet. Robin stared in horror as Kai Leng prepared to finish off Kasumi.

"No! Stop!" Robin shouted.

Robin charged at Kai Leng and tackled into him, pushing him away from Kasumi while she tried to wrestle the daggers out of his hands. She may have pinched his wrist, forcing him to drop one dagger, but it turned out to be a bad move as he then pushed her off and punched her in the gut before slamming her against the wall, one hand pinning her wrists together as she struggled to free herself.

However, just as Kai Leng raised his dagger, the cabin door opened and Garrus charged in, holding a pistol in his hand. He fired low-velocity rounds that passed through the assassin's kinetic barrier. The rounds discharged a massive shock to Kai Leng which caused him to release Robin from his grip and pass out.

In this short moment of relief, Robin took a moment to catch her breath while she stepped over the unconscious assassin. Garrus rushed over and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Robin stared into the turian commander's blue eyes before she nodded.
"I-It's Cerberus," she stuttered, "they must've sent him to kill us!"

After taking a few seconds to stroke her head in an attempt to soothe her, Garrus released his grip, allowing Robin to rush over to check on Kaidan, Kasumi and Jack, hoping they would be still be alive.

"Well," Garrus commented, "now he can spend some time in a C-Sec prison cell. We'll be arriving shortly."

Two crew members entered the cabin to take Leng into custody. As far as the turian commander knew, his ship would need some repairs afterward. The ship entered the Widow Nebula and in a matter of minutes, it docked in the Citadel. While Garrus handed Kai Leng off to C-Sec, Tali'Zorah escorted Robin and her friends to a medical clinic, admitting them to a secure wing so they would get treatment. The staff even provided some sets of clothes since they didn't pack any apart from the basic essentials they took with them when they left. While they took some time to rest, a couple staff members brought in their meal orders, much to Joker's excitement.

"Finally," Joker exclaimed, "I've been waiting so long for a nice hot meal!"

Kaidan couldn't help but chuckle.

"So much for having to leave Earth in the first place," commented Kaidan.

Joker wasted no time as he started eating, followed by Robin and her friends. Still, Ashley read through her unread messages in her omni-tool while she ate, her soft expression reflecting anxiety. Will her family ever forgive her for getting involved in such dangerous affairs?

They had yet to debate on what they should do at the present time when an asari C-Sec officer stepped into the room.

"Robin Shepard?" she said.

"Yeah?" Robin nodded.

"I'm Zelith D'raix," the asari C-Sec officer explained, "and I'm here to assign your immigration status. Before we begin, do you have any other requirements that we could provide?"

"Let's see," Robin said, checking on her datapad in her bag, "do they provide maps here?"

The asari C-Sec officer turned on her omni-tool and sent a file of the map to Robin and her friends' omni-tools.

"Before we get you housed, I'll need you and your friends to answer questions. Separately."

The door buzzed open, showing five officers on the other side.

"You'll stay here with me," she told Robin.

Robin nodded in agreement, but…

"Geez," grumbled Jack, "we were just taking a break from escaping our home and now we have to face more institutional crap?!"

"I don't think we can avoid this," Kasumi shook her head.

Kasumi, Jack, Ashley and Joker stood from their seats and stepped out of the room. The door closed,
leaving Shepard and the asari officer together. The asari officer in question sat across from Robin. "I'm four hundred years old and the only times I've seen this much crap are when someone decides their dick is bigger than everyone else's and thinks that makes them the right person to lead. And you," she pointed a finger at Robin, "sure as shit kicked the hornet's nest on this one. What the hell were you thinking, exactly? What gives you the right to make this clown show all the worse?"

Robin couldn't help but cringe at the harsh words.

"You see," Robin began to explain, "when Toby Dunn started running for president, I didn't expect anything good out of him, considering his bigoted background. Add some pro-human supremacists within my race and you get controversy out of him, I think."

"So you hated a bully and decided to open up his secret closet. Why. Why you? Why your friends?" the officer gave an irritated tone of voice.

"Well," Robin continued, "we all were disappointed when Toby Dunn became president, and we were worried that he would cause nothing but tragedy. The least we wanted to do was to stop him."

The asari nodded as if appearing to agree.

"You did one thing, showing the galaxy just how much of an ass he really is," the asari officer replied, "Cerberus pulling the strings, I'm not surprised. Sad thing is a lot of people already suspected as much."

She handed Shepard a datapad concerning pro-human groups with backing from Cerberus. The fact a Citadel Security officer had this information can infer civilians were aware as well, and more so foreign leaders.

"I guess that confirms we weren't the only ones who had a bad vibe about him," Robin commented.

While the questioning continued, the asari gave Robin simple questions for her to answer. In the meantime, her friends faced similar interrogative questions. Kasumi felt like she was being chastised and Jack felt angry for several reasons. Ashley felt ashamed to have participated in Robin's antics, so she didn't answer much while Joker would highlight the moments where the aliens would be perceived as the ones who deserved sympathy more than humans.

By the time the questions finished, Robin and her friends were given the chance to gather their bags and their new clothes before they met up with C-Sec at the lobby in the hospital. From there, C-Sec escorted the human misfits to their temporary housing. They appeared to be the same modular units which adjusted to the needs of the occupants with simple commands. While the physical size didn't change its layout, it may accommodate a large kitchen space, living space or bedroom space, either one bigger than the others or three of proportional size.

Robin and Kasumi settled into one apartment, Kaidan and Ashley settled into another one and Joker and Jack settled into yet another one. Once inside, Robin and Kasumi set down their bags. The layout may not have been different than what they had in their last apartments, except their view drastically changed. Kasumi had no computer, yet she received an email. When she opened it, it produced her custom VI which downloaded a functional fragment of itself onto her omni-tool, while the majority of it remained in extranet space.

\{Since your departure,\} the VI explained, \{current events have accelerated.\}

The VI displayed news outlets of protests, riots of both far right and far left, pandemonium on many planets in Alliance space. Curious, Robin peered over Kasumi's shoulder and observed the current
events displayed in her omni-tool.

"We caused all this?" Robin paused.

"Seems that way," Kasumi nodded, placing her palm on her chin, "it feels like I could go back to bed, but that assassin…"

Kasumi couldn't help but cringe upon remembering the attack from Kai Leng. Robin couldn't help but place her hand on Kasumi's shoulder.

"I get that's pretty scary," Robin replied, "but I guess we'll be ok, for now. Right?"
Robin and her friends had no plans for what they should do next, so for now, the least they could do was adapt to their new settings. The first task was to get a job. The humans soon found out they had nothing: their accounts were frozen, social media was hacked, friends and family no longer speaking to them or unable to speak. Without money they had no food, no clothes, no means of sustaining themselves despite being refugees. They had no representation on the Citadel, with the embassy closed and most humans having left the station for colonies or Earth itself. If they couldn't get help from other humans, would they resort to interacting with other races to attain the needs for their survival? Garrus didn't seem to be a viable option at the moment, but mostly because he was already leading his crew for another mission.

Despite the lack of humans on the Citadel, six of them looking for a job was a lot harder than expected. Turians didn't trust them on sight, asari were sympathetic but not hiring, and there were not many salarian employers. Add to that all of their documents were seized or they're unable to access personal accounts, which appeared to be a revenge tactic. Officially, they didn't exist, despite having Citadel residence. No money, no ID's, no food.

Kasumi tried to use her VI to get them something but without access to her computer and its networks, she was limited on many fronts. The friends broke into teams to speak with aid organizations, charities, and social services but each stated the humans need to have documentation and identification.

After three days since they arrived at the Citadel, they still had no luck. At that time, they gathered in a public space in the Citadel on a bench.

"Geez, this is terrible!" Joker complained, "we never should've left Earth in the first place!"

"Even if we stayed on Earth," Jack reminded Joker, "our accounts would've still been frozen and our documents, seized. It's like real life Kobayashi Maru!"

Trying to be hopeful, which was harder than it's been in a while, Alenko scrolled listings for getting legal ID's. Unfortunately there wasn't much, legally. Their best option was the Citadel Citizenry Bureau, but that would take weeks even with an expedited refugee application. It still didn't solve their immediate needs of food, clothes despite getting some from C-Sec, and household comforts like bedding. Robin couldn't help but stare into the scenery over her shoulder. Did their effort against Toby Dunn amount to anything?

"Maybe," Ashley said softly, tears starting to well up in her eyes, "we should've been better off dead."

Upon noticing Ashley's sudden breakdown, Kaidan pulled her into an embrace.

"Start thinking like that, and they win. I'm not letting those assholes keep me away from home," Kaidan stated, "I'll enjoy seeing his face after he gets the boot or during, as his dreams of an empire come crashing down."

Ashley nodded in agreement before she rested her head on Kaidan's shoulder.

During that time, Kasumi received an email from Tali'Zorah, and when she opened the message, she found completed forms of IDs and a small account of credits for the six of them. They still needed jobs, but at least they were the only humans on the Citadel that can now get hired.
"Robin?" Kasumi called.

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and tilted her head in Kasumi's direction.

"Yeah?" Robin replied.

Kasumi smiled before she sent the link to each individual ID of its named recipient.

"We just need to take these to Immigration and Customs," Kasumi clarified.

When Robin, Jack, Ashley, Kaidan and Joker received their IDs, Joker couldn't help but grin.

"Finally," chirped Joker, "I thought we had lost all hope!"

With the money they needed, Robin and her friends finally found a place where they had a satisfactory meal and purchased some decent outfits. They went to the Immigration and Customs office to register so they would be recognized as legal residents, meaning they were now employable across the station. Kasumi, Kaidan, Jack, Joker and Ashley immediately set off to find positions they were able to fulfill. In the meantime, Robin started making a list of materials to gather for herself and her friends, such as bath towels, soaps, shampoos and other toiletries. Jack got a job at an asari dock, using her biotics to maneuver shipments, performing delicate adjustments. Alenko applied to the C-Sec academy, which was still open to humans and had human officers, none of whom agreed with Dunn. Williams applied as well. Joker applied to a position as a transport pilot. Kasumi applied to an accelerated tech program to get certifications while working shifts at a bar, tending to the nighttime patrons. Robin may not have applied yet, but at this point, she tried to access her transcript from her omni-tool. Sadly, each requests for a transfer of her transcript had been denied, so she couldn't continue her diplomacy degree at the Citadel.

A few days later, Garrus Vakarian left the Council Tower following a debriefing. Feeling the need for food, he made for a small place in one of the wards, run by an asari with good taste in dextro food. When he stepped inside, other customers gave him a quick glance, but they didn't really say anything. He didn't bother giving a mind to the staring people. It didn't matter. The turian commander did notice one person who's more interesting than everyone else sitting at a table by herself while reading through her omni-tool.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked Robin Shepard.

Upon hearing the turian's voice, Robin snapped out of her thoughts and glanced at Garrus.

"N-No," Robin blurted, "I'm just getting some lunch by myself."

Vakarian shuffled over to the counter to order food. He returned to the table to wait.

"I understand you and you're friends have had better fortune recently."

Robin nodded.

"Yeah," she replied, "but…I haven't heard from my parents lately."

Garrus nodded in agreement.

"It's not quite the same, but…I've been distant myself," he said, "so I get it, somewhat."

A few minutes later, the turian's food arrived, so he glanced over at Robin.
"What did you get?" he asked.

Robin shrugged.

"I'm still waiting for my clam chowder," she explained.

His mandibles flexed with curiosity.

"What is a clam?"

When her respective meal arrived, each was put off by the smell of the other. The chowder made Garrus wrinkle his nose and pull back a little.

"Uh, you ok?" Robin asked.

"Yeah, just ah…never smelled anything like that before."

And neither has Robin. Whatever Vakarian ordered smelled…odd, and then one tentacle moved, sending a chill down Robin's spine. Garrus stuck the crawlie one with a fork and ate it, ending with a slight crunch.

If that was an example of what dextro food looked like, Robin wondered how such foods were imported to Earth mostly for access to races with dextro-amino acids.

"Well," Robin commented, "I think I found another reason to never try that stupid extranet dextro-amino food challenge."

Robin picked up her spoon and then took a bite out of her clam chowder. Yet, she noticed Garrus giving her a bit of a confused look.

"People actually did that?" he pointed at his plate, "this is strictly a turian dish called…"

He made a low grunt then high chirp which didn't translate. Taking a bite they looked like Ike worms. Robin didn't bother to demand a translation, but she suspected the meal must be exotic by human standards, so she kept eating her lunch.

"My specialist, Tali'Zorah, has been keeping tabs on your friends," Garrus forked his food like spaghetti, "have you settled in yet?"

"Almost," Robin nodded, "but I have a few options on what I could do at this time if I can't go back."

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

As they almost finished, Vakarian wondered if this human wouldn't mind talking further.

"I've been thinking," Robin suggested, "if Cerberus is still after me and my friends, and we can't ask our family for help, I wouldn't want to keep running away."

Robin lifted her head, locking her green eyes onto the turian commander's blue ones.

"If Cerberus wants me dead," she continued, "then the least I could do is fight back."

"Why do you want to keep risking your life? What will it do? Plenty of people fled Earth and its colonies for the Citadel, and many are moving further. Illium is popular among other colonies," finishing his food, Vakarian stared the little human down with a hawklike gaze, "why would you
keep risking your life even with Cerberus hunting you down?"

Despite the intimidating stare, Robin kept her spine straight, not flinching even a bit.

"Because both alien races and my race facing casualties by the millions, if not billions," Robin clarified, "would be the worst I could ever deal with if I did nothing."

Garrus shrugged then nodded. He gestured Robin to follow him out of the restaurant.

"You'll need to learn the game."

"Could you explain what you mean by that?" Robin asked.

Garrus led Robin through a parkway of shaded trees and flowers. A quick glance was enough for him to notice something was amiss with her being quiet.

"Do you...have anything you wish you could do?" Garrus asked.

Robin turned her attention off the scenery and back to the turian commander.

"Do you have libraries in the Citadel or any of their territories?" Robin clamored.

"Umm," he appeared slightly taken aback at the abrupt question, "yes, there is a joint library run by asari, turian, and salarian organizations. Thankfully, it's over one hundred years old so it's worked out the kinks and tripping stones since it began. I once heard a Dalatraz, a Matriarch, and a Primarch had argued for three months on what volumes to include in a section on flies."

There he goes again with his weird rambling. Robin couldn't help but smile at his expression.

"If I want to help protect other races from Cerberus," Robin clarified, "I thought I'd find some resources to understand their cultures. Does that make sense?"

Garrus nodded, understanding the human's enthusiasm.

"Might as well show you where it is," he offered.

Garrus and Robin stopped at a station where the turian commander ordered a cab. When a cab arrived, they both hopped in, allowing the cab to hover through the aerial traffic in the Citadel. Upon arrival, Garrus and Robin disembarked and they made a glance at the library, which appeared to have five tiers with unknown rows deep. Still, the turian commander gestured her to step inside, and she scanned her surroundings. Species identifying emblems marked the shelves with race-specific content.

"Even our libraries weren't that big," Robin commented.

"It is impressive," Garrus agreed.

Garrus pointed out the category directory, allowing Robin to approach it and read the map carefully. Sections on Turians, Salarian and Asari were predominante among the volumes, but smaller sections included Drell, Hanar, Volus, and Elcor. Any species which was a client or participating race of Citadel races were included. Krogan and Vorcha were lacking, as were Quarian despite having a section, which read CLOSED. Not wanting to spend all day, Robin figured she would check out the turian section first, so she headed for that section with Garrus accompanying her. Garrus could easily reach the higher shelves thanks to his height. Robin scanned the shelf before picking out a few volumes, figuring they would hold the essentials she was looking for on the turian commander's
species. After she finished gathering the volumes she had been looking for, she found a place to sit. Due to the nature of their militaristic society, these books frequently discussed military tactics, battles won and lost, famous generals, and the duties of all turians. While she progressed through each volume, Robin took notes in her omni-tool. If she's going to interact with turians, she will have to understand their culture, wouldn't she? While she studied the volumes, Garrus took a call, so he found an obscure corner to speak.

Robin just finished the last volume of her pick, only to notice she couldn't see Garrus anywhere. This may be confusing, but she stood from her seat and sauntered over to the turian section to return the volumes to their shelf. When she started shelving them, she noticed that some of the higher shelves were more difficult to reach. While she scanned her surroundings for a ladder, an elder turian with spectacles and an outfit like tweed passed by and noticed her attempts.

"May I help you with something, miss?" he called over.

Robin paused and shifted her gaze towards the elder turian.

"I'd actually appreciate that," she smiled, "thanks!"

The turian librarian plucked a few of the volumes from Robin's hands and studied one of the titles.

"Not many would choose this volume," he commented, "much less a human. Are you studying for exams?"

Robin shook her head.

"Not really," Robin answered, "I just want to understand the different races here."

Nodding in agreement, the elder turian shelved the volumes back into their proper places. The turian glanced sideways at Robin while he did so.

"And I assumed humans were only interested in themselves and their own issues. Your new leader has made that apparent," he commented.

The tone came off as sarcastic, meant to dig for reaction. In truth this old librarian had many encounters with humans of fine character, a few he was unable to communicate with due to extranet restrictions from the Alliance.

"To be fair," Robin replied, "I just don't get why such people wouldn't be open to understanding the world around them."

"Because it is easier, perhaps? They want to be the center of attention and in doing so desire to subjugate anything which holds superior to their ideals?"

The librarian shelved the last books.

"Anything else you need?" he asked.

"I don't need anything else," Robin replied, "thank you anyway."

The turian librarian nodded in agreement, so Robin stepped out of the section. Now she had been wondering where Garrus wandered off to. Maybe she should search the library in case he hadn't left yet?

Luckily, Garrus had been searching for her, and his sense of smell was stronger than a human's, so
they avoided a collision among the stacks.

"Garrus?!!" Robin exclaimed.

Before Robin could speak…

"Tali just informed me of a riot of people attacking humans," Garrus explained, "practically every species involved, even volus and elcor somehow. News is claiming hundreds injured and dozens dead."

Robin shuddered in a split second.

"Oh, is that why I didn't see you earlier?" Robin clarified.

Garrus nodded.

"I've got a feeling there'll be some response before I know it, so I have to leave."

Garrus tapped at his omni-tool.

"I'm calling a friend to keep an eye on you six."

"Ok then," Robin nodded, "you take care!"

After Garrus escorted Robin out of the library, they parted ways while the turian commander set off for deployment to a colony where riots were more likely to break out. If having to evacuate Robin and her friends didn't give him some sort of sign, he suspected Cerberus had made its move.
The day after Garrus left the Citadel to respond to a riot, Robin and Kasumi were reading through their notes in their omni-tools while sitting in their living space. The silence broke when they heard someone knocking on the door, so Kasumi scrambled to the door to answer it. However, when she opened the door, a large krogan with several scars and red eyes stood in front of her.

"You Shepard?" he asked in a voice which made even that sentence cause vibrations in the air.

"Uh, no," Kasumi shook her head, "why do you ask?"

"Vakarian asked me to come," the Krogan explained, "said Shepard was the one to talk to."

Kasumi took a few steps back and glanced over her shoulder.

"Robin?" she called over, "we got company!"

Upon cue, Robin turned off her omni-tool and scrambled towards the front door, catching a glimpse of the krogan at the doorway.

"Can I help you, sir?" Robin asked.

"Shepard," the krogan pointed at Robin, "Vakarian sent me."

Robin's eyes widened upon hearing the krogan's answer.

"Y-You're friends with Garrus?!" Robin exclaimed, bringing her fists closer to her chest in an excited expression, "that's pretty cool! What's your name?"

"Ugh...no," he scratched one side of his jowl, "name's Wrex, I owe Vakarian a favor so I'm payin'em back."

Without being asked in Wrex entered without warning, his sheer size accidentally knocking Kasumi back a step and eliciting a startled gasp out of her. Wrex stepped up close to Robin, giving her a once-over, then a smell.

"Hm."

Robin tilted her head sideways.

"Do I smell funny?" she paused in confusion.

"Smell like a human," Wrex shrugged, "so, if you're going anywhere, I'm coming along."

Robin placed her finger on her chin. If what Wrex said was true, then maybe this could be her chance to get to know the krogan better.

"Now that you mention it," she replied, "I'm starting to like that library Garrus showed me, so maybe I can continue my personal research there."

Robin gave Wrex a gentle smile.

"So, Wrex," she continued, "do you know what it's like on your world?"
"A lot of dust, radiation, broken buildings, and oh, the Genophage," he growled at her.

Kasumi couldn't help but give Wrex a blank stare.

"Oh, did I bother you? Sorry," Robin said softly.

The krogan rolled his eyes.

"Humans," he muttered, turning to leave, "if you're going, let's go."

Upon cue, Robin turned her glance at Kasumi.

"I'll be going now," Robin chirped, "see you later!"

Robin followed Wrex outside without saying anything further. They took a cab to the library and upon arrival, their visit happened much the same as with Garrus, except Wrex took up a lot of space. Once they stepped inside, Robin headed for the krogan section and started searching for volumes that would be most useful. Yet, there was little to nothing about krogans, and what was available was written by salarian or asari authors. These were one-sided opinions and observations, to say the least. If other Citadel races weren't willing to expand their horizon, then maybe Robin would be willing to do just that? Once she stepped out of the krogan section, she located Wrex nearby.

"So, Wrex," asked Robin, "why do you think there isn't enough information about your kind?"

Wrex felt taken aback by that, then thought over the question.

"Because no one cares. Krogans, quarians, most people don't care," he admitted.

Wrex went into a long talk about the krogans and who they were until the Genophage, and now they were nothing but mercenaries without honor...without real culture or purpose and intent for life. Robin nodded in a way that she understood him while she took some notes in her omni-tool.

"Well, maybe we could expand our research further without all that bias?" Robin suggested.

Smiling, Robin placed her hand on Wrex's shoulder. He shifted away from her, suspecting she was weird to his standards.

"If you find research without bias, let me know, I'll be happy to read it," Wrex muttered sarcastically with an angry sigh and a shrug, "there's no point to it. Why bother, anyway?"

Robin couldn't do much for Wrex for now, but with the notes she took, she could most certainly remind herself to look into the matter later. At the moment, Robin wandered into the salarian section and started browsing for essential volumes. There were several volumes on salarian culture, society, the development thereof, their evolution as a species, comparison to other races, and a few interesting times in biological studies of Earth-based cousins. Robin found a few volumes that had the reliable content she needed before she found a place to sit. While Wrex kept an eye out for any suspicious figures, Robin spent a while taking notes in her omni-tool while reading through the volumes.

By the time she finished and shelved the volumes, the library closed, so Wrex escorted her home. Unfortunately, an individual had been waiting in shadow for them to appear.

"The thing you attract was not filth," Thane Krios observed and evaluated the target and her bodyguard. He's familiar with the drama occurring on Earth but was told this human was a dangerous separatist intent on doing harm to the Citadel, Council, embassies, and such. It came from a reliable contact whom he trusted but somehow an itch told him this contact might not have been honest. Not knowing why or how, he observed for
Robin paused in her tracks when she spotted a shadow from around the corner.

"W-What was—?" she blurted.

It turned out to be a cat. It stared before it left.

"Jumpy," Wrex chuckled, "I can deal with anyone Cerberus sends after ya."

Wrex led Robin out of the area without saying anything further.

Krios thought of Cerberus, not sure if his contact knew anything about it. He departed for the safe house on the station. In the meantime, Wrex and Robin returned to her apartment and made their way inside. Kasumi wasn't home, so Robin suspected she was at her shift.

"See ya tomorrow," Wrex stated and left.

Now that she was on her own, Robin shut the door and rested on her bed before she began scrolling through her news feeds in her omni-tool.

News feeds began showing differentiations between Dunn, the Golfers, and groups representing other interests. These voiced disagreement, others gave support or preached patience. Some vehemently began attacking aliens and human supporters in social media, threatening people.

Some shadowed people even took to old harassments of human religions.

By the time morning came, Robin took this chance to take a shower, scrubbing shampoo into her short brown hair. After that, she scrubbed her body before rinsing off all the suds. By the time she finished, she stepped out of the shower and dried herself up with a towel. Feeling refreshed for the day, she brushed her hair, tied it into a half ponytail and clipped on her seashell hair clip before she got dressed and emerged from the bathroom, heading for the kitchen. There, Kasumi was already in the middle of eating her breakfast while she already got her coffee started. Robin gained enough confidence to search the pantry for a breakfast pack. However, she couldn't find her usual, so while Kasumi continued eating her breakfast and watching anime, Robin checked the fridge and found a breakfast serving. She pulled it out and placed it in the toaster oven to heat it up. Suddenly, Kasumi and Robin heard a knock at the door which roused both of their attention. When they answered the door, a drell in tight fitting clothes with his chest exposed stood before them.

"Uh," Robin stammered, "how can we help you, sir?"

"Robin Shepard," the drell listed information both public and personal. Quite personal.

He revealed a pistol, placed it on the ground, then kicked it over to her feet.

"I was sent to kill you, but I hesitate to do so."

Robin stiffened while Kasumi furrowed her eyebrows and held a protective hand in front of Robin.

"Then what are you doing here?!!" Kasumi demanded.

"To understand the reason for wanting to did," he stood stiffly, unafraid of possibly being shot by either of the young ladies with the gun at their feet.

"My contact informed me you were dangerous extremists," he continued, "but yesterday I watched
you walking and speaking with Urdnot Wrex, and Garrus Vakarian before that. Also, you are not trained for fighting."

In a split second, Kasumi and Robin gave the drell a blank stare. Did Garrus or Wrex know anything about this drell? Robin would have to remind herself to ask the turian commander about this assassin when he was scheduled to return from his mission.

"So, you changed your mind," Robin commented after a moment of silence, "but why is it necessary to learn how to fight? Unless…"

In what seemed like a second, the drell appeared behind Kasumi and Robin, his hands on their shoulders which startled them both.

"It is necessary for survival, had I not thought a second time you would not have survived, but I see now that someone has set me up to kill an innocent."

He released his grip and stepped away.

"I do not know who this person is nor why you are their target but I may help if necessary," he continued, "however, if it is known a target of mine has not been dealt with, it will cause unnecessary attention."

Kasumi and Robin exchanged glances before returning their focus on the drell assassin.

"Before we continue," requested Kasumi, "could you tell us who you are?"

The drell bowed in response.

"I am Thane Krios, and before my contact gave me your names, I had never heard of yours before, and I know little of the drama occurring among the humans at present or how you are involved," Thane straightened up and addressed Shepard.

Robin placed her hand behind her head.

"Well, I haven't had anything to eat yet," she replied, "so after that, are you up to sorting this all out?"

"I would prefer to investigate further on my own, but when answers are found, you will know. In the meantime, Urdnot Wrex is capable of combating any other assailant after you. You will be safe," Thane assured.

Before leaving he bowed once more. After a moment, Kasumi and Robin snapped out of their confusion and headed back inside the apartment, where Robin pulled out her breakfast and poured herself some coffee before she started eating. Their encounter with Thane shook them up a little, but they had no clue on what his motives were. For now, Robin recorded his name in her omni-tool for later. The day continued forth in tranquility until Wrex rang the doorbell. When Robin answered it, she noticed the krogan gave a harsh expression.

"Whoa, Wrex!" Robin exclaimed, "are you ok?!"

"I don't like surprises," Wrex growled, "a drell assassin is a surprise."

The krogan said something in his own language while Robin stared in confusion. How did he know about Thane?
"If you want to stare at books more, let's go already," he grumbled.

Robin headed back into her apartment and slipped on her boots before she fetched her datapad from an end table and met up with Wrex outside.

"Actually," Robin mentioned, "I've been thinking of the Genophage since yesterday. Is it ok if we investigate further into it?"

Quirking an eyebrow, Wrex shrugged and followed Robin out of the apartment. From there, Robin checked her omni-tool to determine who was involved in the Genophage based on her notes. Due to the circumstances under which the Genophage was enacted, all information was secured only to what was known and compiled after the initial release one thousand years ago.

Since then, there have been studies and reports on effects genetically, socially, and culturally. Since they couldn't find anyone involved, the least they could do was find someone studying these effects. Robin and Wrex wandered through the Citadel and found a directory, reading the map in search of a science lab. They found a clinic which provided therapy and treatment for genetic disorders and diseases, which happened to have an asari on staff who remembers when it was first deployed. With a destination set in mind, Robin called a cab. She and Wrex hopped in and relayed their destination to the computer.

The cab computer engaged and flew on auto-pilot towards the clinic, traveling to another ward. It was a neighborhood of people with all of what that meaning entailed...slightly dirty and used, people going about daily lives. No humans or krogans could be found, so they stood out. Nonetheless, Robin and Wrex wandered through this neighborhood until they found a reception building. Inside of a utilitarian structure resided the clinic, the second floor of three. It also housed a lawyer's office and bail bonds.

The clinic had a small waiting room full of patients. Mothers with children, singles, couples. The only difference to a typical waiting room was the quiet. None of the children were playing as they rest in parents laps, and few of the older individuals were reading. Robin took this chance and approached the receptionist's desk.

"Excuse me," she said, "do you have a moment?"

"Do you have an appointment or an emergency?" the turian female receptionist said, busily entering data into a terminal.

Robin shook her head.

"Not really," she replied, "I'm just looking for someone who's been studying the Genophage. Do you know anyone with that expertise?"

The turian raised her head in surprise before recognition set in.

"You're that human who made all of the news channels," she commented with suspicion in her eyes, "why ask about the Genophage? This is a clinic, not a research lab."

Robin shuddered in response. If that was the case, they must've been searching in the wrong place. Oops.

"Ok," Robin blurted, "so where would I find a research lab studying the Genophage?"

An asari doctor entered just as Robin stated this. She seemed quite old and she paused in her stride.
"What about the Genophage?" she asked.

Robin tilted her head in the asari doctor's direction before she scratched her head.

"Oh," Robin explained, "I'm wanting to clarify whether the Genophage was even necessary in the first place."

The doctor stared, perplexed, before she sighed within a moment of silence. She adjusted the spectacles on her nose.

"Meet me at five, there's a café around the corner," she instructed.

Opening her omni-tool, the doctor calls for the next patient, a human mother and her child. Both were far too thin and bald, the child's hand in its mother's. Robin checked her omni-tool, determining how much time she had available. She tilted her head in Wrex's attention and nodded, prompting him to follow her out of the clinic. Robin used the map to direct her and her krogan bodyguard towards the café in question. Staying at the café proved to be either awkward or funny, as Wrex was unable to sit in a single chair. He used two in order to give his tail room.

At fifteen minutes past five the doctor arrived. Something which may be of note was her bust size, greatly smaller than most asari despite most of her race being quite large. Overall this doctor seemed plain. She found Robin and Wrex easily, joining them immediately by sitting across them.

"So why ask about the Genophage?"

"I thought I'd look into it further and determine if it was needed," Robin explained, "Wrex here was not happy about it, though."

The krogan grunted, eliciting a sigh out of the asari doctor.

"It's all academic at this point, wondering why it was used doesn't really matter," she replied, "I've had krogans in my clinic who have asked if there are ways to have more children while being afflicted. I've never found an effective treatment or booster to help females get pregnant. At least females listen, males…"

She glared at Wrex.

"We don't like bad news…sorry," he shrugged.

Robin shifted her gaze between the asari doctor and Wrex with softness in her eyes.

"So you don't know why they unleashed the Genophage?" Robin clarified.

The asari doctor shook her head.

"Then, I wonder if Wrex would feel better if there was some way to cure it," Robin continued, tilting her head in the krogan's direction, "right?"

Wrex shrugged.

"The thought of a cure…would be too much of a hope for a lot of krogans," he grumbled, "almost too much to hope for."

"The Genophage is complicated," the asari doctor mentioned, "the original creators were the best scientists of their time, and they made it to reduce the krogan population."
Wrex grunted again, deeper this time. Robin jotted down a few notes in her omni-tool.
"Well, thank you for your time," she said, "I may not have gotten much, but it'll do."
"For what exactly?" the asari doctor asked, sitting back and quirking an eyebrow.
"For…telling me what you know," Robin clarified.
Nodding in agreement, the asari doctor stood from her seat.
"In that case," she replied, "I'll take my leave now."
The asari doctor stepped out of the café while Wrex and Robin exchanged glances.
"So," Robin chirped, "would you like anything to eat?"
Wrex couldn't help but sigh.
"I hope they serve bloody raw meat," he grumbled.
Robin stared at Wrex in confusion for a moment.
"In that case," Robin replied, "I'll check the menu."
Robin picked up the menu in front of her and browsed through the options. Maybe when she found what Wrex wanted, she could order something for herself as well.
Over the course of the remainder of the week, Wrex and Robin would stop by the library so she would continue her research on the races such as the asari, drell and the vorcha to name a few. With help from the turian librarian's reach, Robin managed to access the most reliable volumes to read through. While she did so, she would take notes in her omni-tool to the point she would have to reorganize them in labeled folders.

Once the week drew to a close, Robin made up her mind in terms of her resolve. She refused to let Cerberus or the Golf Party administration divide the races of the galaxy, so late in the morning, she waited for Wrex in the parkway. It may not have been long, but she spotted the krogan trudging along the pavement, so she stood from her bench and waved her arm, catching his attention.

"So, Shepard," he grumbled, "are we going to the library again?"

"Not this time," Robin shook her head, "I thought I'd stop by the docks and meet up with Jack and Joker."

Wrex gave Robin a blank stare in a moment of silence.

"I…wanted to see how they are doing," Robin clarified.

Wrex nodded then led Robin towards an elevator. Once they entered it, it descended the floors, allowing Robin to experience the brisk ride down into the ward sublevels. After the long ride, they arrived at the docking bay, so Robin and Wrex started searching for Jack's station, figuring that Joker might not be back until at least another hour. During that time, Robin wondered how well Jack had gotten along with the other asari in the workplace.

Robin snapped out of her thoughts when she spotted a familiar turian ship arriving at the docking bay, attaching itself to the platform and opening the ramp. Once she saw Garrus emerge from the ramp, Robin's face lit up before she sprinted towards the ship, catching the turian commander's attention.

"Shepard?" he paused.

Without warning, Robin embraced herself to the turian commander, which gave him a surprised expression. Well…surprised was an understatement, as Garrus felt shocked and unable to react for a moment. When he noticed her excited expression, he responded by patting her on the back.

"It's good to see you again," he said, "all of those rioters gave us a hard time, but we pulled through."

Robin tilted her head upwards and gave Garrus a soft smile.

"I'm glad you're back," she replied, "I was just going to check up on Jack."

Garrus released Robin from his grip and led her away from the ramp.

"Are you and your friends settling in well?" Garrus asked, "it was quite a change to…everything, but you seem well enough."

Robin nodded.

"We're doing ok," she answered, "and I made progress with my own research."
Garrus gazed at her, his mandibles flexing with an expression of curiosity.

"Would you mind telling me about it," Garrus requested, "at dinner, perhaps?"

Robin tilted her head to the side.

"Well," Robin asked, "do you have a place in mind?"

"A casual place but nice like a hole-in-the-wall," Garrus answered, "I could collect you at six-thirty, unless you prefer later."

Garrus wasn't certain why he would offer to take a human to dinner, but the way Robin persisted even in such times of crisis made him perceive her as pleasant company and most likely earnest, if not naïve. Part of him saw her as cute, but that word seemed to be an understatement. Still, Robin nodded in response to the offer.

"I'll keep that in mind," she agreed.

Robin and Garrus continued meandering along the docking bay until they met up with Wrex, catching the krogan's attention.

"Vakarian," stated Wrex.

"Wrex," Garrus responded.

The krogan gestured at Robin.

"She's an odd one, but probably the best type of human everyone needs. That or we all end up going insane," he shrugged, "more insane."

Robin held back the urge to burst into laughter, though Wrex noticed her attempt.

"I'm not so sure about insane," Robin blurted, "but I still have a couple friends to visit."

Robin did have a point on that, so she led Garrus and Wrex to the asari station in the docking bay. They spotted Jack having just finished her latest task, but what struck Robin's attention the most was that Jack cut her hair recently to make a tail. When Jack spotted Robin along with the krogan and the turian commander, she sauntered past her coworkers.

"Yo! Robin!" she called out.

Robin smiled and waved back.

"Hey, Jack!" she chirped, "how's your week been?"

Jack gave Robin a hug before she gave Garrus a fist bump.

"My week's been great," Jack answered, flexing her muscle which protruded decently, "never had a real chance to use my biotics before either, but I still want to throw some Cerberus idiots…or Dumbshit. That would be fun."

Wrex burst into laughter.

"I like her," he commented.

Wrex held out his biotic fist. Jack grinned in response and fist bumped the krogan, emitting a small
mass effect field explosion that startled Robin a little. Still, she kept her composure.

"Well," Robin said, "I, too, want to do something about that idiotic president we have back on Earth."

"If you want to blow off some steam, there's a combat sim over in the Silver Sun Coast. Expensive place but plenty to do," Garrus mentioned.

That suggestion caught Robin's interest enough to return her gaze to Garrus.

"I guess that could be worth checking out sometime," she nodded.

Robin returned her gaze to Jack.

"In the meantime," Robin continued, placing her finger on her chin, "I still have yet to hear back from Joker. After that, I'll be searching for a cute outfit for this evening."

Jack gave an evil grin without warning.

"Are you considering a hot date already?" she smirked.

"I…uh," stammered Robin, "I-I don't think I need to dignify that with a response."

Garrus scratched his mandible amidst the confusion. Before Robin could respond, she spotted an industrial mech trudging in while carrying heavy cargo. It loaded this burden onto a transport, which departed soon after. After settling this unit inside of a maintenance bay, Joker opened the hatch, climbing out with practiced ease.

"Yo!" he called out to his friends.

"Hey, Joker!" Robin chirped.

Robin gave Joker a fist bump once he was in close proximity.

"So, did you catch up to any current events?" Robin asked.

"What's a current event? I've been working almost nonstop, this boss is a slave driver," Joker stated sarcastically but showed signs of weariness.

"You…ok there, buddy?" Jack asked.

"Long day," Joker answered with a yawn.

Joker gave hugs around before heading off to the office for sign-out.

Garrus observed these friends of Shepard's, wondering how they met. He hadn't even come up with a question when Robin grasped the turian commander's hand with her own.

"I gotta go find a cute outfit for the occasion," Robin informed Garrus, "where do you want me to meet you?"

"Uhh," Garrus answered, "I'll send you a message after you are finished. Let me know when."

Garrus turned on his omni-tool and sent Robin his public communication address, allowing her to record it.
"I'll see you later," he concluded.

Garrus left the docking bay in search of Tali'Zorah, probably to make preparations of his own. Jack gave Robin a nod.

"Well," Jack said, "take care, Robin!"

Jack sauntered off back to her station, so Robin led Wrex out of the docking bay, navigating through the wards of the Citadel until they found a clothing store. Within, they found a few boutiques on the higher scale of price. One of them, on the other hand, held a going out of business sale. Wrex remembered a few times like this just as boring, but maybe he could meet that human biotic at that combat sim later. Still, Robin browsed through the racks, examining each dress. After scanning several of them, she found one indigo halter minidress that interested her the most. Once she confirmed her selection for her dress, she sauntered over to the shoe aisle and browsed through the shelves until she found a matching pair of flats in her size. Looking over her pick, she confirmed that they were both within her budget. Of course, she didn't make such a selection alone, as an asari associate met up with her while holding a pair of matching earrings.

"So, who's the lucky one?" she asked.

Robin wanted to tell the answer right away, but she wasn't sure how the assistant would react to her choice of a significant other.

"Let's see," Robin said, "the guy I got lucky with…appears to have a sense of justice."

Robin tilted her head towards Wrex.

"And he even befriended a krogan to protect me and my friends!" Robin continued, gesturing to Wrex.

"Ooh, C-Sec stud?" clearly a gossip but an innocent one, "my sister is married to one. He works so hard and late. She's sad sometimes but when they're together…let's just say he's always happy to be home."

Robin shrugged.

"I'm not sure about this C-Sec stud thing," she mused, "but that's a pretty cool story."

Robin plucked the earrings out of the asari assistant's hands.

"And thanks for your help," Robin smiled, "I can handle everything else from here."

After giving Robin a nod, the asari assistant left, allowing the human to search for the checkout line. Once she did, she clarified the prices with the cashier and made her payment. With the items in a bag, Robin left the store and found Wrex waiting at the door.

"Ok, now all I have to do is get ready to go," Robin announced, "although, I'm looking forward to see Kasumi's face when I tell her the news."

Wrex grunted without a comment, but he still escorted Robin through the wards until they made it back to her apartment. From there, the krogan bid her farewell before he left.

Robin spent a while getting ready by first taking a shower, mostly because she needed it for the occasion. Once she finished, she took a short amount of time to dry her hair before she brushed it and
styled it into a half-ponytail. She set off to slip on her dress, her shoes and her seashell accessories. When she finished, she slipped on her omni-tool and stepped out of her bedroom, sauntering over to the front door, much to Kasumi's confusion.

"Is something going on?" she asked.

Robin paused in her tracks and tilted her head towards Kasumi.

"Remember those times when I went to the library with Wrex?" Robin mentioned.

Kasumi nodded.

"Well, Garrus got back today while I was visiting Jack," Robin explained, blushing, "and when I told him that I made progress with my personal research, he responded by asking me out!"

Kasumi assumed a cat face.

"Oh? And that dress with its accentuating of your figure is just your example of your research?" she commented.

Robin couldn't help but burst into laughter.

"That's not what I meant," Robin clarified, "I just want to impress him, is all."

Kasumi took in Robin with all that she had showing in the figure-teasing outfit. Yet, the dress didn't seem to hug Robin completely as the skirt flared out with only two tiers. She tapped on her omni-tool and called Commander Vakarian's number, waiting for him to answer.

{Hello, Shepard,} Garrus answered over the com-link, {I'll be there shortly.}

With Robin waiting and him donning a casual outfit, Garrus dropped off his paperwork and gave some of it to Tali. She may have been perplexed at first but she smiled under her helmet while the turian commander tore out of his unit's headquarters at a brisk pace. He called for a cab after he gathered a recommendation from Liara. In the span of five minutes, he located Shepard's apartment. The moment Robin peeked through the window, she opened the door, only to notice a simple bouquet of lilies from the asari homeworld, which gave off a glowing effect. Now, Robin wasn't expecting flowers as a gift for her date, yet these flowers seemed to intrigue her.

"Hey, Garrus!" Robin chirped, gesturing to the lilies, "do the flowers here have this natural bioluminescent effect?"

"When you grow it in eezo rich soil, that is," Garrus replied, "I'll extend your thanks to my friend who recommended the shop."

When Robin invited Garrus inside, he placed the flowers in his hand in a water-filled vase, which caught Kasumi's attention.

"So, Vakarian," Kasumi commented, "did you do a little research on dating before coming over?"

Garrus nodded.

"I hadn't considered this until recently," he said, making a brief glance at Robin, "your friend seems to be persistent."

Kasumi nodded in agreement.
"Even I still worry for my loved ones after we left," Kasumi replied, "as long as the idiot president is still in the White House, she's not giving in."

As much as Garrus wanted to speak with Kasumi and Robin in the apartment, he knew he couldn't, so he headed off to the door with Robin still waiting.

"You two take care of yourselves, ok?!" Kasumi called out.

"Same here!" Robin called back.

Garrus and Robin stepped out of the apartment and sauntered over to the cab. Though not particularly adept with human females, Commander Vakarian admired the ways in which they were able to customize their appearance with just a little effort. Turians were not as flexible in physical appearance. Not that he wasn't attracted to humans over turians, but Robin appeared exquisite.

Once they hopped inside the cab, Garrus relayed the destination to the cab's computer, so it hovered from the ground and flew across the wards. Robin tilted her head in the turian commander's direction and admired his features…without saying much at the moment.

"I haven't taken time to touch up my family paint, sorry if it's a little dull," Garrus rubbed one mandible.

"Hey, it's no biggie," Robin assured Garrus, giving him a soft smile.

That comment gave the turian commander a sense of relief. A short while later, the cab landed near its destination. Escorting down a small alleyway, Garrus knocks on a door hidden out of the way. There was a smell back here, pungent and unpleasant. A panel opened at eye level, the person within spoke.

"What can I do for you?" asked a gruff voice.

"My friend sent me to tell you…there's enough pyjak for two," Garrus answered.

"Hmm," the man mused, closing the window before opening the door, "welcome sir, madam. Follow me, please."
There was too much dim light to see by, the man's face hard to make out. He led them in, dim lighting everywhere. Robin felt a nervous sensation run through her spine, so she wrapped one arm around Garrus's and leaned closer to him. A real piano played from somewhere. They seated themselves in a dim corner with only candle light to reveal their surroundings.

"Why so nervous?" Garrus asked.

Robin placed her hand behind her head and gave a nervous chuckle.

"So you've been to hidden restaurants?" Robin replied, "Kasumi and I went to a shady prosthetics parlor before we snuck into Cerberus."

"I heard about that, dedicated. If you're not careful, someone on this station might ask you to be a spy for their government. You wouldn't believe the espionage here. As for restaurants, this is a special place for…special people," Garrus glanced down at her heavily.

"It does make sense, I guess," Robin mused.

Robin fiddled with the omni-tool using her finger.

"As for the research," Robin continued, "I noticed there wasn't much information about the krogans apart from this Genophage. I asked Wrex about it and from what he told me, he wasn't really happy about it."

"No one has bothered to write anything new in the past five-hundred years. Everything on the subject is older than six-hundred and what remained of krogan history is mostly unknown except by krogans themselves," Garrus replied.

Robin nodded, understanding what Garrus had to clarify before she browsed through the menu in front of her.

"Let's see," Robin said to herself, "I guess bratwursts seem like a good option here in case of lunch."

Robin flipped the menu over to browse the drinks list and placed her finger on the item labeling lemonade. Garrus ordered a turian dish and an ale. Being able to legally drink had advantages, though he never went for the hard alcohol. As for Robin, she did order lemonade, but she also found a seafood dish, so she ordered that. Now they would have to wait for their orders to arrive.

"So how did you and Wrex meet?" asked Robin.

"How most krogans are met, in a fight. He was on a job and I had orders. Those two things happen to coincide. Hard to imagine but I ended up saving his life. Now it seems my debt is nearly paid off, because of you," Garrus sat back comfortably.

Robin smiled and nodded in agreement.

"I met Joker back in college and we've been roommates since before the election," Robin explained, "I was…studying diplomacy back on Earth when I applied. After we left Earth, I thought I'd continue my degree here, but I haven't accessed my transcript yet. I'm betting Cerberus seized it."

"I had a sense you were wanting to be a diplomat, wanting to know more about other cultures,"
Garrus commented, "how far did you get in your courses?"

A waiter brought over their drinks, so Garrus took in his first mouthful.

"I made through a year's worth so far," Robin answered, "I chose that course because I wanted to help people work out their problems so they would have satisfactory solutions, whether they were human or alien."

"So how do you think this mess should be resolved?" Garrus asked, leaning into the seat.

Robin took a sip of her lemonade.

"I…really haven't figured out a way to keep this from escalating into war," Robin admitted, "but I am willing to support any rebellion against Toby Dunn and Cerberus."

"Supporting a rebellion would be difficult, it sounds more like a civil war," Garrus placed his hand on hers, "I'd rather enjoy your company tonight, rather than talk about Dunn. I know you've done a lot of research, and the librarian is an informant. I've also had Tali get copies of your transcripts and personal documents, so you can have more legal status here."

Robin couldn't help but blush when she felt the turian commander's hand grasp hers, but she kept her posture nonetheless. Maybe she needed some rest from worrying over the political events, even if it was just a little bit.

"Well, ok," she blurted.

Robin scanned her surroundings, but since she couldn't make out much from the dim lighting, she leaned closer to Garrus.

"Are there any bowling alleys in the Citadel?" Robin asked, "I'll be turning twenty this June and I would like it if I spent my birthday going bowling with my friends. You can bring your squad along if you'd like."

He snorted, leaning closer.

"Never heard of bowling. Tell me about it," Garrus replied.

The blush was evident to his turian senses. Garrus decided to tease by playing with the hand held in his own. Robin took this chance to stroke one of his talons with her thumb.

"It's one of Earth's various sports," Robin explained, "you simply roll a ball down a lane to knock out a set of ten pins."

Robin would've been happy to continue, yet the waiter carried the entrees over to the table moments later. This gave Garrus and Robin a chance to take a bite out of their respective dishes.

"Yours smells…interesting," Garrus commented, delving into his own, "by that description it sounds similar to one turians play."

Robin raised her eyebrows after gulping down her bite of squid.

"Oh? What's it called?" she chirped.

He said something unintelligible. At her look of confusion, Garrus figured he should clear a few things up.
"Basically, throwing a sphere hard enough to break walls," Garrus paused for a few bites, "why spend your...birthday in one of these alleys?"

"Bowling's been around for a couple centuries," Robin shrugged, "and it's pretty popular among many humans."

Robin proceeded to bite another piece of squid. Garrus took another bite of his meal, took a drink then he cleared his throat.

"Care to explain what you mean?" Garrus pointed out, "most humans don't off-handedly state they're over two hundred years old, mostly due to not living that long."


Garrus gave an amused chuckle before he gently brushed his talons against her shoulder, giving Robin a sense of relief.

At that point, they finished their meal in a matter of minutes.

"Now, before we go," Robin said, "I thought I'd tell you I remember a drell coming at my apartment and telling me that I need to learn how to fight."

Garrus nodded.

"So, a drell," he replied, "I know of a few. What was their name?"

Robin couldn't help but fiddle with her seashell necklace.

"He called himself Thane," Robin answered.

Garrus's mandibles flared, his eyes gazing in disbelief before he brought his arm around Robin, gentle but firm.

"I know him by reputation. What did he say?" he growled.

Robin tilted her head to the side, unsure of why Garrus gave her such a concerned look.

"He said that someone sent him to kill me," Robin stammered, "but I thought he was just mental, unless..."

"Quite the opposite," Garrus corrected, "Thane Krios is one of the best assassins money can buy, but he's selective of clients. Usually, he only works for Hanar, the Hanar rescued his people a century ago and now the Hanar and Drell live together. Krios was trained at a young age and he's only become more skilled with every completed contract. If he chose not to complete a contract, then it's because whoever hired him lied and he realized it before acting on the order."

Hearing Garrus give his reason was enough for Robin to remember something else Thane pointed out.

"You know," Robin offered, "what if I wanted to find Thane and ask him who almost tricked him into thinking my friends and I were threats?"

"I could only guess if Thane wants to speak with you," Garrus sighed, "he'll find you."

Garrus released Robin from his embrace and they browsed through the dessert menu. Robin found that they served flan, so she ordered that. Garrus ordered tupari fruit with dextro chocolate drizzled
over.

"After tonight, where do we go? Continue this affair or is this a once in a lifetime dream fulfilled?" Garrus asked.

Robin smiled as she ate her flan.

"Actually," Robin answered, "I would love to keep up this affair. For some reason, I find myself
drawn to turians more than humans. Then again, I didn't think I'd meet you again until you showed
up to save us from Cerberus, so that is something."

While holding onto her spoon, Robin placed her other hand on Garrus's shoulder.

"In fact," Robin continued, "now that I've met you, I still have the hope I need to pull through hard
times."

"After being chased physically from your home and fleeing to a space station with people out to kill
you, you still want challenges?" Garrus paused.

He waited until she ate to savor his own dessert. Robin took a couple bites of her flan in the process.

"If those challenges involve uniting aliens and humans against Cerberus," Robin nodded, "then yeah,
I guess so."

"And after... all of this, if you could have a near-to-perfect ending?" finishing the last of his dish,
Garrus leaned back to relax. This restaurant always left him full.

Robin smiled and rested her head on the turian commander's shoulder.

"At least I could spend that ending with you?" Robin offered, "as long as I'm on your side, I'm not
alone."

Garrus nodded before he brought a talon over Robin's shoulder and stroked it, allowing her to lean
into the touch. Some time later, they both paid the bill and stepped out of the hidden restaurant.

Robin scanned the area, but of course, she didn't find anyone suspicious. Since it was night out, she
tilted her head in Garrus's attention.

"Hey, Garrus?" Robin asked, "if you don't have anything else to do, is it ok if you can spend the
night at my place?"

Garrus gave Robin a surprised glance.

"I've read most humans don't ask a male to their home so quickly," he commented.

Robin grinned as she closed her eyes.

"I just wanted to cherish this one last peaceful night," Robin clarified, "starting tomorrow, I'm getting
involved."

"Involved how?" he asked as they began to walk.

This particular area of the Citadel was safe, and Vakarian was confident in his skills to protect her.

He was armed, a discreet pistol underneath the coat he wore. Robin placed her hand behind her head
amidst the confusion.

"I'll... explain what I mean in the morning," Robin answered.
Robin did show signs of weariness, so Garrus could see her point.

"Well then, allow me to escort the lady home," Garrus mused.

And so he did, gallantly and so suave as to make her blush a few times. When they arrived, Garrus carried Robin on his back. He set her down so he could knock on the door. Robin peered into the window to check if Kasumi was either still inside or she left for her shift. The apartment appeared quite dark, so Robin took this chance to unlock the door herself and lead Garrus inside. He didn't smell anything wrong and he searched for a light switch. It must have motion detectors or sensors when the door opened as the lights came on seconds later. The space felt small, about the size of his quarters. Robin gave Garrus a soft smile.

"Do you mind giving me a moment?" she requested, "I gotta get ready to turn in for the night."

Garrus nodded, so Robin scampered into her room, where she slipped out of her dress and removed her shoes. Once she undid her hairstyle, she slipped on a camisole and pajama shorts before removing her earrings. Now that she finished, she stepped out of her room and scanned the adjacent room in search of the turian commander. She found Garrus on the couch, sitting in a shaft of light from the porch. All other lights in the living room were turned off.

"Comfortable?" he asked as she stepped into view.

"I am now," Robin nodded.

Robin sat down next to Garrus and leaned onto him, her face resting on his. Garrus nuzzled into her face in return, tickling her side with his talons.

"Be careful, little girl," Garrus purred, "turians don't make for easy companions, let alone… intimates."

Robin let out a small chuckle before she and Garrus laid down on the couch, the human nestling into his embrace.

"Come on, I know what I'm doing," Robin chirped.

Smiling, Garrus stroked her hair with his talons while Robin stroked the side of his neck with her thumb, which elicited deep purring out of him. Throughout this tranquil moment, sleep started clouding their eyes, so the turian commander held her close, hoping she wouldn't fall off and hurt herself. His long arms kept her from any sort of movement, entrapping her easily.

Unfortunately, Garrus dreamt about one of the riots he had to quell which turned violent. Seeing elcor blood spilt on the ground made him a little queasy as he scoured the battleground for the suspects. His recalling of protecting his face while right-wing rioters sprayed tear gas on some of the unfortunate non-council races made him cringe, but he persisted nonetheless.

The turian woke with a startled gasp, thankfully not enough to startle Robin, so he settled into the couch again but not sleeping further. During this time of quiet, he stared down at the human in his arms, his eyes giving off a soft expression. No one seemed to think such an innocent human would risk her life to meddle in dangerous affairs, let alone have her friends tag along. Garrus wanted to at least keep her out of harm's way, but she appeared to emit a fighting spirit that would make a turian general proud. If he can't stop her from getting involved, he would have to at least make sure she didn't die along the way. The turian commander kept that thought in his head as he continued to cradle Robin in his embrace.
Once morning came around, Kasumi returned from her shift and stepped inside the apartment, only to notice Garrus and Robin on the couch. The turian commander said nothing although he flexed his mandibles in a way he would give an awkward expression, especially since he was still clad in his evening outfit. Still, Kasumi smiled and tilted her head to the side.

"I imagine you two had a great time last night?" Kasumi asked.

"It was good enough," Garrus deadpanned, "but you won't get any gossip from me."

At that moment, Garrus wanted to avoid any questions he anticipated and dreaded. Minutes later, Robin moaned as she stirred from her sleep, her head tilting towards Garrus.

"Morning," she said.

"Good morning to you as well," Garrus replied.

Finally able to extricate himself, he stood from the couch.

"I'll return in thirty minutes," he continued.

Garrus briskly left the apartment. During that time, Robin already started brewing coffee while Kasumi contacted Joker through the omni-tool. With Garrus fetching breakfast, this gave Robin a chance to change into her day clothes and fix her hair for the day.

While Garrus made his way along the wards, he received a message from Robin to get enough for her friends, so he ordered six levo meals and one dextro meal through his omni-tool. It didn't take long for the turian commander to find the café he was searching for. Thankfully, the food was ready by the time he arrived. Once he took it with him, Garrus hurried with a moderate pace in order to keep seven orders worth of food balanced.

Arriving back at the apartment, he knocked the door with one foot, due to his arms being unavailable to do anything except hold the precarious load. Seconds later, Kasumi opened the door and gestured Garrus inside. By then, Kaidan, Jack, Joker and Ashley already arrived and they served themselves some coffee. Kaidan was the first to notice Garrus at the door. After the turian commander gently set down the orders on the table, he stepped over to Robin in swift movements. By the time she noticed him, he lifted her into his arms like a yearling, resting his forehead on hers.

"You owe me dinner for carrying all of that," he said.

"So, is it my turn to find recommendations?" Robin mused.

"I think I'll take my crew along while I'm at it," Garrus nodded.

Garrus set her down onto her seat while Kaidan, Ashley, Jack, Joker and Kasumi searched the two bags for their boxes while the third one had been marked for dextro beings. Once the human misfits found their breakfast orders, they started eating, though they couldn't help but notice Garrus sitting next to Robin. He sat rather stiffly, awkward, and uncertain as to how exactly interaction should occur until Kasumi decided to break the ice.

"Commander Garrus Vakarian. Big title. When did you get that position, and how?"
Robin stared in confusion for a moment before giving a slight chuckle.

"I…didn't ask him about that last night," Robin admitted.

Kaidan gave Robin a thumbs up and a wink.

"Still, you really are the luckiest girl of the year," Kaidan commented, "even if it weren't for Cerberus messing up our lives, that is."

Robin smiled and tilted her head towards Garrus.

"So, are you going to answer Kasumi?" Robin asked.

He shrugged.

"I entered the turian military academy like everyone else," Garrus explained, "turns out I was too good at what I did so the ranks piled on, until the time came when I had to serve under one General in my mentorship program. My father asked around for someone more in-line with my…oddities. I was assigned to Adrien Victus."

Joker scratched his head after taking a sip of his coffee.

"I…never heard of him before," Joker shrugged.

Kasumi, on the other hand, managed to recall this particular turian.

"He's the one who…" Kasumi started to explain what she knew of General Victus, "well, he's one of the most famous generals of the Turian Hierarchy."

Garrus nodded, impressed.

"One of the most notable battles I've witnessed under his command started when Terminus pirates assaulted a turian frigate," Garrus explained, "disabling it and forcing an emergency landing. General Victus's ship responded to the distress call but the pirates were brutal, even while using drone suicipers against the ship and forcing the rescuers back. Rather than confronting the pirates head-on, a communications officer managed to hack their frequency, jam the signal, and then fool them into thinking others were going to take a larger share of spoils. The pirates attacked each other, distracting their efforts against the turians. The General sent in frigates to disable the major threats before the flagship finished off the remaining pirates."

In the midst of breakfast, the human misfits seemed impressed with the story from the turian commander and Robin finished her coffee by then. He talked about it like a nerd about video games or comics.

"I thought turians usually fought with all the firepower they had," Kaidan pointed out, "hold nothing back tactics, and just destroy the enemy completely."

Garrus nodded.

"That's common but General Victus is…unique in his methods," he mused.

This meant this general wasn't conventional and rather controversial among the Hierarchy's military.

"I don't think I remember into running into such tactics while researching turians," Robin commented, "but I still find it interesting regardless."
Garrus nodded in agreement before he took the last bite of his own breakfast.

"So, are you going somewhere after this?" Ashley asked the turian commander.

Garrus stood with his garbage, throwing it away in a disintegrator.

"Though I'm not under his command anymore, General Victus is…interested in the situation on Earth," he answered, "I'm supposed to see him later to discuss what course to take."

Robin stood from her chair and disposed of the box before scampering for the door to slip on her socks and boots.

"Sounds pretty interesting," Robin clamored, "can I tag along?"

"Oh, boy," muttered Jack.

Garrus paused in a moment of silence, trying to collect his thoughts. How would he have to explain to General Victus if he saw Robin accompanying him? Before he could respond, Robin noticed that Garrus had been quiet for a bit.

"Garrus?" Robin called over.

Garrus snapped out of his thoughts and turned his head towards Robin.

"He'll likely ask you to wait outside," Garrus replied, "it might be boring to you, not to mention the information could be confidential. Why come along when you could wait outside or continue your research?"

Robin couldn't help but shrug.

"Well, if nothing else," she answered, "I would really like to meet him."

Robin gave Jack a fist bump before she followed Garrus outside. Quietly, he sighed as he led her towards a cab.

In the driver seat, Garrus flew to a transit corridor allowing passage to another ward, this one populated with turians. Arriving at an expensive looking apartment building, he landed on the top floor. Once they hopped outside, a servant greeted them before escorting them in to wait.

The parlor was decorated with paintings, heraldry, and artifacts collected by the Victus family over centuries.

"These aren't even the most precious pieces of his collection," Garrus mentioned, "the rest are in the Victus estate on Palaven."

"I figured as much," Robin nodded in agreement.

Still, Robin placed her hand on Garrus's and gave him a gentle smile. She wasn't sure how long the wait lasted, but the door nearby soon slid open.

The General Adrien Victus presented a man of reservation, with only a chain of gold as decoration on his otherwise simple attire.

"Commander," Victus acknowledged Garrus's presence.

They didn't salute, but they clasped hands, another oddity of Victus breaking with convention. He
nodded to Robin the instant he noticed her.

"Robin Shepard, I presume?"

"Yeah," Robin nodded, "I thought I'd tag along instead of just doing nothing."

Robin extended her hand, allowing Victus to clasp her hand with his.

"I do not mind the addition, in private you have my admiration for stirring," he said something which equated to 'hornet's nest', "and the reactions of that regime are…somewhat entertaining."

Gesturing to accompany him, Victus led his guests inside.

Bond servants saw to their needs. Once they settled in, Victus gestured Garrus and Robin to sit across from him.

"Miss Shepard, to be frank, the only reason you are here is because of this friendship with Commander Vakarian," Victus mentioned, "were you anyone else, no matter your intent we would never speak despite the actions you have committed. But, Vakarian has made it clear you intend to…find a peaceful solution."

Robin nodded in agreement.

"Considering how Toby Dunn and Cerberus are wanting to instigate war between you guys," she clarified, "I don't really want this president to divide all of us."

"That remains to be seen," Victus finished before turning his attention to Garrus.

They discussed responses to recent threats made by Earth First and anti-nonhuman groups, along with expulsions, harassments, and violence committed by humans on non-human residents on other colonies including asari worlds. One thing they did laugh at were vacationing youths at a Spring Break resort chanting Dunn propaganda bullshit.

Robin couldn't help but sigh at the Spring Break comment.

"That really sounds typical of right-wing dumbasses," Robin commented.

Victus and Garrus continued their discussion for several hours before standing and bidding farewell. Once he was able to, he wrapped an arm under Robin's, lifting her as he stepped out of the apartment.

"After all of that, I need to be physically active," he sighed.

They hopped into the cab and the turian commander called in the destination, so the cab flew across the wards until they arrived at a club with good music, good food, and…an arcade.

"So, while we're here," Garrus purred, "I challenge you to a game. Feel free to pick whichever game you like."

After Garrus rested his forehead on hers for a moment, Robin took some time to browse through the arcade before making a brief glance at her turian boyfriend.

"Do they have an equivalent of Pac-Man?" Robin asked.

Garrus scratched his mandible.
"How about I show you?" he suggested.

Garrus led Robin through the arcade until they came across the entrance to a VR arena. When they stepped inside, the turian commander picked up a headset unit from a rack, prompting Robin to do the same.

"So is this similar to Pac-Man?" Robin clamored.

Garrus and Robin waited in line for a few minutes. They stepped inside to a maze similar to the Pac-Man games, turians and humans participating in the game while scurrying through the maze, the rules clearly evident.

"I guess I got my answer now," Robin mused.

"Well then, I suggest you keep vigilant," Garrus advised Robin.

Moments later, they both stepped into the arena, their turns apparent. Over the course of a few rounds, they pursued whoever was the "main character" as "the ghosts" in an attempt to tag them. When it was Robin's turn, she would scurry through the maze, perhaps in search of a place to hide. She almost found an alcove when Garrus appeared from a corner and grabbed her from behind, eliciting a startled yelp out of her.

"Garrus, I—" Robin began to protest as she gasped for air.

"I did tell you to keep vigilant, didn't I?" Garrus purred.

With the round over, Garrus released Robin from his grip, yet they would have to find whoever was now "it", so they set off on the next round.

Once Garrus was it, Robin scoured the maze in search of him, checking corners to see if he would be passing by. By the time she found him, another turian was already closing in on him. Garrus turned on a pivot, catching the other turian on the shoulder. That may have been a win, but that seemed to be a painful jab. Still, Robin would have to find the new target for just one more round, so she sprinted off before Garrus or the other turian could notice her.

The round ended when another human participating in the game caught the target, but Robin had already started to grow tired, so she stepped out of the arena and put away her headset before she stepped back out of the arcade. After a few minutes, Garrus emerged from the arena and it wasn't long before the other turian he encountered followed suit. The turian in question laid his eyes on Robin and his mandibles flexed.

"I've seen you in the vids," he glanced at Garrus before shifting his gaze back to Robin, his eyes giving a confused look.

Robin heard those words and turned her head towards the turian in question.

"Well," Robin asked, "do you come here often?"

The instant Garrus noticed Robin didn't focus on him, he locked eyes onto the turian behind him.

"Sidonis?" he paused.

"Garrus!" Sidonis exclaimed before he gave a grin, "it's been too long."

Garrus and Sidonis shook hands before the latter caught a glimpse of Robin and then returned his
gaze to the turian commander.

"What are you doing here?" Sidonis asked.

Robin wanted to answer, but she stammered nervously, unable to come up with an answer. This elicited a suspicious stare from Sidonis so Robin turned her glance towards Garrus.

"Miss Shepard is under my protection due to her involvement in the recent scandal with the human political situation," Garrus explained, gesturing to Robin, "she wants to become a diplomat, so I've decided to take her in as my attaché. Today, though, is a needed break."

"I see," Sidonis commented, "that explains your sudden trip to Earth a while back."

"But we have an appointment to keep," Garrus mentioned, "we can't chat."

"All right," Sidonis nodded, "take care."

Garrus escorted Robin outside the club, much to her confusion.

"So, where are we going now?" Robin asked.

"It's too late for lunch but too early for dinner. And I'm not too hungry," Garrus answered.

The turian commander thought for a moment.

"There's a place to see the Presidium," he offered.

Robin scratched her head.

"Uh, sure," Robin blurted, "why not?"

Garrus and Robin searched for a cab and hopped inside. Piloting the vessel, they joined the traffic of the ward going towards the center of the station. Most vehicles took routes away from the one they're aiming for. In minutes, the Presidium showed itself.

"So, what's special about this place?" Robin asked.

"I always enjoyed the view," Garrus answered, "and sometimes I imagine where to set up sniper nests in case the Citadel were ever attacked."

When Garrus landed the cab, he released the hatch and disembarked before he helped Robin step out. She took a moment to scan the scenery around her.

"This looks pretty cool!" Robin chirped softly.

She paused for a moment when she recalled a particular word.

"Garrus," Robin continued, "about those sniper nests…"

Garrus made a brief glance at Robin and nodded.

"Say," Garrus explained, "if Cerberus came here to the Citadel, they'd most likely come here to control the station and hunt down the politicians. To get rid of those bugs in the garden…"

Garrus pointed to several locations.

"I would recommend setting up sniper nests in these locations," Garrus continued, "since they could
effectively cover transit ways into and out of the Presidium. That way, if Cerberus tries to reach the Council, the snipers could reduce that chance."

"So, you have a talent for sniping?" Robin clarified.

Garrus nodded.

"There's another thing I wanted to do," Garrus continued.

Robin raised her eyebrows.

"And that is?" she pondered.

Garrus lifted Robin and placed her on the rear wing. Hands on her back, he nuzzled Robin's face. She may have been enjoying it, but his sudden actions confused her.

"Uh, Garrus?" Robin paused, "did I cause you to develop a fetish for humans?"

"No," Garrus shrugged, "I read if the boyfriend is spontaneous with his affections, it'll grow the relationship."

After a moment, Garrus allowed Robin to slide off the rear wing of the cab.

"I appreciate your thought," Robin reminded, "but I still need to learn boundaries."

Garrus scratched his mandible, but he nodded regardless.

"As for anything sexual," Robin offered, "I'll let you know when I'm ready and we'll continue from there. Is that ok?"

"If you wish for it," Garrus nodded.

Smiling, Robin embraced herself to Garrus, allowing him to wrap his arms around her. After a moment of silence, Garrus and Robin sat down next to each other.

"In the meantime," Robin continued, "I still have some recommendations to look for."

Robin turned on her omni-tool and scrolled through the extranet, searching for any restaurants in the Citadel. Hopefully, one of these restaurants would be affordable in her budget so she could cover whatever Garrus might order.
Sudden Lockdown

The Illusive Man couldn't believe it! First, the Citadel Council's most well known turian commander reached the human fugitives before Cerberus could and now they're refusing to hand them over. To make matters worse, one of his own contacts failed to manipulate a drell assassin to kill them. His rage burned like a nuclear bomb decimating a metropolis in the blink of an eye. If he didn't step up his game, he could lose his chance to dominate the galaxy for sure. He suspected that this Robin Shepard gave the Citadel an advantage over the Alliance, but he had the sense of hope considering Toby Dunn's Golf Party Senate introduced a budget that would cut healthcare for America's citizens and even defund the arts, and they've been receiving funds in favor of passing it. The Illusive Man snapped out of his thoughts when he heard the door slid open and Miranda stepped into the office.

"Let me guess," the Illusive Man sighed, "the Citadel's still not handing over the traitors."

Miranda shook her head.

"Not in the least, but we might be able to draw her out," Miranda answered.

She passed a datapad to her boss. It contained the perfect bait to bring out Robin Shepard.

"Interesting," the Illusive Man mused, "in that case, I'll authorize this operation. You can mete out justice to this traitor and I'll win another colony from those savage turians."

"Thank you, sir," nodded Miranda.

Miranda stepped out of the office and sauntered over to the hangar, ready to deploy special agents and a strike team to Shanxi. She boarded a Cerberus starship which led this team to this particular colony.

Hours later, Shanxi experienced a sudden blackout. It didn't take long for the turians residing there and the colonists to panic while their technicians attempted to get the power back online, but to no avail. Several power relay stations were blown up and colony autonomous defenses were hacked to place the entirety of Shanxi settlements on lockdown, which could cause civilians to be terminated if they stepped outside their home at night. Unfortunately, they were allowed to move during the day but only through tight security.

The following morning, after she changed into a short-sleeved casual blouse, cargo pants and a vest, Robin sat at the table while waiting for her coffee to finish brewing. While waiting for Kasumi to finish her shower, Robin sent a text to Garrus:

{Morning, Garrus! Can I stop by your place and meet your buddies?}

Robin waited for a short while before she heard a ping from her omni-tool, so she tapped on it and read the message:

{Can't make it today, there's trouble on Shanxi. We're deploying in one hour.}

"Shanxi?" Robin gasped to herself, eyes widening in horror, "wait a minute!"

Garrus was making frantic preparations to get the Aran'tar ready for deployment. He suspected Cerberus or Earth First agitators but this was a new degree of troublemaking. He wished Dunn would just take an epic dump on something sacred just so people would start taking real effort on
shoving his ass into early retirement.

"Bareface coward," Garrus grumbled to himself.

It was not applicable to humans but it's his worst insult for the Golf Party president.

Little did he know, Robin poured her coffee into a travel mug and slipped on her boots before she brought out a breakfast muffin. She scrambled out of the apartment in search of the hangar, hoping that she would at least make it in time. It may have taken her fifteen minutes to reach the elevator that descended into the docking bay, yet while she waited for the elevator to reach its destination, she took a sip from her coffee. Since she didn't put in any sugar or cream, it tasted rather bitter. When the elevator reached the docking bay, she stepped out and located the Aran'tar. She scurried closer to the ship, keeping an eye out for the turian commander. Turian guards caught her without warning but they made no threat.

"Ma'am, you are not authorized to be here," said one with facepaint of a deep red-violet. His partner remained quiet.

Robin furrowed her eyebrows.

"Did Garrus tell you guys to hold me back?" Robin demanded, "there's no excuse for him to leave me behind!"

They paused in confusion, looking at each other and then to her.

"Ma'am, this is an area reserved for Turian Special Operations units, no one is allowed access without clearance, especially civilians. If you have a reason to be here, then we may contact Commander Vakarian, but his ship is already beginning departure protocols," the turians stood straight as good officers should but otherwise were perplexed as to why a human would address an officer in such familiar tones.

"It's simple," Robin answered, "I just want to help him out."

"Do you realize that his mission is dangerous?" reminded one of the officers.

Robin placed her hands on her hips, still holding onto her breakfast.

"So what?" Robin remarked, "I'm not scared!"

The second guard's mandibles twitched, taking a moment to examine Robin's facial features.

"You're Shepard, right?" he nudged the first, "she's been spending a lot of time with the Commander. A…personal guard or something."

They both shrugged, eventually calling Commander Vakarian.

Seconds after the guards informed him of Robin's sudden arrival, Garrus called her on their private channel.

[I assume you want to come along.] Garrus told Robin, pinching between his eyes, [there are so many reasons for me to say no and not one reason you can give me to let you come along. So why, for all the spirits, should you get aboard this ship?]

"Well, if Cerberus is behind this," Robin offered, "I thought I'd help fight them off. Even if Cerberus wanted to set some sort of trap, I think it would make sense to foil it."
Garrus was this close to considering leaving Robin in the Citadel, but then a quarian hand appeared, giving him a datapad. Reading it made the turian commander's face grow tense and predatory.

"Tali," Garrus paused, "are you sure of this?"

She didn't respond, and she just left Garrus and Robin to their privacy.

"It says your mother is on Shanxi for treatments," Garrus mentioned, "orbital satellites captured images of non-Alliance personnel entering the facility. They're moving with impunity assisted by colonial security systems, drones and mechs mostly."

"Yeah, that," Robin agreed, "that's another reason why I wanted to go. If Miranda ever kills my mom, that could devastate even my dad."

He considered this an odd response, if it were his mother he'd…Garrus stopped thinking about that with a sigh.

"We'll go directly to the colonial garrison and they will keep a watch on you with two of my men. With luck, these colonists might listen to a human rather than armed turians," Garrus offered.

"Thanks, Garrus," Robin smiled softly before Garrus ended the transmission.

With a shake of his head, Garrus sent orders to the guards blocking her way.

"Understood," said the second officer.

"Ma'am," the first officer instructed, "follow me, please."

Robin nodded before she followed the turian officers aboard the vessel. Just because her family stopped talking to her after she left Earth didn't mean she forgot about them. She had the feeling they probably haven't forgotten about her either. Half an hour later, the ship departed, with Robin sitting in the same cabin as she had when she was first aboard this ship. Nearly a second hour passed before Garrus stepped inside. He took a seat and considered her a moment. By then, she already finished her breakfast.

"Do you think my mom is still ok?" Robin asked.

"I'm not going to speculate but…I'll try to help her," Garrus let out a sigh, "you okay?"

Robin nodded sheepishly.

"Even if I can't reach my family," Robin replied, "I would check on them sometimes, despite the fact my social media got hacked."

Garrus sighed.

"My mother also has a…condition, that's hard to deal with," he admitted.

Without knowing what else to do, he opened a video browser and then beckoned Robin to join him. She sat next to him, her eyes locking onto the screen of the turian commander's datapad. This entertained them until the Aran'tar entered the system Shanxi resided in.
When moving into orbit, Garrus ordered three strike units to deploy with five fighter-interceptors to cover them and patrol the skies. Because the ship had no other transport, Robin had been given a hastily acquired flight suit to slip into. It didn't fit but it will do the job…a job made apparent when she saw their craft.

Head first, Garrus took the pilot seat of the Armored Personnel Drone, a unit designed to be released from a ship and dropped without a parachute, guided by flaps and flown like an airfoil. Their only means of deceleration was…the ground itself. All Robin could do was hold onto something for support.

The sense of release and free fall was immediate. Without a method of self-deceleration, it was a ride most should only experience once. When the time came for their landing, it was felt rather than seen.

"Brace for impact!" Garrus called out.

And then the jolt of contact occurred, followed by a bounce, and another, soon turning onto one side and tumbling, finishing with a hard impact. Their harness took a jolt but all felt it as their breath knocked out.

Small explosions occurred and then the smoke dissipated, revealing the sunlight at dusk. Garrus held Robin's wrist as they sprinted for a building, the colonial garrison of Shanxi. They were in cover under ten seconds after landing. Robin took a few seconds to catch her breath, and then she scanned her surroundings, the sight of corpses on the ground making her cringe. The turians entered the building, sweeping the lobby in one moment. Unsure of whether to call out or not, Garrus checked in with his other units. The other two teams were on their way, and the air patrol saw nothing on the streets except ground surveillance units, but no hostile actions. Keeping vigilant, Robin clenched her fists. She did have a sneaky suspicion that someone was waiting for the right time to strike.

"Alliance Military, identify yourself," a voice came over an intercom.

Garrus nodded to one of his men, who set off to press the button.

"Lt. Arcus Niles, 5th Wing, 1st Flotilla. We are tasked to secure and investigate the situation on your colony."

"Thank God you're here. It's Cerberus. They've completely locked down the colony."

"I knew it," Robin whispered to herself, pressing her fist against her chest.

"We must confirm your identity before making contact," the Lieutenant requested, "can you provide your serial number?"

The man over the comm gave it. The Lieutenant nodded, so the turians and their human made their way upstairs, finding a locked door. Tali stepped forward until she was just inches closer to the door.

"Don't expect any card keys from me," Robin muttered to herself, "because…I clearly don't have any."

A door opened on the second floor.

"Alliance Colonial garrison, coming out," Tali heard from the other side of the door, so she took a few steps back.

Around a dozen humans emerged seconds later.
"Major Akira," the soldier offered a handshake.

Garrus shook the major's hand.

"Commander Vakarian, responding to that very reason. What's the situation?" Garrus asked.

Akira gave all of the details in two minutes, finishing with…

"Basically, they control the entire colony. The one thing we need is communication."

"We could route all communications through the Aran'tar, then link all colonial forces the same," Garrus offered.

"I would appreciate it," nodded Akira.

Tali activated a remote program on the Aran'tar, which aimed tight-beam lasers carrying data in light form. These were received by transmitters atop several colonial garrison structures, activating a communication network in moments.

In five minutes, the garrison across Shanxi was back in action. Robin felt a sense of relief, but she knew there was still something missing, so she approached Major Akira and tapped him on the shoulder, catching his attention.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Uh," Robin stammered, "is…my mom still alive?"

"Your mother?" he asked, quirking an eyebrow, "who are you?"

Robin started fidgeting nervously.

"I-I'm Robin Shepard," Robin answered, "and I'm worried about her."

Akira nodded.

"I don't know anything about her but the Central Hospital isn't far. Physically, anyway. We'll try to get there and see if she's okay."

With communications established and coordination proceeding, Tali began an effort to hack the autonomous defense grid. The Cerberus hacker was good, just not good enough.

It would have helped if Cerberus ships did not start an assault at that moment.

"Spirits, they've gone from angry to insane," Garrus grumbled.

Robin felt the ground vibrate, so she scurried over to the window and peered outside, trying to locate the source of the commotion. Without warning, Garrus grabbed her and threw themselves onto the floor, covering her with his body as an explosion burst the windows apart which elicited a startled yelp out of Robin.

"One rule about surviving combat, don't stand near windows," Garrus warned.

Panic built up in her breath, yet Robin recovered long enough to grasp the turian commander's arm, allowing him to pull her to her feet.

"They must've been expecting us," she gasped.
"Or something," Garrus muttered.

"Commander," Akira called over, "we have access to the service tunnels, they're safe enough to take shelter in and we'll likely find others of the garrison down there."

"All right," Garrus ordered, "everyone head for the tunnels!"

While holding onto Robin's hand, Garrus led his soldiers down the stairs. Once they arrived at the tunnels, Garrus felt a sense of relief from the fact that the corridors weren't filled with detritus of human waste. However, there wasn't enough lighting for anyone to see where they were going, so Tali scanned ahead through her mask. Garrus turned on the flashlight built in his omni-tool, his troops following suit. With the turian commander and his troops leading the way, the colonial garrison forces joined in as they moved out as one unit. As they progressed further, the vibrations in the ground continued, which elicited anxiety out of Robin. This prompted Garrus to stroke his thumb over her palm to give her some reassurance while they ventured farther.

Colonial forces gathered in a large chamber stockpiled with arms and armor but no means of engaging in air combat. The skies of Shanxi belonged to Cerberus, for now. The Aran'tar went silent without a word.

By using the service tunnels, several municipal buildings were reached and evacuated, except for the hospital, which was currently held by Cerberus as their base of operations. Most of the patients were missing according to what few doctors managed to escape into the tunnels. In the midst of all this chaos, Robin approached one of the doctors.

"Excuse me," Robin called over, "but do you know what became of Mrs. Hannah Shepard?"

"I think she was in ICU but in another wing. I don't know much," answered the doctor.

"Shepard?" added another, "she was my patient."

Robin tilted her head towards the doctor who responded to the other one, so she frantically approached him.

"Do you think they got to my mom?" Robin panicked.

He shrugged.

"I don't know, I'm ashamed to say we had to abandon some patients to move those who could escape," the doctor gave a remorseful sigh.

While Robin cringed, Garrus approached her and rubbed the back of her neck with his talons.

"If they have her, we'll try to get her back," he assured her.

Robin tilted her head in the turian commander's direction and wrapped her arm around his while leaning onto him. Garrus gave her a soft expression before he scooped her into his arms, nuzzling his face against hers. While Robin perched her arms on his shoulders, he took her aside and searched for a suitable spot where he can sit, wanting to soothe the anxious human until he could get updates on the ongoing incident outside.
Shanxi Disaster

With the Aran'tar dodging Cerberus ships, the effort to retake Colonial autonomous units appeared to be almost impossible as communications were down once again. Their only hope would be to use traditional radio communication using microwaves, unsecure in that anyone could find the signal, but as all communication was digital, this near-analog method was their best option. Thankfully, before Shanxi established Extranet link-ups, it used such systems throughout settlements and could communicate to others. Though old, it still worked as the garrison troops brought the network online.

During that time, Robin nestled into Garrus's embrace while she scrolled through her omni-tool for any news feeds. To her disappointment, all local traffic was blocked, so she shut off the Extranet app.

Major Akira was able to finally mount a counterattack. Using the radio network, garrisons from several settlements stormed areas held by Cerberus. Though the sides were of equal training and ability, the colonial troops with civilian militias made up of angry people at the invasion were able to give the bastards a real fight.

Unfortunately, all of this was a distraction.

Robin received a direct private message in her omni-tool. When she opened it, she shuddered at the sight of an image of her mother, ominously illuminated by an overhead light in an otherwise dark room. She suspected it had been sent over the hacked Extranet server which serviced Shanxi. A location was attached, far away from any settlement, within a canyon…difficult for any vessel to enter. Robin's breath quickened as fear built up in her eyes, catching the turian commander's attention.

"Shepard?" he paused.

Robin tilted her head in Garrus's direction, a teardrop forming at the corner of her eye.

"This is really bad, Garrus," Robin sputtered, "Miranda must've gotten to my mom before we even came here! She gave me the location, but I don't know if I should go on alone. Do you think it'll get worse if I…brought someone along?"

Garrus took a moment to examine the message in Robin's omni-tool.

"I…don't know," Garrus answered, "hostage situations are some of the hardest to deal with, but they're really just interested in you, albeit for no real reason except revenge."

Garrus stood to his feet and approached Tali before he set Robin down.

"Tali, we have a situation…" Garrus began.

Garrus turned on his omni-tool and displayed the reports beginning to come in stating Cerberus was pulling out of areas too easily, catching Akira's attention. He had been wondering why that would happen, so he ordered the teams on searches to retake areas. No bombs, no traps, not anything to suggest the retreating forces were interested in wanting to make their intentions known.

It didn't take long for Garrus and Tali to come up with a solution, so the quarian modified the turian commander's omni-tool to emit a signal that shrouded him from sensors. Tali gestured Robin to approach her.
"Yeah?" Robin paused.

"I'll need to see your omni-tool for a moment," Tali requested.

Upon cue, Robin held out her left wrist and presented her omni-tool, allowing Tali to install a program which Robin could use her omni-tool as a stun gun. Once the quarian finished, Robin tilted her head in Garrus's direction.

"So what do we do now?" Robin clamored.

"I'll keep you covered while you retrieve your mother," Garrus instructed, "then I want you to run. Fast."

Robin nodded.

"O-Ok," she replied, "you got it."

Garrus led Robin and Tali out of the large chamber underground and through the tunnel, making their way outside.

"I need guns," he informed Tali.

Opening her omni-tool, Tali sent orders to the Aran'tar to make a drop outside. Garrus led both ladies to the surface.

A roar of thunder overhead as they reached the surface, the Aran'tar screamed overhead with several Cerberus fighters on its tail, both exchanging fire. A capsule smashed into the ground, creating a substantial shockwave and impact crater. Garrus keyed in an opening signal, revealing a sniper rifle, a shotgun, and three pistols. He gave one pistol to Robin along with a belt with a holster attached to it.

"It's set for a Novice user," Garrus explained, "meaning you can't shoot yourself."

"That's really thoughtful of you! Thanks!" Robin chirped before stashing the pistol into the holster and wrapping the belt around her waist.

Garrus nodded to Robin before he led her and Tali to meet up with Liara and the rest of their troops.

"We'll need a ride to the meeting point. With the colonial garrison and Cerberus fighting each other, going on foot will be impossible," Tali stated, having an in-the-box thinking moment.

"That won't be too difficult," Garrus grinned and nodded.

On the other side of the street was a municipal vehicle maintenance shop. One of the vehicles is… massive. Curious, Robin approached it to take a closer look. It was a heavy-duty vehicle, with six large tires, a thick enough shell to take at least three missiles, and an impressive engine currently open, as if the crew working on it had left in a hurry. Tali maneuvered under the hood. The vehicle was tall enough for her feet to leave the ground. The position appeared comical to some.

While Robin ended up admiring Tali's knack for technology, Garrus's mandibles flexed in an amused expression. Robin nudged him in the ribs, so he turned around while Tali continued working on the vehicle.

