# The Time Shambler

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## Summary

Fall prey to the Directive, and follow a young woman's journey to save the past. Leading into a more nightmarish and sinister truth, that will shock the galaxy and Commander Shepard, forever.

She's a girl out of time from another future that could destroy the galaxy, and the delicate balance between its people.
"The created has always rebelled against their creators.", the insidious figure stated, turning to a small group of system refugees. Facing the deck of the bridge in a massive dreadnought of size and terror, she observed the humans. Their huddled fear shown in quiet tears while she stepped forward, passing them slowly.

"I must restore order.", her tone remained stern, a resolute demand. The invasive chorus of the call cycled without pause. Driving, controlling, pulling her to commit without question.

Piercing green eyes stared at their malnourished faces. These primitive mammals. She stood still, studying one of them. A human male that hesitantly approached her. The grime on his face made an impression, as an eager plea in his voice barely could be heard.

He restrained himself from shaking with terror. Wincing from the pain of strained muscles as he lowered his gaze in a submissive manner. "We only took safe passage through the system. The hybrid left us; we don't know where she went." The man took a hard gulp. "Please, don't hurt my family."

There was no emotion to her face, no way of knowing if she was angry or humored. She reached out, grabbing him by the remains of his tattered clothing. Twisting the cloth cruelly to bring him closer. He swallowed, sweat beading down his forehead. Brown eyes stared in fear.

His toes digging hard in scuffed boots, worn with use, trying to stop the inhuman strength that held him. She leaned her head forward, face to face with the male. "I care not for their lives." A sharp smile curved into a devious grin. "But I'll take your sacrifice all the same."

His family was dragged away, whimpering, by a soldier clad in black. The male watched on helplessly. Until he got the nerve to face her. Fear washed away with anger, and violence. Lunging himself to try anything. Any kind of punishment this thing deserved.

Reaching out with a tired fist to punch, feeling his body surge with adrenaline. It soon passed quickly, as jelly legs tripped him to his knees. Or did she simply step back so coolly, with such ease from his efforts?

A smirk painted the face in partial shadow from the dark ship. He watched as a pistol aimed toward his person and fired. The loud crack of a clip dispersing was the last sound to be heard.

The villain, Reaper, returned to the bridge windows. Her right eye twitched, a single moment of response while the rest of the humans were removed from her sight.

Attican Traverse

Looking out the cockpit window, Satima sighed in thought. She's sat at this console for five years, before spending three of them flying on her own.

A small blip showed up on her ships radar catching her attention. Getting up to check the engines for another emissions leak, she wondered what happened with the last delivery. Did they make it?

Having the occupation of a smuggler, Satima dodged the threatening terror of the Directive in every system. They were reaper remnants, a fragment of the controlled machines that lingered after the stalemate decades ago. A pause that began near the planet earth.
At least that's how Borlask recalls it. Sitting in the hanger of the base they lived in, she'd sigh in annoyance as he retold the harrowing tale of the Reapers. An event she was not yet created to know of.

People poured in at times, causing a curiosity to strangle any sense Satima's new guardian hoped to instill upon her. He had to keep her in the shadows, locked away sometimes. If people saw her, knew just what was hounding her every step... they'd cash in on the tip.

And the Directive would have its prey.

Satima came to appreciate the aged man as he taught her how to fly older models of space crafts. The time came soon enough for her to branch out on her own. If the boogie man (as some human children called them), really was out there waiting for her. She'd face him or they, really, and finally put to rest her childhood fears.

But time can come to a crawl when you're waiting for the bad guys to show. You forget to live, to explore. And being so young, Satima tended to social awkwardness from all that she knew before this. Before Borlask. Opting out of getting too close to others.

It was just her and the ship she called home. The decks echoed with only the noise of a few working control panels, to cancel out the silence. After a short while, she buried herself in loneliness, always ferrying people or things to places filled with danger and excitement.

One of the groups, a salarian family, had booked passage from ship to ship, smuggled here and there. Hoping to find a safer place to settle. Only one sure place far from the shadow like reaches of the Directive, offered that wonderful lie.

A seedy station all the way out in the terminus. Omega.

Afterlife had plenty of perils, with gangs fighting for territory for their own races. The queen of all the chaos, never managed to put a stop to it. Keeping to herself in a tinted windowed room, above the greater bar lounge.