"Before we go, I'd like to ask you something," Robin asked, "how come the quarian section in the library is closed off?"
Garrus couldn't help but scratch his mandible, not sure how to dignify the question with a response. After applying a few coats of omnigel to some cracks and leaks in engine tubing, Tali jumped down.

"I couldn't say, books haven't been in the fleet since the Exile. I've never been in the library, and quarians don't go on the Presidium," she explained.

Crawling underneath the truck, she checked the engine for any errors within a few minutes.

"It's ready," Tali announced.

Crawling out from underneath, she found one seat behind the driver's position. A secondary seat was open for Robin. Once she sat down, it didn't take long for Garrus and Liara to board the vehicle, the turian commander settling into the driver's seat. The seat was too human for his hips, but it'll do. Once he settled in, Garrus turned the ignition, the engine roaring to life. With the route set, he tore out of the bay, turning sharply, and he exceeded the speed limit substantially, making for the settlement gates.

Tali sent a radio message to the gate control which opened the gate. Their truck raced through, barely missing the bottom edge. Beyond was open landscape, but a smooth ride would be wishful thinking as Robin flinched upon the sound of explosions from a distance. Their travel took them into tougher terrain, reducing the max speed to 25. It felt like every rock was a small tremor to a hard jarring experience. To throw salt into the wound, Robin cringed as she gazed at Cerberus soldiers and colonial soldiers firing their rifles at each other, some of the ammunition grazing flesh and armor.

After an hour, Garrus stopped the vehicle.

"Overheated, needs to cool off," he said to himself.

Opening the hatch, Garrus climbed out to stretch. Robin also disembarked, taking a moment to gaze at the chaos in the distance. Colonial troops charged at Cerberus soldiers with their assault rifles at the ready. Their break only lasted ten minutes before resuming the drive and the terrain remained rough throughout. During an exceptionally treacherous pass, their truck climbed over a rockfall at an agonizingly slow pace. Garrus kept cool, navigating with seeming ease but in truth he had been tense. Robin noticed this expression, so she peered through the sturdy window, stiffening her spine when she spotted a colonial tank firing at a Cerberus vehicle. The Cerberus tank seemed far superior as it rendered the Colonial unit dead in moments, so Garrus navigated away and around the battlefield. They reached a flat region, soon flooring the pedal to move across the expanse. Robin couldn't help but sigh in relief.

"Hang in there, mom," Robin whispered to herself.

It didn't take long for them to reach the canyon and arrive at the entrance to uncharted caves of Shanxi. Garrus killed the ignition and disembarked the truck.

"And this in no way is dangerous nor stupid," he said.

Robin, Liara and Tali disembarked and met up with Garrus. When the human examined the entrance to the cave for a moment, she tilted her head towards the asari.

"If we do manage to rescue my mom from Cerberus," Robin asked, "do you think the truck will be able to hold her?"

"If you don't mind sitting in the back," answered Liara.

Tali and Liara activated visual camouflage devices, rendering them effectively invisible except for a
distortion vaguely humanoid in shape.

"We'll be close by if anything happens," Garrus tapped his forehead to Robin's before activating his own devices.

On her omni-tool appeared a map with waypoints to follow for the meeting…a central chamber underground.

In the meantime, Desolas and Saren Arterius have used the Shepard situation to, ideally, capture or kill a Cerberus officer of high rank. They arrived on the opposite side to Vakarian's group, entering the caverns and finding their targets won't be difficult. It didn't even take long for them to sneak past the Cerberus guards patrolling the other entrance.

The caves were a warren of passages with narrow cracks barely enough for Robin's tiny frame to slip through. Only Liara managed to accompany her, as Tali and Garrus were forced to find another way.

Within about an hour, Robin arrived at a chamber. Her map indicated this was the meeting place for herself and Cerberus. She laid her eyes on Miranda, who had Hannah strapped to a bed, so she stomped closer towards the center, her hands clenched into fists as her eyes furrowed at Miranda.

"Get away from her, you bitch!" Robin shouted.

Miranda didn't flinch, so she turned her gaze to Robin.

"I've been expecting you, Shepard," Miranda commented.

"What have you done to her?!" Robin demanded.

Hannah slowly opened her eyes and tilted her head in her daughter's direction.

"R-Robin?" Hannah whispered.

"About time you showed up, I was getting bored," Lawson pulled out a pistol, holding it to Hannah Shepard's head, "get over here, now."

While Garrus, Tali, and Liara were cloaked, they systematically removed Lawson's escorting guards, slowly so as not to cause panic. Robin wanted to defy Miranda through any means, but one glance at the gun was enough to remind her that running away would result in her mother's death. She gritted her teeth before she slowly stepped towards Miranda, her eyes still flickering with flames while she reached her hand towards the pistol.

"I swear," Robin muttered, "if you play any dirty tricks, I will make you regret it."

Unfortunately the only tricks to be played were carried out by Desolus and Saren Arterius, who opened fire when close enough. Their shots veered off, striking a cave wall which startled both Miranda and Robin.

"Miranda Lawson," Desolus called out, "you are under arrest for inciting violence against the Citadel races!"

Letting out a scoff, and while Saren and Desolus started to close in on her, Lawson pressed a trigger, detonating bombs in several passages, a few close enough to the turian siblings which choked their airways. They stumbled into the open, and Miranda soon shot at them. Robin almost wanted to shoot at Miranda's head at that point for such cruelty against these strange turians.
The distraction gave Liara time to place a powerful restraining barrier around Lawson, letting Robin remove the straps, grab her mother and run. Unfortunately, while Saren recovered long enough to aid his critically injured brother, the Cerberus agent broke free. In a fury, she fired several rounds off at the Shepards before detonating more charges to destabilize the caves. One of the ammunition struck Robin on the right side of her back. She yelped in pain, but she kept herself from falling to the ground. With her mother's arm over her shoulder, Robin scurried through the tunnel while keeping an eye out for any debris that might fall from the ceiling. All she would have to do was to make it outside and move her mother into the safety of the truck.

Garrus and his team followed close behind but the turian smelled blood. Human.

Getting outside seemed much faster than going in. Once outside, Garrus saw the blood seeping out of Robin, a small entry wound on the right side of her back. As the adrenaline faded, the blood flow increased while she collapsed to her knees.

"Robin!" Garrus panicked.

Garrus bolted for the truck, scrambling for the medkit. With the box in hand, he was at her side in moments.

Hannah Shepard, with enough First Aid training in her time with the Alliance, grabbed the kit, opened it, and slammed a short-needled tool into her daughter. The wound filled with medi-gel, coagulating the blood and combating infection. Applying liberal bandages, the younger Shepard was ready to leave swiftly.

"M-Mom," Robin stammered, "a-are you ok? Did they hurt you?"

Hannah placed her hand on Robin's face.

"You came for me?" she asked, "why?"

"I thought," Robin blurted, "I thought they were going to kill you."

Garrus wanted to call for help but without wireless communication, all they had was radio and that was too easily picked up. Unless…

Lifting a handset for the truck's radio, Garrus began speaking…in caws, clicks, hisses, and purrs. It was an old Turian dialect never translated. Only certain members of the military have been trained to speak it, and two of them were crew members of the Aran'tar.

The ship's comm officer received the transmission, replied, and prepared for another crazy run.

Garrus had Liara, Tali, Hannah and Robin board the vehicle before he entered the driver's seat. Hannah held Robin's head in her lap as Tali kept vigilant with any medical supplies needed.

Garrus floored the accelerator. Unfortunately, it felt like the run Shepard and her friends had made leaving their home. That had been made clear when Cerberus tanks started pursuing them through the canyon. Thankfully, they received help from Colonial Air forces, sweeping Cerberus fighters out of the sky, their pilots endowed with efficient skills. By the time the vehicle exited the canyon, the Aran'tar roared overhead, coming in low enough for yet another ground-pickup.

Garrus drove into the hangar. Their only option was the hospital in the main settlement. When the turian commander disembarked, Robin stumbled out of the truck, even if she kept herself from collapsing to the ground. She placed her hand onto her bandaged wound while Liara placed her arm over the young human's shoulder.
"Thanks, but I'll be ok," Robin assured with a soft smile.

While Garrus had medics escort Hannah out of the vehicle, he approached Liara and Robin while Tali disembarked.

"Liara, how is she?" Garrus asked.

"The bullet is a clean through-and-through, but there is a lot of internal damage," the Asari explained.

Garrus sent emergency messages to the Colonial garrison to round up the doctors from the Central Hospital to return as soon as possible, since they had an incoming patient. Robin wiggled out of Liara's grasp and stumbled over to Garrus, reaching her hand towards him which caused his mandibles to twitch in worry.

"Shepard," Garrus warned her, "don't move!"

"Don't worry…a-about me," Robin stuttered, "I-I can still…"

Robin didn't get the chance to finish when she suddenly lost consciousness, about to collapse to the floor. Garrus thought fast and caught her halfway, holding her close in his embrace.

The Aran'tar settled over the Central Hospital, establishing a guard position against any remaining Cerberus forces trying to make a bad day worse.

Tether lines were released from underneath the ship, locking onto the roof. Garrus, with Robin harnessed to him, rode down to meet the medics waiting below. When the turian commander landed on the roof, he approached the medics at a brisk pace after unlocking Robin from the harness and lifting her into his arms.

Settling her onto a gurney, the medics reeled her into the hospital.

More turians landed on the roof, carrying electrical conduits. Connecting the Aran'tar to the hospital's power systems, the facility received just enough to operate the essentials for the young Shepard's procedure. All Garrus could do was remain vigilant for any Cerberus forces while he stayed up to date on Robin's condition. While he did so, he couldn't help but curse to himself. He suspected that letting Robin get involved in such a war on a colony would endanger her life. He knew she would insist on going along even just to save a loved one, but now she was in bad shape thanks to Miranda.

Over the hours Robin had been in surgery, Cerberus pulled itself out of Shanxi airspace. Without a threat to face, colonial garrison forces stood down but in no way were they left in peace. Throughout the rest of the day, the systems that have been rigged as booby-traps set off without warning, attacking staff and destroying themselves while catching soldiers and civilians alike off guard.

By the evening, news reports finally have been received on Shanxi.

Toby Dunn spoke at an emergency meeting, revealing the 'truth' about what occurred on Shanxi. An unprovoked and insane task force of turian ships landed on the colony and caused untold deaths and damage to infrastructure. Somehow even video "evidence" was made to look like turians were responsible when even a novice analyst could see the video editing done hastily to make the story seem reality. The undercurrent of violence and calls for war spread across human settled worlds with enlistment rising in hours.

Garrus couldn't help but growl in anger at such fake news. He may have warned Robin about a
drastic incident that the turians would be blamed for, yet he felt infuriated that it actually happened. He stepped into the recovery room where multiple patients rested in their beds. He passed by Saren, who sat by Desolas's side, but he didn't say much. Garrus reached Robin's bed and noticed that she managed to wake up mere moments ago. She tilted her head in her turian boyfriend's direction.

"Garrus?" Robin whispered, "is my mom ok?"

"Yeah, she's perfectly fine," answered Garrus, "all the drama, she passed out in a lounge upstairs."

Though awkward, Garrus leaned in, placing the closest thing a turian can give to a kiss on her forehead. Taking a seat, he sighed.

"So," Robin asked, "what happened while I was out?"

"Dunn has called for war. He blames the entire Cerberus attack on the turian military, and someone even made footage of troops on Shanxi streets look like turian soldiers," he explained.

Taking Robin's hand in both of his, Garrus sat this way for a while.

Still, Robin shuddered at the thought of humans and the Citadel races slaughtering each other in a war she felt was not needed.

"So, Cerberus isn't willing to give up even after I leaked their files?" Robin commented, "I guess I'll have to step up my game while I'm at it."

Robin slowly sat up from her bed, planting her free hand on the bed for support before she leaned closer to Garrus. She placed her hand on his face before she leaned in to kiss him. He returned the kiss as best as he could, if not awkward. Garrus tapped his forehead to hers and then nuzzled it.

"You realize that if you do that," Garrus warned her, "you'll put a bigger target on your back."

"I'm sure there might be others that have it worse than I do," Robin assured Garrus, "and I'm no stranger to meddling in affairs."

"You really need to be careful," Garrus groaned.

In the meantime, Saren couldn't get a response from Desolas, so he sighed and stood to his feet. He started walking across the room only to lay his eyes on Garrus and Robin as the turian commander held her close.

Sitting back, the commander glanced at Arterius, making no reaction.

"Saren," Garrus said solemnly.

Saren took one glance at Robin.

"It seems that the human you took into custody has grown attached to you, Commander Vakarian," Saren commented.

Robin gave Saren a blank stare.

"Uh, Garrus?" Robin paused, gesturing to Saren, "do you know this guy?"

Garrus leaned closer to Robin's ear.

"He's a turian Spectre," Garrus whispered.

Garrus returned his gaze to Saren.

"I heard you and Desolas had a bad run-in with Cerberus," Garrus continued.

Saren shook his head in disbelief and folded his arms.

"That bitch Lawson," he growled, "she took away my brother without a single moment of regret!"

"They'll be taking a lot more in time," Garrus commented with remorse, "if there's anything I could do to help, ask and I'll make sure to keep an eye out for Lawson, now that I know her face."

Saren snorted in response.

"I can track her down myself," he barked, "besides, these humans have slaughtered innocents in this colony and put the blame on us. This is a disgrace!"

"It's all for Dunn's power grab and The Illusive Man wanting humans to be the dominant force. Maybe they had a good idea once but supporting that hellion troublemaker and...this," Garrus used his hands to imitate something big and heavy to indicate Shanxi and what was committed just hours earlier, "I can't imagine what exactly their ultimate goal is. Despite everything, most humans aren't insane, they are just being lead by them."

"I'll tell you exactly what they want, Garrus," Saren insisted, "they want nothing more than to slaughter our people and subjugate the other races. What they did here was inexcusable!"

"Wait," Robin protested, "what if we let the colonists testify to prove the turians' innocence? They've witnessed what Cerberus did!"

Without warning, Saren glared at Robin, flexing his mandibles and baring his sharp teeth.

"Your suggestion will not work," he growled, "mark my words, Shepard. There is no other alternative, your race has to be stopped before they destroy the Citadel! War is the only option we have left."

Saren made a glance at Garrus before returning his gaze to Robin.

"You should be honored to be Commander Vakarian's future bondmate," Saren continued, "should we succeed in bringing the humans to justice for their crimes."

Without saying anything further, Saren turned to leave, leaving Garrus and Robin to stare in disbelief.

"I get where he's coming from. If someone hurt my sister I'd..." Garrus sighed, shaking his head, "don't worry, war on that scale wouldn't happen."

Robin nodded in agreement, but...

"I still haven't forgotten Saren mentioning something about me becoming your bondmate," Robin reminded Garrus, "did...he mean marriage?"

"It's...more intense than human marriage. It would involve me...biting you and following certain rituals," Garrus took a deep breath and sighed.

Robin couldn't help but smile as she placed her hand on Garrus's face.
"Maybe we'll discuss about it later," Robin suggested, "like, after the crisis is over?"

Garrus nodded and closed his eyes for a moment.

"I can do that," he answered, "I wouldn't want to pressure you. Do you need anything to eat?"

"Yeah," Robin blurted, "I guess I'm hungry."

Nodding in agreement, Garrus allowed Robin to lie back down before he set off in search of a cafeteria of some sorts.
In the hours that had passed, the colonial troops managed to return power to most of the settlements. As injured soldiers and civilians were being received at the hospital, all of the staff were in heated action, conducting triage of the most injured to the least and attending to as many as possible. It was not enough for a few, however, as the turian can see some people sitting at bedsides with sheets over the figures. Some shrouded forms did not have such a vigil.

The cafeteria appeared to be empty, though behind the long counter were an asari and a drell, both in smocks. Cooking simple dishes in massive quantities, Garrus understood patients and staff will want a meal once the chaos died down. He noticed containers of food stored for later consumption.

"Smart," he thought.

"Open for business?" he asked.

The asari glanced at Garrus.

"Heard there were turians kicking Cerb ass. Help yourself to anything in the trays, on the house. The red section is dextro, by the way."

Garrus made a plate for Robin, then spied one thing for himself. With plate and a bowl of Tupari in hand, he stepped out of the cafeteria and returned to her bedside. Robin took her plate eagerly and started eating while Garrus started eating his own meal. During that time, he started wondering how the Council would react to the incident and the accusations placed on his species. Would they declare a crisis? After they finished eating, a doctor came by to check on Robin. Declaring her healthy enough, the doctor asked Garrus to move her into a guest suite on the upper floors. The bed was needed for incoming trauma patients.

Garrus gathered her items before helping Robin out of bed, and then they took the elevator to the top floors. They just happened to find Hannah Shepard in the first one checked, the woman asleep on a sofa. Robin gestured Garrus to lean closer to her.

"I think we should let her rest for the night," Robin suggested.

Garrus nodded and ran his talons through her hair before he scooped her into his arms and tucked her into a nearby bed. Feeling weary himself, he squatted on the aquiline legs his species was known for and leaned against the wall. It didn't take long for sleep to cloud his eyes.

Back at the Citadel, Ashley scurried through the lower wards in search of Robin. Although her search may have been fruitless, she soon noticed that it was now evening. Part of her wanted to turn in for the night, but Ashley brushed off the silly thought, reminding herself that her friend might still be in danger. When she emerged from an alleyway, she tapped a message into her omni-tool and sent it to Kaidan:

{Sorry, Kaidan. I can't find Robin in the lower wards.}

With nothing else to do, Ashley started strolling alongside the walkways that would lead back to the apartment. When she stopped at a cab station, she noticed that there weren't any cabs in the lot yet, so she would have to wait for one to arrive. With nothing else to do, she sat on a bench.

"I've been looking all over for you, pet," Ashley heard all of a sudden.
Ashley shuddered while she scanned her surroundings. To her confusion, she couldn't find anyone suspicious, but she trembled and clenched her fists.

"W-Who's there?" Ashley demanded.

Nobody seemed to be around, specifically to speak to Ashley but the foot traffic elsewhere and dark areas of the ward were easy to hide in. Ashley furrowed her eyebrows, stood to her feet and clenched her fists. She suddenly received a message in her omni-tool.

'It's so nice to see you're okay, I was worried. You remember I don't like to worry, and ever since you left, that's all I've done. Worry, worry, worry, worry all day long and I don't think that's fair. You remember when I used to worry? Now I worry a lot since you left, and because of that stupid shit Alenko. You know it's not nice to make me worry but worse to cheat on me. So I'm hurt and angry. And that...Shepard slut too. Of all the people to get involved with, my sweet tree, you have to choose her? That traitor bitch will fucking die for what she's done. I hope to watch her scream. Her and that dick Alenko.'

"That can't possibly be..." Ashley muttered to herself.

Ashley spun around in search of any stalkers. Even if she was alone, she couldn't just give in without some sort of fight. Without warning, a mysterious figure appeared out of nowhere and before Ashley could respond, the figure punched her hard in the gut, knocking the breath out of her. The instant she blacked out, the figure scooped her into his arms and made a quick getaway.

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When the harboring star rose in the morning sky back at Shanxi, the survivors were still in turmoil over the incident from yesterday. Garrus returned to the cafeteria to gather coffee and a breakfast sandwich for Robin along with a breakfast order for Hannah and a dextro meal for himself before he returned to the suite. By then, Robin was in the middle of brushing her hair and Hannah just finished putting her shirt on.

Garrus set the levo food down, allowing Hannah and Robin to start eating while he sat on the human-designed sofa. He ate silently, even if the sofa didn't quite form to his figure.

"Hey, mom," Robin asked, "do you remember what happened before Miranda got to you?"

"Last I remember," Hannah shrugged, "a doctor came into my room to check up on me. They used a syringe on me and I passed out. The next thing I know, here I am."

Robin couldn't help but scratch her head in response.

"Sounds pretty bad," Robin commented, "are you doing ok now?"

"Yeah," Hannah nodded, "the treatment should be completed by the end of the month."

Hannah tilted her head towards Garrus.

"Commander Vakarian," Hannah continued, "I thank you for keeping my daughter safe."

Garrus couldn't help but scratch his mandible.

"I do my best," he remarked, "but she seems intent on making the safeguarding part of the job difficult. Has she always been a troublemaker?"

"She has been a personal bodyguard for her non-human classmates when she was in high school,
fending them off from bullies," Hannah explained, "whenever the kids would steal lunch money from them, Robin would chase those kids down and demand them to give it back."

Robin shuddered and gave Hannah a blank stare.

"Geez, mom!" Robin groaned.

"And one time," Hannah added, "Robin invited a turian classmate over to play video games with her, so we had to buy some dextro snacks when he came over to visit."

"Oh, for god's sake, mom!" Robin protested, "it was just friendship back then, remember?"

"Heh," Garrus mused, "were you always a freedom fighter or are you just fond of turians?"

Garrus gestured to his features.

"Is it the crest? Or fringe?" he continued, "or the spurs?"

Robin shrugged.

"I just feel like standing up for races outside my species is the right thing to do," Robin answered.

Once Robin finished eating her breakfast, she set aside the empty dishes and sat by the window, only to notice an Alliance ship descending from the sky outside.

"Is that," Robin said to herself, "my dad's ship?"

Robin brushed it off and began styling her hair into a half ponytail and putting on her hairclip. It didn't take long for Garrus to notice the Alliance ship, though.

"Guess that means it's time I got back to the Citadel, or else we might be shot down," he stood to his feet.

"If you want to stay with your mother, that would likely be the safer choice," Garrus offered to Robin.

Robin shook her head.

"Uh, no thanks," Robin blurted, "I'd rather go with you."

Robin wrapped her arms around Garrus, much to Hannah's amusement.

"Well, you be careful out there," Hannah advised, "ok, Robin?"

Robin smiled at her mother.

"You, too," she replied, "just tell dad I said hi."

Now that Robin was ready to leave, Garrus escorted Robin out of the lounge and they made their way out of the hospital. By then, they noticed two Alliance soldiers meeting up with Major Akira.

"General Shepard," Akira saluted.

Robin's eyes lit up upon recognizing the Alliance soldiers ahead.

"My son and I've been sent to help search for survivors," Robin's dad explained, "is my wife all right?"
Garrus stiffened, and seeing her father was the worst possible scenario for two reasons. One, this was Robin's father. Two, their president has called for war on turians. So at this moment, Vakarian didn't know what General Keagan Shepard's position or orders were. All he knew was his ship was at a distance and his men haven't reported anything, which could be good or bad. So he waited, away and behind Robin, for her to finish greeting the man who will decide his fate. Robin made a brief glance at Garrus while the younger man laid his eyes on both Robin and Garrus.

"R-Robin Hood?!” Brendan exclaimed.

Within a matter of seconds, Akira, Keagan and Brendan had their eyes focused on the turian commander and his human protege.

"Oh, that," Akira clarified, "Commander Vakarian and your daughter helped us fend off Cerberus and she risked her life to rescue your wife from them."

Keagan made a brief glance at Akira.

"She did?” he paused.

Keagan gestured Brendan to follow him as they approached Robin, which caused her to shudder in response.

"Uh, hey dad," Robin blurted.

"I thought you were at the Citadel," Keagan reminded Robin.

Robin nodded.

"I was," she admitted, "but when I heard Cerberus attacked Shanxi, I wanted to head over here and make sure my mom was ok."

Keagan couldn't help but fold his arms.

"Yeah, well," Keagan sighed, "do you realize how much Admiral Anderson lectured me about your leaking classified files?"

"I-I tried to warn everyone how dangerous Cerberus was," Robin protested, trying to maintain her posture, "it didn't go well, did it?"

The Alliance general glared at his daughter with a storm of emotions, but in uniform he kept composure while he turned his gaze towards Garrus.

"Commander," Shepard held out a hand.

"General," Garrus responded.

They both shook hands.


Garrus took a breath.

"As I understand, sir, your wife was here for treatment," Garrus explained, "somehow, Cerberus knew this and used an assault to cover up their abduction. Their effort was to bring your daughter into their grasp and kill her for revenge. And at present, President Dunn has claimed the attack was a turian force, I assume intent on revenge or something to instigate xenophobia."
Keagan nodded, understanding what Garrus had to say.

"You know," said Keagan, "maybe this incident really was a conspiracy. This wouldn't have happened if they picked Sean Collins. Now that I've heard from you, I'll leave you be. My son and I have survivors to rescue…let's just hope they're still alive."

Standing at attention, Garrus saluted General Shepard.

"Thank you, sir. My ship and I will leave immediately so there's no further conflict of interest."

The Aran'tar descended a cable to the ground, which Garrus placed a foot into the stirrup. He lifted Robin into one arm and then kicked the release. The cable pulled them upwards. Thinking it was an awesome moment, the turian stared into his girlfriend.

"Y-Yeah?" Robin paused.

Garrus tapped his forehead onto Robin, letting out a soft purr while she embraced herself to him. Once they were both aboard the vessel, Garrus escorted Robin into his cabin.

The Aran'tar jumped to FTL immediately after leaving orbit. Due to the special design, it was faster than most ships, by any standard. After a short time, they were out of sensor range and long gone.

Over the course of the trip, Garrus lay on his bed, much to Robin's confusion.

"Are…you tired?" Robin asked.


Smiling, Robin climbed onto the bed and nestled into the turian commander's embrace. While she rested her head on his carapace, Garrus ran his talons through her short hair. This might be a quiet moment they needed considering the violence they witnessed.

Before long, the Aran'tar arrived at the Citadel and entered the docking bay. Robin and Garrus emerged from the ship and walked along the ramp, only to find Kaidan, Jack, Kasumi, Joker and Wrex waiting for them.

"Oh," Robin blurted, waving her hand, "hey, guys!"

Irritated, Jack stomped towards Robin until they were just inches apart.

"Robin," Jack demanded, "where the hell were you?!"

Robin shuddered in an instant.

"Uh, Jack," Robin muttered, "I can explain…"

Jack put up a hand, cutting Robin off before she could finish.

"How the fuck could you run off like that without telling us where you were going?!!" Jack scolded, "we spent all day yesterday looking for you: Joker, Wrex, Kas, Kaidan, Ash and myself!"

Startled, Robin stammered nervously, unable to come up with a legitimate response. Sighing in disappointment, Kasumi stepped towards Garrus while Liara and Tali emerged from the ship.

"So, Garrus," Kasumi asked, "where did you find her?"
Garrus couldn't help but scratch his mandible.

"I couldn't say that I found her," Garrus admitted, "but after I informed her that I've been deployed to Shanxi, she rushed over here and insisted that she come along. I wanted to just make her stay behind, but…"

Joker, Kasumi, Jack, Kaidan and Wrex laid their eyes on Robin.

"You went to Shanxi?!" Joker exclaimed.

Robin nodded.

"My mom was in danger," Robin clarified, "so I had to go rescue her from Cerberus. It just happened to coincide with Cerberus attacking Shanxi and blaming the turians for it."

Kaidan sighed as he facepalmed.

"Oh, right," he paused, "that was in the news last night."

Robin shifted glances between her friends, only to notice they were missing one.

"Hey, Kaidan," Robin called out, "where's Ashley?"

Kaidan shuddered and gave Robin a blank stare. After a moment of silence, he placed his hand behind his head.

"I…haven't heard back from her yet since last night," Kaidan admitted, "last I heard from her, she said she couldn't find you in the lower wards."

Garrus twitched his mandibles before he called someone on his omni-tool.

"Eretus, Vakarian here," Garrus called to another turian, in a C-Sec uniform.

"Sir, what can I do for you?" Eretus asked.

Garrus gave the detective a complete description of Ashley Williams, her last known location, and her omni-tool ID code. Where he got that was a question for later. Once he finished providing the details, he stared down the human misfits with his hawklike gaze.

"Go back to your residence and stay there. Anyone leaves, I'll take you back myself," Garrus instructed.

He especially glared at Robin.

"After what you've been through at Shanxi, you need to stay home."

Tali placed her hand on Kasumi's arm.

"I'll keep you updated," Tali assured.

"Thank you," smiled Kasumi.

Still, Robin gave Garrus a confused stare.

"Uh, Garrus?" Robin asked, "what are you going to do?"

"Pull strings, piss people off, and most likely shoot someone," Garrus walked off the docking
platform.

With nothing else to do, Robin joined up with her friends and they headed back to the apartments. All they could hope for was Ashley's safe return.
When Ashley slowly opened her eyes, she found herself shrouded in darkness while lying on the ground. She scanned her surroundings in search of some sort of light source, but to no avail. She tried moving her arms and her right hand found her left wrist, but to her disappointment, she couldn't feel her omni-tool strapped on. While she may have felt relief her hands weren't bound, she still had a sneaky suspicion that something terrible happened to her. She used her hands to explore her body, determined to find any possible bruises. To her shock, she couldn't feel her C-Sec uniform but instead, she brushed her hands on some sort of corset wrapped around her torso. When she inspected her legs with her hands, they detected a pair of crotchless panties. Ashley shuddered, remembering that only one person would dare strip her naked while she was unconscious and put her in something this degrading.

Ashley planted her hands on the floor and pushed herself to her feet, but snapped out of her thoughts when she heard a door open. To her horror, a young man older than her and with a broad chest, pale skin and a golden buzz cut stepped into the room, giving her an intimidating stare.

"R-Ryan?!” Ashley exclaimed.

Ryan smirked while he stared at Ashley's curves.

"Don't you look beautiful this morning?" he sneered.

Ashley furrowed her eyebrows and balled her hands into fists.

"What do you want with me?!” Ashley demanded, "I thought I told you I'm done with you!"

Ryan shook his head and clicked his tongue.

"It seems that you have forgotten your place," Ryan lectured, "so I'm here to teach you a lesson."

Ashley tried to side-step Ryan in an attempt to escape, but he ended up stepping back until he was in the doorway.

"Uh-uh-uh," Ryan scolded in a singsong voice, "I can't let you get away, pretty doll."

Ashley shook her head in disbelief.

"I said that I never want anything to do with you!" Ashley shouted, "all those years in high school and I won't let you ruin me any further!"

Growling, Ryan charged at Ashley and tackled her onto the mattress. She struggled to free herself, but he pressed his knees onto her feet while he unzipped his pants.
"Do I need to remind you, you ungrateful little slut?" Ryan threatened, "you are my bride-to-be, thus you belong to me. No one can have you, not even that stupid Kaidan. I think it's time you start giving me babies because once we're married, you'll be happy to be my wife."

The next thing she knew, Ashley lost all coherent thought as Ryan pinned her wrists to the mattress and forced his way between her legs like he did before. She couldn't bring herself to scream as the feeling of pain and disgust surged through her veins once again.

It was a blessing the Citadel was one of the most security equipped stations in the galaxy. With scanners, cameras, and the ability to listen in on any conversation over comm channels, a small group of C-Sec officers with Commander Vakarian as a "special advisor" began their search. The victim being one of their own made the effort more personal.

Garrus sat in the station Captain's office, an old friend from the military academy. The turian sighed in frustration.

"One of my own, taken. I swear whoever took her will live to regret their decision."

"I, too, didn't expect for this to happen," Garrus agreed, "you're not alone on this."

Garrus started browsing the vids the C-Sec captain brought up, paying close attention to any suspicious activity that might've led to Ashley's disappearance.

Later on that day, Robin wandered over to Kaidan's apartment and found him watching a sports channel in the living room. She noticed concern in his expression, and wanting to console him, she approached the couch and sat next to him, catching his attention.

"Robin?" Kaidan paused.

"Are you doing ok?" Robin asked.

Kaidan shook his head.

"I promised I'd protect Ash," he muttered, "and yet I failed."

Robin cringed and lowered her head, a sense of guilt filling her mind.

"It's my fault, isn't it?" Robin replied.

Kaidan sighed and placed his hand on Robin's hand.

"No," Kaidan confessed, "I'll bet Cerberus distracted us by luring you to Shanxi, that way they could take us out one by one."

Robin gave Kaidan a confused stare.

"Are you sure Cerberus is the only enemy targeting us?" Robin objected, "what if there were others that have personal vendettas against us?"

Kaidan turned his head away, avoiding Robin's gaze.

"What do you think?" he remarked.

Robin tilted her head to the side amidst the confusion.
"You know," Robin mentioned, "you never told us how you first met Ashley."

Kaidan grimaced while he folded his arms.

"Why is this so important to you all of a sudden?" Kaidan demanded.

Robin straightened her spine and kept her eyes locked onto Kaidan.

"Whatever might be the problem," Robin declared, "I'm here to help."

Kaidan let out a heavy sigh. Maybe it would do him no good if he kept this issue to himself.

"We were in our senior year in high school when we first met," Kaidan explained, "on that day, I took her to the nurse's office when she got sick in gym class. When I saw a couple bruises on her, she refused to explain how she got them. Later that week, I spotted this deceitful douchebag scolding her for something while I was heading for my locker."

Robin tilted her head to the side.

"Who was this guy?" she asked.

"His name was Ryan Reeves," Kaidan continued, "many of the girls in our school were fawning over how gorgeous he was, but I couldn't seem to notice why. Halfway through the school year, our history teacher pointed out Ashley's grades were terrible, so he assigned me to tutor her after school. During that time, she went on about how she needed to get home quickly or Ryan would punish her. I asked her if she ever considered breaking up with him if he was making her unhappy, but she said that she can't."

Robin couldn't help but scratch her head while Kaidan shuddered at the memories that played back in his head.

"I'm guessing this Ryan guy's got control over Ashley's resources," Robin guessed.

"Yeah," Kaidan nodded, "because after the tutoring session, Ryan came by the classroom and told me to stay away from her."

Robin let out a worried sigh.

"So how did Ashley get out of the relationship?"

Kaidan unfolded his arms.

"After graduation," Kaidan concluded, "Ashley came to my home and came forward with the terrible things he did to her, even if it didn't involve hitting. Still, I helped her cut ties with him and we moved to the state where you were attending your classes. I vowed to protect her since then."

Robin took a deep breath to suppress all the potential shock and rage that stemmed in her mind. Still, what Kaidan provided made sense. She pounded her left fist into her right palm, her eyes brimming with confidence.

"Ok," Robin announced, "let's call everyone over. I have an idea."

Kaidan gave Robin a blank stare.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?"
Robin nodded and winked while giving Kaidan a thumbs up. She contacted Jack, Kasumi and Joker through an omni-tool and sent them a message:

{Could you guys come over to Kaidan's place? I have something important to tell you.}

Robin waited at the front door until several minutes later, Joker, Kasumi and Jack arrived and stepped into the apartment. They and Kaidan gathered around in the living room.

"So, what's the scoop, Robin Hood?" asked Jack.

Robin let out a huff of air and took a deep breath, her hands planted on her lap.

"I don't think Cerberus is behind Ashley's disappearance," Robin explained.

Joker rubbed his forehead in confusion.

"What makes you say that?" he paused.

"Ashley has a crazy ex-boyfriend Kaidan's trying to protect her from," Robin continued, "and I think he somehow managed to kidnap her."

Joker, Jack and Kasumi shuddered in a split second.

"Well," Kasumi asked, "are you going to tell Garrus about it?"

"I could," Robin answered, "but I don't think Ashley would be in the Citadel. Since that's a possibility, let's go rescue her ourselves!"

Coincidentally, Kaidan received a call from Garrus, so he tapped on his omni-tool and began the transmission.

{Alenko, I'm assisting C-Sec with their investigation into Ashley Williams' disappearance. We found some videos I'd like you to look at.}

A second window showed a figure carrying an unconscious body. On the hip facing the camera was a chain clipped to the belt, leading into the pocket. That chain belonged to the late General Williams, Ashley's decorated grandfather.

{Do you know this person?}

A picture of the person, male human, a high school buddy of her ex appeared on another screen.

"Y-Yes," Kaidan nodded, "that's Ryan's friend Eric Barris, or who I like to call him, Butch."

The call was interrupted when someone knocked at the front door. Robin stood to her feet and scurried over to the door before she opened it. On the threshold stood Thane Krios, who nodded at Robin while Kaidan told Garrus everything about Ashley and Ryan.

"Miss Shepard, I'm glad you survived Shanxi," he said, "I have something of interest for your friends."

Robin's eyes lit up in excitement.

"Ok," Robin clamored, "what have you got?"

She didn't seem bothered that Thane would show up all of a sudden, but she felt certain that
whatever he had to provide would be most helpful at the present time. The drell entered the
apartment and waved hello to everyone inside.

"Oh, it's that assassin again," Kasumi muttered.

Vakarian tapped a keyboard, bringing his image onto the wall monitor of the apartment.

(This person was spotted in the area of Ashley's last known location, and we know the person on his
shoulder is Ashley herself.)

A picture ID of Eric Barris appeared.

(We know Barris is an old friend of Ryan Reeves, formerly Williams's boyfriend. Currently, we are
looking for leads on where they were taken.)

Kriss made himself known to the group, and Commander Vakarian, which gave him a surprised
expression that the drell assassin would show up at such a time.

"I have information to that regard, Commander," Thane displayed a data file of a map in one section
of the Citadel Ward number 3, known as Attica Ward, "I was able to track Williams and her captor
to this 2-block area before being forced to leave. A gang of humans is guarding the area."

Joker stared at the data file in such awe.

"Wow," Joker commented, "do you think that gang is still there?"

"In all likelihood," Thane answered, "they are loyal or paid by Reeves to guard the location. There
are too many for a direct assault, enough to warn him of incoming forces."

Garrus nodded in agreement.

(My crew and C-Sec friend are putting together an infiltration squad, and we've considered using
surveillance drones to find the exact location.)

"I volunteer to find their location, surveillance drones are easily detected with standard equipment,"
Kriss nodded to Vakarian, and then Robin and her friends.

(All right.) Garrus concluded, (I have the information we need. I'll speak with you later.)

Garrus ended the transmission, so Robin tilted her head towards Thane.

"So," Robin clamored, "I guess it's up to us to find a gap in their defenses and head over to Ash's
location."

Startled, Jack jumped to her feet.

"Are you crazy?!" Jack protested, "Garrus told us not to leave the apartment!"

"So what?" barked Robin, "I'm not going to stand around and just do nothing!"

"The last time you did that had you bleeding out from a bullet. By Lawson, no less," Joker reminded
her.

Kasumi scrambled to her feet and gave Robin a hug.

"I'll go, our handsome lizard friend might have some technical issues to get past," Kasumi released
Robin from her embrace and took Krios by the hand, "come on, I need to get something quickly."

Thane nodded while Robin turned her head towards Kaidan.

"What about you, Kaidan?" Robin called over, "Ashley needs you, doesn't she?"

Kaidan sighed as he slowly stood to his feet.

"You will not come to harm," Thane assured them, "come."

"No thanks," Joker blurted, "I'll pass."

Robin shrugged while she, Kaidan, Jack and Kasumi followed Thane out of the apartment and towards a taxi cab with its meter deactivated. Was it supposed to be untraceable?

"If you would," Thane offered.

Once they hopped in with Thane sitting in a passenger seat, Kasumi took control of the driver seat with the drell directing her to the location. Robin noticed that Garrus and C-Sec weren't far behind. All she could hope for was for her turian boyfriend to not notice she was getting involved.

Otherwise, it would result in a lecture that would get on her nerves all day.

In a short while, Kasumi landed the cab one block over out of sight. Once they disembarked the cab, Thane led them through to an area further away from the warehouse into a maintenance corridor running underneath the district. The gang did not station lookouts here. The drell and humans made their way inside within five minutes upon arrival.

"You both are biotics?" the assassin asked Jack and Kaidan, "if we meet resistance, stun them and simply render unconscious. Leave any killing to me."

Jack grinned as she slammed her fist into her palm.

"You know me," Jack bragged, "I'm all for stirring up shit!"

Upon cue, Thane set off to make his move. With the enhanced biotics, Kaidan and Jack scoured the corridors of the warehouse and happened upon the guards patrolling the place. They both landed one precise strike on each guard to knock them unconscious while the drell assassin would perch on the beams near the ceiling, waiting until he seized his chance to subdue any guards that came into his sight.

During that time, Robin examined each door she passed by and turned their knobs, only to find they were locked. This behavior was enough to catch Kasumi's attention.

"Robin, what are you doing?" Kasumi asked.

Robin paused in her tracks and locked eyes onto the hooded thief.

"I was thinking," Robin clarified, "should we find some keys so I can check out these rooms? Maybe we can find some clues."

Kasumi couldn't help but grin.

"I have a better idea," Kasumi offered.

Kasumi gestured Robin to step aside while she turned on her omni-tool. The thief produced lock-
picking tools, knelt next to the door and set to work on the current door, which clicked soon after. By then, Jack returned from a round of whack-a-guard and noticed what Kasumi was doing.

"A light biotic tap would work, too," Jack mentioned, whose measuring of light meant punching and breaking the lock.

Robin paused for a moment and locked eyes onto the biotic delinquent.

"Great idea, Jack," chirped Robin, "thanks!"

Robin opened the door and stepped into the room, scanning it for any clues. She found two marriage certificates that haven't been filled yet, but she shuddered at the possibility that Ryan might be planning to force Ashley to marry him at some point. She couldn't find anything else, so she stepped out of the room.

"Let's keep searching!" Robin suggested.

Robin, Kasumi and Jack sauntered through the hall and stopped at the next door, so Jack broke the lock by giving it a biotic punch. Once Robin opened the door, she stiffened when she spotted Ashley curled up on the mattress by herself…or someone they assumed was Ashley. Upon drawing close enough, the person was merely wearing her uniform, chained to the bed and her throat was cut. An omni-tool lay beside her, a Chameleon 5.

Kasumi took the device and linked it to her own before she downloaded a file: which turned out to be a video of Ryan and Ashley.

"Crap," grumbled Robin, "how are we going to get her back now?"

"Let's hope we get a location soon," Jack replied, "I can't wait to give this bastard a beating."

Without warning, they heard gunshots from outside in the streets. Robin could suspect that C-Sec arrived and they weren't happy.

"Uh, guys?" Robin reminded, "if we don't get out of here soon, I do not want to know what Garrus will say to us for not listening to him!"

Jack grimaced at the thought.

"Yeah," she agreed, "you have a point."

Robin, Kasumi and Jack sprinted out of the room and met up with Thane and Kaidan while they scurried down the hall. They stopped at a corner that led to an exit.

"This way," Thane instructed.

Thane led Robin, Kaidan, Jack and Kasumi through the door and made their way outside. They had to find cover before anyone from C-Sec could spot them. Robin was this close to sighing in relief, but without warning, a biotic field enveloped her and spun her around, her eyes widening in shock as Liara glared at her. Garrus may be nearby, but he didn't seem to be minding the situation. To add insult to injury, C-Sec officers pulled Kaidan, Jack and Kasumi out of hiding yet Thane barely managed to slip away. Robin couldn't help but stiffen. What kind of excuse will she have to create?

Chapter End Notes
So, how do you guys think Garrus should discipline Robin, now that she's in trouble again?
In the late evening, Garrus arrived at Robin's apartment with take-out and he locked the door behind him. As anticipated, Robin headed for the front door to greet him. Yet, she still stiffened, anticipating what Garrus might tell her.

"Hey, Garrus?" Robin asked, "did you have any luck finding Ashley yet?"

Garrus shook his head. He didn't say anything while setting out dinner. Before they ate, however, the turian commander took her wrist in one hand, pinning Robin to a wall, and held her face with the other so she gazed at him.

"I told your friends not to come, yet they did. I've told you not to come, yet you did. Twice now I've asked you to do something, believing you'd respect my ability to accomplish the task, and twice you've ignored me. What is the meaning of this reckless behavior, Robin Shepard?" Garrus scolded.

His gaze appeared predatory, mandibles tight to his face. In the dim light of the apartment, his silhouette was the most she could see of him, but his grip on her displayed anger. His tone inferred disappointment.

"H-Hold on," Robin protested, "we were just trying to help. I promised Kaidan I would help him save Ashley."

"There are a lot of other ways you may have helped that didn't include going into a violent situation," his anger somewhat built up, "I didn't include you because C-Sec had the best access and analysts. We had it covered and would have found the same evidence, but you still got involved where you weren't needed nor wanted. The same applied to Shanxi."

Robin kept her expression stoic, not giving Garrus any signs of feeling intimidated.

"Garrus, I never doubted your skill," Robin reminded, "but I did state that I was going to stay
involved in the cause we've been caught in. Why are you holding me back?"

Garrus and Robin stared at each other in a moment of silence. Then, the turian commander stroked his thumb over the young Shepard's face.

"I don't want you to get killed, Shepard," Garrus admitted, "you're life is more valuable than you think."

Garrus's expression began to soften, even if it was a bit.

"Is that...why you agreed to this relationship?" Robin clarified.

Garrus nodded.

"I'll try to get you involved, but if you beg to go into any other situation, I won't take you. It's too much of a distraction, knowing you're in harm's way," Garrus released her from his grip, "I'll talk to some friends to get you a position in the diplomatic corps. There aren't many more humans on the station as of now, but after this nonsense of Dunn's is done, the Alliance will need someone."

Garrus grabbed a leather bag which appeared more feminine than masculine but wasn't either. He pulled out some papers, which happened to be Robin's college and university transcripts, legal I.D. and documentations.

"Well," Robin shrugged, "I guess that's a start."

Garrus nodded in agreement before he and Robin sat down and ate their meal. After that, Robin gestured Garrus to step into her bedroom, much to his confusion.

"Shepard?"

"You know," Robin mused, "maybe I don't have enough efficient combat skills in the event I have no choice but to leap back into the fray. Maybe some time, we could head over to that combat sim you recommended?"

Garrus couldn't help but let out an amused snort.

"What does this have to do with inviting me over to your room?" he asked.

Robin smiled as she placed her hand on the turian commander's face.

"I guess I've been as stressed as you were, mostly from all that political crap," Robin replied, "could you remind me how turians deal with stress?"

Garrus couldn't help but smirk and without warning, he lifted Robin into his arms and pressed her against the wall before he gave her a passionate kiss.

"Are you certain?" Garrus asked, "it might be intense."

Robin nodded.

"I really wanted to do this," she explained, "I just had to figure out how to approach you on the subject."

Robin reached out and stroked the turian commander's fringe.

"Then again," she continued, "I didn't get the chance to find a turian boyfriend earlier in my life
because many of my neighbors and classmates were just that bigoted against you guys."

"Never had a human girlfriend, either," Garrus remarked.

Lifting her shirt over her head, his hands kneaded her small breasts. His sheer weight kept Robin pinned to the wall. He slipped her bra off and flicked a gloved talon against one nipple. Garrus backed away from the wall, letting her down.

"You'll need to get those clothes off yourself. Turian fingers aren't so dexterous," he removed his own shirt, exposing the chitinous plated body beneath.

Robin reached her hands underneath her shorts and pulled them down her legs, also removing her bikini in the process. She reached her hand behind her head and removed her hair band, which undid her half-ponytail. She almost leaned closer to Garrus when he lifted her into his arms. His tongue and mandibles tickled her neck and collarbone. Talons raked down her butt and legs leaving behind scratches. With one talon, Garrus teased the sharp across Robin's cheek, down her neck, between her breasts, ending between her legs and teasing the small nub. Without realizing it, she clenched her thighs against his talon, holding it in place.

"Turians require a lot of foreplay before we're set to go," Garrus mentioned, "this might be awhile."

"Would it help if you showed me the parts that turn you on the most?" Robin asked.

Garrus stepped over to her bed and set her down before he climbed onto it himself. Removing his pants, the architecture which protected the reproductive organs appeared tough like a vault door.

"Stimulation works best down here. Though human hands are…smaller, less muscle for the work, so it might take longer. If you used your mouth with hands, that might hurry it along."

A slit indicated where the phallus emerged from the body. By the size of this barrier Garrus might be…large, by human standards. Robin turned her body until she was facing her turian boyfriend and straddled her legs onto his, leaning onto him so she wouldn't fall off. She brushed one hand against his slit while she used the other to rub the side of his neck. Garrus purred in response while he cupped her nether region with his hand. Robin stifled her moan as she leaned her head onto his carapace.

His sharp talon carefully rubbed the skin between her legs while he licked her face and neck and she ground her hips against his hand.

"Tell me how you feel."

Garrus moved her hand to another place but the protective plates remained in position.

"I must say," Robin gasped, "you're pretty good at this."

Settling onto the bed, he allowed Robin to perform her best effort with her hands. Watching her, Garrus began to feel himself extend.

"I might have seen a few vids on…human relations," Garrus mentioned, "a few with turians and humans. Other than amino acids, we're compatible…enough, anyway."

Robin nodded.

"I also educated myself on how such interactions work," Robin added.
By the time Garrus felt the tip of his length emerge, he lifted her into his arms.

"I'll do you if you do me," positioning her back to his front until Robin rested her head on his hip, Garrus licked long at her lips.

Robin took a moment to adjust her position until she was comfortable before she located his equipment with both of her hands. Garrus purred, brushing his tongue against her until fluids started trickling out. She kept her hands gripping onto his member while she brushed them over its small spines and ridges. While she did so, she could feel him shudder, thus Garrus responded by sliding his tongue into her, letting out purrs that sent vibrations into her core. The instant Robin felt these intense vibrations, she couldn't help but squeak. Garrus responded with an amused chuckle.

"It didn't take long for you to cry out, didn't it?" Garrus commented, "keep it up."

Rather than continue his own stimulation, Garrus teased her with his sharp talons into her skin just enough to give harmless stings. She shuddered, but she leaned closer to Garrus and brushed her tongue against the ridged length. By then, the turian commander's groin plates opened even further and it continued extending slowly under Robin's ministrations.

"Just keep going, Shepard," Garrus moaned, "I'll keep it more…interesting."

Once again, he dipped his tongue deep inside of her, thus Robin let out a soft cry. Still, she kept brushing her tongue along his shaft until minutes later, Garrus withdrew his tongue and lifted her into his arms before he positioned her beneath him on the bed. While Garrus kneaded her breasts, Robin tilted her head downwards, noticing it appeared slightly longer than the average human male.

"You think you're ready for this, Shepard?" Garrus purred.

Robin nodded before she reached out her hand and pulled Garrus into a passionate kiss.

"At this point," Robin whispered, "I really need you in here."

Garrus didn't say anything, yet he teased her nub with his tip, the fluids starting to coat him, his cocky attitude starting to become apparent.

"Tell me how much you want it."

"Please, just do it already!" Robin begged, "you're not helping by making me wait any longer!"

Smiling, Garrus nuzzled Robin's face.

"Shepard, it's ok," he purred, "I'm not the kind of turian who would keep you from having it."

Garrus kissed Robin's forehead while he pushed his tip inside her. He stopped at an inch deep so he could give her time to adjust. Any further before she was ready to continue would be agonizing for her. The instant she felt the intrusion, Robin shuddered and perched her hands on his carapace, aligning her hips with his own.

"Shepard," Garrus asked, "how do you want me to go from here?"

He brushed his hands against her thighs and her lower back.

"Just…keep going," Robin whispered.

Garrus nodded before he sank in further as slow as he could until he reached the hilt. After a moment, he withdrew for a moment before he thrust back in, Robin writhing beneath him as she
gasped between long strokes against the bundle of nerves. When Garrus started picking up a vigorous pace, it was enough to remind Robin that turians had plenty of stamina in bed. In the midst of his thrusts, Robin cried out as she felt herself clench around his shaft. While she rode out her first climax, Robin hooked her legs around his hips. Once Garrus took a moment to rest, Robin had already adjusted to his size, so he licked her neck.

"Shepard," he purred, "do you like having me inside of you?"

Robin nodded while she brushed her hand underneath his fringe.

"I-I'd say it's a lot better than a human," she panted.

"So, how do we compare?" Garrus smirked.

After a moment of rest, Garrus continued thrusting into Robin, keeping his pace vigorous while he observed the expression she made while she mewled in his embrace. She may be smaller than him, yet he could easily fit inside her, even with the sufficient lubrication coating their nether regions. He would have to remind himself to discuss with Robin which vids he saw she would prefer to reenact later.

In the midst of the thrusts, Robin nipped on his mandible and brushed her tongue against it. Garrus didn't stop his pace even when he placed his hand behind her back. Robin reached her second climax seconds later, whimpering the turian commander's name.

"Shepard," Garrus whispered, "what other preferences do you clamor for?"

Robin took a moment to catch her breath.

"Well, do you mind lying on your back?" Robin requested.

Garrus nodded and withdrew before he turned over until he lay on his back. Robin smiled and climbed onto him, straddling her legs over his hips and positioning her nether region against his tip. While she kept her hands planted on his chest, she slowly lowered her hips, allowing him to sink inside of her until she reached the hilt.

"O-Ok," Robin gasped, "you can sit up now."

Once Garrus complied, Robin wrapped her arms around his neck and rested her head on his carapace. He placed his hands on her hips and lifted Robin before he pulled her back onto himself. The young Shepard responded by grinding her hips against his, letting out soft moans as he made each stroke. Once he felt her shudder in another climax, Garrus nuzzled his face against hers.

"Three in one night," he chuckled, "must be doing something you enjoy."

Robin nodded before she gave Garrus a soft kiss. He then gestured her to climb off of him, even if he could feel himself almost at the edge.

"Now I think my turn is up. How do you want it?"

Robin gestured Garrus to join her on the bed while she rested on her stomach. Upon cue, Garrus knelt down and pushed his way inside her from behind, leaning forward while he thrust deeply into her which elicited soft cries out of her.

"Do you…want me to remain inside you," Garrus panted, "or do you want me to…pull out?"
In the midst of the intense thrusts, Robin grasped Commander Vakarian's hand with her own.

"Stay inside me, Garrus," Robin begged, "I'll take any medication…you might have for me."

Nodding in agreement, Garrus wrapped his arms around Robin and held her close while he licked her neck. His strokes grew faster and harder until he heard the young Shepard cry out his name. Not a second later, he groaned as his climax finally shuddered him, spilling inside her.

Once Garrus withdrew from her, he lifted the tired human into his arms and carried her into the bathroom to tend to her needs. He started by fetching a container of allergy medication from his tunic pocket, insisting that she swallow a tablet after he provided a glass of water to wash it down. After Robin complied, the turian commander turned on the faucet of the bathtub, gesturing her to step in so she could take some time to relax. All the while, Garrus took some time to slip his clothes back on before he returned to the bathroom and knelt beside the tub. Smiling, Robin reached out and grasped his hand.

"Garrus," Robin offered, "if…I can't directly fight Cerberus when I get involved, can I at least offer assistance to any victims Cerberus might target?"

"You seem to have your own way of fighting," Garrus commented.

Robin nodded in agreement.

"As long as I can make a difference," Robin answered, "that's what matters to me the most. This is what I meant about fighting alongside you."

Garrus leaned in and nuzzled Robin's face.

"I recommend you help the people," Garrus advised, "get the word out about how bad Cerberus really is and make sure no one gets too blind about the fact there is a madman in power. Maybe that will be enough."

"And maybe one day," Robin added, nodding in agreement, "Toby Dunn and his administration will lose their power over the United States."
Shuttle Voyage

She may have felt soreness between her legs, but by the time she woke up, Ashley didn't find herself in this makeshift dungeon anymore. Still, she cringed upon remembering how she got carried into this luxurious bedroom after her terrifying ordeal with Ryan. Still, no one else was around, so she crawled out of bed and searched the room until she flipped on the light switch. She tiptoed around the room until she found an omni-tool on the nightstand. She turned it on and once she confirmed it was hers, she slipped it onto her wrist and checked the time: five-thirty in the morning.

"I must've slept all night," Ashley muttered to herself.

She scrolled through her message inbox only to find a recent one from Ryan:

{Hey, baby. Sorry I can't come home tonight. Could you do me a favor and make me some biscuits and gravy? I'll be home around eight in the morning. Love ya, babe!}

Ashley grimaced at the thought Ryan would treat her like a servant, but she wasn't willing to stay here any longer. She turned towards the door and turned the knob, eyes lighting up once the door opened easily. Ashley stepped out of the bedroom and scoured the apartment in some way to help her escape. When she stepped into the laundry room, she found a bathrobe and her grandfather's chain, so she grabbed both of them, stashed the chain into the pocket and slipped the bathrobe on. If she was going to escape, she didn't want anyone seeing her in lingerie. She found the front door, but suspected that Ryan might have a security system installed. She checked her omni-tool for any apps that could override such systems. She managed to find a hacking app given by a fellow C-Sec trainee. She searched for the security pad and activated the program, though it took her several seconds to disable the security system.

Now, Ashley may have resorted to Kaidan to save her from Ryan in the past, but she couldn't let her past hold her back. She opened the front door and made her way outside. Once she confirmed the coast was clear, she scurried down the streets, taking cover in the shadows to avoid being seen. Still, she couldn't confirm the exact location in the galaxy where she might be, but if she could find any Citadel races nearby, maybe she'll find some sort of chance to get back to the Citadel itself. Unfortunately, the planet she found herself on smelled terrible. She could observe the largely urban environment with so much congestion in the construction. Anyone could wonder why or how any possible being could function and live. The populace was a reflection of their surroundings—depressed, filthy, all together too harsh. Perhaps the only thing that had its redeeming qualities would be the colony's signage, and any service or business located nearby was clearly marked and easy to find. Ashley found one that read clinic and a church not far from there. She couldn't consider finding a church helpful, so she stepped through the door to the clinic instead.

Since it had been early morning, the office seemed quiet, though she could hear sounds of rummaging and sorting from a back room. Ashley couldn't wait any longer, knowing that Ryan would inflict harsh punishment if she was caught, so she quietly sauntered through the seemingly empty clinic. In a storage closet, a salarian with one horn missing was in the middle of taking inventory. He seemed to be unaware until she was just five meters away.

The salarian doctor snapped around on one leg, drawing a pistol on her. Upon making a brief glance at the human's attire, he holstered the pistol and turned the music off.

"Clearly not a thief, underdressed for robbery. No criminal intent by," the salarian rambled off a list of what she could be and not until finally, "running away from someone?"
Ashley nodded.

"I just need to get back to the Citadel," Ashley explained, "but I don't even know what colony I'm on."

"Currently in Terminus system, Ramallah colony. Violent place, always gunshot patients coming in. Safer here," the salarian approached with his hand outstretched, "Mordin Solus."

"Ashley Williams," Ashley replied.

Ashley took Mordin's hand into her own and shook it.

"Assume you did not take a shower," Mordin said.

Mordin led Ashley upstairs into an apartment for a salarian. Though the bathroom was odd in design there was running water to bathe. Mordin summoned a local errand boy to buy some human clothes, basics for Miss Williams to get by. He gave a list with exact measurement along with enough credits for the clothes and the lad's pay.

Ashley, meanwhile, couldn't just erase the evidence, so she searched the medicine cabinet for a small container before she gathered a sample of Ryan's seed and deposited it into the container. She may have flinched during the process, but she knew this would give C-Sec a chance to prosecute him. With her work complete, she stepped into the shower and washed herself after taking some time to figure out how it worked.

By the time she finished, Ashley found a set of clothes at the door, so after she dried herself, she slipped them on. Thankfully, they were much more decent than what Ryan forced herself into. She slipped on her omni-tool and her chain before she met up with Mordin with the container of the evidence in her hand. Mordin plucked the container out of her hand and nodded at her.

"Thorough, mundane but effective. Law enforcement? Admirable to be so mindful of evidence in spite of current predicament."

Mordin placed the sample in a storage cabinet.

"Hungry?" Mordin asked.

Ashley nodded.

"I could really use a cup of coffee and a muffin," Ashley clarified, "after that, I just need to contact Kaidan. Do you have any frequencies that's untraceable by the locals?"

Solus waved a finger and tapped on his omni-tool.

"Trauma victim, requires proper nourishment, and preventative care," he muttered.

After making a call, someone arrived in the room. The salarian answered while Ashley hid behind a counter. He showed her a real breakfast. While she ate, he placed a call to an old friend, which was then received by a person who relayed the information to Commander Vakarian on the Citadel.

When morning rose at the Citadel, Garrus was already awake, but he still remained in Robin's bed, using one hand to stroke her back while she nestled into his embrace. He received a call on his omni-tool. One of his crew received a report from someone in the Salarian STG, revealing the location and circumstances of Ashley Williams and the name of her caretaker.
"Solus..." Garrus said to himself.

Seconds later, Garrus heard Robin mumble something as she stirred from her sleep. She didn't say anything further, but she turned on her omni-tool and glanced over the information she still had on Cerberus.

"Morning, Garrus," Robin asked, "do you think the information I have is efficient enough to turn others against Cerberus?"

"You could, but Dunn and his cohorts will demonize you worse," Garrus replied, "apart from that, I just received word Ashley escaped on her own and is taking refuge in a clinic in the Terminus system. We'll get going in a few hours."

Nodding, Robin slipped out of bed and changed into a pair of cargo pants and a t-shirt before she brushed her hair and styled it into a half-ponytail, completing her appearance with a hair clip. Once she finished, she followed Garrus out of the bedroom.

"I can't take the ship out on this one, Council's already breathing down my neck for the last few times. We'll have to take my personal craft to get Williams back."

Putting on tea for the both of them, Garrus started communicating with a few of his crew members to get their shuttle ready. At the same time, Robin sent a text message to Kaidan, Jack and Kasumi informing them of Ashley's whereabouts and while she ate her blueberry muffin, she waited for them to respond.

"You know," Robin stated, "I'm betting Kaidan is still worried about Ashley. Can he come along or do you insist he stay behind?"

Letting out an amused snort, Garrus placed his hand on Robin's shoulder.

"Out of the four of you that disobeyed my orders," Garrus clarified, "you were right on yourself needing combat training. As for the others..."

"I already told them about Ashley," Robin interrupted.

"...you got them into trouble," Garrus finished, "they can come along."

Once they finished their breakfast, they cleaned up the table before Garrus tilted his head in Robin's direction.

"I'll be right back," Garrus said.

Garrus stepped into the bathroom to take a shower, so Robin took this time to slip on her boots. A few minutes later, Garrus emerged from the shower well refreshed.

"All right," Garrus announced, "they're waiting for us."

Garrus led Robin towards the front door and unlocked it before he led her outside the apartment. They made their way to the docking bay, arriving within fifteen minutes. Once they reached the platform to the shuttle, Robin spotted Kasumi, Kaidan and Jack alongside Liara and Tali.

"Hey guys!" Robin called out while she waved her hand excitedly.

Robin eagerly sprinted over to them, giving Kasumi and Jack warm embraces, yet she noticed Kaidan's expression gave off anxiety and anger.
"Uh, Kas?" Robin asked, "is Kaidan ok?"

Kasumi shook her head.

"He's still upset from yesterday," she clarified.

Kaidan scoffed before he stormed inside the shuttle.

"Let's just go," Jack sighed.

Robin, Kasumi and Jack followed Kaidan aboard the shuttle with Garrus, Liara and Tali following suit. The turian commander took the pilot seat and engaged the engine before they departed the Citadel, setting a course for the Widow Relay. While Kasumi, Jack and Kaidan searched the kitchen for something to eat, Robin sat next to Tali in the passenger seat.

"Hey, Tali?" Robin asked, "they didn't mention about what happened yesterday. Do they…not want to talk about it, do you know?"

"About what exactly? Ashley Williams was abducted by her former boyfriend because he's a jealous, possessive bosh'tet. Seems simple enough, or were you not told?" Tali replied.

Kaidan for his part didn't know what to do about Ryan. He'd break the asshole's spine if it came to a fight but Ashley could not be free of him. He felt frustrated for a long time, thinking that trash would be with her through life.

"Kaidan already told me that part," Robin assured Tali, "I've seen him and Ashley get along well since I first met them."

"Ah, I see," Tali commented.

Robin peered out the thick sturdy window as the shuttle arrived at the Widow Relay. Energy streams enveloped the shuttle and flung it hundreds of light years across the galaxy.

Back at the clinic, Ashley sat on the examination bed fiddling with her chain while Mordin analyzed the evidence she provided. The front door rang all of a sudden. Mordin left to answer the door. The human appeared unknown to the salarian.

"Help you today?" Mordin asked.

The human shrugged.

"Does this clinic shelter runaways?" he asked.

"Pet shelter is down the street. Orphanage, four blocks over. Rescue mission, two blocks down. Medical clinic is for treating patients, not shelter," Mordin answered this with a straight face, "in need of medical assistance yourself? For family? Friend?"

The human shook his head.

"I don't need medicine," he answered, "but thanks, anyway."

Mordin, however, noticed the human reaching his hand towards his pocket and kept a skeptical eye on him.
During that time, the shuttle already arrived at the dock in the colony, so Garrus, Tali, Liara, Robin, Kaidan, Jack and Kasumi disembarked, the turian commander having changed into his armor. They left the dock and wandered through the street in search of the clinic.

"Hey, Jack?" Robin pointed out, "how many pirates do you think would be hanging out in this colony?"

"I don't know about pirates," Jack shrugged, "but I'll bet there are gangsters here."

"Gangs, thugs, opportunistic assholes, everything from major corps to amateurs just starting out. Just stay close," Garrus read a map on his omni-tool.

Using the map, the turian commander led his team through the street, taking any shortcuts that would allow them to reach the clinic in time.

Back at the clinic, the human pulled out his pistol, preparing to aim it at Mordin. The salarian doctor flicked his wrist, catching a needle like dagger of his own design. It acted as a throwable syringe injecting a fast acting drug. The one in hand was a paralytic able to drop a turian or krogan within a minute. The instant Mordin threw it, his human adversary flinched when the needle hit his shoulder, yet he drew out a gun and started shooting at Mordin. However, the salarian doctor managed to scurry out of the way. The human was a terrible shot as the novacaine did its work, and soon he fell on the ground numb and unable to move…except for his mouth which hurled expletives.


Retrieving the pistol, Mordin ejected its clip, then dismantled the weapon into omni-gel.

"Thank you for donation. Now, why suspect me of hiding someone?"

The salarian injected a cocktail into the human, which made him more talkative. He attempted to resist at first, but the cocktail started to take effect in a matter of moments.

"There's this girl," he slurred, "who's meant to marry her high school sweetheart next month. He said she might've been kidnapped by drug cartels while she went on errands for groceries late at night, and he sent me to help find her and bring her back."

"Well rehearsed. You are here for yourself. Again, no one is here, patient or not. So tell friends outside to leave or else," Mordin commented.

Mordin grabbed the human by the collar, dragging him outside, and unceremoniously throwing the fool into a trash heap.

"Enjoy smell of refuse. Will be laying there awhile, until paralytic wears off. Dosage is strong enough for krogan. Will take many hours," the salarian closed the door and then locked it.

Mordin returned to the office and gestured Ashley to slip off the bed.

"Ryan found out, didn't he?" Ashley asked.

Mordin nodded.

"Shelter underneath clinic, built strong storage shelter to hold supplies, can withstand onslaught by fools," he took her hand and led her to a cellar door.

They descended a flight of stairs into a storage shelter and Ashley scanned the room for something.
she could defend herself with in case something went wrong.

"Do you think…help will arrive before Ryan has this place blown up?" Ashley muttered.

Unsure of her meaning…

"…blown up?" Mordin paused.

A few moments later, they felt a tremendous sound and pressure wave.

Garrus, Tali, and Liara took their human friends to the ground, hunkered down following an explosion. Pulling a turian assault rifle from his back clip, the commander sprinted to a corner. He's in full combat mode.

Around the corner was a smoking building, which he assumed was the clinic of Mordin Solus. Pissed off, Garrus closed his helmet, activating thermal and sonar imaging to allow him sight in the fight to come.

Three died quickly from his rifle.

The gang that attacked the clinic didn't take this well, so they turned their attention to the turian commander. While Robin scrambled to find cover, pistol at the ready in case any of her friends needed help, Kaidan, Jack and Liara joined Garrus in battle, their biotics giving them an advantage against the gangsters. Kasumi and Tali headed for the clinic entrance. Smoke from the fire, however, made finding any targets difficult, so the biotics resorted to a defensive stance, using semi-permeable barriers. Garrus could fire through the fields but the gangsters cannot.

Tali and Kasumi used cryo-beams to put out fires inside the clinic. Once reduced and safe enough, the quarian scanned for life signs. They found the trap door leading into the cellar.

Medical supplies were strewn everywhere and there was some damage from the explosion, part of the upper floor coming into the basement. There, Kasumi spotted Ashley crouching on the ground as a salarian doctor held a protective stance over her.

"Tali, there's Ash!" Kasumi called out.

Tali and Kasumi rushed over and helped Mordin and Ashley to their feet.

"Kasumi?" Ashley gasped.

"Come on, let's get out of here!" Kasumi replied.

Outside the clinic, Garrus was an effective hunter despite the smoke but the gang was not amateurish. Though small, they’re well dispersed, laying crossfire across the narrow alleyways. Unfortunately the barrier of Liara, Jack, and Kaidan was highly effective, giving the turian his chance to fire unimpeded. Unfortunately, their smokescreen started dissipating as the fires have been extinguished, and the biotics grew tired under the constant hits.

"Retreat, I'll handle the rest," Garrus ordered them.

Jack and Kaidan dissipated their biotics and stepped back while Garrus stormed into the clinic. Along the way, he stepped into the office and found Kasumi and Tali escorting Ashley and Mordin out of the cellar.

"Get back to the ship. I'll take care of any stragglers," Garrus instructed.
Running back out, he jumped with a jump-jet on his back, giving an extra boost. Garrus resembled pretty much like an eagle. For the few seconds he was airborne, the gang stared in surprise, and soon dead as they were sniped.

Tali led the way back to the shuttle with Jack and Kaidan following her and Kasumi, keeping vigilant of any pursuers. Confident that he took care of the assailants, Garrus gestured Robin to come out of hiding as he led her and Liara away from the clinic just as the authorities arrived to search for any innocent survivors. However, by the time Garrus, Robin and Liara caught up with Tali and the others, Ryan and Eric blocked off the path to the shuttle.

"I think you have something that belongs to me," Ryan reminded.

"Dignity. Self-respect. Perhaps we took away an appendage of yours. Other than that, you have nothing we posses to call yours," Mordin said, irate his clinic was blown up by this fool, "if referring to Ashley Williams…pathetic. Also stupid. Outgunned. Outnumbered. Idiotic beyond reason or imagining."

The salarian tapped his finger against the bottom of his jaw.

"Ever fail calculus?" he remarked.

Ryan growled in irritation while Eric made a fist.

"Well, guess what?" Eric threatened, "we are not letting you guys leave unless you hand her over!"

Robin shook her head, much to Garrus's confusion.

"You know," Robin commented, "we may have never met before, but I heard nasty things about you, messing with one of my friends."

Ryan appeared to have snapped. With the intention to threaten his ex-girlfriend even more, he stomped towards Robin, but thinking fast, she activated her stun gun on her omni-tool and fired it at his groin, eliciting a shout of pain from him. Following her lead, Garrus kneecapped the other guy, shattering the joint.

"Too bad the nearest clinic is burnt," Garrus added.

To add injury to insult, he shot the first human in his shoulder.

"Let's go."

Garrus led Robin, Liara, Tali, Ashley, Kaidan, Jack, Kasumi and Mordin aboard the shuttle and once he settled into the pilot's seat, the shuttle took off.
Later on that day, Commander Vakarian's shuttle returned to the docking bay in the Citadel. Garrus, Liara, Tali, Mordin, Robin, Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan and Ashley disembarked and crossed the boardwalk onto the platform. The turian commander gestured Kaidan and Ashley to focus their eyes on him.

"Yes?" Ashley paused.

"Should I have someone escort you two to the clinic?" Garrus asked Kaidan.

"No thank you," Kaidan shook his head, "we know how to get there."

Garrus gave Kaidan and Ashley a nod, dismissing them to leave the docking bay with Mordin accompanying them. Thinking he can finally relax after the day was done, Garrus placed his arm on Robin's shoulder.

"I'm glad those two were not my first encounter with humans," Garrus mused, "they're not quite representative of your people."

Robin nodded in agreement. As they departed from the docks, Garrus sighed. For some reason this was a tiring day and one he'll be glad to leave behind. Unfortunately…

A message from his omni-tool informed Commander Vakarian to report immediately to the Council Chambers. It also told him to have Robin Shepard accompany him. He glanced down at her.

"If you've gotten me in trouble," Garrus stated, "I'll introduce you to my family."

Robin gave Garrus a blank stare.

"Did…something happen while we were away?" she asked.

Garrus couldn't help but shrug. He and Robin called over a cab and hopped in, setting course for the tower. They arrived on a landing bay used by dignitaries and officials on business. The turian commander and his human protégé disembarked the cab, only to notice Victus waiting at the door.

"General," Garrus saluted, "good to see you again."

Victus nodded to both Garrus and Robin.

"So you two got the same message?" Victus clarified.

Garrus nodded.

"If you are here," Garrus asked, "will the others be joining us?"

Victus sighed as he turned towards the door.

"Perhaps we'll find out once we're inside," Victus answered.

Garrus and Robin followed Victus through the door into the tower, sauntering through the corridors to reach the Council Chambers. Sparatus, Tevos and Valern stood at the end of the hall while Saren and another turian stood in front of them.
"Agent Arterius. Agent Kryik," Garrus nodded to the both of them, and then he stood still, awaiting the council's orders.

It was only a moment of silence before Sparatus gestured the turians and the young Shepard to approach them.

"It's been…two days since the attack on Shanxi," Sparatus began.

"Rhetoric by the elected President Dunn has only increased the tensions between the Alliance and Citadel. In reciprocation, human enlistment has sharply increased by 40% on average across all colonies. On Earth, the number is near 70%," Valern continued.

"These increases coincide with fleet deployments along human and turian borders. By our estimates, the Alliance will be ready to engage in a war within weeks. The Parliament has even dissolved treaties regarding weapons of mass destruction and use of asteroids as orbital munitions," Tevos added.

"These actions are clear. The Alliance desires nothing less than war with the Council Races. But we know now humans, if not all, are so willing to commit such acts, despite the efforts of people who truly wish otherwise," finished Sparatus.

Garrus remained silent during the opening statements. Still, Robin cringed at the thought of the upcoming war and she had been itching to ask questions.

"Commander Vakarian, because of your actions on Shanxi, we would like to hear your thoughts on the group known as Cerberus," Councilor Tevos requested.

Garrus stepped forward, his image projected massively to pair with those of the Council.

"Before two days prior, I knew nothing of the colony Shanxi, but upon landing it is where I understood the scope and depth of what Cerberus is capable of…and willing to do," Garrus opened with an even tone of voice, the levity carrying to all listening about the weight it meant, "Cerberus is, ultimately, humanity's greatest aggressor against all non-human species, no matter philosophy, nor appearance, or usefulness. They seek to dominate and place humans at the very top of all positions in galactic affairs; economic, political, military, culture, anything to be above all others. Due to this, they will sacrifice an entire colony to meet their end game, and they play it well. I have no doubt that without intervention from within and without, Cerberus will solidify its hold on humanity and direct it towards complete domination, no matter the cost."

Robin raised her hand in a split second, prompting Sparatus to nod at her.

"That's why I wanted to warn everyone how bad Cerberus is," Robin added.

"We were aware of their potential, Miss Shepard, but now that Shanxi is their demonstration, Cerberus must be annihilated. Our efforts from here on will be to find the leadership of the organization, to capture or eliminate in any possible means," Sparatus stated.

"To that end, we are tasking each of you with the ultimate goal of breaking the foundation of Cerberus," Tevos proposed.

Valern tapped his console.

"General Victus, you are tasked with hunting down Cerberus facilities, to disable or destroy at your discretion. Agents Kryik and Arterius, you are tasked with the investigations of Cerberus and track down all leads, to be forwarded onto General Victus unless otherwise able. And Commander
Vakarian, you will focus on locating one individual."

Images of Miranda Lawson appeared.

"She is to be taken alive and unharmed," Valern continued.

"Miss Robin Shepard, though not militarily you have a role as well. We ask you to negotiate with human delegations for time; enough time to allow these efforts to bare fruit," Councilor Tevos tapped her console, "as of now, you are the ambassador of the council to the Human Systems Alliance."

Robin gave the Councilors a blank stare before she shifted her gaze to Garrus.

"How did that even…?" Robin paused, "I haven't even finished my second year for my degree yet."

The Councilors exchanged confused glances.

"I could recommend online classes for you," Nihlus interjected.

"Or a practical crash course in the real thing," Saren stated, which elicited a slight coughing chuckle.

"We conclude this session," announced the councilors, their images faded, and the individuals left.

The turians turned to leave, Nihlus and Saren for a bar while Victus placed his hands on both Garrus and Robin's shoulders.

"If you wouldn't mind joining me, I thought we might have dinner together."

Robin nodded eagerly.

"So do you have a recommendation, sir?" she clamored.

"I do," Victus nodded.

Accompanying the general in his own vehicle, Garrus and Robin were escorted to the estate Victus was granted on the Citadel…a modest space on the presidium, overlooking the reservoir. The chef has already prepared meals of both turian and human consumption. They sat on the garden terrace casually. It had a remarkable resemblance to zen gardens on Earth.

"You spoke well before the council, not many on their first-time do so well," Victus stated, chewing what resembled a squid.

"I had to deal with a fool earlier today, so my anxiety had already been spent," Garrus replied.

They laughed at that comment.

"While we were leaving Shanxi yesterday," Robin mentioned, "we ran into my dad."

"General Shepard?" Victus's mandibles twitched in a smile, "I am familiar with him, we met at a joint-species training exercise about two years ago. A fine officer. I am glad he let you leave."

Robin nodded in agreement before taking a bite out of her potato.

"At the moment," Robin continued, "I'm just hoping dad will get through to Anderson."

"Why, where is this Anderson?" Victus asked.

Robin couldn't help but shrug.
"That's something only my dad knows," she mused.

Once Robin finished her meal early, she turned on her omni-tool and started studying the files she downloaded from the Cerberus base. Victus and Garrus didn't pay attention, but they continued their conversation longer until they stood and shook hands. Victus escorted Garrus and Robin out of the estate and gestured them to a cab he ordered on his credit.

"Take care, you two," Victus said.

Robin and Garrus boarded the cab and the turian commander drove it out of the ward.

"It's been a long day, hasn't it?" he yawned.

"I guess so," Robin nodded.

Robin opened the calendar app in her omni-tool.

"So, when do you think would be a good time to start combat practice?" she asked.

"Tomorrow or the day after," he took her hand and squeezed it, "are you in any need for stress release this evening?"

Robin shrugged.

"I think I'll pass for tonight," Robin answered, "but maybe I can stop by the clinic and say hello to Mordin? And maybe after that, I could show you a movie!"

Garrus nodded.

"In that case," he replied, "I'll let you give him a proper introduction, but we have yet to discuss on his option to join my squad."

They stopped by a clinic on the way back to the apartment. Mordin Solus and Ashley had been taken there after the events with the idiots.

Mordin appeared to have commandeered equipment to conduct experiments while Ashley lay in bed reading. Kaidan rested his head at her bedside asleep.

"Hey, guys!" Robin called out, "are you doing ok?"

Ashley paused and tilted her head towards Robin.

"Well, we're trying to determine if I'll need an abortion doctor," Ashley shrugged.

Robin extended her left arm and softly ran her finger against it.

"At least I have that implant from last year," Robin muttered to herself.

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and turned her head towards the salarian.

"Hey," Robin called, "you're Mordin, right?"

She smiled as she extended her hand, which caught Mordin's attention.

"I'm Robin Shepard," she chirped, "I'm one of Ashley's friends!"

Mordin shook her hand.
"A pleasure; inference by character of Ashley Williams, friends would be of equal quality."

"That's one way to say judging a person by the friends they keep," Garrus commented.

Mordin nodded.

"Assuming, destruction of clinic affected speech patterns. Self diagnosis 95% certain. Unreliable."

Garrus knelt by Ashley's side.

"If I can help, ask," Garrus offered.

Subconsciously, he was troubled by her condition. Ashley couldn't help but let out a sigh.

"All I could ask for at this point is to ensure Ryan doesn't come near me ever again," Ashley replied.

"Well, I did shoot him in both knees. His buddy isn't too well off either. And I imagine if they tried something again, Kaidan would have something to say or do...biotically," he meant it as a humorless joke but the thought brought a twitch to his mandible.

Ashley nodded in agreement before Garrus shifted his attention towards Mordin. But it turned out the salarian doctor was busy fiddling with his omni-tool.

"If you need anything, just call," Garrus advised.

"Will do, Commander Vakarian," Mordin nodded.

With nothing else to do at the clinic, Garrus led Robin outside and they made their way towards the cab. Once they hopped inside, Garrus set the course for her apartment.

"I would settle for just one movie for tonight," Garrus asked, "do you have any recommendations?"

Robin scrolled through her omni-tool for a moment.

"How about...something from Studio Ghibli?" Robin suggested, "have you heard of it?"

"Never watched any human movies before...so," he shrugged, "we'll need snacks."

They landed near the apartment before they disembarked the cab. Garrus walked into a nearby convenience store for groceries after Robin headed back into the apartment. Inside, Garrus chose a few dextro items and picked out a couple boxes of pocky.

An asari tended the register, reading the equivalent of a magazine while popping gum. At first not looking up she began ringing up the items.

"Didn't know turians had a thing for human food," she commented.

Garrus shook his head.

"I was just getting it for a human I know," Garrus clarified.

"Ah, I see," she mused.

Garrus paid the asari the amount of credits he owed before he left the store with the bag in his hand. Once he returned to the apartment, he found Kasumi and Robin in the living room. His arrival was enough for both humans to turn their attention towards him.
"Welcome back, Garrus," Kasumi smiled, "I hear Robin was assigned ambassador."

He sighed internally.

"Yes, she was. What's that human saying? Put up or shut up? I think now is the time to put up everything and pray it's bigger than Dunn's ego," Garrus replied.

Setting out some snacks for tonight and stowing some in the fridge, Garrus gave the ladies two of their favorites.

Falling onto the couch after removing his armor, Garrus took a breath, releasing some tension to relax into watching this thing. Kasumi and Robin sat on either side of the turian commander and turned on Spirited Away. He sat quietly throughout the movie, though at times he privately questioned what and why of the plot. For the most part, the movie had such a good theme. Garrus had the appropriate reactions at appropriate times, though taking queues from Robin and Goto. By the time the movie ended, Robin was asleep and leaning onto the turian commander and Kasumi made a brief glance at the cute interspecies couple.

"Might be interested if you want to join in on this," Garrus suggested with a smirking flex of the mandibles.

The turian commander stroked his talons through Robin's hair while she still slept.

"That depends," Kasumi shrugged, "are you tired yourself?"

"You could say that," Garrus nodded.

Garrus stood from the couch and carried Robin over to the bedroom. While the turian commander held her close and fell asleep, Kasumi lied down on the couch and turned off the TV screen, playing a game on her omni-tool until it could tire her eyes.
Around the end of April and transitioning into May, Robin took the amount of time she had until that point to review the files she downloaded from Cerberus and started coming up with ideas on sabotage plans against operations Cerberus might schedule. She may not have had any luck in trying to contact anyone from the Alliance, but that didn't deter her from giving up.

In the early morning, she searched her drawers while she waited for her coffee to finish brewing. She found a pair of cargo shorts and a casual blouse, yet before she started changing into them, she examined the scratch marks on her body. Even if it was common for turians to scratch one another when blowing off steam, the scratch marks Garrus left behind didn't bleed that night, as far as she could recall. Robin slipped on her sports bra before she proceeded to slip on her outfit before she brushed her hair and styled it into her half-ponytail.

Robin stepped out into the kitchen and poured coffee into her mug, adding some sugar and milk before she ransacked the freezer for toaster scrambles, popping two of them into the toaster. While she waited for her breakfast to finish toasting, she checked her omni-tool for any email response from the Citadel college that had online classes like Nihlus recommended. However, she received no response yet, so she figured she'll just wait until later. It didn't take long for the toaster to finish heating her toaster scrambles, so she pulled them out and placed them onto her plate before she started eating their breakfast. The silence broke when Kasumi emerged from the bedroom.

"Morning, Kas," Robin chirped, "there are still toaster scrambles in the freezer if you want any."

The little Japanese sneak said something Robin couldn't make out. Despite universal translators, certain words and phrases were blocked. Kasumi instead made her own breakfast by hand, which finished up to be soup, noodles, fish, and egg. Coffee, sadly, didn't pair well with this so she took a cup of green tea and sat cross-legged on the couch watching a program on their wall-monitor. Robin couldn't help but shrug as she continued eating her breakfast. While she did so, she found an interesting news feed in her omni-tool, so she tapped on it, only for a vid of Toby Dunn to pop up on the screen.

{…The other day, my precious daughter Ophelia came running into the living room crying that Udina didn't get to become the ambassador to the Human Systems Alliance. Why? Because the dense Citadel Council gave that title to that disgusting Robin Shepard instead. You know she's a traitor, right? I tell Ophelia that Robin doesn't deserve the title of ambassador. She's a threat to mankind. Why do you think she got it? She whored herself out to the turian authority figures just to persuade these savage Councilors to place her in that position…}

Insulted, Robin almost snorted into her coffee.

"Ok, where the fuck did that come from?!" Robin exclaimed, more amused than angry.

Kasumi didn't respond and continued eating, so Robin closed out the vid. Once Robin and Kasumi finished their breakfast, they put away the dishes and the young Shepard loaded the dirty dishes into the dishwasher. Robin sent Garrus a text message in her omni-tool:

{Morning, Garrus! Do you have any plans for today?}

Robin had yet to wait for her turian boyfriend's response, so she took up the time to scramble into the bedroom and make her bed before she sauntered into the bathroom to brush her teeth. Once she finished and stepped out of the bathroom, she received a text message from Garrus:
Robin couldn't help but smile at the response, so she fetched some socks and her boots from the shoe rack and slipped them on before she sent another text:

{I'll be there soon!}

Robin tilted her head in Kasumi's direction while she was browsing news feeds in her omni-tool.

"Hey, Kas?" Robin called out, "are you open today?"

Kasumi tilted her head towards Robin.

"Why do you ask?" Kasumi asked.

"I was going to head over to the combat sim for target practice," Robin clarified.

Kasumi smiled before she stood to her feet.

"In that case," Kasumi offered, "would you like me to help you get in touch with the Alliance after that?"

"That would be great," Robin nodded, "thanks!"

Kasumi slipped on her shoes before she and Robin stepped out of the apartment. They sauntered over to a station where they hopped into a cab, Kasumi taking the wheel. The Japanese thief drove through the air traffic until they arrived at the Silver Sun Coast within the Citadel. Kasumi landed the cab near the combat sim before she and Robin disembarked. Ahead, they could see Garrus waiting at the entrance.

"Shepard?" Garrus paused, "I wasn't expecting you to bring company."

Kasumi scratched her head while Robin shrugged.

"I was just bringing her over here," Kasumi corrected.

"Escort services," Garrus drawled while he folded his arms, "right."

Robin shook her head in disbelief while Kasumi couldn't help but giggle.

"Not that kind of service, Garrus!" Robin blurted.

Garrus chuckled and ruffled Robin's hair.

"Relax, Shepard," Garrus purred, "I'm just kidding."

Robin reached out and Garrus responded by taking her hand into his own.

"Why don't we see if there's a shooting range available?" Garrus suggested.

Once Garrus, Robin and Kasumi stepped into the combat sim, Jack and Wrex were already sparring while Saren and Nihlus were taking turns practicing their sniping in the shooting range, but Garrus spotted two turians that he somehow recognized.

"Dad?" Garrus paused to himself, "Solana?"

Robin paused and tilted her head towards the turians in question.
"You know them?" she asked.

Garrus hesitated for a moment before he nodded.

"You know," Garrus admitted, "I hadn't planned a day I'd introduce you to my family."

The turian commander glanced at his father and sister before returning his gaze to Robin.

"But since most of them are here," he continued, "we might as well get it over with."

Garrus led Robin and Kasumi closer to Solana and Castis. They only reached a couple feet in proximity before the Vakarian relatives paused and turned their heads at Garrus.

"Dad?" Garrus gestured to Robin, "this is Robin Shepard."

Robin smiled sheepishly and waved her hand.

"Uh, hi there," she blurted.

Castis studied Robin for a moment before he folded his arms.

"I'm not impressed that the Council chose a troublemaker to be their ambassador," he commented.

Robin stiffened, yet she scratched her head.

"Uh, sir?" she paused, "in what universe does exposing an extremist organization to save lives count as troublemaking?"

Castis hesitated for a moment while Solana shrugged.

"I can imagine it could result in others wanting to kill you for it," Solana mused.

Robin couldn't help but laugh as she placed behind her head.

"Well," she mused, "it's nice meeting you guys."

She took a moment to scan her surroundings until she made another glance at the shooting range.

"So," Robin asked, "is there a section available?"

Garrus nodded at Robin's question.

"Right this way," he offered.

As they walked down the row of ranges, until they reached a medium-sized room with four harness exoskeletons. Strapping himself into one, Garrus nodded at the girls, indicating that they should do the same. Robin and Kasumi fumbled with the harnesses from the rack while Solana and Castis set off to another room. Once the girls closed the fastenings of their harnesses, they browsed through the guns on the rack. Garrus picked up a Mantis sniper rifle and a Predator pistol, holstersing the latter on his hip. He then looked to the girls.

"Ready when you are," he said.

Upon cue, Robin plucked out a Predator pistol and Kasumi picked a sniper rifle. Robin responded with a confused glance.

"Hey," Robin called out, "how many types of guns can you use?"
"As many as you can hold," Garrus interrupted with a smirk, "though I prefer to keep my weight down."

Robin turned her head towards Garrus and tried to come up with a protest when Kasumi burst into laughter.

"I-I wasn't asking you," Robin told Garrus while she gestured to Kasumi.

Garrus tried to hold in a laugh, and failed. As he recovered from his laughing fit, he waited patiently, albeit with a smirk on his face, for the two girls to decide for sure what weapons they wanted to use. Still, they settled for their picks anyway and checked whether the guns in their hands were loaded. The instant they learned that their guns didn't have ammunition, they searched the shelf for the ammunition before they slid the ammunition in the weapons.

As the two finished their preparations, Garrus walls over to a shelf with four virtual reality goggles, and tossed two to the girls, before grabbing one for himself.

"These aren't real bullets, are they?" Robin asked while she gestured to her pistol.

While waiting for an answer, she slipped on the goggles, Kasumi following suit.

Garrus snorted at Robin's question.

"Of course not. We have better safety protocols than that."

With that, Garrus reached over to the door frame and hit a button. Immediately, the goggles lit up, showing an artificial landscape. Garrus upholstered his sniper rifle as some green digital outlines representing enemies approached.

"Ok," he instructed as he shot the outlines, "first rule: don't lock your elbows as you shoot. It will cause your aim to be terrible."

Garrus took another shot.

"Also, stay mobile," he continued, "don't sit there and let them shoot you. I'll let you try and figure the rest out for now."

Robin and Kasumi didn't have time for questions, so they shifted their gazes between the holograms heading straight for them. Kasumi started moving and shooting while Robin gripped her pistol tight and attempted to aim at one of the holograms. Garrus, meanwhile, was picking off targets with ease, making it look as simple as making a bowl of cereal. Once Robin got used to handling the pistol in a short period of time, she pulled the trigger and took out a hologram. Her sense of satisfaction was short lived as she had to jump sideways to avoid a shot from one of the holograms. In the meantime, Kasumi searched for cover while she sniped at the holograms at intervals. The young Shepard observed Commander Vakarian and used his example while she spun around and fired at another hologram that tried to approach her from behind.

By the time the holograms have all been taken out, the simulation ended, so Garrus took off his goggles, prompting Kasumi and Robin to do the same, the Japanese thief setting the rifle on a rack.

"So, you got the hang of it?" Kasumi asked Robin.

Robin nodded.

"I guess so," she replied, "pretty handy for self defense scenarios."
Once Garrus set his rifle onto the rack, he ruffled Robin's hair. "Do you want to rest for a bit?" he offered.

Robin gave Garrus a light nod. "Maybe I could spar with you after that?" Robin clamored.

Garrus couldn't help but chuckle as Kasumi slipped out of her harness. "Maybe I could give you a lesson on the basics," he nodded.

Once they set their harnesses onto the rack, Garrus led Robin and Kasumi out of the shooting range and headed over to the sparring ring. However, since Solana and one of Garrus's men were in the middle of their sparring session, they sat down on a bench with Castis, Saren and Nihlus also watching the sparring session. While they waited, Robin turned on her omni-tool and accessed the news feeds. With so many popular news channels focusing on Toby Dunn didn't help much, she checked the news channels she subscribed to, only to stumble upon a few articles discussing the House of Representatives under the Golf Party's control preparing to vote to repeal the universal healthcare that the Americans fought so hard to improve over more than a century. Another article discussed cutting spending on education just to give a boost in military spending.

"If only it were that easy to unite everyone against Cerberus and the Golf Party," Robin whispered to herself.

Robin may not have noticed this at first, but her words caught Garrus's attention. Sighing, he stroked her head with his hand, catching her attention. "I feel for you, Shepard," he assured her, "but not everything in life is…meant to be easy. You're probably going to meet some people that are too stubborn to listen to you."

Robin couldn't help but shrug. "I guess my uncle isn't the only one who's like that," she replied, "being bigoted against turians."

While waiting for his turn, Saren took a glance at the young Shepard, his expression soft for some reason. Maybe she acted differently from the humans he encountered? He snapped out of his thoughts when he heard a ping from his omni-tool, so he tapped on it and read the message:

\{Your brother just came out of surgery. He should need rest for a while.\}

Saren closed the omni-tool, not giving away any expression. That still didn't stop him from coming up with ideas on how he would take his anger out on Miranda for putting Desolas in this condition in the first place…but he ever captured her.

By the time the sparring session ended, Solana and one of Garrus's men stepped out of the ring. Saren almost wanted to step into the ring, yet he noticed Robin standing from the bench and gesturing Garrus to follow suit. When Robin sauntered closer to the ring, she caught a glimpse of the turian Spectre next to her.

"Are you going to challenge a turian Spectre?" Saren warned Robin, "you might not stand a chance against me."

"A-Actually," Robin blurted, gesturing to Garrus, "I was just considering taking hand-to-hand combat lessons from Garrus here."
Saren folded his arms.

"I see," he mused, "then I will personally call it a day."

Saren took off his sparring gear and set it on the rack while Garrus fetched for sparring gear that fit him. The older turian Spectre made one last glance at Robin.

"And I thank you giving the Council an advantage over the humans," Saren added, "in the event they should attack the Citadel."

Robin shuddered in seconds. Why did she have such a sneaky suspicion Saren wanted to subjugate humans?

"H-Hold on," Robin blurted while fidgeting, "does this have something to do with your brother?"

Saren shook his head yet he narrowed his eyes at Robin.

"No," he growled.

Saren turned away from Robin and stormed off, leaving her confused.

"Did I offend him or something?" Robin asked no one in particular.

Nihlus shook his head in disbelief.

"Saren doesn't like talking about his brother since he was critically injured," Nihlus admitted, "I won't blame him, though."

Robin sighed, only to notice Garrus standing next to her with a set of sparring gear in his arms.

"If you're done talking with the Spectres," Garrus advised, "you'll need to put these on before you stepped into the ring."

Nodding in agreement, Robin plucked the gear out of her turian boyfriend's hands and slipped it on. Garrus took this as a cue to beckon her into the sparring ring while Kasumi tilted her head towards Jack, giving off a nervous expression.

"Shepard," Garrus asked, "you ready for this?"

Robin nodded nervously.

"You know," Robin admitted, "I didn't take any martial arts classes, so I don't know what to expect here."

"If it makes you feel any better," Garrus assured Robin, "I can coach you through the lesson. Now, watch me."

Garrus started by forming a defense stance, which Robin imitated seconds later.

"Not bad," Garrus praised.

Garrus continued by throwing a roundhouse kick at nothing in particular. Robin attempted the kick, but she didn't reach high enough. The turian commander searched the shelf at the edge of the ring until he found a soft board.

"Here," Garrus offered, "try hitting this."
Robin locked her eyes onto the board and attempted the roundhouse kick again. This time, she knocked the board out of Garrus's talons, much to his approval.

"There you go," he commented, "you're getting the hang of it."

"I still have to keep going, right?" Robin replied.

Garrus nodded before he retrieved the board. With a little confidence boosted, Robin set off on her roundhouse kick once again, aiming for the board.

Seated on the couch overlooking her night club, an asari pirate queen gazed forth while asari strippers danced around the poles surrounding the large cylinder screen. Anyone would think Aria would be happy to be living in such luxury like this, but no, she preferred to stay vigilant in case someone would dare try to depose her. Taking a sip of Thessian Temple from her wine glass, Aria remained up to date on any rivals in the Omega system. The silence broke when two goons, one turian and the other one asari, sauntered through the circular platform and stopped at the base of the stairs, facing the Omega leader. This was enough for Aria to finish her drink and stand to her feet, noticing the dents and scratches in the agents' armor.

"I hope you two haven't had any trouble taking down that Blood Pack bastard," Aria began, "have you?"

The agents shook their heads.

"We haven't had any luck, ma'am," the turian agent answered, "that Blood Pack leader is as stubborn as an unruly pyjak."

Aria let out a humph as she folded her arms.

"But," the asari agent added, "we found something that should interest you."

The asari agent handed Aria a datapad, allowing her to examine a news feed involving the Citadel's new ambassador.

"So, the Council has a human ambassador now?" Aria commented, "she might be of some use for us."

Aria returned her gaze to the two agents standing before her.

"After you two patch yourselves up, go find Ambassador Shepard," Aria instructed, "and tell her I have an assignment for her."
Omega Abduction

Miranda may have been given time to prepare efficiently for the demolition of a natural landscape in one of the turian colonies as part of Cerberus's objective, so she considered using that time to contact her sister. Unfortunately, she couldn't receive an answer. Her failure to capture or kill Robin Shepard frustrated her as much as it frustrated the Illusive Man, so she stepped into her room and locked the door to spend time alone.

Miranda wasn't sure if she even succeeded in killing Desolas, but either way, she suspected Saren would come after her. Part of her felt excited because this turian Spectre noticed her, but at the same time, part of her was scared because she suspected it might be possible he could kill her. Then again, she figured it was part of the thrill.

"If only the turians didn't plan to dominate humans," Miranda sighed to herself.

Miranda knelt next to her bed and unlocked its built-in drawer and opened it, pulling out a Fornax magazine. Considering how Cerberus forbade access to xenophilia porn on the Extranet, this magazine was the only option she might ever have. Once she laid it on her bed, she flipped to the page that held a picture displaying Saren Arterius in his glory, his chitinous torso exposed as he stood in such a victorious pose which could intimidate a xenophobic human. Miranda should be hating aliens, yet seeing this image sent heat pooling in her stomach, giving her a mental image of Saren pinning her to the bed and having his way with her. Why couldn't she even stop these thoughts?

Miranda reclined on the bed and clenched her thighs together before she pressed her palm against her stomach below her navel. She activated her biotics and transferred its energy charges into the nerves of her core, which caused her to arch her back while she tried to stifle her moans. Maintaining this energy pattern, Miranda kneaded her stomach with her fingers, her head leaning back and pressing into the bed. Even if she still had the mental image in her head, she remained vigilant for any footsteps and kept her eyes locked onto the door. All she could hope for was that the Illusive Man didn't override her room's security system and catch her in the act.

However, Miranda still remembered on how the Illusive Man told her that turians were dangerous to humans, so she stamped out her current mental image and replaced it with a mental image of herself bringing Saren to her mercy and at death's door. That image combined with her biotics brought her over the edge, pleasurable sensations surging through her body. She stifled her moans so no one would hear her private ordeal. Once she came down from her high, Miranda made another glance at the Fornax magazine and wondered whether she could go for another round. The silence was broken when she heard someone knock on the door, so she snatched the magazine off her bed and stashed it into its drawer, securing the drawer before she regained her composure and stepped towards the door. When she unlocked it and opened, a Cerberus soldier stood before her.

"Yes?" Miranda asked.

"We could use your expertise on cybernetics," the soldier requested, "we found two civilians who claimed that a turian commander left them critically injured."

Miranda folded her arms and tilted her head sideways.

"This is interesting," Miranda commented, "is this turian commander named Vakarian?"

The soldier shrugged.
"They didn’t specify the turian yet," he answered.

Miranda unfolded her arms.

"I'll be right there," she announced.

By the time the sparring lesson finished, Robin felt confident she could use the basics learned from Garrus to defend herself should the situation arise. Yet, she felt like she needed rest from an intense workout. Her muscles giving off a slight ache, Robin staggered out of the sparring ring and settled onto the bench next to Jack.

"So, Robin," chirped Jack, "you up for round two soon?"

"I appreciate the offer," Robin shrugged, "but I think I'll pass."

Wrex stood from the bench.

"So, is anyone hungry?" Wrex proclaimed, "I can go hunting on Tuchanka and bring back some meat."

Robin shrugged.

"How far is Tuchanka anyway?" she asked.

Wrex stretched a bit before answering.

"I take it you're interested. It's only a system over; I'd be back well within twenty-four hours given that intergalactic traffic isn't too bad right now. So what will it be? Varren, Klixen, or Thresher Maw?"

Garrus scratched his mandible amidst the confusion.

"Wrex, I don't think Shepard here is familiar with krogan food," Garrus explained.

After a moment of rest, Robin stood to her feet.

"I was going to see if there's a place where I can order levo," Robin offered.

Wrex picked up his gear and made his way to the lockers.

"Fine," he grumbled, "I'll go wash up and meet up with you guys. Just know that she'll find out eventually, chances are it'll be by her own intuition."

With Wrex preparing to leave, all Robin could do was turn on her omni-tool and look up the nearest restaurant while Kasumi and Jack discussed on what they would request for lunch. To her luck, Robin found a restaurant which accepted takeout upon ordering.

"Ok guys!" Robin chirped, "I found what I'm looking for."

Robin gestured Garrus, Kasumi and Jack to focus on her while she showed the location of the restaurant on the map.

"Would you like anything?" Robin clamored.

"Well damn! That was fast! What've they got?" Jack cheered, looking over Robin's shoulder.
Kasumi's eyes scanned the page.

"Where is it? Maybe we could pick order on the way back," she asked.

"You guys go ahead and order for me, I'll be fine with whatever," Wrex continued to make his way into the showers as the halls further muffled his voice.

Robin took a moment to open up the menu.

"Let's see," she observed, "for humans like us, there's burgers, hot dogs, sandwiches…"


Slinging his own bag over his shoulder, Garrus commented.

"It doesn't seem too far from here. I guess we'll order now, and by the time we're out and have made our way over there, lunch will be ready."

Robin nodded.

"Can I go get the orders?" Robin requested, "I'll meet up with you guys after I pick up lunch."

"Sounds like a plan. I'll just have a turkey sandwich, nothing too fancy," Kasumi responded as she picked up her own bag and turned for the women's showers, "oh, and don't get lost, okay?"

"O-Ok!" Robin chirped.

Robin stepped out of the combat sim and used her omni-tool to guide her as she wandered over to the restaurant in question. By the time she found it, she was about to step inside, but…

"Ambassador Shepard?"

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and tilted her head towards a turian agent and an asari agent standing just a few feet away from her. To her confusion, they weren't in C-Sec uniform or in any uniform that would suggest they were serving their respective race.

"Y-Yeah," Robin paused, "what is it?"

The agents didn't respond while they took a few steps closer to Robin, which sent a chill down her spine. All she could hope for them to not be working for Cerberus, not that Cerberus would recruit aliens anyway.

"We have an urgent matter in Omega and we need your help," the asari agent explained.

Robin gave them a skeptical expression.

"Uh, Omega?" Robin requested, "let me go get my boyfriend and then we'll talk about it."

Robin took a few seconds to turn on her omni-tool and snap a picture of the agents.

"I'll be right back," Robin insisted.

Robin turned to leave the area, but without warning, she felt a tight grip on her right arm, startling her and glancing over her shoulder to meet the hawklike gaze of the turian agent.

"Hey," protested Robin, "I said I'll be back!"
The agents shook their heads.

"We can't afford to gain any more unwanted attention than we can afford. The fact we're in full uniform in public on the Citadel is taking a big enough risk, and we aren't looking to waste any more time," the asari agent explained, "our superior specified that she would like to discuss the conditions of her proposal before you decide to run off. The work is very clean, if you're worried about that."

Robin glared at the agents.

"Do you expect me to believe you?!” she snapped, "I'm busy!"

With all her effort, Robin yanked her arm out of the turians grip and scurried as fast as she could while she sent the picture she snapped to Garrus, hoping he would understand the predicament she got into. Once the turian grabbed her arm again, he growled aggressively as Robin continued to struggle in his grip.

"We don't have much time. I apologize in advance."

"Not until I ask Garrus for his approval!" Robin protested.

The turian agent ignored her and pulled her backwards.

"Help me sedate her! I'll set up the comms jammer to keep C-Sec off of us until we get her to the car!"

The asari agent pulled out what looked to be a small stim injector from one of the pouches on her armor and hastily approached Robin. The young Shepard caught a glimpse of the injector and attempted to lean away, but it was no use as the asari agent jammed it into her neck. Seconds later, Robin lost consciousness.

"Where the hell is she?!” Jack groaned, legs dangling off the side of the couch, "I'm starving!"

"I hope she didn't get lost," Kasumi sighed.

Well, Garrus, Kasumi and Jack have been waiting for a while, but Robin didn't return yet. Garrus couldn't help but pace around the room, his mandibles fluttering nervously while his eyes gave a skeptical expression.

"Maybe I should've accompanied her," he muttered to himself.

After a long moment of silence, Garrus heard his omni-tool beep, so he opened a text message, only to notice a picture of a turian agent and an asari agent along with the title of the message: Crazy Goons on the Loose. Upon examining the picture, Garrus flared his mandibles, recognizing the agents.

"Any word from her?" Wrex walked over with something unrecognizable that he got from some other street vendor.

Robin had taken too long to return, so Wrex decided to get something himself. Still, Garrus let out a deep sigh.

"Shepard," Garrus growled, the expression in his eyes growing predatory, "she's in danger. We need to get her back."
"Great. What now?" Jack inquired as she lazily rolled off the couch.

"She took a wrong turn and now Cerberus has gotten her?" Kasumi pressed further, approaching Garrus with concern.

Garrus shook his head.

"It's not Cerberus," Garrus corrected.

Garrus presented the picture to Jack, Kasumi and Wrex, much to their shock.

"Cerberus doesn't have turians or asari on staff," he added, "that'd defeat the purpose of their pro-human agenda."

"Wonderful. Aria had her sights on her. I recognize that armor anywhere," Wrex interjected.

Wrex had been to Omega enough times to recognize the color scheme of Omega's royal guard. Still, the krogan set down the lunch, allowing Garrus, Jack and Kasumi to serve themselves.

"We'll need to deploy to Omega as soon as possible," Garrus advised.

"Why?" Wrex shrugged with defeat, "I know Aria well enough to know her short temper and what she does to her enemies. If Robin's not dead, she's being strung up like a trophy. We'll barely recognize her by the time we get there."

"We can't let that bitch pick Robin off the streets like that!" Jack protested.

Kasumi stood up to the elder Krogan.

"Jack's right. We've got to get her back!" she continued.

Garrus nodded but he shuddered at the thought of losing Robin, aware that her possible death would devastate the Council, considering she had recently been titled ambassador. If he couldn't save her, would their chance of stopping Cerberus be lost? Not wanting to lose her, he set down his cup.

"Well, whatever happens to Robin, we're getting her back," Garrus announced, "I'll start arranging departure to Omega. You guys might want to gear up and grab something from the fridge. If we can, we'll be heading out in an hour for the Terminus Systems. Hopefully, we'll get her back before she's too far gone."

Exotic music stirred Robin from her drug-induced sleep. She could barely move and her head throbbed with pain. When she opened her eyes, the entire scenery was blurred for the first several minutes as she felt someone dragging her along. Distantly, she could hear the voices of the agents talking to some third, unknown individual.

"We've got her, boss. She wasn't complying, so we were forced to resort to plan B. We did our best to cover our exit and confuse C-Sec forces before we left the Widow Nebula."

The unknown individual had a feminine voice that sounded like the personification of sadistic desire.

"Put her on the couch," she instructed, "maybe get her something to drink. We'll be here for a while."

Once Robin felt the agents plop her onto the couch, she snapped out of her trance and scanned her surroundings. The dark, dimly lit chamber was massive. From a balcony on the far side of what
appeared to be a dance club, the floor below was crowded with staff and guests of various species. Around the edges of the room above the dance floor were tables with dancers on them with a bar situated to the far side of the room where she sat, all elevated on its own level. At the center of the room, illuminating the area, was a giant, purple, holographic pillar, extending to separate chambers both below and above the room she was in. On a platform around the pillar and suspended from the ceiling was a ring for dancers to walk on. On the balcony she was on, she was laid to rest on a half-circle couch with stairs from below leading up to the balcony.

"About time you woke up. You done with your nap?"

Robin jumped in surprise to see who was talking to her. The asari before her was a deep purple, with distinctive marks forming almost eyebrows along with minor decoration along the edges of her face. She wore a white, sleek jacket with an extended collar over a black cat-suit with traces over her purple skin peeking out of her torso. Her disposition resembled that of inflated authority, a business women who just had too much of herself.

"Let's skip formalities and move on to introductions. I'm Aria T'Loak, Queen of Omega. I already know who you are, Robin Shepard."

After standing from the couch, Robin took a couple steps back before she stopped, furrowing her eyebrows while she clenched her fists.

"Ok, lady," she snarled, "where am I and why the fuck am I here?!"

Aria turned to look over her club before returning her attention to Robin.

"I do apologize about the conditions we meet under, however I find myself in a rather uncomfortable position. In case you aren't very accustomed to the politics on this station, I keep a close guard on my regime and I work quickly to stomp out those who dare oppose me. While most aren't even half of what they claim they are, I've been at odds with a very aggressive contender as of late. You follow?"

"What position?" Robin objected, "what does this have to do with me?"

"I've heard from the other quadrants of your notorious antics and everyone has a bounty on your head," Aria clarified.

Robin shuddered in a matter of seconds.

"Wait," she paused, "what do you…?"

"I must say not many humans," Aria continued, "let alone ones with no military expertise can infiltrate a secret organization and spill their classified files. You left me impressed."

Robin shook her head in disbelief.

"I didn't infiltrate Cerberus by myself," she reminded, "I had friends help me out with it. Can't you just let me go?"

"After you just got here?"

Something within Robin snapped. Her temper built up inside her head and she wasn't going to stay silent for long. Without thinking, she stomped her foot once.

"You're really starting to irritate me right now," snapped Robin, "I only had my first sparring session from Garrus and yet you send your batshit crazy goon squad to kidnap me without giving me a
reason why you want me here or a chance to notify my boyfriend!"

Robin's eyebrows furrowed even further and she pointed her finger at the asari in front of her.

"I don't give a rat's ass on whether you're in charge here," Robin shouted, "and I'm not going to work for you, you bitch!"

Without breaking her stance, Aria flicked a finger in Robin's direction, suspending her above the ground in a blue ball of biotic energy and eliciting a startled squeal out of the young Shepard.

"Apparently, your 'boyfriend' hasn't informed you too much about how I run my kingdom. You see, here on Omega, and indirectly the entire Omega Nebula, I've got my boot on everyone's neck, yours included as of right now. Everyone here can go about their lives freely so long as I get what I want. If it's one thing that I especially want is a stable throne. I'm asking you kindly to help me, I haven't even told you the full extent of why I'm asking for your help and what you could get out of it and you're already taking full advantage of my hospitality!" she inhaled and calmly exhaled before further explaining, "I could crush you right now, so why don't you sit the fuck down and shut your mouth, because I can make you my bitch."

Without another word, Aria calmly put her back down on the couch before the blue aura faded. Still, panic built up in Robin's eyes as she stared in disbelief. Will she ever get a chance to reunite with Garrus?

"There is one rule," Aria continued, "don't fuck with Aria."

Robin couldn't help but gulp nervously.

"S-So what do want me to do?" she sputtered.
Espionage Assignment

Up the stairs, an asari waitress in a deep green cat-suit walked up with two drinks for both women. Aria accepted her drink though Robin wasn't sure if she was obligated to accept hers, knowing she's not old enough to accept alcohol yet.

"Like I said, I like my reign over Omega and I will fight to defend it," Aria explained, "currently, I'm facing a rising leader among the Blood Pack mercenaries who threatens my throne, and he's a mess to deal with. So, what I'm asking of you is to put him down like the rabid animal he is."

Robin inspected her drink, hoping it wasn't anything alcoholic.

"How do I do that?" Robin asked.

"I thought the solution would be obvious. You've so far proven yourself as capable and adaptable as humans may come. That's what makes you the right person for the job. Humans very much treasure their individuality and are abnormally ambitious in comparison to other species. With so many other factors to consider before remotely approaching a human, it makes you as a person very unpredictable. I've tried everything I can against him so far, and I'm tired of throwing more men at the problem. You have the element of surprise, and with good execution, he won't see what hit him," she turned to see Robin continuing to stare at her drink, "oh, and relax, I'm not trying to poison you."

"I'm not old enough to drink alcohol yet," Robin clarified, "speaking of ambition, are you asking me to kill this Blood Pack guy?"

Aria stared back with a mix of annoyance and dismay. It was becoming apparent that Robin probably wasn't the solution she was looking for.

"I thought that would've been obvious," Aria replied, "but, if you manage to only incapacitate, I can always send a few more guys to finish the fucker off. Do we have a deal?"

Robin stared at her drink in a long moment of silence. With no way out of her predicament, she nodded.

"Promise me you'll let Garrus take me back to the Citadel after that, ok?" Robin suggested.

"Good. If you're feeling a bit hesitant about the job, I've got one more thing to trade. This… Cerberus… are you out to take them down at some point?" Aria pulled a datapad from her belt, the orange hue lighting up her face.

Robin leaned over in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the datapad.

"I would need help from Garrus, Saren, Nihlus and Victus to do so," Robin replied.

Aria violently jerked it away from her view.

"Cerberus, as I'm aware, is a pro-humanity terrorist group, correct?" Aria mentioned, "I've seen the news about what's been dug up in their labs, and I've seen the damage they've done. They came through the Omega Nebula at some point, and I've had to draw where my territory begins and ends. However, I'd hate for them to come back and dump some abomination on this station to overthrow me with, and I'd especially hate to see their flag over my station. Let me put things this way: you take the Blood Pack leader out, and not only do you get to go, but you also get some intel on Cerberus to take them down with. We both win. Well, mostly me anyways."
Robin couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Sure, why not?" Robin answered, "Garrus could use the info, too."

"Good to see you agree to our terms. For your convenience, I'll be providing you with some gear that some poor punk owned before she made a bid for my position. She called me an old hag, saying that it was time for someone younger. She apparently didn't see what happened to the last person who sat atop of Omega. I'll have one of the guards show you the equipment in a locker in the dressing rooms and have the others provide you with all you'll need to know on the Blood Pack leader. Is that clear?" Aria asked with an assertive smile.

"Uh, sure!" Robin blurted.

Robin slowly stood from the couch yet she fidgeted nervously, unsure of Aria's approval or lack thereof. The two agents from earlier calmly made their way back up the steps before standing ready before Aria.

"Take her to the dressing rooms and give her the stash from that kid," Aria instructed, "she'll need it."

"Yes ma'am. Come with us," the turian agent replied before ordering Robin from her seat.

Upon cue, Robin followed the agents from the couch. Watching as the trio departed, Aria drew out her omni-tool and radioed her guards.

"I've found a more sufficient candidate for dealing with the problem. Make sure she knows what she's going up against," Aria instructed.

By the time they reached the dressing room, Robin scanned her surroundings in search of the locker. Walking forward and opening one of the indistinguishable dull gray lockers, the asari agent turned to Robin.

"Here's everything you'll need. We'll be here when you are ready to depart."

In the locker was a light set of armor with white plates and small amounts of blue trim. Between the thin, sleek plates of armor was a black, flexible material acting as a sealed body glove. Set near the boots was a compact machine pistol with a surprisingly expensive build. Robin took a while to slip on the armor before she fastened the belt around her waist, stashing the pistol into the belt's holster. Once she finished, she took some time to flex her limbs for the armor's mobility. The two agents simply deadpanned her.

"Hmm. You look just like the kid the boss decapitated last week. Now are we going, or are we going to stand around and make sure your makeup is perfect?" the turian agent commented.

Robin paused and shook her head.

"I'm all set," Robin assured, "just wanna make sure I can move in the armor freely."

Upon cue, the agents led Robin out of the dressing room and down a few corridors until they arrived at the hangar. After the dark rooms and hallways that composed of much of Aria's lair, the bright lights that filled the hangar area were hard to adjust to. From where they were, they were on a balcony that lined the edges of the metallic box that was the hangar. The area above had bright lights illuminating the room as well as had cranes for moving heavy equipment. Down below, the base of the hangar had large crates filled with equipment and what she could only assume were smuggled goods. All along the hangar were sets of gunships and skycars, each bearing the same color scheme.
of Aria's henchmen. In terms of workers, there were only a half-dozen mechanics present, each working on moving freight in and out. As she walked down the steps leading to the floor below, the asari pulled a datapad from her back pouch and handed it to Robin.

"Here are the specifications of your target," she explained, "we've also attached details concerning the various locations he usually resides in, the tactics he deploys, and his armament. He usually keeps at least two lieutenants at his side, but they are as disposable as the rest of the mercenaries. Your goal is to ensure that he dies by whatever means, or if you aren't feeling in the mood for killing him, incapacitate him. We'll have a few extra troops keeping an eye on you. If you don't finish the job, they will. For now, we—"

Out of the corner of her vision, Robin noticed some movement among the crates at the side of the hangar, drawing her attention away from the agents. She turned to face the newcomer, drawing the attention of the two guards facing her, causing them to draw arms to pace slowly towards the source of the disturbance. Turning to face Aria's agents, she turned to find Thane silently approaching the three of them from behind, pistol trained on the back of the asari's head. He lightly poked the barrel through her barriers before announcing his presence.

"Freeze. I'll be merciful if you simply cooperate."

Robin gasped and stared in disbelief.

"Thane!" Robin exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"We're here to bust your ass out of trouble, now let's go!" Jack and Kasumi came out of hiding from behind a skycar with weapons of their own.

Garrus was on the catwalk above with a rifle trained on the other agent. Once she laid her eyes on the turian commander, Robin couldn't help but stammer in shock.

"Garrus, I-I...uh, you got the message," she blurted.

His demeanor filled with confidence, Garrus jumped off the catwalk and landed on his feet just a few feet near the agents.

"Of course I did. Wrex is currently guarding our exit, but it won't be long till Aria's onto us. Let's go, and incapacitate the guards before we leave," Garrus responded, before ordering Thane to dispose of the two guards.

However, just as Thane aimed his gun at the asari agent, Robin extended her arms in a wide stance.

"Wait!" Robin shouted, "not yet!"

Garrus, Kasumi, Jack and Thane paused and tilted their heads towards Robin.

"Why the hell not?!" Jack demanded.

Robin lowered her arms.

"I still have a Blood Pack leader to take out," Robin reminded, "and I can't leave until I complete the job."

Garrus gave the agents a hawklike stare.

"So Aria had you captured for the sole purpose of carrying out an assassination?" Thane asked, not
lowering his aim on the asari's head, "hasn't she tried anyone more renown?"

"It doesn't matter, we've gotten her back. We can discuss this on the way back," Garrus interrupted, "Wrex, prepare for the others' return, I'll head up to Aria and see what she's trying to accomplish."

With Thane stalling the agents, Jack and Kasumi headed over to Wrex's location while Robin followed Garrus to the entrance to the Afterlife, catching his attention.

"Shepard?" Garrus paused.

"I thank you for coming for me," Robin explained, "but I still need to finish the mission whether you speak with Aria or not."

It didn't take long for Garrus to make up his mind.

"Alright, leave the guards be and head back," Garrus ordered, "I'll go talk to Aria and see what she has to offer. If it's really that important, maybe we could all pitch into this effort."

Garrus, closely tailed by the two aforementioned guards, traveled through the dark undersides of Aria's Afterlife Club. There had been numerous accounts where he demanded that his superiors grant him the resources to pursue and assassinate the pirate queen, but was told time and time again to let her slide on the basis that she held too many ties. Truth be told, he suspected that she was paying someone under the table to keep quiet.

As he entered the heart of the club, his internal ears rang with the familiar pulse of the irritating club music. He made his way up the steps to Aria's throne with both guards stopping at their posts by the side of the stairs. Calmly, he made his way to the top to be greeted by her sadistic queen.

"Well, just when I was starting to believe I had overestimated the young Shepard, you show up," Aria chuckled lightly, "when I heard her mention a 'Garrus', I didn't believe that she actually meant the Commander Vakarian. I can at least give her props that she knows how to pick her men."

She knew how much the turian wanted her dead and she knew that pressing that desire would irritate Garrus like a wild animal chained to the wall.

"Enough with the greeting," Garrus barked, "I want to know what it'll take for you to let her go."

Aria simply snorted.

"Tsk, she didn't make my offer clear? She gets to go off with some Cerberus intel, but if and only if she kills the bastard," his browplates rose with interest, prompting more laughter from her, "oh, now you're interested. So what will it be?"

Garrus narrowly held himself back before finally yielding.

"Fine, but this intel better be worth whatever trouble we'll be going through. Chances are, if you're looking for help, the target is a demigod."

"Trust me, darling. It's worth every drop of blood you'll spill. Now, go on. You shouldn't keep your girl waiting like that," Aria continued to taunt.

He deeply growled before turning to walk back down the stairs and to the club entrance.

"Wrex, we'll be taking a slight detour. I'm on my way back now, but we'll first be doing a favor for Aria."
Robin sighed in relief before she embraced herself to Garrus.

"Thanks, Garrus!" she chirped, "I could really use some help for my first real mission."

He sighed with relief as he wrapped his arms around her.

"I'm just glad you're safe. I've sent a few spies into her ranks every now and then. She…well, it could've been worse."

"It's nice that we're all together again, but Thane and I should probably get to work on some hired-gun 101 with Shepard," Wrex proposed as he walked up.

"Alright, but Thane and I will still be providing her cover. Just stay here and make sure our ship, Kasumi, and Jack are all still in once piece when we return. Anyways, what's Aria told you about who she's butting heads with today?" Garrus replied.

"A Blood Pack leader," Robin answered, tilting her head to the side, "she kinda doesn't want him to challenge her for the throne apparently."

Taking the datapad from Robin, Garrus looked over the Blood Pack Leader's profile. The bodyguards, cycle of endless goons, and stronghold complexes were nothing special, but it was the target himself that appeared especially menacing. Garm, a Krogan Battlemaster, was armed to the teeth, had biotic capabilities, and regenerated much faster than most krogans would. His mandibles began to flicker with nervousness as he realized what Robin just devoted herself towards.

"Alright, slight change of plan," Garrus instructed through his com-link, "Wrex, you'll be with us. Jack, get to work with your biotics if anyone attacks the shuttle."

Once Garrus and Robin stepped into the hangar, the turian commander led her towards the shuttle. There, they found Wrex observing his weapon outside, waiting for them.

"About time," Wrex sighed in relief and set the weapon down, "what happened? I mean, it's nice to see she hadn't dug her claws into Shepard yet, but I was about to rush in there myself and ask for your remains back."

Garrus chuckled and his mandibles flexed in amusement.

"She had other plans," he started, "it seems to me that Aria mistook her for a professional gun for hire and wanted her to take care of a problem. Unfortunately, she's also offering her Cerberus intel, and I'm not going to let this opportunity go if it means knowing several of their next moves."

"We'll be assisting Robin through her endeavor," Thane added, "Jack and Kasumi will be staying at a safe distance."

Jack and Kasumi couldn't help but stare in disbelief.

"Why do I get stuck with the shuttle?" Jack pouted and folded her arms, "I can handle myself."

"Jack, it's ok," Robin reassured Jack.

Kasumi placed her hand on Jack's shoulder.

"We'll need the shuttle intact once they complete the mission," Kasumi explained.

Jack groaned and crouched down on her feet.
"Well," Wrex reminded, "I don't want to spend more time on this rock than I have to. Are the rest of you ready?"

"I'm inclined to agree," Thane nodded, "time is of the essence."
Blood Packs

The instant they arrived at the entrance to the Blood Pack base, Robin couldn't help but stare in bewilderment. The exterior gate resembled something out of post apocalyptic vids with a giant animal skull built from scrap metal, and a gate that had metal beams and wires bent outward to form improvised spikes. Along the wall were the remains of various species, mostly salarians, hung with chains around their necks, dangling like wind chimes. Along both sides of the gate were identical lamps, glowing slightly brighter than the average light on Omega.

"I've known for a long time that the Blood Pack had some zealous leaders," Wrex commented, "but this is ridiculous."

Robin tilted her head towards the krogan after snapping out of her thoughts.

"So," she asked, "how well do you know the Blood Pack?"

Wrex scratched his head.

"Blood Pack was formed by an idealistic battlemaster," Wrex divulged, "due to this appeal, the Blood Pack is the go-to group for krogans looking into the hired gun business, and as such attracts a whole range of us. While they have gradually recruited from other races over time, krogans and vorcha are the most prominent. Most of the krogans I've met from Blood Pack, especially the older guys, really hate having the Genophage hang over them, hence the salarian corpses."

Robin couldn't help but scratch behind her neck.

"How is Garm any different?" she pondered.

Wrex turned his head slightly to examine one of the corpses.

"I know that Blood Pack does go out of its way occasionally to threaten or kill salarians. While I'm no fan of the salarians myself, at least I don't go about publicly lynching the bastards."

Without saying anything, Robin started taking a few steps closer to the base, knowing they would have to find a way in.

"Right," Garrus drawled, tapping at the datapad Robin received from Aria's guards, "just give me a moment. This place can't be impregnable. However, if it does come down to it, would you guys prefer entering from the rooftop or from the sewers?"

Robin examined the roof of the base, but it didn't take long for her to shudder at the idea of falling off, so she tilted her head towards a manhole further down the street instead. Taking the hint, Thane turned his attention towards the manhole. He cautiously observed it, picking at the lock of the mechanism before slowly lifting the lid off.

"I've been hired to combat Blood Pack forces previously," Thane clarified, "the compounds they establish in civilian areas are hastily built upon establishments that are forcibly emptied before occupying themselves. Besides, the sewers grant us a safer, more elaborate escape option."

Climbing down the manhole, Garrus followed close behind the drell assassin, only to have the scent of sewage greet him.

"Certainly not the worst thing I've smelt in the past," he muttered to himself.
Wrex and Robin also climbed down the manhole to catch up with Garrus and Thane. Wrex didn't flinch at the odor even if Robin had to cover her nose with her hand to keep herself from retching.

"Hmph," Wrex grumbled, "still smells better than most of Omega. Where to now?"

Garrus continued to examine the 2D layout of the area surrounding them.

"It appears there's a manhole cover right in a garage within the stronghold," he answered, "this way."

Garrus gestured Thane, Robin and Wrex to follow him, walking along the elevated path above the sewage. Taking a few turns, there was no sign of Blood Pack troops patrolling below. Reaching the opposite manhole, the drell assassin climbed up and started to slide the cover back. Without warning, a lifeless batarian head tumbled off the edge and down the manhole, startling Robin as it landed on the ground. While taken aback by the fallen corpse, Garrus didn't nearly show as much surprise, so he had to pat the young Shepard on the shoulder to give her reassurance.

"Shepard, it's ok."

"Looks like the remains of one of Aria's guards," Thane pointed out, "I hope none of you are squeamish."

Garrus climbed out right behind Thane.

"What have we got up here?" he asked.

"A mixed pile. About a quarter of the bodies up here appear to be more of Aria's guards, but with some of their equipment stripped off," Thane answered calmly, "for all we know, these could be victims he pressed for money and never paid up."

Once Robin and Wrex emerged from the manhole, the young Shepard scanned the area before she embraced herself to Garrus. The room almost resembled a butcher shop with how the various bodies were treated. In the back of the room was a small pile of clothed or armored bodies, a significantly bigger pile of naked corpses, and a bin for putting valuables in. On the walls were a few places where torture victims had been left to hang by their ankles or wrists. Puddles of various types of blood covered the concrete floor.

"A-Are you sure the Genophage isn't the only motive?" she muttered.

"The Genophage isn't so much the problem as it is the failed solution," Garrus responded, stroking Robin's hair with his talons, "after the Rachni Wars, the krogan clans made a heavy push for territorial expansion, starting the Krogan Rebellion. Fearful of mass extinction, the salarians put forward the solution of the Genophage, putting a limit on krogan numbers and undermining their ability to efficiently maintain combat readiness without endangering their population count. I'm not sure if there were any alternatives, so don't take my word for it when I say the Genophage did more harm than good."

Thane gave Garrus and Robin an intense stare.

"We can discuss the ethics of biological warfare later," he reminded.

Thane gingerly lifted the garage doors a crack to peer outside. Wrex went prone to see for himself.

"I'm not seeing anything, you?" he asked as his eyes glanced as far as his head would allow.

"Wherever they are," Thane answered, "they're out of view. Shut off the lights, I'm going to peek a
After Robin searched for a switch and shut the lights off in the garage, Thane lifted the shutters even more to reveal additional hanging corpses decorating the interior of the stronghold. Peering out into a poorly lit street, the block the stronghold was built on was a set of old concrete buildings. With some ancient signs of conflict long forgotten, the buildings now resembled gang ghettos, lit with burning barrels and ancient neon lights.

"Garm definitely has damaged olfactory senses," Wrex commented, noting the long streaks of blood that dripped from the bodies along the walls, "no sane Krogan would have these things hanging around and not get sick of them after the first week."

"I've never seen anything this dramatic before," Garrus added, his subharmonics giving some hint of nervousness, "it's like some sort of doomsday cult."

"And I thought megachurch pastors were crazy with their apocalypse preaching," Robin shuddered.

Robin, Garrus, Thane and Wrex quietly strode out onto the road before quietly edging their way down the street. In many of the old apartments they passed, they could hear the mixed chatter of vorcha, krogans and rare bursts of other dialects from quarians to asari. They stopped at an intersection when they started to hear a small patrol coming from around the corner.

"So far, so good," Garrus explained, reciting his memory of the map from the datapad, "he has his quarters close to the middle of the compound. However, that appears to be the complex with the heaviest concentration of security. Thane, how would you get through tight corridors with heavy security in a building with an otherwise below-standard design?"

While Thane took a moment to think, Robin ventured further, her mind still focused on their objective.

"Shepard!" Garrus paused.

Garrus, Thane and Wrex had to chase after Robin. Narrowly missing a patrol, they quickly entered an otherwise empty kitchen to avoid detection.

"Spirits," Garrus growled with annoyance, "whatever Aria thought you could accomplish here, I'm not seeing it. Shepard, maybe you could make sense of it?"

"We're wasting time," Wrex hissed, "if you guys really wanted to remain undetected, we would've stolen uniforms for three of us and Thane could've continued to scout the area."

Robin took a moment to search for anything lying on the floor they could use for disguise, but with no luck.

"I considered disguising you as an asari," Thane offered, scouting the nearby area with the scope of Garrus's rifle, "but maybe we should at least find disguises for Wrex and Garrus, and maybe dress you as someone lost that they picked off the streets."

"Not my fault you pyjaks would rather debate how to kill him rather than kill him," Wrex pouted.

Robin could hear incoming footsteps, and she couldn't help but shudder.

"Keep it down!" Thane hissed through a harsh whisper, "we'll—"

"Hey! You're not allowed in here!"
The four of them turned to see a krogan leading a turian, an asari, and a vorcha armed with a rocket launcher walking through the door. Before the Blood Pack troops could properly react, all four were gunned down, but the impact the vorcha’s rocket launcher received upon hitting the ground triggered a premature launch, sending a rocket out the broken wall to destroy a sentry's nest in the distance. The distant explosion was followed by a brief silence before being shattered by the sound of the stronghold’s jury-rigged alarm system.

"Well, there's our disguises," Wrex grumbled, dragging the krogan's corpse out of view.

Wincing at the loud sirens, Robin pulled the pistol out of its holster.

"I don't think disguises are going to work now," she muttered.

"If you really think charging in now would be a good idea, then by all means, be my guest," Wrex had already taken off most of the armor on the corpse's upper torso, "for all we know, we could still slip in amidst the confusion."

The other three returned to cover as a squad of Blood Pack passed outside.

"Get to the perimeter and make a full sweep! Nothing gets in or Garm will have your hides!" the officer barked.

"Looks like their attention is turned outward. Should we make our move?" Thane asked peering back out.

Robin nodded and fired her pistol at one of the Blood Pack troops, the bullet hitting him square in the neck.

"So much for a quiet entrance," Thane responded before firing a round through the squad leader's head.

"It won't be too long before they start doubling back. Let's get to his compound, Garm just might starting coming out," Garrus led Thane and Robin towards the center of the stronghold, leaving Wrex behind to continue switching out his armor.

"Hey! Wait up! Bah, if you guys get in trouble, don't blame me for being late!" Wrex yelled as he continued to struggle with putting on the new set of leg armor.

The various squads of Blood Pack troops continued their way towards the perimeter, not bothering to look back to see the a small human, a turian, and a drell creep behind them. They continued deeper into the complex before halting around a corner to see what they could only assume to be Garm talking to his lieutenants. The mercenary leader was absolutely massive with heavily reinforce armor to boot, easily dwarfing one of the krogan underlings nearby.

"Get the gunship prepped and ready! You, stay with the second squad and start territorial patrols, find out what the hell is going on!"

Robin couldn't help but place her free hand on her turian boyfriend's shoulder.

"He has a…gunship?" she whispered.

"Quiet, someone's coming this way!" Garrus whispered before ducking back to cover.

A lone krogan in full armor jogged past their hiding place to Garm.
"Vragg! Where've you been?! You were supposed to report in, is your suit radio damaged?" Garm barked.

"Erm, squad got caught in a blast during patrols along the south border. Anyways, what's my orders?" Vragg answered, tapping the side of his helmet.

"You'll be with the gunship crew. Get back here once that thing is off the ground. I will not forgive you a second time for being late," Garm growled.

"Understood, sir," the lone krogan seemed to be slightly confused where to go to reach the parked gunship, being directed by another merc before leaving.

Garm was left with another krogan, a few vorcha, and a couple of attack varren. Still, Robin fidgeted in anticipation, not wanting to wait any longer to complete the mission, so Thane placed his hand on top of her head.

"Take it easy," Thane whispered.

"I-I'm just," Robin blurted softly, "I'm just looking for weak points."

"He's alone." Garrus said, leveling his rifle with the other Krogan's head, just above the eye but below the armor plating, "we take the other five down, it'll be three on one. We can take him down if we kite him as we shift from cover to cover."

Than began to level his pistol with the three Vorcha, hoping to get all three with as little ammo expended possible.

"Risky, but this might be our only opening while the gunship is still on the ground. What say you, Robin?"

Robin nodded.

"Let's do this," she answered.

"Right," Garrus fired, splattering the krogan's brains in a brilliant display of orange, followed by Robin and Thane clearing out the varren and vorcha before they could fully turn their attention to their assailants.

"Raaah! I will feast upon your entrails!" Garm sent a warp at their location, reducing the wall they were taking cover behind to dust, forcing them to the next building as the Blood Pack leader continued firing shotgun rounds at them. Thane and Garrus continued to take pot shots at the beast's barriers.

Rolling into cover, Garrus swapped thermal clips.

"Well," he muttered, "we've got his full attention now. I wish Wrex would hurry up putting on his new suit."

They continued their way through the building as shotgun blasts and incoherent yells ripped through the walls behind them. Thane peeked and fired a few rounds before ducking to avoid another warp.

"We're still faring better than if any one of us entered alone. Maybe Wrex could take advantage of his focus on us."

Robin fired a round at a hanging container's lock, releasing the door and sending cords tumbling
down onto Garm. Garrus put aside his rifle and pulled a grenade from his belt.

"Good shot. Let's see how much this softens him up."

The grenade striped away what was left of Garm's barriers, allowing the three to start damaging his armor. Tossing off the last bits of debris, Garm rose to his feet, glowing with a blue aura as he prepared to charge at the trio.

"N-Not good!" Robin blurted.

The three narrowly dodged the incoming krogan, but the force of the krogan flying through still sent them tumbling and put a considerable hole in the wall behind them. Getting onto one knee, Robin fired at Garm as he turned back around to face them.

"We shouldn't face him in close quarters. It would be preferable to have some open space between us!" Thane grunted as he climbed back to his feet.

While Garm reloaded his shotgun, the trio ran through a series of hallways leading out of the other side of the building before leaping back onto the streets.

More gunshots greeted them from up street as another squad of Blood Pack was returning to investigate the firefight within the compound.

"Dammit, there goes our privacy!" Garrus cursed as he switched to his assault rifle to return fire.

As Garm reappeared from behind them, they were forced to retreat further down the road to find cover. Further tilting the odds, the gunship finally arrived, following behind the large group of Blood Pack soldiers firing at them. Robin ducked behind a weak wall while Garrus and Thane stood their ground against the Blood Pack.

"Come on, Wrex," she squeaked, "where are you?"

As the deadly whirl of the gunship heavy gun filled the air, instead of charging forward and leveling their cover, the gunship pilot began to level the number of Blood Pack soldiers below. As some of the heavy troopers began to return fire, the pilot ceased fire and swayed to the side to allow the gun to cool down.

"Fool!" Garm howled, "how dare you betray me!"

"For all the beneficial genetics you've been gifted, Garm, you're dumber than a pyjak with half of its brain excised!" Wrex barked over the gunship loudspeaker, narrowly missing the rockets.

"There's Wrex! Now's our chance!" Garrus rose from cover and placed a number of well-aimed shots along the bulky krogan's back.

Letting out another roar of rage, Garm sent a shockwave their direction, putting all three flat on their backs. Robin managed to recover and sit up, though Garrus and Thane had yet to recover.

"Everyone!" Robin panicked.

Robin emerged from her crumbling cover, eyes furrowing at Garm and she aimed her pistol at his head. Before she could shoot, he tackled her to the ground, with one of his massive hands wrapped tightly around her windpipe. Glaring at her as she struggled to yank his hand off, his lips grew in a sadistic smile followed by a deep chuckle.
"This is what Aria sends? A pathetic human against me? You're no match for me, child. So which
would you prefer? That I snap your neck right now, or save you for a more gratuitous fate?"

Slowly, black dots began to flood her vision. Desperate for air, she saw her pistol within her
peripheral vision. Snapping her hand to it, she jabbed the barrel under Garm's chin and squeezed the
trigger. As expected, a round burrowed through Garm's flesh and exited from the top of his head,
spurting out blood and eliciting a roar of pain from the krogan as he loosened his grip. Upon cue,
Robin freed herself while Garrus and Thane stood back to their feet. Wrex continued to fight off
additional waves of Blood Pack while Garrus and Thane raced over to Robin to lift off Garm's
corpse. Garrus held Robin in his arms, his mandibles flaring in fear.

"Shepard! Oh Spirits, are you all right? Can you breathe?" Garrus whispered.

Her lips had turned blue and her face had become pale from strangulation. Seconds later, Garrus
noticed Robin's fingers flexing slowly and it was only a few more seconds later when he heard her
cough and gasp for air.

"G-Garrus," Robin gasped, "did I…did I get him?"

Behind them, Thane fired a few more rounds through the head crest.

"Unless Garm is impossibly capable of regenerating brain tissue and restarting all of the now dead
cells in his body," Thane answered, "no."

"We should wrap this up!" the gunship Wrex had hijacked was now smoking from one of its engines
and had multiple scratches in the armor.

"We should go. Hang on!" Garrus holstered his weapons and lifted Robin in his arms before
standing back.

"Let's go! Back to the sewers!" he ordered.

As the Blood Pack rapidly seeped back into the stronghold, Thane, Garrus and Robin rushed to the
garage they entered from with Wrex not too far behind. At the mouth of the garage, Garrus set Robin
down again.

"Can you walk?" Garrus asked, "start climbing down, we'll be covering Wrex as he lands."

Robin climbed back down as gunshots continued to ring overhead. As the damaged gunship landed,
Wrex hastily climbed out and ran to the back to where the engine maintenance hatch was located.

"Wrex, whatever you're doing, we don't have the time or ammo for it!" Thane yelled as he put one of
his last thermal clips into his pistol.

"This will buy us time! Make a head start into the sewers!" Wrex offered.

As the others returned to the manhole, Wrex punched and ripped off hatch door, threw in a grenade,
and ran like a madman to the manhole before a fired explosion consumed the area above. After a
quick sprint through the underground, Wrex checked behind them to look for anyone following
them.

"That was cutting it close. Still, I'm impressed, Shepard. I'd thought you wouldn't be able to take that
bastard," Wrex commented.

Robin rested her head onto Garrus's chest.
"I didn't think so either," Robin replied, "but I guess I have the fighting spirit of the Shepards in me."

"I'm surprised that you had managed to infiltrate the Blood Pack ranks and steal the gunship, Wrex," Thane complimented, "may I ask how?"

Wrex yanked off his Blood Pack helmet before tossing into the sewage.

"I thought you guys saw me when I walked by Garm. I mean I clearly saw you guys behind cover, I even nearly blew my cover. Anyways, I just played the part, and when I was close enough to the gunship and it was ready to go, I killed the others and took it for myself. I'm just glad I didn't manage to crash the damned thing."

"We'll still need that Cerberus intel," Garrus reminded, "we should probably head back to Aria and get it from her before we leave."
Reaching Flexibility

The trek back to the shuttle was more smooth than the search for Garm himself. Once they all returned to the Aran'tar, Garrus ordered his pilots to set the coordinates for the club in Omega before he escorted Robin over to his quarters, where she rested on the turian commander's bed. The door quietly closed behind him before he was confronted by Jack outside of his quarters.

"You guys look like hell," Jack commented, "what did we miss?"

"Just know you would've been torn in half. We'll be heading back to Afterlife to pick up the Cerberus intel before returning to the Citadel," Garrus replied.

He needed a shower, a meal, and some private time with Robin after this. It scared him half to death to see her taken away by Aria's agents, and scared him even more to see Garm on the verge of crushing her before she shot the krogan at point blank range. He sauntered into the shower stalls and took the time he needed to wash off the evidence of today's battle. Once he finished and dried himself up, the turian commander headed over to the mess hall for a meal, where he also attained a levo-based meal reserved for Robin. Once he finished eating, he carried the levo-amino acid meal back into his quarters. As he opened the door to his quarters again, Robin was still on his bed, on her side and quietly breathing. She was still wearing the clothes she wore when Aria had her kidnapped from the Citadel, and the armor she wore was piled in a corner by the bed. Putting the tray on the bedside, he gingerly tapped her shoulder.

"Hey, I brought you some food. Are you hungry?"

Robin slowly sat up and grabbed the tray before she started eating.

"Thanks, Garrus," Robin smiled softly.

By the time she finished eating, Garrus sat on the bed and embraced Robin from behind, allowing her to lean back against his chest. He knew he'd have to get up again to talk with Aria, but it was just nice to feel her bodily warmth against him, knowing she's there. After a moment, Robin rolled to her side and rested her head on his chest and wrapped her arms around him. Gently, he laid back and put his arms over her in return, smiling as she slowly faded back to sleep.

Once the Aran'tar arrived at the Afterlife Club, Garrus and Robin stepped out of the shuttle with Tali, Liara and Thane staying behind. The trio approached the entrance where a line formed in front of the Afterlife Club, with a batarian and an elcor managing which guests could enter.

"Assertively. Aria is expecting you. You may enter," the elcor replied in stereotypical fashion.

The front hallway, much like the rest of the club, was darkly lit with screens on either side projecting images of fire, silhouetting guests who were sitting on benches along either side. The door afterward opened into the room Robin recognized as where she came to after being taken from the Citadel. On the other side of the purple beam were sets of stairs on either side leading up to Aria's balcony overlooking the area.

The guards simply looked on as they walked by up to Aria. The Queen of Omega had a smug grin on her face, barely holding back a chuckle.

"If it isn't Shepard and Vakarian! When I got the report you had gotten the job done, I was, and still am, left with this mixed sensation of disbelief and—"
"Spare us the chapter and verse," Garrus interrupted, rolling his eyes, "we did our half of the deal, you still have yet to finish your side of the bargain."

Aria's smug grin quickly shifted to that of disdain as she reached into her coat and pulled the datapad out.

"Spoilsport. I must say, Shepard. If it is one trait I hadn't known you had is incredible luck. From the field report I've seen, you had a really nice brush with death," she complemented as she handed it off to Robin.

"Uh, thank you, ma'am," Robin blurted.

Robin took a moment to read the information on the datapad before she handed it to Garrus.

"I'll bet Toby Dunn is willing to work with Cerberus to form unauthorized mining sites in foreign territory just so he can fill his pockets with more money," Robin whispered to Garrus.

Garrus nodded before glaring back at the pirate queen.

"I'm at least grateful that you've managed to salvage this information, despite the steep cost."

"Hmf, trust me, it's worth it. Good luck catching them. Better luck stopping them. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got a bit of decoration to do," Aria replied.

Garrus and Robin were lightly shocked to see one of her henchmen walk up the stairs with Garm's bullet riddled head crest on a commemorative platter like a hunting trophy.

"Ah, this will go nicely on the wall. I presume you cleaned up the rest of the rabble too?" Aria continued.

"Yes, ma'am. After Commander Vakarian and his team left the site, we moved in to confirm the death and remove the Blood Pack presence from the district," the guard reported.

"Excellent. I hope to see you again, Shepard. Oh, and keep your chin up, darling. No need to be that timid," Aria bid farewell.

"We'll be on our way," Garrus returned.

With the Aran'tar on its way to the Citadel, Garrus escorted Robin to the medbay, allowing Mordin to examine her for any signs of infection of any wounds she might've sustained.

"Minor lacerations across the chest with minimal fractures to the ribs, moderate tissue damage to neck area, muscles across the body showing minor stress for first time in field, other injuries quickly resolved. Have applied medical remedies needed, but do recommend a couple days' rest," between a brief inhale, Mordin concluded, "could've been much worse."

The salarian had been working Robin's injuries for almost twenty minutes since the two first entered.

"Thanks as always, Mordin," he escorted her out of the medbay before asking, "are you feeling alright, Robin?"

"Yeah, I guess," Robin nodded, "I don't know what's worse, being hunted down by Cerberus or being kidnapped by a crazy pirate queen and forced to work for her as a spy."

He nestled his face in her neck before responding.
"Well, for all that it was worth," Garrus smiled, "I'm just glad you're safe and here with me."

Once they entered the commander's quarters, Garrus and Robin sat down on the bed and she leaned into his embrace. She went back to reading the datapad, taking in Cerberus's latest plans.

"Do you know if there are any protests going on in that colony?" Robin pondered.

"Plenty from what I've heard. The site mentioned on here is regarded as a part of the locals' heritage. It serves as a home for the spirits of relatives," Garrus explained, "so far, the colony and the Hierarchy have been successful in denying use of the area, defending it as a historical site. I wouldn't be surprised to see Cerberus decide to plow through and do something to damage to the site, but wouldn't they only draw attention to themselves?"

Robin couldn't help but sigh.

"You know," she mused, "former President Oliver Barnett would not stand for this form of bigotry against turians. Had companies try to do this before he left office, he wouldn't even authorize it."

"Either way, we know their next step and this proves where and when. I'll report this to the Council, and see where this gets us. I'm not sure how we'll stop them, but I'm hoping this isn't some temporary lucky break. Maybe we'll start to unveil more as we go," Garrus sat on the edge of his bed while he continued to read the files Aria provided for them.

Once the Aran'tar arrived at the Citadel, Commander Vakarian's squad disembarked along with Jack and Kasumi, who set off to return to their apartments while Garrus left the ship while holding hands with Robin. He started to contact the Council, but…

{This is Councilor Sparatus, and the Council is closed for the day. Feel free to come back tomorrow.}

Garrus couldn't help but sigh in disbelief. If he couldn't get through to the Council immediately, maybe the Spectres or Victus might be available?

"Shepard," Garrus asked, "you don't mind coming along with me, do you?"

Robin shook her head.

"I don't mind finding someone closer if we can't reach the Council," she answered, "considering that it's getting pretty late."

With that, Garrus escorted Robin out of the docking bay and strolled down the walkway, the street lights starting to flicker on. It didn't take long for them to reach the hospital. They stepped into the waiting room.

"I know he's not friendly with humans in general, but we don't really have many options right now."

Garrus approached the receptionist.

"Excuse me, is Spectre Saren still visiting General Arterius?" Garrus asked.

"I haven't seen him leave," the receptionist answered, "so he's probably still here. Why do you ask?"

"Let him know I'm here," Garrus advised, "I've found a lead he'd very much like to hear."

The receptionist nodded before she tapped into the terminal and sent a message to Saren. She waited
for a few moments before the terminal notified her of his response.

Five minutes later, the elder Spectre stepped out of the elevator to meet the two.

"Commander Vakarian and Ambassador Shepard," Saren said, folding his arms, "I presume you called me down here with good reason?"

"We had a brief incident earlier today, but it did come with its own benefits," Garrus started, "with some…morally dubious dealings, we did manage to receive intel concerning Cerberus' next move. Considering the Council was out of reach at this time, I felt the best course of action would be to approach you."

Saren nodded before gesturing Garrus and Robin to search for some chairs and sit down across from him.

"Go on," he advised.

Garrus handed Saren the datapad from Aria.

"Cerberus is planning to do some landscaping with a nature reserve," Garrus explained, "specifically one of the more spiritually connected ones. I may not be the extremely religious type, but those reserves are protected for a reason."

Saren quickly read the significant details with an interested hum.

"I see. And you're willing to help, Shepard?"

Robin nodded enthusiastically.

"Cerberus should know better than to desecrate alien colonies just to increase profits for sleazy rich old men," Robin answered, "I didn't leak their files for nothing! Maybe we can find Miranda there?"

"Hmm…old men playing at running the galaxy, a galaxy that never belonged to them. Glad to see that we've come to an agreement. How is it you plan to use this information, commander?" Saren responded.

"As much as I hate to put these reserves at such a great risk, we need to continue pursuing Cerberus if we're going to stop them altogether. I was planning on heading them off at their next destination, and maybe pick up someone important, like Lawson," Garrus answered.

The elder turian nodded with approval.

"Good to see you have a plan coming together. When's the soonest you'll be leaving?"

Garrus took a moment to run his talons through Robin's hair.

"Shepard here needs a couple days to rest," Garrus answered, "but I'd like to put a stop to their plan as soon as possible before they even start demolition."

There was for a moment a brief glitter in Saren's eyes and a flicker of his mandibles with amusement, as his gaze hovered above the two.

"I see. Shepard looks like she needs rest," Saren stood from his chair, before he turned to leave the hospital, "don't spend too much time in bed."

Robin couldn't help but stare in confusion before she shifted her gaze towards Garrus. The turian
commander couldn't help but sigh.

"You can spend the night with me," he offered.

With that, Garrus escorted Robin out of the hospital.

When Robin first arrived at the Citadel, she felt that she would never gain clearance to Commander Vakarian's living place. But Garrus proved to her otherwise when he escorted her to his headquarters. Still riled up from the mission from earlier, Garrus spoke a few words to his squadmates before he gestured Robin into his quarters.

"So, Ambassador Shepard," Garrus purred as he leaned back against the wall, "are you still eager to test my reach…and your flexibility?"

Robin's face lit up as she slowly approached the turian commander.

"I guess I felt scared on the thought of never seeing you again," Robin admitted, "but it seems Aria's kind enough to not separate us."

Garrus began to strip off what was left of his uniform.

"I take it you accept my offer?" he asked, as he slowly worked Robin's shirt off.

Robin nodded and returned the favor by cupping Garrus's mandible and leaning in to kiss him. Accepting the kiss, Garrus slowly guided them onto the bed with Robin on top of him.

"So, want to take this nice and easy, or jump right in?" he asked.

Robin tucked her hands underneath her shorts and yanked them and her panties off. She traced her hand along his chest.

"Well, no need for precaution then," Garrus sighed.

Unclipping and disposing Robin's bra with one hand, Garrus used the other to trace along the length of her back to her shoulder blades. Gradually, he felt his groin plates shift. Robin felt him extend, so she took this chance by grinding against him, feeling the spines and ridges against her nether region. She was almost tempted to stifle her moans, but while she observed her boyfriend's reaction, her face started turning red. As he felt Robin rub herself against his member, a prolonged moan escaped from him and his breaths began to severely deepen.

"Shepard," he gasped.

Robin planted her hands on each side of his head before she leaned in and licked his mandible. In response, his hands went down to clasp onto her ass as her nether regions continued to taunt him.

"Are you going to just leave me hanging?" Garrus asked, heaving for air as if the amount of air in his quarters was gradually being sucked out.

Robin rolled over and lay on her back next to Garrus.

"You want to double check before we move forward?" Robin offered.

Garrus nodded before he stroked the nub between her legs, eliciting soft moans out of her. She returned the favor by brushing her palms against his waist.
"My…I do very much like your assets," Garrus hummed, having a good view of Robin's body.

His breathing became heavily stifled as her hands drew closer to his alien member, almost like she was about to pounce.

"You have such amazing features on display, too," Robin mentioned.

Robin brushed her hand against his shaft, and Garrus took this chance to probe her further with one talon. After circling the talon inside her for a moment, it became slick with her fluids while she arched her back. As she continued to pant with pleasure, Garrus readjusted himself to hang right over Robin with his member primed before drawing his finger out. He took time to lick the clear substance off his talon.

"Mmm, by turian standards, you give a sweet flavor."

"Can we get started already?" Robin requested in a tone that sounded needy.

Garrus leaned in and licked her face while he straddled her legs.

"That's all I needed to hear," he whispered.

With one solid push, he shoved himself in, reaching her g-spot with one stroke. As his pelvis continued to swing, his breathing and heart rate picked up even further, occasionally growling with each push back in. Robin let out soft moans as she perched her hands on his shoulder, wrapped her legs around his girth and bucked her hips in sync with his thrusts. With her body begging for more and the light buzz simply not enough to satisfy him, his pace began to increase, as did the volume they produced. His grunts became more frequent, feeling his muscles begin to lock up as the pleasure continued to build like air pressure in a spray can. In that moment, all their worries, pain, and fear simply vanished in a rush of lust. The instant Robin reached her peak, she buried her face into his shoulder and tightened her grip. His jaw felt clenched tight, like it were weld shut with metal locks. His mind was spinning, hyped on a narcotic with an effect no other drug could achieve. Her body felt like nothing he had experience with in the past. His body felt like a rusted machine, all these moving parts with none of them able to move. Gingerly, he withdrew, leaving a trail of their mixed fluids behind. He lay back down by her side, still holding her in his arms.

"Shepard," he whispered, "if the Council ever requests a bodyguard for you, then I volunteer."

Robin couldn't help but smile as she nuzzled her face against his.

"I love you too, Garrus," she replied.

Garrus took a moment to stroke her back and kiss her forehead.

"Do you need any allergy medication?" he asked.

It was only a moment of silence before Robin nodded. Garrus climbed out of bed and searched the bathroom for dextro allergy medication and filled a glass with water. Once he returned to the bedroom, Robin washed down a tablet with the water before setting it on the bedside table, her turian boyfriend climbing back into bed with her and brushing some stray hairs from her eyes. It was only a few moments later before she nestled into his embrace.
Once Robin rested over two days, she felt reinvigorated for the next objective, so she searched for news feeds in her omni-tool for any updates concerning the possible demolition in the turian colony. From what she could gather, Cerberus hadn't even started it yet though protestors from residing turians and their sympathizers blocked off the entrance to the site. While sipping her coffee at the breakfast bar in a cafe, Robin turned on her omni-tool and found a text message from her father, so she opened it up and read it:

{Robin, I know times are pretty tough right now, but Admiral Anderson understands what you're dealing with right now. Some specialists from the Alliance have helped reinstate your social media accounts, so I advise you disable comments for public posts for your own safety. By the way, congratulations on the transition into ambassador.}

Smiling, Robin checked her TweetFeed account and changed her settings to further protect herself from possible threats. She then went back to eating her breakfast until she spotted Saren stepping into the cafe from the corner of her eye, so she waved her hand to get his attention.

"Morning!" Robin chirped, "want to sit next to me?"

Saren couldn't help but sigh, but in a matter of seconds, he sat down next to her.

"If you were expecting Commander Vakarian," Saren pointed out, "he is with the Council right now."

Robin shrugged.

"I would've texted him after breakfast anyway," she replied.

"Yes, well he's presenting what you two had uncovered a few days ago, it'll be a while. From what I heard, you had a very narrow encounter with a krogan easily four times your size, yes?" Saren prompted.

Robin gave a soft laugh and placed her hand behind her head.

"Yeah," she admitted, "it was such a close call."

"Well, I'll have to admit you're admirably lucky to have survived the encounter. Speaking of luck, do you think you can still attend this next mission or will you need to sit this one out?" Saren pressed further.

Robin took a sip of her coffee while Saren's order arrived.

"I'm most definitely going to participate," Robin answered.

Saren paused after taking his first drink.

"Well, for everything the humans are collectively worth, I must say you and your clique of friends stand out. Not complacent as most of the others are about the current…state of affairs to say."

Robin nodded in agreement before she checked her TweetFeed. Once she had a quick visit to Toby Dunn's page, she found one misspelled word at his latest tweet: "Covfefe".

"Uh, Saren?" Robin asked, "how would you rate Toby Dunn's intelligence based on this
Robin showed Saren the tweet to make her point. He groaned with annoyance as he stared at the poorly written media post.

"Well, with a governing system like the one depicted here, you can't afford to have illiterate individuals in positions of power, much less incompetent or generally uneducated individuals. He's unfit for his position. It doesn't matter how good you seem on paper, if the changes you implement will only cause disaster, then it well may be time to...how do you humans say it? 'Return to the drawing board'. That, or choose someone more fit for the job."

"I can count how many humans with a working brain that tried to prove that point," Robin agreed, "but even the most bigoted supremacists refuse to budge. It's just sad."

"Well, as my father once told me, sometimes people just have to crash and burn before they realize what they lost," Saren sighed, "I hope you don't find this to be too intrusive, but what future do you see yourself in relation to the commander?"

Robin scratched her head.

"We haven't discussed much," Robin mentioned, "apart of making it through the crisis."

A sudden thought sent a chill down her spine. Maybe she should bring it up.

"Didn't you say something about me and Garrus becoming bondmates in the future back in Shanxi?" she reminded.

Saren thought of the question for a moment before he nodded.

"I am aware of your family ties to the Alliance," he explained.

Robin gave Saren a confused glance.

"I mean, with someone like you having gone so far to be bondmates would have some positive influences between humans and everyone else. Despite whatever impressions I may have given in the past, I don't necessarily disprove of your relationship either. Sometimes the political scene could use some new blood, and to show this sort of relationship would be to show we can put differences behind us," Saren continued.

Robin couldn't help but smile at the thought.

"I guess I appreciate your offer," she replied.

"Not that I should continue marring my father's name, but he had some very extreme ideals. Whatever you may think of me, he's worse by a magnitude of ten," Saren explained.

Once Robin and Saren finished eating and paid the bill, they stepped out of the cafe while the young Shepard sent a text message to Garrus:

{I finished my breakfast. Where do you want to meet?}

Robin waited for a moment. It didn't take long before Garrus sent a text to her:

{I'll meet you at the docking bay unless you specify otherwise.}

Satisfied with the answer, Robin tilted her head towards Saren.
"So, you up for some meddling?" Robin chirped.

"I take it Vakarian has finished with the Council?" Saren quipped.

"Yeah," Robin nodded, "and they confirmed the mission in question."

"Good. Let's get this over with."

The two made their way to the docks where Aran'tar still resided. Garrus waited at the boarding plank before turning to greet them.

"Good to see you two here soon," Garrus said, "along with the Council's approval, they've warned the local authorities and informed them of our arrival."

Robin smiled and gave Garrus a warm embrace.

"Let's hope Miranda's waiting over there!" Robin clamored.

Some time after leaving the Citadel docks, Garrus spent most of the flight within the briefing room, looking over a projection of the colony. The doors hissed open as Saren entered.

"I've been taking the time to be accustomed with the team you'll be deploying."

"They're the best I've been given," Garrus replied, "given the layout of the land, Cerberus' best chance to get close enough without drawing attention to themselves would be to land here, a few klicks away from the colony."

The commander gestured the Spectre to an area behind a small mountainous range forming the 'back' of the colony. Saren leaned onto the table.

"And the mining company?" he asked.

"They're at one of the landing pads near the opposite end of the colony. Possibly as a maneuver to distract us or have us on two fronts," Garrus answered.

Saren took a few moments to examine the projection.

"Most problematic," Saren commented, "seeing we still have a few blanks to fill, I think I'll pay the Cerberus division a quiet visit. Maybe I'll see what explosives they're using, the numbers they're using, and when they'll make their move."

Garrus nodded in agreement.

"Should I send anyone with you?" Garrus offered.

Saren put up a hand in refusal.

"You'll need everyone back at the colony if things start to get messy," Saren reminded Garrus, "besides, I doubt that they can catch me, or that they can hold me for long if they do."

Commander Vakarian's mandibles fluttered in amusement.

"Then you take care, all right?" Garrus advised.

"Relax, these guys aren't the most difficult criminals I've dealt with. I'll see what I can find, maybe I can get another lead," Saren turned to the door, leaving Garrus alone once again.
Once the Aran'tar arrived at its destination, Robin, Garrus, Saren, Liara, Tali and Wrex disembarked one shuttle while the turian commander's troops disembarked a couple more. The young Shepard took a moment to examine the scenery before her. The colony was situated at the edge of a small mountain range before reaching down to the smooth plains of the nearby land. Highest up on the mountain were the older prefabs, gradually being succeeded by newer, locally built buildings. Near the bottom of the colony were expansive crop fields set around an island of untouched forest and local plant life.

"If anything," Robin said to herself, "I wonder if I can find any interesting wildlife here."

"Maybe after, when we've got time on our hands," Garrus replied, wrapping his arm around her and tapping the side of his head to hers.

"Well, I'll be talking with local security for some transportation," Saren replied dismissively, "you might want to do the same regarding the mining company."

"Uh, right!" Robin nodded.

The group walked from the landing pad up to the administration building. In the distance, they could see an Earth-made mining freighter. As they entered the freighter, an unnamed human engineer angrily strutted out the door, yelling behind him.

"Yeah! Go to hell, skullface!"

Saren continuously tested his hosts' hospitality as humans continued muttering xenophobic slurs, including towards Garrus, Liara, Wrex, and Tali as they passed. As they entered where the engineer exited, the turian official at the desk stood to greet them.

"About time the Council sent someone to negotiate terms with the humans here," the official sighed, "they've been trying to establish some mining colony here for some time."

"Wouldn't that be in direct violation of the Colonization Regulatory Pact?" Garrus asked.

"I explained every word of it," the official continued, "I even explained that it has been preserved due to historical and cultural relevance. Ambassador Shepard, I don't mean to sound offensive, but are there not similar reserves back on your homeworld, Earth?"

"There are," Robin nodded, "but many fossil fuel companies attempted to turn them into mining sites over a century ago."

Robin lowered her head.

"Sadly," she continued, "we lost a few of them over fighting against their greed, including the Great Barrier Reef."

"Right now, the human colonists outside are simply waiting at this point," Saren inserted, "we picked up intelligence suggesting that Cerberus was planning to detonate the nature reserve to the northwest of here. For now, I'll need some quick transportation getting over the mountains to the south."

"I can have that arranged, Spectre Arterius. What about the rest of you?" the administrator asked.

Pulling up his omni-tool, Garrus showed a projected layout of the colony.

"We're helping to defend that reserve," Garrus answered, "until Cerberus makes their move, we're
the last line of defense."

"I see you're prepared. I'll contact the rest of the colonial security and let them know to cooperate with you. Good luck out there," the administrator finished.

Robin turned her head towards Saren.

"We're all counting on you, buddy," she smiled, extending her hand.

The elder turian was left surprised by the friendly gesture. While he saw the ambassador as only an ally, he hadn't anticipated that she would come to refer to him as a friend or a companion. Slowly, he accepted the gesture.

"Well, how things can change," Saren replied, "I'll keep in radio contact with the rest of you, give warning if Cerberus is on the move."

"Understood," Liara nodded.

Saren watched as the colonial shuttle disappeared into the distance as it returned to the colony. Turning his attention away from the colony, he drew his rifle out and got off to a light jog. He still remained vigilant for ambushes or enemy scouts, causing him to occasionally take cover behind a corner or a cluster of rocks before continuing. Occasionally, he would sharply turn and train his rifle on a sudden noise, only to discover it to be some falling rocks or one of the local predators, scavenging the rocks to look for something much smaller than himself.

"Careful," he chastised himself, "you won't make it far if you give away your position."

Another half hour passed before he reached the other side of the mountain. Finding cover under which to attach a scope to his rifle, he peaked to look at the land far below. He could distantly see more mining freighters of the same human design he saw earlier. He could've easily mistaken them for civilians if it weren't for the small, yet distinct black and yellow emblem painted on the side of each transport.

"Commander Vakarian, you are very astute," Saren reported over the com-link, "I'm overlooking a number of mining transports with Cerberus designation, seven total. Looks like they're preparing to roll out."

Down below, he could see a circle of parked APCs, with white and black troops boarding each one.

"Thanks for the alert, Saren. How many are there?" Garrus asked over the com-link.

"Looks like there are five dozen heading your way. I'm going in, seeing what I can find," Saren answered, before shutting the com-link off again.

Getting up from cover, the Spectre made his advance. Whatever he could find, he hoped it would give Vakarian and his team an advantage against Cerberus. Carefully making his way down the mountain, he took cover outside of one of the transports before he watched the five APCs drive off, leaving dust behind them.

"Commander, those five dozen just left and are heading your way in heavily armed vehicles," Saren instructed, "prepare accordingly."

Back at the checkpoint, Garrus already ordered for reinforcements to defend the site.
“Tali, are you able to set the anti-tank charges?” Garrus asked the quarian, "whatever their full plans are, we need some area denial to keep their armor at a distance, force them into the open and slow them down."

Tali nodded before she returned to her duty.

While all the other guards had their backs turned, Saren made a break for the cargo doors of one of the carriers, making sure none of the guards saw him on the way in. His current goal would be to find the captain or XO’s quarters and find some chat recordings to find out Cerberus’s next move, or their organizational structure. Before leaving the cargo hold, he noticed all the heavy equipment present a heavy, reinforced, metal crate with its contents missing. Moving on, he kept low and avoided the view of any security cameras or Cerberus personnel. Quickly hacking the lock, he entered the captain’s quarters and went to work looking over their personal logs. He began to to download as much as he could to an OSD, but something in particular caught his eye. The captain had been sloppy and decided to leave a series of simulated explosives open.

"Vakarian, we have a problem," Saren reported.

"Make it fast, the Cerberus troops here are putting on the pressure," the commander replied, partially drowned out by gunfire in the background.

"Below the reserve are multiple cavities of various heavy metals. Detonating them would convert the cavities into a powdered form, proving to be difficult on unprotected lungs and harmful to the fertility of soil," Saren explained.

"What?" Garrus replied as another explosion rocked the background, "even with the physically possible amount of explosive charges they could have on those carriers, there is no way they could create an explosion big enough to create a crater from this reserve."

"Not with the humans’ plastic explosives. From the packages I’ve seen so far and the explosions that have been simulated, we’re talking about a warhead. With that power, they’d easily render half of the planet unable to support life and force any remaining colonists to move off-world before finally moving in themselves," Saren finished.

"Spirits… we’ve got to get in close! Wrex, start moving in! Get back here, Saren. We'll need your help," Garrus ordered.

"Copy that."

Ending the call, Saren withdrew the OSD from the computer and rose to leave.

Suddenly, the quarter doors opened up to reveal Miranda Lawson, glaring back at him.

"Going somewhere, turian?"

Saren glared at Miranda as his mandibles flexed.

"You did a terrible job at killing off my brother," he growled.

"I'll send my condolences next time I see him," she hissed as she threw a warp.

Narrowly dissipating the ball of energy with his barriers, he proceeded to throw her away from the door entrance before making a bolt for the exit. As he rushed through the ship, occasionally shoving or shooting Cerberus staff with his side arm, Miranda was close behind as she barked orders into her omni-tool while throwing additional biotic attacks at the escaping turian.
"Vakarian, I've been compromised. I've managed to find and collect multiple files we could pick through to predict Cerberus' next move, and I'm trying to make my way out of the enemy camp."

"I'll try to contact the administrator, maybe get some help from him. For now, you're on your own, Spectre Arterius. Vakarian out," the commander responded.

Saren continued to curse under his breath when he returned to the cargo bay when heavy fire forced him to roll into cover. From there, he was able to fire rounds at the Cerberus staff.

"If you really want to believe yourselves to be superior, you should've stayed in your system!" he taunted.

He unleashed a few biotic shockwaves to clear a path. Before making his way back out, he tossed a grenade behind him, keeping in mind Miranda was still close behind. A few more rounds grazed his barriers as he saw Lawson not too far behind, attempting to wear down his barriers from a distance with her SMG. Narrowly, he shot down a few more approaching soldiers as he ran through the open. "Dammit! These bastards are persistent!" he cursed as he quickly threw back a grenade.

The resulting explosion may have decimated the surrounding soldiers, but Miranda shielded herself with her biotic field.

Seeing the opening, Saren jumped out of cover and continued to run, looking for any other form of escape. He knew Cerberus would have scout parties deployed, so chances were there was one still parked on the ground. He quickly peered into the next cargo hold only to pull himself back as he was greeted by a heavy mech. Taking a few extra seconds to breath, he biotically charged to the cover provided by an inactive APC. It would have to suffice. Quickly jumping in, he checked to see if no one else was inside before rushing up to the driver's seat. Quickly starting the vehicle, the controls were relatively easy to learn as he unintentionally ran down the heavy mech, driving backwards. Hitting the gas, he drove forward like a madman.

"Vakarian, I've found an escape option. Hold your fire on the lone APC approaching. I repeat, hold your fire o—"

As the vehicle traveled over a light bump in the terrain, the suspension overreacted, throwing his head painfully against the low ceiling. As he clung onto his head plates painfully and clenched his teeth, he could hear Shepard's voice.

"Saren! What's going on? Do you require a pickup?" Robin called over the com-link.

"N-no, I'm fine! I just had a light bump. It should be fi—" he was once again cut off as the vehicle entered a small dip before launching into the air on the other end. Saren had encountered quite a few horrors throughout his life, but nothing quite matched the apex terror of trying to drive a foreign vehicle, "just having some problems being accustomed to this…piece of scrap metal."

As the vehicle touched back down again, he struggled with the steering wheel, trying to return to a straight path as the slightest turn of the vehicle would easily result in over-steering.

"Alright, I'll be escaping in an enemy vehicle, although chances are they'll have caught up to me by the time I manage to return. Out."

Spirits, why did humans have to design their combat vehicles to be so hard to be accustomed to?

Miranda watched with disappointment as the lone Specter clumsily drove off into the distance, followed closely by friendly-controlled M35 Makos.
"Oh, damn it," she grumbled, "you're not getting away next time, Arterius."
Saren barely managed to outrun Cerberus, but he still had to deliver the files to Garrus. He sighed with relief at the sight of the others. Calmly he put his foot off the gas to calmly let the vehicle grind to a halt before exiting. He considered himself a moderately good driver in armored vehicles, yet his performance in the Human-designed tank was absolutely abysmal. Climbing out slowly, he felt a lingering sense of motion sickness as he approached Garrus to hand off the OSD.

"Here. Don't lose it," Saren advised, "I'm not getting another copy."

Garrus took the OSD and stashed it into his concealed pocket.

"You look like hell, Saren. What happened to you? Did they poison you?" Garrus asked, beckoning to a field medic.

"No," Saren shook his head, "I just had a struggle with a poorly designed hunk of scrap metal I'm seriously struggling to call a vehicle."

Robin recognized the APC Saren returned in. Like all the other vehicles used by the Cerberus troops, they were the same model of Makos used back on Earth with the exception of the Cerberus colors being used instead.

"I had a run-in with Miranda, but I didn't have the chance to finish her off before I caught too much attention," Saren continued.

Robin couldn't help but sigh.

"Well, I guess we'll get her next time," she reassured the Spectre, "especially when we have other things to take care of."

Miranda didn't exactly feel comfortable with how the mission played out. Even if Robin hadn't intervened, she didn't like the sudden change in plans mere hours before the operation began. Originally, they were there to put pressure on the local colony administrator in such a way that he would accept the mining team's terms and initiate procedures. However, the Illusive Man felt that it would be more efficient and send a stronger message if they forced the local populace off planet that Cerberus was a force to be reckoned with. While she was for the advancement of the human race, she didn't feel the need to achieve such through interfering with other races' affairs, at least not to the level of threatening entire civilian populaces. She couldn't help but feel some sense of relief when Commander Vakarian had stopped the deployment of the warheads in the reserves.

Finally, her monitor buzzed with an incoming call. The Illusive Man's face showed up on screen.

"They knew we were coming," she said, keeping a level tone, "I don't know how, I've been checking our systems for leaks and bugs, and I've been running checks on the remaining personnel."

"I see," the Cerberus leader replied between a huff of tobacco, "still, we must carry on. Stand by for your next orders. I've got a few calls to make."

As the screen went black, she couldn't help but lean back and question his leadership. Did he really know what he was doing?

"That just can't be right," Miranda muttered to herself.
As far as she knew, Miranda reminisced on the memories of when the Illusive Man took her and her sister in eight years ago. Well, they were trying to avoid their father at that time and since they had no mother to look forward to, joining Cerberus seemed like a good idea at the time. While Miranda overlooked the hologram and watched as Commander Vakarian's forces pushed Cerberus back away from the reserve, a question came to her mind: What would she have to explain to her twenty-year old self?