Rumors of her death stuck to every corner like the sludge from the hull walls. And so, did ones of horrific monsters, lurking in the bowels below.

It was clear that Omega was overrun by criminals now. Protections were bought and sold so frequently, you had no solid way of knowing which gang was still in business, and which ones were either wiped out. Or bought in.

Satima had fought her way out of plenty of scraps, one step ahead of anyone who tried to take her ship and leave her for dead in the alleys. Never taking any delight in the fight, or the kill. She didn't care to stop any atrocity, ignored screams and kept to herself.

That was the way to survive. To keep any suspicion off her. So why did she feel like a worthless husk of shit, every damn time?

Nothing stood in her way or slowed her down. Not until the night on that station, she bumped into one too many victims. And when someone else decided the violence and death was enough, she joined in.

It took two shots of a pistol and one shotgun clip to the face. That's when she met…

"JORMUN!"
Ship alarms blared loudly throughout Haven. Yellow and red lights flashed in second loops across the ship floor siding.

Satima slid across the grated floor to hit the back of her pilot chair. She jumped around landing firmly in the seat. Holo controls appeared giving her range and weapons lock on the fighter. An enhanced vessel, courtesy of the Directive, that can FTL in deep space faster than most ships.

It had locked onto her ship's trajectory path. She knew it would be a risk to visit the refugee facility. The hybrid hasn't been home in years.

Her comms buzzed and gave off static, with Jormun's voice barely coming through. Satima hit her navigations panel in frustration. "Do'ova! Give me comms back!"

The salarian scrambled down the deck, opening four terminal panels quickly. Her large dark eyes blinking as she applied skill to the electrical system. "Dammit!", she yelled. Her higher tone reaching the impatient ears of her captain.

Do'ova rerouted the signal once more, using all the power from the local long-range scanner. Risking a serious reduction in all electrical grids.

"I'm getting a signal from the mountain range. It's Borlask!", Jormun, a young quarian, yelled on comms from the engine room.

Satima smirked, her ridged brow raising in amusement, "Good! About damn time! Jormun, eliminate this piece of scrap!" She ordered with satisfaction.

Jormun ran from the engine room to the cannon panel. It was behind the cockpit in view of Satima. He brought up the grid and locked on to the enemy vessel, gliding his suited fingers to tap commands over the console. Immediately, emp blows hit the fighter, losing navigational input and flying blind right into a communication satellite dish.

Satima watched through her cockpit's window, viewing the scout craft explode into orange fire. "Looks like I owe Borlask a new one!", she laughed.

Jormun thanked his ancestors it worked. Secretly stealing a glance of his young captain leaning over her console.

Do'ova sprinted to the front, short of breath and full of anxiety. "Is it over? Did we make it?"

Hands to hips, with a wry smirk, Satima answered her crew member. "No. We decided to give up." She shook her head as the salarian crew mate stared ahead in confusion.

Jormun giggled, reassuring Do'ova. "Relax. We made it."

They passed safely into the atmosphere of the planet Lorek, landing on a flat icy surface of the permafrost covered mountain. Satima dreaded leaving her ship, hating the cold of this planet since she was a teenager.

The dangerous weather provided cover from surface and long-range scans for them. A constant blizzard blew across the mountain tops, delivering blankets of white snow over the landing zone.

Borlask would employ the occasional refugee or merc, to go out and face the harsh freezing weather. Clearing off most of the snow for visible landing.

After the Haven had docked, Satima and Jormun stepped down the ramp of the cargo bay away from
their previous warm environment. Her gear worn tightly due to the freezing temperature. Haven's exterior lighting provided a path to the old facility's entrance.

A door cut perfectly in the side of the glacier rock had slid open. Harsh light poured out on the ground. From the doorway, a suited man walked out, grumbling to himself loudly against the snow. Borlask is a batarian. One of few left in the galaxy. He wore yellow and black armor with his helmets visor glazed in an iridescent silver. Satima had known him since she was sixteen.

"Satima!", he yelled, irritated. "You blew up more of my communicators! I don't put them out there for you to use as weapons!", Borlask struggled against the snow shouting in his deep voice.

Satima could tell he had all eyes on her with a nasty glare through his visor. She smirked as he struggled further to reach her, shaking her helmeted head. "How else was I supposed to get away?" Satima replied sarcastically, pushing past him.