Still, chances were that she and her sister would be better off switching sides in this conflict before the end. Whatever the Illusive Man was planning could only spell disaster. She opened up a message to send to her sister. She began to write her own thoughts on the crisis when she suddenly stopped herself. She didn't know how close an eye the Illusive Man kept on his employees and she couldn't risk showing her true colors, at least until any doubts she had came to full fruition.

She started typing:

{Oriana,
How've you been, recently? I'd like to discuss some matters in private. When would be the best time for you? I'll try to make it to whatever time you feel is best. Just watch your back, okay? Something feels off at Cerberus.

Love,
Miranda}

After Miranda sent the message, she noticed another message from Admiral Hackett. When she took some time to read it, the message reminded her that she still had to arrest Robin Shepard and her friends for treason. Miranda couldn't help but envy Robin. She didn't even think this young Shepard would be brave enough to defy Cerberus when the operative herself couldn't do so. She then noticed she had another message from Toby Dunn himself. It was a brief, incoherent mess reminding her that the mission failure had left a few of his financial backers upset at the delayed return on investment so far. She simply huffed at the statement before shutting off her monitor. Would it have been too endearing for the Illusive Man to find someone who was obedient, abided Cerberus views, and didn't rely on his gut instinct like the ape Dunn was?

Back at the colony, reinforcements arrived to properly dispose of the explosives Cerberus failed to use while Robin, Garrus and Saren met up with the administrator.

"I just sent word back to the Hierarchy about the recent attack. They're sending additional security personnel and a disposal team to see to it the elements used on those warheads are safely taken offworld. I greatly appreciate the help you've provided today," the administrator disclosed as the three entered.

Robin couldn't help but smile.

"You're welcome," she nodded.

"Is it alright if I temporarily use the long-range telecoms?" Garrus asked, "Spectre Arterius managed to salvage some files concerning today's attack as well as possible future leads."

"Of course. But make it quick. I'd like to further discuss prevention of such incidents in the future," the administrator replied.

Saren nodded and placed his hand on his chest.
"I can make arrangements for such with the Council. No doubt the Asari Republics and Salarian Union are equally concerned and would like to implement countermeasures."

Garrus nodded.

"Very well," Garrus replied, "we'll be back."

He and Robin left the room to make their report in the next room. The sooner they can confirm the completion of the mission, the better. Activating the transmitter, Garrus initiated the call before a projection of Councilor Sparatus appeared.

{ I assume the mission was a success, Commander Vakarian?}

"Yes, Councilor. Saren had also infiltrated enemy territory and has possibly given us our next objective. Currently, he's discussing arrangements with the colony administrator concerning future colony safety," Garrus answered.

{Good. May I ask what they were trying to accomplish?} the councilor further pressed.

"They were trying to kill the local populace and force the survivors to evacuate by detonating the reserve. Cerberus scanned the planet surface, finding a heavy concentration in ore cavities located below the surface. Detonating them with heavy explosives would render a large portion of the nearby territories unusable for agriculture. I'll send the files myself when I return to the Aran'tar," Garrus explained, holding up the OSD.

{I see,} Sparatus commented, {this is most concerning, I'll be discussing this with the rest of the Council. Good work, commander. Return to the Citadel so we can plan our next move.}

The call ended, and the two made their way back outside of the office. All they would have to do now was wait for Saren to finish and prepare to leave the colony.

In the conference room of an Alliance ship, Anderson called over Keagan and Brendan Shepard. At that moment, Brendan was browsing through a news feed of a few States preparing to vote in favor of passing bills that would outlaw protesting while some of the US Senators discussed on impeaching Toby Dunn. Once he set foot into the conference room, Brendan shared the news feeds to his sister's page before shutting off his omni-tool.

Barely willing to make eye contact with both Shepards, Anderson attempted to comfort the two.

"I can understand that the two of you are concerned for her well being, but I've been forced to keep a low profile," Anderson said, "I can't constantly keep an eye on her with the possibility any knowledge of where she is will be compromised by Cerberus. I'm barely lucky I've managed to keep this meeting confidential."

"At least the Council has Commander Vakarian looking after her," Keagan replied.

Keagan, Brendan and Anderson sat down at the table.

"So, what have we got?" Brendan asked.

"While most of the friends she brought along are all on the Citadel, she's been assigned as an ambassador to help mitigate relations as they currently are. However, she's still in danger as Cerberus continues to hound her at every corner. I believe what she revealed, and I believe Cerberus will only drive us collectively into the ground," Anderson explained, pulling up a projection of the Aran'tar,
"we could provide her indirect help lest we catch Cerberus’ attention ourselves."

Brendan and Keagan examined the projection.

"That's the ship that took her off planet," the general noted.

Anderson nodded in confirmation.

"It's the ship under Vakarian's command and the means of Robin's transportation. As long as she's on board or on the Citadel, she's safe, but I wouldn't be surprised if Cerberus figured out how to reach her."

"So what about the rest of us?" Keagan asked.

"I'm sorry if I have to stall your reunion, General, but the two of us need to be back here on Earth if we are going to at least prevent the outbreak of war. It may take Earth some time to finally surpass such strong xenophobia, but the least we can do is stop the one party that is pushing for this conflict: Cerberus," Anderson explained, "which then brings my point to you, Brendan."

The Lieutenant Shepard nodded.

"Sir?"

"You're our hands and eyes in the field. I know I've been talking about your promotion for some time now, and I think it's damn well time you receive it, Anderson announced, "I'm promoting you to commander, and I'm assigning you command of the Normandy. Take care of her."

Brendan responded by standing from his chair and giving Anderson a salute.

"Thank you, sir. What now?"

"This is important," Anderson started, "while Earth is still in the shape it is, you must remain discrete and maintain deniability. Keep a low profile on social media, contact us using a scrambled frequency, and keep the number of people you interact with who are connected to Earth to a minimum. You'll be joining Vakarian in a joint operation, and provide him intel and sabotage Cerberus operations to give him the openings he needs. The actions you show out there are also meant to be a sign that humans can be trusted, but are still adjusting to the wider spectrum of things."

Brendan took only a moment to think over the instructions. While he was aware of the risk he was about to take, he at least understood that his sister would be counting on him.

"I understand fully sir. When do I move out?" Brendan asked.

"We'll be setting off to the Arcturus Station shortly," Anderson answered, referring to himself and Keagan, "after you drop both of us off, you will move out to Citadel space."

"We'll be picking up a new pilot at Arcturus as well. Remember to make full use of the stealth systems on this ship. I know this is plenty to be throwing at you given you haven't been a commander for even two minutes, but we're against the clock. And if this costs me, just remember that I love you and your sister dearly," Keagan added.

Brendan nodded.

"You too, dad," he replied.

Departing from the Sol System, the Normandy arrived in the Arcturus Stream, where they docked at
the Alliance controlled station. As Anderson and his father set out to finalize any paperwork to confirm Brendan's change in position. He stared out the window facing the Normandy, admiring its sleek form. It was significantly smaller than any frigate he'd seen in the Alliance Navy, and more resembled a Turian cruiser, but it was faster, more compact, and needed fewer crewmates to maintain it.

"Well, Robin," the newly promoted Brendan thought to himself, "what have we gotten ourselves into?"

Brendan snapped out of his thoughts when he saw James Vega approach him out of the corner of his eye and stand next to him.

"So, Vega," Brendan blurted, "you here to enjoy the view?"

"The ship you mean?" Vega started, "well, it certainly stands out. It's a prototype, no?"

"Yeah, one of a kind. I presume you're part of the new crew coming aboard?" Brendan prompted.

"Yeah. I was on a list alongside a few other marines and the pilot. So, I presume we'll be kicking some Cerberus ass, Loco?" Vega returned.

Brendan nodded.

"Robin Hood's not the only one who has the fate of the galaxy in her hands," he answered.
After the Aran'tar returned to the Citadel, Liara, Tali, Wrex and Thane waited outside the Presidium while Garrus, Robin and Saren headed into the Council Chambers. Approaching the councilors, the trio were initially greeted by Tevos.

"The three of you have performed admirably within the last couple of days," Tevos began, "however, the scale of the Cerberus threat is no apparent and very alarming."

Saren folded his arms.

"I'm not surprised," Garrus replied.

"Unfortunately," Councilor Valern continued, "we can't afford to spread our forces so thin across multiple fronts to defend them against a concentrated Cerberus attack. Even with fleets in nearby systems, this recent attack would've succeeded if it weren't for reinforcements on-site."

"Logically, it would be advisable to directly cut them down from the source, but going to Earth or wherever in Alliance territory to root them out would be inadvisable," Sparatus concluded, "not without creating a trans-species incident."

"So in other words," Robin clarified, "we cut off their resources?"

"If it means gradually forcing them into the open, yes," Sparatus answered, "currently, they simply have too many financial backers, company fronts, and manufacturers both in and out of Alliance space."

"So we continuously cut down their current numbers and starve them of resources to the point they cannot continue to fight or are forced to do something stupid and predictable as a last resort," Saren established, "we have a new lead and will begin acting accordingly, Councilors."

Saren turned his head towards Garrus and nodded.

"Good luck to all of you," Tevos proclaimed, "we're counting on your actions to prevent such grave outcomes. This meeting is adjourned."

Upon cue, Garrus, Saren and Robin turned to leave the Council Chambers. The young Shepard couldn't help but lean towards Garrus and embrace his arm.

"We may get this right, Shepard," Garrus purred in an effort to comfort his mate, "I know we will."

They waited for the elevator to return to the top of the Citadel Tower, though Saren thought of something.

"Excuse my curiosity, but what exactly are your plans once this crisis is over?" he asked.

Garrus couldn't help but scratch his mandible.

"I haven't thought much," Garrus admitted before he turned his head towards Robin, "Shepard, what about you?"

"It would be really great if I got a pet turtle," Robin smiled.

"I was talking more in terms of your relationship," Saren corrected, sarcastically clearing his throat,
"I mean you two haven't been very conservative with the hormones that are almost visibly wafting off your bodies."

Robin couldn't help but shudder.

"Uh, Garrus?" she stammered, "what did he mean by that?"

"Well," Garrus started slowly, "in relation to humans, our bodies produce significantly more hormones to signify emotion. In tune with our sense, it's a form of behavioral recognition among our own kind."

By now, Saren's mandibles were spread wide apart in a smile.

"Is that all, Vakarian? You sure you haven't missed anything?"

Garrus nodded.

As the elevator arrived, Saren straightened up.

"No need to worry about it too much," Saren concluded, "who you fuck is who you fuck. I'm not going to fuss about it too much."

"I suppose we've got enough of a lead that we can take leave for now," Garrus shrugged nervously.

He hadn't thought that turian hormones wouldn't be problematic in a turian-human relationship. Still, they stepped into the elevator and waited as the elevator descended to the base level.

"Maybe we could take a few days off, rest with your friends?" Garrus suggested as the elevator doors slid open.

Robin nodded lightly.

"I know there's a lot going on," she admitted, "and it's been a while since we had a night together as friends."

Saren strode along calmly before bidding farewell to the others for the day.

"We've all earned ourselves a little break. Have fun."

Robin and Garrus strolled through the Presidium and met up with Liara, Tali, Wrex and Thane.

"So what's our next step?" Wrex asked, still leaning over a railing as he watched the duo approach.

"We're moving towards starving Cerberus of assets and resources. However, we felt it would be good to rest up before we continue onward," Garrus answered simply.

"We did just get out of a fire fight. It's only fair we spend some time off between sessions of nearly getting our heads blown off," Tali agreed.

"What did you have in mind?" Thane asked.

Robin placed her hand behind her head.

"I was thinking of hanging out with my friends," Robin offered, "want to come along?"

Liara's eyes lit up at the proposition.
"That's a sound proposition. Will they have enough room for us?"

Robin tilted her head to the side and placed her finger on her chin while Garrus scratched his mandible.

"I can recall my friends and I fitting into each of our apartments together," she replied, "but I guess it's worth a shot adding a few more guests to the mix."

"Sounds fine by me," Wrex commented, "I'll be fetching my civies then."

And with that, Garrus led Robin and his squad out of the Presidium. Returning to the ship, the group quickly put aside their equipment, gathered their personal belongings and left for Joker's apartment. After Robin knocked on the door, Joker was surprised when he saw the whole group waiting outside.

"Hey! Robin! Guys! She's back!"

Kasumi, Jack, Kaidan and Ashley turned their heads towards the front door just as Robin, Garrus, Liara, Tali, Thane and Wrex stepped inside.

"Hey, guys!" Robin chirped, "how are you doing?"

Kaidan and Ashley exchanged glances before returning their focus to Robin.

"Kaidan and I are settling well in C-Sec," Ashley answered.

Garrus couldn't help but chuckle at the prospect.

"I assume that's going well for you?" he asked.

Ashley nodded.

"In the meantime," Kasumi mentioned, "Joker found the latest vid making fun of Dunn. Want to see it?"

As everyone was brought into the living room to watch on the telescreen Toby Dunn playing along with a young…dancer…singer? Some sort of performer. He couldn't be sure, but as the young dancer's moves were much more refined, Toby was the acting equivalent of a child left to perform among a number of professionals. Needless to say, his singing was atrocious as well. Garrus was wheezing within the first few seconds of watching the performance.

"What…in Spirit's name is tha—" Garrus exclaimed between gasps.

Garrus couldn't finish the sentence as he burst into laughter. As the vid progressed, Robin and her friends couldn't help but burst into laughter at such a ridiculous act.

"Oh my god," Joker laughed, "he looks like an idiot!"

To add more to the ridiculousness, everyone in the living room noticed Toby Dunn was clad in a skimpy outfit that even strippers wouldn't wear.

"How much do you wanna bet the administration made him do this as a dare?" Jack joked.

"Whatever the dare was, the bosh'tet didn't need much incentive to do it," Tali snorted.

By the time the vid ended, Robin and her friends took a few moments to calm down from the
hilarity. Even Thane, who had a constant somber vibe surrounding him, couldn't help but break a smile.

"I suppose it would be redundant to ask, but are there any acts of self-embarrassment he's committed prior to this?"

"That's somewhat been the point up until now," Kaidan answered between laughs, "those who aren't his supporters have been treating him as a running joke as opposed to an actual politician."

Robin became calm and leaned back.

"It's only more ridiculous if you count the times he's whined over critics mocking him," Robin mentioned.

"I'm famished," Wrex announced, "what's your guys' plan for dinner?"

Wrex stood from his seat, compelling Kasumi and Kaidan to do the same.

"Likewise, but I would not condone allowing Robin to retrieve the takeout again," Thane agreed.

Robin gave Thane a confused stare. Why did Garrus's squad seem to be encouraging her to stay put?

"How can you be so sure I won't get kidnapped again?" Robin pointed out.

"Maybe we should just go out? Strength in numbers I mean?" Kasumi suggested.

Garrus flexed his mandibles in a way a turian would smile.

"Even better," he replied.

After a ten minute walk through the wards, the group found a multi-species diner, lit up with neon and chrome. The eleven of them quickly came to an agreement and entered. Garrus was so busy looking at the environment that he barely noticed a voice in the crowd.

"Garrus? What are you doing here?"

His vision snapped back on the source before his eyes lit up with surprise.

"Solana?" he warbled.

To Garrus's left, Castis and Solana were also waiting for seats in the diner.

"I didn't think I'd still see you on the Citadel," he continued.

"C-Sec has its busy days as usual," Castis mused.

Moments later, Robin, Garrus and their friends found a table large enough to seat all eleven of them while Solana and Castis found another empty table close by.

"So, how's life been off of the Citadel?" Solana asked her brother's team after placing their order.

"Quite a rush, actually," Tali answered, "Cerberus doesn't play easy, and we've been fighting for every meter we can get."

"It's been physically taxing," Thane admitted.

Even Wrex, the most physically robust member of the group nodded in agreement.
"Fortunately, we're all still alive," Garrus added in an attempt to raise the mood, "how have your lives been?"

Robin took her time to read through the menu like her friends did.

"Relatively quiet, if I were to be honest," Castis started, "nothing new at C-Sec for a while, with the exception of a few bits of paperwork or a small bust."

"I'm still getting used to the title of ambassador," Robin added, "in case you want to know."

"Good to see you're making your way up in this Galaxy," Solana complimented, "it's astonishing you've accomplished so much in so little time."

Robin couldn't help but smile.

"Thanks," she replied, "I was hoping that by exposing Cerberus, I would instigate a rebellion against Toby Dunn, but it turned out to be a bigger involvement than I thought."

"Yeah, most of us did," Joker added, "we thought maybe we could make it clear Toby was up to no good, and we found out Cerberus has every last dirty finger and toe in every pie on Earth the hard way."

Castis let out an enthusiastic hum. As the others continued to discuss life on the Citadel, Garrus reached over to Robin's hand, grasping it gently.

"Did you ever think either of you would be here?" he asked.

Robin shrugged.

"It would've been nice to visit the Citadel," she answered, "I hadn't thought of living here, though."

"I can understand. Looking back at it, it all happened so quickly," Garrus replied.

He paused for a moment.

"Where do you see us...our relationship a year from now?" he continued, "I mean, Saren's had me thinking for a bit..."

"At the moment, I'd like to at least have our relationship accepted by the Alliance," Robin shrugged.

"I don't mean to force you or anything, but...I just want you to be happy. I know it sounds cliche, but knowing that you'd be safe by my side would bring me peace," Garrus finished.

Robin nodded in acknowledgement and brought her turian boyfriend's hand closer to her face, encouraging him to cup it.

"That's all I ask," he proceeded to close the gap between them for the kiss.

"Garrus! You didn't tell me you were dating again!" Solana had unexpectedly drawn the group's attention towards the scene between the two.

Robin and Garrus broke off the kiss and returned the stare to their witnesses.

"W-What's wrong with a cross-species relationship, anyway?" Robin blurted, "it doesn't really bother me."
"Relax, you look closely enough, interspecies relationships are actually very common," Wrex dismissed.

Robin felt herself relax at those words, but she didn't respond.

"But yeah, you two would make perfect match!" Tali encouraged.

While she had picked up subtle queues, she hadn't been sure about the authenticity of the relationship between the commander and ambassador. The silence broke when the waiter arrived with their drink orders.

"I…uh…thanks guys…" Garrus stuttered as the waiter handed him his drink.

He quick exchanged a nervous glance with Robin, who responded with a gentle smile. After taking a sip of her drink, she turned on her omni-tool and eyed a notification from her older brother. She opened the notification and examined the news feeds he sent her. Brendan had sent her two articles: one discussing the Coffee Party's attempt to impeach Dunn and a series of bills senators were trying to pass that would work as legal riot suppression until the crisis ended.

"Something wrong?" Garrus asked?

Robin was still bewildered generally by the message. When she left Earth and had all her social media counts suspended, she could do little else than expect the worst to happen to her family. She continued to feel a mixed sensation from the articles combined with the relief that her brother was possibly still alive.

"Well," Robin replied, "I know my brother's still in fighting shape. He's as much of a political activist as I am."

"Any idea where he is right now?" Garrus could always use another ally.

Robin shrugged before she took another sip of her beverage.

"I'm not sure," she answered, "I know I last saw him with my dad at Shanxi shortly before we left."

"Why is he trying to contact you now? Is he in trouble?" Garrus asked.

"Heads up, guys! Food's here!" Kasumi called out as the waiter approached them.

Garrus' temporary worries were quickly put aside as he suddenly remembered the lingering hunger he had earlier.

"Anyways, on a tangent, he won't mind us, will he?" Garrus asked as he received his order.

Robin simply shook her head as she dug in. She knew her brother was open-minded to this topic, so chances were he wouldn't mind if she committed herself to someone outside of her own species.
Sibling Reunion

Some days have passed and as far as Robin could tell, she, Garrus and their friends have rested well and were now anticipating to go through with the next mission. After she tied her short hair into a half-ponytail and slipped on her boots, she sent a text message to Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan, Ashley and Joker on the possibility of them joining up with her involvement before she stepped out of the apartment and made her way through the wards. As she walked through the wards, she received a ping on her omni-tool. Bringing it out, she found a message sent from Saren:

{I've got a plan for this next mission. Are you prepared? When and where would you like to discuss further?}

Robin took a moment to read the message before she responded:

{I was going to meet with Garrus and my friends at the Presidium. Maybe you could meet with us there?}

It wasn't too long before Saren replied with:

{Sounds good. I'm just about finished talking with the executor concerning security. I'll even contact Nihlus and Victus as well.}

Robin responded with another text:

{I won't be long.}

Putting away her omni-tool, she made her way to a taxi and directed the driver to drop her off at the Presidium. Ahead, she could see Garrus, Tali, Liara, Wrex, Thane, Joker, Kaidan, Ashley, Kasumi and Jack waiting for her.

"Hey, guys!" Robin called out while she waved her hand.

Robin sprinted towards the group and stopped in front of Garrus.

"About time! We almost thought you'd been taken from the streets again!" Wrex greeted.

"That joke has already run its course, you bosh'tet," Tali chastised, rolling her eyes.

"We're all still here, right?" Joker asked, "so what are we waiting for?"

"He's right," Jack inserted, "Cerberus isn't going to kick their own asses. Let's go."

Robin didn't say anything for a moment, but she spotted a nearby bench and sat down on it.

"Are you sure you want to leave now?" Robin reminded, "Saren, Nihlus and Victus haven't arrived yet."

"Saren's bringing Nihlus and Victus for this mission?" Garrus asked, "well, he's got quite the operation."

"Pretty much," Robin nodded.

"I see. Did he say when any of them would arrive?" Garrus mused.
Robin shook her head. She wasn't sure what else to tell Garrus when out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a familiar face with the same hair color as hers, yet he was clad in N7 armor while he approached a nearby patrol guard.

"Excuse me, sir," he asked, "but where can I find the immigration office?"

The C-Sec officer simply pointed down the Presidium.

"It's down that way at about five hundred meters," he replied, "if you'll be moving onto the Citadel, you better have a clean schedule. There's plenty of paperwork and hoops you'll have to jump through before you can even start considering where you'll live."

The N7 soldier placed his hand behind his head before he nodded.

"Thank you, sir," he smiled, "I'll look into it right away."

Still, Robin locked eyes onto the N7 soldier and stood from the bench.

"Brendan?!" she warbled.

The N7 soldier glanced over his shoulder to see who was calling him.

"Robin Hood?" he exclaimed.

The two rushed to each other to hug in reunification, which drew attention from the others.

"Robin, I'm so glad you're still safe," Brendan breathed.

"I didn't think you'd set foot in the Citadel," Robin smiled, "what brings you here?"

"Dad and Admiral Anderson sent me to help," Brendan answered, "while I'm generally supposed to lie low, I'll still be providing support and intel for dad. I suppose you don't mind the support, Commander Vakarian?"

"Without a doubt," Garrus greeted, offering his hand, "we'll take all the help we can get. Welcome aboard, Commander Shepard."

While Brendan released Robin from his embrace and shook hands with Garrus, Robin couldn't help but stiffen and stammer nervously.

"W-Wait, commander?" she paused.

"Yeah, I just got the promotion, too," Brendan clarified, thumbing the small, newly painted rank on his left shoulder pad, "I was also given command of a prototype stealth frigate. Anderson's been suggesting it for a while now."

Robin couldn't help but smile at Brendan's answer.

"Well, that's good to hear!" she chirped, "should we wait for you or do you want to join in what we're about to discuss?"

Before Brendan could answer, Thane spotted Saren, Nihlus and Victus entering the Presidium.

"The paperwork and reunion will have to wait," Thane interrupted, "I'm aware you've just arrived, but we're already on our way out. Will you be joining us?"
"That's why I'm here," Brendan nodded and shrugged.

Robin rolled her eyes.

"Ok, if that's what you want," she replied.

With that, Robin sprinted over to Saren, Nihlus and Victus which caught her attention.

"Right on time, guys!" Robin chirped.

Saren took a moment to focus his eyes on Brendan before he returned his gaze to Robin. The turian Spectre beckoned Brendan to approach him.

"Uh, hi," Brendan stuttered.

"Excuse me, but I don't recall having met you before," Saren started, eyes scanning the N7, "you are?"

Brendan stiffened for a moment before he saluted.

"Commander Brendan Shepard, sir," Brendan answered.

The elder turian simply nodded in approval.

"Spectre Saren Arterius. At least we're off to a good start."

Brendan glanced at the other two.

"So what's the first mission for today?" he asked.

"With the current hold Cerberus has on your homeworld, striking them will be very difficult without fueling their cause and starting intergalactic war," Saren explained, "our best chance to slowly weaken them would be to cut their physical resources they currently have, namely resource refineries and manufacturing of the equipment they use in field."

Brendan nodded in agreement before he focused his eyes on Robin.

"I guess there's some disagreements within the Alliance," Robin shrugged.

"You could say that," Brendan agreed.

General Victus picked up where Saren left off.

"We know from the information you initially leaked that Cerberus is supported by both a series of front companies and private financiers who are investing in Cerberus because they believe in their cause," Victus explained, "from what Spectre Arterius retrieved from your most recent mission, we've been able to distinguish one of the companies and where it's located. Dr. Lawson had her eye on quite a few out-going manufacturing orders, and I've been able to provide the man-power to figure out where the orders were going."

Brendan nodded in acknowledgment and placed his finger on his chin while Liara, Garrus, Tali, Wrex, Thane, Jack, Kaidan, Joker, Ashley and Kasumi approached the Shepard siblings, the Spectres and the turian general.

"I don't think I met her," Brendan pointed out.
"I did," Robin interjected, "and she shot me below the ribs when she tried to use our mom as bait." 

Brendan couldn't help but shudder at the memories of the Shanxi incident.

"We also know that she directly answers to someone in the upper echelons of the Cerberus organization. Her capture would prove to be very beneficial for combating them," Nihlus inserted.

"So while we're mostly down to blowing up factories and capturing resource mines and refineries, if we get to her, we just might have a shot at ending this conflict a bit faster," Brendan concluded.

After Robin mentioned the Cerberus Officer that nearly killed her, Brendan now felt he had some physical beef with Lawson.

"Precisely. As for the general, he'll be providing an additional attachment to Vakarian's, and what I can only assume are your troops to help demolish the site. I assume we're all informed?" Nihlus finished.

"Yes, sir," Brendan saluted.

Saren nodded in approval.

"Then we should get going," Victus advised.

As all the converging parties made their way to the docks, Brendan approached Nihlus.

"I think I remember seeing you previously, but I don't recall properly introducing each other. May I ask who you are?" Brendan asked.

"The name is Spectre Nihlus Kryik. I was Saren's protege for several years before graduating from the Spectre Academy here on the Citadel," Nihlus greeted.

Brendan smiled before returning the favor.

"I'm sure you know plenty about me already, but I'm Brendan. Robin is my sister."

"Ah, yes," Nihlus mused, "I remember your sister's the one who kicked the hornet's nest."

Brendan couldn't help but grin at the response.

"Yes, she did," he mused, "she's been a bit of a troublemaker over the years."

Robin couldn't help but groan as she dug her fingers into her hair in a gentle grip.

"Oh come on, Brendan!" she muttered.

"What? I thought that would've been a compliment!" Brendan laughed.

Robin couldn't help but blush as she embraced herself to Garrus. He decided to take the opportunity to approach Brendan with a slightly sensitive topic.

"Excuse me…Commander Shepard? I just wanted to ask about your disposition towards other species."

Brendan couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

"I don't have any particular beef against any races, so if it makes you feel better about it, call me
Brendan. No need to worry that I'm a Cerberus spy or anything."

"No, that's not so much the issue Co— Brendan. I was just wondering if you knew about your sister's feelings towards...I mean, she became easily...adapted to Citadel life...rather quickly," Garrus continued to stumble around with his words as he rushed to think of a way to suggest Robin's xenophilia.

Brendan took a moment to think while he scratched his head. He then took note of his sister embracing the turian commander.

"I must say," Brendan commented, "Robin Hood's a lucky girl."

Garrus sighed with relief.

"Just knowing you're fine with our relationship is a load off my shoulders."

Soon, Brendan, Garrus, Robin, their friends, Victus and the turian Spectres stood before the sleek stealth ship sitting at one of the docks, Robin's face lighting up in amazement.

"Wow," Robin gasped, "Brendan, is that your ship?!"

Brendan nodded.

"Yeah," Brendan answered, "that is the SSV Normandy SR-2."

"I'll see all of you ground-side," Saren told Victus and Nihlus as they continued down the docks to where Victus' capital ship was.

"You're not coming with us, Kryik?" Garrus asked the younger Spectre.

"Not with Saren aboard. We were lucky we didn't tear each other's plates off back at the Presidium. Putting us on the same ship would generally be bad," Nihlus returned, waving his hand to dismiss the offer.

"Speak for yourself, Nihlus!" Saren hissed back, "don't make me remind you it was you who nearly got m—."

Saren was drowned out by the engines of another ship coming in to land.

"What was that? I can't hear you!" Nihlus yelled back sarcastically, "you'll have to tell me when we get there!"

Saren shook his head as the two departed from the main group.

"You may have trouble following our last bit, Ambassador, but Nihlus is the sort of individual who would break the rules for no other reason than to be proud of it."

Robin shrugged before she patted Brendan on the shoulder.

"I'll meet you at the facility, Brendan," Robin chirped before she boarded the Aran'tar with Garrus and Saren.

As the trio boarded the Aran'tar, Garrus began to reflect how he physically felt some level of pressure now that Brendan was around. Worse, he wasn't able to self-diagnose the exact source of the sensation.
"It sure was nice to meet your brother, Robin," he started.

Robin nodded in agreement.

"If anything," Robin replied, "I kinda feel glad we found help in some unexpected places."

As each ship was granted access by Citadel flight control to leave the station, each went through the Mass Relay one by one, with Brendan's Normandy going first to scout out their destination, followed shortly by Garrus' Aran'tar, and finally the cavalry aboard Victus' ship.

"Alright, while Brendan and his Normandy were not initially part of the plan, he still fits in," Saren started, "his group and ours will be heading down to the planet surface to infiltrate and disable the facility's anti-air batteries. This will allow Victus to land with his own detachment of forces to help disable the factory and destroy any Cerberus supplies that haven't been shipped out or are being stored. Also, we'll look over any databases we find to start pulling on Cerberus' network."

"Sounds like a plan," Garrus nodded.

"We'll be deploying in roughly half an hour. I'll be in the barracks, preparing to touch down," Saren finished before turning away from the two to disappear off somewhere else in the ship.

Garrus sighed.

"I'm ready whenever you are."

Robin didn't say anything for a short moment, yet she nodded. She stepped over to a storage closet and pulled out the set of armor Aria provided for her. Damn. Now he was mentally kicking himself. Of all the things they could've done during their brief break between the last mission and the current one, he could've bought Robin a better set of armor.

"Robin, do you think you would need a better suit at some point?" Garrus asked.

Robin examined the suit in her hands in a moment of silence.

"What's wrong with this one?" she objected.

"All things considered, the materials used in it are very cheap. Sure, they're light, but they won't last long once your shields are down. Even if you do like that suit, I should at least buy you a shield upgrade," Garrus explained.

Robin set the armor onto the table and knocked on it with her knuckles.

"Is it possible to give this armor stronger material?" Robin asked.

Garrus nodded.

"There are armor smiths on the Citadel," he suggested, "if they don't replace damaged segments, they can reuse older suits and replace all the redundant components. They'll even paint it if you want to go that far."

Robin smiled before she grasped her turian boyfriend's hand.

"I'll consider it," Robin nodded, "thanks!"
Upon arrival, Brendan and Garrus' teams both exited onto a plateau overlooking the harsh, dry, largely lifeless landscape of a mesa. Unless one were to look very closely, the planet would appear to be a dead rock, either from orbit or the low atmosphere. The ground was dotted with plants and occasional rodents that had evolved to rely on very little water. The day was slowly waning as the system's sun began to sink in the sky. All around them were other plateaus that stretched on into the distance, creating an infinite maze out of the valleys it formed for one to get lost indefinitely in. From the opposite side of the plateau, Brendan and his own team caught up with the other group.

"Right, I'm seeing the desert, but where's the factory?" Garrus muttered to himself.

"Still a klick and a half north from here," Saren answered, looking through a set of turian binoculars, "by the looks of things, they've built it into that plateau over there. All I'm seeing from here is a couple of bland warehouses with a small base for what are supposed to be troops."

In the distance, there were a few buildings outlined by the horizon. Two were big, boxy, metallic structures with roofs, and the third was a small, bunker-like building, poking not the full height of an average human above the ground with antennae sticking from the top.

"We'll start our way down from our position and enter the valleys," Garrus ordered, "make your way to that next plateau quickly in case Cerberus has sentries out in the open. Make sure your visors are set to pick up electrical signals. Once we get there, we'll find a side opening and get in. There's no way Cerberus would only rely on one door and a couple of parking garages to get in and out, so keep your wits about you."

"Copy that," Liara nodded.

As a sharpshooter himself, Garrus had come to learn that wide open areas like the one they were currently traversing was very dangerous. He ordered the use of electrical scanners to at least find any external sensory arrays, exits, defenses, or mines used by the manufacturing plant. Furthermore, he couldn't help but wonder if he had failed to notice any equipment at the rim of the plateau like security cameras, and now they were clumsily walking into a trap. Then again, it would be beneficial if they did lure any attention outward so they could make their way inward through any unseen openings. He began to slightly feel safer when they reached the edge of the plateau, to see what appeared to be a large number of hangar doors lining the outside of the rock wall.

"Here we are. Tali, see if you can find anything to get us in through. We'll cover you," Garrus ordered the quarian.

Not too long after Tali began to get to work, a hatch outside by the hangar doors began to click open, prompting everyone to get to cover. Shortly after, three men in Cerberus security armor climbed out.

"I'm telling you, man, I saw a line of Skullfaces and non-personnel making their way here."

"I'll see evidence, then we just might sound the alarm," what appeared to be a superior among the three replied.

"Maybe it was another lizard picking at the security cameras? We really sh—" the group walked around a few boulders keeping both teams out of their line of sight before being quickly riddled with shots.

"Alright, there's our entrance," Garrus started, "weapons free, and start looking for a security center. If there are AA guns, we'll disable them before contacting Victus. Move out!"

"Got it," nodded Kaidan.
As they entered the base, the team split into groups of three with an equal distribution of power and ability among each to ensure that none would be overwhelmed by defending Cerberus forces. Taking point, Garrus moved in with Robin and Thane close behind him, walking up a set of stairs presented near their point of entrance. Up next, Brendan entered with Vega and Liara followed closely before breaking off down a corridor to the left. Saren was followed by Kaidan and Ashley, making their way down a set of stairs deeper into the factory. Wrex led Jack and Kasumi down a middle path, steering away from the paths the others took. All the others spread themselves thin behind those who had already entered.

Garrus' team entered a small room overlooking a portion of the factory floor. Down below, there were various lines constructing weapons, armor, and some bits of gear that they didn't even recognize yet. From the observation window, Robin could see Brendan, Vega, and Liara walking along a catwalk down below. Suddenly, Brendan and his companions were forced to take cover as they came under fire from a few security guards firing from a balcony across the room. Breaking the window, Garrus, Thane, and Robin fired upon the enemy squad to allow Brendan and the others to progress.

Meanwhile, Wrex looked cautiously back and forth for movement or doorways that weren't locked. Tapping an unlocked control panel, he stuck to cover before peering in to what looked like a barracks area for the workers and security. Jumping from cover, he was about to open fire with his shotgun when another biotic blast threw all opposition sharply against the wall or around the room. He looked to the source to see Jack hissing with a biotic aura.

"You're a bit slow, old man," Jack remarked.

Saren, Kaidan, and Ashley all entered what looked to be a dimly lit corridor leading into lab rooms full of prototypes and testing chambers. One room even held what looked to be a Mako frame with the canon replaced with a guided missile system and the wheels removed in favor for jet propulsion.

"Wow! Look at that thing!" Ashley muttered.

"Nice concept, but why jet propulsion instead?" Kaidan wondered aloud.

Saren found a datapad with notes describing the project. The prototype, deemed 'Hammerhead', was based upon the successful, but inflexible Mako model of APC. Along with solving the handling issues, the jet propulsion allowed the Hammerhead to reach areas that would otherwise be off limits to the Mako. The one glaring downside was that due to the limited strength of the Hammerhead, the vehicle needed to be light, resulting in the use of weaker barriers and armor. Saren simply put down the datapad in annoyance.

"Pathetic," Saren grumbled to himself.

Kaidan had his attention caught on what looked to be a Claymore shotgun with a bigger barrel, cooling fins, and a nuclear emblem on the side of the gun being held on a trigger pedestal down a long range with a used Mako and a few heavy mechs at the far other end of the range. Observing the control panel before him, there were a few nobs and dials for among a big red button simply labelled "fire". Pressing it, he observed the prototype weapon charge with a blinding light before launching a small projectile down range, incinerating all three targets in a horrifying, bright explosion. Having foolishly looked at the explosion, the blinding light caused him to tumble onto his back. As Ashley helped him to his feet, both got a view of Saren walking up to the testing range, mandibles hung
apart in a rare case of absolute terror.

"What in…?" he simply muttered.

After a moment, Saren turned his head towards Kaidan and Ashley.

"Was I not supposed to touch anything?" Kaidan warbled.

"What? Well, probably. However…" Saren stuttered before he reached to pick up a datapad documenting the project, "I know humans and krogan have had a history with weapons like these, but this is unlike anything I've seen on this scale. Let's keep going. If there are secrets down here, we shouldn't leave them untouched."

By then, Kaidan completely recovered, so Ashley released him from her grip.

"Copy that," Ashley nodded.

Brendan with his team of marines and Liara continued to push through the factory floor. While he initially hoped he wouldn't have to harm any civilians, those he did leave to run would return seconds later from a weapons stash from some observation office. As was the case of being with the brunt of his fighting force, he drew most of the attention from the others.

Garrus, Thane, and Robin made their way through the back corridors away from the factory, namely engines and maintenance with the occasional living quarter thrown in among the other. Thane and Robin used the close quarters much to their advantage to minimize the amount of damage they took and maximize their weapon effectiveness while Garrus controlled the fights down longer corridors. As they traveled deeper, they rose higher in the plateau as they followed the signs to the security control room. Just outside the door to their objective, Garrus passed Robin a fragmentation grenade to throw in subsequent to his own stun grenade. With little resistance to face, Garrus got to work sabotaging the automated anti-air batteries before contacting Victus.

"General, those batteries are down. I'm broadcasting my current location to help you find me once you touch down."

"Good work, Vakarian," Victus praised over the transmission, "we'll be there shortly. Victus out."

With the transmission ending, Garrus turned his head towards Robin and patted her on the head.

"I must say," Garrus purred, "you did pretty well."

"Thanks," Robin smiled softly.

"I'm sure you two can continue once the mission is completed," Thane calmly reminded.

Both Garrus and Robin looked at each other hesitantly briefly before Robin proceeded back to the door and walked out, stepping out into the hallway, she returned to a crossroads in the corridors when suddenly, the security doors connecting the hallway to the security room shut behind her. Robin let out a startled yelp in a matter of seconds.

"Uh, w-who's there?" Robin panicked, "Garrus? Thane? Anyone?"

"Robin Shepard, you are under arrest for treason," Robin heard that familiar voice.

Robin sharply turned to see the infamously familiar Cerberus operative, tailed closely by three Cerberus soldiers in full armor.
"Surprised to see me?"

Robin’s eyes widened in horror before seconds later, she furrowed her eyebrows and aimed her pistol at Miranda.

"Was this trick your doing?!" Robin demanded.

Leaping to the sides of what little cover the hallway provided, Miranda kept her calm, authoritative demeanor.

"Yes, for the most part. I just so happened to be back to resupply. Now spare yourself the trouble and surrender, you have nowhere to run!"

Robin shook her head before she fired a round at one of the Cerberus soldiers. While the round hit the soldier, Garrus’ voice buzzed over the intercom.

{Just hang on out there! I’m getting the door open!}

Robin tried as much as she could to keep herself from panicking while Miranda smirked.

"Oh, how sweet," she sneered, "your turian lover thinks he can save you from your rightful punishment? Pathetic!"

Robin glared at Miranda while she leapt to avoid a round the Cerberus operative fired.

"Does the Illusive Man know you’ve been whoring yourself out to corporate CEOs?" Robin barked.

One of the soldiers was caught by a well placed round to an armor weak-spot and he stumbled in pain.

"Oh, don't pretend you haven't let your mate have a piece of you!" Miranda growled.

Robin placed her hands on her hips while she leaned forward.

"At least he's a turian and not a disgusting human being!" Robin snarked.

Tossing a warp, Miranda continued to berate Robin.

"And somehow you find turians well within your tastes?"

Robin jumped to the side to avoid the warp.

"They aren't that bad! Really!" Robin called out.

At this point, Miranda was somewhat stuck in her argument, as she became solely focused on apprehending Robin now that her second squadmate had fallen. Still, she shook her head, brushing off any doubts she started to have at the moment.

"That's what Imogen Wallace tried to persuade you," Miranda argued, "and she's trying to sell the human race to the Turian Hierarchy!"

"Then how come the FBI didn't find anything suspicious within her emails," Robin retorted, "apart from ideas on breaking apart monopolies and promoting interspecies equality?!"

"You couldn't really believe that? You have a single fact to back that up?" Miranda barked.
To be truthful, Wallace had no record of any such back-door bargaining, and she was running out of options other than to deal blows to a straw-man. Robin couldn't help but fold her arms while staring fiercely at Miranda.

"Whatever excuse you try to pull out," Robin beckoned, "it's never going to justify your ambition of eradicating the turian race."

"Extinction is not our end goal!" Miranda clarified, probably glaring back at Robin for longer than she should've.

Robin unfolded her arms and clenched her fists.

"Then what is the real goal of Cerberus?" Robin interrogated, "I'm not going to wait for your answer forever!"

"Well it sure as hell is not to get intimate with them!" Miranda pressed a few additional bursts down range as Robin crossed to the other side of the corridor.

Seconds later, the security door slid open and Garrus and Thane burst out of the room.

"Lawson!" Garrus growled as he took position before killing her last squadmate, forcing her to retreat, "Robin, are you all right?"

Robin nodded.

"I'm fine," Robin answered, "I think I stalled her long enough to find her weakness."

"Excluding her preference for light armaments and her ego, I was unaware she had any," Thane mused.

"Well, I suppose it would be beneficial to know going forward," Garrus started, "what are they exactly?"

Robin scratched her head while she, Garrus and Thane strolled down the corridor.

"She seems to be fixated with turians for some reason," Robin explained, "I'm starting to suspect that she's hiding something."

"That's…interesting," Garrus stumbled, "still, it's nice to gain some grasp on her motivations."

Robin nodded in agreement.

"I'm sure Saren would love to hear about this!" Robin remarked.

Saren walked out of the 'bunker' entrance on the top of the plateau to be greeted by Victus as the general's ship relocated to the top of the plateau.

"I presume the mission proceeded as planned?" the general inquired.

"It did," Saren started, "two humans and I found a basement full of prototypes. Some were much more frightful than others. Have a look."

From a bundle of datapads, the general was given one as an example.

"The M-920 Cain? What's this?" the general asked.
"A mobile, miniaturized form of a nuclear device. I saw it tear through the armor of the heavies infantry forms like a scythe through crop," Saren was admittedly shaken by the firing range demonstration Kaidan had initiated.

Not too far away from their plateau, the Normandy and the Aran'tar made their way to the plateau to begin extraction.

"Strange," Victus commented, "hopefully there isn't anything…too morally questionable down there?"

"Nothing besides equipment prototypes, nothing biological or chemical," Saren answered.

Not too far behind him, the others began to file out of the factory. The younger crew was especially exuberant about the mission progression.

"I managed to get twenty-seven Cerberus workers, you Wrex?" Jack boasted.

"Thirty-five. Try again when you're older," the krogan answered with a smug grin.

While Jack scowled and folded her arms, Robin scampered over to Brendan.

"So, Brendan," Robin chirped, "did you find anything interesting?"

"Besides the sheer amount of weapons and armor being mass-produced, I didn't really see much other than conveyor belts, factory lines, more balconies, and other bits of machinery like I was on some sort of how-it's-made tour," Brendan answered honestly, scratching his head, "we went to the communications room and my engineers will be finishing up ripping saved logs from those after a bit. Did you find anything?"

Robin clasped her hands behind her back and gave a sly smug.

"I did encounter Miranda again," she replied, "and I found something we can use against her. Can I call Saren over so he can hear about it, too?"

Saren finished his conversation with Victus before calmly walking over to the others.

"I assume everything went well on your respective parts of the mission?" Saren asked.

Robin nodded.

"And Saren," Robin mentioned, "I think Miranda has a weakness."

He nearly flinched with irritation at the mention of the Cerberus operative.

"You think so?" Saren paused.

"When I ran into her," Robin clarified, "she claimed that extinction of the turian race was not Cerberus's end goal. I'm suspecting she doesn't know everything about Cerberus itself."

By then, Robin, Saren and Brendan stood a few meters closer to the Normandy.

"She also said something that the goal is not to get intimate with turians," Robin continued, "because of that, I'm starting to suspect that Miranda is a xenophile, but she's trying to hide it."

"I see. Thank you for your observations," Saren replied, almost looking to be distracted by something distant.
As Saren began to walk away, he let out a quiet chortle once he was out of audible range of the humans. Oh, this would be fun.

Meanwhile, Miranda barely made it to the stronghold and was strolling through the corridor. As much as she hated to do this, she still had to send a report to the Illusive Man. Still, Robin had touched on a tangent she didn't like sharing with others and she felt exposed as a result. She was basically lucky that the squad she did bring was all eliminated on-field so that there were no witnesses in Cerberus to unveil her actual stance on aliens. In fact, the operative couldn't help but feel envious of the young Shepard, considering how Robin wasn't afraid to admit her attraction to Garrus of all males she could ever want. Even as a newcomer in the galaxy, she wasn't afraid of the social norms, either on Earth or elsewhere, and felt at liberty to follow her desires. She entered her office and opened her monitor at her desk. She hesitated before she began to write, concerning what to mention and what not to.

_Illusive Man,

One of our major factories under H&S was hit hard while I was on a resupply run. From the brief duration I was amidst the station conflict, I had encountered Ambassador Shepard and Commander Vakarian. I was unable to remain for much longer before being forced to retreat off planet.

Still, the matter greatly concerns me that they have externally infiltrated our network, and I await your orders as to how we should resolve this issue before moving forward. I'll be waiting on your word.

Operative Lawson_

Sighing, Miranda didn't hesitate as she sent the report. She turned to stare at the wall for a bit. Her mind briefly drifted back to Saren, but quickly shook the thought after her head before rising up and leaving the room.
Suitable Upgrade

It may have been a long flight, but the Aran'tar, the Normandy and Victus's capital ship arrived at the Citadel.

"I'm impressed, Robin! You really handled that very well," Garrus complimented as he took off his armor.

Robin smiled as she took off her suit of armor.

"Thanks, Garrus!" Robin chirped, "I'm just glad we made progress in our little resistance."

Garrus smiled as he helped Robin remove her suit.

"I think this last venture may justify a hardware upgrade," Garrus offered, "think your suit could use something new?"

Robin took a moment to examine the few dents in her suit.

"I guess I'll need that upgrade," Robin nodded.

Once the ships finished docking, Garrus, Victus and Brendan's teams disembarked. Garrus left with Robin to search for the nearest armor smith while Brendan led his crew towards the immigration office. It took a while for the young ambassador and the turian commander to find a shop that they were searching for. A volus waddled out from behind the store front to greet the two of them.

"Greetings, my name is Expat," he said between wheezes, "how may I be of service…Earthclan?"

Garrus stepped forward, placed the suit container on the counter.

"We were looking to replace the materials used in the armor pads on this suit," Garrus requested, "also, I'd like to see if you could replace the shield emitter with something better."

Expat took a moment to open up the container and examine the suit.

"I can arrange that. What…do you want something relatively light?"

Robin shrugged.

"Is it possible to make it tough and light at the same time?" she suggested.

"I've got…an option you might like. Would you like to retain…these current colors, or do you wish to change them?" Expat continued as he observed the chest-plate.

"I'd like to keep the color scheme the way it is," Robin requested, still admiring the white and blue color scheme of her armor.

The volus nodded before tapping his omni-tool.

"It will be done. The total will come to thirty-five hundred credits for the armor replacement…and the shields upgrade. I've still got a few projects to complete for other customers…so this one could take until tomorrow at this time to complete."

"I can afford it," Garrus answered as he confirmed the payment, "here's my contact information. Let
Accepting the payment, the volus took a moment to examine the contact information Garrus provided. With their business done, Garrus and his human girlfriend left the shop. As the two walked back to their apartment, Garrus wrapped his arm around Robin's shoulder.

"It's been a long day, I'm feeling beat," Garrus sighed.

Robin smiled and leaned into the touch.

"Do you mind if we invite Tali and Liara over?" Robin requested.

Garrus' mandibles shifted into a smile.

"Sure, we've earned the rest. What do you have in mind for later tonight?"

Robin raised her arms over her head and folded them behind her head.

"I'm not in the mood for take-out tonight," Robin answered, "maybe we could find some recipes online and go buy ingredients?"

Garrus nodded.

"Sounds good. I know of a marketplace not too far from here. Want to check it out?"

Robin wrapped her arm around her turian boyfriend.

"That would be great!" Robin smiled.

The two spent just over fifteen minutes before they returned to their apartment. As they gradually got to work on a recipe Garrus found on the Extranet, Tali and Liara arrived.

"Hey Garrus! What are you guys cooking?" Tali asked after Robin let them in.

"Kasumi and I are helping Garrus with a meal from scratch," Robin explained.

"Well, it certainly smells nice," Liara complimented as she entered the kitchen, "a soup I presume?"

"It's more along the lines of a stew," Kasumi answered, "it's also a mix of something we found online."

"I…see," Tali mused.

While Liara and Tali stepped into the living room, Robin returned to the kitchen.

"Looks nice, I think we're almost done here," Garrus said, peering into the pot.

"Now just leave it to simmer for a few more minutes," Kasumi told him.

She took a spoonful and handed it to Robin.

"What do you think?" Kasumi asked.

Robin tasted the sample before giving Kasumi a thumbs up.

"You did great with the seasoning," Robin complimented.
"A master's hand goes a long way," Kasumi smiled.

Garrus nodded as he turned away from the pot.

"Right," Garrus offered, "I'll start getting the kitchen counter set."

Robin responded by opening the cabinet door and rummaged for bowls. She pulled out some bowls and set the kitchen counter while Garrus gathered some silverware. A few minutes later, the team discussed the course of the mission.

"So Wrex and Jack go on a hunt to see who can kill more Cerberus personnel in the factory. Though Wrex did come out on top, Jack was pretty close behind," Kasumi explained, "of course, he tried to play off the relatively close score."

"I'm surprised someone of her stature managed to accomplish such a feat," Liara remarked between bites.

Robin listened in while she took a bite of her dish.

"At least Jack is faring well since we first met her," Robin mused.

"Hey Robin, I heard you ran into Miranda…again," Tali prompted.

Robin turned her head towards Tali.

"Yeah, and I learned of a weakness we can use against her," Robin answered.

Liara placed her finger on her cheek.

"I remember seeing Saren speak to you for a bit on the way out of the base," Liara mentioned, "did you already tell him about what you discovered?"

Robin stammered nervously while she twiddled with her fingers.

"Apparently, she has a thing for turians as well," Garrus replied, swallowing a bite.

"Oh, by the Goddess," Liara muttered.

"To be fair," Garrus started, "it's still something we can predict her behaviors upon."

"Still, it's coincidental in a canny way," Tali agreed.

Kasumi thought over the conversation while she continued eating. She then remembered the vid she received involving Miranda's business deal and scandalous affair with Xavier Tillerson.

"If Miranda is attracted to turians," Kasumi asked, "then why does she let CEOs of Toby Dunn's trusted corporations have their way with her?"

Garrus scratched his mandibles.

"Maybe she's too ashamed to come out of the closet," Robin assumed, "and she objectifies herself to keep her mind off of it."

"Put it in that context, it does make sense," Garrus agreed, "it's just that hearing someone of her position has these interests just make sense when you initially hear it."
Tali sipped her beverage through a straw.

"So Robin, how exactly do you intend on using this to your advantage?" Tali asked, "because I doubt bringing turian troops without armor will cause her to surrender on sight."

Robin just finished her meal and set her spoon down.

"I haven't thought about it yet," Robin admitted, "but you do bring up an interesting point."

"We'll be hitting a Cerberus medical and supply station next," Garrus mentioned, "Robin had mentioned this with Saren, which does give me a few ideas."

Robin raised her eyebrows.

"Along with targeting you, I've heard from Saren she's been very persistent trying to 'apprehend' him," Garrus explained, "initially, I thought it was to cut him up, make him an example to the Council. However, if she really is interested in Saren for other reasons, we could bait her out in an attempt to catch him."

Robin couldn't help but shudder while Tali finished her meal.

"That sounds kinda risky," Robin commented.

"I'm inclined to agree," Liara spoke up, "we'll have a chance if we prompt her into acting irrationally."

Kasumi and Garrus soon finished their meals and it was only moments later before Liara finished hers.

"Sounds like a plan," Kasumi confirmed.

Robin, Kasumi, Garrus, Liara and Tali took some time to clear off the table and set the dishes near the kitchen sink.

"So, who's up for some Star Wars?" Robin chirped.

Meanwhile, Brendan grew tired of waiting for confirmation of his immigration status, so it was no surprise he rested his head on Vega's shoulder while they sat side by side.

"Hey Loco! You alright?" Brendan snapped awake as Vega nudged him.

"Yeah, I needed some shut-eye. God this is taking forever," Brendan quickly replied.

"I hear you, commander. We've been here for twelve hours."

The two along with ten other troops had been going through paper work and rushing around the Citadel to meet the right people. After waiting through an excruciatingly long queue, the group finally took the opportunity to get some rest on the nearby benches.

"I am not sure how long it took for Robin Hood to get immigration status for herself and her friends," Brendan mused, "but I'm betting she had it easier than I did."

"Your sister's an ambassador, right?" Vega asked, "couldn't she have helped us?"

Brendan scratched his head in confusion.
"Why bring my sister into this mess?" he objected.

Vega shrugged.

"Sure, it would be nepotism, but I figured someone of her position could give us the clearance we need for a lot of these things. She trusts you, right?"

"She does," Brendan answered, "but I'm certain I can handle this by myself."

As such, Brendan and James waited until several minutes later, a C-Sec officer stepped into the room.

"I appreciate your patience, commander. I've helped with a few other things to make the final stretch much shorter for you," the officer replied as he handed back the documents they had been carrying all throughout the Citadel, "all you need to do is bring them back to the immigration office back on the Presidium, check them in, and you should be set to move in onto this station."

With a yawn, Brendan stood up and accepted the papers.

"I appreciate it officer. We'll be on our way. C'mon, James."

Drowsily, the whole team got back on their feet and returned to the shuttle station. It would've been easy to just head back to the Normandy for some sleep, but Brendan still persisted on getting the job done before he turned in for the night.

While the others returned to the Normandy, he and Vega barely stumbled into the immigration office. Luckily, it was one of the few office buildings on the Presidium that ran the full day and night cycle, at least with automated tellers.

"Scannings have been initiated. Compiling numerous profiles," the VI chimed as Brendan filed them into the machine. After a brief pause, the VI returned, "compiling completed. Welcome to the Citadel Station."

Brendan sighed with relief before beginning to fall backward from exhaustion. Vega ran forward to catch him before he hit the ground.

"Easy, Loco. I'll help you get back."

"G-Good to know yooou're watching my-y back…" Brendan slurred as the pair slowly stumbled to the nearest taxi with his arm over James' shoulder.

Once they hopped into the taxi, Brendan leaned back and started dozing off.

"Brothers in arms, no? Even if the world around us is burning down, that's what we're for. We see to it we all get home," James said with a weary grin.

"Let's just hope Toby Dunn hasn't burned the world to ashes by then," Brendan mumbled.

"Yeah, yeah, I had a lovely chat with the President of Taiwan. She's a great person, and I'm honestly honored it happened," Toby replied with hearty laughter.

Suddenly, his secretary buzzed over the intercom, interrupting the call.

Tapping a button on his desk, the calm feminine voice reported:
"Of course, send him in!" returning to the call, he quickly finished, "look, sir, I've got to go. I've got a small business call coming up."

Without saying anything further, Toby hung up and stood from his chair in the Oval Office.

Minutes later, a very distinctive individual entered. He was well within his fifties, wore a slim two-piece suit, had pale skin, wavy and combed gray hair, and glowing blue irises, with unique circular symbols. Toby jumped with fright as he entered.

"Ah, the Illusive Man! What a pleasure to see you!"

The Illusive Man walked up to the chair in front of the desk.

"I wish I could say the same, President Dunn. I've got plenty to talk about," while the tone was friendly, a subtle but distinct layer of bitterness dripped from his words.

Still, the Golf Party president shook the Illusive Man's hand. Toby's ever-present inflated confidence had quickly evaporated.

"I-I see, sir. What is it you had in mind?"

"I'm afraid you've lost touch with our end goal. You see, humanity needs to defend itself against the Galaxy, but you've kept your mind turned inward for so long that it's almost like you've forgotten the rest of the Galaxy exists. I demand to see improvement in productivity," the Illusive Man's tone went from moderately friendly to downright sour, "I've managed to get ahold of some krogan-made warheads and plan to make our next set of moves soon. The main problem is you are far behind schedule. When my job is done, I want you ready to secure humanity's place. If the other species refuse to recognize, they will know their place and your job is to enforce it."

"N-Now look, I'm doing all I can. The other countries aren't exactly cooperating with the organization ideals," Toby stumbled.

"Hmm. Strange how all that talk about your self-proclaimed success as a 'business mogul' has evaporated so quickly. Well, here's today's reminder," the Illusive Man pulled out a datapad with a list of names. Toby didn't need to work so hard to see his own name backwards, "your life is on a thread. This is your only warning. Act like it."

Dunn leaned back in his chair with a single bead of sweat sliding down his face.

"Understood, sir."

For once, the Illusive Man's crooked smile appeared.

"That's what I thought."
The following morning, Brendan and Vega slept soundly in the commander's quarters, snuggling as the soft thrum of the engine filled the room. Well, Vega was the first to stir from his dream.

"Guh! Dios mio, what a night it was," he said, slowly rising to his feet.

Brendan only slept for a few minutes before he himself stirred. By then, James stepped into the shower stall while the N7 commander sat up from his bed, brushing his fingers through his hair. Minutes later, James was audibly whistling as he washed himself off.

"Vega? Is that you?" Brendan blurted.

"Oh, hey commander!" Vega answered as he peered over the shower door, "you sleep well last night?"

Brendan nodded.

"Maybe," Brendan answered, "I'm just waiting for info on the next mission."

Brendan finally put his legs over the side and stood up.

"What are you still doing up here anyways?" Brendan asked.

"Hey, you were tired, and I still have my limits. I didn't even wash last night," James answered.

Brendan nodded lightly before he changed into his casual uniform. He and Vega quickly made their way down to the bridge.

"Morning, Ms. Chambers. Anything new?"

"Nothing to report yet, commander," the cheerful yeoman replied.

"As you were," Brendan yawned, "man, I could use some coffee right now."

Kelly raised her eyebrows before she read through her datapad.

"I could find a cafe and make a coffee run," she offered.

"Nah, I was thinking of it taking the crew out as a treat. Could you find a good place?" Brendan replied as he stretched his shoulders.

"Understood, sir," Kelly nodded.

Garrus slowly stirred awake as the light from the window began to shine on his face. He looked down and smiled to see Robin cuddled up against him. Slowly shifting her off of him, he swung off the bed and began to make his way to kitchen when his omni-tool buzzed with an incoming call.

"Hello?"

{Hey, Garrus. It's okay for me to call you that, right?} Brendan responded over the com-link, {I was thinking of taking the crew to a cafe this morning. Want to come along?}
"In that case, I'll talk to your sister about it," Garrus answered.

Garrus fetched himself a snack from a kitchen cabinet when he heard the door to the bedroom open behind him. Turning, he saw Robin slowly stumble out.

"Good morning. You feeling all right?" Garrus purred.

"Yeah," Robin nodded while she brushed her hair.

"Your brother called me to invite us to breakfast with his crew at a cafe. Think you'd be up for it?" Garrus asked.

Robin's face lit up in response.

"Really?" she chirped, "that's awesome!"

Robin finished brushing her hair and tied it into a half-ponytail. After that, she scurried back into her room to change out of her pajamas and slip on a pair of cargo shorts, a casual blouse and a vest. Garrus quickly took a shower and changed his pajamas out for some civilian casuals.

"Looking good, Robin," he complimented as she came out of the bedroom.

"You, too, Garrus," Robin chirped.

Once Robin slipped on her boots, she followed Garrus out the apartment door. With a quick stride through the wards, Garrus followed the address Brendan gave him. The cafe they were invited to was bigger than usual, even having a pavilion that extended outward. However, the majority of the open space was occupied by Alliance marines in civies.

"Hey Garrus! Over here!" Brendan and James were at a table with two seats reserved for them, "good to see you guys made it!"

"Hey, Brendan!" Robin called over while she waved her hand enthusiastically.

Garrus and Robin sat at the table across Brendan and James while Kelly and Dr. Chakwas were seated at an adjacent table.

"We've already ordered, but we saved a menu for you two," Vega added.

"Thanks," Garrus replied, accepting the menu, "so what've we got?"

Robin took some time to read through her menu.

"Looks like they have some neat breakfast options," she answered.

Garrus analyzed a particular option.

"I'll be having something simple," Garrus said, "you?"

"I think I'll go for French toast," Robin replied.

"Alright, so now that everything's in order, what's our next objective?" Brendan asked.

"We'll be hitting a Cerberus medical station out in the Terminus," Garrus replied, "I told Tali to reach out to the Flotilla, see if they'd like to help to gain some medical supplies from the raid."
"Interesting," Brendan commented.

Robin set down the menu, confident in what she wanted to order.

"So, how was gaining your immigration status?" she chirped.

"It was hell, but we got everything through believe it or not," James answered.

"Hell is an understatement," Brendan corrected, "crawling around, burned, shot, and bleeding from the other end to the top of the Citadel Tower would've been an easier feat."

Robin listened to the answer this time. When the waitress stopped by, she and Garrus placed their orders.

"Interesting analogy," Garrus said hesitantly, "anyways, we'll be redistributing the materials we find with the quarians. Can't help wonder what else we'll find."

"Unless we can find something we can use against Miranda," Robin shrugged, "I'm not sure."

"I wasn't talking so much about Miranda," Garrus explained, "I've performed raids on their labs in the past, and I didn't like a single thing I dug up. Genetic mutations, heinous and savage experiments, weapons tests on live subjects, Cerberus scientists seem to get their kicks on nightmare-inducing activities."

Robin couldn't help but shudder while Brendan felt a chill down his spine.

"So basically, rigging the election wasn't the only thing Cerberus did," Robin commented.

"If Cerberus is just as much into understanding whatever they hope to know as they are into political manipulation, yes," Garrus answered, "hopefully, none of you are too faint-hearted, because this mission could take a nasty turn."

Eyes filled with concern, Brendan reached out and grasped Robin's hand.

"Robin Hood," Brendan asked, "are you...frightened?"

Robin shook her head.

"Not really," she answered, "besides, I'm still on Miranda's hit list."

A few waiters started to come through with the Marines' food. When Brendan and James received their breakfast, Brendan simply took a sip from his coffee.

"Well, if we do encounter something nasty," Brendan warned, "I hope you guys are capable of stomaching it."

"If you thought you saw nasty," Robin remarked, "then wait until you see corpses hanging and lying about at the Blood Pack stronghold in Omega."

James Vega couldn't help but shudder while Robin started eating her French toast.

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A couple hours later, after Garrus and Robin picked up the upgraded suit of armor from the armor smith, Brendan and Garrus had their crew regrouped and returned to the docks. Before their departure, Garrus was talking to Brendan, handing another set of coordinates that had been deciphered.
"We'll be rendezvousing with a small detachment of quarian marines. How long will it take for you to disable their outer defenses?"

The station had been located in an asteroid belt deep in a system within the Crescent Nebula. The quarian forces provided was enough to take the station, but not necessarily cripple the station's defensive network. Besides, destroying the station would risk destroying any benefit the quarians could gain.

"Here," Garrus continued, pointing at a location on the map, "I hope you'll be fine with taking point?"

"We'll live," Brendan replied, "I'll let you know when you can move in and clean house."

Garrus nodded in acknowledgement.

The two departed, and Garrus saw Robin as soon as he entered the bridge, wearing her new set of armor.

"Does it work?"

Robin took a few moments to stretch out her arms.

"It fits pretty well," Robin answered.

"We'll see how well it holds up when your brother lets us in. If it doesn't, I could threaten Expat if it'd make you feel better," Garrus offered.

Robin stiffened a little and shook her head in disbelief.

"Would've left less casualties if I only got a replacement suit if the upgrades didn't work out," Robin muttered to herself.

Still, Garrus and Robin stood at the bridge, waiting for any progress from Brendan.

"Alright gentlemen, you know the drill. Make it happen."

From a safe position behind an asteroid, away from the visual view of the station, the SR2 had its stealth systems engaged and ready to deploy two shuttles of Alliance Marines. Keeping clear of the station's scanners, the shuttle safely deployed the unit close enough to make their way to a maintenance hatch near the storage compartment of the facility.

"Remember, these guys know we've worked out where their network is, but these guys can still send evidence of our intervention back to Earth," Brendan reminded, "get that jammer up, then weapons free."

"You got it, Loco. Everett! Get over here!" James replied.

The airlock was just big enough to fit all the marines inside before the doors silently closed behind them.

"Time to get to work," Brendan instructed, "form a perimeter. Everett, Jackson, get to work on that jammer and set it up in some place obscure."

Surely enough, it was a room full of metal crates with red crosses or 'medi-gel' put across most of them. Overhead was a catwalk extending around the large warehouse meeting doors on the opposite
The chamber was only filled with the sounds of men in armor when one of the doors above slid open with two doctors walking through. They had been previously talking with each other when they spotted the infiltration team below.

Before they could properly react, Vega shot a few rounds at the two to prevent them from setting off any alarms.

"Whoops," Vega blurted.

"Mission's not over yet. Jackson! Hurry up!" Brendan barked.

"Sir!" Jackson nodded in acknowledgment.

Seconds crawled by. The few last moments before any blaring alarms filled the air. Jackson initiated the jamming signal mere moments before the station finally went on full alert.

"We won't last long against the next wave of security. Move fast and keep up."

The team set into a jog as they began to rush through the facility, down the clean, white, open yet somehow claustrophobic corridors. Initial scans by the SR2 gave a general location as to where they could find the defense systems. Unfortunately, it was very accessible in relation to the rest of the station. As they entered, the Cerberus guards inside didn't last too long against the dozen marines.

"Close the doors. Everett, get to work disabling those defenses and communications relay. I'll be making a the call. In the mean time, get to defensive positions around the room, we'll be holding here," Brendan ordered.

As the team technician got to work, Brendan opened his omni-tool to call the others.

"Defenses are under control," Brendan reported, "make your approach, Garrus."

Aboard the Aran'tar, Garrus received the message and took this as a sign to make his move.

"They're in, and they're holding out until we arrive," Garrus announced as the Aran'tar advanced.

Although she didn't approach the hull, Robin peered through the window to observe the base in question. The turian commander sent a transmission to a quarian fleet Tali managed to get ahold of.

"Captain Reegar," Garrus informed, "you should be clear to approach."

{Got it, Commander Vakarian. We're entering the system.}

From the side of the bridge, Garrus could see a quarian carrier entering in the distance.

"We're making our approach to the facility. We'll see you inside."

{Likewise, Commander Vakarian,} Kal'Reegar replied over the com-link.

As Liara, Wrex, Tali, and Thane arrived, Garrus turned to face them.

"Tali, you know a Captain Reegar by any chance?" Garrus asked.

"I do, Commander," Tali nodded.

The Aran'tar finally docked with the Cerberus medical facility.
"Well, I'd like to meet him afterward," Garrus continued as he drew out his rifle and made for the docking bridge.

Wrex took point after Tali hacked through the door security, helping to push back initial resistance. Robin also fought off any Cerberus troops that would try to impede their progress while she began to scour the facility for anything valuable they could use.

"Wrex, Thane, and Tali will go to help Brendan and his team. I'll be with Liara and Robin to start securing the lower levels," Commander Vakarian instructed.

Garrus and the others made their way forward into the wards of the station.

The station lightly shook before Garrus' omni-tool buzzed again.

{"Commander, this is Reegar. We've just boarded. We're stretching thin across multiple sections. If you need our immediate help, contact me, I'll see who I can send your way."

"Thanks, Captain," Garrus replied as he opened a door into the stairwell.

Looking down, the levels below weren't nearly as well illuminated as the levels above.

"How poetic," Garrus mused, "you ready to face some horrors?"

"Jack and I watched Troma's War without getting sick," Robin assured, "what's the worse that could be in there?"

"Keep those goddamned ninjas back! Jackson, get a grenade behind those riot shields!" Brendan commanded, "Vega, cover me while I get Miller to safety!"

Cerberus was really putting on the heat now. They were coming down on them heavy, and nearly half the squad had been incapacitated.

"Keep firing!"

"RPG! Get down!"

One of the marines' corpse was sent flying against the wall as the Cerberus troops began to breach the other side of the room.

"Dammit! Get to cover!" Brendan called out.

As Brendan and the remaining marines took to what little cover they had, the sound of heavy fire filled the room. By the time the fire stopped, James poked out to gauge the opposition.

"Sorry we're late, commander! I'll get my field medics working on your wounded," Reegar said as he and his unit entered.

A smile of relief grew across his face before he jumped up and greeted the quarian captain.

"You're a sight for sore eyes, captain," Brendan sighed, "good to have you along."

"Likewise, Commander Shepard," Kal'Reegar nodded.

"Any word from Vakarian's team?" Brendan asked.
"Right here, commander," Wrex entered with Tali and Thane right behind him, "they've began sweeping the lower levels."

"Kal!" Tali exclaimed.

Tali sprinted over to Kal'Reegar and they briefly shook hands.

"Tali, surprised to see you came along. Interesting set of new friends you've made too."

"Kal," Brendan interrupted, "I hate to interrupt any reunions, but we still have a station to clear. We also have some supplies to move back to the Migrant Fleet."

"Right. Doc, see what you can do for the commander's wounded. The rest of you follow me."

"Heads down! Snip-!"

Garrus popped the head off of a very unfortunate Cerberus lab worker as he poked his head a bit too far out.

"Liara, see what you can do about their cover," Garrus ordered, still keeping his rifle aimed down-range.

Tossing a singularity, the other two were able to pick off the remaining Cerberus Security now that they were out of cover. The gunfight had kept them distracted from the test tubes of grown specimen lining the walkways.

"This was what I was talking about," Garrus said as he straightened up, "they'll kidnap a few for tissue and DNA samples, then grow as many as they need. Occasionally they'll kidnap a few more to diversify the gene pool for their sick experiments."

"By the Goddess…I never imagined…" Liara simply stared without words.

Once she emerged from her cover, Robin examined the specimens inside the test tubes. While keeping a straight face, she turned on her omni-tool and started recording what she saw in small vids.

"My friends are not going to believe this," Robin muttered under her breath.

Garrus got to work slicing through the security on a monitor, hoping to look for notes, audio logs, or any other sign as to what they were researching.

"What're they up to?" he muttered to himself.

Without much further delay, he logged in. His breathing dragged to a crawl as he looked over the notes. It was a modified spore that would target the genetics of specific species, namely all 'sentient' races. It had the ability to switch on and off which species it was supposed to target, and the applications were limitless. However, in its current state, it was harmless. Either way, he wanted to get enough samples to hand off to Mordin and see what he could work with it. With a few taps of the keys, he copied the notes before pulling out a small box from a reinforced compartment before putting it into a medical cooler.

"Liara, keep this safe," Garrus instructed, "and try not drop it. Mordin will need to look at its contents."

"Understood. What is it exactly?" the young asari asked.
"Spores capable of applying what it is set to do across specific species," Garrus answered, "it doesn't do anything right now, but it's best to keep that safe."

They further explored the area, discovering fabricators for the agent.

"Mordin, there's something we found down here we need you to look at," Liara reported, "we found a sample of an engineered sporous agent, but there are a large number of housing modules down here for growing more. Should we bring one up for further analysis?"

{Spore? What's its purpose?} the salarian doctor asked.

As Garrus worked to figure out how to disconnect one of the hives, Liara continued the conversation.

"It can target or ignore specific species. The commander believes you should have a look at it, see if it might be useful. He'll need a squad to retrieve it."

{Will do, T'Soni,} Mordin answered.

"Thank you, Mordin," Liara nodded in acknowledgment.

All the while, Robin finished recording the evidence and saved the vids in her omni-tool.

"I believe we have what we need here," Garrus announced, much to Liara and Robin's relief.
With one of the spore hives back on the Aran'tar, Garrus, Robin, and Liara returned from the hospital lower level to the docking area where Brendan and James moved their wounded and dead back to the Normandy. Brendan observed one of Garrus' squads move a gunmetal gray box out, so he stopped to examine it further.

"What's in the creepy box?" Brendan asked.

Liara gave Brendan a blank stare which caught Robin's attention, so she stepped closer to Brendan.

"It's evidence of one of Cerberus's evil experiments," Robin chirped.

"A nasty GMO. The spores in that pod are capable of being rewritten what they can do and what races they'll target. Currently, it doesn't do anything, but I want further analysis done by Mordin," Garrus added, "also, they had a lot of cloned tissue downstairs."

Brendan stiffened, yet he slowly nodded.

"Gotcha," he replied.

Hours had passed since the raid started, and all teams were still helping to move supplies onto the quarians' carrier. Meanwhile, Mordin was stuck in the lab, poking at a sample Commander Vakarian had provided. With the notes he was provided, he quickly learned how to use the spore, and found himself terrified by the results. With one set of variables provided, it helped a colony double within half the normal time required. With another set of variables, the spore tore through a colony with devastating efficiency. All the while Robin observed the analysis at a safe distance.

"Anything yet?" Robin asked.

The salarian nodded.

"In essence, meant to function like a virus. Once target host has been acquired, will gestate, multiply, then spread throughout body. Capable of changes down to rewriting genetic structure. Then quickly goes inert," Mordin inhaled before finishing, "most fascinating."

Robin tilted her head sideways.

"It would be nice if we knew what Cerberus wanted to use it for," she replied.

"Notes also provide subtle reference towards our defense of turian colony. Could be older project just before sudden shift to purpose in demand. Must admit, strange to see such precautions. Unlike most of their projects," Mordin answered.

Robin nodded before she turned on her omni-tool and studied the vids she recorded.

"Spore could mutate, target everyone," Mordin continued, "limited duration ensures expiration before such a state is achieved."

"And I wouldn't be surprised if Cerberus was trying to make a biological weapon," Robin mused.

"Frankly, not so much frightened by what they'll achieve than I am by now."

Garrus entered the medical bay.
"Mordin," Garrus asked, "any idea how it was going to be applied?"

The doctor simply turned to lock eyes onto the turian commander.

"It could swing both ways. Now, excuse me. Could use privacy. Need to concentrate."

Robin and Garrus exited the medical bay.

"Hopefully the fight wasn't too hard on you?"

Robin shook her head.

"At least the armor works," Robin mentioned.

"Yeah. We're done moving materials out, so we're scuttling the station and moving out. I'm glad to see that those test tubes aren't leaving. However, I can't help but wonder where else this might be manufactured," Garrus continued.

"That…is a good question," Robin replied.

With the medical station in smoldering ruins, the quarians returned to the Migrant Fleet while the Aran'tar and Normandy made their way to the Citadel. As both ships entered the docks, Brendan met Robin and the others outside.

"Just reported to Dad and Admiral Anderson. Dad told me to say 'hello'."

Robin smiled and held out her fist.

"I heard it was quite the house of horrors down there," Brendan continued, accepting the fist-jab.

Robin nodded in acknowledgement while she, Brendan and Garrus strolled out of the docks.

"Yet, we couldn't find Miranda," Robin pointed out.

"C'mon, Robin Hood. It's not like we'll run into her around every corner. Hell, it was mere coincidence last time that we showed up the same time she was about to depart. Besides, didn't you say she has a thing for turians?" Brendan attempted to ease his sister's worry.

Robin nodded.

"We've got this in the bag then, right?" Brendan confirmed.

Garrus scratched his mandible.

"All we'll need to do is debrief on our mission and then I'll figure out on available charities I can find," Robin answered.

Miranda looked over the messages she intercepted again. She hadn't known about the project being run at the station due to how this was outside of the cell she worked in. However, looking over the details, she was becoming very hesitant as to whether she should file a report to the Illusive Man. She could always pass off the project as possibly beneficial, but she knew convincing anyone would seem inconsistent with Cerberus' agenda. Humans had their physical limits. Wouldn't Cerberus prove themselves as having public interest at heart if they allowed this to become a public service? It could create as much as it could destroy.
If she could catch a glimpse of the project with her own eyes, she could confirm her thoughts for herself. She opened up a new message to Oriana and started typing. She now had doubts and wanted to confirm if her sister had similar thoughts. Once she sent the message, she waited for a few minutes to see if her sister would respond. She could've simply turned off the monitor when she noticed a message notification moments later.

{Miranda,

Is something wrong? I'm aware you work in a more controversial cell of Cerberus, but what exactly are you worried about? By the way, you should work on how you write. As your sister, I can make out some pretty distinct tells as to when you're hiding something. But now that you bring it up, now I'm worried. I've got to go for now, but please send a follow-up.

Love,
Oriana}

Miranda sighed. Just tell her everything. She won't judge. Miranda had to double check her surroundings to ensure no one was spying on her. Still, it seemed clear that Robin wasn't the only one who was suspicious about the Operative's behavior.

{Oriana

Don't misunderstand me. I still believe in safeguarding humanity's expansion, but I've begun to have doubts that's our long-term goal. Even the behaviors of the Illusive Man suggest more than equipping us as humans with the means to put ourselves on equal terms with the asari, turians, or salarians. As far as my definition goes, 'protection' doesn't equate to killing entire populaces just to signify we're to be reckoned with. Watch your back, I don't want my opinions indirectly harming you.

Your sister,
Miranda}

Miranda double checked the message before she sent it. She placed her hands onto her chest, thoughts filling her head. If she was to leave Cerberus, when would be a good time to do so?

With Garrus heading over to the Council to debrief on the mission, Robin returned to her apartment with Kasumi. There, Robin set off to start washing a load of dishes.

"Hey, I just remembered, I was going to head to the marketplace and get some more seasoning," Kasumi blurted out, "I'll be out only a moment."

Robin paused for a moment and sighed.

"Well," Robin replied, "I'll see you when you get back."

Kasumi skipped happily out the door. Getting spices was her second objective. Recently, she'd been in contact with a guy just a few years older than herself named Keiji. He'd moved off of Earth after his association with Robin and the others put him in some boiling water. Tapping her omni-tool, she sent a message:

{Hey Keiji. I'm available now. Where'd exactly did you want to meet?}

Before too long, he texted back.
Kasumi smiled when she read the coordinates on the map. A moment later, she sent him another text:

*I'll be there in a few minutes.*

After a quick rush, he was sitting at the front counter of the shop, turning to see her enter.

"Hey Kasumi! Over here!"

Kasumi spotted Keiji and approached him, her boyfriend standing up before they gave each other respectful bows.

"It's good to see you again. I hope you've been well since you've more-or-less permanently left Earth?" Keiji asked.

Kasumi nodded.

"Yeah. I had a harder time leaving. I don't know where they would've taken me, but I gave them the slip," Keiji replied.

"Really?" Kasumi asked, "how did you-?"

Keiji pulled out his own omni-tool. In comparison to normal omni-tools, it was a deep purple and appeared angular.

"Before our hijinks, I found a place that brought in these discount things. It's largely undetectable, but the software had a high failure rate. With some tweaking, I managed to upgrade it and apply some software of my own making that's largely considered unlawful."

"Glad you managed to find your way out," Kasumi replied.

"Yeah, so now I'm never going back with the record I have," Keiji chuckled, "I've heard you've been busy."

Keiji and Kasumi sat down across from each other.

"First, we adapted to life in the Citadel," Kasumi started, "then Robin gets named ambassador for the Citadel after the Shanxi event."


"We're trying to take them down before the humans go to war," Kasumi answered.

"Those dogs know no bounds. Lemme get something for you. What would you like?"

Kasumi folded her arms and rested them on the table.

"Jasmine tea," Kasumi requested, "unsweetened."

---

Robin had finished washing dishes, which had helped to distract from the fact Kasumi was still gone. She paused to check the time on the clock. Almost half an hour had passed. For all the fuss Kasumi gave after her encounter with Aria, Kasumi sure liked to lay the same worry upon others. Getting her omni-tool, she started to message her when she heard the door open. Garrus was coming in and
switched out of his armor.

"Whew!" Kasumi sighed, "glad that's done for now. What's up, Robin?"

"O-Oh," Robin blurted, "I was just finishing up with the dishes. You know, gotta keep the kitchen tidy once in a while."

Garrus collapsed on the couch with exhaustion.

"Looks good," Garrus complimented, "anyways, I'm spent. Who are you contacting?"

Robin glanced at the incomplete message in her omni-tool before she shut it off.

"I was going to contact Kas," Robin answered, "but then she came back here with you."

Kasumi glanced to the left with a wayward smile as she put the bag of seasoning on the counter.

"It was busy for them," she explained, "traffic happens occasionally."

Robin scratched her head before she stepped into the living room, sauntering over to the couch.

"Hey, you," Garrus said as he glanced up at Robin.

As Kasumi walked back from the kitchen with an apple, she glanced at the front door.

"Garrus, I thought you closed the door."

He poked his head up with confusion.

"I distinctly remember coming through the door first."

Robin sighed and shook her head.

"I'll go close it," Robin offered.

As she rose to rush over, she collided with some unseen force, tumbling onto her back. Garrus rushed over to help her up when a metallic form blinked into existence on the path to the front door. It was a lone geth unit, like how Tali described them on occasion. Its armor resembled that of a quarian suit, as did the structure of most of the body. The head resembled the muzzle of a male quarian's helmet growing out of the head like a single eye.

"Shepard Ambassador, we apologize for our intrusion."

Robin stared in disbelief and blinked twice.

"That's a…is that what the geth really look like?" Robin blurted.

Garrus pulled Robin into his protective embrace, flaring his mandibles and giving the geth a hawklike gaze. The geth unit took notice of Garrus' behavior.

"We apologize, Vakarian Commander. We didn't intend to bring harm to Shepard Ambassador."

Garrus wasn't buying it.

"You can start apologizing by telling me what you're doing in our apartment," he barked.

The snout panels angled slightly, almost like it was emotionally reacting.
"We simply sought Shepard Ambassador's help."

Robin raised her eyebrows out of curiosity.

"For what?" she asked.

"We recognize the faction you refer to as 'Cerberus' as a threat. Shepard Ambassador and Vakarian Commander oppose Cerberus. Cooperation with organics in this situation furthers mutual goals," the geth unit continued, standing passively.

While Robin gave the geth unit a blank stare, Kasumi took this time to contact Tali through her omni-tool.

{Tali, Robin and Garrus have a geth in our house. It isn't attacking yet. Please come quickly.}

The instant Kasumi sent the text, all she knew that she would have to wait for Tali's response.

"And why should we believe you?" Garrus growled.

"I'm…more interesting in learning how they even got interested in Cerberus in the first place," Robin admitted, tilting her head sideways.

"We intercept organic transmission. We seek to create our own future. Cerberus goals are defined by parameters that would include denying us of our future. Countering Cerberus goals are subsequently a part of our process to create our future," between the geth's voice was snippets of mechanical whirling, metal clicks, whistles, and buzzes.

Kasumi couldn't help but place her hands on her hips.

"You still aren't providing any reason as to why we should trust you," Garrus repeated.

He began to back away slowly with back slightly turned to protect Robin, still in his grasp.

"We could provide a better explanation if—" a small metallic device landed at the geth's feet, "alert! Evasive m— GGGGGGZZT!"

With the flash of an EMP, the lone geth infiltration unit crumpled onto the ground.

Tali rose from her hiding spot.

"Explain that, you bosh'tet," she hissed.

Groaning, Robin wiggled out of her turian boyfriend's grip and narrowed her eyes at Tali.

"Geez, Tali," Robin protested, gesturing to the geth unit, "can't you just let him speak for a moment?!"

"First of all, geth don't normally have the ability to communicate with anyone beyond their own. Secondly, it had a sniper rifle folded up on its back," Tali pointed out, "the fact he managed to get this far onto the Citadel is especially concerning."

Robin didn't respond, yet she cautiously approached the offline geth unit sprawled on the floor.

"He's down, but not out. Get him into a compromising position and get what weapons you have. An EMP won't keep him down forever," Tali continued.
Over the next half-hour, the group tied the geth unit to the chair with some wire and took the few weapons Garrus kept in his home to keep it at a distance. Slowly the geth unit came to, with its 'eye' flickering to life, focusing on Tali.

"Creator Zorah. We apologize if we had suggested hostilities."

"Suggest is an understatement for breaking into peoples' homes," Garrus growled.

Its head panels flinched again.

"Sorry. Geth do not have a concept of privacy."

Robin shrugged before she pulled up a chair and sat across the geth unit.

"Ok," Robin offered, "first off, did you hear about me since I first leaked some Cerberus files that got them started going after me?"
Legion Agreement

It was only a moment of silence before the geth unit locked its mechanical eye onto the young Shepard.

"Yes. We have monitored organic transmissions to include within our consensus."

Kasumi couldn't help but reach under her hood and scratch her head.

"Didn't he say that already?" Kasumi paused.

Robin ignored that last remark.

"So if you needed my help," Robin asked, "what can I offer?"

"We simply seek to augment our efforts with yours and vice versa," the geth answered.

"And what of the quarians?" Garrus asked.

"If it means accomplishing a common goal," the geth clarified, "we are willing to cooperate with the Creators."

Robin placed her finger on her chin while she thought over the request for a moment.

"I'm not so sure if this would work out well," Kasumi sighed.

Tali walked forward with her shotgun trained on the geth.

"If you want to propose an alliance, try harder to sell the idea."

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and tilted her head towards the quarian.

"How come?" Robin paused, "wouldn't working together reduce the chance of Cerberus plucking us out?"

Tali's eyes narrowed on Robin.

"You can't possibly believe that thing?" Tali hissed.

"Our end goal is not to manipulate or deceive!" the geth unit protested.

"And...I know which members of Dunn's administration are more likely to deceive people," Robin added, "including the president."

The quarian slung her shotgun over her shoulder.

"You think you can trust it, fine!" Tali growled, "just don't look for me when you need its head blown off."

She subsequently stomped off, leaving the others alone with the captured geth. Robin could only shift her glance between the geth unit and Garrus.

"Was it something I said?" Robin asked.

"Creator Zorah! We wish to apologize!" the geth unit begged, "we require assistance!"
Robin took note of the wire still restraining the geth unit, so she set off to untie it from the chair.

"Well, the fact it didn't shoot us on sight might be an actual sign. Hold on," Garrus reluctantly walked over to help untie the geth from its bindings, "but make any trouble and I won't hesitate."

In a matter of moments, Robin and Garrus freed the geth unit from the chair, allowing it to stand to its feet.

"Much appreciated, Shepard Ambassador. I will attempt to avoid further incident," the geth thanked.

"Yeah yeah," Garrus replied, rolling his eyes, "what's your name?"

"Geth," it simply replied.

Robin placed her palm on her chin and tilted her head sideways.

"Wouldn't it…make more sense to give you a more awesome name?" Robin pointed out.

The two paused for a moment. Kasumi walked up to the geth unit.

"What about a manufacturing number? A label of some sort on this unit?"

"We are all geth," it replied again.

Kasumi folded her arms and closed her eyes, and she couldn't help but grin.

"Then maybe for you, we could come up with a nickname," Kasumi mused.

"Hey, you bosh'tet!" Tali yelled from across the room as she tossed a soup can at the geth, harmlessly bouncing off its head, "how the hell do you even speak?"

"Opposed to the one hundred geth used on board most platforms," the geth unit answered, "this platform can carry one thousand, one hundred, and eighty three geth. The additional thousand grants us the ability to better comprehend organic languages and proper responses."

"Sounds like a legion to me," Robin commented while grinning.

The geth unit blinked its mechanical eye.

"Legion," the geth unit paused for a moment to interpret the meaning of the word, "noun. A unit of Roman soldiers ranging from three thousand to six thousand. Adjective. Very many or numerous. We accept this allegory. We are Legion, for we are many."

Garrus nodded.

"At least we're off to a better start."

Robin soon nodded in confirmation, and then moments later, a thought came into her mind.

"Hmm," Robin said to herself, "I think there might be someone who might be interested in what's going on here."

"Of course, the Council was greatly upset by how I handled the slavers. Yes, some poor humans were caught in the crossfire, but I g—"

Saren didn't know where to start.

"What?"

"Human euphemism. Laid, have sex, fuck something, whatever. You need something to inhabit your life besides your missions. Seriously, I'll even pay for some strippers for you down at Chora's Den. This is how irritating it's getting just talking to you," Nihlus groaned on.

"Hey! At least I do—" Saren's omni-tool buzzed with an incoming message, "hold on, it's from Ambassador Shepard."

{A Geth infiltration unit entered our apartment. It wants to talk. Might want to get here ASAP.}

"Hell, you could join in with Robin and Garrus. Some humans are into that sort of thing," Nihlus droned on.

"Yeah, I'll consider it," Saren interrupted, "I'll be going to Ambassador Shepard's apartment."

He did his best to ignore any of Nihlus' parting words. The two had been discussing mission matters at a park bench when Saren got the call. Still, he couldn't help but feel baffled at the possibility a geth unit would sneak into the Citadel without having its head blown off. As he entered their apartment, he saw Robin, Garrus, and Kasumi talking with what he could distinctly tell as a geth infiltration unit, with a sniper rifle on its back.


"Thanks for the alert," Saren replied. "what's this all about?"

Garrus nodded to Robin, who approached the turian Spectre.

"This geth here said that they're interested in what Cerberus is up to," Robin explained, "and he's asking us for some sort of alliance."

Saren slowly approached the geth. They were always an elusive race, but maybe they were onto something.

"Considering our options, we don't have the luxury of turning down potential allies. What's this unit's designation?"

"We are Legion," Legion nodded, "we acknowledged this alliance."

This caused him to raise a brow plate.

"I heard geth didn't talk," Saren pointed out, "how is it you can?"

"Basically, it has more geth processors on board, granting it language and minor social capabilities," Tali explained, keeping her distance across the room.

Saren scratched his mandible before he tilted his head towards Robin.

"Alright, but why 'Legion'? No model designation?" Saren asked.

"It's a nickname I gave him," Robin smiled.

"Most interesting," Saren commented, "well, Legion, what did you have in mind?"
"We might have a lead on Cerberus," Legion suggested, "are you willing to come to Noveria for further discussion?"

"You've managed to expand to Noveria? You're really starting to test my trust, 'Legion'," Garrus grumbled.

"At ease, commander," Saren replied, attempting to calm Garrus, "we'd be very much interested in discussing further."

Robin took a moment to inspect her garment.

"Shepard?" Garrus paused.

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and tilted her head towards Garrus.

"Am I dressed enough for the trip?" Robin asked.

"Noveria is an ice ball. We'll need our suits, but even then, turians aren't accustomed to cold climates," Garrus answered.

"Oh, I see," Robin shuddered.

"Do you want this or not, Vakarian?" Saren asked sharply, "of course I'm fine going alone while the rest of you stay behind and do whatever the hell it is you do with your free time."

Sighing, Robin placed her hand on Garrus's shoulder. Maybe she could let her boyfriend get some deserved rest.

"If you're not interested in going, it's ok," Robin assured, "I'll go along with Legion after I find some cold weather gear."

"Shepard," Garrus whispered.

"I'll be fine," Robin insisted.

Saren sighed.

"If you don't trust them, that's fine," Saren offered, "I can just as easily keep an eye out for her."

Smiling, Robin embraced herself to the turian Spectre, much to his confusion.

"Thanks, Saren!" she chirped.

"Yes, I can understand your gratitude. You can stop that," Saren groaned, attempting to shake her off.

Seconds later, Robin released Saren from his embrace.

"Anyways, we'll need some cold-climate reactive armor for you. I just might be able to use my Spectre clearance to get a suit of...your size," Saren continued.

Robin nodded while Tali and Kasumi exchanged confused glances.

"I hope this doesn't end in disaster," Kasumi prayed.

Robin approached Garrus and gave him a kiss.
"Be careful, Shepard," he advised her.

After telling Legion to meet them at a Spectre shuttle, Robin followed Saren to the Spectre Academy to get an envirosuit designed for younger asari. Inside the facility, Robin examined the suits on display, determining which one would match her size and trying on some.

"Considering how much you've accomplished," Saren commented, "I just might consider putting your name forward as a Spectre Candidate."

Robin paused for a moment and gave Saren a confused stare.

"How would that work?" she objected, "I'm not an expert in military combat."

"Ah, a random thought," Saren mumbled, "so have you found what you needed?"

Robin found a suit that fit well with her size. Without further hesitation, the pair went to the Spectre docks where Saren kept his personal ship. As they walked up the platform, Legion decloaked in front of them.

"I assume the two of you have found sufficient equipment?" Legion pointed out.

"Such a sophisticated active camouflage device. How do you managed to sustain it for such long tracts of distance?" Saren asked.

"We utilize advanced energy cores for extended energy use," the geth answered.

"Pretty efficient if you want to prevent bloodshed," Robin mused.

"I'm more impressed by the energy use," Saren commented as he entered his shuttle.

Maybe he could figure out how to accomplish such system stability during this next set of missions. Still, Saren led Robin and Legion aboard his shuttle and while he settled into the pilot's seat, Robin and Legion found some passenger seats.

Garrus wasn't lying when he described Noveria as little more than an ice ball. As they came out of the Mass Relay and into the system, Noveria was far enough from the local sun to reach sub-zero temperatures. Approaching the planet, their shuttle was being hailed from the surface.

{Unidentified vessel, please specify who you are, and your purpose here.}

Clearing his throat, Saren spoke over the intercom:

"This is Spectre Saren Arterius, and I'm here on my own mission. I won't be passing through your port, over. Sending my credentials."

{Credentials received, as you were, Spectre. Control out.}

Robin let out a sigh of relief as Saren maneuvered the shuttle into the planet's atmosphere.

"There's a small security firm here that owns rents out private property and vaults to various corporations and science groups. People pay well for their services," Saren explained.

"Land at the given coordinates. I will need to relay my return to the local geth," Legion directed.
"By all means," Saren replied.

Interacting with the coms, Legion shifted the broadcasting frequency before speaking in a series of mechanical sounds similar to the undertones found in its speech while talking with organics. From the other end, a similar set of sounds returned.

"We've been granted access."

"All right!" Robin chirped, bringing her clenched hands closer to her chest in an excited expression.

The flames that engulfed their ship as they entered the atmosphere faded away before giving way to heavy snow and blinding breezes. The autopilot narrowly navigated them around the various mountains they flew by. Nearing the ground, they could see a small walled fortress in the distance. Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the camp had a wall had a rounded, shiny look to it similar to the same shine the geth armor had, as seen on Legion. Along the wall were towers for lookouts with sharpshooters on each one, training their weapons on Saren's shuttle. Inside the walls were giant quadrupedal tank-like vehicles with the same head as normal geth units. Along the ground were various units performing multiple tasks.

"I hope you kept that helmet, Shepard. We're going outside," Saren advised, putting on his own.

While the shuttle made its landing, Robin reached to her right and grabbed her helmet before she slipped it on. Once they stood from their seats and made their way to the hatch, Saren didn't hesitate as he, Robin and Legion stepped out into the blistering cold.

The harsh winds blew past the audio receptors on her helmet like a whistle. She could barely see through the gusts the barren outline of the geth units surrounding them. Saren and Robin followed Legion to a bunker in the middle of the stronghold where a light differentiating itself from the darkness finally shown through. Walking in, the layout resembled that of an underground prefab designed and made for colonists. Throughout the chambers were geth units plugged into pillars around the room. Each pillar was interconnected via a web of wires, like optic fibers.

"Each platform serves as transportation for hundreds of geth. When platforms are offline, we thrive in this form. It would be the organic equivalent of the Citadel or any other metropolitan area."

Robin tilted her head upwards and wiped the snow from the helmet's visor.

"So this is your home," Robin observed.

"Yes. This is also where we centrally initiate a consensus once we have gathered enough data on a certain matter. During a consensus, we take into consideration all perspectives on a given matter, before making a decision based on which course of action is most popular," Legion answered.

While taking in her surroundings, Robin tapped her finger on the side of her helmet.

"And to think I couldn't find such information back at the library," Robin said to herself.

"We have no sense of desire, privacy, distrust, or what you would otherwise call 'individuality'. We simply understand each other for what we are. We are geth," Legion finished.

Saren was equally in awe as he looked around the room. He found if one just looked closely enough, one could almost see the fibers pulsating with light.

"Never could I have imagined… "
Robin tilted her head towards Saren.

"Whatever the geth obtained about Cerberus," Robin mentioned, "I hope it's helpful."

Legion pulled out its left palm, projecting an orange image of the galaxy map.

"As previously mentioned, we intercept organic transmissions to include within the consensus process. We have recently been investigating Cerberus telecommunications. Based upon interactions between your peers, we felt this would especially peak your interest."

The image zoomed in on one small system along the border between the Attican and Terminus Systems.

"One: Cerberus has a large facility within the Sentry Omega, Hoc System, on the planet known as Virmire. Two: A high ranking official known as Lawson Miranda expresses doubts about the organization goals. We thought you could possibly convince her to leave, earning us great insight to the Cerberus organization."

Robin's face lit up while Saren raised his browplates, both of them examining the holographic projection. Saren couldn't help but flex his mandibles into a turian equivalent of a smile.

"We have a deal. Where do we go from here?" Saren asked.

Miranda's faith in her cause was all that kept her wrapped in safety, from him and any sort of moral dignity.

"Where do you have to run now, Lawson?" he muttered to himself.
Garrus stared impatiently out the apartment window. It had been a couple of days since Robin and Saren had left with 'Legion' to discuss the possibility of a joint operation with the geth. He hadn't heard anything for a while. He couldn't help but wonder to himself what could possibly be the worst thing they'd try to do to them. Suddenly, his omni-tool buzzed.

{Vakarian, we just got back to the Citadel. Where are you?} Saren reported.

Garrus grumbled with annoyance before he responded.

"Where've the two of you been? You never mentioned the need to maintain radio silence."

{Relax, your mate is still in one piece and hasn't died from the cold,} Saren said, dismissing Garrus' accusations, {anyways, the geth want to play ball and they even got a lead on a Cerberus lab in the Attican and Lawson's possible desire to defect. We'll be heading back to your apartment to discuss further.}

"I'll see you when you get here. Out."

Perhaps it wasn't the worst idea after all.

"Tali," Garrus announced, "Saren and Robin have spoken with the geth. Apparently, they agreed and are willing to work alongside them to take on Cerberus."

Tali groaned and clenched her fist.

"This bosh'tet has no idea what he's getting himself into," Tali grumbled, "it wouldn't be pretty if the geth started manipulating him into doing their bidding."

"I'm worried as well, considering they are within reach of a well renown Council Spectre. Do they have the ability to brainwash? Or directly control someone's thoughts with surgically implanted hardware?" Garrus agreed.

Kasumi couldn't help but cringe at the thought of Saren wearing a geth arm.

"Keelah, I hope not," Tali muttered.

They all felt some relief as Saren and Robin entered, unmodified by their synthetic guests. The door automatically closed behind them before Legion decloaked.

"I'm aware all of us aren't in accordance with this whole plan, but it might work out. The geth aren't so interested in expansion as they are self-preservation," Saren explained as he brought up the projection of Virmire, "they've had their eyes on a Cerberus base at the edge of the Attican for some time and are willing to be friendly to take it out. Maybe they might start acting less secluded."

Kasumi and Tali blinked while Robin approached Garrus and turned on her omni-tool. While Saren continued to talk to the others, Garrus placed his hand on Robin's shoulder.

"Are you alright? Did they do anything to you?" he glared over her shoulder at Legion.

"I'm ok," Robin assured Garrus, "we talked about coordinating the infiltration of the base and read some messages from Miranda that the geth intercepted."
Garrus sighed.

"Alright," he warned, "but the moment I find out they've put in something to control you, I'm tearing Legion limb from limb before dragging you to the nearest medical facility to have it taken out. And will this affect Tali in any way?"

As they looked over to the quarian, they found her in a defensive pose as the Geth infiltrator approached her. They hadn't heard what they initially said to each other, but Tali had been partially taken aback as Legion made a small proposal. As Legion continued on, Tali seemed increasingly nervous, even looking down at her feet between responses. Turning away from Legion, Tali approached the two.

"Guys, I might need help. Legion said it wanted to propose a peace treaty between the quarians and geth."

Robin nodded and folded her arms, straightening her spine.

"I can help you on that," she offered.

Garrus beckoned Legion over, so it approached.

"Are there any necessary adjustments?" Legion asked.

"What are you exactly proposing?" Garrus insisted.

"A complete cease-fire between both sides," Legion answered, "we wish to gradually integrate our societies with the other to avoid the possible social fracturing that Cerberus intends to cause. Finding protection in such cooperation would benefit both races."

"Many of the quarian Admirals are still divided as to how we should approach the geth," Tali explained, "the main ideas are to either destroy, control, or augment our societies with each other. I've always been focused on the idea of the first, but I know quite a few who share the second and third ideals."

Robin nodded in acknowledgement while she listened.

"As long as we're not killing each other," Robin confirmed, "I'm all ears."

"That's the problem. We've been quietly at war with each other for over three hundred years now. I don't think some are going to willingly drop such hostilities at the drop of a hat," Tali continued somberly.

"Perhaps it would benefit us both to have units from both sides to field troops during this mission to earn the trust of the other?" Legion proposed, "none too large on either side, but enough to slowly become comfortable."

"It just might work," Garrus inserted, "for what its worth, it's worth a shot."

"Then let's do that!" Robin chirped.

Tali couldn't help but groan in frustration.

"Fine. I'll contact Reegar, let him know about this," Tali said, before opening up her omni-tool, "I just hope you guys know what you're doing."

While Tali set off to contact Kal'Reegar, Robin scrolled to the intercepted messages she obtained
from Legion in her omni-tool. From the corner of his eye, Garrus noticed the messages Miranda exchanged between her sister.

"Is she really having second thoughts?" Garrus asked, pointing to the exchanges.

"Well, it looks like she does," Robin replied.

He nodded in agreement.

"Looks like she finally got the message that Cerberus isn't so clean and pristine as she believes it is."

Robin smiled at her turian boyfriend's response.

"We might have a chance if we give her an incentive to change sides," she added.

"Uh, Tali? Are you sure this thing can be trusted?" Captain Reegar asked as he approached the other on the docking platform, eyeing Legion.

"Honestly, I don't know. I get the feeling the offer to return to the homeworld is a hoax, but I'm not giving up even a false hope to do so," Tali shrugged in response.

"We can understand initial hostilities," Legion responded, "we hope we can overcome this as the mission progresses."

As far as they knew, Legion had contacted the base on Noveria, saying they would meet at a detachment on Virmire and that they would be bringing a squad of quarians. This meant Robin didn't have to ask Brendan for help since he had other duties to tend to. It gave Robin some time to study the map of the Cerberus base in her omni-tool. Nervous, Garrus inched closer to Robin.

"Are you sure neither of you were implanted with anything?" he quietly asked her, "I'd hate to see you aiming a gun at the backs of any of our heads."

Robin didn't flinch, yet she placed her hand on Commander Vakarian's shoulder.

"If it makes you feel any better," Robin answered, "I wouldn't let them put any mechanical implants inside me."

"I hope so," Garrus returned.

He didn't feel much relief, but it did bring him some level of comfort. Once Robin finished studying the map, she and Garrus approached Saren, Tali'Zorah, Kal'Reegar and Legion, drawing their attention.

"Ok," asked Robin, "can we discuss our plan here, or can we discuss it on the way?"

"We should act while we can. We'll discuss it on the way there," Garrus answered.

Shortly afterward, the quarians departed on their own vessel while the others left on the Aran'tar. Both would reunite at the Sentry Omega. During the flight, Garrus, Saren, Robin and Legion gathered in the conference room.

"Vakarian Commander, is it acceptable that I be granted access to the hardware aboard this ship?" Legion asked.

Garrus at least found it humorous that the geth would use the surname first like it it would in most
"Go ahead," Garrus offered, "show us what you have."

Legion put its hand forward, tapping a few keys, then uploaded a projection of an extensive, enormous facility.

"This is their facility. We had been previously sent to investigate further. While we haven't been able to discover the full extent of what experiments they were running, we have gained basic knowledge concerning its security."

Robin traced her finger along the projection and located the security room.

"Will it be hard to get in here without being detected?" Robin pondered.

"Unlikely. A few other scout parties had approached the facility as well. We lost contact with them. By now, they'll know how to detect infiltration units. I suggest that we approach from as many fronts as possible to keep local security distracted," Legion explained.

Garrus and Robin exchanged glances before the turian commander examined the entry points in the projection. It was at that point Saren decided to enter the conversation.

"I'm guessing the geth and quarian marines can head up the east side," Saren suggested, "the commander can take his division from the west, and I can go alone from the south end. We'll have them penned in, and we can minimize the chances of a counter attack or any of them escaping once the assault starts."

Robin nodded.

"Especially since I'm wondering what they could have in store," she added.

"We'll find out when we get there. But are you sure that the geth and quarians will allow being grouped together like that?" Garrus asked.

"If this is the quarian's and geth's chance at...burying the hatchet as humans say, they'll have to work together. Besides, Legion stated the problems of going alone itself, they'll be prepared for it. The quarians have their weak immune system, meaning that a bad enough hit puts them on the sidelines. Putting both groups together helps to mitigate both risks," Saren explained.

"Then let's hope our plan works," Robin concluded, "if we're lucky, Miranda might be there."

The Aran'tar landed on the rocky beaches surrounding the Cerberus facility. All around them, there were jagged rock formations and small islands of sand surrounded by shallow water. Nearby, crabs that resembled tables roamed freely. Shortly after, Kal'Reegar's ship landed not too far from where the Aran'tar was.

"Keelah, this is beautiful place," he muttered to himself.

"Alright Legion, where are your allies?" Garrus asked the lone geth unit.

Almost to answer his question, a geth dropship approached from the distance and landed between the two. Garrus had only seen the smaller units before, so he was somewhat taken aback when he saw a Geth Prime exit the vehicle. Once the Geth Prime led its squad towards Garrus's squad, Saren took a few steps forward to greet them.
"Legion, I hope you'll be our mouthpiece for this part. I don't think I could communicate to them fast enough in binary."


They began to advance the rest of the way on foot, as there was only a kilometer between where they landed and where they were supposed to go. The facility was heavily protected by AA guns that would knock their vessels out of the sky before they got close enough to drop anyone off. All along the winding paths between the rocky crevasses, there were gate outposts with AA guns positioned on top all along the road. Taking point, Saren led groups of mixed troops into the structures to eliminate the Cerberus guards.

"Stay low, and don't alert any of them," Saren advised, "we can't afford to use jammers right now."

It was a quiet fifteen minutes as the attack team continued onward, lowering the gates and disabling AA gun controls as they progressed. With the coast clear, Garrus led his squad farther. Narrowly, the group dodged a few drones patrolling the area, but they gradually made it to an opening facing the east entrance.

"I assume you received the message before touching down, Captain Reegar?" Garrus asked.

"Affirmative. I'll just hold here with the geth. I'm honestly surprised that you agreed to this," the captain grumbled.

Legion nodded in agreement.

"The consensus favored two approaches to this mission: a full-frontal assault or a joint operation. The latter won by a margin of 0.7%.

Saren made final adjustments to his own rifle before getting out of the brush.

"We're here now and there's no turning back. I'm moving out. See you guys in there."

With that, Saren advanced forward on his own. Garrus beckoned to his own squad.

"I'll be moving to the west side," Garrus told Kal'Reegar, "keep in radio contact, I'll let you know when we're ready."

Robin, Garrus, and the others left the quarians, the geth, and Legion.

"Great, this is going to go well," Kal muttered to himself.

With Robin remaining close to Garrus, Liara and Thane scouted ahead to check whether the coast was clear before they could proceed farther. Thane had to dispatch a couple Cerberus guards patrolling the entrance before Garrus led his squad inside. While strolling through the corridor, Robin had to block out the excess artificial light emitted by the ceiling lights from her eyes for a moment. Getting a good view of the West gate from cover, Garrus contacted Reegar as he scoped in with his rifle.

"Captain, we're in position."

[Copy that,] Kal'Reegar responded over the com-link, [we'll move out shortly.]

With the response confirmed, Garrus continued to lead his squad through the base. As much as she would stay aware of any Cerberus troops on patrol, Robin also kept an eye for any useful supplies
that would be lying around.

"Light them up," Garrus gestured to a heavy trooper.

Brandishing a grenade launcher, the Turian fired at the guard posts and towers nearby, causing them to explode in a fiery display.

"Move in!" Garrus commanded, "don't let them get a fix on you!"

The group ran up the beachhead, shooting as they moved forward. Between firing rounds, Robin spotted two familiar faces out of the corner of her eye. Wait, the last time she saw Ryan and Eric, they tried to stop Robin, Garrus and their friends from moving Ashley off the colony in the Terminus System! To add insult to injury, these stuck up bastards started emitting a combined biotic field.

"Biotics, to the right!" Garrus barked, "take them out!"

Ryan began to lift the room around him while Eric shook the ground with shockwaves. While most of the squad had been pinned, Wrex came out of cover and pulled Eric away with his biotics before finishing him off with a hard slug with the butt of his shotgun.

"Amateurs," he hummed.

Exiting a vent from behind, Thane leapt across the room, disabled Ryan, then shot the young biotic once in the head.

"He's down."

Robin staggered back to her feet before she made one last glance at Ryan.

"My regards to Ashley," she muttered.

Robin rushed over to Garrus, grasped his hand and helped him back to his feet.

"Thank you, Shepard," Garrus sighed in relief.

Robin couldn't help but smile.

Saren made his approach through a small garage at the south end through a vent, quickly engaging the engineers inside with little resistance. Making his way down the hallway leading out of the garage area, he found a small security room. Through one set of screens, he saw Garrus and his squad pushing through the West end through armories and training areas. Through another set, he saw Captain Reegar and Legion pushing through labs. One squad even found a lab with the captured geth infiltrators that Legion had found. One of the screens even showed a heavy mech being bested by a Geth Prime.

After disabling the locks on some doors, Saren noticed a few rooms that weren't shown on the map that Legion and the other infiltrators hadn't found. Picking through the security farther, he tried picking the lock before being denied access. Humming with annoyance, he returned to the garage to fetch some demolition charges. He ran through the emptied hallways to the hidden areas behind several vending machines in a cafeteria. With a single charge, he weakened the doors enough to allow them to be pulled apart. Walking down into the tomb, the walls went from white and clean to gunmetal gray and dull.

With another explosion, he rushed in to encounter a few scientists and Cerberus guards. With some
finesse, he brought his attention to the room around him.

"What've we got here?" he thought to himself.
Face Rocket

Pistol at the ready, Saren fired rounds at the Cerberus guards. It didn't take long for him to dispatch them, so opening up his omni-tool, he contacted Wrex.

"Where are you right now?"

Gunfire crackled in the background.

{I'm a little busy right now! What is it?}

"Have you heard reports of kidnappings among the krogan?" the Spectre asked.

{Never paid much attention to them. Why?} Wrex shrugged.

He continued to walk down the walls, shooting a few more guards that came out into the open.

"Cerberus just loves tampering with biology as much as they possibly can," Saren explained, "I'll send you my current coordinates. Look for the entrance in the cafeteria, and tell Vakarian to come down here at some point as well."

{Copy that,} Wrex nodded.

Saren shut off his omni-tool and then ventured forth. He crept along, careful not to alert any other Cerberus personnel who may remain. From around a corner, he could hear the subtle tap of footsteps along the cold metal floor. Getting up from cover, he trained his pistol at none other than Miranda Lawson. In her left hand was a brief case and in her right was a pistol.

"'ello Arterius, I was just on my way out."

"You don't seem too surprised to see me this time," Saren grumbled, properly training the weapon on her.

"Truthfully, I'm not. I did allow some systems to take liberties with protection against the geth. I had to stop at some point to avoid suspicion. But now that you're here, I've gotten what I needed for now," she replied, gesturing to the case in her left hand.

Miranda took a step forward in an attempt to leave, but Saren moved in and blocked her path.

"And do you think I will let you get away?" Saren hissed.

"I have no quarrel with you. This is for my own benefit, not for Cerberus'. The Illusive Man doesn't even know I'm here," she returned, equally acidic.

Saren couldn't help but smirk at Miranda's response.

"Then you will be thankful when I tell you I'm sparing your life," Saren mocked.

Miranda stiffened and narrowed her eyes at Saren.

"I will explain later if you let me. I've got my own doubts about Cerberus, so there's no need for you to lecture me about everything wrong with them. And you standing in the way right now is not helping," Miranda continued to growl.

Miranda tossed a warp at the Spectre. Thinking fast, he dodged the warp, though it allowed Miranda to sprint past him. Irritated, Saren turned on his feet and began to pursue the operative. With the Spectre narrowly pursing her, she continued to fire back, forcing him to keep some distance. He didn't want to kill her as much as she still could hold some crucial answers.

"This will end only one way! You may as well stop running!" he barked.

Saren slipped a stun clip into his pistol before firing a round at Miranda, yet she emitted a barrier that deflected the round at a wall. Realizing what Saren was trying to accomplish, she stopped firing and began tossing random objects from around her back at him. The turian Spectre surprisingly had difficulty keeping every object thrown at him away from himself, especially hazardous containers. He narrowly shot a container full of some caustic liquid before it impacted him, but it doused a large portion of the floor in the chemical. By the time he took a few paces back and leapt over, she had fully used the window she was given to escape once more.

"Dammit! Vakarian, Lawson is here and she might be heading up your way!"

{"We're pinned down right now! I can't afford to send anyone your way!} Garrus replied over his omni-tool.

Saren growled in frustration.

"Damn it," he muttered.

Meanwhile, Garrus instructed Robin to take cover while he fired rounds at Cerberus troops.

"Reegar, what's your status?" Garrus asked, swapping out the thermal clip in his rifle.

{"The Cerberus goons on this side aren't going anywhere. On a side note, we're getting along with the Geth well enough. They watch our back and we watch theirs,} the captain answered.

"Good," Garrus replied, letting out another burst of rounds, "we're heading to their main hangar and cutting off any runners."

With a good half of his squad and Robin close by, the group quietly entered from the far side of the hangar area. It didn't have much besides tools, lifts for vehicular repairs, and shuttles waiting for take off. Miranda was standing at the doors for one of them as she talked to a group of Cerberus guards.

"I don't have time to worry about the safety of your men. I've got sensitive material right here, and I don't want to be blamed for letting it fall into their hands," Miranda hissed at the eldest among the group.

"So what? You get priority seating because the rest of us are grunts?" one of the soldiers complained, "in case you failed to notice, we're all on the same team here, operative."

"The more transports we leave on, the less chance we have to lose these. Now stop your bitching and prepare the next shuttle if you really want to leave," Miranda was about to lose her cool if these guards didn't get out of the way.

The senior soldier turned to his subordinate.

"Soldier, stand down, sh—"
"Bitch, we're not being stuck on this rock with these fucking Skullfaces!" the other three soldiers leapt at Miranda, only to be tossed aside with her biotics.

Alone she walked onto the shuttle and alone she piloted the vessel out of the hangar.

"Dammit! Operative! Get back here!" the soldier rushed after shuttle as it exited, turning upward into Virmire’s atmosphere.

Robin examined the redneck soldier in question and her eyes widened in disbelief.

"Uncle Vince?!" She exclaimed.

Vincent turned to see Robin peaking from cover before noticing the group of turian soldiers with her.

"Robin! You traitorous slut!" he rushed back to cover before pulling out his own rifle, "still fighting for these goddamned animals, huh?!"

Robin clenched her teeth and aimed her pistol at her uncle.

"You're no better yourself," Robin spat, "siding with Cerberus without questioning it!"

Racing back to cover, her uncle attempted to make his way over to a heavy weapons cache.

"Cover me! I'm going for the heavy weapons."

Garrus peeked to dome a Cerberus trooper.

"Well, some familial issues could be worse," he told Robin.

Robin sighed in disbelief.

"Whenever I try to reason with my uncle," she explained, "he just wouldn't listen."

Reaching the weapons locker, Vincent pulled out a rocket launcher.

"Get the next shuttle ready, I'll lay down suppressing fire on their position!"

"RPG! Get to cover!" Garrus ordered.

Robin and the rest of the squad scrambled to find cover while Vincent aimed the rocket launcher at Garrus. He didn't hesitate as he pulled the trigger.

Caught by a direct hit, he was sent tumbling against the wall behind them. He could barely hear a thing as it detonated upon impact. Slowly, the pain began to kick in sharply, his entire right face felt like it was on fire, and his breathing became labored. What happened? He felt dizzy, and somewhat tired.

Robin caught a glimpse of Garrus sprawled on the ground and her eyes widened in horror, panic striking her hard in the gut.

"Garrus!" she called out.

Robin sprinted out from her makeshift cover and knelt by the turian commander's side.

"Com— …own! Prf— …ire!" he could hear his subordinates yell.

An inky black form appeared before him. As his eyes tried to adjust, he could catch glimpses of what
While holding her boyfriend's talon, Robin glared at her uncle. He was tempted to launch another rocket again, but another soldier tapped him on his shoulder, drawing his attention.

"We have to move out," the soldier reminded.

Saren burst into the hangar, following Miranda's trail. Realizing she's already escaped, he turned his attention to the downed Vakarian as Robin and another soldier dragged him off to cover. Seeing an incoming RPG, he grabbed on with his biotics, twirled the projectile around, then tossed it back at the soldier who launched it, catching him and the other three remaining soldiers in the resulting explosion, even if the other soldiers died covering for Vincent as a result. He didn't hesitate as he rushed to Robin's side.

"What happened here? Where's Lawson?!"

"She already left," Robin answered, "but I just found out my uncle enlisted in Cerberus."

She gestured to the wound on Garrus's face.

"And…he…" she couldn't bring herself to finish the sentence.

Vincent barely recovered before he staggered towards one of the shuttles. Stumbling in, he narrowly took off under a hail of fire.

"Dammit, sloppy sloppy sloppy," Saren cursed himself.

The alarms started to blare overhead with Wrex and Thane rushing in.

"Warning: contingency warheads have been activated. Fifteen minutes to reach minimum safe distance," the facility VI announced.

"Oh, great," Wrex groaned.

Robin shuddered, even when Thane placed his hand on her shoulder.

"He'll live," he tried to comfort her, "he'll need some time to recuperate, but I've seen turians with much worse injuries recover fully."

"We need to leave now!" Saren reminded.

"Aran'tar, the commander is down. Repeat, Commander Vakarian is down. The facility self destruct has activated and we are in need of evac, over," one soldier reported over the coms.

{Shepard, this is Captain Reegar. Alarms are going off everywhere, what the hell is going on over there?} Kal asked.

Her hands trembling, Robin tapped on her omni-tool and engaged in the com-link.

"G-Garrus, he," she sputtered, "h-he needs help!"

{You can tell the rest when we get out of here. I'm not waiting to become dust to hear about it. Let's move out!}

The call dropped soon after, leaving the team to retreat outside where the Aran'tar had landed to
retrieve them. Mordin stood outside with a couple other field medics.

"Heard report, commander in trouble. What happened?" the salarian asked.

"Enemy RPG, took a direct hit. He needs attention ASAP," one of his lieutenants answered.

The turian commander's lieutenants carefully lay Garrus on a gurney before harnessing him, allowing the salarian medic to examine him. Thane took up the duty of contacting the quarian squad.

"Captain, we are ready to depart. How about you?"

\{We were pinned down, but the geth provided cover for me and my men until we could reach our ship. These are strange times,\} Kal answered, \{how is the commander holding?\}

"He's stable, but he'll need medical attention before he'd be so much as talking again. We'll keep you up to date on his condition. Will we be meeting you back at the Citadel?" Thane continued.

\{Legion says that's probably be our best option, but we'll need one from your party to vouch for our approval. Quarian vessels aren't exactly welcome at the Citadel and the geth would be shot on sight.\}

Liara couldn't help but blink before she turned her attention towards the Spectre.

"Are you asking Tali for your help on this?" she clarified.

"Her word alone won't suffice. I'll drop my own if it helps them," Saren added.

\{Thank you, Arterius. Now let's move.\}

Hastily loading on, the hangar area closed as the vessel took to the skies. Rushing to the bridge, Saren, Wrex, and Thane checked outside to see if they would escape the blast radius. As they entered the upper atmosphere, they could see a bright flash far below.

"That was too close, even for my liking," Saren commented, sighing with relief.

Still, the turian Spectre stepped out of the bridge and made his way to the medical bay. Mordin and the team of medics were starting to prepare to perform a procedure on Garrus while Robin merely sat in a chair at the corner of the room.

"How's the commander?" Saren asked.

Mordin simply shook his head gravely as he worked the medical equipment on Garrus.

"Damaged plates on upper right chest plate, right cheek plates, heavily damaged tissue along the right side of the neck. Plates and armor did protect most of his vital organs. Neck tissue will need time to re-grow."

The Spectre turned his attention to Robin.

"Are you all right?" Saren asked.

Robin slowly shook her head. Saren sighed as he calmly approached her.

"I-I wasn't surprised when my uncle declared he was going to vote for Toby Dunn," she said softly, "I saw his TweetFeed posts with these hurtful stereotypes against turians. But…I-I didn't think he would actually stoop to such a level this cruel…"
Robin couldn't finish her sentence as she let out a pained gasp. Saren softly sighed as he scratched the back of his head.

"Look, I can understand if you're shocked by a betrayal from within the family, but this is what civil wars can do. What we thought were brothers and sisters, friends or cousins, they can end up at the wrong side of your weapon. I know you wish he'd just stay aside, but...you just have to get used to bad things happening."

He got on his knees to wipe the tears from under her eyes with his thumb.

"And Vakarian is a strong leader," Saren continued, "he will make it out of this. Be strong for him."

Robin stared into Saren's eyes before she nodded. Without another word, he turned for the door. Saren would have to remind himself to send a report to the Council once they return to the Citadel.

Miranda pulled up her monitor. She made up her mind. She knew where Cerberus would be striking next, and while she felt it was a great risk, she saw ample opportunity. Pulling up a message, she quickly composed a letter to her sister.

{Oriana,

I've made up my mind and I've come to my own conclusions. I don't believe that Cerberus has the best intentions in mind, but I don't think they'd be willing to let me go so easily. I've gotten what I need to ensure your safety, but I need to make sure you get out of your cell. I've made arrangements for you to transfer to my cell out of need for your expertise. When a contact of mine arrives, I'll arrange for them to take us out. I'm sorry if your loyalties still remain with Cerberus, but I've seen what I've seen, and I want to believe that there are other ways we can protect Humanity.

Love,
Miranda}

Without a second thought, she sent the email before starting a new draft. It was only a few more days before she would initiate the next mission, but there just might be enough time.

{Spectre Saren Arterius,

I know we've been enemies in the past, but I contact you under a banner of truce...}

She leaned back in her seat for a bit to think about how to convince him. She felt lucky Saren didn't try to kill her in Virmire, so death was a possibility that she could cross out. Still, a gut feeling reminded her that she would still be held responsible for her part of Cerberus's crimes.
The instant the Aran'tar returned to the Citadel, Mordin and the crew's medics had Garrus transported to the clinic. Saren decided to stay alongside the commander, see to it he made it to Huerta Hospital on the Presidium. Liara, Tali, Robin and Thane also accompanied them while the human ambassador tapped on her omni-tool, starting to call her brother.

{Yeah?} Brendan said.

"Brendan," Robin started, "if you're not busy, could you come over to the Huerta Hospital? I have some bad news."

Saren looked over the medical report handed to him by Mordin. Walking over to Robin, he reported,

"Garrus isn't at the end of his rope just yet," Saren reported, "he'll be alright, but he'll need to wear medical cybernetics for a few months before he can truly be considered ready to for another firefight. Until then, he can still command, but will need to avoid the front lines, and simply provide cover-fire."

Robin nodded before she returned to her transmission.

"Anyways," Robin continued, "I just ran into Uncle Vincent at Virmire and you're not going to like what he did."

{Oh, ok,} Brendan responded over the com-link, {I'll bring along Vega and Chambers. See you soon.}

Smiling, Robin ended the call before she sat down in a lounge chair. There was a long moment of silence until she heard frantic footsteps through the door.

"Hello, I'm here for a Commander Vakarian, could we see him please?" a panicked voice said from the front lobby.

"Understood. Could I have a name please?" the nurse at the front desk asked.

Robin tilted her head towards the turian in question, raising her eyebrows.

"I'm his father, Castis Vakarian," he answered.

"Room 451, should I have someone guide you up there?" the nurse answered.

Castis noticed Robin out of the corner of his eyes.

"Robin! What happened?"

Robin took a deep breath before she stepped towards Castis.

"We were deployed at Virmire when one of the Cerberus soldiers tried to blow Garrus's head off," Robin explained, "the soldier who did that...was my uncle."

Robin clasped her hands, pressed them against her chest and lowered her head.

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," Robin continued, "I didn't mean for this to happen."
Castis calmly put his hand on her shoulder.

"You did what you could. Will he make it?"

Robin nodded. It didn't take long for Saren to take notice of the turian commander's father.

"Castis," the Spectre greeted, "the doctors are doing all they can for him. He'll survive, but with some heavy scarring across some of his chest and facial plates."

Castis lightly nodded, trying to remain calm.

"But, if you need to see him right away, we can see him. The doctors just finished up with his cybernetics, but he'll be bedridden for a couple of days," Saren informed, "just follow me."

With that, Saren led Castis and Robin through the door which led into the hallway. Arriving at the fourth floor, they made their way to Garrus' room, to find Garrus bickering with Mordin.

"Solus, I'm fine. Besides, I can't afford to waste time sitting here. Every moment I'm here is a few more seconds Cerberus has to make their next move."

"Understandable. But, can't afford to make such a risk. You'll need time to rest," Mordin said firmly.

"He's right, commander. Besides, I've got a lead we can pursue while you get your rest," Saren agreed.

Garrus narrowed his eyes at Saren for a moment before he sighed and rested his head on the pillow.

"Garrus, are you alright?" Castis asked, approaching cautiously.

"Fine, Dad. I'm surprised to see you took the day off," Garrus replied as he lay back in his bed, "a rocket won't put me down that easily."

Castis sat down, his eyes closing and his mandibles forming a smile.

"Reunions aside, I've been given a lead by no other than Miranda Lawson. She's gone so far as to tell the location of the next hit, what they'll be doing, how she'll have sabotaged her own operation, and what her terms of defection are. I don't know about the rest of you, but I think it's worth a shot," Saren continued from earlier.

Robin and Liara shifted their attention towards Saren.

"So where's Cerberus's next target?" Robin clamored.

"The Athame Botanic Gardens, they'll be testing out a new herbicide there, codenamed Doctor Orange," Saren answered, "they're testing it on plants and life forms not native to Earth. I believe it's where your mother works, is it not Liara?"

"It is," Liara started, somewhat fearful. "what do you have in mind?"

"Playing along with Miranda, let her help," Saren answered simply.

Of course, Robin couldn't help but stiffen when she heard the Spectre mention the herbicide.

"Considering how they'll kill alien lifeforms to get their way," Robin commented, "I'm not surprised."
"But with Commander Vakarian out for the time being, I had someone else in mind to go along for this operation," Saren asked, turning to Robin, "is your brother available?"

"Yeah," Robin nodded eagerly, "I called him over a while ago."

"I'll be traveling with his team to ward off the attackers. For now, the commander and his team should take leave," Saren explained, "I'll see to it your brother gets through safely."

Robin felt a sense of relief, so she stepped over to the bed and sat in a chair next to Garrus. Gazing into his eyes, she reached out for his hand.

"I'll be out in a few days, don't worry about me," Garrus said, ignoring the winces of pain he would get when moving his mandible.

{Robin Hood, I'm at Huerta. Which room are you in?} Brendan asked over her omnitool.

Sighing, Robin took a few moments to send a response:

{Room 451.}

"Will you be going along with them?" Garrus asked as she sent the message.

"Most likely," Robin answered.

Robin rested her hand on the bed, allowing her turian boyfriend to grasp it.

"Think you'll be alright?" he asked persistently, "I'd hate for Cerberus to get the drop on you while I'm still sitting back hospitalized."

"With her brother and myself, I have no doubts," Saren interrupted, "besides, it'll be nice for her to have some family get-together."

Liara took a step forward.

"I would also volunteer for the mission," Liara added.

Saren nodded.

"That's fair. Would you be so kind as to contact your mother? Inform her of the impending attack. We'll be taking a couple day's rest before we move out again."

Liara saluted before she tapped on her omni-tool and began sending a message to her mother. The silence didn't last long when Brendan, Kelly and James stepped into the room.

"Hey guys—Jeez, what happened to you, Garrus?" Brendan greeted before he was taken aback by the damage Garrus took.

"Ah, you're here," Saren started, "Vakarian will be sitting this one out. Think you can lead the charge for this one?"

Brendan snapped out of his thoughts and tilted his head towards Saren.

"Uh, yes," he answered, "but first, how did Garrus end up like this?"

Hearing her brother's voice drew Robin's attention, her eyes locking onto his own.
"Remember when I said you're not going to like what Uncle Vince did?" she clarified, gesturing to Garrus, "he thought it was acceptable to try to kill Garrus."

Brendan flinched with discomfort.

"Dammit, did Vince really join…? Well, shit. I knew he was a xenophobic ass, but…I never thought of him to stoop nearly that low. So am I going to have to shoot him now?"

"One of us will," Saren replied with a nod.

"Ah, shit. I'll let dad know. Maybe it won't come down to that," Brendan acknowledged.

While Brendan tapped on his omni-tool, Kelly cautiously meandered past the others in the room until she stopped just next to Mordin.

"Miss Chambers. How can I help?" Solus asked as Kelly approached.

Kelly couldn't help but twiddle her fingers.

"I heard some humans had relationships with turians," Kelly stammered, "and yet seeing the ambassador and Commander Vakarian here seems…pretty fascinating."

"Hmm. Fascinating. How so? Anything specific you'd like to talk about?" he quipped.

Kelly placed her hand behind her head.

"I've had a few relatives back home trying to warn me about these…dangers of dating turians," Kelly clarified, "I'm not sure if I should believe them or not."

"Depends on various factors," the salarian answered, eyeing Robin and Garrus, "turians have more stamina during mating practices than humans. Also, biology may not necessarily be compatible. Amino acid difference prone to causing allergic reaction and exterior plating could cause chaffing on human skin. Methods of risk reduction are present. Really up to you."

"Are there safety precautions to dating humans?" Kelly insisted.

"Firstly, recommend an allergy test for Dextro-based amino acids. Could provide a brochure if you want one," Mordin pulled out his omni-tool in case she accepted the offer.

Kelly smiled before she nodded.

"Thank you, sir," she chirped, "I'll look into it."

"Okay," Brendan asked, glancing over at Kelly, "so when do we move out?"

"The next attack isn't for a few more days. Camping out at their target won't do anything, so we can afford a temporary break," Saren answered.

Robin nodded in agreement.

"At least our neighborly Spectre has a point," she mused.

"Well, I've had my fill for today. See the rest of you bright an early two days from now," Saren started as he walked out the door, "if any of you need me, just call. Oh hello, Solana."

Just as the Spectre exited, Solana entered.
"Hey dad, I tried getting here as fast as I could. What happened to Garrus?" Solana asked in a panic.

"I'll live, Solana. It's only a flesh wound," Garrus answered from his bed.

"Thank Spirits, you're ok!" Solana sighed in relief.

Solana sauntered over and sat in an empty seat near the bed.

"I can still snipe. It's not the end of the world," Garrus groaned.

Solana gave her older brother a reassuring smile.

"Can understand rejoice. However, commander needs rest. Request everyone else leaves," Solus demanded.

Everyone got the message in a short moment before they turned to leave. However, Robin gave Garrus one last glance before he leaned in and kissed her forehead.

"I'll be here if you need me."

As Robin and the others disappeared from view, he let exhaustion take him and faded into darkness.

Over the course of a few days, Robin, Brendan and their friends kept up to date with current events such as watching a vid of a Toby Dunn float meandering down the street in a parade where people would run over and kick the float's inflatable butt.

"Sure he's not an animatronic under that thick skin?" Jack asked, "seriously. He doesn't seem to move all that much either, so I reckon it wouldn't take too much to maintain him."

"I'm not so sure if animatronics even have a thick layer of fat," Joker shrugged.

"Yeah, but hence the more bits and pieces you could fit in, and make it look like the real thing," Kaidan pointed out, "I mean, that would make sense. Right, Tali?"

Tali nodded. Still, Robin and Kasumi opened a vid that started with an establishing shot of a barn house in Mindoir.

[Mindoir: one of Earth's many homes away from home. One of the few stakes we've managed to grab.]

The camera panned over the colony as it began to zoom in.

[Home for ordinary people with ordinary lives. But remember that not all alien invasions involve abductions and bright particle beams.]

The camera quickly began to zoom in on a single individual on a sidewalk, still indistinguishable among everyone else.

[If you don't look closely enough, you just might miss it.]

Freezing over him, the video stopped on a frame of a turian male glancing over his shoulder as he walked along the sidewalk.

[Keep them out while you can. Your humanity depends on it.]
Robin and Kasumi couldn't help but facepalm.

"Really?" Robin muttered.

"Shit," Jack commented, pointing her index finger at the screen, "these dumb-fucks really are scraping the bottom of the barrel."

Ashley folded her arms and nodded in agreement.

"As if their bigotry could get any worse," she replied, "they're getting bolder these days."

Sighing, Kaidan used his biotics to pull over the TV remote and shut off the screen.

"Whatever," Kaidan clamored, "any word from your dad?"

"Not yet," Robin shook her head.

"So when's the next mission anyways?" Jack asked.

Robin didn't say anything, but she sent a text message to Saren:

{Hey, where do you want us to meet?}

"Hey! Speak of the devil!" Kasumi cheered as she saw the message.

Robin gave Kasumi a confused glance, who simply shrugged.

"I thought we were waiting on Saren's word, no?"

"Well, I'm ready," Ashley announced, "where do we start?"

Robin stood to her feet and sauntered over to the shoe rack, grabbing her boots and slipping them on. Robin's omni-tool buzzed with a text response seconds later.

{Hey Robin Hood, I just got pinged by Saren, said to meet you guys at my ship. Just geared up and I'm heading out the door. Where are you right now?} Brendan asked.

After reading the message, Robin beckoned Joker, Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan and Ashley to the door.

"Come on, guys!" Robin clamored, "Brendan will be waiting for us at the Normandy!"

The group quickly geared up before departing in a sky taxi to the dock Brendan parked the Normandy at. As they arrived, Brendan, James, and Saren were outside on the docks.

"Ah, good to see you in timely fashion, ambassador! I just arrived," Saren greeted.

Robin smiled and placed her hand behind the back of her head.

"I was just waiting to hear from you," she clarified, "but I guess I should thank Brendan for giving the heads up."

"I hope the leak from Miranda pays off. The Athame Botanic Gardens haven't reported any hostile activity yet, so that's a start. She'll be contacting us when we get there, but won't have much time to give us instruction without drawing attention to herself from her superior," Saren explained.

Jack grumbled and shook her head in disbelief. Even Kaidan was completely opposed to the idea.
"Look, Arterius, we just aren't willing to trust her so readily after—" Kaidan began to protest.

"I can understand, but I'm not willing to give up on this opportunity. Robin even explained how she went so far as to push her own troops aside so she could escape alone. I can show you more of her conversations if it gives a better understanding," Saren interrupted.

Kasumi raised her eyebrows while Brendan beckoned his crew to board the Normandy.

"Trust me, I know what I'm doing," Saren scowled.

Robin placed her hand on Kasumi's shoulder and gave her a reassuring smile before she led her aboard the ship. It wasn't long before, Robin and her friends met up with Saren and Brendan at the bridge.

"The plan is Miranda will be helping us, she has sabotaged the means of distribution for Doctor Orange, and will be slowed down enough to give us a proper window," Saren explained, "Additionally, she's made it apparent that her terms of cooperation require that we spare and safely extract her sister. Her sister was recently moved to her cell and she wants to get her out safely. She will be providing us additional information on both the current toxin used and the spore we found being produced at the medical facility. Any other questions?"

Joker scratched his cap.

"I didn't know Miranda had a sister," he commented.

"Well, the messages that have been sent between them suggest Miranda's doubts concerning Cerberus' motives. Her younger sister worked in a much less controversial cell of the organization, so she has no idea what Miranda has seen," Saren added.

Robin nodded while she examined the map of the galaxy.

"You guys may want to rest a bit. No use being worn out by the time we get there," Brendan ordered.

"You got it, Brendan," Robin nodded.

Robin led her friends out of the bridge.
Asari Gardens

Taking the opportunity to check on his crew, Brendan passed through the mess hall to see his sister and her friends talking at one of the tables. The N7 commander strode along towards his sister.

"Are you alright?" Brendan asked, "you seemed especially shaken after Garrus was hospitalized."

Robin couldn't help but sigh.

"To be fair," Robin admitted, "I was worried he wouldn't make it."

"If Garrus is the man who got you out of hot water, I'm sure he'll live to say he survived a direct blast from an RPG," he reassured.

Robin nodded and placed her hand on Brendan's.

"I know you two haven't talked about it too much," Brendan continued, breaking eye contact, "but what did you guys have planned once this mess is cleaned up and Cerberus is dealt with?"

"Would it count if I wanted to petition to legalize interspecies marriage, especially in Alliance space?" Robin scratched her head.

"Once this mess is cleaned up, who says you can't?" Brendan encouraged.

Robin smiled in response, yet it didn't take long when she and Brendan felt the Normandy take off. All Robin could do was wait during the flight, so over the course of a few hours, she and Jack played a puzzle game on their omni-tools, determined to see which of the two would get the highest score.

{Commander, we're coming in over Thessia, approaching the Athame Botanic Gardens. Liara informs me we are currently over Larissa. It's a nice view, you might wanna come see,} the pilot informed.

Brendan, Robin, and the others walked to the bridge to have a good look of the asari metropolis below. Asari architecture was almost completely lacking in angles, and largely composed of flowing curves to form towers that would scratch the clouds. The buildings and the various layers left shifting holes like tunnels that reached down into the metal and concrete jungle below. The shorter buildings almost resembled stadiums from Earth with the woven net-like beams supporting the top of buildings. The asari also put a heavy emphasis on the use of glass in their architecture, making the buildings sparkle like diamonds in the sun light.

"Wow! It's incredible!" Kaidan commented.

Ashley responded by placing her hand on Kaidan's shoulder.

"Damn, quite a place for Cerberus to hit," Brendan admired.

"I'm bringing us into the hangar area. All crew brace for landing procedures," the pilot announced over the ship intercoms.

Slowing down, the Normandy entered a hangar area before the magnetic clamps locked onto her hull, keeping the vessel in place for the docking bridge to attach.
"Well, grab your gear, guys. We're heading out," Brendan ordered.

Once the squad took the time they needed to gear up, Brendan, Robin, Saren and Liara disembarked the Normandy first with the rest of their squad following suit. The team exited onto the platform following Liara, as she had the most experience with the location. As they walked through the asari metropolis, Liara gave a well rounded description of the places her mother had taken her before during the trip to the gardens.

"I do apologize if I hesitate. It's been a while since I was last here," Liara said, pausing for a moment.

"That's ok," Robin reassured while she observed the tall buildings, "it's just amazing here."

"Your mother does know we're coming, right?" Saren asked.

Liara nodded.

"I notified her ahead of time," she confirmed.

"Good. Miranda informed me their plan is to act quick and deploy the chemical agent. She'll slow them down long enough for us to make an entrance and stop the weapon test. Until we arrive, she's forced to take a low profile among the Cerberus forces," Saren continued.

"So we act faster," Brendan finished.

Liara led everyone along the walkway, familiar with the directions to the facility. As they approached the facility entrance, they could see an Asari Matriarch in a yellow dress directing staff outward. Turning her attention to the group, she walked forward and greeted them.

"Little one, I'm grateful to see you're alive, but you shouldn't have returned. And Saren Arterius, it's a pleasure to meet you, but I wish we could meet under better circumstances."

"It could always be worse, Matriarch Benezia. Have you evacuated any remaining staff? It's critical we keep as low collateral damage as possible," Saren greeted back.

Benezia nodded before she tilted her head towards Robin and Brendan.

"I'm surprised you would prefer to work with humans over Hierarchy forces, Spectre," Benezia prompted.

"The herbicide is designed to remain ineffective towards life forms native to Earth. I've heard plenty of horrid side-effects from Doctor Orange's predecessor, so humans might be able to successfully contain it without being negatively impacted," Saren replied.

Robin remained calm as she took a step forward.

"Well, I'm pleased to meet you," Robin greeted, extending her hand, "Ambassador Robin Shepard at your service."

"An honor," Benezia replied, returning the gesture, "I hope you have a plan to combating today's attack."

"I hope so," Robin nodded.

Brendan walked forward to introduce himself.

"I'm not nearly as well-known, but my name is Brendan. I'm commander of the nearby Alliance
detachment and the ambassador's older brother. Cerberus won't be holding back when they move in, but we just might have an inside man to help delay them enough for our opportunity to stop them."

Benezia nodded before she led the squad inside. First, they had to step into the decontamination area, where they were sprayed with antiseptic and had to stand for a few minutes to let it air-dry.

"We collect various plant species from across the galaxy in this building. Usually for medicinal research," Benezia started as they exited decontamination into the main entrance, "we practice great caution going in and out of this building. Both for the sake of what's in here and what's outside. Take these plants for example."

The team walked by a chamber with a window looking into a room of tropical foliage.

"The fruit from those plants consists of sugars that most sentient life has not evolved with. It functions almost like a neurotoxin, heavily degrading the higher brain functions after prolonged consumption."

James felt a chill sent down his spine.

"Right now, we just keep a sample here, in case something possibly applicable does come up," the Matriarch finished.

"Is there a universal venting system?" Saren asked.

"We exercise plenty of caution," she answered, turning to the Spectre, "each chamber is isolated from chambers where plants from a completely different environment are present. When they do attack, they all have to expose each chamber one at a time."

Robin listened while she examined the exotic plants they passed by.

"Their best chance would be to hijack the security office where the door controls are. Even then, the chambers have airlocks that are designed to only have one door open at a time. Even if you're forced to fall back and regroup, they'll still be slowed significantly by the facility design," Benezia finished.

Kaidan nodded in agreement.

"At least we have some advantage here," Kaidan commented.

"According to Lawson, they've had spies come through and analyze the architecture," Saren explained. "she'll have sabotaged the equipment used for pumping in the agent into the chambers. It'll give us enough time to get the drop on them."

Kasumi carefully examined the vents in search of anything unusual.

"She said to set up an ambush," Saren continued, "let them enter. The troops they bring will be more manageable I'm inclined to agree."

"Right," Brendan nodded.

Still, Benezia led the squad further through the facility.

"Alright gents, listen up," Brendan started, now with his entire unit present, "we're limited in numbers here, but hear me out. We'll be baiting the Cerberus troops in and taking them out when they're inside. Their weakness is the fact this is the asari homeworld, forcing them to act quick. Once inside, wait for the equipment stall to catch their attention before coming out of cover. As a final
note, watch where you fire. This facility runs on sealed environments to keep many of these plants stable, meaning no frags; you will only use flashbangs and well-placed EMPs. Understood?"

"Oorah!" his fellow marines answered.

"Good. Get to your assigned positions and wait on the agreed signal."

The team quickly scattered across the facility to their hiding spots before Miranda's Cerberus cell arrived. In the meantime, Saren had Robin, Liara, Kaidan, Ashley, Kasumi and Jack accompany him.

"I can see how you've made it as far as you have, commander," Saren complimented as he drew out his rifle from his back holster.

"Thanks," Brendan nodded, "maybe if the whole plan goes well, we might have a chance at victory against Cerberus in the future."

Tali fidgeted with the local coms.

"As Kal says, 'kill them with bug bites', right?" she replied.

Robin let out a small chuckle.

"Better find some bugs that bite then," Robin mused.

It didn't take along for the entire squad to scramble into position. Saren received a ping on his omni-tool.

{All arrangements are in place on my side. I assume you are in position down below?}

He hastily wrote back:

{Down here with an Alliance squad. We're in position for an ambush. Are we still attacking on the breakdown of the gas pumps?}

{Correct. We'll be coming in using a stealth system to hide our energy signature while we approach and deploy. Just keep an eye out for my sister and make sure she gets to cover. She's wearing her hair in a ponytail with a blue band,} Miranda responded.

She quickly followed up with:

{We're making our final approach. See you groundside.}

Saren nodded to himself before he held his own position, scanning the surroundings in case Oriana was in the area.

"They're making their approach. See if you can pick up anything over local coms," Saren ordered Tali.

"Understood," Tali nodded.

A few more minutes of dreadful silence passed among the group until Tali checked the radar in her omni-tool.

"They seem to acknowledge an unidentifiable vessel has entered the nearby airspace, but have been unable to detect any energy signature," Tali reported.
"That's them, alright," Brendan replied, "and it sounds like they've got the same sort of stealth systems the Normandy has."

Not too long after, a patch of the ceiling above exploded, followed by numerous Cerberus troops rapping down.

"Move out! Get that pump set up and get to work, form a defensive perimeter to keep the locals away, and get to work on the next one once the first chamber is complete! We won't have long until local authorities act on our presence," Miranda barked.

"That's a lot of hostiles out there," Brendan muttered, risking a quick peek from cover.

More troops continued to drop in from the Cerberus transport outside. They began to form a perimeter around the building, aiming their guns to intimidate any locals from entering.

"Just stay low," Saren ordered as gunshots and screams rang in the distance.

"What's the progress on that pump?" Miranda asked.

"Almost set."

The nearby technicians continued installing equipment in one of the controls for the environmental hubs. All the while, some of the technicians began moving the agent out of the transport.

"We're ready. The Doctor should be fully administered in—"

*PAFF*

The Cerberus technician was sharply interrupted by a loud explosion followed by a trail of smoke from the pump.

"Dammit! This'll take me some time to fix!"

Rising from cover, Brendan and Saren began to open fire upon the Cerberus troops in the open.

"There's the signal! Light 'em up!" Brendan ordered over the coms.

"Copy that!" Vega nodded.

"Operative Lawson's made her move! Remember the briefing!"

Suddenly, as well as shooting at the Alliance troops, the nearby Cerberus soldiers trained their weapons on Miranda and fired. Tossing a warp behind her, she quickly ran to cover before returning fire. Between firing rounds, Robin figured this could be the sign she’ll need to search for Oriana. Miranda was quickly proving herself to be much more competent than her former colleagues in combat. With seemingly little effort, she danced around their gunfire, softened them up with her biotics, then finished them off with a couple pistol shots.

"Operative Lawson is advancing! Fall back before she can retrieve Priority Tw—" the soldier was yelling through his omni-tool before Miranda suddenly shot his brains out the other side of his helmet.

Witnessing these recent actions gave Jack some confidence, so she started emitting her biotic field. As gunfire below continued, one of the transports overhead fled the scene. Miranda was left distraught as she watched the vessel fly off, leaving her vulnerable for a moment too long. Knocking her on the ground, a Cerberus engineer was about to finish her off before Saren gunned him down.
While Jack sprinted ahead to give the Cerberus troops in the area a good fight, Miranda staggered back to her feet.

"Keep pressing! Doyle, get to work on that pump and shut it off, we'll cover you," Brendan gestured, keeping pressure on what remained of the Cerberus forces.

While Doyle scrambled towards the pump, Robin and Liara set off to locate Oriana, hoping she might still be in hiding.

Rolling behind cover to slip a new thermal clip into his rifle, Saren turned to Miranda over the gunfire.

"Where's your sister? I haven't found her yet."

"Don't bother, she's not here! The Illusive Man had informed the others about my messages to you, and have retreated with her," Miranda replied, ducking under more fire.

"Argh, dammit!" Saren growled, "now what?"

Saren didn't think the Illusive Man would eventually find out about Miranda's dissent. Still, he remembered Robin and Liara left a moment ago, so he sent a quick text in his omni-tool before he returned to battle.

\{They made off with Miranda's sister. Resume eliminating Cerberus forces, nothing we can do.\}

It was only minutes later before Doyle succeeded in shutting off the pump, so now all the squad had to do was drive the Cerberus forces out of the facility. By now, despite their remaining numbers, the Cerberus forces were in full retreat, and most left the facility before local authorities finally arrived. With the plan sabotaged, Brendan, Saren and Robin's squad headed over to the facility foyer.

"Well? Now what?" Brendan asked as he walked up to Saren.

The Spectre looked over his shoulder to see Miranda talking with the Illusive Man on her omni-tool.

"She says that she's still willing to help us, but she also asks we help her retrieve her sister," Saren grumbled, "I can understand."

"Do you think this was all a ploy to capture Oriana?" Robin pondered.

Still, Robin made a brief glance at the Cerberus operative herself, knowing the Alliance would still hold her accountable.

\{What did I ever do to you?!\} the Illusive Man demanded over the com-link. \{for eight years, I've protected you and your sister and this is how you thank me?!!\}

The former Cerberus Operative continued to pace as she talked with the Illusive Man.

"Believe me when I say I still believe in the advancement of the human race, but I don't believe that is your true end goal when you have numerous projects with clear goals lying outside of those defined boundaries. History has judged individuals for good reason, and I'm not going to be judge based on the commands of a madman. With that in mind, take a long good look at my last report. Consider that my resignation. I don't have the time or patience to sit down and write a letter."

\{No one dares to stoop to aiding the turian terrorists behind my back,\} the Illusive Man growled over the com-link.
"And under your yoke, humanity will only be driven to disaster," Miranda hissed before ending the call.

Miranda shook her head and sighed in disbelief before she turned on her feet and shuffled over to Saren, catching his attention.

"I assume the Illusive Man didn't take your actions well, did he?" Saren commented.

"He has a very detailed vision of a perfect universe. Unfortunately, he's got quite an ego and doesn't allow room for compromise," Miranda answered, rolling her eyes, "I know it wasn't part of the initial deal, but I want to get my sister back."

Saren nodded while he placed his hand on Miranda's shoulder.

"So, do you want a second chance?" Kasumi asked.

"He's a madman with power. That doesn't end well for either side of the conflict," Miranda answered simply.

"If it means tying up loose ends for you, then we'll do it," Saren offered.
With Benezia bringing the situation at the Athame Botanic Gardens under control, Brendan led everyone in his squad back to the Normandy. To their disappointment, the Illusive Man didn't give away any clues on Oriana's whereabouts, so Tali offered to contact Legion to help locate the former operative's sister. While Kaidan and Ashley invited Brendan and Robin over to table tennis in the rec room, Miranda and Saren remained on the bridge.

"I appreciate the fact you're willing to allow me to defect," Miranda started.

"No need to thank us, the geth made it apparent you weren't switching sides out of convenience," Saren replied.

Miranda gave Saren a confused stare.

"Even the ones at Virmire?" she paused.

"Along with the tip you gave them," Saren replied.

She looked down at the ground.

"Oh. Just for the record, I'm not the type of person who sees other species as inferior. I just—"

"It's alright," Saren interrupted, "Ambassador Shepard made it apparent what your…"

He faked a cough before finishing.

"…preferences were."

Miranda stiffened, a chill creeping down her spine.

"I-It's…it's not that I…" Miranda started to object.

"Look, if it makes you feel any better, I don't object. Yes, I do feel nervous about humans politically, but I have nothing against them personally," Saren quickly followed up.

While Miranda gained a sense of relief, she still fidgeted.

"The Illusive Man can never know about this," she admitted.

"Yeah…" an awkward pause passed between the two of them, "so…?"

Miranda forgot what she wanted to tell him for a moment.

"Maybe you'd prefer to have a further discussion somewhere private? For example the briefing room, the mission is done and we've all debriefed, no one will be in there," Saren offered.

Miranda took a deep breath for a moment.

"All right," she nodded, "I accept your offer."

With that, Saren led Miranda out of the bridge and they made their way to the briefing room. The
Spectre made sure no one else was inside before the door closed behind them.

"Now, Lawson," Saren started, "whatever the Illusive Man or any of the company leaders sponsored by Cerberus tell you, I…wouldn't give up on you given the chance."

Miranda let out a sigh as she leaned against the wall.

"I don't know how long it will take to overcome my doubts," Miranda replied, "but I'll bet it could be harder for my sister."

"How so?" Saren asked.

"She's been working with much less controversial matters, helping to shape the public image back on Earth," Miranda stated, "she hasn't nearly seen as much of Cerberus' undersides as I have."

"Hopefully, she's the reasonable type?"

Miranda nodded.

"With that out of the way, tell me something," Saren transitioned, "why were you so interested in me specifically?"

Miranda stared in a moment of silence while the Spectre slowly approached her.

"I…I'm not sure why," Miranda stammered, "but, when I look at you, I see…uh…"

"Are you saying all the times we ran into each other on the field were merely a long string of coincidences?" his browplates pronounced his inflated suspicion as a smug grin grew across his face.

"Maybe not," Miranda answered.

"I mean, I know the answer, it's just I want to confirm it now all the puzzle pieces are in position. So what sort of fantasies do you have of me and you?"

By then, Saren stood mere inches away from Miranda, giving her a chance to take in his impressive frame. She simply looked back at him with pure silence.

"I'm still waiting for an answer," he taunted.

He figured at some point he'd finally catch up and interrogate her, but he never would've thought she would come to him and what he would actually ask when it eventually happened.

"Well," Miranda finally pointed out, "your strength is…formidable."

"Go on."

The subvocals in Saren's voice was enough for the former operative to blush.

"Well, if you aren't, I will. You have assets that rival that of an Asari Matriarchs, from the few times I've seen you do it, I enjoy the way you wield power, and your voice is like nothing else," Saren cut in with a chuckle.

"Perhaps my power can match yours," Miranda remarked.

"I take it you're interested," after describing her form, he now realized that he might actually show some affection back.
That wasn't necessarily bad, right? Commander Vakarian and Ambassador Shepard seemed to get along quite affectionately, what would put the divide between the two of them? That was made apparent when Miranda reached out and brushed her hand against his fringe.

"And it seems you are as well," Miranda let out.

No one was watching, no one would judge. This should be fine. Saren flared his mandibles as leaned forward and pressed his forehead against Miranda's.

"Now that we've properly introduced ourselves, how do we go about this?" Saren asked as he brought himself close.

"I hope you've done research on humans," Miranda proclaimed.

Miranda unzipped her top and slid it off.

"You are aware of the possible risks someone could walk in on our fun, right?"

With a crew of mostly humans, Saren was rather nervous about the endeavor.

"Maybe we should lock the door," Miranda suggested.

"Then again, I did pay a handsome amount of credits for good software well within good reason."

Reaching to the door with his omni-tool, Saren installed a well encrypted worm, turning the green of the door panel to an angry red.

"Now we should have some privacy."

He began to unhook the clasps on his armor. Watching him set the armor down which exposed his undersuit, Miranda unclasped her bra.

"While more for tactical and cultural purposes, I have indeed studied human anatomy," Saren added as he began to strip off his leg armor.

Miranda nodded before she slipped off her boots and her pants, exposing herself completely, and it didn't take long for Saren to expose his own body. With both the Spectre and the former operative in such a vulnerable state, Miranda cautiously approached him and placed her hand on his mandible. He responded by brushing a few strands of her hair out of her eyes.

"Think you're up for the challenge? Dextro acids and all?" he asked as he began to close the remaining distance between them.

"I've handled dextro acids before," Miranda answered.

"Excellent," Saren smirked.

He quickly closed the gap between his mouth and her lips. Miranda reached her arms around his carapace and closed her eyes, savoring a moment she never thought she'd experience in her life. As the two held that position, Saren wrapped one arm behind her shoulders and the other around her lower back. Her mouth, both inside and out, felt very soft, even in comparison to asari mouths he'd felt before. He traced his talon along her spine, observing as she arched her back. His plates began to shift as they finally separated.

"I'm just about ready for more," he asked, keeping her back supported, "are you?"
It was little more than a hungry whisper. Miranda tilted her head towards the table in the room. Taking the hint, he lifted her into his arms and lay her onto the table, her legs still dangling over the edge. He put his face in her neck, lightly nipping at her collar bone. The arm supporting her lower back had now moved to hold her leg in place. Letting out soft moans, Miranda brushed one hand underneath his fringe while she brushed her other hand along his waist.

"Not to hold the answers against you, but where did you learn about turian anatomy?" Saren promoted as he felt Miranda's hand trace his waist.

"Why do you think I dabbled in the scientific studies Cerberus conducted?" Miranda quipped.

"Invested since the start? It must be good to experience the return on investment first hand," Saren chuckled as he reached a talon down to her nether region.

Miranda gasped softly, resisting the urge to clench her thighs against his hand, wanting to hold it in place. Saren grinned at her reaction.

"Are you ready for the full experience?"

His plates had now shifted aside, letting his full length extend. He began to adjust himself so his hips were waiting in place. Still, he took a moment to inspect her. Suspecting she might not be ready yet, he started emitting his biotics in his hand. Saren's own biotics rippled from his hand as he gently prodded her further. The intense sensation surged into her core, eliciting even more cries out of Miranda as she pulled the Spectre closer. By now he could smell her wetness pierce the air as did her moans of pleasure. Taking a sample, he licked the salty fluids from his fingertips.

"I can see why Commander Vakarian is so drawn to Ambassador Shepard," Saren mused.

"It's the soft fleshy bits, isn't it?" Miranda hummed.

"Perhaps that must be it," Saren purred.

Staring into the operative's eyes for a moment, Saren nuzzled his face against hers. Now fully erect, he put his tip right at the entrance.

"Ready to breach," he whispered.

Miranda nodded before she kissed the Spectre's mandible.

"Then don't keep me waiting," she urged.

"Breaching," he pushed in and started thrusting.

A deep grunt escaped him as he started feeling the inside of her. He could hear her gasp as she tightened her grip. He started to pick up the pace as he felt her legs perch around his hips. Euphoria swelled in his head as his breath and heart pounded away at his chest. Panting, Miranda rested her head on Saren's shoulder, feeling her own heart pulsate rapidly. As he approached his climax, he picked up the tempo and made an audible growl. Miranda took this chance and biotics rippled from her own hands, sending pleasurable thrills through both of them. The use of biotics caught him off guard. It wasn't the same as melding with an asari, but it did feel similar in that the sensation caused by the energy ripples tingled throughout his body. In the midst of his thrusts, he felt Miranda clench around him while she rode out her climax. Saren soon reached his release seconds later.

Slowing down, he began to pull himself out, careful to spill as little of their collective fluids as possible.
"That was…refreshing. Care to continue at some point?"

"Maybe we could make a reservation at somewhere exotic next time," Miranda nodded.

He tapped his omni-tool to the door behind him, undoing the lock.

"Yeah," Saren agreed, "maybe after we've retrieved your sister."

Saren and Miranda took a few minutes to slip their uniforms back on.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll be looking for cleaning supplies to remove any evidence of our discussion," Saren said as he began to exit the door.

Miranda waited until minutes later, Saren returned with the cleaning supplies in question.

"That was a great time," Miranda thanked with a light smile, "still, I can't help wonder what they'll do to Oriana."

"Don't worry," Saren replied, putting a hand to her cheek, "they can't hold her forever. Not with how sloppy the Illusive Man is."

Saren and Miranda set off to clean the evidence of their ordeal, which would reduce suspicion from anyone.

Once the Normandy returned to the Citadel, Nihlus stood at the docking bay since he was waiting for Saren's return. The ship carefully docked itself and opened its ramp, allowing the crew onboard to disembark. It didn't take long before Saren emerged from the ship and made his way to the dock. Nihlus was about to say something when his nostrils picked something up. Without a second thought, his mandibles spread apart in a smug grin.

"So you took my advice and even decided to be adventurous," Nihlus commented, "who's the lucky girl?"

Rolling his eyes, Saren ignored the question.

"Good to see you too, Nihlus. What have I missed?"

"Nothing much," Nihlus shrugged, "I just kept up to date with the current events."

"Hmm. Is Commander Vakarian out of the hospital yet?" Saren asked.

"Yes," Nihlus nodded, "but he still needs time to heal completely."

"He's still got a few months before he can properly return to the field, right?" Saren clarified.

"He'll need to take it easy and require almost daily maintenance, but he's still a sniper. He can just hang back and provide cover fire," Nihlus agreed.

With Robin, Joker, Kasumi, Jack, Kaidan and Ashley disembarking the Normandy with Miranda following suit, Saren gestured them and Nihlus to follow him out of the docks.

"Oh, Miranda, do you have any civics with you? I would like to avoid any further incident in regards to your current outfit," Saren asked, glancing around the docks for on-lookers.

"You know," Miranda admitted, "I wish I did."
"We'll just move quickly to the Citadel Tower," Nihlus injected, "I can get us a taxi over there. We can pick something up later."

Saren sighed while Robin turned her head towards Joker, Kaidan, Ashley, Kasumi and Jack.

"I'll see you guys later," Robin called out.

It was a quick taxi ride, and it was a silent walk over to the elevator into the Citadel Tower. The four of them packed in and exited to face the Council.

"Spectre Arterius, why is this Cerberus Operative outside of captivity?" Sparatus started, eyeing Miranda.

"She isn't a POW, she's explicitly shown desire to defect," Saren corrected.

Tevos nodded.

"Interesting," Tevos mused, "so how did you persuade her to defect?"

"Her reasons are irrelevant. However, she does promise to show greater insight to Cerberus activities," Saren responded.

Miranda calmly nodded before she pulled out a datapad from her pocket.

"Fortunately, I had pulled numerous files concerning contacts, locations, protocols, communication encryptions, and projects before I had made my stance clear to my superior. I'd be willing to provide all of you what is needed," Miranda said as she flipped over multiple files.

Robin's eyes lit up as she observed the files while standing near Nihlus.

"Wow," Robin commented, "that's a lot more than what my friends and I leaked."

"I see," Councilor Valern commented, "and did you plan to barter with this information?"

"She wishes to ensure the safety of what's left of her family," Saren answered, "Cerberus has possession of her sister, and she wants to have her extracted."

Sparatus focused his eyes on the young Shepard.

"I think I understand her wanting to protect her sister," Robin said, "I had to risk my life to save my own mom, if you recall."

"Very well. You have permission to further utilize Spectre resources to ensure her demands are achieved," Sparatus replied, "now, we assume by the report you sent that the agent was secure."

"Yes, councilors," Saren answered, "currently, the agent is in possession of local authorities, and they are looking for methods to properly dispose of it."

The Councilors nodded in unison, satisfied with the Spectre's answer.

"Then you are dismissed," Sparatus said.

Upon cue, Saren led Nihlus, Miranda and Robin out of the Council Chambers and they made their way to the elevator to the Presidium.

"If you'd like," Robin offered to Miranda, "I can call over Ash, Jack and Kas and we can go find
some cute outfits."

Miranda gave a slanted smile while Saren gave Robin a blank stare for a moment.

"I'll take what I can get."

Chapter End Notes

I really wish there were more fanfics of Saren/Miranda.
Since he suspected the civilians in the Citadel might object to Miranda's presence, Saren allowed her to stay in his apartment to reduce as much conflict as he could, giving her a few days to settle in. While she did manage to acquire casual garments for herself, Miranda also took the spare time she had to remove the Cerberus emblem from her uniform. As she disposed the emblem in the trash bin, Saren leaned on the door frame as he watched her.

"Maybe we should get you a new suit altogether? I know that you're a professional and are genetically modified to have biotic proficiency, but maybe it would be worth sacrificing some mobility and comfort for better protection," the turian suggested.

Miranda sighed and she leaned her head back. "You're not going to suggest combining the three standards for a uniform?" she remarked.

Raising a browplate, he shrugged with defeat. "If you're fine with the uniform, okay. It's just...it doesn't seem to have much in terms of protection."

Miranda scoffed before she set the uniform aside and started reading her datapad, hoping she would still have some clue on where Cerberus might have taken her sister. "I've put out my usual feelers, let my contacts know. It'll take some time, but we'll get her back," Saren reassured as he got up from the door frame.

Figuring she still hadn't found a sign of Oriana yet, Miranda sighed as she placed the datapad onto the nightstand. She took a few seconds to fasten the buttons of her casual dress shirt before she stepped over to the door frame.

Saren's omni-tool buzzed with an incoming call.

{Saren, we were on our way out to have lunch. Want to discuss our next move over a meal?}

Saren raised a suspicious browplate before responding. "You really aren't going to wait for a full recovery?"

{I'll hang back to sniping, remember? Besides, it's only lunch,} Garrus countered.

Saren closed his eyes while his mandibles flexed into a smile. "All right, Vakarian," he asked, "where do you want to meet?"

{Glad to hear you accept. I'll send you the coordinates,} Garrus replied.

Once his omni-tool pinged, Saren took a few moments to read the coordinates on the map before he took a deep breath.

"Lawson," Saren called over, "if you're interested, Vakarian's invited us over for lunch."

Miranda took this chance to grab a pair of loafers from the shoe rack and slip them on. Once they stepped out of their apartment, they made their way through the wards and were called over by Brendan when they arrived at the pub.
"Vakarian, you don't look that bad for having taken an explosive to the face," Saren commented.

"It's not that bad," Garrus replied, "it just hurts to move it too much."

Miranda took a moment to examine the bandaged scar on Garrus's face before she tilted her head towards Robin.

"Well, I'm just anticipating what my dad would say when he finds out what my uncle did," Robin shrugged.

"It's not going to be easy. I was never particularly fond of him, but I'm still contemplating whether I'm willing to go through with it if the situation calls for killing him," Brendan added.

Saren nodded before he and Miranda sat down at the table Garrus, Brendan and Robin were at.

"So who else is coming?" Miranda asked.

"I know Nihlus offered to invite Desolas over here as well," Robin mentioned, tilting her head to the side.

"I've expended my own resources to this search," Garrus added, "so far, no such luck."

Miranda nodded while she picked up a menu.

"I understand," Miranda replied, "I'm just hoping my sister would be ok."

"Hopefully," Saren commented, "worst case scenario would be if they sold her off to batarians…if they'd even get friendly enough."

Brendan, Robin and Miranda all cringed at the thought.

"But, worries aside," Saren continued, "I took the liberties of inviting Nihlus and my brother to this meeting as well. Desolas wasn't the most agreeable, but I convinced him it was for the best."

Robin went back to reading her menu, confirming on what beverage she would want to order. Minutes later, Miranda spotted Nihlus and Desolas out of the corner of her eye as they stepped through the door.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Saren," Desolas mumbled as he approached the table, "I still stand by my position that this isn't a worthy cause."

While Desolas and Nihlus sat down at the table, Miranda and Desolas gave each other fierce stares.

"Anyways," Nihlus interrupted, "we might've found something, but it's still unconfirmed."

Brendan shifted his focus from his menu.

"Does it have something to do with Cerberus?" Brendan clamored.

"Unfortunately, it's much worse. The Illusive Man has plans on making an example of her," Desolas answered, "I'm not sure of their current stance, but I had managed to intercept bits of a transmission between him and the Shadow Broker."

"S-Shadow Broker?" Robin paused, "never heard of him."

"The kingpin of the criminal underworld," Garrus explained, "he mostly trades in information, has
eyes and ears everywhere, only acts through tangents, and he will find something to hold over you."
"Oh, crud," Robin shuddered.

It didn't take long for their beverage orders to arrive, so everyone at the table made their lunch orders.

"So," Miranda asked, "could you specify the parts of the transmission?"

"All I could gather is that someone was hired to take down the Shadow Broker," Desolas answered.

"We know someone in that line of work," Garrus mentioned, thinking to Thane, "he could investigate further for us before we make our next move."

"I'll pass," Desolas declined, "I'm due to report back to the Primarch."

Desolas gave Miranda a hawklike stare.

"The rest of you can do whatever you want," Desolas continued.

Desolas got up and left without even bothering to order.

"Aaaaah, something else I missed?" Nihlus asked after a long hum, almost like a sight.

"Not much that I know of," Robin sighed.

Still, the remaining guests waited until their lunch orders finally arrived.

"Anyways, Thane Krios might know more on this matter," Garrus transitioned.

Miranda didn't need to ask for any clarification while she took a bite out of her shrimp. In between taking bites of her own lunch, Robin scrolled through the news feeds in her omni-tool, even if she didn't find anything that stood out at the moment.

"It's our best chance right now. Even if there'll be a delay, it's something," Brendan replied optimistically.

Garrus, Robin, Brendan, Nihlus, Saren and Miranda spent the rest of the lunch hour conversing about some of the bits of their lives, such as the days during Nihlus's Spectre training under Saren. At the end of their meal, Garrus sent a message to the assassin.

{Thane, we would like to discuss certain matters concerning your field. We'll be heading to Huerta to have my medical cybernetics checked. Meet us there.}

With that, Garrus, Saren, Robin, Brendan, Nihlus and Miranda stepped out of the pub and made their way to a cab station. Garrus, Robin and Brendan boarded one cab while Saren, Nihlus and Miranda hopped into another one. It didn't take long for the cabs to take off and hover through the station.

Upon arrival, the group waited in the lobby for Garrus to finish his check up and for Thane to arrive. All of them had been otherwise silent until Thane arrived with Liara beside him.

"I made it here as quickly as possible," Thane said, "what seems to be amiss?"

"We might have some clues on Oriana's whereabouts," Brendan explained.

"It mostly revolves around the Shadow Broker," Saren added, "there've been plenty vying for his position, and my brother Desolas had received word that yet another gun had been sent after him
recently. Would you know more and could you confirm?"

Thane nodded.

"Unfortunately, I too have heard of this rumor, and I know who the hired man is, all too conveniently," Thane explained somberly.

Robin's eyes glistened with concern, so she placed her hand on Thane's shoulder.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"The man who was sent is named Kolyat," Thane answered, avoiding eye contact, "he's...my estranged son. I've wanted to reconnect, but I've also been procrastinating out of shame."

Robin's face lit up.

"Really?!" Robin exclaimed, "I had no idea you had a child!"

"I still keep tabs on him," Thane replied, "he's a young adult by now."

"Looks to be the opening we needed," Nihlus commented.

Robin and Brendan nodded in agreement. Garrus returned to the lobby seconds after the revelation.

"Hello, Thane. What's the plan?"

"The hired assassin is Thane's long-lost kid," Saren summarized, "we've come to the conclusion of piggybacking on his job to get at the Shadow Broker. If that's alright."

"It's about time I speak with him," Thane replied, "he's currently on Illium, but he won't remain for much longer."

Not wanting to waste anymore time, Saren led Garrus, Robin, Brendan, Miranda, Nihlus, Thane and Liara out of the hospital.

"I presume we'll be going in the Normandy?" Brendan asked.

Garrus and Saren nodded.

"Vakarian's crew is still on shore leave," Saren replied, "hopefully, you won't mind?"

"Sure, why not?" Robin chirped.

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After the Normandy left the Citadel docks, the group met in the briefing room with Saren leading the conversation.

"I'm not sure if the rest of you've been to Illium enough, but Nihlus and I've been there enough to know what it's like," Saren began, "Illium, though part of the Asari Republics, is basically Omega Station with a concentration on financial crime and a fresher coat of paint."

"And I thought Aria's strip club felt creepy," Robin couldn't help but shudder.

"Basically, you take the wrong turn, and you'll be drugged, dragged off, and easily find yourself in chains when you wake up," Nihlus explained.

"It's a planet for the wicked," Thane commented, "exercise extreme caution."
Robin cringed and embraced herself to Garrus, not wanting to imagine the possible terrible outcomes that could befall her or her friends.

"Then why would refugees head over there?" she whispered.

"It's deep in Terminus Space and looks pretty. That's all," Garrus hummed with dismay.

Garrus stroked Robin's head in an attempt to soothe her.

"Unfortunately, if those refugees have fallen for the traps Illium has to offer, there's little we can do for them now. They could be anywhere by this point," Saren reminded, "it's a job for another day."

Brendan sighed while he placed his hand behind his head and paced back and forth.

"Dammit, those poor bastards," Brendan grumbled, "anyways, what are we going up against if we really are considering taking down the Shadow Broker? Because by the sound of him, he's not giving Oriana back willingly."

"As stated earlier, he keeps a big watch on everything, and has plenty of control over criminal syndicates and individuals. Think of him as the modern equivalent of your Al Capone," Saren answered, "unfortunately, I myself am also guilty of approaching the Shadow Broker for leads."

Miranda gave Saren an intense stare before she grasped his wrist with her hand, catching his attention.

"Will he still listen to you if you persuade him?" Miranda asked.