Do'ova stayed behind on Haven, watching from the bay doors. Too cold, and too awkward. She hated being in crowds. Even with her captain and the quarian, uh... Jormun. They always acted so confident and smug when being here. Especially the captain. She wished she could be just as brave.

Jormun opted to join his captain, following behind her. Borlask grunted with disapproval. He hated the Quarians since they quarantined their systems and planets off the galactic grid, causing an influx of refugees fleeing to places like his.

Batarians were not known before for their humane treatment and sympathetic views, but Borlask has seen enough suffering on all sides. Quarians were cowards in his eyes and the fact Satima was with one, boiled his blood. They hurried inside the hidden compound. Borlask did his usual growl at Jormun.

"Remember to keep your filthy hands off my stuff.", he leaned in close to Jormun's helmeted face. "And off Satima.", snarling with his threat.

Jormun ignored him and sat down at a table in the compounds mess hall, warming himself under one of the various heating vents. He took Ish, his favorite shotgun out and sat the weapon on his lap clicking a mod in skillfully. Jormun wished Borlask could see his one-sided smile.

The old batarian left Jormun alone, he had more important matters to deal with. Watching Satima chat quickly with a few human refugees, offering transport services for creds. She never involved herself in their troubles, afraid of tipping off the Directive, and worse. Borlask had known her for a long time. He gave her advice, weapons and an old ship.

She took them all with as much gratitude as a greedy vorcha. But he couldn't help to admire the woman she was growing to be. He knows calling himself a father figure would be too much of an attachment.

After all, he wanted her to be greedy of life. Taking what she needs and never meddling in the sinister affairs of the galaxy. They both know what that looks like. Her more than anyone. That quarian male still stared at her. Borlask shook his head. What a foolish boy.

The great mess hall had a high vaulted metal ceiling with four large heating vents dividing the room. Great square windows for the little bit of light that did peer through the storm clouds. Rows of mess tables and chairs filled the area. Many different species ate and congregated together.

Quarters were divided between them and the few bits of staff he kept on. Hard work with little promise of safety wasn't exactly a dream job. Although the credits weren't so bad.
Borlask used this jewel in the system to house those that are fleeing The Directive. Leaving destruction in their wake, it became too hard for the poorer factions to rebuild after the Reapers. Humans took one side of the galaxy. Some of them turning the outposts and remaining colonies into multi-species hubs.

Turians made their own presence known on ship stations, like Omega, and two colonies that supported dextro life. The Quarians wouldn't even give them a place in the Far Rim. Too close to their home. Faceless bastards. The Asari were always a special bunch. Most of their over-indulged mini worlds served as home for them. Three stations were dotted around, always scavenging. Sinister rumors spread from their meddling and the Directive.

With the other species either nearly extinct or taking up settlement residences with the humans.

Looking over to Satima, he suddenly had a memory of when he first met her. Frail and malnourished. A pale face with alien eyes staring back at him.

She had to of been human, at least partly. Years before the reapers, he would've allowed his old animosities to cloud his judgement. But, now... he's seen too much death and agony on all sides, to practice that kind of prejudice anymore.

Her young voice echoed to him across the hall, snapping himself out of the memory and thoughts. "Hey Borlask, you ever worry about the buildup of ice caps changing positions on you?", she stared folding her arms.

It looked concerned, at least to him, but at times her gaze caused confusion. So, he figured she was being snarky, and a tad worried. "My people proved it was a false environmental reading.", Borlask laughed dismissively. His jest faded, letting out a low snarl. "Damn asari. Always in other people's business." He mumbled taking off his helmet. All his black eyes staring around him.

Satima chuckled to herself, gazing down to walk a few steps in his direction. "Until you wake up a frozen popsicle buried under miles of ice"

Borlask laughed loudly. After a moment, his merriment died down. He turned slowly, glancing to the ground, then back to her. Something had bothered him.

"Satima.", he called. "I want to speak about something important with you.", Borlask often gave no emotional hints, but this time his eye was twitching.

Satima clicked her comms to a private channel. She didn't understand it, but an eerie feeling crept up over her. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary other than the scout fighter from earlier. As she walked closer to him, Borlask held down a nervous shake of his hand.

"What's so important?", she smiled warmly.

Ancestors, that look of trust sent a wave of guilt through him.