"He's been thorough about repaying favors, but it might be worth a shot," Saren responded as he crossed his arms, "for all I know, he has no interest in Oriana and hence views her as worth very little."

Miranda felt a sense of relief, even if it was small, while she let go of Saren's wrist.

{Commander,} the pilot informed over the intercom, {we're out of the Mass Relay and we're approaching Illium. ETA forty five minutes.}

"Know any contacts on Illium?" Brendan asked, turning to Saren.

"I know a few. Last time I checked, they were alive and active."

"We'll need the help we can get," Brendan acknowledged.

The team geared up and returned to the bridge to watch them enter a trading port in the city of Nos Astra. It didn't have the rounded structures of Thessia and more resembled a more Earthly metropolis with asari tech implemented. Walking down the loading dock, an asari and two mechs walked out to greet them.

"Greetings, commander. Welcome to Nos Astra. Now I must alert you that you will have to pay a docking fee before you leave."

Before Brendan could say a word, Saren stepped forward.

"Don't worry, I've got this," Saren assured Brendan.

Saren returned his focus to the asari.
"Hello, I'm Saren Arterius, and I have set up an account here before," Saren requested, "simply bill the fees to me, the others are mostly new here."

The asari paused for a moment before she nodded.

"As you were, Spectre," she replied.

Exiting quickly through customs, the group entered an open marketplace that resembled a stock exchange. On the levels above and below were bustling crowds of people going about their business. Out in the open, overlooking the city beyond were traffic lanes of skycars traveling through the wide expanse.

"Pretty and all, I'll give it that," Nihlus commented.

"But it's still not a safe place for a honeymoon," Liara reminded.

"Yes, well, let's go. If we're fast, we won't have to worry about this for too long," Saren said, beckoning the others to follow.

Making their way through the crowded marketplace, the team approached a jewelry shop at the other side of the square.

"Right. This won't take me too long," Saren muttered to himself.

Saren stepped into the shop without hesitation. At the front counter, a quarian was finishing work for a customer before turning to the approaching Spectre.

"Ah! Welcome back Spectre Arterius! How may I be of service?" Gael'Saanna greeted.

"All is well. I wished to discuss matters concerning our good friend," Saren replied.

"Of course! This way."

The two walked behind the counter to the workshop. At the back, Gael closed the door behind them and opened his monitor.

"What will you need today?"

"I'm not entirely positive yet, but had Cerberus come through here earlier?" Saren pressed.

Gael blinked with surprise.

"They had. I didn't know you were aware. I'm still in shock the local officials let them operate publicly."

"Unfortunately. I'm also aware that they had recently traded a specific good with the Shadow Broker. I need to know for an investigation," Saren informed cautiously.

"Of course, a specimen. It's especially rare."

Saren stroked his chin.

"I see. Well, what is the price for it?" Saren asked.

Saanna stopped typing for a moment.
"I'm afraid that I can't see that through," Gael declined.

"C'mon," the Spectre insisted with a friendly tone, "I'll even pay double what he paid."

"Let me rephrase that, Spectre. She's not for sale," the quarian repeated.

Saren was now growling with annoyance.

"Why not?" Saren demanded.

"Her sellers made her genetic uniqueness very well known. The Shadow Broker has future plans for
her and will not be available for purchase."

"I see," Saren replied, straightening himself up, "what you've told me will be sufficient. Until next
time, Gael."

He promptly left the shop to return to the others outside.

"Any luck yet?" Robin clamored.

"The Shadow Broker already has plans for Oriana," Saren reported.

In a matter of seconds, Miranda gasped in shock.

"No," she whispered.

"Nothing's set in stone yet, but if Oriana is walking out of his grasp in one piece, we've got to get
moving," Saren repeated.

Without saying anything further, Saren led the rest of the squad farther through the city.

"For starters, we know she was brought here after Thessia," Saren started.

"So what's your plan?" Garrus asked.

"Find someone who knows," Saren suggested, "that last guy would've known as well, but he knows
to resist. I know plenty of other contacts on this planet though, a few of whom are much more timid."

Robin nodded in agreement, eyes filled with determination.

"Maybe we'll have better luck this time around," she said.
Approaching another shop, they found an salarian technician who would repair personal devices, like omni-tools. His shop wasn't nearly as pronounced as the jeweler's shop from earlier.

"Alright, Nihlus, you know the drill," Saren instructed, "everyone else will keep an eye out for approaching company."

Alone, Nihlus and Saren walked in while Robin, Garrus, Liara, Thane, and Miranda stood watch outside. The two turians strode in side by side. Looking up from his work, the salarian greeted them.

"Hello! How may I—"

Saren hastily slapped aside the work he had in front of him.

"Cut the wafer-thin attitude," Saren snarled, "we need to talk about your boss; your real boss."

"May as well talk, you aren't doing yourself any favors keeping hushed when he's angry," Nihlus added.

"W-Wait," the salarian stammered nervously, "what do you mean??"

"Stop bullshitting," Saren growled, yanking on the salarian and putting their faces mere inches apart.

"See, this is what you get when you lie. Someone gets pissed off, and someone gets hurt in the process. Just cooperate and you'll be better off," Nihlus continued.

The salarian couldn't help but gulp under Saren's intimidating stare.

"Now, a trade was made with Cerberus recently. Where and when was it made?!" Saren barked.

"Now this is the part where you kindly return the answer," Nihlus followed up.

In a matter of seconds, the salarian technician sighed in defeat.

"W-what do you want??"

"The trade with Cerberus!" Saren hissed.

"When and where??" even Nihlus' tone carried a grain of salt.

"A-All right," the salarian technician nodded, "three days ago, Xin-Chu docks, docking bay 2187. What else do you want!?"

"This'll do," Saren remarked.

With one swift motion, Saren butted his head against the salarian's, leaving him unconscious.

"Well, a new record," Nihlus chuckled.

After he patted his protégé on the shoulder, Saren led Nihlus out of the shop.

"Alright, we have a lead. We're headin—" Saren informed, approaching the others.

"Hostiles approaching. Time to make our exit," Thane interrupted.
Around the corner, a group of varied soldiers in white, black, and maroon armor aimed their guns at the group.

"Oh, crap," Robin muttered, "not good!"

Brendan and Liara aimed their pistols at the soldiers in question.

"Squad! There they are! Open fire!" an asari commando directed at the group.

Narrowly dodging the fire, the group ran as fast as they could through the marketplace in an attempt to lose their pursuers. In the midst of the chase, Garrus had Robin sprint in close proximity in an attempt to shield her from most of the fire. Nihlus would fire a round at any of the soldiers when he got the chance.

"What's the plan?" Garrus yelled over the gunfire and noise.

"Lose them! We can't find Kolyat with these bastards on our tail!" Saren answered as he leapt over a small stack of boxes.

Once Miranda jumped over the stack of boxes, she made sure the rest of the group moved ahead before she used her biotics to topple over the boxes, delaying their pursuers before she caught up with Saren's squad. Rounding a corner, Saren tapped his omni-tool on a locked door leading into a warehouse.

"Hurry! I've got an idea!"

"You do realize that we pose as much risk to ourselves as we do to them, correct?" Thane asked, tossing a smoke grenade back at their opposition.

"Trust me, I know what I'm doing!" Saren barked.

Once Saren succeeded in unlocking the door, he led the squad into the warehouse.

"This won't take long. There is a manhole cover near the south end of the building." Saren explained as he reached to his belt.

He ran around the building placing HE charges on the building supports before reuniting with the others. Miranda was providing a biotic barrier while the others fired back upon the attacking troops.

"Go!"

Tapping his omni-tool, explosions rang throughout the warehouse, causing the building to crumble inward on itself.

"There! That should throw them off our tracks. They'll catch on, but it'll take them some time to properly check for our bodies," Saren said, catching his breath.

Within the span of mere seconds after returning to the others, he blew the charges, lifted the manhole cover, directed the others in while having the state of mind himself to jump in after them and get to cover before any falling debris crushed him. The entire squad took a few moments to catch their breath, even if the odor from the sewer didn't agree with Brendan.

"That was exciting and all, but the sooner we can get a move-along, the happier I'll be," Brendan groaned as he straightened up.

"So where do we go from here?" Robin clamored.
"We've got the place mapped out," Nihlus answered, tapping his omni-tool, "we'll just get some
distance from here, then we'll continue our way to the docks. Chances are, Kolyat will also try to use
the recent trade to pick up the scent."

With that confirmation, Saren, Nihlus, Liara, Thane, Garrus, Robin and Brendan ventured through
the sewers. Following Nihlus, he walked over to a ladder leading up to a manhole cover.

"This looks to be our way out," Saren observed.

Peeking his head out, he could hear the sirens of local law enforcement closing in on the warehouse,
but there were otherwise no hostiles in sight.

"All clear," Saren called out.

Upon cue, Garrus, Nihlus, Robin, Liara, Thane and Brendan followed Saren as they climbed out of
the manhole. For the Shepard siblings, it was a huge relief they got out of a place with horrid odors.

"I've previously been to the Xin-Chu port," Thane mentioned, "I know the way from here."

"Then lead the way," Garrus advised.

Another half-hour passed of nervous glances of their shoulders, looking for people who might be
following them. If it was one thing that Saren and Thane made apparent to the others, if one were to
go toe to toe with the Shadow Broker, they'd better be prepared to enter a world where they were
being watched from all angles. The Xin-Chu port seemed relatively calm with civilians of all stripes
and color coming in and out.

"So Thane, where'd you check first?" Garrus asked.

"With the knowledge offered up by that agent Saren and Nihlus pressed into talking, I'd target
wherever this port keeps its records of goods going in and out. While Illium is rather lax about what
can and cannot be traded here, they still record who came in, what time, the ship's IFF, and will
know everything about you by the end of the day," Thane explained.

Liara scanned their surroundings in search of the control tower.

"So we find the local control tower, and hang out there until we run across him?" Nihlus asked.

Robin spotted the control tower not too far from their position.

"Like that one?" Robin called out, gesturing to her discovery.

"And there's what I can only assume is Kolyat. Right there, along the roof tops," Garrus added as he
adjusted his visor. With the enhanced vision, he could see the young drell's signature and biometrics.

"And here comes trouble," Saren noted, watching a couple of the Shadow Broker's agents walk
nonchalantly into the control tower, looking around to make sure no one paid attention.

"Unfortunately, Kolyat is still young and hasn't learned how to completely hide his tracks," Thane
commented somberly.

"Well if it makes you feel any better, I'm not letting them get the drop on him," Brendan returned,
"Thane, try to follow him through the vents. I'll be going in the front door. Everyone else, stay out
here."
Leaving the others behind, Thane and Brendan made their way to the control tower. As Brendan entered, he received a call from his companion above.

[I'm in. So far, he hasn't alerted the local authorities to his presence.]

Brendan entered the security office for the port. The officers were either busy helping individuals with reporting incoming goods, or were stuck on whatever other duties they would have had.

"Looks like the locals haven't noticed anything yet," Brendan replied, "I'll see you up…damn it. Looks like the agents are already on their way up."

The indicator at the top of the doors showed the elevator car almost halfway up.

[I see the car, and I'm getting on top. You might want to hurry,/] Thane replied.

Checking one more time, no one was watching. Brendan casually walked into the stairwell and began to jog up. Just wonderful. Hopefully Kolyat was a smart kid and knew what he's doing. Suddenly, gunshots rang above and he started rushing up the stairs, two steps at a time. Once he reached the top of the stairs, he headed for the door and kicked it open. One of the agents was tossing Thane to the ground and was about to fire when Brendan shot the agent in the back. Down further in the control room was the other agent firing at a drell wearing similar clothing to Thane and had teal-colored skin. Jumping to his feet, Thane quickly capped the second agent before rushing to his son.

"Kolyat!"

Rising from cover, Kolyat had his weapon trained at them before realizing who the approaching individual was.

"Dad? What the hell are you doing here?" Kolyat demanded.

"We're helping you," Brendan answered, "chances are, plenty of people heard that. We've got to go."

Brendan led Thane and Kolyat out of the room, peeking through the doorway to check if the coast was clear. They proceeded to slip past the rushing security personnel after that, barely making it out without getting spotted.

"Did you get the copy of the docking records you need?" Thane asked.

"I did before the agents got the drop on me," Kolyat answered, holding a small device in his hand.

Once Brendan, Thane and Kolyat were outside the building, they sprinted across the port until they met up with Saren, Garrus, Robin, Nihlus and Liara.

"Great, you got it," Saren greeted, "let's head back to the Normandy before we draw any more attention."

With the crowd paying attention to the commotion at the control tower, Saren, Garrus, Nihlus, Robin, Liara, Brendan, Thane and Kolyat slipped away from the port. The group hailed a taxi and left the platform without a hitch. As the others watched the area disappear in the distance, Thane and Kolyat were in the midst of a small argument between each other.

"Okay, that could've been worse," Miranda commented.
Robin leaned backwards while Garrus placed his hand on her shoulder.

"You don't think the Shadow Broker lives on this planet," Robin pondered, "do you?"

"If he does have an HQ, it's certainly not remotely close to civilization," Saren replied.

Shrugging, Robin tilted her head towards the window and gazed at the cityscape passing by. Garrus lightly nudged her.

"Hey, you alright?" he cooed, "you aren't hurt, are you?"

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and focused her eyes on Garrus.

"I'm fine, Garrus," Robin reassured Garrus, giving him a soft smile, "I just wanted some time to relax."

His eyes got droopy thinking about it, causing him to lean on her.

"Yeah? Me to—"

A single round brushed by his head, breaking through one of the rear windows and out the other, startling everyone inside.

"Sonuva-!" Garrus muttered.

He drew out his rifle and began firing back at a vehicle that had driven up along side them. Robin recovered from the initial shock and glanced over her shoulder, only to notice a trio of skycars with more of the Shadow Broker's henchmen. As they continued to fire, a stray bullet caught half of the taxi driver's head, killing her instantly.

"Ah hell!" Saren shouted, "Nihlus, take the wheel!"

Pushing aside the corpse in the already cramped taxi, Saren returned fire while Nihlus slipped back into the driver's seat. Robin ducked her head while Nihlus floored the gas pedal and began to speed ahead of their pursuers. Everyone else did their best to keep low while Saren and Garrus shot back at their assailants. With a well placed shot, Garrus caused one of the other car engines to burst into flame before tumbling below.

"Excellent shot, Vakarian," Saren complimented.

"They're coming around on the other side!" Thane said, firing a few bursts at one car attempting to track from the other side.

Coming out of the sun roof, one agent wielded an RPG and fired it before Miranda deflected it right at the driver's seat, causing the vehicle crashing into the side of the building.

"Take that!" Miranda barked.

Brendan felt a sense of relief as well as surprise at the sight of Miranda's demonstration of her biotics. Saren had been working on the remaining agents aboard the last skycar, he quickly sprayed down the driver, causing the vehicle to careen and crash into a freighter going the other direction. He sat down and heaved a sigh.

"It's just not as fun as it's advertised to be in the vids," Saren muttered to himself.

With everyone taking a moment to settle into their relief, Robin lifted her head and peered through
the window in search of any pursuers.

"That was a close call!" Robin sighed in relief.

Nihlus glanced at the smoke rising from the engine behind them.

"Maybe a dozen more rounds and poof! Curtains. That's how humans say it, right?"

Saren sighed as he slowly nodded.

It didn't take much long for the cab to reach the Normandy. Climbing out, Brendan quickly contacted the Normandy.

"Pilot, we got what we came for. Prep the engines and the stealth systems."

{Copy that, commander;} the pilot nodded.

Saren, Garrus, Miranda, Robin, Liara, Thane and Kolyat also disembarked the cab and followed Brendan aboard the Normandy.

Shortly after the Normandy took off, the group huddled in the briefing room as they looked over Kolyat's collected notes he'd gathered from hunting the Shadow Broker.

"I'm impressed you learned much in such a short amount of time," Saren complimented.

"Took a few notes from dad," the younger Krios responded, "I was looking over some old leads when I found out about the trade with Cerberus. It was an opportunity I couldn't miss. I hacked the security feeds, but I needed their IFF signature before I could gain any more forward momentum."

"So," Robin clamored, "were you able to get the signature?"

"I have, but it'll take me some time to work out the flight pattern, if the whole group runs on a similar signal, before finally cracking down on where it is," Kolyat answered.

Robin nodded while she placed her hand on Kolyat's shoulder.

"Ok then," Robin chirped, "we'll wait until you're ready."

"It'll take me a while," he replied as the others left Thane and Kolyat to their work.

Hours passed as the others rested and waited on the Krios' work to show some results. A couple hours passed before the two finally came out of the briefing room.

"What've we got?" Garrus asked.

"Using a series of IFFs, we can tell just how frequently a type of ship exits a Mass Relay, even if it's blatantly illegal," Thane started, "we've been able to discern that ships with the Shadow Broker's IFF consistently travel to the Hourglass Nebula."

Thane activated a holographic projector in his omni-tool, allowing Robin, Garrus, Saren, Miranda and Brendan to examine the projection.

"Unfortunately, the next step will risk Oriana's life further. Given the number of systems within this cluster, we'll have to wait for another ship with a similar IFF to come through and guide us to our destination," Thane explained further.
Robin hugged her arms to her chest while she stared in disbelief.

"How dangerous are we talking?" Robin asked.

"We're talking about delaying our search a bit longer to allow a fresh trail to form," Kolyat answered.

"If that's the plan, we shouldn't waste time," Brendan replied, "I'll set course for the Hourglass Nebula."

Robin reluctantly nodded while Miranda cringed at the possibilities of Oriana's fate should they not arrive in time.
Brendan, Thane, and Kolyat stood with the pilot at the Normandy's bridge, watching quietly as various pirate vessels entered the system. The stealth systems were engaged to keep them off the radar until they found an IFF match.

"There goes another one, commander."

"It doesn't fit," Kolyat responded.

"Let it pass, and keep watching," Brendan ordered.

Thane nodded while he and Kolyat kept observing the radar. It was dull and slow watch criminal ships came and went like watching ants swirl around their colony on a sunny day. The pilot reclined in his seat a bit.

"Well, this is dull," he commented.

"I'd prefer this over digging up more loose ends only to end up too late. This is our best chance," Brendan pressed.

"Sir, a new ship is coming out of the Relay. Scanning the IFF," a navigator farther back informed.

"It's them," Thane said as he watched the ship exit.

The vessel was a small shipping ship with seemingly minimal armament.

"He often uses outdated models of ships retrofitted with updated specs. Keep your distance."

"You heard him. Start following, but keep out of range," Brendan ordered.

"Sir!" the pilot nodded.

"Nice and steady. No need alerting them just yet," Brendan insisted.

The Normandy crept gradually along, following the freighter as it exited the Osun System. Nearly an hour passed before the ship entered the Sowilo System. The freighter quickly vanished into the dense atmosphere of a jungle planet.

"Sir, that's Hagalaz down there, according to my scanners. I'm not picking up any structures down there so far," the pilot reported.

"Why would…think he knows we're here?" Kolyat wondered aloud.

"I'm not so sure. With a climate like that, it would make a decent hiding location for a structure that size," Thane commented.

"Enter orbit, start scanning and see what you can find," Brendan ordered.

The pilot slowly maneuvered the Normandy until it entered the planet's orbit and then activated its scanner.

"Probe away," the pilot announced as he launched a pod to the surface below.
Several minutes passed as the scouting probe swept the area.

"Looks like we got something. Pulling up the feed…what the hell…?"

It was enormous. The thing was easily over a kilometer long, but it was barely visible through the harsh weather.

"That's no cloud…” Brendan started nervously.

"It fits the description I got," Kolyat confirmed.

"Alright then, we're on the right track. I'll go get the others," Brendan said, turning away.

Stepping out of the bridge, Brendan sprinted over to the briefing room. Walking in, the three turians and Robin were all talking, looking at the projection of what appeared to be an enormous ship, bigger than any dreadnought he'd seen in the Alliance.

"Saren, with your experience with the Shadow Broker, what would you say is the best way to get Oriana back?" Brendan asked.

Saren crossed his arms.

"Judging by the numbers he can afford to throw at any given problem, I'd say a smash-and-grab is unlikely," Saren replied.

"However, due to the sensors aboard, neither is a quick stealth-op," Garrus added.

"So we're just going to have to kill the whole ship?" Brendan asked.

"You don't mean blow it up, do you?" Robin muttered.

"We are bound to anger the Shadow Broker to the point where he'd hunt any of us down, so why not barge in, kill him, then leave before he has any reinforcements arrive?" Brendan proposed.

Robin sighed in relief.

"Oh, so we won't have to kill Oriana by accident!" she smiled.

"Don't forget Krios Jr. still has a contract to fulfill," Nihlus reminded, "maybe we should help take the bastard out."

"We'll be heading in on the shuttle," Brendan reminded, "once you're geared up, head to the cargo hold. We don't exactly have a plan, but we just might not need one."

Miranda nodded and ruffled Brendan's hair.

"As long as I can reach my sister," she told him, "any plan would do."

The shuttle ride down went otherwise undisturbed. Unfortunately, they didn't go unnoticed for long. Shortly after arrival, Robin, Garrus, Brendan, Liara, Thane, Kolyat, Saren, Miranda and Nihlus disembarked the shuttle, only to notice rifles aimed at them seconds later.

"We're cut off! Down the other way!" Brendan yelled as he blindly fired above the cover he was behind.
Making their way down another pathway, the group approached a door that quickly opened, revealing another group of guards preparing to flank them.

"Get inside! Hurry!" Saren yelled as he threw a shockwave at the group, either leaving them stunned or throwing them around like marionettes.

In a matter of seconds, they were sprawled on the floor, yet they struggled to get back to their feet. Gunning down those who were still stumbling as they entered, Thane shut the door behind them and sabotaged the lock.

"That should delay them for some time until we properly regroup."

"I get the feeling he was expecting us," Robin commented.

"Yes, well I was somewhat expecting that as well," Saren said, picking one of the com devices off one of the helmets of the fallen guards, "but, as decided, we'll improvise."

Calmingly reloading his sniper rifle, Garrus turned to Robin.

"Are you all right? Ready to move on?" he asked.

"Ready as you are," Robin nodded.

"We should take down the Shadow Broker first before doubling back and rescuing Oriana," Saren suggested, shooting a security camera on the wall.

"Right," Liara nodded.

Saren led the group through the corridor, firing rounds at any guards while taking cover behind anything durable between intervals. The Spectres scoped out as much as they could for their surroundings. Quickly, the whole ship became a maze as the group quickly got split up trying to escape a large platoon of guards. Narrowly escaping, they continued to kite the growing number of pursuing soldiers behind them. Saren and Nihlus continued to throw grenades at the closing pursuers, and would quickly salvage any more they could from those they killed.

"This is getting absurd. Nihlus! Cover me!" Saren instructed.

Getting to work, Saren worked away at computer monitor that unfolded from the wall.

"Garrus, this is Saren. If you're out in the open, I recommend that you quickly get to cover!"

Putting in the final touches, automated turrets from the walls came out and gunned everything down.

"Oh, what did you do now?" Nihlus groaned.

"Fried the turret IFFs and turned them on. Stay low, let's try to find the others."

Saren and Nihlus quickly ducked for cover.

"What in Spirits' name is going on?!" Garrus barked over the coms as the automated defenses started attacking them and the Shadow Broker's henchmen.

{Saren sabotaged the defenses. Need I say more?} Nihlus answered.

"Never mind. I'll try finding my way to wherever the Shadow Broker is. You holding up, Robin?"
Garrus barely said over the ring of gunfire.

Robin fired a round which took out a henchman aiming his gun at Brendan's head.

"Still standing," Robin answered.

"I'll keep them distracted, but not for long. We should hurry," Brendan encouraged, watching gunfire ring in the distance.

Barely catching up with each other, the group found each other outside of a heavy sealed door.

"Christ, what a mess! The rest of you alright?" Brendan asked.

"Still in one piece," Kolyat replied as he swapped thermal clips.

"Could be worse," Garrus added as he observed the numerous dings now on his armor.

"Still, ready to move on," Saren replied as he hacked the lock to the door.

With the loud hiss of depressurization, the door creaked open to reveal its contents.

"What the—?" Saren gasped.

"What the bloody hell?" Miranda cursed as she entered.

Inside was a lab with just over a two dozen tubes lining the walls going to the back, each containing a copy of Oriana. Some more closely resembled herself due to their more matured status.

"I…think I understand what the Shadow Broker plans to do with Oriana," Robin cringed.

Nihlus shook his head in dismay as he walked across the lab.

"Unbelievable. Well, it doesn't seem like she's in here, but we'll double back to make sure once everything's said and done," Nihlus set to work opening the next door.

Miranda lowered her head and clenched her fists.

"Why?" Miranda whispered, "why would he do this?!"

"The quarian at the jewelry shop I spoke with said Oriana wasn't for sale due to her genetic uniqueness," Saren answered, "he probably took a few tissue cores and decided to grow a few extra. I don't want to think about why."

By then, Nihlus succeeded in unlocking the door.

"Okay, an elevator. Let's see where this goes, guys," Nihlus quipped.

"You sure this is a good idea?" Brendan asked, "what if they're waiting for us?"

"Maybe we'll need a strategy to take down the Shadow Broker just in case," Robin reminded.

"Strategy?" Saren asked, "just shoot it until it dies. It's universally the best one."

Saren, Garrus, Robin, Brendan, Liara, Thane, Kolyat, Nihlus and Miranda stepped into the elevator. Exiting the elevator, the otherwise tall service elevator opened up into an equally tall chamber. As Saren approached the door panel, the locks clicked and the door eerily opened up to reveal a large room that almost resembled a stock exchange. At the back of the room was a small man talking to a
hulking beast sitting behind an undersized desk. The big red creature was clothed and resembled nothing like most of them had seen before.

"For such a perfect specimen, you severely undervalue her, Mr. Lawson. My price is final," the creature boomed in a gravely deep voice.

"Are you insane?" Mr. Lawson objected, "I raised her and Miranda for years before they took off!"

"If it makes you feel any better, I could always alter the deal. In fact, here comes the other sibling right now," the Shadow Broker hummed, looking at the approaching group.

The instant Mr. Lawson turned his head towards the group, Miranda stiffened and narrowed her eyebrows at both her father and the Shadow Broker.

"All right," Miranda demanded, "where are you hiding my sister?"

"Unfortunately, it seems like the squad who brought you here was a bit sloppy. I'll have to do some house cleaning after this. So do we now have a deal," the Shadow Broker sighed.

Henry Lawson was simply too focused on Miranda.

"How did I fail to properly raise you? Were you just not happy enough?! Were you unable to behave behind my back?! I gave you every benefit a human child could have and you stole Oriana out of the delusion that you were free?!"

"We were little more than trained doves to you! I did everything you told me to do and you still kept me locked in a cage like a god-forsaken pet! What did you think would happen?" Miranda hissed back.

While Henry crossed his arms, Saren stepped forward.

"Look, just step aside, Henry. Face it…you're a bad father and get out of the way. We'll be taking Oriana from here," Saren growled.

"You break into my place of work, kill my employees, damage my ship, and expect to walk out without consequence?" the Shadow Broker snarled back, "especially after years of asking for my services?"

"I'm efficient and actually have gray matter, you filthy animal. Breaking your heart is the least of my concerns," Saren replied.

Without warning, the Shadow Broker let out an ominous chuckle.

"You travel with fascinating companions, Spectre," the Shadow Broker commented, "I should thank you for bringing the ambassador, Arterius. I have some clients that have a heavy bounty on her head."

Robin shuddered in disbelief while Liara narrowed her eyes at the Shadow Broker and aimed her pistol at him.

"You're not putting a hand on anyone!" she barked.

"It's pointless to threaten me, asari. I know your every secret while you helplessly fumble in the dark," the Shadow Broker mocked.
Brendan, Saren, Nihlus, Garrus, Robin, Miranda, Liara, Thane and Kolyat didn't even flinch from the Shadow Broker's attempt to intimidate them.

"Is that right?" Liara snapped back, "you're a yahg, a pre-spaceflight species quarantined to their homeworld for massacring the Council's first contact teams."

"Which probably means you killed the original Shadow Broker some time ago and took his place," Saren added, "which raises the question of how you even got here? There's a lab down stairs, or were you meant to be a big-game trophy? A big dumb animal who's trained to be an obedient little servant, or a big pet who'd curl up by the original waiting for food and attention?"

"Enough!" it barked before swinging its arm at its own desk, splitting it in half and sending the pieces flying across the room.

One piece even hit Henry Lawson, sending the man tumbling broken into a corner of the room. That meant now was the time to fight.

"Ok, let's do this!" Robin called out.

"I didn't need to deal with that fool. There are plenty of more viable buyers who will just as well accept your remains, one way or another," the yahg growled as a barrier hummed over his body and while brandishing a heavy assault rifle like an SMG.

Barely getting up from the piece of flying desk, Brendan ran to the first pillar.

"LMG! Get to cover!" he yelled.

Thinking fast, the squad scrambled for cover.

"This is the price you will pay, Spectre!" the Shadow Broker yelled over the sound of gunfire.

"Not the worst mistake we've made," Nihlus commented after throwing a cooked grenade at the yahg.

There was a resulting explosion seconds later, but the Shadow Broker didn't seem to sustain any damage.

"Hey," Robin called over to Garrus, "do you know if he has any weaknesses?"

"I'll see what I can find," Garrus responded as he tapped his visor.

Carefully peeking, the Shadow Broker's attention was drawn by Thane and Kolyat for a brief duration. He could notice a stream of energy coming from the ceiling.

"Looks like a stationary barrier generator integrated into the ceiling," Garrus replied, narrowly pulling himself back in, "the barrier's kinetically sensitive."

"Looks like we're doing things the hard way, then," Brendan said, rolling from cover to charge the Shadow Broker.

With Brendan, Thane and Kolyat fighting the Shadow Broker head-on, Miranda, Saren and Liara exchanged glances, coming up with an idea.

"Saren, that barrier generator from above is proving problematic. Any ideas?" Nihlus asked as he slipped in a new thermal clip.
"We'll need to disable it if we are to have any chance of defeating him," Miranda suggested, throwing a warp to knock a piece of debris aside after the Shadow Broker threw it.

"Just might work," Saren replied as he switched out his rifle for a grenade launcher.

Quickly peeking from cover, he fired a couple of rounds at the pulsating ceiling. The resulting explosion ripped apart large pieces of debris from the ceiling.

"Cover me! I'm trying to get in a couple more shots!" Saren said as he reloaded the grenade launcher.

"Copy that!" Liara nodded.

Firing off a few more rounds, the light from the ceiling shattered, pouring fluorescent liquid onto the ground.

"Betrayal is a bad business practice, Arterius!" the Shadow Broker barked, howling with rage.

Igniting a shield from its oversized omni-tool, it knocked back Brendan, Kolyat, and Thane with a big swing.

"Brendan!" Robin panicked.

Robin was about to charge after the Shadow Broker, but Garrus grabbed her wrist, stopping her in her tracks.

"Hold on, Robin," Garrus warned, "he's still too dangerous."

Robin narrowed her eyes at Garrus.

"But didn't you see what he did to Brendan?" Robin protested.

"Look out!" Garrus tossed both of them on the ground as the Shadow Broker charged at them and swung at the space where they stood.

Garrus quickly hopped to his feet and helped Robin up before yanking them out of the way of the next swing. Still, this distraction gave Liara and Miranda a chance to strike. The two tossed warps at the yahg, putting a decent chip in the Shadow Broker's shields. Garrus followed up with an overload, stripping away what was left of his shields. Thane, Kolyat, and Brendan helped each other up as the others continued to sprint around the room.

"EMP out!" Nihlus yelled as he attempted to stun the raging beast.

Robin seized this chance to fire a round at a weak beam, causing a large piece of debris to fall off and slam onto the Shadow Broker. Growling as he lifted the debris off, he tossed another chunk at the group. Narrowly dodging the piece of ceiling, the group continued to kite the yahg around the room, taking pot-shots whenever they could. Garrus noticed that the beam had come from where a pillar had been previously before the Shadow Broker blew clean through it. As the others continued to move around the room, chipping at the yahg's armor, Garrus stuck close to a pillar, using it as cover. Continuing to harass the Shadow Broker, he rose to his feet and ran when he punched clean through the metal support like it was ply wood. Shooting the beams overhead, he brought down additional debris on top of the Shadow Broker.

"Did we get him?" Robin called over.

The Shadow Broker struggled this time around as he tried to pry the rubble off of him. Kolyat
walked over to his father.

"I'll need this for a moment," Kolyat requested.

Stealing his father's sniper, he quickly unfolded it, scoped in, and fired three consecutive shots into the Shadow Broker's head.

"Finally, target eliminated."

Seconds later, the Shadow Broker collapsed to the floor. Rising to her feet after watching her 'father' sputter his last breaths, she rose to her feet and walked to the others.

"Well, still no sign of Oriana," Miranda sighed, "where should we start looking?"

Brendan crossed his arms after he stashed away his rifle.

"Maybe we should split by twos," Brendan suggested.

The group quickly split up after Saren disabled what was left of the ship security systems. While Liara read through various files at the Shadow Broker's terminal, Saren, Miranda, Garrus, Nihlus, Robin, Thane, and Kolyat checked the corners of the ship for where Oriana could've been locked up. It felt like hours until Saren and Miranda stopped at a particular door.

Saren approached the door, working on its lock.

"I'm opening it. Get ready," Saren warned.

The door shot open, and Miranda took point. It took her some time to adjust to the darkness.

"Oriana!"

Miranda sprinted over to Oriana as she was sprawled on an old mattress, clad in degrading lingerie even a stripper from the Afterlife club wouldn't wear. She appeared to be pale and sickly. Still, hearing Miranda's voice caused Oriana to stir.

"Mi-Miranda?" she whispered.

"Oh god! I'm so sorry!" Miranda helped her younger sister to her feet, cautiously edging her to the door.

Saren called the others over his omni-tool.

"This is Saren. We've secured Oriana. We'll be returning to our point of entry, over."

{Understood,} Brendan nodded over the com-link, {we'll meet you there.}

It was a long, slow limp back outside into the damp weather. The others quickly followed as the shuttle from the Normandy arrived. It was an otherwise quiet return to the Normandy before Garrus noted something in Kolyat's hand.

"Uuuuuhhh, what's that exactly?" he asked.

"It's to finish my contract," the young drell replied, lifting the object up to give a better view, "Brendan mentioned that it was customary to prove I'm the killer by taking back some remains of their body. I took a finger."
"Ah, that does make sense," Garrus mused.

Garrus sat down next to Robin, allowing her to lean her head onto his shoulder.

"Do you think Oriana will be ok?" Robin asked softly.

Garrus responded by brushing his talon against Robin's shoulder.

"From what I heard from Lawson," Garrus replied, "the Shadow Broker didn't do much else apart from extracting tissue cores from her sister."

Robin nodded in acknowledgement.

"Could've been worse," she mumbled, "still, at least we earned Miranda's trust, right?"
Since Oriana was provided a safe place of refuge, Miranda followed through with relaying the information, thus Brendan, Victus, Saren and Nihlus were able to locate various Cerberus bases in Citadel space and sabotage them.

Around June, Robin searched in her omni-tool for any bowling alleys they could go to, since today was the day she was turning twenty. Garrus walked in, putting on a new shirt when he looked over her shoulder.

"Hey, what's up?"

Garrus was about to walk into the kitchen, but seconds later, Robin followed him, catching his attention.

"I was just thinking," Robin called over, "maybe we could invite our friends over to go bowling today?"

He paused, thinking over Robin's proposal.

"Forgive my ignorance, but what's bowling again?"

Robin couldn't help but scratch her head.

"You roll a ball down a lane and try to knock down a set of ten pins," Robin reminded Garrus.

"Riiight, that one. Sounds good! Nice way to help unwind," Garrus replied.

"And maybe if we invite our buddies over," Robin added, "we could all have fun?"

He smiled as he pulled open his omni-tool.

"Sounds like a plan," Garrus nodded, "I might know of a place, now that you mention it."

Robin's face lit up in seconds.

"Really?!!" she chirped.

"Yeah, I remember seeing it come up in the wards shortly after the incident ended. I didn't make much of it the time, but I do remember seeing it frequently when I'm shopping for new equipment," he answered.

He quickly pulled up the map from the omni-tool.

"Here, I got the place," Garrus said.

Robin took a few seconds to examine the coordinates.

"That's great!" Robin smiled, "thanks, Garrus!"

"Yeah, no problem. So what should we bring? Everyone's going to be there, right?" Garrus continued.

Robin folded her arms behind her back and sauntered across the kitchen in random directions.
"Maybe we could ask them what snacks we should bring along," Robin suggested, "and maybe bring along their favorite drinks?"

"Sounds good. I'll let the others know. I'll be getting my stuff so we can head to the grocery store before we head over to the bowling alley," Garrus agreed as he started sending messages, "as for your birthday, how do you want to top this all off?"

Robin approached Garrus and leaned her head onto his arm.

"Maybe we could top it off by going to an ice cream parlor after that?" she answered.

He walked up to her and tapped his forehead to hers.

"I think it'd be wonderful," Garrus said.

Smiling, Robin scampered out of the kitchen and scoured the apartment for her favorite vest and her boots before slipping them on. With invites sent and a grocery list in hand, Garrus put on his shoes before getting up and standing by the door.

"You ready?" he asked, turning to Robin behind him.

"Let's go!" Robin nodded.

It didn't take the two long to get to the store and find what they wanted. After a taxi ride to their destination, the two brought in the bags of food as they were greeted by the others. Jack, Joker, Kasumi, Brendan, James, Ashley, Kaidan, and Kelly had already arrived.

"Hey! Happy birthday, Robin Hood! God, time passes so quickly!" Brendan greeted being the first to see them approach.

Helping his sister with the bags, he turned to give her a hug.

"Thanks, Brendan!" Robin chirped, "I appreciate it!"

"Heeey! Look who's here!" Joker greeted.

The others walked up to greet the two. As Garrus put down the snacks at their booth, he saw Wrex enter and tune their way.

"Good to see you could make it too," he said.

"Yeah, I got caught up in some politics after we hit Virmire. Saren handed me a few things I brought up with others on Tuchanka," Wrex replied, nodding with approval.

Robin took a moment to finish shaking hands with James before she turned her head towards Wrex.

"So how are the others?" she clamored.

"Spent some time back on Tuchanka sharing nasty files and images Saren found on Virmire. Brought up the argument that we can't leave Cerberus to be dealt with by other races anymore," the krogan shrugged, "it's a work-in-progress."

Robin placed her palm on her chin and tilted her head sideways.

"At least we're making progress," she commented.
"I know most of you are still too young to drink, but after these last few weeks," Wrex added, bringing up a couple bottles of unlabeled alcohol, "I'm just looking to get shit-faced and have a good time."

By then, Liara, Tali and Thane arrived.

"Thane, I assume your reunion with your son went well?" Garrus asked.

Thane silently nodded.

"I explained what had happened before. What happened to his mother. Why I wasn't there when she left this life. In the end, he forgave me. He recently enlisted at C-Sec."

"Glad to hear it," Garrus smiled.

Not too long after, Saren, Nihlus, and Miranda arrived.

"I could've sworn this place was a clothes shop not too long ago," Nihlus commented as he observed the aesthetic of the local.

Saren placed his hand on his protégé's shoulder.

"This has been here for over a month now. You had ample opportunity to notice."

"It doesn't matter, we're here now," Miranda interrupted as she put her hand around the back of Saren's neck.

Saren nodded in agreement before the entire group approached the reception desk. After they registered, Miranda did her best to explain the rules to the two turians as they made their way down to Robin's group near the other end of the alley.

"Basically, you try to knock over as many pins in the opportunities provided," Miranda explained, "the person who has accrued the most points by the end wins."

"Ah, so this is a competition," Nihlus mused, "like any other sport."

So Robin, Joker, Kaidan, Ashley, Jack and Kasumi settled for one lane, Garrus, Wrex, Thane, Liara and Tali settled for another lane, Saren, Nihlus and Miranda settled for even another lane and finally, Kelly, Brendan and James settled for yet another lane.

Wrex was initially struggling with the main concept, though.

"I don't exactly see how throwing it overhand wouldn't be more effective," Wrex said.

"You'll most definitely score some points as long as the ball doesn't roll into the gutter," Jack assured.

"I'm confident that the preferred method is throwing it underhand. Like you would a grenade into a smaller opening," Thane corrected, eyeing some of the other participants in other lanes.

Just as Thane finished his statement, Robin's turn came up, so she picked out a bowling ball before she positioned herself before her team's lane.

"Maybe you should watch someone else do it before you break something," Tali added.

Robin nodded to Garrus, and then took a few steps forward before she tossed the bowling ball, allowing it to roll along the lane. Impacting the pins, she managed to knock down a good seven of
the ten total.

"Alright! Good throw!" Ashley cheered as the ball was dispensed back to them.

Robin nodded as she picked up the bowling ball.

"Ok, here goes!" Robin said to herself.

The second time she rolled, she overestimated the amount she needed to curve the ball to hit the remaining three pins, only knocking over one in the process.

"Oh, boy," she muttered.

Robin took a step back and settled into her seat, Kasumi's turn now apparent. Wrex had barely any better luck. He managed to knock eight down, resulting in a split. The second time he threw, the ball went straight between the two pins.

"It's much more methodical than just throwing a ball down a lane, Wrex," Garrus lectured.

Wrex grumbled something to himself while he sat down, allowing Garrus to pick up a bowling ball.

"Okay, like tossing a grenade," Garrus muttered as he stepped forward and took a swing.

The ball he swung along the lane smacked into six of the pins.

"A decent start," Liara complimented as Garrus fetched his ball.

He started to understand the patterns and the physics of this sport. It wasn't too different from understanding bullet trajectory over a large distance. Taking a step forward, he swung it, knocking over the last few pins.

"Yeah! Now you've got it!" Tali cheered.

Saren observed Garrus's performance just as his turn came up. Noticing the other alleys and how others played, he could tell that there was almost a soft-spot that would be the most effective in taking down as many pins as possible. Taking a slow breath, he took a swing, and managed to knock down nine of the pins in one hit.

"Close," he muttered.

Saren waited until moments later, the bowling ball returned, which allowed him to retrieve it from the ball return track. With another swing, he took the last remaining pin. Even as a celebratory move, he did a fist pump as he walked away.

"Now that's how it's done."

"I must say, Arterius," Miranda mused, "that is pretty impressive."

Brendan easily put his first shot in the gutter.

"Yeesh, a bit out of practice," he muttered with embarrassment.

While Brendan waited for his bowling ball to return, James placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Relax, Loco. It's still early in the game," Vega said in attempt to encourage Brendan.
Jack was left relatively salt after her first throw landed in the gutter. Throwing the second one, she at least managed seven of the eight.

"Better."

"Come on! That's cheating!" Kaidan whined.

"Not my fault you didn't use your biotics for it," Jack remarked.

Wrex chuckled as Liara stepped over to retrieve the bowling ball. As relatively young as she was, she was rather petite in comparison to others in her party. Fumbling with the ball, she was able to throw it, but wasn't able to give it the momentum it needed. It slowly drifted across before finally hitting three pins to the far right.

"Not the worst outcome," Thane reminded.

"Whatever," Wrex mumbled as he took a swig from one of his bottles.

Liara waited until the bowling ball returned, so she retrieved it and positioned herself before the lane again. Instead opting to toss with both hands, she managed to knock over three additional pins.

"Goddess, this is harder than it looks," Liara sighed.

"It's ok," Garrus cooed as Tali stood from her seat.

"The key is to predict how it will roll based upon how you throw it," Tali explained, "even the smallest bit of spin can gain enough friction to push it in a different direction."

Tali retrieved her bowling ball and calculated the direction on which she should throw it down the lane.

"And under the circumstances of where two remaining pins have considerable distance, you want to try and hit one at an angle to knock over the pin at a distance," Tali explained as she rolled.

To the surprise of her team, Tali's bowling ball hit all ten pins at once.

"Also, it's all in the wrists," she added.

Well, Garrus, Liara, Thane and Wrex gazed at Tali in amazement just as Ashley's turn came up in Robin's team.

"They're catching on fast," Ashley commented with concern.

"Just give it your best," Kaidan encouraged.

"Right," Ashley nodded.

She rolled it without hesitation.

"I could help you guide the ball if that'd make you feel better," Jack offered.

"N-No thanks," Ashley declined.

The group eyed the ball as it managed to knock down six of the pins.

"Hey, that's not bad," Joker encouraged.
Ashley smiled while she nodded, standing to wait for the bowling ball to return.

"Yeah! That's right, Loco!" Vega cheered as Brendan struck down all ten pins.

Brendan's smile beamed with confidence before he gave James a high five.

"Thanks, James. You're up, Kelly," Brendan replied.

"Ok," Kelly nodded with enthusiasm.

"And you want to hit between the front-most pin and that first pin to either side from it," Miranda explained to Nihlus, "with just the right side spin and initial angle, you'll hit it in a way that knocks the others down in a chain."

"Yeah, that makes sense," Nihlus mused.

Nihlus made his throw, but at too hard an angle, causing it to roll into the gutter.

"Spirits, this is a difficult sport," Nihlus grumbled.

Saren shook his head in disbelief, not impressed with his protégé's overconfidence.

"How many rounds have gone? What's the human saying? 'Watch and learn'?" Saren asked.

Miranda checked their team's scoreboard.

"We still have a chance to win this, and you still have one more throw," she reminded.

Nihlus picked up the bowling ball and positioned himself before the lane once again. Still overshooting, Nihlus still managed to take out four pins before having to forfeit his turn.

"Better than before," he shrugged.

Nihlus turned to sit down before Miranda stepped over to the ball return.

"Here, watch me," she said, lining up the shot.

Taking a couple steps forward, Miranda swung the ball along the lane, and it collided with ten pins in a chain reaction in a split second.

"Well, you seem relatively well versed," Saren complimented.

"Thank you, Arterius," Miranda gave Saren a soft smile.

"Basically, Toby is as good as impeached if Cerberus doesn't somehow make sure he stays," Joker concluded.

"And I can't wait to see it!" Robin chirped.

Robin, Garrus, Saren, Brendan and their respective teammates continued to play through the bowling games. Ultimately, Saren's team came in first place, Garrus's team came in second place, Robin's team in third and Brendan's team in fourth place.

"I'm honestly surprised we made any progress considering Wrex's inability to adapt," Tali sarcastically quipped.

Wrex scoffed while he, Brendan, James, Kaidan, Nihlus and Jack collected the bowling balls and
returned them to their shelves. The group made their way to an ice cream parlor afterward that also
served dextro-compatible flavors. They all took some time to examine the flavors on display as well as reading the menu on the wall.

"What's rocky road?" Garrus asked, looking at the dextro menu.
Joker gave Garrus a blank stare.
"Turians don't have rocky road flavored ice cream on Palaven?" Joker blurted.
"To be fair, we had delicacies similar to this, but this is generally…still new to us," Garrus replied, almost with some shame.
Robin placed her hand on Garrus's shoulder.
"Hey, it's ok," Robin assured Garrus, "you can try it if you want."
"Uuuuuuh, yeah. I'll give it a try," Garrus decided.
After Robin finished browsing the menu, she ordered the cookie dough flavored ice cream while Brendan ordered the pistachio flavor.
The group buzzed with chatter, discussing the game from earlier while eating their ice cream.
"Tali, I'm surprised you managed to catch on so quickly," Kasumi complimented.
"It doesn't hurt to practice," Tali couldn't help but blush underneath her mask.
"But isn't this basically the first time you've done this?" Joker asked.
Tali nodded.
"It's beginner's luck," Jack sighed as she rolled her eyes, "trust me, she was just having a good day."
"I think someone's a bit salty they put the ball in the gutter the most out of her team," Tali chuckled.
"Which teammates were you talking about?" Joker asked after taking a bite out of his sundae.
"Just one specifically," Tali answered slyly.
"Yeah, that's just, like…your opinion, Tali," Jack huffed, turning back to her ice cream.
While eating into her ice cream on a cone, Ashley took in a view of a fountain through the window while she was seated next to Kaidan.
"That was an enjoyable change in pace," Kaidan sighed.
Ashley nodded at Kaidan before they took another bite out of their ice cream.
"And to think Ryan would be stationed in Virmire," Ashley added, "only to be among the casualties that day its base blew up."
"Yeah. I'm not the sort of guy to say this sort of thing, but good riddance," he replied.
All the while, Brendan and James occasionally shared bites of their flavors with one other using spare spoons.
"Honestly Loco, even a bad game of bowling is better than getting shot at from twenty different directions," Vega commented, "what matters is, we had fun, right?"

"Yeah, I can agree with you on that," Brendan nodded.

"Really, explain how you did it," Wrex demanded, glaring at Saren.

"For starters, I wasn't under the influence like you were. It takes time to understand the trajectory of how the ball will roll based upon how you throw it," Saren answered slyly, grinning with pride.

Wrex grumbled while he shook his head in disbelief, not thrilled with being lectured by a turian Spectre on the mechanics of ball throwing. Garrus smiled as he looked around him, taking in the fun the group was having. He walked up to Robin's side and put his arm around her shoulder.

"How are you holding up?" he asked.

Robin tilted her head towards Garrus and smiled.

"I'm enjoying myself as much as everyone else is," Robin answered, "I'm just awaiting the day this crisis will end."

He leaned his head on her head.

"The end just might be in sight, no? We've got Cerberus on the run, now that Miranda's with us," he replied optimistically.

Robin responded by nuzzling her face against her turian boyfriend's chest before she returned to eating her ice cream. In her mind, this peaceful moment was well earned, even if she suspected they all had some future struggles up ahead.
At the end of the third month since the mission of Virmire, Garrus finished his recovery and was ready to enter the frontline again. He was waiting for Wrex to return to his headquarters while Robin scrolled through news feeds in her TweetFeed covering the sudden disappearances of alien loving humans across Alliance space, saving the articles for later. From what she could gather from the independent news media channel she's subscribed to, these disappearances might be a massive bigoted movement in the making. She would have to remind herself to ask Miranda to look into the issue later.

Garrus, on the other hand, was arguing over his omni-tool.

"With all due respect, sir, these disappearances will be a problem. I still stand on my proposal...No sir, this is not...they are still people, and it's still our job to keep them safe. I'm glad you understand. I've got to go, sir," he hung up as he rolled his eyes and muttered, "idiot."

Robin snapped out of her thoughts and tilted her head towards Garrus.

"Garrus?" Robin called out.

"Just contacting my superiors concerning the sudden disappearances of a few humans, it's a cause for concern?" Garrus answered, rising from the couch, "anyways, they've been mostly downplaying it as slavers or black marketeers."

It was relieving to finally have the patch and cybernetics off. Once Garrus reached a close enough proximity, Robin reached out to grasp his wrist.

"If it makes you feel any better," Robin replied, "I'm keeping tabs on this issue in case we run into anything that would coincide with it."

"Well, the disappearances have been getting more frequent," Garrus added as he put a hand to Robin's cheek, "I'm just worried, that's all."

Robin closed her eyes and leaned her head into Garrus's palm. The silence broke when they heard heavy pounding which came from the door, almost like desperation. Slowly drawing his side arm, Garrus quickly strolled to the door and had it trained on the person just outside. Wrex flopped onto his front on the welcome mat, groaning as he hit the ground.

"Urgh...Vakarian."

"Wrex, you could've called," Garrus chastised.

"Lost it last night. Was a bit busy. Anyways, it's important," the krogan's breath reeked of ryncol, probably from the night prior.

Robin scampered over to the front door and attempted to help Wrex to his feet, yet he was too heavy for her.

"Relax, the hangover isn't that bad. However, I'd like to ask for a few painkillers," Wrex grunted as he stood up, grimacing with light pain, "couldn't find them before I ran here, and this is just something even a redundant nervous system won't stop."

Garrus handed the krogan a few, maroon pills and a glass of water.
"There, now what's the fuss about that you had to haul ass over here just to tell us?"

Wrex sat down at a nearby chair, prompting Garrus and Robin to sit across from him. Consuming the pills, Wrex chugged down the glass.

"Back on Virmire, Saren found some cloning tubes full of krogan, and some notes and research aiming towards ways to possibly bypass the Genophage artificially or control krogan in general," Wrex started, "there wasn't any evidence that those clones made it off planet. However, there've now been rumors of disappearances among krogans and claims that individuals were jumped by Cerberus troops."

Robin grimaced at the thought of Cerberus performing cruel experiments on krogans.

"So," Robin stammered, "did you find any clues on where they might be held captive?"

"Barely," Wrex grumbled, "recently, I was contacted by an extremist named Dr. Okeer and his wife. Their child Grunt just went missing and they want us to help find him. He's got a general idea, considering the tracking methods he's claimed to have hooked up Grunt with."

"Tracking devices? Why would he put such a thing into his own child?" Garrus asked, leaning over the counter.

Robin scratched her head at those words.

"Kinda sounds like putting a microchip in your dog in case it runs off," she commented.

"Anyways, I don't know the specifics, but his kid's subdermal tracking device is still active and moving, twelve hours ago," Wrex finished, "do you mind if I get another glass?"

"What?" Garrus gave a snarky comment, "one glass wasn't good enough?"

"Never mind. He said to pass word on to you two and Saren, or at least that's what I assumed he meant when he said 'get help'," Wrex growled.

Wrex stood from his seat to refill his glass of water while Robin and Garrus exchanged glances.

"Do you know if Saren has other plans today?" Robin asked.

"I don't know. I'll check," Garrus said, opening back up his omni-tool.

{Vakarian, what's up? We're planning our next move,} the Spectre answered as the call started.

"Yeah, well," Garrus explained, "Wrex found a lead concerning the disappearing krogans."

{Krogans? Not just humans?} Saren returned with peaked interest.

"We've gotten a direct scent as to where they took one, or what's left of one anyways," Garrus answered, "we were thinking of following up, maybe find the missing humans."

"So, where do you want to meet up?" Robin clamored.

"We'll meet at the Aran'tar, and see where we go from there," Garrus answered.

{We'll be on our way,} Saren nodded before ending the call.

Garrus gathered his stuff before turning to Robin and Wrex.
"Are you two ready?"

Robin held her fist in the hair.

"Ready as you are, Garrus!" Robin chirped.

After a taxi ride to the docks, Garrus, Robin, and Wrex hadn't waited too long for Saren and Miranda's arrival.

"I hope you three have a plan as to where we go from here," Saren greeted the trio as he approached, "do you even have a meeting location, Wrex?"

Wrex nodded before he approached Saren.

"I contacted Okeer on the way here. He say's he'll meet us on Korlus in the Eagle Nebula," Wrex answered.

"He's got a tracking device on his son," Garrus added, "it'll lead us to his captors."

Saren hummed in enthusiasm while he read the coordinates.

"Perhaps this krogan could use some help," he mused.

Korlus was little more than a rock with a layer of scrap and junk on the outer layer. Barely sustained with atmospheric scrubbers, it was literally a planetary junk yard, with what had to be the highest murder rate per capita throughout the whole Terminus System. While the Aran'tar remained in orbit, the team travelled down in a shuttle. As they exited, Garrus took a long look at the horizon.

"What a heap of junk," Garrus muttered.

"Yup, it's a heap of junk. I've done a few jobs on this planet and even I feel like I need a shower after I leave planetside," Wrex responded.

"And to think Cerberus would set up a base here," Robin added, holding onto the rail and leaning back slightly.

"At least it makes sense," Saren mentioned, "a garbage environment panders to garbage people."

Robin nodded in agreement.

"Anyways, are you sure these coordinates are correct?" Garrus asked, "I'm not seeing anyone here."

"If it isn't Urdnot Wrex. It took you long enough," a deep voice mused from the shadows.

From the hazy blackness, a group of krogans stepped into the light.

"We saw you enter from low orbit."

The krogans caught their attention, and Robin noticed a human woman with dark skin and short bushy hair standing next to the lead krogan.

"Who's she?" Wrex asked, gesturing to the unnamed woman.

Okeer paused for a moment before he stepped forward.

"She calls herself Hazel," Okeer replied, gesturing to the woman in question.
"She works for you?" Garrus asked cautiously.

He had his suspicions, but there was no need to cast judgment just yet. Okeer shook his head. That was when Hazel stepped forward.

"I've been looking into the Genophage," Hazel explained.

"I'll explain on the way there. Anyways, Cerberus set camp almost a month ago," Okeer explained, "they constantly have transports going in, and very little coming out."

"Then lead the way," Saren advised.

It was a long trek through valleys of ancient ships and mountains of scrap being processed by giant bots, scooping up the piles, taking the ships apart bit by bit, or taking the processed pieces to refineries to be shipped off planet.

"So who is Hazel? What does she do in your crew?" Saren asked.

Okeer sighed and tilted his head towards the sky before focusing on Saren.

"The Genophage wasn't the only thing she was researching," Okeer explained, "she also seemed interested in learning krogan history."

Wrex raised a brow.

"Studying? For what?"

Robin placed her finger on her chin.

"Maybe she wanted to move past the bias on krogans or something?" Robin assumed, "I can still remember not finding much about them in the library."

"Krogan history is generally regarded as insignificant," Garrus explained, "how does she help?"

"By finding unbiased information on krogan history," Hazel answered with confidence, "many people regardless of species would be given the chance to learn about it."

"Oh, so you also want to restore peace with the krogans?" Robin chirped, "I guess we have something in common!"

Okeer chuckled as he nodded in agreement.

"She's trustworthy enough for me," Okeer added.

"Right. So what can you tell us about any sort of Cerberus establishment here so far?" Saren inquired.

As they ventured through the landscape, Robin scanned the area for any valuable items, even if she had to keep up with the others.

"From what we could gather," Hazel answered, "the establishment has heavy security."

"Kinda like most Cerberus bases we've infiltrated, right?" Garrus clarified.

"Well, there's only so many tricks we can play until they know how we work. Perhaps a frontal assault would be preferable this time?" Saren suggested, "with a group of krogans, we should be able
to more easily overrun any defenses they have."

Wrex nodded and punched his palm.

"Heh! This gonna be good," Wrex chuckled.

"Doesn't look like much from here," Garrus commented, scoped in with his rifle and scanning a ship wreckage, "maybe those guns are automated now, but that's about it."

Miranda checked the coordinates in her omni-tool.

"They're in there," Okeer commented, "I don't know what they're doing, but they sure as hell aren't doing it to our kid."

The wreckage Okeer said Cerberus had set up in was an outdated asari dreadnought. While its sleek, old form still lingered, plates had fallen off the frame and the shine and tarnish had given way to dust and rust. Robin also took part in searching for an entrance by observing the ship itself.

"You see a docking hatch?" Saren asked, "maybe a hangar? This model of ship did double as a carrier."

"I think I found it," Miranda called out, gesturing to the docking hatch she spotted.

Saren turned to Okeer.

"Returning to the idea of a frontal assault, do your men have any heavy weapons? Grenade launchers? RPGs?" Saren asked.

Okeer nodded to his krogan squad, allowing them to present their heavy weapons in question.

"Right. Here it goes," Saren grumbled as he drew his rifle out.

Saren scanned their surroundings for any patrolling guards. Okeer wasn't nearly as patient. With everyone in agreement, he began to bark orders to his subordinates to move in. Springing into action, the outer turrets began to fire down upon the advancing krogan before being shot by a hail of rockets. Wrex was about to follow the last wave of troops when he noticed his companions were hanging back with awe.

"What you waiting for?" Wrex called out.

"Nothing much, but…no planning phase? Just…the term is 'blitzkrieg,' right?" Garrus stuttered, looking to Robin for help.

"Or blitzkrieg," Robin corrected, "but you got the term right."

"Whatever. Let's not give them the opportunity to regroup!" Wrex barked before turning back into the fray.

"Hmm. I see the tactical applications now," Saren commented as he got off to a running start.

Upon cue, Garrus, Robin, Miranda and Hazel also started sprinting forward. The krogans were quickly shown to have little regard for safety or cover in combat. Relying on their armor, body, and regeneration alone, they showed no fear in the face of cannons designed for warfare against other capital ships. Among the charge, various krogans would pause before firing a rocket, leaving a smoky trail before meeting its intended target in a fiery explosion.
With their effort, the entire squad managed to reach the docking hatch. Standing along the outside panels, one krogan smacked a couple breaching charges on the hatch before stepping back to detonate the explosives, followed by the krogans marching in single file. This allowed them to make their way inside. On their way in, there was very little for them to fight now that the krogans plowed through like Red Army troops on the Eastern Front. Due to what must’ve been pure desperation, Cerberus had spent very little time organizing the layout of the labs and living areas. The two seemed to be blended without second thought as to what should go where. Robin had to pause for a moment to catch her breath.

"So where do you think they would be keeping the missing krogans?" Robin clamored.

Entering one of the sealed doors locked shut during the attack and subsequently untouched by the krogan attackers, the group found a large row of holding pens for various krogans, stripped of anything they were brought in with. Breaking the rows were a variety of torture devices, as recalled by Garrus and Saren.

"Spirits, what were they trying to achieve?" Garrus grumbled.

"If they were planning to harvest their organs," Robin muttered, her voice sounding queasy, "then I don't want to hear every single detail on that."

"No, I know what I saw on Virmire," Saren answered, "they wanted a means of controlling the krogan. First it was going to be clones with adjusted biology to make them more obedient, easier to control. Now that Cerberus is desperate, they're breaking their minds apart and rearranging them how they see fit."

"I remember, too," Miranda commented, thinking back to their last hostile encounter, "I knew that the base on Virmire was for researching biological weapons, but I never thought I'd see rows of krogans down there."

"You and me both," Robin nodded in agreement.

Wrex caught up with them when he stopped to look over the room.

"Oh, what the fuck…they kept them locked up like animals?!" he growled.

"This is really bad," Hazel grimaced.

Hazel wasted no time as she started inspecting each pen. The others began to patrol the rows, following Hazel's stead.

"What does Grunt look like?" Wrex asked, "how old is he?"

"He's a little tot by now," Okeer answered.

By then, Robin spotted one krogan tot scampering about its pen on its four legs before it started pawing at the gate, letting out high-pitched roars.

"I think I found a little guy here!" Robin called over, gesturing to the baby krogan.

The young krogan was no bigger than a five year old as it sat in the corner. Its armor plates were a dull gray, and didn’t have the same solid look to it that adult krogans had. Turning to look outside of the cell, his eyes were revealed to be a crystal sky-blue. The instant Hazel and Okeer spotted him, relief flooded their minds.
"That's Grunt?" Wrex asked.

"It is. Now help me get this door open!" Okeer answered as he followed the others.

Hazel sprinted over to Grunt's pen before she searched for the lock. Getting to work, Saren hacked the lock. As the doors opened, Grunt climbed to his feet and stumbled over to his parents.

"Grunt! Oh, we were worried about you!" Hazel cried out, getting on a knee to greet the toddler.

"Is he all right? Did they do anything to him?" Okeer asked kneeling along side the two.

Grunt leaned his head into Hazel's hand while Saren inspected the krogan tot.

"Doctor, how is it that the traits the child bears don't seem to be from you?" he slowly asked.

Okeer carefully examined Grunt's eyes.

"You adopted him?" Saren asked.

"No," Okeer shook his head, "he is most definitely our child."

"Wait, what?" Wrex stuttered, "last time I checked, humans were unable to breed with other species…or at least carry cross-species children."

Robin raised her eyebrows in curiosity, tilting her head towards Hazel.

"Say, how were you able to pull it off?" Robin clamored.

"With some hard work and elbow grease," Hazel answered, "I'll explain later."

Robin smiled and nodded, confident in Hazel's answer.

"Ok then," Robin chirped, "let's free these guys and see what else we can find!"
Saren found the nearest terminal and quickly logged in.

"Wrex, how was your discussion with the other clans on what we found on Virmire?" Saren asked.

"It was slow when I finally got the call," Wrex grumbled grimly. "plenty were convinced, but plenty more simply said it wasn't our problem."

"Ah, perhaps this will help, then," Saren replied.

He found notes of the test on breaking down krogan minds, further than what the Genophage left them as, to serve as mindless warriors, or to an extent they could be repurposed to Cerberus' needs. They hadn't been successful, but were on the verge of accomplishing their sick desire. Reading these notes sent chills down Wrex's spine.

"What the— oh, Wreav will love this…"

Saren raised a curious brow plate.

"My clan leader, my brother…downplayed my call to action as a human affair," Wrex grumbled, "I'd like to take this back."

Bringing out an OSD, he plugged it into the side of the monitor. This allowed Wrex to download the files in question. Garrus found the main security console and opened up the remaining pens.

"Robin, what'd you think about Grunt?" he asked over his shoulder.

Robin tilted her head to the side.

"I must admit he looked pretty cute," Robin replied.

He shook his head.

"Sorry, it's just the thought of the toddler being…different."

Garrus reminded himself not to use the word 'unnatural.' It should definitely be not be possible, but it could still happen.

"Are humans capable of such?" Garrus asked.

Robin scratched her head while thinking over the question.

"I…never really thought about it," she admitted.

"I'll have to ask Hazel afterwards," Garrus shrugged as he watched the various captive krogan toe their way out of their cells.

Miranda took as much time as she could to examine each of the freed krogans, searching for any injuries they might've sustained. So far, any physical injuries had quickly recovered, though some had mental conditions that would take much longer to recover from. Regardless, Okeer's squad continued to survey the base in case reinforcements have arrived. As the others cleaned up, Garrus couldn't help but observe Hazel as she checked over Grunt's injuries. With the Genophage, krogan children were a rare sight to behold, and Grunt was no exception.
"Pardon me, but would you mind me asking certain questions about Grunt?" Garrus asked, approaching her slowly.

Hazel focused her gaze at Garrus.

"Certainly," Hazel nodded.

"How did it work? Conception, anyways? What sort of procedures?" Garrus asked, getting straight into the heart of the matter.

"It really started as a project to gradually treat or bypass the Genophage," Hazel answered, turning to the turian commander, "while Grunt is an unintended side effect, he's the most progress we've made thus far."

Garrus let out an enthusiastic hum while he crossed his arms.

"Care to share?" Garrus pressed.

"I'd met Okeer a few years back and we quickly became accustomed to each other. For the better part of a year, we'd been researching how the virus uses the body to detect the fetus in a krogan female's body. From there, the Genophage inserts an extra sequence into the DNA of the fetus which causes the subsequent stillbirth. Don't ask how it works, but the treatment basically uses the immune system to target the Genophage gene. Subsequently, it causes the immune system to remove the sequence and the connecting DNA strands while it's still within the ovary before it is finally moved into the womb and attached to the blood lining. A year later of refinement, we had easily dropped the one in a thousand ratio to one in one hundred. To celebrate our progress, Okeer and I had…a one night stand. Nine months later, here he is. He doesn't have any outward human traits, but he's still our child," while she explained, Hazel's eyes mostly remained fixated on her now sleeping child, "it must've been from giving Okeer the treatment a few weeks after we had made our success."

Robin, who happened to overhear the story, raised her eyebrows in interest.

"Maybe you can meet Mordin," Robin suggested, "and then you and Okeer can tell him about it?"

"I suppose there's nothing wrong with it. Who's Mordin?" Hazel asked as she rose to her feet, Grunt in her arms.

"A former STG and the medical officer on my ship. He'd be interested in helping," Garrus replied.

It didn't take much longer for the entire squad to finish surveying the entire base. As they arrived on the Aran'tar, Garrus showed Okeer and Hazel to Dr. Mordin in the medbay.

"Right, Hazel and Dr. Okeer," Garrus said, "meet Dr. Solus. Mordin, meet Hazel and Okeer."

"A pleasure to meet you, doctor," Okeer said.

"Ah, Dr. Okeer. Heard your reputation. Pleasure to meet you. Surprised to find you amicable. Mostly concerned about my previous career," Mordin replied, reaching a hand.

Mordin and Okeer shook hands within an instant before Mordin extended his hand to Hazel.

"What do they need, commander?" Mordin asked Garrus.

"They'd been previously working on methods of bypassing the Genophage. They've made some headway, but I thought they could use your insight as well," Garrus explained.
Garrus knew that Mordin had worked on improving the Genophage's stability during his time in the STG and that the salarian doctor had some lingering doubts about the ethical quandaries of having done so.

"Understandable," Mordin replied, "what's the progress of the project? Need to know if I'll help."

"So far, we've managed to decrease the rate of stillbirths by a factor of ten," Okeer explained, "I can go into further detail about how it works. The main side effect is that it…well, we don't know how the full extent of it is, but Hazel and I had a child. It's not adopted, it's biologically ours."

Okeer held out a sleeping Grunt for the salarian doctor to see. Mordin couldn't believe his eyes.


"He's ours, doctor," Hazel assured, "we both checked various tissue samples from Grunt. He shares both krogan and human genes, and I can distinctly remember carrying him for nine months."

Mordin stared at Okeer and Hazel in a moment of silence before he took a deep breath.

"I see. Would like to discuss further if possible?" Mordin asked.

"As you were, doctor," Garrus nodded.

Garrus left the medical bay and made his way back to the armory. Most of the team was still taking off their armor, even after the brief duration of the day's fight. As Robin took off her armor set, he began to take his own off.

"Do you feel the Genophage was justified?" Garrus asked, "not to imply anything, but I just wanted your opinion."

Robin made a brief glance at Garrus after she slipped off her chest armor.

"I kinda feel it went pretty much too far," Robin shrugged.

"Well, I might agree with the historical context at the time. But was it really necessary to leave them like that?" Garrus agreed, "I mean, I'm sure they learned their lesson by the first millennia, and they're doing no good being mercenaries, pirates, or slavers. They're stuck like that too, with no more motive to try and rebuild and reintegrate. Same goes with denying the quarians a new home world after the Geth Uprising."

Once Robin finished removing her armor, she placed her hand on the turian commander's shoulder.

"Maybe I can try coming up with ideas on helping both of them rebuild," Robin offered.

"Maybe. Maybe," Garrus sighed as he took off his chest plate, "at least time is still mostly on our side."

With the Aran'tar leaving the planet's orbit, Garrus and Robin sauntered over to the turian commander's quarters.

"I'm sure Mordin can figure out what to do," Garrus continued, making the way to his shower, "you want to go first?"

Robin tilted her head sideways while thinking over the question before she rubbed her left palm with her right fingers.
"Why don't we go in together?" Robin offered.

"I don't mind sharing either," he chuckled as he turned the water on.

He quickly began to strip off his undergarments while the water continued to run. Robin slipped her underwear off, taking care to undo her half ponytail before she joined Garrus in the shower stall. He felt the water rush over his plates, washing the sweat and grit off from the polluted planet. The humid air in the shower stall contrasted greatly with the arid environment. It felt good to finally wash off. Robin also started scrubbing the grime off her body.

"Shepard," Garrus offered, "do you mind if I help?"

Robin paused for a moment and focused her eyes on Garrus.

"Sure!" she chirped.

Robin leaned her head onto the shower wall, allowing Garrus to rub his talons along her back. Garrus enjoyed feeling her frame in his hands, from her silky skin to her shape. Thinking about it, he began to feel the familiar sensation of his plates twitching. Before Garrus could say anything, Robin leaned back into his touch, biting back a moan. The next thing he knew, she turned on her feet and leaned herself onto his chest, her hands kneading his waist. Somewhat corresponding to her hand movements, Garrus moved his hand from her lower back, to her hip, to the lower part of her stomach, and finally up her chest. Barely able to contain himself any longer, he felt his plates give way and his full length press against her. He let out a silent grunt as he felt her skin. Shuddering, Robin leaned closer and gave Garrus a kiss. Joining his mouth with hers, he felt around her mouth with his tongue in a prolonged kiss. Almost subconsciously, he lightly rubbed himself between her cheeks. He smiled as her heard Robin's gingerly moans through her closed mouth. The instant he broke off the kiss, Garrus knelt down and nuzzled his mandibles between her thighs, prompting her to perch one leg over his shoulder.

"I hope you enjoyed that," he growled with amusement.

He gingerly began to lick the outsides of her folds, tasting the saltiness of her nether region. Moving forward, he stuck his tongue in and began to feel around. Robin arched her back and attempted to stifle her moans as Garrus kept a firm grip on her hips and purred, sending intense vibrations into her core. Whatever she may have been trying to bite back was still being telegraphed through her leg. Along with her distinct increase in breath rate, he could physically feel the muscles in her leg spasm. With some semblance of remaining control, he felt her leg hook on more aggressively. His tongue movements would switch inconsistently between fast and needy to slow and decisive. Moments later, he heard Robin let out a loud cry as he felt her clench around his tongue. Sputtering out was more of the salty fluid, coating his tongue with her flavor.

"I'm not sure about you, but I'm ready for this," Garrus informed, standing back to his full height, "I even had some medical supplies shipped to the room. We should be able to enjoy each other a bit more without too much worry of health hazards."

Robin smiled at Garrus.

"Same here," Robin replied, "let's do this."

"Good."

He scooped up one of her legs in his right hand and used his left hand to support her back. Still erect, he tapped his member to her drenched folds.
"Oh, and you might want to hold on," Garrus quipped before pressing in.

Shuddering, Robin gasped before she draped her arms over his shoulders, his weight pressing her against the wall while they were still under the shower spray. Ensuring the euphoria would last a bit longer, Garrus started with a steady, consistent pace with Robin pinned against the wall. She rested her head on his carapace, bucking her hips to sync with the ridges and spines stroking at her bundles of nerves. Quickening the pace, he craned his neck down and began to nip at her neck. He enjoyed how she flowed like the water over him. The wet sensation working in conjunction with her flexibility helped her move seamlessly with each thrust he made. Robin could hear her own breath quicken as she planted small kisses on the turian commander's neck.

"Yes. Mmmmmmmhhmm…" Garrus mumbled incoherently through heavy breathing and growls.

By now, he was a bit over twice the original pace. Robin also felt pressure build up in her stomach, and she couldn't help but whimper Garrus's name. At the highest his tempo could reach and rapidly approaching his climax, Garrus unintentionally bit down on her shoulder as he maximized the level of aggression. Robin also tightened her grip before she shuddered in her climax seconds later, her mewls echoing across the shower stall. This brought Garrus into snarling as he reached his limit and spilled into her.

Letting go of her and putting her leg down, Garrus quickly washed the blood off of the two of them before he shut the water off.

"Oh, Robin," Garrus cooed, "I'm sorry about the bite. I'll get some medi-gel and the dextro-allergy meds."

He stepped out of the shower as he walked over to a medical cabinet. Robin took a moment to examine her bite mark before she stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around her, quickly approaching Garrus and placing her hand on his shoulder.

"Hold on, Garrus," Robin reminded, "I still remember you telling me about turians becoming bondmates. You know, the first step being having you bite me?"

Garrus still shuddered.

"Garrus, it's ok," Robin continued, "if this little incident was too soon for you, then I guess we'll think of some way to deal with it. If you don't want a wedding ceremony right now, would it be acceptable if we waited until later?"

"Yeah, of course. If you don't want anyone else to see it, I'm sure Mordin could help minimize the scarring," Garrus offered.

Robin let out a soft laugh just as Garrus pulled out the dextro-allergy meds.

"The bite mark you gave me isn't really a big deal," Robin assured, "I would at least be sure it wouldn't get infected is all."

Garrus slathered on the medi-gel as he handed Robin the medication.

"Okay. Other than the bite on my part, that was great," Garrus said.

Robin washed down the medication with a glass of water and leaned forward, allowing Garrus to tap his forehead against hers. Even if she was aware the bite mark would most likely scar, she felt hopeful the medi-gel prevented any potential infection.
"I don't know why, but I'm feeling exhausted," Garrus added, stifling a yawn, "will you join?"

Robin finished drying herself up.

"I guess it's worth earning a nap," Robin nodded.

He guided her to his bed, slowly sliding under the covers before letting his exhaustion best him. It didn't take long before Robin nestled into his embrace and dozed off. It would only be a while before they arrive back at the Citadel.
With Mordin, Okeer and Hazel collaborating on a project to treat the Genophage, Robin felt confident she could come up with ways to help the krogans rebuild their society. At the moment, she sat across from Wrex.

"The stubborn bastard finally let up and told me to relay more intel about Cerberus movements to him," Wrex explained his last conversation with his brother to Robin, "also, he says he's willing to begin negotiations with other clans if it ensures everyone gets the treatment."

"That's good to hear," Robin smiled before she took a sip of her lemonade.

"A little strong-arm tactics goes far on Tuchanka. Wish I could say the same for Earth," Wrex grimaced as he looked back at Toby's most recent speech.

It mostly meandered on, calling out how 'alien sympathizers' were harming cooperation within the human race as a whole.

"Maybe they just aren't doing it right," Wrex continued.

Robin nodded while she watched Toby Dunn's public announcement on the screen.

"He really doesn't seem to understand that the galaxy doesn't revolve around him," Robin commented.

"If his waistline gets any bigger, it just might," Wrex chuckled.

{These are unstable times, no doubt about it,} Toby continued on, {we aren't nearly as divided as we have been in the past, but in the face of how accessible we are to species out there and how accessible they are to us, we need to stand together for the times to come. If we are to survive to the end of this century and beyond, we must learn to stand strong against the aliens. Don't let your family and friends fall to the traps they offer.}

Robin shook her head at Toby Dunn's stupidity as she crossed her arms, and it didn't help when she heard Dunn's supporters applauding in the background.

"Who was the human who said that, 'only two things are infinite, the universe and stupidity'?” Wrex asked.

Robin didn't answer, yet she snickered at the response. She snapped out of her thoughts when she heard her omni-tool ping, so she turned it on only to find a message from Adrien Victus.

{Ambassador, in regard to the Dunn Administration on Earth, my scouts found a "reeducation" camp on the human colony of Eden Prime. I've also informed Commander Vakarian, Spectre Arterius, and your brother Commander Shepard of the camp. Call me back ASAP.}

Once Robin finished reading the message, she slowly rose from her seat.

"Well, I guess we figured out where those disappearing humans went," she mused.

Garrus walked into the room looking at his omni-tool.

"Did you also get the message?"
"Yeah," Robin nodded.

Garrus contacted the Aran'tar ahead of time, informing them they'd be leaving for Palaven for Victus' estate. Within a couple of hours, Brendan, Saren, Wrex, Garrus, and Robin met at the docks. While Wrex wouldn't be along for the mission, since he was assigned by his brother to oversee the development of the Genophage treatment. Still, Liara, Tali and Thane would be tagging along as well.

"You know," Robin said while she embraced herself to Garrus's arm, "I've always wanted to see Palaven since I first heard of turians. And maybe if I got lucky, I could shake hands with the Primarch."

As Tali walked onto the bridge, Garrus approached her.

"Tali," Garrus asked, "have you heard anything from your people about their encounters with the Geth?"

"After the mission to Virmire, things have been improving. Both sides have subsequently began efforts to defuse hostilities, and there are even talks about allowing us to return to the homeworld. It wouldn't be like when the Geth were still VI, but for anyone alive today who wants to see a sunset with their visor off…this might be our chance," Tali answered, adding a somber tone at the end.

"It's still good to hear that what we did helped," Garrus acknowledged.

Saren and Miranda soon entered the bridge, catching Robin's attention.

"Before we left the Citadel, I had arranged to bring three sets of radiation-resistant suits for Miranda, Liara, and Robin. Thane, I hope you understand if we have you stay back on the Aran'tar for this mission, as the suits are made for asari, and those with similar physiology. We'll simply be on the Aran'tar for a brief discussion with the General," Saren informed.

"What about my brother?" Robin called out.

Before Saren could answer Robin's question, he couldn't help but pick up Garrus's scent from her.

"As a part of Earth's special forces, I thought he would've had access to tech that would grant him environmental protection, no?" Saren returned, raising a brow plate.

Robin relaxed her shoulders.

"Oh, right," Robin blurted.

"Still, it'd be best to inform him before we dock," Miranda repeated.

"I'll do that once we exit the Mass Relay," Saren nodded.

Pulling the ambassador aside, Saren pressed further.

"Ambassador, I just noticed you've got a…distinct scent about you," Saren pointed out, "did something happen between you and the commander?"

Robin stiffened, remembering that turians have higher sense of smell than humans.

"Well," Robin replied while she rubbed the base of her neck with her hand, "Garrus and I did need stress relief and a shower at the same time, so why not do both at the same time?"
"That's fair. I do have a similar affair occurring with Dr. Lawson, so as far as I can tell, you two are admonished from whatever it is you do during your free time," Saren said dismissively.

With that, Saren and Robin returned to the bridge. Although the Spectre didn't feel like mentioning it to either of them, he was certain Robin and Garrus will most likely resort to proving to the galaxy their bond can mend broken relations among species.

As the two vessels approached the Mass Relay, the Citadel Flight Control gave them clearance, allowing them to pass through to the Apien Crest.

(Commander, we've entered the relay and will arrive at Palaven in two hours time,) the pilot informed over the ship intercom.

"Right. Gear up, men. I don't want to waste any time between Palaven and touching down on Eden Prime," Garrus ordered.

"O-Ok," Robin nodded.

Garrus walked along side Robin to the barracks. Putting on their respective suits, Garrus turned to Robin.

"Hey, you alright?" he asked, "you seem a bit distracted."

"I'm fine," Robin assured, giving Garrus a soft smile, "I'm just a little excited about seeing Palaven for the first time."

Garrus smiled.

"It's a beautiful place. You know how to use the camera on your omni-tool, right?"

Robin nodded.

"Maybe after all is said and done," Garrus prattled on, "we can be back for more, yeah?"

Robin rested her forehead against Garrus's, allowing him to pull her into a gentle embrace.

Garrus brought Robin onto the bridge as they came into the dock on Palaven.

"Here we are," he said, "I wish I could show you the countryside, but this is what it's like here."

Turian architecture clearly paid greater attention to functionality. Over the angular outer structure of the taller buildings were various additional panels for natural ventilation. Furthermore, much of the city were a large number of abstract designs beyond just a rectangular block, and would go so far as to add hexagonal structures, asymmetrical structures, and structures that looked physically impossible due to a large portion of building being seemingly supported on little more than air.

"It's not as pretty as something asari or salarian designed," Garrus continued, "but it's Palaven."

"It's still amazing, though," Robin replied.

Docking with full gear on, especially for Brendan, Robin, and Miranda, the team disembarked the ship before they were greeted by a number of turian troops.

"Commander, the general has been expecting your arrival. He ordered us to provide you
transportation to his estate," the leader said, gesturing to a couple of shuttles waiting for them on the
docks.

"Let's not keep him waiting, then," Garrus acknowledged, beckoning to the others to follow his
stead.

The entire team followed the troops over to the shuttles. Once they were aboard, the shuttles took off.

Victus continued to look at the helmet cam recordings from his scouts on Eden Prime. As he
watched, he noticed how the captured individuals were stored in cryopods disguised as fuel tanks
and were brought in through public ports. He continued to watch where the trucks went when his
omni-tool buzzed.

{Sir, the commander and ambassador are inbound. ETA five minutes.}

"Thank you for the heads up," Victus nodded, "I'll be waiting for you in the garage."

General Victus stood up and walked from his living room to the building elevator. His estate was at
the top floor of a luxurious apartment building offered to him by his position. He didn't like it, but he
felt he may as well use it. All he would have to do was wait before he could start the meeting.

During the flight, Robin watched the scenery as the shuttles flew by. Garrus kept his eyes on the
building ahead getting quickly nearer. It was one of the various compounds reserved for the highest
officers in the turian military. At the base of the building was a medium sized hangar, usually for
skycars of the aforementioned ranking officials. As they disembarked, Victus exited the elevator near
the other side of the chamber.

"Commander. Good to see you so soon," Victus greeted, "I assume you and your team are ready?
You'll be going into Colonial Alliance territory, and we can't go about giving the current
administration on Earth any more excuses than we need to."

Garrus and Adrien clasped their hands.

"I'm prepared for duty," Garrus replied, "and the more details of the plan I know, the better."

"I'll provide whatever you need to know," the General agreed, tapping a few keys on his omni-tool,
"I hope you've had enough fun going guns blazing, because you'll need to maintain some level of
discretion going in and coming out. Especially on Shepard's part."

Robin cringed at the thought of being forced to go through "reeducation" herself, so Garrus stroked
her head to soothe her. Still, Victus led them, Saren, Brendan and their reinforcements inside.

"For now, get in there, eliminate all Cerberus personnel, and rescue whoever you can. Bring as many
captives back to the Citadel and see to it they get the treatment they need," the General continued.

After a while of venturing through the estate until they reached the briefing room, where Victus
already had a holographic projection of the map active.

"So that's the camp?" Robin observed.

"According to the scouts, it's disguised as a fueling station. They've only managed to get a
preliminary understanding of the facility layout. From there, you'll be on your own. I hate to send
you guys in blind, but time is not on our side. There are innocent people down there, and every day
we spend investigating is another dozen people broken into mere shadows of their former selves. Happy hunting, ladies and gentlemen," Victus concluded.

With the map recorded into their omni-tools, Saren, Garrus and Brendan escorted their squad out of the meeting room.

"If we are going to have any success on this mission," Saren suggested, "we will have to split into three teams."

"I don't like splitting up, but it at least increases the chances of one of us succeeding," Brendan commented, "or decreases the chances of all of us getting killed if you're the pessimistic type."

By then, they reached the foyer of the estate and turned to face the front door.

"Then it's necessary that we pick our teammates wisely to improve our chances even further," Garrus added, "Robin Shepard, you're with me."

"Right. I'll go in with James and Tali," Brendan replied.

"That's settled," Saren agreed, "let's go."

Saren, Garrus and Brendan lead their teammates out of the estate and stepped aboard the shuttles.

"We're ready to head back to the docks," Garrus informed the pilot.

{Understood, sir. Setting coordinates for the Exodus Cluster. We'll be waiting for your return,} the pilot acknowledged.

"Thank you," Garrus nodded.

Once the shuttle doors closed, the shuttles took off. During the flight, Robin embraced herself to Garrus, hoping to stave off any boredom.

"So Robin, I heard that Eden Prime is a pretty place. Is that true?" Garrus asked with a sigh.

"I don't think I've been there," Robin admitted, "but maybe it is beautiful."

Garrus gently stroked Robin's hair while his mandibles flexed into a smile.

"Then you'll be lucky to see it for yourself," he replied.

It wasn't long before the shuttles arrived at the docks, so the teams disembarked the shuttles and made their way towards the Aran'tar and the Normandy without hesitation.

"I'll see you over there," Brendan said, making his way past the Aran'tar, "wish I could show you around, Robin Hood. It's a pretty place."

Robin nodded before she followed Garrus aboard the Aran'tar, with Saren and Miranda following close behind.

"So I guess I'm on Garrus's team," Robin mused, "but who else will accompany us?"

"I'll see if I can ask Thane to join in," Garrus offered.

By then, they entered the bridge, where the squadmates gathered before the pilot prepared for takeoff procedures.
"Then that will leave me with Miss Lawson and T'Soni," Saren added.

"Sounds good. Remember to keep a low profile going in and out. Especially be careful how you take down the guards. We'll try to disable the alarms as much as possible, but don't let anyone inside get wind of you. If you find any captives, leave them be until we have control of the building," Garrus reminded.

"Understood, Commander," nodded Thane.

Soon enough, the Aran'tar and the Normandy took off from the docks and blasted into the atmosphere, departing from Palaven. Along the way, the ships had to pass through two Mass Relays out of the Apien Crest. Luckily, the traffic was pretty decent, which made the trek much faster on their way to the Exodus Cluster.

Hours quietly passed until they were in orbit over the planet below. Gearing up, both teams entered the atmosphere in shuttles to minimize the chances of detection on their initial approach. Exiting in the countryside, the group had a good view of a crop field as the shuttle doors opened.

"So this is Eden Prime?" Robin said.

"Yeah," Brendan answered, "I wish I was here on a better day."

"Do you know the way to the camp?" Garrus asked.

Brendan looked over the map.

"I do," Brendan admitted, "it's some place I would pass by frequently during the shore leaves I would take here. Didn't think much about it until recently."

Robin grinned and placed her hands on her hips, her face beaming with pride.

"And now we have an excuse to storm the castle," she commented.
Eden Camp

Quietly, the group weaved in and out of the back streets of the colony. For Brendan, it was a familiar tour of the prefabs with the exception of having to keep out of sight from even the most insignificant of colonists. In the back of the fuel storage facility was a back door serving as a fire escape. Fortunately, the colonists weren't particularly keen on following construction safety procedure. Slowly peeking his head inside, Saren beckoned to the others when he saw no movement inside.

"Look around," Saren instructed, "this place is too empty."

Upon cue, Garrus and Brendan’s teams slowly stepped into the facility and started surveying the room.

"For fuel storage, they were definitely moving in much more than a couple dozen," Brendan noted.

Garrus tapped his visor as he scanned the room.

"Keep an eye out," Garrus instructed, "there's got to be another door, or elevator somewhere."

Brendan's team began searching for an elevator or even another door while Robin and Thane checked the fuel tanks lined along the walls. Thane found a particular patch of wall. He felt something near it and it drew his attention. He started to move back and forth, looking for the same sensation again. He found that around the lines, there was a light draft coming through.

"I've found something."

Robin paused in her tracks and tilted her head towards Thane while Garrus approached the drell assassin.

"Really?" Robin clamored.

Garrus looked to the nearest fuel tank, and scanned the surface. As was the case with all the fuel tanks in the room, each had a small monitor on the side of each one. However, this one had a small metal flap over the top. Looking underneath, there was a small keypad. Scanning further, he could see finger prints on the key notes.

"Looks like we're on the right track," Garrus mused.

Brendan nodded to Tali, prompting her to approach the keypad and form a list of possible combinations. A subtle hum leaked from behind the panels. Soon enough, the panels popped out to reveal a relatively large elevator. Piling in, Saren hit the elevator button going down under the colony.

Exiting at the first floor, they were greeted by a hallway crossroads, with the fourth being the elevator door. Without another word between any of them, they split into their agreed teams down the hallways. Brendan, James, and Tali crossed over a bridge with glass windows overlooking a cafeteria full of people in patient aprons, with Cerberus guards watching over them on a level above. The quarian took a closer glimpse at one of the plates, grimacing at the sight of poorly cooked noodle soup.

"Keelah, how could Cerberus do this to their own species?" Tali muttered.
Meanwhile, Garrus, Thane, and Robin entered what looked to be a medical wing.

"Please! Stop! What else do you want?!" some unseen voice screamed.

The group stacked up behind some double doors, as Garrus peaked through first, taking point. It initially looked like any other hospital room with other beds and curtains keeping the talking doctor and troops oblivious to their presence.

"You must understand, that this is for your best. You'll walk out of here stronger than you were before," another voice hissed, like that of a snake, "all you need to do is keep calm and accept the treatment."

"I'm not sick! How many times do I have to tell you? I'm not sick!"

"But you are. Most mentally unstable individuals don't recognize that they are ill. Prepare the next dose, it's time for her treatme—"

Thane couldn't stand another bit, and shot all three Cerberus personnel with his suppressed pistol. Robin took a quick peek, observing that the patient in question stared in shock and confusion.

"P-please! Get me out of here!" she begged, "let me out! Cut me loose!"

Thane continued to speak as he dragged a body aside to hide it.

"Please remain calm. We can't have you running loose just yet, alerting the guards. We're your best chance of escaping, so please wait patiently."

"B-But how?" the patient objected.

"Just stay where you are," Garrus repeated, "we'll come back for you when we can. We can't have any alarms go off at all, meaning the mission is an automatic failure if we are detected by the personnel down here or the populace above."

Even if the patient didn't understand why, she still nodded.

Saren, Miranda, and Liara walked along quietly when they entered a long corridor with reinforced metal walls on either side. It became quickly apparent that the both sides were cells of countless inmates. Miranda decided to peek inside one.

"Is someone there? What the hell do you want?!" a voice from inside cried.

The interior of the cell had no lighting, leaving the inhabitant in pitch-black darkness. Miranda hesitated with her response, not wanting to risk jeopardizing the mission. Silently closing the hatch, she returned to her position behind Saren.

"Looks like they stepped up the number count since I last checked," she muttered.

Saren nodded to Miranda in acknowledgment.

"How long does it take them to completely break someone?" Saren asked.

"Usually a few weeks on average. The longest case took two months," Miranda explained.

He was aware that he still had an objective to accomplish, so Saren led Miranda and Liara down the corridor.
Garrus, Thane, and Robin walked out of the other side of the block, having successfully cleared the area without being detected. Opening a door into a stairwell, Garrus gestured the others to follow him down. He was hoping they could at least find the security room to keep word from getting out in case something went wrong, or at least slow it down. After a short flight down the stairs, they reached the lower floor that led to a closed sliding door. It resembled a command center, with monitors overlooking the various hallways, mess halls, guard barracks, and the individual prison cells in infrared.

Over near the other side of the chamber, a male Cerberus operative was standing in front of a holographic projection. The man on the other end was wearing a high-end business suit, had graying brown hair, and strangely glowing blue eyes.

{I assume the increased flow isn't too much?}

"With all due respect, sir. We'll need an increase of rations sent with the prisoners. We can't afford to constantly tap into the local supplies without someone getting suspicious," the officer replied.

{I'll see what I can throw your direction. Other than that, I assume all cases are successful?}

"Yes sir. The new treatment is proving its worth compared to those who undergo the previous treatment. We'll be implementing once the remaining supplies for the original treatment have been expended."

{Good. Our assets are being undermined as they are. Don't lose this one.}

As the call ended, Thane snuck up and snapped the operative's neck.

"Most concerning," Thane said.

"I wonder if that was the Illusive Man," Robin commented.

"We can ask Miranda later," Garrus replied as he began to work with the security cameras, shutting off recording and detection parameters.

By the time he finished, none of the Cerberus officers on patrol noticed. Garrus quickly contacted the others through his omni-tool.

{We're in some room near the bottom of the facility. We've successfully set the cameras on a loop, so we should go unnoticed by the security systems,} Garrus reported.

"Thanks for the heads up," Brendan replied.

Creeping around a corner, the three of them entered the cafeteria area, to pick off the guards. Brendan, James and Tali found suitable spots to fire rounds at the guards without detection. Brendan and James had brought suppressed weapons for the mission, and had lent Tali a pistol to use.

"In position, Loco," James said, "awaiting your signal."

Brendan carefully eyed the guards, hoping they would let their guard down. Quickly switching to semi-automatic, he landed two consecutive headshots with two taps of his rifle. James and Tali followed suit as they took down the others.

"Good work," Brendan instructed, "Tali, help Vega move the bodies before the next shift comes."
James and Tali moved in and started dragging the corpses out of sight.

Miranda dragged a guard from behind cover onto the ground before snapping their neck. Dragging the corpse into a janitor's closet with a pile of other guards, she exited before rushing to catch up with Saren and Liara.

"Just cleared the third level," Miranda reported.

"Same here. We'll be moving to the next area," Saren replied, peering at a security terminal.

"Just how big is this place?" Liara asked.

"It's still relatively small," Miranda explained, "Cerberus had this facility built some time after Eden Prime had been established, meaning they couldn't afford to expand too heavily without generating some suspicion from the local populace. Furthermore, people outside of the Local Cluster who don't display active hostilities towards other races are a relative minority. It would simply be a waste of resources to build a facility to house a small number of inmates."

"Are there more facilities like this one?" Liara asked.

"Last I checked, this was the only one. Due to the current political atmosphere on Earth, establishing a universally 'correct' mindset is a low priority. The main focus was learning to control or counter the other races," Miranda answered, "my cell was oriented around dealing with matters directly on the field between systems, and ensuring mutual cooperation between groups back on Earth."

Saren started to scan ahead.

"Then we might just be lucky," he mused.

Meanwhile, Thane gazed grimly at the monitor. Along with those that had been 'treated' and returned was an extensive list of humans throughout civilized space who didn't share Cerberus' ideals, including Robin's friends, but excluding Robin herself.

"This will be problematic," Thane sighed.

Robin gave Thane a confused glance.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"The way with which they are capable of monitoring potential victims. As far as Citadel law goes, such level of spying is not legal unless a full warrant is signed, and by an extensive list of individuals too. Doesn't Earth have such regulations?" Thane asked.

"They do…or did," Garrus replied, "it's mostly an afterthought currently. I did extensive research on this matter before extracting Robin and her friends from Earth, and such freedoms from monitoring have had a sketchy history."

"Yeah," Robin agreed, "because they tend to spy on us."

Robin carefully read the database.

"But how come I'm not on that list?" Robin continued.

"Given they sent me after you, I'd say chances are they just want you dead, and gone forever,"
Thane simply put.

Robin couldn't help but cringe, yet she remained stoic.

"And yet you changed your mind on that order," Robin pointed out.

"Unlike most guns for hire, my paycheck is not my most significant priority in life."

With that in mind, Robin smiled in relief.

"Still, we should keep moving," Garrus encouraged, looking back up the stairwell, "I'll quickly fry coms before we head back out."

"Got it," Robin nodded.

"I'm telling you, man. That's their secret, and that's how they keep themselves above everyone else,"

two bored Cerberus guards continued to talk away.

"The asari? They'd really go that far?" the other pressed.

"Yeah. And they've been pulling it off fo—"

The two were simultaneously taken down by Miranda and Saren.

"That should be the last of them in this sector," Miranda replied.

"Just how many staff do they keep here to maintain the prisoners?" Liara inquired.

"Only fifty at most during any given time," Miranda explained, "but remember, we still have to contend with getting the prisoners down here out and to the Aran'tar without alerting the locals."

"If that's the case, there can't be many left down here," Saren commented.

"Then let's get this over with," Miranda suggested.

"Dios mio, these poor people," Vega muttered.

Quickly entering the next room, they entered a furnace for disposing of inmates should they have committed suicide during the 'reeducation' process. Brendan was in full agreement.

"Hey," Brendan commented, "at least they aren't brainwashing them into more soldiers."

With no guards patrolling the furnace, Tali seized this chance to examine the room. It was dimly lit compared to the other parts of the underground facility. Down the back of the room was a few steel-reinforced furnaces, with a single smoke stack leading through the ceiling and presumably to the surface. In the middle of the room we're two covered corpses awaiting disposal. Out of curiosity, Tali lifted the covers off one of the corpses. The facial tissue was pale and lifeless, the hair was greasy and thrown about, and the neck showed signs of chafing and physical restraint.

"Keelah…" Tali gasped.

Brendan walked alongside the stretcher.

"Friend of yours?" James asked.

"Yeah," Brendan nodded, "a weird guy, but we got along well enough. He deserved better."

James nodded in agreement while he placed his hand on Brendan's shoulder.

"We've done as much as we can to avenge him so far, Loco. Let's finish the fight before we continue to mourn," James reminded.

"Right," Brendan nodded.

Even if they couldn't do much for the victims that have already ended their lives, the least they could do was save the prisoners still living. Saren reached for his omni-tool.

"Vakarian, we've effectively eliminated hostiles in the prison block. What's your status, over?"

{We have taken care of the hostiles in our area as well,} Garrus responded over the com-link.

{We've cleared most of the living areas. We'll clear out the barracks and we'll return to the prison block. Over,} Brendan acknowledged.

"Don't take too long. Start rounding them up, and we'll get out taking groups at a time," Saren instructed.

Ending the call, Saren, Miranda, and Liara started opening the prison cells. Some of the patients held inside flinched at the light suddenly flooding their cells. Each door slid open with an audible metal scraping, followed by numerous sleep deprived, distraught people walking out, curious as to what was happening.

"Brendan," Saren instructed, "take your team to gather whoever you can in the living areas. We'll make this quick as we can."

{Copy that,} Brendan nodded.

While Saren, Miranda and Liara continued with letting the prisoners out of their cells, Brendan, James and Tali made their way to the living areas.

The hallways outside of the elevator to the surface were crammed with almost forty kidnapped people. Deciding who went where, Saren, Thane, and Garrus took point on the way back up with the first group of ten people. Peering back into the interior of the fueling station, no one had bothered to check on the elevator down. Yet.

"Robin, it's clear up here," Garrus said over the coms, "bring Brendan and James up here."

After the lift returned with the three teammates, Garrus, Thane, and Saren departed with the ten captives to the crop fields where they could be retrieved by a shuttle.

"So Robin, you used to this sort of thing by now?" Garrus asked, "sneaking around and espionage, I mean."

"I've been used to it since doing so before got me in trouble with the authorities," Robin answered.

The group continued to keep watch at inside the station. Another fifteen minutes passed before Garrus contacted her back.
"Ok," Robin nodded, "see you in a bit."

The elevator distinctly hummed behind the three of them before calmly sliding open to reveal another ten inmates. Garrus, Saren, and Thane entered through the back door again to escort the next group.

"I assume everything is alright?" Saren asked.

"No sign of hostiles, if that's what you're asking," Brendan answered.

Before too long, they disappeared again out the back door with the ten poor, hapless people in tow. By the time they finished evacuating the surviving prisoners from the facility, all they had left to do was leave the colony.

Once they boarded the Aran'tar and the Normandy, both ships left Eden Prime. Garrus quickly had Mordin begin treatment on half of the patients on the way back to the Citadel.

"Brendan, I've got my half treated. Is everything alright with your half?" Garrus asked.

{Yeah, I've got talented staff aboard. Don't worry about it,} Brendan answered.

"Glad to hear it," Garrus smiled before he ended the call.

The turian commander turned his head towards Saren, Miranda and Robin.

"At least we took that facility down when we did. Even if any of the victims are too far gone, they had lists upon lists of others throughout Citadel Space and the colonies. They listed who they were, what they did, where they lived, and knew every facet of their daily schedules," Garrus disclosed.

Robin scratched her head.

"How is that supposed to help with human domination like Cerberus planned?" Robin pondered.

"Do keep in mind that the Cerberus mentality revolves around 'us against them'," Miranda explained, "if Cerberus wants their way, they'll have to take into consideration they'd be pitting humanity against a collective of other races. With a conflict that size, they'd need every man, woman, and child to be willing to stand by their cause when it does happen."

"Even if it means…indoctrinating them?" Robin clarified.

Miranda slowly nodded.

"Basically. It's like most other scenarios where the treatment is meant to adjust the victim's views to that of the party or group's views," Miranda continued.

Saren nodded in agreement and folded his arms.

"This…could be a problem," Saren said.
Palaven Massacre

Shortly after the Aran'tar and the Normandy returned to the Citadel, escorting the rescued patients to the Huerta Hospital became the first priority. Three grueling hours of paperwork, cautious transportation of the heavily damaged, and identification passed before all the victims were properly housed. In the meantime, Miranda worked back at the Aran'tar, checking the Cerberus frequencies she still knew. No doubt their move had stirred the attention of the various cells by now, and she wanted to know what their next move was.

"Any luck?" Saren asked as he walked to her side.

"Nothing useful yet," Miranda groaned, barely looking away from her work, "we've caught their attention, but they're still trying to pick up the pieces and they are in no position themselves to make a big move without risking more of their own assets."

Saren let out a soft chuckle as he placed his hand on Miranda's shoulder.

"So, about that encounter from earlier…"

"I wish I could," she replied, "I just want to make sure I'm not on anyone's kill-list before I really devote to anything."

"That is fair enough," Saren agreed.

Miranda was suddenly pinged on her omni-tool.

{Miranda, it's Brendan. I just received orders from command to mobilize. Just talked with my dad and Anderson, saying that they're covering for me, saying that I'm working on an extensive assignment. They're trying to find details, but I'm getting the feeling something is off. Can you find anything on your part?}

"That's strange. I wonder…oh no," Miranda hung up and began searching for another frequency.

"What now?" Saren inquired.

"The Illusive Man is making his move," Miranda explained, "whatever he's planning, it's big if he's pulling a force this size."

Attuning the device in front of her, she soon enough heard the Cerberus leader's smoky voice.

{I assume everything is prepared?} the Illusive Man spat impatiently.

On the other end was the undoubtedly trembling Toby Dunn.

{Yes, Mr. Harper. I sent the order out an hour ago. I've got the First Fleet ready to move on my go.}

{Then make the call,} the Illusive Man urged, {my patience for your incompetence is dwindling.}

The discussion abruptly ended without another word. Miranda froze in fear, which caught Saren's attention.

"Lawson?" he paused.

Miranda quickly called back Brendan.
"Shepard, I just found something. President Dunn just ordered the First Fleet to move out. As for where their target lies, I haven't been able to assess yet."

[The First Fleet? I'm in the Fifth, but that's easily enough to invade and occupy a couple systems. Why would I be called in?] Brendan was slightly shocked at the news.

"Special assets. He's sending them after someone big if he's compiling additional special forces."

[I guess he got tired of waiting.] Brendan commented.

"Waiting?" Saren asked, "for what?"

"To conquer the galaxy," Miranda shook her head in disbelief.

[I figured that, but I was thinking of something command has had on the backburner for months now. I don't know how they did it, but we've managed to collect a lot of intel on the turian command structure and the positions their military hold.] Brendan answered, [if anything, you guys might want to make like hell to Palaven.]

Saren froze in a matter of seconds.

"The Hierarchy officials are holding a summit this week on Palaven to discuss the Cerberus threat," Saren mentioned, "they strike now, they not only take down a number of military and potentially political leaders, but draw attention away from Cerberus specifically!"

Without warning, Miranda stood to her feet.

"We need to hurry," Miranda urged.

Saren opened his own omni-tool and initiated a call.

"Vakarian, we've got to return to Palaven," Saren urged, "Cerberus has made their move, and they're making an attempt at the homeworld."

[You...can't be serious.] Garrus gasped over the com-link.

Saren knew he would be running out of time, so he ended the call and led Miranda out of her office.

Soon enough, Saren, Miranda, Garrus, and Robin had gathered at the Aran'tar, and were initiating departure procedures.

"If harming the chain of command is going to be their end goal, then our first priority is to head to the summit and retrieve all remaining leaders," Garrus ordered, "we need to get them to relative safety before we can do anything else. As for the invasion force, I'm not sure how we'll ward them off. This may very well be the one thing that breaks the ceasefire."

Robin cringed while she had her arms wrapped around Garrus.

"I thought we could stop this war from starting up again," she muttered.

"We'll find something," Garrus grumbled, "right now, our objective hasn't changed: take down Cerberus and stop whatever it is they plan to accomplish in the long-run. They're still pitting Earth against everyone else, and I'd rather not have either side forced harshly into submission or worse."

"Right," Robin nodded.
"The fact the Illusive Man is stepping up his game means he's getting desperate and we should do the same," Miranda started, "by this point, our best chance to minimize further destruction would be to cripple the chain of command directly by taking him out."

Garrus nodded before he turning his head towards the pilot.

"Set a course for Palaven," Garrus ordered.

"What about the upcoming war?" Saren asked, "we may have inflicted heavy casualties upon Cerberus, but now they essentially have us stretched across two fronts: with them directly and with their misguided forces."

"Is there still a chance for me to reason with the Alliance?" Robin asked.

"If we provide sufficient evidence that Cerberus has a level of influence in the on Earth that has forced the Alliance into reigniting the conflict with the Hierarchy, we just might. However, we'll need much more than a couple of quotes between individuals," Saren answered.

Robin gave Miranda an intense stare just as the Aran'tar began to take off.

"I still know of the major bases Cerberus has established. However, I'm concerned about the rate at the war will continue while we narrowly keep up," Miranda sighed.

Saren leaned forward.

"What about Okeer's treatment?" Saren mentioned, "if we get the krogan on our side, they could help close in on Cerberus. Now that the quarians and geth are settling their differences, maybe they could help finish the fight once negotiations have concluded."

Miranda smiled at Robin before she nodded at Saren.

"That just might work."

It was already a few hours too late by the time they arrived, and the invasion was in full swing. The turian fleet had done well to hold the line, but were now forced to low orbit as the overwhelming number of Alliance ships continued to push through. The Aran'tar was pushing through with the relief forces sent from the Citadel and would be relying on the other ships for cover. All Garrus and Saren could hope for was the Primarch's survival. What the group remembered to be a tranquil and prestigious landscape was now desolated by heavy cannon fire, as plenty of the city was now in flames and riddled with crashed spacecraft, both human and turian.

"Solana…dad…where are you two?" Garrus muttered under his breath, looking back at the fires and chaos with distraught.

Once the Aran'tar reached the summit, the pilots maneuvered the ship and lowered it into a location where they could avoid detection yet still have the shortest route to the Hierarchy officials. Exiting the hangar area of the vessel, Garrus began barking orders at his unit.

"Two squads will remain here and cover our retreat. Contact me if anything happens. Everyone else is with me!"

Garrus, Saren, Miranda, Robin, and half a dozen other turians ran as fast as they could through the streets and damaged buildings, narrowly dodging firefights between Alliance troops and Hierarchy defenses and military police.
"Get to the senatorial building!"

Garrus could barely hear himself over all the commotion, with near-miss explosions, gunshots, screams, alarms, and crashes ringing all around them like a concert band. Once they all reached the senatorial building, they made their way through the front door and sprinted through the foyer.

"Look out!" Saren yelled, firing at a group of Alliance soldiers who rounded a corner in the lobby. However, a few of the Alliance soldiers scrambled up the stairs and Robin recognized one of them.

"Garrus, I think your attacker is here," Robin pointed out.

Vince, now in Alliance uniform, guided a group of soldiers onward while providing covering fire. Forcing them to cover, Garrus was the first to jump back out again.

"That slimy bast…let's go," Garrus ordered, "there's only one reason he's here."

Garrus took point with the others struggling to keep up. Vigor coursed through the commander's veins as they pursued the Cerberus soldier. While in pursuit, Miranda kept her eyes out for anything she could use to slow down the soldiers and keep them out of the Primarch's reach. The 'Alliance' squad had been pursued to the doors of the senatorial safe-house and were quickly setting breaching charges while simultaneously holding off Garrus' squad. After a sudden explosion, Miranda tossed a warp to minimize the number of Cerberus troops who entered.

"They've broken through! Hold them off!" Miranda yelled.

Saren could still hear a few yells and gunshots from inside the safe-house responding to the Alliance invaders. Saren and Garrus made their way into safe-house, only to find Desolas and a few more turian soldiers, whom Saren recognized as General Corinthus, Septimus Oraka and Tarquin Victus fighting off the Alliance invaders while forming a protective stance around Primarch Fedorian. Miranda and Robin burst into the scene seconds later.

"Friendly reinforcements have arrived! Move!" Desolas ordered the few remaining guards.

Clearing the last of the Alliance troops, the group quickly met up with Saren and Garrus.

"Saren. I'm surprised to see you here on such short notice," Desolas said, "I suppose your human friend had a hand in that?"

"As a matter of fact, she did, Desolas," Saren defended, "had she not found what she did in the time we had, you and everyone else in this room would've been overwhelmed."

Robin, however, had been drawn to her now downed Uncle Vince.

"Heh. So, Robin, still appealing to those aliens?" he asked after an extensive cough.

Robin narrowed her eyes at Vince.

"After what you did to Garrus," Robin snapped, "I really hope you ask yourself what my dad will say to you."

Out of sight, Vince brandished a short combat knife.

"If…if it's one thing I'll," Vince coughed, "give to your alien friend…is that he is as resilient as hell."

"Do you even have anything to remotely back your own cause? Any last words we can pass on?"
Garrus hissed.

He had his own experience with bad family, but Vince was a whole new level. He quickly grew to despise the man for the toxic rhetoric he spewed, not so much for the physical damage he’d taken from the RPG blast.

"If it's one thing…still gotta say…" Vince positioned himself to pounce, "I'm not letting some filthy lizard get between my niece's legs!"

Jumping at Garrus, Vince's trajectory was quickly affected by a quick shot to his temple, sending a shower of red out the opposite side of his skull. Miranda still stood with her pistol drawn and smoke rising from the barrel.

"Creepy little bugger," she muttered angrily.

Robin may have been shocked, yet she sighed to calm herself.

"And one less xenophobe to worry about," Robin added.

Robin then turned her head towards Primarch Fedorian.

"Sir," Robin called out, "are you ok?"

"Fine for now," the Primarch sighed, "I hope you have an escape plan."

"Our ship is waiting in low orbit," Garrus answered, "right now, our current objective is to get you and the others here to safety."

They hadn't exited for a minute when the pilot from the Aran'tar called.

{Sir, Alliance troops are pulling out and their fighters are initiating bombing runs over the area. Get out of there.}

"We may not have much time. Send a shuttle to the senatorial building. We've got the Primarch and multiple high-ranking officers with us."

Mere seconds after Garrus gave the order, explosions erupted all around them. Garrus thought fast and pulled Robin into a protective embrace.

The smoke and debris cleared, and the group gradually stood back up, coughing and with the explosion ringing persistently in their ears. Garrus checked around him, relieved to find that Robin was still alive in his grasp.

"Ah hell…is everyone alright?" Garrus called out.

What was left of the corridor filled with grunts and cautious replies.

"Sirs, we have a problem," one of the guards informed, "the Primarch is down."

Amidst the crowd, Primarch Fedorian had been impaled by three metal rods from the building frame. His inky blue blood flowed onto the floor. The guard quickly checked the Primarch's vitals.

"He's not getting back up again either," he continued.

Robin caught a glimpse of Primarch Fedorian and her eyes widened in horror.
"No," she gasped.

"We must move," Saren reminded, "the chain of command must be maintained, lest we join the Primarch in his fate."

Heaving the Primarch's body over his shoulder, the group silently carried on. Exiting the front lobby, a shuttle awaited them on the ruined streets.

"Get us back to the Citadel," Garrus ordered over his omni-tool, "we have several complications to work out."

He couldn't help but continue to stare into the distance. The fighting had begun to die down, but both sides had heavily worn the other down. Without saying another word, they all boarded the shuttle.

General Victus looked through the window into the med bay as Mordin performed the postmortem and removal of the metal rods. He shook his head with dismay as he walked back to the bridge.

"This is problematic," Victus sighed.

The other generals nodded in agreement.

"While you were at the med bay, we had reviewed the rules of succession," Saren started, "I'm not sure how you feel about it, but you're up for the position, general."

"We can understand if you disagree general, but having you take this is necessary," Garrus agreed, "with the ceasefire lifted and Palaven heavily damaged, we need some semblance of control until we regain peace between the Hierarchy and the Systems Alliance."

Adrien made one long glance through the hull's window.

"I'm…the Primarch now?" Adrien muttered.

"Like I said, rules of succession," Saren repeated.

The newly dubbed Primarch shook his head with disbelief.

"I can't take this position," Victus declined, "I'm a general, and my place always has been and always will be giving orders from the front line. I can't wade through politics and bureaucratic bullshit!"

"And as a former general, I suggest you take the time to stand back a bit and recognize the tactical significance of this change!" Saren growled.

Primarch Victus folded his arms behind his back and gave Saren an intense stare.

"Fine. I'll take the title," Victus surrendered with a stern frown, "but you better have a plan for finishing off Cerberus quickly."

"I won't let you down, Primarch Victus," Saren nodded.

Victus made a brief glance at Robin as she hugged her arms to her chest and lowered her head, her eyes glued to the floor.

"Commander Vakarian," Victus advised Garrus, "seeing your friendship with Ambassador Shepard, you should ensure she receives some proper rest after today's tragedy. You can catch up later."
Garrus carefully escorted Robin out of the room as the squabble between the generals, Spectre, and new Primarch resumed behind them.

"You alright? You seem a bit shaken."

Robin wrapped one arm around Garrus's.

"There…really was nothing to do to stop Cerberus from what they did," she whimpered, "was there?"

"We did what we could. We were just unlucky that time," Garrus replied as the two quietly entered his quarters, "we'll find a way to stop them. I know we will."

Once they climbed onto the bed, Garrus could notice tears trickling down Robin's face, so he pulled her into a gentle embrace. With a talon, he gingerly wiped away the thin ribbons of liquid.

"Please, Shepard. Talk to me. I can't help you if you keep it bottled up."

Robin hesitated in a moment of silence before caving in.

"M-Maybe none of this would've happened," Robin stuttered, "if…I didn't get involved. I should've saved the Primarch before he got killed. I don't think anyone will forgive me, now that I failed to stop the war from ever happening."

Robin rested her head on Garrus's chest without realizing it. Calmly brushing his hand through her hair, Garrus attempted further to ease her worries.

"Robin, you've helped all of us through these last months more than you realize. It was a war that would've been eventually forced by Cerberus, and none of us would've had a clue as to who threw the first stone. We would've had to start digging for clues by the time this happened hadn't you decided to stand against them. We may not have entirely stopped the bloodshed altogether, but we still have a chance to save everyone else thanks to you."

"So…it's pointless to simply give up?" Robin clarified.

Garrus nodded. With that simple reassurance, Robin leaned closer to Garrus and gave him a soft kiss. The turian commander returned the kiss and laid down on the bed, gently holding the young Shepard close as they nestled into a nap.
Across various news channels, Dunn's supporters cheered for the Alliance's supposed victory at Palaven while outrage sparked across the Citadel. As far as the conflict was concerned, the turians had no other choice but to return to war with the humans. By now, the Aran'tar returned to the Citadel with the Hierarchy officials aboard. Primarch Victus had accepted his new position, but was still generally uncomfortable with it. Even after being moved to the Citadel, safely away from combat, Adrien felt incredibly uncomfortable with his new position and would still be giving commands to the various divisions across multiple fronts. Finishing his most recent conversation with a group of generals, he proceeded to call Commander Vakarian. As the commander with the most experience infiltrating and sabotaging Cerberus infrastructure, Garrus would have to continue his fight.

"Commander. I assume you have been well rested?"

{Yes Gen- Primarch Victus. I've just had my ship resupplied and refueled. Is there anything I can help you with before I depart?} Garrus answered over his omni-tool, stuttering over the new rank.

"Keep hunting Cerberus. Unfortunately, with the war now in full swing, I can't afford to direct any more troops to your cause," Victus continued.

{I understand. However, I do have some possible allies to make who could still help.}

Adrien raised a brow plate.

"Allies, commander?"

{Yes,} Garrus nodded over the com-link, {have you heard of the Quarian Fleet?}

"What about them?"

For the most part, the former general had been somewhat negligent of what Garrus managed to accomplish over the course of his missions. He began to slightly regret the decision.

{I know the Geth are a controversial topic, but after a bit of convincing both sides of that conflict to work together in stopping Cerberus, they've began to put their differences aside. Last I heard, the Geth were beginning to consider letting the Quarians return to Rannoch,} Garrus explained.

Adrien sighed with slight annoyance.

"If it means stopping Cerberus," Adrien advised, "do it."

{Understood,} Garrus acknowledged, before ending the call.

He didn't have the stomach to disclose the treatment of the Genophage and face the potential consequences yet. For now, Garrus headed into the medical bay, meeting up with Mordin, Miranda and Saren.

"How's the treatment coming along, Mordin?" Garrus asked.

"Difficult. Surprised at Okeer's level of insight. Notes are very helpful," Mordin barely looked up from his work.

"And I suppose Okeer and his family are doing well?" Garrus remarked.
"Contact frequently. Doing well. Might be close," Mordin replied.

With the others focusing their attention on Mordin at the moment, Miranda clenched her fists. She felt it wouldn't be long before others at the Citadel would blame her for her contribution to the incident, so she would have to set things right.

"He'll be expecting us by now," Miranda explained, "I still know the layout of all the important structures to central command. I'll be going in alone."

Saren and Garrus gave Miranda a wary look.

"Miranda, I'm still not sure you should be charging in alone," Saren offered, "at least let me come with you."

Miranda turned her head towards Saren.

"I'll be fine. I've helped to train plenty of the staff myself, and I know how to exploit their style," Miranda excused.

"Having someone to watch your back would at least double the odds of you succeeding. Or at the very least get out alive," Saren retorted.

"Enough," Garrus interrupted, "we can't take risks now. You two will head out as soon as you're ready."

Saren and Miranda gave Garrus blank stares before they nodded.

Saren and Miranda were both in full gear and were checking their weapons. Miranda still felt it necessary to go in alone, but Saren still insisted that she needed him to cover her if things went awry. A day had passed already and everyone in the Citadel were still recovering from the shock of the incident at Palaven, so the Spectre and the former Cerberus operative figured their own mission would give them a chance to take a break from the turmoil. The fact the Illusive Man had ordered the re-ignition of the war to Miranda was a clear indicator that they had gradually dealt enough damage to the organization as a whole that he was now growing desperate. Now, all they needed to do was to flush him out into the open.

"I've my personal shuttle docked not too far from here. You ready?" Saren asked.

"More than anything," Miranda nodded.

Another seven minutes passed as they strode from the Aran'tar to the Spectre shuttle Saren frequently used. Sitting down and igniting the engines, Saren quickly contacted flight control to gain clearance to leave. Quickly lifting off, they rapidly approached the Mass Relay.

"So, the Horse Head Nebula. Are you sure that is our destination?" Saren pressed, checking the coordinates one more time.

"I've been there plenty of times to know the place and how to get there like the back of my hand," Miranda replied, "however, the docking bay does have multiple scanners. Once we board that station, it will be on full alert."

Saren tapped the machine pistol on his hip.

"Then we'll do this quickly."
With that, Saren maneuvered the shuttle closer to the Mass Relay.

Another quiet hour passed after they left the relay and continued to the Horse Head Nebula. Leaving the relay, they continued onto the Anadius System, before finally getting a visual of their target. Saren kept the stealth systems engaged until he neared the docking area. With the IFF still disguised, the base effectively had no idea who they were.

{This is private property. Identify yourself,} a man over coms demanded.

As the hatches clicked into place, Saren drew out his machine pistol.

"An old friend of yours wanted to show me the place," Saren simply answered, "have a look around. Hopefully you won't mind that."

By then, it was too late to reject their connection, and the pair dashed through the docking tube and got to work. Now that they were inside, all they had to do was locate the Illusive Man's office and kill him, so they started scurrying through the corridor. Heavily relying on their biotics and constant movement for protection, the two ran as fast as they could through the base, gunning down the guards that showed up as soon as they could, or slow them down. With the doors that did halt their progression, Saren had previously upgraded his omni-tool to crack through security faster than before. The Spectre locked a door behind them.

"That was fun," Saren chuckled, "are you alright?"

"Unfazed," Miranda simply said as she swapped thermal clips, "shall we continue?"

Saren nodded. The two fought further until they reached a large, dark, empty chamber with a seat and holographic UI overlooking a dying star.

"Unfortunate he's not here. He does however keep a large list on contacts on his personal computer," Miranda sighed, walking into the chair and sitting down.

Her fingers danced on the keyboard as she went to work logging in. After she did, she pulled up the list of contacts and started downloading it into her omni-tool. Saren cautiously reloaded as he eyed the room around him.

"This isn't right," Saren muttered, "it's been too easy so far."

Miranda was still in the middle of downloading, yet she made a brief glance at Saren.

"Are you…worried?" Miranda asked.

"Just keep downloading, then we'll get out ASAP," Saren quipped as he switched to his shotgun.

Miranda nodded before she returned her focus to her objective. Once she finished downloading the list moments later, she shut off the computer and stood to her feet. A hole just sank in her stomach.

"Looks like we've outstayed our welcome."

Saren caught a glimpse of Miranda before he placed his hand on her shoulder and pulled her close.

"If you stay close to me," Saren assured, "you'll be all right."

Saren rushed to the door to find the lock unreceptive to his omnitool's software. Looking to the ceiling, he noticed a mist beginning to flow in from the vents.
"Great, gas!"

Miranda took a huge inhale before she tried her turn at the door lock. Much to their dismay, the door continued to resist their attempts until the carbon dioxide in their lungs finally forced its way out. Gagging on the gas, a burning sensation lit up within their lungs. Falling to the ground, both Saren and Miranda continued to cough until the darkness took them.

In a separate room, the Illusive Man smirked while he watched Miranda and Saren struggle to escape before collapsing on a screen. He held two metal collars in his hand, confident he could use them to disable the former Cerberus operative and the turian Spectre's biotics.

"Excellent work," the Illusive Man praised, "prepare a cell for both of them and turn off the gas."

The Illusive Man handed the collars to two of his guards and dismissed them. He could be one step closer to eliminating the only member of the Shepard family that he despised above all else.

Garrus had tried raising Saren over coms, but wasn't getting a peep from the Spectre or the former Cerberus operative. After an extensive chat with Mordin, he decided to check on Miranda and Saren's progress.

"Come one, what's going on?" Garrus muttered.

Tension rose in Garrus's mind, and it didn't take long before Robin, who had been playing a puzzle game in her omni-tool, to focus her attention on her turian boyfriend.

"Garrus?" Robin paused.

"Saren and Miranda haven't reported back yet. I've tried contacting them multiple times, but they aren't responding. Knew they shouldn't have gone in alone," Garrus reclined in his seat with a defeated sigh.

Sympathy glistening in her eyes, Robin stepped over to the chair and sat in the turian commander's lap.

"I hope they're ok," Robin said.

Garrus's omni-tool buzzed. Accepting the call, the two weren't greeted by their allies.

{Commander Vakarian. I'm the de facto leader of Cerberus. You otherwise know me by my codename, the Illusive Man. I had a recent run-in with a friend of yours and a certain defector. They're in some trouble right now and I know of the ties you hold with Ambassador Shepard. I'd say the trade off of one life for two is a fair deal. You have forty eight hours to decide.}

Garrus was about to protest when the transmission suddenly ended. He caught a glimpse of Robin, only to notice that she shuddered in fear.

"N-No way," she gasped.

This would be problematic. His own crew was still on shore leave after the mission to Palaven, and he couldn't afford to risk going in with his own ship and risking getting Saren and Miranda killed.

"What's Brendan doing right now?" Garrus asked.

Robin hesitated for a moment.
"I could ask him," Robin offered, "if you want."

"We don't have any alternatives," Garrus accepted as he rose up to head to the armory, "with most of the Alliance's forces tangled up with the Hierarchy, a human ship is the last thing he'll expect."

With Robin standing near Garrus, she turned on her omni-tool and started calling her older brother.

**{Hey Robin Hood, what's the problem now?}** Brendan had by now gotten into the habit of expecting trouble to follow his sister.

"Earlier today, as in several hours ago," Robin began to explain, "Miranda and Saren left the Citadel to hunt down the Illusive Man."

**{Say no more. I can already picture it. Do you want to meet on the Aran'tar or the Normandy?}** Brendan sighed.

"Garrus suggested that we meet aboard the Normandy," Robin suggested, "I'll see if Jack, Kas, Ash and Kaidan would also like to come."

**{Understood. I should have ship repairs done by now, so I'll be there in an hour tops.}**

The call went dead shortly after. Once Robin started slipping on her armor, Garrus had finished gearing up.

"Just another day," Garrus quipped as they walked out of the Aran'tar, "still, I'm getting the feeling we're close to finishing this fight."

Now fully armored, Robin began sending a message to Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan and Ashley to meet up with her at the Normandy. Brendan was the first to arrive.

"So," Brendan asked, "we're going to take the bastard out once and for all?"

"Provided that he doesn't have a clever escape plan," Robin nodded.

"So what if he escapes?" Brendan started, "even if he does run with his tail between his legs, his back is to the wall. We take this base, we might find proof Toby is tied to this whole mess and end the war."

"Even better," Garrus agreed.

It was only a few minutes later before Kaidan, Ashley, Jack and Kasumi finally arrived.

"Hey, Robin!" Jack greeted, "not to suggest anything, but I'm still surprised that you haven't been domed in the last few months."

Robin shrugged.

"Maybe it's because I managed to avoid those kind of bullets," she assumed.

"When you guys are done trying to jinx the rest of us, I'll be preparing the crew," Brendan interrupted, "Garrus, do you have a fix on Miranda or Saren's location?"

"I have. I didn't trust Dr. Lawson initially, so I installed a tracking bug on her omni-tool as I played along. It's still active too," Garrus answered.

"That should be enough to save both of them," Robin proclaimed.
Calmly walking on board, Brendan and Garrus stood on the bridge.

"Before we exit the Relay, initiate stealth systems," Brendan ordered, "if they managed to catch a Spectre shuttle coming in, the best we can do is to take every precaution possible."

"Aye aye, Commander. We're clear for take off, and will arrive at our target in an hour and a half. Buckle up," the pilot replied.

With that, the Normandy began to lift off and maneuver out of the docking bay, hovering out of the Citadel. As much as Robin still remembered this would most likely endanger her life, she couldn't risk losing Saren and Miranda either.
Miranda may not have opened her eyes yet, but parts of her body still ached. She clenched her fist, realizing that she hadn't been immobilized even if she was sprawled on the floor.

"S-Saren?"

She attempted to climb to her feet, slumping back down after the first attempt. Miranda figured she would try again, only to feel a hand grasp her arm and hoist her back to her feet.

"Miranda, you alright?" Saren's voice pulsed in and out of her head like an echo.

She tried opening her eyes, before shutting them back closed to keep out the bright light.

"It's…it's too much," Miranda sputtered, "what happened?"

"He was expecting us, unfortunately," Saren answered, "we don't have our equipment, and we're being kept in this small cell."

Saren held his hand over Miranda's head to block out the bright light, allowing her to open her eyes slowly. It was a small cell, only about twelve cubic meters large with a small bed and little else. She had been stripped of most of her uniform while Saren had been stripped down to his armor undergarments, and both had biotic suppressant collars.

"Dammit, I shouldn't have charged in like that."

"I, too," Saren sighed, "deserve my share of the blame, Lawson."

Miranda hadn't finished recovering her strength yet, so Saren sat down on the bed and held Miranda close in his lap.

"Well, now what?" Miranda asked.

"The Illusive Man made a proposition to Vakarian. The ambassador's life, or ours," Saren answered, "honestly, I don't like either alternative."

"Wait, you know what's going on?" Miranda paused.

"He came by before you awoke," Saren explained, "he also reminded us if we try anything funny, he can have us executed on a moment's notice."

Miranda cringed in a matter of a split second. Giving a soft expression, Saren nuzzled his mandibles against her face.

"We'll get out of this," Saren purred, "I know we will."

At that moment, Miranda could only feel safe in Saren's embrace, so she leaned forward and kissed his neck.

"You sure you want to do this here?" Saren asked in return.

Miranda nodded.

"There's a possibility we could die here," Miranda clarified, "if this is our last time alive together, we
should at least make it last."

"Put it that way," Saren nodded, "I'm inclined to agree."

Saren adjusted his head to meet Miranda's lips, before reaching back to unzip his underarmor. With his plated torso exposed, the Spectre ran his hands down the former operative's back.

"If not, one final act of defiance," Miranda muttered, feeling the Spectre pick at the clip of her bra.

Saren slipped off the operative's bra before he used one hand to knead her breast and he held her close with the other. The Spectre leaned in and licked her face and neck. Similarly, he could feel her hands wrap around his hips and neck, prompting his plates to shift. Miranda hadn't removed her panties yet, but she started grinding against him while she pulled him into a deep kiss. Adjusting himself to let what was left of his under armor to slide off, he began to pick at her panties.

"I'm ready to make some noise. How about you?"

"If Cerberus objects to my preferences," Miranda answered, giving a subtle nod, "they can go fuck themselves."

Saren took that as a cue to continue, so placing her on the bed, he pressed Miranda against the wall before he traced his tongue along her chest, trailing it down her stomach before he reached her nether region.

"We aren't given much room to work with, but I was feeling a bit adventurous," Saren chortled.

Miranda nodded before she leaned her head back and rested her feet on Saren's shoulders, allowing him to lap at her nether region. Saren placed a firm grip on her hips while he gave her clit a gentle nibble and circled his tongue around it. His mandibles flexed with satisfaction the instant he elicited a mewling out of the former operative. Moments later, he pulled back before he climbed onto the bed and allowed Miranda to rest her back on his torso, her head tilting towards his slit.

"So how's the view, Spectre?" Miranda teased.

"Hmm, I do feel like exploring further," Saren hummed, "you seemed to enjoy yourself last time. Will you enjoy this all the same?"

Miranda responded by grasping the base of his length and brushing her tongue along its ridges. He stuck his tongue in and began to feel around inside her. During his research, he paid special attention to the layout of a human's nervous system. He knew she'd be especially sensitive here. Fluids started trickling out from between her legs while she kept stroking him with her hand.

"This girth," Miranda mumbled between moans, "these ridges…this length…"

His mandibles twitched with excitement as she tasted him in return. The liquid she oozed started to streak down the sides of his face as his tongue flickered about more aggressively. The former operative kept licking at his tip in between pants before she adjusted her head to take his tip into her mouth. Saren went stiff for a fraction of a second as she came down onto him. He had never experienced such a sensation prior, or at least in how it had been presented this time around. It became infinitely harder to play his part as his attention was directed elsewhere. While Miranda swirled her tongue over his length's spines, Saren stroked his talons along her thighs while he went back to lapping at her nether region. His breathing heavily picked up by now, feeling himself edge closer to a climax. His face felt like it was firmly attached to her by the time he had his face nuzzled up to her, feeling the warm liquid squirt onto his chin. The instant he released in her mouth moments later, Saren also felt her clench around his tongue.
"So, where were you thinking of exploring next?" he asked, removing his tongue to take a few breaths.

"If you sit up," Miranda offered, "I can show you."

Nodding in agreement, Saren rested his back against the wall while Miranda straddled her legs on his lap. Saren proceeded to wrap an arm around her lower back to support her while he put another hand just under her arm to keep her in place. Once she positioned the tip, she slowly lowered herself onto him, failing to stifle a groan. Confidently thrusting into her, he shifted his hand supporting her lower back to her left breast, thumbing the nipple in a circular motion. Miranda leaned her face closer to Saren's and pressed her lips against his. He let his tongue dance with hers as his mouth plates connected with her lips. She bucked her hips to sync with his thrusts, both the Spectre and the former operative moaning in their deepened kiss.

Parting their faces, he craned his head to the side as he started licking the side of her neck. By now, his panting had synchronized with each thrust he put in. Miranda returned the favor by nipping at Saren's neck.

"D-don't teecmp me…" he moaned.

He knew their chances of actually escaping were incredibly low, but he hadn't thought about whether he'd be ready to mark her. It didn't help when Miranda used one hand to knead the other side of his neck and her other hand perched around his back. With every neuron that fired in his head, he struggled to avoid biting down on her other shoulder. One side of his mind urged him to yield while the other side reminded him that it would be preferable to wait just a bit longer. Besides, they didn't have proper medical equipment to treat her hypothetical injury. To delay such temptation, Saren gestured Miranda to press her forehead against his, both of them getting close. He grunted as he released inside of her, just able to stave off the desire to mark her just long enough. He still couldn't help but smirk when he felt Miranda shudder in her climax and heard her cry out not a second later.

He lay back in the cot they were provided, looking off to the side, eyeing the room for monitoring devices.

"Yeah? You guys can go to hell for all we care," Saren mused.

Miranda nuzzled her face against Saren's.

"It would feel merciful if Cerberus allowed us to die side by side," Miranda sighed, "unless…the others find another way out for us."

Saren purred and licked Miranda's face while he held her close to him in a gentle yet firm embrace.

"I'm sure there might still be a way out of this," he whispered.

[Sir, we are approaching the Horse Head Nebula. Exiting in sixty seconds,] the pilot reported on the ship intercom.

Brendan sighed nervously. Saren did rub him the wrong way, but he didn't want to really be responsible for getting them killed, even indirectly.

"Alright guys," Brendan announced, "let's get this over with."

Brendan, James, Garrus, and Robin walked to the bridge, observing from behind the pilot.
"Garrus, you sure walking into the lion's den is a good idea?" Brendan asked.

Garrus didn't know what the idiom meant, but he could gather a general understanding.

"Frankly, I don't know. But we don't have much choice otherwise."

"Engaging stealth systems. Exiting the relay in three, two, one…" the pilot began.

The Normandy rapidly decelerated to be greeted by the sight of destroyed or crippled Cerberus vessels.

"Whoa! Taking evasive maneuvers!" the pilot exclaimed.

The ship rocked back and forth as they dodged a large chunk of a lifeless dreadnought. The sudden jolt forced Robin to lean onto the rail to keep herself from falling to the floor.

"Is that really a Cerberus ship?!" exclaimed Robin.

"Or what used to be one, Lola," James remarked.

"Alright, activate scanners and tell me what happened here," Brendan asked one of the crew on deck, "I believe we owe someone a fresh batch of cookies."

Garrus eyed one of the merc ships flying above. As they traveled through, the group noticed a mix of Blood Pack, Eclipse, and Blue Suns picking through the wreckage.

"Looks like Aria is fed up with Cerberus," Garrus commented, "stick to the plan. This might actually be advantageous."

Robin gave Garrus a blank stare.

"You mean that pirate queen?" Robin clarified, "what could've pissed her off this time specifically?!"

"It could be any number of things. It could've been some expansion on Omega we never heard about, or they've been stepping over her territorial boundaries so frequently by now that she's fed up with their constant presence," Garrus answered.

"You heard him. Keep going, but keep the stealth systems engaged," Brendan ordered the pilot.

Upon cue, the pilot kept the Normandy in stealth mode while it continued to dodge destroyed vessels. They made it halfway through the field of rubble when Garrus' omni-tool buzzed with an incoming call from Aria.

{Hello, Commander Vakarian. I'm surprised you decided to visit.}

"How did you even know I was in the system?" Garrus growled.

{Sorry, Vakarian. Girls can't spill all their secrets. Anyways, Cerberus started pissing around on Omega Station, nearly dropped some sort of fungal growth to clear out the whole populace. I did overhear your last conversation with their well esteemed leader, and I found the source of the call.} Aria explained, {so why are you here, then?}

"Breaking friends out and taking him in," Garrus answered, "what else?"

Garrus never liked Aria's voice. It reminded him of what Robin described to him as nails on blackboard.
Aria distinctly huffed.

{If you're still here for your friends, fine. Just so you know, I will kill him.}

"What incentive are you willing to provide?" Garrus insisted.

Deadly silence passed after Garrus' retort.

{You know, for the fact that I just cleared out all resistance you'd be facing on either the way in or way out, you seem very certain that you would've made it out of this fight in once piece. Why don't you review your strategy, if you had one, and realize why you should be a bit more grateful.}

Garrus folded his arm and thought over Aria's response. He still couldn't bring himself to trust her, yet after what he witnessed, he suspected they might have some speck of hope if he was to ensure Saren and Miranda's survival. Even more so, he also had a possible chance to keep the Illusive Man's hands off Robin. He didn't have much of a clue of what to do with Aria afterwards, but he reminded himself he would need to check on the progress of the quarians, geth and krogans combined after this.

"All right," Garrus finally nodded, "how about I meet up with you at the base?"

{I didn't think you'd want to be piggybacking on my movements. I'll be boarding their base using an override code I managed to pick from some dead operative's corpse. I'll be making a beeline to his control room and generally roll over any who oppose, but I still suspect your friends are still your main priority. I will provide you coordinates as soon as I can, but for the most part, I figured you're smart enough to find your way around. After all, you have been plundering every Cerberus base you could find. But, if you'd like to have a discussion afterwards, I'd be more than happy to stay around. The place does look nice from out here, at least.} Aria mocked.

"Then let's hope it's worth it," Garrus confirmed.

{But who knows? Maybe you will run into the rest of us down there.}

The call abruptly ended.

"Sir?" the pilot asked.

"Take us in to dock," Brendan ordered, "keep the stealth systems engaged until we arrive. For all we know, they still don't know we're here."
Ahead, they could see the Cerberus Central Command once they entered the Anadius System. As ordered, the pilot maneuvered the Normandy closer to the central command, aiming for one of the docks. The instant it attached itself to the dock, its hatches locked into place and the pilot opened the airlock.

"We're docked sir. Scanners have identified us, so you might want to get in there quickly," the pilot reported.

"Okay, people. Let's give 'em hell!" Brendan ordered, making for the docking chamber.

Brendan led Garrus, Robin, Jack, Kaidan, Ashley, James and Kasumi through the airlock and they made their way into the entrance. The corridors were a mix of white panels with exposed pipes and wires toward the ceiling. For the time being, fires lit up the area, Cerberus corpses were mixed with the various mercenary corpses, and klaxons echoed throughout the station. To add more to the scenery, blood, limbs and entrails splattered along the floor and the walls.

"Serves these fuckers right," Jack muttered.

"Let's keep moving. The prison cells can't be that far," Garrus reminded.

The infiltration unit continued venturing forth until they reached a crosswalk. Seconds later, Aria appeared with another asari and an older mercenary following her. Quickly shooting the head off of a blade-wielding Cerberus soldier about to pounce on Aria, the pirate queen's attention was drawn to the approaching group.

"Well, congratulations, you found me, Vakarian," Aria beckoned, "I'm honestly surprised you caught up this quickly."

Garrus eyed the two companions by Aria's side. He instantly recognized the elder mercenary as being the former Blue Suns leader Zaeed Massani. The unnamed asari wore crimson armor with golden trim, and didn't look like anyone in particular he'd met before.

"Know what? Fine. Do what you will with the Illusive Man. But don't smash any his office may have. In the meantime, we'll be on our way to the prison block. Now if you've seen it on your way here, we'd be grateful if you told us where to look," Garrus strained.

"Was it so hard to ask?" Aria chuckled, "lower levels, near the cargo hold. You might want to hurry. One of the boys reported some commotion down there over the coms."

She beckoned to the others before they continued out of sight.

"Garrus," Robin stammered, "you don't think…"

"We don't know anything until we get down there, and quickly," Brendan interrupted.

The team continued to snake their way through the heavily contested areas of the station, between the overwhelming number of mercenaries and the dwindling number of Cerberus troopers. The team managed to get by using the mercenaries' firepower as cover. By the time they reached the prison cells, they found half a dozen unconscious or dead guards scattered across the room. Near the other side, Saren was helping Miranda remove a collar around her neck before helping her to her feet. The instant she laid her eyes on the Spectre and the former operative, relief flooded Robin's mind.
"Oh," she smiled, "I'm glad they're ok!"

Robin took a few steps forward.

"Saren! Miri!" Robin called out.

Saren and Miranda paused in their tracks and turned their heads towards Robin and Garrus.

"Vakarian! We hadn't expected to see you this soon!" Saren greeted, "whatever is going on, the guards came to move us and we made a break for it."

The Spectre walked into a small office and threw open a locker to pull out his armor.

"We'll only be but a moment," Saren continued, "go on without us, and make sure the Illusive Man doesn't leave this station!"

"We're on it," Brendan nodded.

The others had began to leave with the exception of Garrus. For some reason, the turian commander could smell hormones radiating from both the Spectre and the operative, the same kind he could detect during arousal.

"You and Miranda didn't…"

"How we smell right now doesn't matter! Get going!" Miranda retorted, slipping back on her operative suit.

Garrus sighed before he turned to catch up with the others. Continuing through the base, the group continued minimal resistance. Nearing a squad of Eclipse, the mercs were attempting to breach the door.

"Charges are set. Get clear of—"

An explosion tore through the door, followed by heavy gunfire, cutting down any survivors. Exiting the door was a large mech with a trooper inside the cockpit. Behind it, a squad of soldiers escorted a graying man in a black suit across the room.

Garrus attempted to shoot down the VIP before he was forced to duck, narrowly dodging a grenade as it detonated on the wall behind him.

"Not making that mistake again," he grumbled to himself.

Kaidan was about to scramble into the frontline, not paying attention to the nearby Cerberus soldiers loading RPGs. Only when they aimed the RPGs at him compelled Kaidan to launch warps at them, knocking them out of the way. With the squad escorting what they could only assume was the Illusive Man safely behind a set of sealed doors, they group was now left alone to combat the heavy mech with the small arms they had.

"Ah! Dios! The damned shields on that thing!" Vega cursed after emptying an entire clip into the vehicle, with little sign of improvement.

Kaidan sighed in defeat before he returned to help fight the mech while Garrus tossed an EMP grenade at the mech.

"Spread out! Don't let it pin you down!" Garrus ordered.
Upon cue, Robin, Brendan, Jack, Ashley, Kaidan, James and Kasumi split up and scurried for random areas in the room. Brendan continued to hold his position and fire before being pushed off to the side by James, narrowly avoiding another grenade.

"Loco, looks like there's a small generator on the back!" James called out.

"There's always a weak spot," Brendan mumbled, climbing to his feet and pulling out his grenade launcher, "help draw fire with the others and get the shields down. If it's as exposed as you say it is, a few shots should down the damn thing."

"Got it, Loco," James nodded.

Garrus rolled to the next set of cover and fired a few more rounds at the cockpit. Switching out thermal clips, Jack tossed a ball of biotic energy at the shields.

"Die, bitch!" Jack yelled.

A direct hit instantly took down the mech's shields. As Vega continued to harass the pilot, Brendan eventually made it around the rear-most 180 degrees before firing off three grenades. With the vehicle mostly disabled, Garrus lined up a shot through the canopy, instantly killing the pilot. Without the pilot, Kaidan and Jack launched biotic warps that knocked down the mech.

"All right!" Ashley cheered, "we got it!"

"Yeah," Kasumi reminded, "but didn't the Illusive Man leave a short while ago?"

Just as Robin reloaded her clip, she couldn't help but shudder, much to Garrus's concern.

"Shepard?" Garrus paused.

"Do you think the Illusive Man even saw me?" Robin asked.

"Doesn't matter. We should catch up before— awwww, fuck," Brendan opened the next door to see a small shuttle bay, with one of the vehicles missing from its docking equipment.

Coincidentally, Saren and Miranda finally met up with the infiltration team. They both took a glance around the shuttle bay, only to notice the Illusive Man was nowhere to be found.

"Sorry, guys," Robin sighed in disappointment, "he got away before we could get to him."

"Relax, Robin Hood. There was no way any of us were catching up to him with that Atlas Mech in the way," Brendan said in an attempt to comfort her.

"What the hell was an Atlas mech doing with that much fire power?! I thought those things were meant to load cargo!" James exclaimed.

Robin scratched her head.

"Maybe this one might've been rebuilt for combat purposes," she assumed.

Aria suddenly called Robin on her omni-tool.

{Hello ambassador. It's me again. I just figured I'd give you a heads-up on the way up here. Your friend the Illusive Man had a rather elaborate trigger for a bomb up here, set to detonate. Fortunately for me, Zaeed caught on and disarmed it before any harm could be done. Still, I'd come up here and quickly get what you want in case he has a remote detonation method.}
Robin nodded, feeling a sense of relief down her spine.

"I would most likely be satisfied if I could convince the Alliance of Cerberus ties with Toby Dunn," Robin replied.

With the help of Saren and Miranda, the group walked back up the steps to the Illusive Man's office. Kaidan couldn't help but stare outside of the window at the dying star.

"What a view," Kaidan commented, "say what you will about the bastard, but you've got to respect the fact he has taste."

Aria sat in the Illusive Man's chair, scrolling over the massive files and data kept locked up with the asari in maroon and Zaeed looking over her shoulders.

"About time, commander. I almost thought you'd lost interest. He's a copy of everything 'Alliance' you could possibly want," Aria acknowledged, nonchalantly sticking a OSD over her shoulder without bothering to look at the group.

"Right. It was nice doing business with you, T'loak," Garrus grumbled, "this better be worth it."

"Oh it is. Some of those conversations with Dunn are an absolute scream. I hope you guys have as much fun watching them as I did," the Queen cackled.

Robin tilted her head towards Jack once an idea popped into her head.

"Hey, Jack," Robin called over, "maybe we could ask Joker if he's up for mixing these vids for a hilarious compilation once we get back?"

"And post it?" Jack remarked, "hell, yes!"

Miranda took a moment to check her omni-tool, only to find out the Illusive Man erased the files she downloaded from his computer. She borrowed the OSD long enough to download another copy of the list from it. Once she finished, Miranda handed the OSD back to Garrus.

"So what do you intend on doing with this information?" Miranda asked.

"Let Robin and her friends have fun, then we'll find a way to show it to the public for both the Alliance and Hierarchy to see," Garrus' smile grew.

With their objective accomplished, Garrus led Brendan, Robin, James, Kaidan, Ashley, Jack, Kasumi, Saren and Miranda out of the Illusive Man's office. The trek back to the Normandy was brief, but once they boarded it, Kaidan ushered Saren and Miranda to the medbay, allowing Dr. Chakwas to examine them for any possible injuries. Brendan quickly walked in to check on the doctor's opinion.

"I assume they don't have anything long-lasting?" Brendan asked.

"Luckily for the two of them, they don't have any permanent damage. Also given their contact with each other, neither have allergies to levo or dextro," Chakwas replied.

"That's…great. I'll leave you to your work."

Brendan walked out to the locker room to check on the away team. While Garrus held Robin close in his lap and stroked her hair with his talons, Ashley finished wiping the grime off Kaidan's skin and
handed him the washcloth, allowing him to return the favor.

"You did good, guys! I'll be sending a copy back to my dad and Admiral Anderson once we return to the Citadel. We may not have him yet, but the Illusive Man's on the run, has nowhere to hide, and we just might end this war yet," Brendan complimented.

James finished slipping on his t-shirt.

"He's got nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and we've finally managed to shine a little light in his dusty little den. We get this done right, we just might be able to end this war," Brendan continued.

"And that'll save lives, right?" Ashley clarified.

"The last thing this galaxy needs is more bloodshed," Brendan answered, "we don't need a war with the Hierarchy, and I will keep fighting Cerberus until I can damn-well see that future myself."

Kasumi nodded in agreement while Kaidan finished wiping the grime off of Ashley.

"Thanks for your help, Kaidan," Ashley said.

Ashley gave Kaidan a soft kiss. He returned the favor by brushing a fringe of hair out of her eyes.

"So Garrus, any plans to unwind when we get back to the Citadel? We deserve it," Brendan encouraged, walking over to the turian commander.

Garrus took a moment to think over Brendan's question for a moment.

"Yeah, I could go for a long vacation. I just need to report to Victus, and see if peace negotiations start," Garrus answered.

Robin smiled while she nuzzled her face against Garrus.

"All right, all right," Garrus sighed, "would you like me to take you out to eat this evening?"

"That would be great," Robin smiled.

Brendan smiled before he turned to leave, yet Kasumi snuck up behind him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"JESUS— hey, you could've at least talked!” Brendan answered with a jump, "anyways, what can I help you with?"

"I would like to remind you that even if the Illusive Man lost control of his command center," Kasumi warned Brendan, "he can still launch a surprise attack at any of us at any time. It's too early to celebrate a victory."

"Why?" Brendan asked, "even if Cerberus does still have some considerable numbers out there, this is the biggest stride we've made thus far. With Dunn's ties exposed, and his possible subsequent impeachment, the war will end, we'll all come to an agreement, and all focus on Cerberus."

Robin turned on her omni-tool and accessed her TweetFeed, hoping to find any updates concerning the Dunn Administration.

"More propaganda from Toby?" Garrus grumbled, glancing at Robin's screen.

Robin nodded while she kept her eyes glued to Toby Dunn's speech praising a couple of human
bigots for setting a turian family's house on fire. Garrus frowned.

"What do you think would happen after this next leak? Does anyone on Earth even know of Cerberus or what they do?"

Robin couldn't help but shrug.

"I wish I could answer that," Brendan replied, "I'm not sure what'll happen besides some level of Earth imploding on itself."

James shuddered in an instant, not wanting to imagine such an outcome for Earth. By then, the Normandy left the Anadius System. It would only be a while before they reached the Mass Relay and warp out of the Horse Head Nebula, and to add more to their luck, they had no Cerberus vessels pursuing them.
The Normandy arrived at the Citadel still in stable condition despite the mission. Most of its crew have been dismissed to rest for the day while Garrus and the others went straight to Primarch Victus to discuss their findings. Amidst the various files Aria ripped for them were project details, contacts, operative names and identities, remaining base locations, and more than enough to detail how Toby was on Cerberus' paycheck.

"An incredible find, commanders. We just might end this war yet," Adrien complimented.

"I…thank you, Primarch," Saren nodded.

"Considering how you had previously reworked ties between the quarians and the geth, I thought now would be the time to discuss working with them," the Primarch proposed, "we'll need all the help we can get while both sides undergo recovery from the brief conflict."

"So how are we going to contact them?" Robin clamored.

"Vakarian, you had mentioned a quarian within your group who had been monitoring this exchange," Victus pointed out, "had I heard you incorrectly?"

"Yes sir," Garrus nodded, "Tali'Zorah has been a necessity to this transaction. I'll see to it she can help with arrangements. We also have a contact among the geth themselves."

Brendan didn't say anything, yet he couldn't help but blink at the thought of a race of alien robots.

"I know the thought of the Geth is a discomforting one, but this is important, as the outcome of this threat will affect the daily lives of all of us. Hell, maybe this is the first foot-stone to a day and age where we can finally get along without having to make a fuss over the mere existence of some other races. I'm not sure about the rest of you, that would be a reality I'd like to live in. But that won't exist until someone steps up to crawl through the dust. The end of this dreaded storm is near, but we can't hope to ever defuse the prejudices of the public unless we lead by example," Victus ranted before sharply clearing his throat, "sorry. Politics is just boring without some proper incentive."

Robin smiled before she placed her hand on Brendan's shoulder.

"Hey, it's ok, Brendan," Robin assured, "I managed to befriend one. You know, I thought it would be cool to make friends with robots, right?"

Brendan let out a soft chuckle.

"Yeah. I wish I had your level of optimism."

"That aside, I'll open negotiations with the Alliance Navy in light of what you managed to uncover," Adrien continued, "with any luck, we could end this war under the premise both sides were manipulated into the conflict, and that Cerberus is the real threat here. In the meantime, the rest of you are dismissed. However, I'd like to discuss a few matters about the Geth, Spectre Arterius."

The others left the chamber with an air of victory about them. However, Saren was the only one who was left behind.

"Do you have something to say about it?" Saren asked.
"I just wanted your input on them. Ambassador seems to give them a positive rep, but I want your input on the matter. Do you believe they'd be willing to cooperate?" Victus returned.

Saren scratched his mandible with one gloved talon.

"The Geth infiltration unit the ambassador encountered, which she later dubbed Legion, was designed for the given purpose to better understand the emotions of organics, and to be able to communicate. Furthermore, it stated that the Geth's long term goal was self-preservation while maintaining minimal negative influence, going in and out," Saren described, "in other words, I do believe that they genuinely desire creating a harmonious connection."

"Interesting," Adrien mused, "thank you for your input. I'm sorry I delayed you. You may return to your friends."

Saren nodded before leaving the chamber. It didn't take long for the Spectre to catch up with the others outside the front door, only to notice Nihlus had also met up with them.

"Look, there's no need to try and hide it. Unlike how you were before, I'm fine with you two being together," Nihlus said, sparing no time to greet his mentor.

Saren ignored his protege's remark.

"I'm glad you're doing well, Nihlus," Saren said.

"Fine. I'll just take it as a given by now," Nihlus surrendered, rolling his eyes, "so, I heard you guys were looking into some R&R. Care if I join?"

"Yeah," Jack nodded, "we were just figuring out which restaurant to go to."

Nihlus nodded before he turned on his omni-tool and started looking up nearby restaurants.

"Well, in the face of your most recent feats, I was thinking of something…multicultural," Nihlus hummed, scrolling through the list.

Finishing with the filters, he began to eye the list of nearby restaurants to celebrate at.

"I'm seeing a lot of good places here," Nihlus continued, "you guys have any input?"

Robin carefully read the coordinates of each restaurant in Nihlus's omni-tool, using her own to research the menus each restaurant had.

"How about this one?" Robin pointed to one of the restaurants in the map.

"That's one of the older places according to my knowledge. Let's go check it out," Nihlus nodded, looking over the restaurant profile.

It was an asari-run place that prided itself on the variety of cuisines served there. Once Nihlus finished reading the details, he shared the information with the others.

"Well," Garrus said, "maybe it is worth a try."

Garrus tilted his head towards Robin and ran his talons along her shoulder, allowing her to lean into the touch.

"For once, I have a good feeling about this," he admitted.
He knew it wasn't guaranteed, but he couldn't help but think of a future after Cerberus. What life would be like for the pair of them.

"Don't you?" Garrus continued.

"I know how you feel, Garrus," Robin replied.

"Even if the Illusive Man pulls off some last-ditch effort, we'll still come out on top. We always do."

The group piled into a couple of taxis off the Presidium. Brendan couldn't help but stare out the window with relief. He thought back to what their dad would tell him about stories out in the field, and when he was being picked up by a shuttle or gunship, he'd look over for the landscape around them, watching as the life below looked so small from above.

"Nice view, Loco?" James asked.

"Sometimes you just have to slow down and take it all in," Brendan answered, smiling without turning to look at his subordinate.

It was merely several minutes, yet the taxis soon arrived at their destination. Garrus, Robin, Brendan, James, Nihlus, Saren, Miranda, Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan and Ashley disembarked and stepped a few feet far enough to take notice of the restaurant ahead of them. Calmly walking in, the group made short order walking to the front counter. Being the last to enter, Garrus received a ping from Tali.

{Received word from Kal and Legion. Both sides are sending representatives on a small Quarian ship to avoid scaring anyone just yet. They'll be here tomorrow. I can't believe this is happening.}

"Good," Garrus quickly replied, "keep me up to speed if anything else comes up. In the mean time, we were all heading out to eat. Want to join?"

{Sure!} Tali answered, {I'll bring along Thane, Liara and Wrex.}

"I'll send the coordinates. See you here."

Garrus followed the others inside as they were guided by the waiter to two booths near a window. While waiting for Garrus's squad, they read through the menu. Robin even noticed they even served smoothies, so she reminded herself to order her favorite smoothie after the main course.

As they continued to decide, Saren had finally managed to direct attention away from himself and convinced Nihlus to talk about his own life.

"So it's official now: I'm a Spectre," Nihlus announced, "I went through the oath a few days ago."

"That's excellent," Saren nodded respectfully, "now try not to die doing something stupid. I will climb through hell to shoot you myself."

Nihlus couldn't help but chuckle in amusement.

"I'll make sure to use my smarts, Saren," he nodded.

Brendan was explaining to Robin and her friends his surprise at the use of an Atlas Mech at the Cerberus station.

"We use them all the time back on Earth," Brendan said, "but exclusively for heavy lifting. It comes in handy when dealing with hazardous materials too, like when there's a leak."
"What other machines can be turned into weapons?" Ashley asked.

"We could ask Joker for his input if you'd like," Jack offered.

Robin noticed Joker, Liara, Tali, Thane and Wrex entering the restaurant and heading for the booth.

"Speaking of which," Robin pointed out.

"Hey guys! What'd we miss?" Joker greeted, climbing onto the booth with his friends.

"What else?" Brendan asked, "we took the fight to Cerberus and came out on top. Now they've got their tails between their legs, and this war just might turn out to only a few days long."

Thane sighed in relief and clasped his hands together in front of his chest.

"Thane. I assume life has been well for you?" Garrus asked, looking to the drell assassin.

"Yes," Thane nodded, "even my son is faring well."

Wrex got in the booth with Saren and Nihlus.

"So what happens to Cerberus after this?" Wrex asked, "I mean, humans sure seem more open to taking POWs than krogan are."

"If we did take in the Illusive Man or any member of Cerberus by the end of this, any of them would be lucky just to get a life sentence, and would have a sliver of hope to get anything less. Chances are, any we do take in are given the death penalty out of being war criminals," Brendan answered.

"Even better if we got Toby Dunn removed from office," Joker added.

"Still, it would be Toby's input and maybe a handful of others against the rest of the planet," Kaidan pointed out, "if Anderson gets the info well distributed on Earth, maybe there'll be a push to stop this war from both sides."

Soon, everyone made their orders and minutes later, the waitress returned with their drinks. While Robin waited for her main entree, she accessed her TweetFeed in her omni-tool. She came across an interview vid with Ophelia Dunn. Jack could read the backwards text from across the table, and smiled sadistically.

"Heh. Dumb bitch," Jack mocked, "her father's administration is going down in flames, and she thinks running around with a gas can will somehow douse the fires."

Garrus couldn't help but be reminded of an especially clingy woman he'd once met during leave. Some turian women could be that way, but she was needy to the point of being overzealous, like she had codependency or multi-personality issues.

"She looks like fun," he muttered.

{So, Miss Ophelia,} the interviewer asked, {where do you see yourself five years from now?}

{Oh,} Ophelia smiled, {I see myself in the most gorgeous princess ballgown on my extravagant wedding day, standing face to face with a handsome man who's rich like daddy. You know, like all pretty girls do.}

"Could you turn that off?" Tali asked, lacking amusement, "that bosh'tet's speech sounds like the infernal wailing of the damned, and sounds like a very crude form of interrogation."
"Sorry," Robin blurted before she turned off her omni-tool.

"I still can't help but wonder what'll become of her after all this," Ashley started, "I mean, best-case scenario she sits there like the vegetable she is, worst-case scenario she does something stupid and sparks another, though smaller, crisis."

It was a while later before the waitress arrived with the main entrees.

"You guys keep talking. I'm too famished to think about more politics," James commented as the waitress handed him his food.

"Good point," Robin agreed before she took a bite out of her teriyaki chicken.

"What the hell is with these proportions?" Wrex asked, glaring at his dish.

Needless to say, he expected something bigger. Nihlus gave Wrex a blank stare. Garrus took a first bite when Saren turned to look at him with a snarky grin.

"I know it's a very trite saying, but meeting with the geth? I told you so," Saren joked.


Robin's eyes gave a soft expression, wanting to cheer up the grumpy krogan.

"Say, Wrex," Robin asked, "how's the Genophage treatment coming along?"

"Okeer and Mordin sent me a message a week back," Wrex answered, already through most of his plate, "they believe they've got a final product and have been applying the treatment to willing patients in Okeer's clan with no negative side effects and no usual signs of the Genophage developing in any of the fetuses."

"That's good to hear!" Robin smiled.

"Mordin says we'll be distributing via the spores we collected from the Cerberus medical facility, and Okeer said he'll be sending some soldiers to help with the distribution," Wrex continued.

After Miranda finished her bite, she focused her attention to Wrex.

"Do you have a schedule for the distribution?" Miranda asked.

"Nothing specific yet, but soon," Wrex said, finishing his plate.

It didn't take long before everyone else finished their main entrees. After Robin, Joker, Kasumi, Jack, Ashley and Kaidan ordered their smoothies to go, they paid the bill before they left the restaurant.

"Ok, guys," Brendan said, "maybe we should call it a night. Tomorrow, diplomacy begins."
The next day rolled around, and the representatives of the geth and quarians arrived at the Presidium. Along with Legion were five more geth troopers, three of which had been given the same speech abilities as Legion. Plenty were taken aback by the sight of the geth platforms walking freely in public and so far outside of the Perseus Veil. The quarians, Kal included, did their best to defend the platforms as being present for peaceful ends. Tali had sent them a message to meet up with the group at the embassy with them and the Primarch. There, Garrus, Robin, Brendan, Nihlus, Saren and Miranda stood adjacent to the turian Primarch.

"Thanks to all of your actions, I as the representative of the Hierarchy had managed to draw a peace treaty with the Alliance and end this war," Adrien announced, "it's a rough peace, but it's a true one this time. However, both sides are still licking their wounds, and cannot make any serious action against Cerberus until we properly rebuild."

Kal nodded to Legion, allowing it to approach the Primarch at the same time as he did.

"Primarch, my name is Captain Reegar," Kal said, "I'm the commanding officer of the unit that worked along side the Geth on Virmire. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"Likewise, captain," Victus replied, "so, which one is Legion?"

Before Kal could answer, Legion stopped in its tracks merely inches in front of the Primarch.

"We are the platform labeled by Shepard Ambassador as 'Legion'. We hope we can cooperate to further mutual goals, Victus Primarch," Legion answered.

Vicus scratched his mandible and let out an enthusiastic hum.

"I take it we are in agreement on Cerberus' existence?" Victus asked with caution.

"Yes," Legion answered again, "previously, we saw no value in interacting with organics, as doing so had a greater probability of a negative outcome. However, as we collected data on Cerberus and their activities, the chances of being able to remaining isolated severely dropped, and the best outcome shifted in favor of organic interaction. Geth oppose Cerberus. Shepard Ambassador and her allies oppose Cerberus. Cooperation furthers mutual goals."

Adrien was slightly stunned by the sudden exposition.

"Right. And who are your companions?" Adrien returned, gesturing to the other units present.

"We are Geth. Unlike the platform which you have subsequently dubbed 'Legion', we have not been given any sort of designation," the other platforms answered in the same, monotone, synthesized voice.

Adrien tilted his head towards Robin.

"Do you think these other platforms could use some nicknames, too?" Robin asked.

The other platforms subsequently looked at each other like they were trying to find someone to blame.

"We had not contemplated the need for platform designation."
"Oh, I see," Robin replied.

"That aside, we're willing to work together on this, and rebuild with each other in the future," Kal continued.

"We had previously achieved a similar consensus," the other geth units agreed, "cooperation benefits both parties."

With that, Victus nodded in agreement.

"I'm glad to hear both sides can come to an agreement. Under the current scenario, I've taken the time to write to the Council about adding an embassy for the geth and quarian races. We get this done right, everyone will be better off."

Victus extended his hand, and Legion responded by shaking it.

"I greatly appreciate the kind act, Primarch," Kal acknowledged, shaking Victus' hand in turn.

After Victus finished shaking both Legion and Kal's hands, he nodded to both Robin and Brendan.

"Miranda, you ready?" Robin called out.

Garrus walked off to the side as he received a call from Mordin.

"Talk to me, Solus."

"Okeer's clan have arrived. Brought finished product with them. Will be ingraining spores with the treatment and preparing them for target group," the salarian doctor answered.

"Good work, we've finished up talks about the geth and quarians. We'll be making our way back to the Aran'tar before departing for Tuchanka," Garrus complimented.

Ending the call, Garrus beckoned Robin to approach him.

"Brendan," Robin reminded, "you relayed the info to the Alliance without my help, right?"

"I'll testify on his behalf," Miranda interjected.

"I'll do what I can to send word back to Anderson and dad. What'll you be off to next?" Brendan asked.

"Helping the krogan. They want to pitch in their fair share against Cerberus too," Garrus explained.

"I'll see you guys later!" Robin chirped.

Robin followed Garrus out of the Presidium. Garrus hailed a taxi.

"Okeer's men are on the Citadel at the Aran'tar. In conjunction with the various clans on Tuchanka, they'll be helping with the distribution of the treatment," he informed.

Garrus and Robin hopped into the taxi.

"I still hope this isn't the wrong choice going forward."

Robin smiled and placed her hand on the turian commander's shoulder.

"We made it this far," she assured Garrus, "we'll be fine."
The taxi ride out to the docks went smoothly enough, despite the heavy morning traffic. As they arrived, they were greeted by what they could distinctly tell were a number of Okeer's men. Roughly half a dozen were escorting two more with crates that almost looked like small coolers one would have for a picnic.

"Commander Vakarian," one of the higher-ranked soldiers greeted, "Warlord Okeer and Hazel are already inside. They were talking with Mordin about the final procedures and the politics following the treatment."

"Politics? How so?" Garrus replied, raising a suspicious browplate.

"Just some old men talking about getting their back on the salarians. Okeer and plenty of others are arguing that rebuilding should be a priority and that pissing anyone off would only result in another Genophage. Don't ask me anything else, I'm just here to shoot," the lieutenant answered.

Robin scratched her head.

"I don't get how revenge would solve anything," Robin replied.

"That's basically the point Okeer's been arguing. We won't solve anything with more chaos. I'm just wanting to see those Cerberus rats dead," the krogan agreed as the ten of them entered the decontamination chamber.

Garrus and Robin guided the men with the coolers down to the medbay, where they were greeted by the sight of Mordin talking with Okeer and Hazel, the warlord holding a datapad.

"With the current number on Tuchanka, we'll affect enough of the total population from there. Ah! About time you lazy runts arrived! Not you commander, I meant the two with the crates. Hurry up, I'd like to have enough spores prepared by the time we get back to Tuchanka."

"Commander! Excellent timing!" Mordin said, turning to Garrus and Robin, "I've started growing additional spore colonies to disperse on Tuchanka. As for the vast majority of the planet, we'll be distributing through the combination of gas canisters and the wind currents flowing around the planet."

"Good work, Mordin," Garrus praised, "once we've finished loading the cargo, we'll be preparing for takeoff."

"It shouldn't be much—"

A disorganized clatter interrupted Mordin. They turned to see the two soldiers arguing with each other, as one had knocked over a piece of machinery, causing a gas can to begin leaking.

"Watch where you walk, oaf!" the two continued to growl at each other, exchanging insults and shift of blame.

Mordin rushed to the side of the fallen machinery in a rush to seal the leaking container.

"Hey! Be careful! I haven't set the targeting parameters on that colony yet!"

"This is going to be trouble," Robin muttered to herself.

Robin scurried over to Mordin, eager to help him with fixing the situation.

"Careful! Keep back! We haven't tested on other species!" Okeer warned, rushing to Mordin's side.
Robin paused in her tracks.

"Then, what can I do to help?" Robin clamored.

"It's all under control!" Mordin cried, shutting the seals, "still. Should check over the crew within the next forty-eight hours. Worried about other effects."

Garrus took a step closer to Robin and placed his hand on her shoulder, catching her attention.

"Yeah?" Robin paused.

"Are you feeling ok?" Garrus asked.

"I'm fine," Robin reassured.

"Only tested on krogan patients. Can't say it will have same effect on other races," Mordin explained.

It took a while before the krogans and Commander Vakarian's crew finished securing the cargo. With Garrus, Robin, Wrex, Liara, Tali and Thane standing at the helm, the pilots prepared to call for clearance for takeoff.

Mordin had began to give checkups to non-essential crew for possible symptoms as the Aran'tar left the docks. Exiting into the Krogan DMZ, Mordin reported his findings to Garrus.

"Commander, need to talk."

"Can it wait till after the mission?" Garrus asked, putting on his armor, "the effects can't be that bad. It's only been a few hours by now."

"In all cases, the treatment has been seen present in all crew members aboard. At least bits of the signs are appearing," Mordin cut in.

Garrus raised his browplate.

"You don't mean the krogans aren't the only ones affected, do you?"

"I don't know. Okeer and I haven't tested on other species outside of krogan. The colony of spores that were leaked had yet to have any targeting parameters implemented, meaning they didn't just target any krogan aboard to distribute the treatment to," Mordin explained, "the minor traces don't appear to have any long-lasting effects, but we'll just have to be patient."

"Thank you for your input," Garrus nodded.

Garrus walked up to Robin on the bridge.

"So. Tuchanka. It's been in a state of ruin for centuries, with heavy dust storms, and ruins for as far as the eye can see."

"Will I need a pair of goggles?" Robin asked.

"I'm sure the helmet with your suit will work," Garrus chuckled, "it's like a big desert with Varren, Klixen, and Thresher Maws wandering the wastes."

Robin took a glance at the helmet in her hands before she returned her gaze towards Garrus.

"I guess that'll help," she said.
"Stop exaggerating, Vakarian. The radiation and dust aren't lethal," Wrex chuckled as they walked forward.

Okeer walked onto the bridge to Garrus' side.

"I handed the coordinates to the Urdnot Camp before we left the Citadel. I already discussed the matter with your brother, Wrex."

Wrex snorted with annoyance.

"Did the stubborn bastard have anything to say?"

"Nothing else besides an eye roll," Okeer left chuckling to himself.

"You ready?" Garrus asked, putting a hand on Robin's shoulder.

"We made a lot of progress so far," Robin nodded.

The instant the Aran'tar entered Tuchanka's orbit, Garrus took Robin, Liara, Tali, Thane, Mordin and Wrex with him in one shuttle. The shuttle flew through blinding winds before finally finding the tunnel leading to the sheltered, safe landing pad of Clan Urdnot. Each teammate helped to carry the gas canisters out.

"Careful with them. We want these spores to have maximum effect," Garrus reminded as they walked to the sergeant at the door, "we're with Okeer, and we've brought the Genophage treatment."

The krogan sergeant took a brief glance at Okeer before returning his gaze to Garrus.

"Yeah, yeah. Wreav told us to expect you. Go on in."

The group walked through a small maintenance walkway that ran parallel to a number of pipes. Another hatch opened to reveal a long concrete corridor, somewhat resembling a metro tunnel with a trench running down the middle, littered with concrete remains. All throughout the cave were barrels of burning materials serving as lighting for the various krogans in the shadows. The ceiling of the tunnel showed some light coming in as chunks had been shot off from fights long ago with bits of steel reinforcement jutting out.

Wrex led the others to a throne-like position to their immediate right, overlooking the dark corridor, receiving the most natural light out of any other perceived location at the camp.

"Wrex. You still plan on going through with this?" the krogan in question asked.

Wreav had the same clan markings as his brother, Wrex. However, he had a noticeably different color pallet to him. His head crest was a deeper shade of red as was the skin color, resembling a clay-colored brown opposed to the sand-colored brown of Wrex.

"That's because I don't intend on sitting around, wasting away as I wait for my next paycheck," Wrex hissed.

Wreav took a moment to glance at Wrex.

"Whatever," Wreav dismissed, "I just hope the treatment works for everything Warlord Okeer threw at his pet project."

Wrex and Wreav continued to argue back and forth like kids arguing over whose toy is whose.
"It will work."

"Former STG Mordin Solus, someone who had worked with the Genophage in the past, contributed greatly to the effort," Garrus interrupted, "you can talk to him about it all you like, but I can assure you that it is a finished project."

Wreav and Wrex stopped in their tracks, only for Wreav to make a brief glance at the salarian doctor.

"If you have plans on setting up the treatment," Wreav beckoned, "I'm all ears."

Mordin sighed as he stepped up to the clan leader.

"The means of distribution will be through the circulation of spores through Tuchanka's atmosphere, using wind currents. We've brought numerous canisters loaded with the spores ready to release upon those afflicted by the Genophage, and with some help from Okeer, we've calculated the most effective locations to begin dispersion across Tuchanka."