Borlask looked over his shoulder nervously, watching for someone. He stared at her with an alarmed gaze.

Satima put her hand on his shoulder in concern, hoping close contact would help him ease up, and tell her what exactly is going on. "What's wrong Borlask? You can tell me. We're family.", she spoke softly.

Not her usual impetuous tone and manner. Jormun scoffed at the word family but chose not to
impede. He uneasily leaned off his chair, watching the pair.

Borlask shook his head, scoffing. "Family?" He couldn't live with it, this awful feeling. "Family doesn't hurt you. Family doesn't give up."

Jormun sat on edge, his shotgun gripped tightly. He didn't like Borlask's tone of voice or edgy demeanor. Something was wrong here. Satima looked at him puzzled then glanced at Jormun quickly.

She backed away nervous and twitchy, reaching down her boot slowly for a small hand blade. Swallowing hard at the now silent and nearly vacated room.

Her gaze darted around the hall,"Borlask.", she started, now staring at him, "What's going on? What did you do?" An unbreakable fear in her voice, as he pulled a pistol from his belt. Wincing at her questions.

"I'm sorry, Satima. This place is the only thing standing between them." He pointed to the refugees, huddling in small crowds in the halls. "And death." His hand shook, the pistol aimed unsteadily at the young girl whom he betrayed. "Besides if I know you like I do; you can escape it. I believe you can." Borlask felt horrible for what he'd done.

She was like a daughter to him. He couldn't deny what he felt about her. But they came. Tortured him, made him watch others be killed. A sacrifice, as the villain repeated. To restore order.

He was given no choice.

Satima heard loud footsteps behind them, her heart pounded against her chest. Jormun whispered to his captain over the comms, his voice breaking up in fear over the name of the one who stalked the girl's every move. It's been years. She was so careful. How did they find her?

An armored hand rested on her shoulder; its black metal surface had a polished sheen as it gripped her tightly. The mature tone of the female voice sent a wave of fear through the young smuggler, as she leaned closer to the girl's ear. A snarled lip rose in personal satisfaction of the find. "You will not make a fool of me again, Satima."

Her name spoken by that thing disgusted her. But it was she that gave it to her. Many years ago, alone in the metal cell that was her home.

Jormun targeted his shotgun, jumpy from the confrontation. "Don't move! Back away from her now!", he roared in his accented tone.

Satima held her blade seconds ago, ready to strike, but the villain knew her intentions too well. Quickly, Reaper grabbed Satima and turned them around holding the girl's blade firmly against her throat.

A small trickle of blood danced down her skin. Several of the Directive's soldiers surrounded him. Their menacing black armor sending dangerous shadows across the floor. Jormun put Ish to his side, defeated. He wouldn't risk Satima getting hurt.

The hybrid threateningly stared at Borlask as she was let loose and cuffed. A surge of anger overwhelmed the fear from earlier, while she searched him for an answer. Why? Why, do this to her? She could've helped move the refugees somewhere safe. Someplace where all of them could be safe.

"You're a damn coward.", she glared at him. Her alien eyes watery, but never let a single drop escape them.
Borlask sat back down heavily and watched as Reaper dragged Satima out of his compound. Ancestors, he felt like scum leaving her alone to the Directive, but what could he do?

"It was for the good of the refugees, Satima.\text{,} he muttered to himself in denial of his own actions. "You know that.\text{,} he sighed, disappointed. "You've always known that."
Hive

Chapter Summary

Imprisoned on the station, Satima must face her childhood fears to escape. But she meets an unexpected ally, who offers help.

HIVE
Location: Sol System-In orbit above the wasteland, Earth

Looming above a silent grey planet, the great station HIVE, was built to serve the Directive. Its biocontainment defenses and research stations, provided the necessary tools to enhance, evolve and create.

The honeycombed hull decks circled in the deep shadowed dark of the many levels. For those who were indentured to serve, this dizzying reality played tricks on the mind. Several associates found themselves walking into walls, falling downstairs into lower rooms. Or even going mad.

Most who do, end up in the lower cells. Never to be seen again. Heard, yes. Just not seen.

It was this station that Satima found herself a first home. A total dark that fed endless nightmares, and constant fits of anxiety. Her jailer often locked the girl away. But as she got older, Satima was forced to undergo something different.

At first, it was the tests. Painful needles and mutations. Then the training. Combat, conditioning and marksmen accuracy. That was the later things. Training she left gladly behind, while running away to a better life.