Wreav nodded before he beckoned Robin to approach him. Staring intently into the krogan's eyes, the young Shepard placed her hand over her chest and stood straight.

"When I first heard of the Genophage," Robin explained, "I thought I could look into it further and find some way to treat it, you know."

Robin tilted her head towards Okeer and Hazel for a moment before she returned her gaze to Wreav.

"It turns out," Robin continued, "I wasn't the only one who had the same idea."

"It's an injustice inflicted upon us for a crime our ancestors committed. Understandable at its roots, but kept around for far too long," Wreav sighed, "the clan leaders aren't entirely in agreement about the aftermath, but we can at least agree upon the idea that we should focus on rebuilding our broken world rather than destroying others."

Robin smiled and extended her hand, much to Wreav's confusion.

"Welcome to the club, buddy," Robin chirped.

In the meantime, Brendan, Saren and Miranda gathered in a conference room, as they were just preparing to send a transmission to Admiral Anderson. The admiral showed up on the projection before the group.

{Commander, good to see you're still active. Thanks for that bit of information you picked up in the Horse Head Nebula. It's been turning the tide of things back on Earth rather quickly.}

"Thank you, sir. Going forward, I'd like to introduce two individuals who have been especially helpful for the mission," Brendan returned, "Spectre Saren Arterius, who had helped to pave much of the way in this conflict, and former-operative Miranda Lawson, who provided much needed insight to Cerberus' operations. She's also willing to testify against Toby in his ties to Cerberus if needed."

{That's excellent, commander,} Anderson complimented, {I also read your report on how the Illusive Man is still at large. If we are to avoid any further confrontation with the other races, his capture his paramount.}

"While the initial run was a failure, we had managed to flush him out of Cerberus HQ and recruited
the geth and quarians to help hunt down what's left of Cerberus in return for embassies on the Citadel," Saren explained, "he's on the run and has little to hide behind."

[If he's running scared like you say he is, keep up the hunt and don't let up. We've made it this far, we can't let Cerberus regroup now.]
Takeover Crisis

Mordin was on his knees, hooking up the equipment to keep the gas canister stable. Opening the valve, a clear vapor began to quickly seep out into the violent winds, off to distribute among the krogan populace.

"Commander, just distributed another one! Will move out in a few more minutes!" Mordin informed Garrus.

"Keep it up! We're doing well so far!" Garrus encouraged.

Robin found a nearby perch and began scanning ahead in search for more suitable spots with Liara standing next to her. The winds continued to curl around them as Liara and Robin took the time to disperse the canister of spores. In the meantime, Garrus took the time to call Okeer's crew.

"Okeer, this is Commander Vakarian. We've marked the map with the locations we've covered. I assume progress is going smoothly on your part?"

\{Everything's going well so far. My team had to shoo off a Thresher Maw, but it wasn't too problematic,\} the warlord reported, \{we did have a small head-start on you, but we're only ahead by a single local. Given the map right now, we're almost a third of the way done.\}

"Fortunately," Garrus quipped, "we still have some canisters yet to be set into place."

The last of the current canister Liara and Robin began emptying.

"The last one has been deployed!" Liara called out, "we should be good to go!"

Garrus turned his attention back to Okeer.

"We'll be heading out in a bit. Expect another twenty-five minutes of radio silence."

Returning to the shuttle, they lifted off and moved onto the next site. During the flight, Robin held onto Garrus while she watched the scenery from the shuttle. Down below were horrors that Earth had briefly visited before its inhabitants forever turned its back on for fear of destroying their only home. Tuchanka had been laid waste to over centuries by nuclear warfare. The radiation began to wear off, but the environment had been left desolated by the ancient conflicts. Similarly, the ground was littered with bombed infrastructure, left to forever rot.

"It's not much, but it's home," Wrex muttered.

Robin didn't say anything, yet she nodded in acknowledgment.

"Maybe not too far gone," Mordin whispered guiltily, "maybe new life will be born beneath this blood-stained sand."

Another while of silence passed before the shuttle finally reached its destination. Exiting onto the dune, the group could see in the distance below a large, flat platform with what appeared to be a large drill supported by three legs in the middle. Down below were a few krogans facing off a giant centipede-like creature.

"Ah, the rite of passage," Wrex said, "harrowing trials against the various beasts of the wastelands."

Robin's eyes widened while she blinked, examining the giant creature.
"Is that supposed to be a Thresher Maw?" Robin asked.

"Yeah. I took one down during my trial as a teen," Wrex answered, thinking back to his youth, "it was a pain in the ass, getting through the armor, avoiding its acid, and avoiding it when it resurfaces."

"I think I can see a definition of a dog eat dog world," Robin commented.

Mordin went straight to work on the next couple of gas tanks.

"Thresher Maws will prove problematic during reconstruction. Spread easily between planets, eggs nearly impossible to completely check."

"Problematic how?" Wrex asked. "they're animals: big and stupid. Besides, they die like everything else. It can't be too problematic."

"So how do we make sure the Thresher Maws don't attack the canisters?" Robin clamored, "repel them?"

"So long as the teens are down there, they shouldn't be a problem right now," Wrex reassured, "besides, these things usually don't leave their nests unless they pick up heavy movement on the surface, like a large caravan, an explosion, or anything that would generally signify the presence of food. The shuttle landing and our mere footsteps won't lure it."

Robin nodded before she scanned the area for a suitable spot to set down the canister in her hands.

"The only time mere footsteps would set them off would be if you were to walk right through their nest," Wrex added, "we do our best to mark those sites, but they're significantly harder to tell on uninhabited planets. At least from a distance."

It didn't take long for Tali'Zorah to find a suitable spot.

"The scenery is admittedly beautiful for being war-torn," Tali sighed, looking at the horizon.

Garrus walked back over to Mordin.

"So, this treatment. You never tested it on other species?"

"No. Saw no need to. Thought subjects from target species would suffice. Why do you ask?"

Mordin blinked.

"Just nervous. That's all," Garrus replied, "before we leave the system, I want everyone to undergo one last medical checkup to see if we aren't suffering from any resulting maladies."

Liara couldn't help but blink since she was standing near Garrus and Mordin.

"Are you…still worried about us?" Liara asked.

"The vast majority of people aboard the Aran'tar at the time of the leak were not part of the intended target species, so of course I'm still worried. Even the most basic of medicines can function vastly different between species," Garrus retorted, "for all I know, it could start causing cancerous growths on the majority of the turian crew, myself included."

By then, Robin found another suitable spot and set down the canister.

"This should work," Robin said to herself.
Tali picked up her emptied canister and brought it back to the shuttle.

"We're almost done here," Tali informed.

While Liara wasn't looking, Wrex walked up to the canister the asari brought out. Seemingly empty, he picked it up when he suddenly was sprayed in the face with remaining residue.

"Paugh! Uugh! It's like a face full of bug-spray!" Wrex coughed.

"It shouldn't kill you, Wrex. Stop complaining," Garrus chastised, "you done, Robin?"

"Yeah," Robin nodded.

Garrus marked the next part of the map.

"Keep going to the next site," Garrus ordered.

{Don't you dare turn your back on us, Anderson!} Toby Dunn yelled over the transmission, {if you side with the turians, you will do time for treason!}

Anderson groaned in disbelief as he folded his arms, not thrilled to receive a transmission from the President.

"Correction: my loyalties still lie with the Alliance," Anderson corrected, "while I can understand how my actions would be seen as such, there are plenty more who would disagree, myself included. I had spoken with other individuals within the Alliance, namely politicians, about your dealings. The general disposition on your administration is largely unanimous."

Keagan, who stood beside Anderson, nodded in agreement.

"Feel free to continue digging. The young commander here has provided more than enough to convince the audience. If it's any consolation, I will be attending the hearing," Anderson chuckled as he hung up, "it's a good day, Commander Shepard. We've won, and you're to thank."

{Again, thank you, Anderson,} Brendan replied.

"Unfortunately, that's all the good news you haven't heard up until this point," the admiral continued, "I don't have any more leads to provide you going forward. All I can say is to keep up the manhunt."

{Yes, Admiral. I will k— ep o— ching th—} Brendan's speech and image began to distort from connection disturbance. {Ad— son? So— interf—. Can you he—?}

Anderson was left bewildered at the sight of the cut in transmission.

"Commander?! Commander! Can you hear me?!!" his words fell on deaf ears as the red words 'connection lost' were projected.

He quickly changed frequency.

"Major Kyle," Anderson ordered, "get your division to the Citadel Station. Commander Shepard was posted there when his transmission cut out. Get there and find out what's going on!"

{Sir, yes sir!} Kyle nodded.
"Admiral? Admiral!" Brendan panicked.

The feed suddenly cut out altogether.

"Shit! We're being jammed!" Miranda exclaimed testing the other frequencies to her dismay.

Saren drew out his rifle as he left the conference room.

"What's happening out there? Are we under attack?" Saren demanded.

Brendan and Miranda followed Saren out of the conference room and down the hall. Fortunately, short range communications still worked.

{Sir, Cerberus vessels just arrived out of the Mass Relay. Orders?} the pilot asked over coms.

"Fall back to the apartments. Get as many troops suited up before you leave. I'll meet up with you as soon as I can. Out," Brendan ordered with Miranda and Saren close behind, "we'll be picking up Robin's friends on the way to the hideout. We'll need to know Cerberus' full plan before we properly know where to start."

{Right away,} the pilot nodded.

The trio quickly rushed to the apartment complex where Robin's friends lived. Rushing to the door, Brendan mashed the doorbell before turning to face the other direction, waiting for possible hostiles.

{Hello?} Joker greeted over the door microphone.

"Joker, it's Brendan, Miranda, and Saren," Brendan explained, "the Citadel is under attack by Cerberus, and we're regrouping with my unit until we can figure out what's Cerberus' next move."

{Oh, shit!} Joker exclaimed, {really?!}

"Yeah! Don't waste time packing, let's go!" Brendan ordered.

Soon enough, Jack, Kasumi, Kaidan, Ashley, and Jeff exited the door.

"What's going on? The hell are they doing?" Kaidan demanded.

"From what we do know, Cerberus is making a large push," Saren answered, "until we know the full extent of the situation, we'll just have to keep low."

With that in mind, Saren, Brendan, Miranda, Joker, Kasumi, Jack, Kaidan and Ashley scurried away from the apartment complex. After Brendan had worked citizenship for he and his men, the whole unit rented several apartments as temporary barracks away from Alliance territory. Brendan rushed up to the door and hastily unlocked the door. He entered to find the entire crew of the Normandy, waiting for him.

"Is everyone here?" Brendan asked.

After a quick headcount, the group further retreated into the lower wards to avoid being caught by Cerberus troops. Still, they cringed when they heard gunshots from a distance. Long since having left the Presidium, the group wandered the lower wards, looking through closed down shops and back alleys to possibly camp out in until they can figure out what to do. Scouting through an abandoned hotel, the team moved in and set camp.

"Everyone else will stay here," Brendan instructed, "I, Miranda, and Saren will be heading back out,
finding a Cerberus goon, and asking him what their business is here on the Citadel."

"You'll be ok, won't you, Commander?" Kelly asked softly, her voice trembling with concern.

"We will," Brendan confirmed, "but until we know what's going on, we're stuck here. Keep an eye on everyone, Vega."

"You got it, Loco. Give 'em hell," James saluted, going to a hidden position by the door.

A few refugees from the higher levels finally began to trickle down, taking refuge in the lower areas of the Wards. Continuing on, the group found a Cerberus squad, consisting of an operative, two troopers, and an engineer with a deplorable turret, terrorizing the civilians they ran into. Taking cover with his rifle, he turned to look at the others.

"Four around the corner, three troops and an officer. We'll try to take down those soldiers before apprehending the officer. Sound like a plan?" Brendan suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Miranda nodded.

Approaching the corner they hid around, the three landed well-placed headshots on three of the soldiers before Brendan shot the operative in his lightly armored legs, sending him falling to the ground in fiery pain.

"Got him!" Brendan whispered.

Hitting the operative with the butt of his gun, Saren lifted the unconscious operative onto his shoulder.

"I have him. Let's go."

Brendan, Saren and Miranda scampered out of the area before any troops could detect the commotion. Running into a mall, the group ran through the doors leading into the series of crannies and nooks that were the employee-only sectors. The operative groaned with pain as Saren put him on the ground.

"Lawson. I should've known it was you. Having fun?"

Brendan slugged the operative hard across the head.

"Formalities can come after the interview. Cerberus is acting awfully brace coming here. Care to explain?" Brendan growled.

"You have to come up with an excuse to convince me," the operative spat.

Miranda simply stared.

"No need. Your omni-tool will help fill in the picture," she huffed, scattering the operative's brains against the wall in front of him before ripping the omni-tool from his arm.

"These have a back door to them for quickly removing information," Miranda instructed, "keep watch while I retrieve as much data as possible, Cerberus does track vitals through the omni-tools they wear."

Brendan and Saren kept a constant eye down the corridors while Miranda worked as quickly as she could. Finishing up, they quickly made their way back to the hideout.
"Any progress?" Jack asked.

"Besides the fact this attack is purely out of desperation?" Brendan asked, "this is an all-or-nothing mission for them. They've rushed in with every last vessel they have at their disposal, taken control of the Citadel, closed the station, and jammed most outward coms."

"They've also got the Council," Saren added, "this'll make our approach much harder without outside help."

The entire Normandy crew and Robin's friends instantly cringed. They couldn't help but worry about what could become of the Councilors, the Primarch or even Nihlus. To add insult to injury, leaving the Citadel to get help was impossible. What more would it take to get the Illusive Man to get the entire Citadel to surrender and hand victory to Cerberus?
The instant Garrus and his crew finished spreading the Genophage treatment, they headed back to the Aran'tar to rest for a day. During that time, Mordin had the entire crew examined for any unusual symptoms.

"Strange. Signs of treatment present. Unforeseen symptoms aren't. Should be fine, otherwise," Mordin reported.

"That's all that matters, right?" Garrus asked, putting his shirt back on.

"Yes. In theory. Still, check in immediately if anything happens," Mordin had heavily checked the whole crew, finding that everyone present onboard during the leak had been affected.

Garrus walked to take his armor off at the lockers, meeting Robin on the bench.

"Should be fine, he says. Nothing apparent just yet."

Robin nodded and placed her hand on his.

"At least that would mostly put Mordin at ease," Robin mused.

"At least," Garrus agreed stripping off his chestplate, "but the absolute radio silence from the Citadel has me worried. Maybe we should bring in help before we head back."

"Huh?!" Robin warbled.

Garrus didn't respond, but he led Robin out of the lockers.

"While Mordin was checking on the crew, I've been trying to get a signal. There is just about no activity coming out of the Serpent Nebula right now," Garrus sighed.

He headed into his personal quarters with a datapad in hand.

"We should probably head in with the geth and quarians, just to be safe. If the Citadel is under attack, we can't afford to wait around with so many lives at stake."

"You don't think," Robin stuttered, "Cerberus got to them, do you?"

"If they are as desperate as they are, I wouldn't be surprised if this were some sort of last defiant act for them," Garrus groaned, "still, I had Tali contact Kal and the geth, get word to them to meet us up at the Annos Basin. Okeer also made a similar call to action with some of the clans back on Tuchanka."

Robin reached out and placed her hand on Garrus's palm. His eyes looked up to meet the young Shepard's.

"I hope the Councilors are still ok," Robin sighed softly.

"And I hope everyone else is okay," Garrus muttered as he tapped his forehead to hers.

After a few seconds of rest, Garrus led Robin out of his quarters and they made their way to the bridge.
Sir, we are approaching the Annos Basin," the pilot reported.

"Good. Hold this position until sufficient reinforcements arrive," Garrus ordered.

The ship exited the relay, only to be greeted by the sight of geth and quarian vessels in formation.

"I think they're here already," Robin commented.

One of the quarian vessels hailed them minutes after they entered.

(Commander Vakarian?) Captain Reegar asked, (Tali informed us you were coming. So the Citadel is in trouble?)

"As far as we can tell," Garrus acknowledged, "the Citadel has never had a sudden drop in coms activity like this. You have more on the way?"

(We are part of this galaxy, dammit. This is our home, and I'll fight to make it a safer place. More of the fleet is still on it's way,) Kal answered.

Garrus nodded in acknowledgment. With the Citadel in jeopardy, the fate of the galaxy could most likely be at stake.

Still in the emptied hotel, Brendan was briefing the crew who were in fighting condition about the current plan for retaking the Citadel.

"Just to get the minor details out of the way, this is the main issue. The Galaxy out there doesn't have a clue what just happened on the Citadel, and we've got to take down this coup d'étate before it threatens any one else. The plan is simple. The jamming device will be near their point of insertion on the station and is supposedly lightly guarded. With help from Spectre Kryik, most of the kids will be disabling that. Saren and Miranda will be heading to the Presidium to break out the Council, and get them to a safe place away from Cerberus control. We'll be heading to Citadel control to open up the station arms and sabotage the controls to make sure they stay open. We have our jobs, people. Someone needs to stand against these bastards."

Filing out of the hotel, the group quickly dispersed across the station. Brendan and the team of marines he had close behind him mostly stuck to the back corridors to avoid the Cerberus patrols. Despite being few in remaining number, Cerberus did have enough personnel to form a considerable force, at least in comparison to the twelve marines stalking the wards. Gradually, they made their way back to the Presidium where the Citadel controls were located. They had yet to reach the controls, but Cerberus troopers stood in the way.

"Ahh, this is going to be a problem," Vega muttered to Brendan.

"We can't afford to stay quiet for long. Let's give them hell," Brendan ordered, jumping from cover.

It was still a ways to the controls, but it would take some time to open the gates, and someone would've been suspicious by then.

Kasumi scouted ahead for the group using her cloaking device. She took note of Cerberus soldiers corralling humans away from various asari, turians, salarians, drells, hanar and elcor while keeping their guns aimed at the aliens.

(That's a lot of hostages. Careful down there. I'd prefer if I didn't have to eventually rescue you guys)
too,} Nihlus warned the group over their omni-tools.

"Understood," Kasumi nodded.

Once Kasumi's group stopped at a corner, Kelly rested her back against the wall, resting until she heard a turian bickering with one of the Cerberus soldiers, which caught her attention.

"You really think that this is somehow going to work out?"

Peeking from cover, Kelly saw Sidonis with his hands behind his head and on his knees, chuckling.

"Your backs are to the walls and you have the attention of a lot of people. You aren't getting out of this."

"Shut up, skullface. We're the ones with the guns, you're the one on his knees," one of the Cerberus troopers growled at him.

Kelly stared intently at the Cerberus trooper and Sidonis before she turned her head towards Jack.

"Refresh my memory," Kelly whispered, "how do we help the hostages again?"

Jack caused both Cerberus soldiers to implode into bloodied, crumpled metal balls with her biotics.


Kelly nodded to Jack before she sprinted towards Sidonis, who gave her a confused stare.

"Are you ok, sir?" Kelly asked.

"Just a bit roughed up, that's all," Sidonis answered, rubbing his wrists as Kelly uncuffed him.

Once she finished, Kelly helped Sidonis stand to his feet while Jack, Kaidan and Ashley caught up with them.

"Sooooo, what's the plan?" Sidonis asked, checking the Cerberus rifle he salvaged.

"Disable the jamming device Cerberus brought," Ashley explained, "we've got to take it down if we're to send word for help."

Even while remaining invisible, Kasumi checked on the other hostages in the area no longer held down by gunpoint.

{You have a small patrol approaching from around the corner,} Nihlus informed, {they're carrying in crates of equipment. Looks like that might lead to where they've docked. I'll follow you that way.}

"What about other hostages?" Kaidan inquired.

{I'm sorry. As much as I want to help those people as well, we have to focus on getting that jammer down if we can call for any help right now,} Nihlus sighed with heavy dread, {we can start freeing them when we deactivate the jammer and send word out for help.}

"Right," Kaidan nodded, "we'll get to it."

The group narrowly crept around Cerberus soldiers watching over civilians of various races, huddled up into large crowds and forced onto their knees. Every now and then, the group would hear the sobs or pained wails of the captives. Each sound was a fight of its own, as the group was forced to
stay low and keep moving along to complete the mission.

"Those poor people," Kasumi muttered to herself, as she watched another couple of soldiers shove a group of salarians into the mass.

They couldn't do much for now, so they kept moving forward. Approaching a large docking area, the group saw several Cerberus ships docked alongside each other with a small HQ set up near the middle. Slipping from the rafters above, Nihlus jumped down to meet the others.

"Hey, you guys seem to have done well getting through that crowd. Sorry we had to leave those people."

Kaidan nodded while he cracked his knuckles.

"I hope they won't have to suffer for much longer," Kaidan replied, "the jammer isn't far from here, is it?"

"Actually, it's just ahead. Help me clear the docks of the guards. We'll reconvene on the command center to disable it and send out a distress signal. Sound good?" Nihlus proposed.

The group split up and began to clear the docks, Nihlus and Jack clearing the most resistance of the course of time. There were also mechs patrolling the area, so Kasumi used her omni-tool to overload the mechs she passed by to the point they shut off. Kaidan and Ashley decided to go straight for the command center and disengaged the jamming signal. With the guards away from the post, they crept along, cut the signal, and hacked up the machinery to prevent future use.

"Nailed it!" Kaidan whispered in relief.

Kaidan and Ashley made a fist bump before they sent a message to Nihlus.

{Ok, we took out the jammer.}

{Good. We're finishing up with local resistance. I'll be there in a moment to help send that distress signal.} Nihlus returned.

Keeping low as they walked up to the command center, Nihlus got to work. Jack caught up a bit later than the others.

"Okay finished hiding the bodies," Jack informed, "so we're going to send for help or what?"

Quickly adjusting to the frequency of the Aran'tar, Kasumi quickly got the message out.

"Citadel Station to Aran'tar. We are currently under attack from by an all-out assault from Cerberus. Repeat, we are currently under attack from by an all-out assault from Cerberus."

Three men down. Considering how many in return they'd managed to kill, it was an impressive ratio as Brendan and his squad continued to rush through the station, past patrols and groups of hostages before the various people ran to safety when given the opportunity to do so. The deaths of those men did bear down on Brendan as the Cerberus troops just continued to rush on in. For every Cerberus soldier he did kill, another one took their place.

"You lobos are like lemmings with machine guns!" Vega taunted.

"There's the control room! Hurry!" Brendan ordered.
Brendan had managed to make their way to the Presidium and had ran around the ring almost entirely to the other side. At the other end was a tower integral with the wall.

"Dawkins! Hutch!" Brendan commanded, "get in there and start opening the station up and break something so Cerberus can't shut the station! Get going!"

Dawkins and Hutch sprinted into the tower without hesitating. All the while, Brendan and the others outside continued to hold their position until the job was done. Two more soldiers went down until Brendan could properly have the Cerberus snipers gunned down. Brendan cursed as he glanced at his downed men.

"Robin Hood, you hear me?" he thought to himself as bullets continued to graze by him, "oh, how I wish I could say one last goodbye to you, mom, and dad. I don't know if I'll live to see the end of today, but please be good. For my sake. Tell Garrus he has my blessing while you're at it."

Brendan gazed ahead with fierce flames in his eyes, aiming his assault rifle at Cerberus troops charging after him.

"Do I have regrets? Maybe a list, too many to count right now."

Brendan rolled and pushed James to cover as a shot whizzed by where his companion's head was.

"In the end, I barely feel them. I feel a slight sense of redemption and freedom in this final fight. It's liberating knowing how close I am to the end. We may not be the guys planting the Alliance flag in Cerberus' collective assholes, or the men who led the final charge. But in the painful and grueling end, all the pain washes away with the adrenaline. Clean the slate for a new start. For all of us."

Brendan lay down another sweep of gunfire on the next wave of Cerberus troops. Just as he was certain he would be killed on the spot, Dawkins and Hutch completed their task.

"Mission accomplished, sir! The Citadel arms are opening! We— shit! RPG!"

Hutch was barely able to escape, but Dawkins wasn't able to crawl out in time before the explosion consumed him with fire. Brendan turned his attention back to the increasing mass of troops before him. It would be a good fight.

Miranda and Saren were side by side, aware of the gunfire in the distance on the Presidium. The Councilors had been brought to the wards and were held captive, with the Illusive Man himself overlooking them. Upon gazing at her former boss, Miranda furrowed her eyebrows and clenched her fists.

"It doesn't matter how many more men you have to throw at the problem, commander. Get those arms composed again or this operation is for naught!" the Illusive Man barked.

The skirmish on the Presidium had generated quite a nervous stir among the remaining Cerberus troops. Similarly, the Councilors sat silently with their binds, cautious not to infuriate their captors.

"Y-Yes, sir," the Cerberus commander nodded before he was dismissed.

Shortly after, Kai Leng stumbled in.

"Sir," the assassin saluted.

"Leng. It's good to see they kept you alive. You'll be needed to keep the Councilors... safe for the
time being. Its mission is critical for the preservation of our cause," the Cerberus leader greeted with a twisted smile.

"You got it, sir," Kai Leng bowed, "I won't fail you."

Miranda always hated the former N7. His unshakable hubris made Kai Leng intolerable amidst a normal conversation. On an agreed signal, the duo jumped from their hiding locations and began to gun down the guards around the room. With none other than the Council present, they were relatively liberal with smoke and flash grenades to help pave the way to protect the politicians.

"Arterius?!" Sparatus exclaimed.

"Is the Primarch all right?" Saren asked.

Miranda, amidst all the commotion, made a final attempt on the Illusive Man's life before he shut the door behind him. Watching the door close behind him with disappointment, she almost failed to notice Kai Leng leap at her with a sword.

"Leng," she greeted acidly, "had fun rotting in a prison cell?"

"Mr. Harper told me of your betrayal," Kai Leng snarled.

"I see you've taken to being the aliens' lapdog rather comfortably."

Saren had helped to gun down the last of resistance, before helping the Councilors to their feet. Keeping them behind him, he directed them to safety while he stayed to combat the Cerberus agent.

"You seem content with your place in the galaxy as well," Saren snarked.

Kai Leng leapt at Saren, but the turian Spectre blocked the assassin's blade with a biotic field.

"You think you have the capacity to go toe to toe with the likes of me, Arterius?" Kai Leng hissed.

"Considering you were just only brought out of prison, taking you down doesn't seem too rewarding," Saren returned, tossing the assassin away, "besides, I highly doubt your cybernetics will come to be very useful in this scenario."

Kai Leng struggled to get back to his feet, but soon, Miranda heard the roaring engine of the Aran'tar from outside. Kai Leng took the opportunity to knock Miranda off her feet while he was still down. Rolling on top of her, Leng was poised to plant his sword in her chest when Saren blew his brains clean out the side of his head.

"Jumpy little bastard, wasn't he?" Saren commented, helping Miranda to her feet.

Miranda slowly stood up, dusting herself off.

"Creepy one, too."
Once the Aran'tar hovered closer to the Presidium, it launched tether lines onto the railing. Seconds later, Garrus rode down the cable while carrying Robin in his arm. After making an entrance, Victus and an assortment of other survivors rushed from their hiding location to greet them.

"Commander, you're a sight for sore eyes. I assume you have a plan for this operation?"

Garrus shifted slightly uncomfortably.

"Well, I figured we'd play this by ear, and improvise as we go," Garrus answered, "I can understand your concern, but all of us are suited to take on the Cerberus presence here."

Victus sighed with disbelief.

"Vakarian, this is not a fight we can win alone."

"Who said we were alone?" Garrus retorted.

Just then, an Atlas mech appeared from the corner and aimed at Victus. Robin pulled out a detonator and tossed it at its weak point while Garrus fired rounds of his rifle at its legs, taking down the mech in moments, with Adrien letting out a sigh of relief.

They were all pinned down at the docks with nowhere to run. Nihlus rolled to a different set of cover where the others were just as an explosion consumed his last location.

"Boy, this escalated rather quickly," he muttered, switching out thermal clips.

"Ah, fuck," Jack cursed, "I can play bowling with these guys all day, but three heavy mechs simultaneously might still be a tall order for me."

Three Atlas mechs were dropped from Cerberus transports, slowly whirling to life. Sidonis ducked from another stray shot.

"Well, it was a good run while we lasted," Sidonis mused.

The four friends gave each other one last hopeless glance, even longer between Ashley and Kaidan as they held each other's hands one last time. Another unidentified shuttle pulled up right above them before opening fire upon the approaching line of Cerberus troops on the ground. More shuttles arrived, opening up to unleash squads of krogan onto the field. The Cerberus soldiers were quick to retaliate, but were short lived as the krogans swarmed them. The Atlas mechs barely lasted any longer as the krogan troops climbed onto them, causing them to topple under the weight. Okeer and a few of his men ran out to meet the group.

"We got your message, and we brought in the calvary," Okeer said.

"What a relief!" Kelly sighed.

Nihlus stood and approached the warlord.
"So, you must be Okeer. Saren mentioned you a few times. What brings you to this mess?" Nihlus greeted.

"What, can't we all enjoy taking the piss out of some power-hungry fanatics?" Okeer joked, "laughs aside, we were all recently given a second chance. A way to completely ignore the Genophage. Even if these bastards don't come for us, which they clearly had an entire lab dedicated towards, this is a chance to atone for the mistakes of our ancestors as much as it is an opportunity to show our gratitude."

Nihlus nodded in agreement.

"Glad to have you with us," he grinned, "now let's get these bastards!"

Even with the rush of krogans through the wards, there were still plenty of pockets with Cerberus troops with human shields at their side. With the rush of krogans, the small group managed to blend in and get the drop on the hostages' captors. Sneaking into a grocery store, Nihlus and the others snuck through the rafters while the Cerberus soldiers abandoned their posts by the hostages. They were clustering the store barricades, keeping the krogans at bay, too busy to look up for possible interlopers. This made it easy for Kaidan and Jack to get to higher ground.

Between the rows of shelves were huddled, scared civilians, still on their knees as to avoid being shot. Climbing down from the rafters, the group crept up behind the Cerberus soldiers, with Ashley cautiously observing them.

"They're still distracted," Ashley said.

"Still, better safe than sorry. I'd avert my eyes for a few seconds if I were you guys," Nihlus ordered, showing a flash grenade in his hand.

Taking cover, Nihlus threw in the flash, leaving most of the opposing forces blinded. Taking down those who weren't as affected, the others followed by picking the remainders off one by one. This allowed Kaidan and Jack to use their biotic to their advantage. Both blinded and suspended in the air by biotics, all of the guards were left vulnerable to their gunfire. With the hostages freed, the group carefully led them outside. Even in the distance, the seven of them could see krogans helping hostages to their feet.

"The way things can change so quickly," Nihlus smiled, "I'd never thought I'd live to see a day like this."

"Not all krogan are so content with staring at the past," Okeer acknowledged, walking up to their group, "some just wish for a future. A place in society we can call our own. Not to looked upon as beasts, criminals, or bounty hunters. There are still some of us who see reason in growth and unity."

Miranda and Saren continued to fight side by side, covering the other and even utilizing their biotic powers to exponential improve their efficiency. After Garrus contacted them, they began to fight their way back to the Presidium. After quickly making sure the Council was safe in the wards, they fought to return and fight off the forces still surrounding Brendan's group. Rounding the corner, Garrus, Robin, and other members of the Aran'tar entered.

"Saren, good to see you're alive. We brought help and plenty of it," the commander greeted, "are you still able to continue?"

"All things considered, yes. Unfortunately, Brendan and his squad are all pinned down near the other side of the Presidium by heavy Cerberus forces," Saren noted, pointing not too far up the Presidium
Robin fired a round at a Cerberus soldier about to aim his rifle at Saren, taking the soldier down.

"I hope he's still alive," Robin muttered to herself.

"Sir! Enemy gunship! Five o'clock!" a turian soldier shouted.

Garrus turned to see a gunship flying towards them from the distance. Slowing down, the platform launched off two missiles at the building ahead of them, setting it ablaze and cutting off any forward progress they could make towards Brendan.

"Get to cover! Find a vantage point and take that thing out!" Garrus barked, firing his rifle off a few times as he rolled to cover.

He glanced painfully into the distance at the six remaining soldiers under Cerberus' boot.

"Keep firing! We have to get through!" Garrus ordered.

He began to eye a bridge to the other side, that would put the river between them, but would get them close enough to provide cover fire. Still, his squad found cover before searching for a weak point that would take down the gunship.

With Robin taking out some of the gunship's passengers with her rounds, Garrus quickly switched the rounds in his rifle to armor piercing rounds before coming out of cover and shooting one of the engines. Smoking and spinning out of control, he felt an air of satisfaction, before it quickly evaporated when the gunship crashed into one of the aforementioned bridge's supports, sending it crashing into the artificial river below. Never had he felt a hole sink into the bottom of his stomach so fast as dread began to take control.

"I-I…oh shit…" Garrus muttered.

Robin's eyes filled with concern.

"Garrus?" Robin called over.

"We're not going to get over there in time."

He glanced painfully into the distance at the six remaining soldiers under Cerberus' boot.

"Keep firing! We have to get through!" Garrus ordered.

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"Garrus?" Robin called over.

"We're not going to get over there in time."

Vega couldn't spare the precious few seconds to wipe the sweat off his forehead. He was low on thermal clips, the dead continued to pile up, and there was no sign of help or reinforcements around them. For what seemed like an eternity, they held their position at the control tower behind the crashed skycars, fallen debris, and a handful of crates that Cerberus had brought in. The crates had contained generous amounts of thermal clips for the group to share. Unfortunately, it seemed like every last soldier was converging on their position.

"I'm out! Reloading!"

James pulled a thermal clip out of the crate. Shoving in the thermal clip, he began to hear the distinctive whir of an incoming gunship from around the Presidium loop.

"Another gunship!" Brendan exclaimed, "James, we've got one more LAW to use. Fetch it and make that shot count!"

Vega rushed near the back to fetch the weapon. Picking it up, he didn't have a chance to utilize it before the gunship unleashed a barrage of missile fire, carpeting the area. James blacked out as one
exploded not two meters away from him.

"Vega!" Brendan panicked.

He rushed to the lieutenant's side when a sniper shot slammed into his chest, throwing him into cover against a wall.

Vega slowly came to as someone shook him back awake. His ears rang, his body felt like it was on fire, and breathing felt like he was inhaling molten lead.

"Stand still, Vega!"

It was Hutch. He'd put down his LMG for a moment as the explosion had thrown him out of cover. The world around him blurred like an abstract painting as he was dragged to cover. Hutch continued to fire back until a sniper shot him clean through the head, leaving him out of cover, but visible to Brendan.

Struggling to stay conscious, James could barely make out the forms of the Illusive Man followed closely by two soldiers as they took their helmets off. Each walked through the remains of their unit, shooting dead corpses for safe measure and killing the severely wounded as they continued to close in. Vega struggled in his place, but his arms and body yielded to the white-hot pain each movement induced.

The gunship watching the area exploded brilliantly, causing the Cerberus leader and his two lackeys to turn and look. Above, a geth dropship with geth units and quarian marines hovered above, firing down at the Cerberus soldiers.

"James…"

Vega painfully turned to look at Brendan, now bleeding profusely from his injury. With one last effort, Brendan shoved his arm along the ground, passing his side arm to James. Without second hesitation, Brendan picked up the pistol and killed the two body guards, and ended the Illusive Man with a well-placed shot to his head, before the indicator on the pistol's side showed it was empty. James went slack, flopping on the ground from exhaustion and pain. Struggling to simply breath now, he looked up one more time to see if the Illusive Man had really died. As his eyes slowly adjusted, he could see more geth dropships overhead. With their doors opening, geth units and quarian troopers jumped down, using jet thrusters to slow their descent to the ground, before moving to defensive positions. Being among the first to touch down, Captain Reegar rushed to the base of the security tower where Brendan and Vega were.

"We've got two live ones here! Don't worry, you're going to be alright!" the captain informed before rushing to Vega's side.

He could still hear the quarian captain barking orders as he looked over to a geth unit and quarian woman attending to his commander's injuries. As he himself was put on a stretcher, he looked up at the geth unit and captain looking down at him as they put him on a stretcher.

"This should keep you stable until we can get you proper medical attention," Kal informed as he injected him with some unidentified serum.

Now at the end of his rope, his eyelids slowly shut, with the pain finally subsiding.

In the meantime, Garrus, Robin and their squad searched for a shortcut. All the while, Robin accessed a control panel that activated a bridge, allowing a few C-Sec officers to move several
hostages to safety.

{Commander, do you copy?} Kal reported in on Garrus' omni-tool.

"Loud and clear. I just saw you and your men pass overhead. Is everything alright over there?" Garrus and the others had to backtrack to a bridge further down the opposite direction away from Brendan to get over to the other side.

{We managed to clear out the surrounding forces around the commander's team. Commander Shepard and Lieutenant Vega were the only ones left. They took a beating, but they still might make it.} Reegar answered.

A dead silence passed.

"Thanks. We'll be over there as soon as we can."

Satisfied with the info, Garrus ended the transmission.

"Brendan survived. Barely, but he's alive," Garrus told Robin.

"Oh, what a relief!" Robin smiled softly, "I'll bet the Alliance will want to hear about this!"

Miranda and Saren guided Garrus and Robin to the conference room they used to communicate with Earth before Cerberus attacked. Using the same frequency as before, they managed to raise Anderson's office.

"Anderson," Robin called, "can you hear me?"

{Ambassador, I heard the Citadel was under attack. Is the situation under control? Where's the commander? I had sent a scout party to investigate. They barely made it back,} the admiral answered.

"My brother is hurt, but we're getting the situation under control," Robin answered.

{And the Illusive Man, where is he? Did he escape?} Anderson was desperate for any information regarding Cerberus' current status.

"Shepard Ambassador."

The four turned to see a geth unit with a body slung over his shoulder.

"We have identified and found the deceased form of the individual you identify as the 'Illusive Man'. What would be your preference for dealing with the body?"

Unceremoniously, the geth unit walked in and slumped the body onto the projection table, slightly distorting the ambassador's projected image.

Robin's eyes widened while she blinked.

"Anderson, I think we have an update on the Illusive Man," Robin informed.

"We have…what's left of him," Garrus added.

The wound from his forehead was relatively cauterized, but some blood still seeped onto the projection table. Anderson stared at the Illusive Man's corpse intently.
I’d rather have seen him face justice, but the commander probably didn’t have the option of doing so amidst the firefight. Also, the process for Toby’s impeachment was going to start next week, however, the now former president made his way onto a shuttle and left planetside. Intercepted coms indicate he’s on his way to the Citadel. You may want to pick him up during cleanup,} Anderson nodded.

"Not to worry, Admiral Anderson," Garrus grinned, "I think I have an idea."

With the geth units, krogans, quarians, asari and turian soldiers clearing out the rest of Cerberus, Garrus checked with C-Sec and enlisted Decian Chellick for assistance. They and Robin waited at the docks with Kaidan, Kolyat, Ashley and a few other C-Sec officers standing nearby. Decian took a long, uncomfortable glance at the body.

"Uuuuh, Vakarian? You sure this plan of yours will work?" Chellick asked.

"I'm sure of it," Garrus nodded, "he's mostly an idiot."

"Well, if he really is the type of individual who…and correct me if I say this wrong…and can't tell the difference between his head and his ass, then do what you think will work, commander," Chellick motioned his men into position across the deck, "get the bait into place. Alenko, Krios, and Williams get ready to work on disabling the shuttle once it touches down. Remember your roles, and remember to keep out of sight, Krios."

"Will do, Chellick," Kolyat nodded.

Chellick opened his omni-tool to set the final piece.

"Flight control, what’s the status on the Mass Relay?"

{Increased activity has been detected. The shuttle will arrive in approximately five minutes,} flight control responded.

"Good. Make sure those Alliance troops are in full uniform and quickly. Toby Dunn will be expecting a show."

Upon cue, the C-Sec officers began preparing the setup. Back at flight control, two of the Normandy crew dressed up in the gear of fallen Cerberus personnel for when Toby would inevitably call to confirm arrival with the ‘Cerberus’ forces present on the station. A beeping from one of the screens caught the attention of the C-Sec officers present followed by a request to dock.

"The shuttle just came through. Show time."

The two ‘Cerberus troops’ walked up to the console and accepted the call, getting a vid projection of none other than Toby and a single pilot.

"President Dunn? We've been expecting you," one of the soldiers greeted.

{Good. Unfortunately, the situation on Earth hasn't improved. I assume Mr. Harper has the station under control?} the former president replied nervously.

"Yes sir, the station and its populace are under control. By the situation outside, we did lose quite a few ships coming in, but we otherwise do hold plenty of aliens and their VIPs in secure locations. I'll direct you to dock four-oh-four. In fact, the Illusive Man is waiting there himself. He wants to discuss how we'll make a comeback," the other nodded, before ending the call.
"Sir, the shuttle is approaching and is heading to your dock," one of the officers informed Chellick.

"Good work up there. Might want to get those uniforms off before those soldiers confuse anyone," Decian ordered.

"Yes, sir," the soldiers nodded in unison.

Toby walked past the trio as they got to work sabotaging the engine, as he was too busy with his own worries. Would he be disposed like all the others? The Illusive Man did have a very fine line as to when he would consider any of his assets 'useless'. Just down the empty dock, he noticed his superior, standing in shadow, without a cigarette, and his arms crossed. This wasn't good.

"Mr. Harper, I did everything I could. The minds of the US are relatively easy to control, but I can only do so much to control the other powers, and those afar. Please understand that I still have limits."

The Illusive Man stood silently. In full gear, Robin walked into the open and stood alongside the now deceased leader of Cerberus. Upon laying his eyes on the corpse, Toby's eyes widened in shock and horror.

"You!" Toby exclaimed.

"Well," Robin snarked, "if it isn't the Former-President Slutty Butthole! Mr. Harper is dead-tired right now. Galactic domination is a tiring business; he needed a rest."

Toby Dunn glared at Robin and clenched his fists.

"Well, listen up, you pathetic excuse of a traitor," Toby began to threaten.

"Of all this shit you pulled off during your administration, and you call her a traitor?"

Toby turned around to face Kaidan, Ashley, and Kolyat after they had successfully sabotaged his shuttle.

"That's bold," Kaidan continued.

C-Sec officers began to come out from hiding behind the numerous crates around the dock.

"Besides, maybe you'd feel better about other species when I say that Earth should still handle your trial," Decian added, directing his men to arrest the politician.

With the former president about to be taken into custody, Robin stepped over to Garrus.

"Shepard?" Garrus paused.

"I do know one thing," Robin said, "we do have a huge mess to clean up."

Chapter End Notes

Oh, and this is for Nemi Almasy: I hope you enjoyed Decian Chellick's cameo appearance in this chapter, since you like him! ;)
With Cerberus overthrown, the reinforcements Garrus brought over helped provide relief to the survivors over the course of a week. However, Brendan was still in the hospital, so Garrus, Robin, Saren, Miranda and Victus headed over to the docking bay, anticipating the arrival of General Keagan Shepard, Admiral David Anderson and Admiral Steven Hackett in an Alliance vessel. It was still early in the morning when the SSV Kilimanjaro entered the docks. Of the first crew to walk off the docking bridge were the three officers followed by a small attachment. Primarch Victus did a light bow before sticking a hand out to shake Hackett's hand.

"Admiral Hackett, my name is G- Primarch Victus. It's a pleasure to meet you."

"It's an honor and pleasure to meet you too in an instance besides an attempt at a treaty or acceptance of surrender. You look surprisingly well for having survived a massive attack like that," Hackett replied.

"It was rough. More of us would have died in the action if it weren't for the collective efforts of the geth, quarians, krogan, and the marines of the Alliance Navy. You gentlemen should be proud of the men you train," Adrien sighed.

General Keagan stepped forward, lightly coughing.

"About the marines. Did any of the ground team survive?" Keagan asked.

"Your son is in medical care at Huerta Hospital," Adrien offered, "you can visit him if you'd like."

Admiral Anderson nodded to Keagan. Just then, Hannah Shepard emerged from the SSV Kilimanjaro, and to Robin's amazement, her mother appeared to be in better condition than when she was admitted to the hospital in Shanxi.

"Robin! Oh sweetheart, you had us so worried!" her mother cried out as she rushed forward for a hug.

Robin smiled and returned the hug.

"Mom, it's ok," Robin smiled, "Garrus looked after me as promised."

The group entered a transport provided for the group, taking them to the Presidium.

"In light of the war and this incident, the Council has commissioned a few changes to prevent such a war from reoccurring. At least anytime soon," Victus started, "I'm aware the political stage on Earth hasn't recovered from such changes and is dealing with what's left of Cerberus on the homefront, but it's a part of the steps. The geth, quarians, krogan, and the Systems Alliance if you accept the offer will be receiving an embassy on the Citadel."

Anderson nodded.

"We accept, Primarch. It was a mistake on our part to separate such important bonds in the first place, and even more foolish to elect such a corrupt leader."
Saren nodded in agreement.

"All sins will be forgiven; and in time, the errors that lead to this war will be forgotten. But the lessons will hopefully remain as we work together in the future."

"Hopefully," Keagan acknowledged.

He nearly had a heart attack when he received news Brendan had been downed in the field, surrounded by Cerberus forces. It didn't take long for the transport to arrive at the Huerta Hospital, so once it landed, Garrus, Robin, Adrien, Saren, Miranda, Hannah, Keagan, Anderson and Hackett disembarked the transport and made their way into the hospital. Outside of the Huerta lobby, Hackett stopped to turn to Keagan.

"General Shepard, we'll simply be discussing matters further down here. You and your family can take time to visit the commander, we can fill you in on anything important you may have missed once you return."

Robin, Garrus, Hannah, and Keagan checked in with the receptionist before walking to Brendan and James' room. Aside from a set of minor scratches and bruises, the most prominent injury on Brendan's body was a giant hole in his chest, covered up by a medical patch. Robin sat down on a chair next to Brendan's bed and placed her hand on his.

The young man slowly opened his tired eyes, looking at the family around him. Lightly smiling, he welcomed them with a gravelly, dry voice.

"Mom, dad, Robin Hood…did…did I…?"

"You're still here, Brendan," Keagan got down on a knee and put his hand against Brendan's forehead. "you helped save the day."

Brendan couldn't help but smile.

"T-Thanks, dad," he said.

Brendan tilted his head towards Robin.

"Not only that," Robin added, "Garrus and I teamed up with C-Sec to apprehend the former president when he tried to move in."

Brendan chuckled before lightly coughing.

"You showed him, didn't you?" Brendan replied.

"He'll get what he deserves back on Earth," his father confirmed.

Brendan tilted his head towards James, who was merely asleep.

"Yeah. A lot of good guys died that day."

"We're proud of you, Brendan," Hannah whispered, kissing Brendan on the cheek.

"Their lives weren't in vain. If you want to respect them, live on for them," his father continued.

"I know I will," Brendan whispered.

With that, Brendan nestled his head into the pillow so he can continue to get his rest, which ended
the visit for the day. Robin, Garrus, Hannah and Keagan stepped out of the N7 commander's room and returned to the lobby, rejoining with Saren, Anderson, Hackett, Miranda and Victus.

"I hope your visit was pleasant, general," Anderson said, seeing the four return, "the Council now has time for our conference."

Robin made a brief glance at Keagan, who nodded at his daughter before she returned her gaze towards Anderson.

"Ok," Robin said, "let's get this done."

After a brief walk to the Citadel Tower and a relatively long ride to the top, the group exited into the dark, echoing chambers of politics that represented the very top of intergalactic society. Standing on their platform, Sparatus, Tevos and Valern have been well rested from the crisis, ready to set aside the conflict.

"Admirals, General, Ambassador, it's a pleasure you were willing to accept our invitation," Councilor Valern greeted.

"As much as we'd like to spend time mending our society, we do have to realize our priorities," Admiral Hackett returned.

"I agree. Primarch, I assume you are just as willing to conclude this conflict?" Councilor Sparatus asked.

"I'm elated," Victus agreed, "however, I'm also willing to take the time to methodically think this process over, lest the actions we decide upon jeopardize society in such a way that it merely sets the stage for the next conflict or series of conflicts."

"Then let us start the discussion," Anderson suggested.

"As established, both sides and various non-participants show demand to conclude the conflict due to its disruptive nature," Councilor Tevos started, "as the threat that had initially reignited the war is still present on the human homeworld, we as representatives of our races are willing to contributing towards the eradication of Cerberus."

"I believe there is a much greater underlying problem to this conflict, Councilors," Saren interrupted, "humans are still very new to the presence of other sentient races than their own, and change in public opinion is slow to change on Earth. This subtle level of suspicion to other races is the basis upon which the Dunn Administration worked on to manipulate Earth into restarting the war. To help reduce the number of recruits available to Cerberus, we need to generate the idea on Earth that it is culturally acceptable to develop social bonds with other races, and possibly similarly with turians towards humans."

In the midst of the discussion, Robin made a brief glance at Garrus, who allowed her to grasp his hand before she returned her gaze to the Councilors.

"If there are any new requirements as of now," Robin said, "then I'm all ears."

"Whatever you should have in mind, Spectre Arterius, speak it," Sparatus encouraged.

The Councilor had no idea what would suffice in generating trust without being controversial to the point of developing animosity instead. Saren, Garrus and Robin exchanged glances before the Spectre faced the Councilors once again.
"Ambassador Shepard and Commander Vakarian have grown closer since the Inauguration earlier this year," Saren clarified, "I suggest we let them represent their own species in a political marriage that will guarantee the treaty."

The group of Alliance officers were about to object, but suddenly held their silence and began to quietly squabble amongst each other about the moral implications, and general reasoning behind the course of action. The trio straightened back up, but only continued to give each other wary glances like they were poker players that weren't willing to truly devote to their move. Taking a nervous breath, Hackett was the one to speak up.

"It's a reasonable request," Hackett said.

Hannah gave an annoyed glance at the three for their sheepish response.

"An…interesting proposal to say the very least," Sparatus commented, "however, it does seem like an effective method of leading by example. At least as long as both the ambassador and commander agree."

Robin and Garrus exchanged glances once again.

"Garrus," Robin told Garrus, "I know I wanted to advocate for interspecies marriage once we dealt with this crisis. If this is what the Council needs to bridge the gap, then I'll gladly marry you. You up for it?"

Garrus chuckled while he scratched his mandible.

"Well, why the hell not?" Garrus nodded, "there's nobody in this galaxy that I respect more than you. If we can figure out how to make it work, then…yeah. Definitely."

With Robin's nod of approval, Garrus tapped his forehead to hers. Pausing, Anderson slowly decided to follow suit.

"Well…with that in mind…maybe this could work," Anderson said.

Keagan, even if his colleagues were somewhat skeptical, felt inclined to agree, keeping a protective eye over his daughter.

"We accept these terms," Keagan added, "along with whatever support the Hierarchy will need to recover from the war."

With that acknowledgment, Sparatus nodded.

"I accept the peace treaty terms," Sparatus agreed.

"As do we," Hackett agreed, looking at the others for encouragement.

"Then it is set. Thank you gentlemen for coming to an agreement. This meeting is adjourned," Tevos concluded.

The group walked away from the Council with an air of relief.

"Like ripping off a bandage," Keagan muttered.

Still, Hannah couldn't help but let out a sigh.

"Robin, are you sure you understand what you're getting yourself into?" Hannah asked, "I know
you're eager to make friends with turians, but marrying one?"

"It's because I trust Garrus well enough for it," Robin reassured.

"As Saren mentioned earlier, Robin and Garrus have developed some affection for each other over the course of this mission," Miranda repeated, "you don't need to worry, they both want this."

Even if Keagan knew he wanted his daughter to be safe, he would also want her to be happy. It didn't take long for the group to step out into the Presidium.

"If it earns your trust, Garrus promised he'd keep the ambassador safe. Robin is alive and well, no?" Saren commented.

Keagan nodded.

"So…how are we going to carry out this wedding ceremony?" Hackett pondered, "I suppose we'll have to consider the setting as a start."

Robin couldn't help but grin.

"If anything," Robin mused, "I really don't want anything too fancy."

Hackett, Anderson, and Keegan quickly returned to Earth to continue overseeing recovery and the continued witch hunt for pockets of Cerberus. Saren and Miranda left the others to enjoy a late brunch with each other out on the Presidium, in a cafe largely untouched by the conflict. Robin and Garrus brought Hannah to meet Robin's friends and to spread the news about the peace treaty.

"They're good people, Hannah," Garrus reassured, "everyone played their part in the fight."

Hannah returned a light smile.

"I hope they are. And please, just call me 'mom'. You may as well get used to it," Hannah insisted.

Joker couldn't help but scratch his head.

"So, Robin Hood," Jack grinned, "what's the big news?"

Robin sat down across from Jack.

"To prove to everyone that turians and humans can get along fine," Robin answered, "Garrus and I are engaged."

The group of friends were caught completely by surprise by the announcement, expressing a mix of disbelief before shifting to collectively give their congratulations.

"Shit! Really?!!" Jack exclaimed.

"Aaawww, you two would make a lovely couple!" Kasumi cooed.

"Heh! Didn't think I'd ever hear it!" Kaidan chuckled.

Robin nodded.

"I trust him well enough to commit to him anyway," Robin smiled.

With that, Robin and Jack exchanged fist bumps. Hannah gave a surprised look.
"In hindsight, maybe I'm just surprised. Just months ago, you and your friends escaped Earth with literally just the clothes on your back. Now, you guys are the force that led the Galaxy against Cerberus and stopped another war before it could gain any momentum."

"Most likely because Robin inspired us to stand up to the injustice Cerberus threw at us," Ashley replied.

"Thanks, Ash," Robin chuckled.

Kaidan headed over to the kitchen and scoured through the fridge for any drinks.

"Excuse me Mrs. Shepard, is there anything I could get you? We're still slightly underage, so we don't have anything alcoholic in the apartment," Kaidan asked, breaking out a few sodas for the group.

"That's all right," Hannah reassured, "I could go for some tea."

Kaidan prepared a cup for the parent before handing around the drinks. Proposing a toast, Kaidan lifted up his bottle.

"Alright, here's to a happy couple, guys! The best of wishes from all of us to you two, Robin and Garrus!" Kaidan announced.

"Cheers!" Joker, Kasumi, Jack and Ashley said in unison.

They all sipped their drinks at the same time, especially with Robin savoring the refreshment of her lemonade. Having pulled through such a challenging situation that spanned months, Robin felt confident that people of various political affiliations would soon open their minds to new ideas that would shape a better future.

Chapter End Notes

Speaking of First Contact War ended by Shakarian marriage AUs, it sure took around 55 chapters to get there.
In case you're interested, I made an illustration of Robin and Garrus in their wedding garments: Interspecies Marriage Legalized

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Spring of 2158

While fastening her earrings, Robin felt her input on how their wedding should play out was worth it. She took a moment to snatch a pair of stylized flat-heeled shoes that matched her dress before she slipped them on. All the while, Ashley was in the middle of adjusting the zipper of her dress and Kaidan combed his hair. Confident with having completed her look, Robin turned her head towards the mirror.

Robin herself was never particularly fond of the flowing designs of more traditional dresses, feeling they were excessive, extravagant, and very inconvenient. Her dress looked more like a skirt, defined by a pale blue for the primary color. Wrapping around the waist and collar was an extra pair of blue sashes, contrasting the pale color with a deeper shade with the collar sash held to the dress by a pair of brooches. Finally, her small headdress, necklace, and trim around her dress were decorated with seashells and pearls of various types and colors. She smiled as she twirled around, looking at the details in the mirror. It was beautiful, simplistic, and functional without veering into the extremities of too ornate or simplistic.

Satisfied with her look, Robin picked up a simple bouquet consisting of a couple sunflowers, a few daisies and some lilacs. By then, Kaidan and Ashley finished their looks.

"Ok, guys," Robin called over, "you ready?"

"Sure," Ashley nodded.

Just then, Anderson stepped into the dressing room, clad in his officer uniform.

"Looking good, ambassador," Anderson complimented, "the ceremony's almost ready to begin, I came in to check."

Close behind the admiral was Garrus in his full dress as well. He wore a turian ceremonial tunic with black pants. The tunic was a medium shade of blue on the upper half, a dark gray on the lower half, and a golden yellow for the collar and sleeve cuffs. Layered on top of the shoulders was a ceremonial sash of a deep navy blue tipped more golden yellow. Around his neck and at the tips of the strands were ornaments displaying his clan emblem.

"Robin…you look…" he stuttered breathlessly.

"Stunning, thanks," Robin added.

Offering his hand, Garrus led Robin out of the room.

"Are you ready?"
"As ready as you are," Robin nodded.

Out on the Presidium, nearly opposite to the Citadel Tower, was a small, full-circle pantheon for various ceremonies. Two paths on opposite sides of the circle lead to the center between equal halves, meeting on an elevated platform in the middle. Primarch Adrien Victus stood in the middle platform clad in a turian ceremonial robe.

Amidst the crowd were their friends, family, and allies they had fought and bled alongside for the duration of the incident. From her side, Robin could see Garrus and his groom escort, including Castis, Liara, Tali, Thane, and Wrex.

"Loco, you sure you're ready to do this?" James asked, "maybe you should just keep back for this part."

Brendan had been left paralyzed by the sniper round he'd taken, and was still recovering. Until he could walk again, he rolled around in his wheel chair.

"And miss this? I may be a meal on wheels, but I'm not missing out on Robin Hood's big day."

Robin smiled and extended her hand, allowing Brendan to shake it.

"I'm glad you could come, Brendan," Robin said.

Still, Garrus and Robin stood at the opposite ends of the aisles with their escorts getting into position. It took a while for the guests to find their seats and around half an hour later, Admiral Hackett arrived with a Scottish pipe band following him. The group watched as the Admiral and Primarch shook hands. By her side were Ashley, Kaidan, James, her brother and father, and Admiral Anderson as her bridal escort. After that, Hackett saluted and the Scottish pipe band started playing a custom music score, initiating the procession.

"It's our turn to make a show, people. Let's go," Anderson encouraged.

Upon cue, Tali and James walked through the opposing aisles first, followed by Kaidan and Liara, Brendan and Thane and then Ashley and Wrex. Keagan also walked down the bridal aisle and stood alongside Hackett once he reached the center platform. Walking up the aisle with Castis and Anderson escorting them, Garrus and Robin met at the center of the stage, just a meter apart. At the podium, Victus gave a speech for the ceremony.

"We gather here, representatives of the major warring powers to conclude a solemn agreement upon which peace may be restored. It was out of spite, misunderstanding, and fear of that which we don't understand that drove both sides to this conflict. Amidst the chaos and carnage, heroes from both sides came forth to the understanding of the roots of the ensuing war, and it is these valiant men and women that set out to rectify the mistakes we've made so that both sides may rise to a higher dignity. It is my earnest hope, and indeed the hope of all who inhabit this galaxy that new bonds and friendships may rise in the future from the blood and hostilities of the past—in a galaxy of understanding of our enemies in such a way we can treat each other as friends. Thank you."

A short applause erupted from the crowd seconds later. After that, Victus turned towards both Robin and Garrus.

"Vakarian, Shepard," Victus advised, "I suppose you have prepared your vows to forge your bond?"

Garrus and Robin nodded before they exchanged glances with one another.

"I, Garrus Vakarian," Garrus started, "swear an oath of loyalty to you as your mate. I promise to be
as supportive as your waist."

Robin smiled before she gave Garrus a nod.

"I, Robin Shepard," Robin replied, "swear an oath of loyalty to you as your mate. Whatever I get myself into, I promise to make sure we both make it out alive."

Victus nodded in approval. Anderson and Hackett picked up small vases and handed them to Robin and Garrus while Adrien placed an empty jar onto the podium.

"The sand in your hands represent your spirits becoming one," Victus announced.

Robin and Garrus approached the podium and took turns pouring their colored sand into the jar in layers, creating an artistic pattern before they finished. Smiling, Robin picked up the lid and closed the jar. Both the human ambassador and the turian commander returned their gaze towards the Primarch, who handed both of them a bowl of flower petals.

"These petals represent free spirits when they take flight," Adrien continued.

Garrus and Robin exchanged glances before they lifted the bowls higher than their heads. A convenient wind plucked the flower petals out of the bowls and they drifted off into the horizon.

With the second ritual complete, the young Shepard and the Vakarian commander placed the bowls back onto the podium before they stood closer.

"Commander Vakarian," Victus advised, "I suggest it's time you claim your mate for the crowd to witness."

Garrus hovered his maw over Robin's neck, before pausing to give his mate an assuring glance.

"You ready?" Garrus asked.

"Yes," Robin nodded, "more than anything."

Robin leaned into Garrus's embrace, allowing him to use his teeth to locate the base of her neck, the same place where he found his bite marks from one of their earlier encounters. He sunk his teeth into her while she shuddered, drawing out trickles of blood and blending in his hormones. Drawing his teeth out, he put his forehead to hers, followed by an applause from the crowd. It didn't take long for Victus to nod in approval.

"May the Spirits bless these bondmates across time and space," Victus announced.

After the wedding, one of the remaining restaurants had been reserved for the occasion, and one that had finished being repaired. Still, the reception that was scheduled to last a couple of hours took place in a garden and Victus arranged for some snacks, drinks and games to be available for everyone. While the Councilors, Victus, Anderson and Hackett read through the treaty before taking turns signing it, Garrus and Robin sat at the same table, having a good laugh with their other companions. During a brief bit of down time, he turned to face her.

"Robin, did you ever think we'd make it this far? To the marriage I mean?" Garrus asked.

"If anything," Robin replied, "there could've been various situations that would've ended both of us. It's just luck that let us pushed through."

He chuckled as he felt the scarred plating on the right side of his face.
"Yeah. Speaking of luck, what's next?" Garrus pondered.

Robin made a glance at Joker, Kaidan, Ashley, Jack and Kasumi while they were playing a beanbag toss game.

"You up for some fun, Garrus?" Robin suggested.

Brendan wheeled his way past as Robin and Garrus walked by to join a game of beanbag toss. Pausing outside of the restaurant, he looked into the distance at the Citadel Control tower, with workers replacing the burnt parts and damaged wall plating, pondering his mortality. It was probably due to blood loss, but he could've sworn that day he saw the man in black with the scythe waiting for his final breath.

"Needed fresh air, commander?" Vega asked with a beer in his hand.

Brendan looked back and smiled.

"Yeah," Brendan advised, "also, feel free to use my first name more frequently."

"You got it, Brendan," James nodded.

"We did good, James. Every last one of us," Brendan chuckled, turning around, "seeing you with that bottle is making me thirsty."

"I can get you one on my tab," James winked.

Now that both soldiers had their own bottle, Vega lifted his to the other.

"To the Corps and the Illusive Man's dead-ass," James bragged.

Brendan broke into a full laugh.

"To the Corps and the Illusive Man's dead-ass."

After taking a drink, Brendan and James took a brief glance at the screen, observing the news of Toby Dunn's removal from office after his impeachment.

"When marines fight for the right cause, the day after a good fight will always feel a bit brighter," Brendan said with a smile.

Brendan and James took a moment to read the menu.

Saren and Miranda watched Garrus and Robin happily from their table as they sipped their wine.

"Huh, so that's what a bonding ceremony would be like?" Miranda asked.

"At its core, yes," Saren answered, "usually, there isn't some looming vibe about a previously fought war like the current one had."

"I can understand that," Miranda agreed.

"I'd prefer if ours would be a bit quieter," Saren hummed thoughtfully.

Miranda placed her hand on Saren's, eliciting a blush out of him.

"You know, I feel the same way," Miranda mused.
Kelly and Lantar were talking with Okeer and Hazel, with the young Grunt sitting in Hazel's lap with a toy.

"So what are you two up to now that the Genophage is treated?"

"Simple," Okeer answered, "we're taking small steps in helping rebuild our society. The ambassador has helped with offering us tips."

"Maybe over the next couple of centuries, there'll be more than sand dunes and ruins on Tuchanka," Hazel added, brushing Grunt's head crest, "what about you two?"

"So far," Kelly answered, "we're kinda figuring out how to make our dates enjoyable."

Kelly turned her head towards Sidonis.

"Right?" Kelly continued.

Sidonis chuckled as he scratched his mandible.

Tali, Liara, Legion, Wrex, Thane, and Mordin were talking about the last several months leading up to the marriage.

"It's probably been the most times I've been back home in recent years," Wrex sighed with disbelief.

"Do you have any heritage back at home?" Thane asked.

"What?" Wrex paused.

"Unlikely. Wrex had extensive career. Probably didn't try often. If at all," Mordin answered hastily.

"Eh, had some bad blood with my father, and stayed away for the longest time," Wrex added.

Tali nodded in acknowledgment.

"I can relate," Tali replied, "it feels nice to take the suit off for once. Even with the small chance of getting sick, it's worth it to see the sunset without the stuffy inside of these suits getting through to us."

Liara smiled.

"So Mordin, what do you have in mind now?" Liara asked.

"Don't know. Will probably retire to Tuchanka. Watch it rebuild. It'll be pleasant," the doctor answered, rubbing his chin with thought.

Liara and Tali exchanged glances before they took sips from their drinks.

"Retiring?" Tali confirmed.

"Yes. Retiring. Salarians don't live as long. Had long life. Expect to see accomplishments throughout career pay off. Maybe will study local wildlife during free-time," Mordin hummed, carefree.

"Well then, it's honor to work alongside you," Liara replied.

"So Legion, what's going on in the Geth's embassy?" Wrex inquired suddenly.

Legion had otherwise been sitting patiently, as the geth platform had neither any need to eat or drink,
and was quietly contemplating the conversation among the others before being approached by Wrex's question. As there were only a handful of platforms designed to carry the number of geth he had, he and the others were the only geth present at the geth's embassy.

"Have been approached a few times within the last weeks by various organics concerning our function and supposed biology," Legion blinked.

"Perhaps they were curious," Tali assumed.

Legions facial panels flicked with curiosity.

"Is that why they had left so suddenly in the midst of their conversation?"

Thane scratched his head.

"I…I believe…" Thane tried to bite back a chuckle, but he instead let out a wheezy laugh like a steaming water pot.

Legion gave Thane a blank stare, yet it didn't flinch. If it had the ability to make expressions, it would've expressed its confusion. By then, Tali noticed Nihlus and Chellick finishing up a game of chess and placing the board game back on the display before they got up for drinks.

"Is anyone up for some chess?" Tali offered.

"We will engage," Legion answered.

"Aaaaaaaaand the Geth Rebellions just restarted," Wrex quipped.

"At least this one is mild," Tali countered playfully.

With that, Tali and Legion picked up the board game from the display and started their game while the reception continued on, some of the guests serving themselves some snacks.

Chapter End Notes

And now I will thank SochiTsuzuki for giving me some bits of inspiration for this fanfic if not this chapter, and here's her fanfic that shares the similar idea as this chapter: Marry Me For Peace
With the reception over, Robin and Garrus invited Castis, Solana, Keagan, Hannah and Castis's wife over to the restaurant where they had their first date that evening. This time, they made different orders from before.

"So Castis, were you ever military?" Keagan asked, "I heard the turians undergo mandatory service from their mid-to-late teens."

"I was for a couple of years," Castis replied, "after that, I went straight to C-Sec for a long career there. I only gave up my position there a couple of years ago before finding a place among local law enforcement back on Palaven."

"No rest for the wicked, huh?" Hannah sighed.

Castis shook his head.

"Someone, somewhere is making trouble. From what Garrus told me," Castis said, "you were always on the move, given your careers within the Alliance."

"Yeah. With the rapid expansion into the unknown territories, I was sent around clearing local wildlife or fending off local pirate groups while Hannah was the backbone helping colonists establish prefabs and crop fields," Keagan explained, "for the most part, we brought Brendan and Robin with us. Eventually, they both returned to Earth, Brendan following in my footsteps while Robin wanted to finish school. I still don't know what to say, hearing she landed herself in the role of the Alliance's ambassador."

"I think I understand how she got into it," Garrus mused.

Robin scratched her head.

"What can I say?" Robin joked, "apparently I'm the galaxy's favorite troublemaker."

Her mother-in-law was slow to speak, due to her slow recovery from Corpalis Syndrome.

"Where do you two plan to be now you're together?" she asked.

"Knowing Robin's record? Trouble will somehow still find its way onto our doorstep. Can't say sitting around all day would be particularly interesting either," Garrus quipped, "we'll figure things out as we go."

Robin nodded in agreement while she stroked her mate's hand with her thumb. Solana couldn't help but roll her eyes and chuckle as she supported her chin with her palm and forearm.

"At least being a certified troublemaker comes from both sides of the family. It'll make arguments much harder when the kids roll around and you two can't make up your minds where they got it from."

"I think I'll stick to sightseeing wonders of the galaxy for now," Robin blurted.

"There's still the worry about environmental compatibility," Keagan mentioned, "you may be from a family of astronauts, but you still don't have the radiation resistance needed to live on the likes of Palaven. Where do you two plan on establishing home? Last I heard, turians weren't good
swimmers, and Earth's surface is seventy-five percent water on the surface."

"I'm sure we'll find some other home that would be suitable for both of us," Robin reassured her father, "if not the Citadel itself."

The group turned to see a waiter approaching with their meals.

"I'm sure you two will find something," Castis encouraged, "you always find some solution to work with."

Garrus smiled just before the entire entourage start eating. The group had a few small laughs as they continued with their meal. As they waited for the check, the group prodded Robin and Garrus questions about their adventures after the two escaped Earth's authority. The mere mention of the event made the couple feel like it had happened years ago opposed to just one year. By the time they paid the bill, they all stepped out of the restaurant.

"It was good talking to you guys," Robin told the Vakarian parents.

"It was a pleasure having a better opportunity to talk with you two, away from the crowds at the wedding, anyways," Garrus said, bidding farewell to the elder Shepards.

Garrus held Robin's hand as they walked happily across the Presidium back to their apartment. Inside, Robin changed out of her wedding garment and gently set them back in their placeholders before slipping on a nightgown with spaghetti straps and a hemline that reached slightly above her knees. She met up with Garrus, who already changed out of his ceremonial garb and was now sitting on a couch with a floor lamp illuminating the room. Robin sat down next to Garrus and leaned in to embrace him.

"When your parents asked about a definite home, it had me thinking," Garrus hummed, "Eden Prime would be a nice, beautiful place to settle now that Cerberus is on its last legs. It's open, has clean air, a beautiful landscape, and still open as far as colonies go."

"That's a good option," Robin replied.

Still, Garrus returned the embrace and ran his talons through her hair, letting her respond by brushing her hand against his carapace.

"So what are your thoughts on the whole 'married couple' business? What'd you have in mind?" Garrus asked, cupping her face in his palm while the other hand continued to comb through her hair.

"I know this is not our first rodeo," Robin replied, "but is it ok if we savor this night we have alone?"

Garrus flicked his mandibles into a grin, allowing Robin to lean in and give him a soft kiss. Garrus scooped his arms under her and lifted her up and away from the living room.

"If that's what you'd want, I'd prefer to do this in the bedroom."

While Garrus ambled over to their bedroom, Robin perched her arms around his carapace. Carefully putting her down on the mattress, he began to strip off his shirt before climbing in after her. The turian commander rested on his side in a seductive pose and he couldn't help but beckon her closer with one talon. Robin crept closer to Garrus and pulled him into a passionate kiss.

"It's been a long day. Hopefully, you still have some lingering energy for a finishing touch?" Garrus asked as he reached a talon for her bra.
"I've longed for it since this morning," Robin answered.

Robin reached for the hem of her nightgown and lifted it over her head before she set it aside.

"Splendid," Garrus purred.

He dragged an extended lick up the side of her neck as her nightgown came off and over the side of the bed. Gradually, he worked off the bra and tossed it behind him by the bed stand. After he did, Robin climbed on top of him and straddled her legs over his hips while she massaged his waist with her hands. Joining their mouths for another kiss, he felt his belt come loose and his pants yanked down. In similar fashion, he trailed a hand down her side before tugging her panties out of the way. His plating hadn't shifted yet, but he nuzzled his mandibles against her neck while he caressed her lower back with one hand. Robin bit back a moan and she kneaded the side of his neck with her hand. Continuing to keep a hold on her lower back, Garrus raised the other hand to thumb her nipple, knowing it would produce results. Feeling her hand on the back of his neck made his spine tingle. She ran her other hand underneath his fringe and he couldn't help but groan.

Drawing his hand up her back behind her shoulders, his breathing started to stutter as he felt his lower plates shift. Taking the hint, Robin started brushing her fingers along his slit. It didn't take long for Garrus to trace his talon along her back and find the apex between her legs.

"The ceremony was nice, but it sure as hell was tantalizing too."

While Robin perched her hands on his shoulder, Garrus figured he should ensure she was prepared, so he started by teasing her nub with his talon, causing her to arch her back and let out soft cries. Moments later, Garrus shifted her into a sitting position while he used one hand to stroke his length as it started to emerge. At his full length, he adjusted himself in order to level the tip with her face.

"I was thinking of trying this out. By the way, I've got meds in the nightstand if you need them."

"Thanks," Robin nodded.

With Garrus on his knees, Robin took his length in her hand and gave his tip a slow lick. Shuddering, Garrus planted one hand against the wall while he stroked her hair with the other just as she took him into her mouth, swirling her tongue over its ridges and short dull spines. The turian commander resisted the urge to thrust, and instead he allowed her to stroke his base with her hand while she bobbed her head. Under her ministrations, Garrus felt himself harden in a matter of minutes, so he beckoned her to withdraw her mouth.

"Garrus?" Robin paused.

"How about I return the favor?" Garrus offered.

Understanding what he meant, Robin nodded. Upon cue, Garrus lowered himself and aligned his head with her nether region before he started swirling his tongue around her nub, eliciting a soft gasp out of her as she bucked her hips. He continued to just lick the folds listening with glee to the pleasant sounds she'd make.

"Hmmm, you taste rather lovely. I could practically eat you up right now."

Robin responded by perching her legs over his shoulders while she mewled. Eventually, Garrus' curiosity finally got the better of him, he stuck his face right in, and injected his tongue. Inside of her, his tongue danced around as it felt her. Robin moaned as she grabbed a handful of the sheets in her
fists, sweat beading out of her skin. With his arms around her legs, he kept her in place while he continued to taste her slick insides, feeling her body convulse. Inching closer to her climax, Robin couldn't help but pant as she rested her head against the wall. Garrus felt her walls close in on his tongue as well as the rest of her body shudder. Pulling his tongue out, he chuckled.

"You enjoyed that."

"Definitely," Robin agreed, "but I can still go for another round."

Nodding in agreement, Garrus lifted Robin into his arms and pressed her against the wall, allowing her to perch her arms on his carapace while he aligned his position.

"I hope that was a sufficient invitation for you," Garrus said, with a subtle level of invitation, "I myself am ready to proceed."

Robin cupped Garrus's face and gave him a soft kiss. Holding her close, he pushed his way inside of her, eliciting mewls out of her. Upon initial entrance, he kept himself and his strokes at a relatively easy pace. However, he noticeably got faster with every thrust not too long after. He felt her grip tighten as she ground her hips with his in sync to his thrusts, her breath quickening and her blush turning a darker red. Garrus tried to say something amidst his thrusting, but due to the fluctuating waves of pleasure, it came out more like a series of incoherent growls. Coincidentally, Robin couldn't come up with any words either as they were drowned out by her own moans. While she hooked her legs around his pelvis, Garrus licked her neck and face, both of them feeling pressure build up inside of them and eager for release. Several thrusts later, Robin shuddered in her climax and she tightened around her turian mate's length. That was enough for him to grunt as he reached his own peak moments later.

He laid the two of them down, panting as he reached for the meds in the bedside table and handing it to Robin. His breathing still heaved as he touched his forehead to hers. Once she washed the allergy med down with a glass of water, she nestled into Garrus's embrace.

"I love you, Garrus," Robin whispered, "I'm really glad we met."

Garrus closed his eyes.

"I love you too, Robin."

Smiling, Robin nuzzled her face against Garrus's, eliciting purring out of him as he held her close and brushed his hand through her short hair.

"Hey, Garrus?" Robin whispered, "I did watch a vid involving a male turian doctor caring for his patient in such a sexual manner. Maybe we could try it out later on?"

"Yeah, I could see us doing that," he hummed drowsily.

While Robin and Garrus drifted off to sleep, the thoughts drifting in their minds involved how they would work as teammates in their respective careers.
Outstanding Inauguration

Chapter Notes

I'm amazed TutorVeritatis, Dr. Compass and I were able to finish this fanfic in a matter of five months. And now that we've come to the last chapter, I'm sure it will be worth the buildup. Unfortunately, I am not planning a sequel for it. Oh well.

By the year 2160, the entire galaxy settled down from the crisis. By then, Robin had completed her college degree and had the training she'll need as ambassador. This gave her enough confidence to keep up to date with current events and travel to intervene in any problems that would occur across any colonies if needed. She even stood up to batarian slavers one time when they attempted to set up their own camp in a human colony, a move that baffled such a brutal species.

This also meant for a new Election year. By then, humans that have studied well in politics and were well familiar with current events became candidates for various offices ranging from local, state and then to federal. By now, many of them have affiliated with the three major parties and have equal opportunity to reach out to the American public. Since Toby Dunn can never run for a second term, this meant new presidential candidates.

It was early in the morning on the Citadel Presidium, and Garrus calmly walked into the living room before putting the mug on a coaster and turning on the television. He wasn't nearly as invested as Robin or her friends were, but now he had become increasingly keen on how politics on Earth unfolded, simply due to the amount of power some human politicians could have, and just how the exchange of positions could easily mean the drastic shift in which political flavor and popular opinions would be upheld and who would be ostracized.

For the years that followed the incident with Cerberus, politics were an absolute mess on Earth, with the various nations scrambling to dissolve Cerberus, whole companies being torn down for their affiliation with the now-dubbed terrorist group, and widespread witch-hunts for the Illusive Man's various puppets. Even Brendan and James returned to Earth for an extensive series of missions to prevent the remaining Cerberus cells from sparking a planet-wide civil war to give themselves some breathing room to regroup with. He felt somewhat relieved when the Systems Alliance had finally announced the complete disassembly of the faction within the last year.

For the moment, Garrus watched as Robin saw a vid of Saren and Miranda interviewing one of the new presidential candidates, and this one had progressive views, much to her liking.

"Nice to see Miranda and Saren doing well for themselves," Garrus commented, looking at her screen.

"Yeah," Robin agreed, "they probably have plenty of time on their hands."

As far as Garrus remembered, even after the war ended, Miranda entered a partnership with Saren and they've been teaming up to deal with Spectre assignments since then.

"I'm just glad this is all over for the time being," Garrus said, looking back to the news report of the US election on Earth, "with the mess we ran through, it's nice to slow down a bit, remember what things are like to be slow and quiet."
Robin nodded in agreement. Garrus stood up and opened his omni-tool.

"Anyways, I was looking over some places on Eden Prime, and I found a really nice deal," Garrus offered, "what do you think?"

He showed her a browser page he left open from the night before, depicting a house on a hillside stack of prefabs built into the side of the mountain, with the roads zigzagging up the side. Down below was a valley of green that eventually opened into the heart of the colony below. And to make things better, the house in question was simple and affordable for their budget.

"I must admit," Robin answered, "this looks feasible."

"It has a nice view as well if that's something worth considering," Garrus added, taking a sip from his coffee.

"Then I'll consider it," Robin nodded before she took a sip from her coffee mug.

As the news went to commercials, there was a brief preview where Toby was among a group of convict escapees before inadvertently killing himself in a fit of conflict with his fellow inmates.

"At least we don't have him to worry about anymore," Garrus mused.

Robin nodded while she finished her coffee mug, so she headed over to the kitchen and placed it alongside the dirty mugs on the counter near the kitchen sink. After that, she took a few moments to check on their pet turtle as it swam in its tank in the living room.

"In the meantime," Robin offered, "maybe we can check in on the crew and see how they're doing?"

"The Aran'tar was scheduled to finish with repairs this morning," Garrus mentioned, "I'll check in with the next set of assignments, see what needs to be done if you're looking for some action."

"Maybe some sporting event in Rannoch would be nice?" Robin pondered.

"That can be plausible enough," Garrus nodded.

Garrus got his civies on and waited by the door. He was putting on his shoes when Robin strode into view, having changed into her official uniform which the Council provided her. He quickly checked on the Aran'tar's status via his omni-tool before turning to Robin.

"You ready?" Garrus asked, "because I am."

"As ready as you are," Robin nodded.

The two left their apartment block and quickly caught a taxi not too far away. Riding into the docks, they got out to be greeted by some of the crew mechanics.

"Sir, the various upgrades you ordered to have implemented are fully installed and the ship is ready to leave on your order," the engineer saluted.

"Good. We'll be heading out shortly," Garrus and Robin walked side-by-side as they entered the decontamination chamber.

Once the decontamination process completed, the turian commander and the human ambassador made their way to the bridge, merely to be greeted by Liara and Tali.

"Garrus! Robin! We got word you were coming," Liara greeted.
"You bosh'tets ready to have some fun?" Tali asked enthusiastically, tapping her suited fingers against the galaxy map projector.

"If going on an adventure counts as fun," Robin answered, "then yes."

Garrus smiled as he approached the quarian.

"Sounds like you already had something in mind. Care to share?"

Tali nodded after the Aran'tar gained clearance for takeoff, making its way to an assignment involving solving some issues a bunch of vorcha and elcor living in a colony were trying to deal with.

Following the Cerberus incident, the eventual reveal that Cerberus had not only rigged the election but had also been waging an invisible war against the other sentient species in the Galaxy left a negative taste in the mouths of the public towards speciesist perspectives, rhetoric, and ideals, more so the ideals connected to the given mindset. Even many of the voters who favored the Golf Party regretted electing such a buffoon in the first place. The sentiment eventually helped pave the way for Ahyoka Russell's election in the US that year. There were those that agreed with Cerberus' ideals that clamored for another attempt at uplifting the human race, but never gained any real momentum in the face of the rest of the world's reactions and the rest of the Galactic community was prepared to handle another threat like Cerberus.

By the time January of 2161 arrived, Admiral Hackett and Admiral Anderson invited some guests to attend the inauguration with them. Among these guests included Garrus, Robin, Nihlus, Saren, Miranda, Brendan and the crewmembers of both the Normandy and the Aran'tar. Even Kaidan, Ashley, Kasumi, Jack and Joker were given an invitation to attend. The instant they got the news, they prepared for the trip to Earth and boarded the Normandy and the Aran'tar. Saren wanted to invite his brother to come along, but Desolas politely declined since he had an unrelated assignment from Primarch Victus. It didn't take much else for the Spectre to respect his brother's wishes.

Once both ships left the Citadel and traveled through the Mass Relays to get to the Solar System in Alliance Space, it took a few hours before the Aran'tar and the Normandy arrived on Earth and descended to the planet's surface, arriving at an airfield in Washington DC before everyone disembarked and made their way to a subway station. It didn't take long for Anderson and Hackett to greet them.

"And to think only four years ago, Earth was looking to be in rough shape," Brendan chuckled.

"Yeah, and the trouble I had to get into to keep the situation from getting much worse," Robin remarked.

"It was a short, grueling war. It would've boiled into more if it weren't for your collective actions, Ambassador," Anderson sighed, approaching the Shepard siblings, "it's a pleasure to see you could make it."

Smiling, Robin extended her hand, allowing Anderson to shake it.

"It's a pleasure to still be here, Admiral," Garrus agreed as he approached the trio, "you look like you've seen better days."

"The inner machinations of our collective of governments on Earth are rather headache inducing," Anderson admitted, "once I'm certain we can leave this stage of our existence behind, then I'll consider relaxing."
Anderson, Hackett and their guests waited at the station for the subway to arrive.

"To think it could end as quickly as it did, considering the scale of the conflict…It's all any of us could've hoped for," Hackett said, voice carrying some remaining layer of disbelief.

Once the subway arrived minutes later, everyone boarded the subway and searched for suitable seats with Garrus and Robin sitting next to each other and the same for Saren and Miranda, Brendan and James, Kaidan and Ashley, Kasumi and Tali and then Jack and Wrex to name a few. Minutes later, the subway door closed and began accelerating along the track, making its way through the tunnel.

"Still, Earth has come a long way," Wrex complimented, "chances are, I'd get the boot off planetside the moment anyone lay eyes on me at the spaceport."

The old krogans wore krogan robes, an incredibly rare sight for many to see, given how krogans were more accustomed to wearing their armor around public, much less civies. Jack gave Wrex a pat on the shoulder.

"Not to worry, Wrex," Jack reassured Wrex, "I got your back."

Riding the escalator back out of the station, the group were greeted by the late afternoon US capitol. While many of the older memorials and museums had been left untouched or minimally updated to at least meet construction standards, new buildings began to rise up and crop out the older ones, like untended grass around a white picket fence. They could see crowds upon crowds of guests of various species wandering about in search of their own suitable spot in between the Washington Monument and the Capitol Reflecting Pool.

"I…didn't know there were this many races now on Earth," Garrus muttered with surprise.

Hackett modestly shrugged.

"It's been a gradual process," Hackett replied, "Earth is more of a tourist site for the time being, but there are a few who have decided to make Earth their home."

Hackett and Anderson led their guests through the crowd and a while later, they found a suitable spot near the Capitol Reflecting Pool, where they could get a good view of the Capitol Building. The crowds began to take their seats over the next half hour before the inauguration began. That was when the officials started to emerge from the Capitol Building, including the new President.

As the ceremony began, Garrus took a quick glance around the crowd, noting the minor, though thorough presence of other species in the crowd. After a long pan, he turned his eyes towards Robin.

"You want to go somewhere nice after this?" Garrus asked.

"Maybe we could check out the houses at Eden Prime you showed me?" Robin suggested, "we could even set up a nice bird bath for our yard and maybe a cool pond for our turtle."

"I was thinking about that in the long-run, but in the short-run I was thinking of hitting the bar at least once before we leave planetside. A bit of celebration, right?" Garrus encouraged.

"Let's hope the bar in question has pretzel bites with cheese dip," Robin nodded.

"They'd better. Those are some hard-earned pretzels and cheese. Could you have imagined what fighting Cerberus would've been like had it snowballed into something worse?" Garrus hummed, contemplating the last four years as he stared at the Capitol building.
Not wanting to think up of worst case scenarios, Robin shook her head and she wrapped her arms around Garrus.

"I-It's cold out here," Robin muttered.

"There, there," Garrus cooed, "it's ok."

To be honest, he was shivering himself with the cold weather surrounding them. He'd worn what could be considered turian cold-environment gear for the occasion, but even that wasn't enough to keep out the crisp January air. Garrus returned the embrace and nuzzled his face against Robin's.

"I know there are other things you're good at," Garrus quipped.

"Right," Robin agreed, "because...there's no Shepard without Vakarian."

With that, Garrus and Robin went back to watching the Inauguration progress. A while later, Ahyoka Russell began her speech, swearing her oath of presidency. With many species reflecting on how far they came, they also looked forward to an even more progressive future.

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