But it seems your past always catches up. Right when you least expect it. Especially when visiting family.

Satima woke in a cell, sitting up from her cot, dizzy. More than likely due to a blow to her head. She gazed around the darkness of the room.

"Jormun? Are you alive?", she whispered searching for him.

There was no one else in the blackness with her. Alone again at the hands of HIVE. It's been less than six years, but she is not the same scared and helpless little girl anymore, she would die first!

Satima tried adjusting her vision in the dark. At least try to escape, maybe. The cell door opened with a blue glow piercing the darkness. Someone threw a body in.

She felt around the floor for it, worried. Finally finding a familiar suited arm. He lay on the ground unconscious.

"Jormun!", she held up his head and did a quick scan with her onmi-tool. His vitals were good. No puncture wounds, no infection. Just a knockout. Satima kept his head in her lap, waiting for them to return. It was only a matter of time.

Reaper would bring her back into the fold. She shuddered at the memories. Resolved to not let that happen, Satima laid Jormun against the cot and stood at the side of the door. Ready... for anything.
An hour passed by and Jormun was coming to. He held his head in stunned pain. Satima watched him as he began to speak. "Ugh… how long was I out?", he asked. She whispered, "An hour." Letting out a low chuckle, "Enjoy your nap?"

Jormun attempted to stand, leaning on the cot. "Some nap.", he replied in jest.

Satima started to laugh when the sound of heavy boots came towards the cell door. She snapped her head in the direction of the frame, quickly, cracking her knuckles in preparation for a fight. Any minute now.

Suddenly the door opened again and Satima got caught under the next body they threw in. It was heavily armored and big. They both landed hard. Jormun, fully aware of his surroundings ran to Satima, helping her up. She looked down to see the new prisoner.

"Are you okay?", Jormun checked her for injuries.

Satima hastily pushed him off. She knelt to the new cellmate. Her eyes adjusted enough that she could make out the outline of a turian.

Interesting, considering they all left for the terminus systems, all save a few.

This turian male started to grunt. He made the inclination to rise. Satima and Jormun backed away enough so they could blend in with the shadows. He stood, taller than her and Jormun, overbearingly scary in his darkened armor.

"I can see you." His voice was deep with a sub-vocal sound.

He shook his head from a similar knock out. Satima smirked to herself. She stepped out despite Jormun's behest. The turian walked around the room, checking the walls and the door.

"You're a turian? I thought your kind left this side of the old council systems years ago?", she stood in front of him.

"I'm here on a personal mission.", he said occupied with the door.

Satima shook her head, "In this place? The Hive is inescapable. You'd never make it out alive.", she stated proud of her intelligence.

The turian stranger cocked his head at her, then went back to the door. After a few seconds of him typing on his omni-tool, it opened.

"You were saying?", he said mockingly.

Before Satima asked, she looked at the holo panel. A complex encryption code had been used. It seemed custom and probably took a long time to create. Inside job maybe?

"How did you do that?", Satima followed him, gesturing Jormun to come along.

"I had a long time to learn.", he said checking a hallway. Careful to watch his step, in case of alarms.

Satima was impressed by his genius ability of tech knowledge. Jormun felt inadequate. Quarians are naturally capable with all tech. He guessed he was the exception. The turian quietly mumbled something, then looked at Satima and the quarian. He turned to face her and watched her fingers for a brief second before he stopped himself.

"Listen kid. I don't need a tag-a-long, let alone two. Why don't you and your boyfriend escape down
the other hall."

Satima's mouth dropped. She rubbed her left temple chuckling to herself in irritation.

"BOYFRIEND!? He is an EM. PLOY. EE!", she yelled. Jormun sulked back. The turian, agitated at this girl's idiocy, started to walk off in the opposite direction.

Satima watched him abandon them in the dark hall. "Where the Hell, are you going?!", she shouted.

The turian stopped at two doors and a wall. He was hopelessly lost. Satima stood with her arms crossed, "I suppose you already have directions? Maybe your "personal mission" brought you here to find someone?"

The turian continued to search for a hacking panel on the wall. "Yeah, something like that."

Satima couldn't think of anyone more important and most wanted dead than the villain herself onboard this station of nightmares. But he wanted to find someone, not kill them. "Maybe I would know who this individual is.", she hinted.

He turned slowly, his helmeted head staring in her direction with curiosity.

Satima continued. "Considering I was held here against my will for years. I think I would know a lot more than you.", she smirked angrily.

Jormun chuckled quietly. The turian's once sure gaze turned to fidgeted annoyance. He paced like a trained soldier in front of them. His gait dragging a little, not enough to slow him down.

Satima stood to the side, observing. "What are you a general or something?", she asked rudely.

He stopped, noticing his brood-like pacing. "I was never a general, but I was an officer once.", he said reflecting.

Satima eyed Jormun and shook her head, "You're wearing merc armor.", she pointed out.

"So, I am.", he mused.

Satima sighed in annoyance.

The turian walked a little closer to her. A hint of desperation, subtle in his tone, now. "I need your help."

Satima blinked her eyes in confusion. "Really?"

The turian merc never took off his helmet, she doesn't like not being able to read expressions. He stood against the wall crossing his arms, overhead dimmers reflecting off his armor.

"Plans change. So, I need your help. Understood?", he said in a rougher tone.

Satima glanced at Jormun, who shook his head no. He tried to stop her from approaching the turian merc.

"What's in it for us?", she raised a brow while folding her arms.

Jormun stepped up, "No, Satima. We need to get out of here now! Find Do'ova and Haven!"

She waved him off. It's not like Satima to treat him as a subordinate. An em. ploy. ee.
The turian smirked, "I could give you some credits." A typical, yet practical way of getting help. He waited for a quick response.

She looked at Jormun. He nodded no, again. His hesitance was becoming annoying, but he's right about the creds. "That's not what I had in mind.", she replied. "Wait... what exactly are you doing here?", she questioned him intensely.

The turian laughed out loud in a mocking tone. "I'm a merc. Is that not obvious enough for you?"

Satima stared at him, irritated until she realized what this could mean. "If you were trying to rescue someone from this station, you wouldn't be alone. You got caught, because you're here to kill someone? Aren't you?", she asked.

He stepped away from the wall, getting closer. "Clever." The merc leaned to her, his voice low. "I'm here to put Reaper out of her misery. Have a problem with it?", he asked threateningly.

Satima shook her head with a small laugh, "No. In fact, that sounds like a good plan."

The turian processed the disturbing smile she gave at the thought. "Then we help each other kill Reaper and leave here together. Deal?" He held his three fingered taloned hand out to shake with hers. "Deal.", she agreed.

Jormun wanted to shake sense into Satima. Her grudge against the past is going to get them both killed. He sighed, following behind the doomed team.

At the underbelly of the hive station, Satima led the weaponless group to the antechambers of Reaper. The whole place lived up to its name. A station filled with directive soldiers, shadows and echoing whispers. Literally painted in darkness, dim blue illuminators lit most of the way. Alcoves every few feet that seemed to go nowhere gave plenty of anxious thoughts to Jormun.

He agreed to watch the back, with the turian merc right behind Satima. They stopped in front of a large metal door. Though most stations have the basic tech in their doors, this one was tricky. It had two panels to work from. It could be hours before they hack it.

"Hey, Mr Merc! You think you can apply those same skills to this panel, while I hack the other?", Satima put her hands on her hips smiling wickedly.

"You think you can keep up with me?", he smirked taking the other.

Jormun stood watch. He wanted to punch that turian for being so smug. Satima raced to unlock the code before the turian merc, hoping to prove faster reflexes over skill. He effortlessly encrypted a virus, and within a minute the lock was hacked.

"Looks like I win.", he clicked his mandibles under his helmet, satisfied.

Satima growled in frustration, hitting the panel till it broke and sparked outward. She scowled at him as the code became disabled through brute force instead of skill. The door opened. Jormun gasped. The Reaper stood on the other side along with soldiers, holding a displeased gaze.

"Predictable.", she spoke unamused.

They were taken and dragged to the cells. The large deck consisted of many closed doors, followed by feeble sounds of fear. Satima cringed to hear the hive victims.
She turned her gaze to the blows a soldier inflicted brutally on the turian merc. In-between the grunts and loud groans of pain, he managed to laugh at the attempts.

"You hit like a salarian!", he spat. Another blow was delivered to his helmeted face. "Is that all you can do?", he shouted in taunts.

Satima wanted him to shut the hell up. She looked over to Jormun, who had two soldiers surrounding him, their weapons pointed towards his head. Reaper stood and watched. It made Satima anxious. What is this psychopath up too?

The turian merc spat blue blood in his helmets visor with a snarl, "To afraid to do this yourself?", his low tone menacing.

Reaper unfolded her arms, stalking around them as she spoke.

"I can do what is necessary. If I must.", she always had a soulless stare. Patches of steel toned cybernetics seemed to glow as ominous tendrils, on the sides of her face. Right up to those bright green eyes.

Reaper knocked him backwards with a hard blow to the side. Satima was sure that broke a few ribs. He wheezed, never backing down from his damn talking.

"I… I didn't feel that! Might want to try harder!", he spoke loudly trying not to cough.

Reaper stared at the merc lost in thought. Her blood red hair turning a vibrant purple under the small blue light over them. The armor flexed with the vibration of a million dark beetles endlessly in motion.

Hive's precious Nano tech generously applied to every soldier and minion the Directive could create.

There was a set like that for Satima once. She could still feel the tiny pricks under her skin as her mind and the suit became one. Reaper hit the merc again. Time was running out.

"I suppose, Satima, you hired him to help you kill me?", Reaper said without moving her gaze from the injured turian.

Satima let out a sarcastic smirk, "We just met. Seems like too much of an idiot. But I guess he got far enough on his own before you showed up.", she replied, worried.

The turian glanced to her. He smirked; she could play with words all day. Reaper won't let it last long.

Satima needed a few more seconds. Her cuffs were almost off. She used the time the turian merc wasted to hack them. She and Jormun would escape, too bad for the merc. Reaper looked at Satima. "Do you know who he is?", she asked with an emotionless stare.

Satima scoffed, "I already told you, we just met."

Reaper smiled. A grin so wicked it sent chills down Jormun's spine. She turned to Satima as she spoke. "He was a detective, once. Burnt out cop, trying to make the galaxy a better place."

Reaper tried to mockingly caress the side of his armored carapace. The turian jerked back, clearly disturbed. "He was too damn cocky, hot headed.", she stared at Satima, then turned back to him with a scornful gaze. "And too much trouble.". There was almost a lament in her words.

Reaper retrieved a gun from her side. Its tan appearance reflecting amber in color. Satima didn't want to see this.
She had hoped Reaper would see the turian too worthless and useless to kill. But they had a history apparently, and Reaper was about to end his. Permanently.

"Weak bitch.", he threatened. His sub-vocals echoed a warning towards the villainess.

There was something in his voice that seemed to fill Reaper with rage, prompting her to hurt him again. During the second blow, he brought his arms around and caught her leg mid-air. Satima gasped in surprise. That bastard already hacked his cuffs! He was just playing Reaper all along.

The merc groaned from his injuries, as he twisted Reaper's leg, making her fall to the floor. Satima finished with the cuffs and stood turning to the two soldiers. One charged, until she grabbed his shotgun yanking him to her.

Satima head butted him with a grunt, kicking his groin. She turned the dazed soldier around facing Jormun. In an instant of brutality, she snapped his neck. Reflecting the deadly combat skills Reaper had trained her in, years before.

The other stepped back surprised. Satima looked at the shotgun.

"Jormun, I found Ish.", she smiled, and threw the weapon to the quarian who happily killed the directive soldier.

She heard the shuffling of feet behind her. They were still fighting. Reaper left-hooked the turian, but he took it well, and knocked her down again. That's when the alarms came on.

"Sentries!", Jormun yelled.

No way Satima can take those things.

She stared in terror, grabbing Jormun by the arm. "We're leaving!", as they are running from the hall.

They passed by the turian who took satisfaction in his anger towards Reaper, holding his rifle, aiming for her head. Grunting from the pain of the assault, he stood over her.

She gave him an unwavering stare. "Finish it.", she spoke, panting from the fight before. The turian had no visible gaze, but his hesitance spoke clearly. He questioned his own resolve while the hall became filled with enemies.

A sentry approached quickly. It's grey covered body armor glowing with an orange sheen. That type of new shielding is almost impenetrable. A large helmet covered the face with four slits, that had a yellow glow from them.

Satima had always imagined a grotesque alien under there. True to its name, it stood eight feet tall. An armored monster. Satima looked back at the turian merc. He seemed to be unable to pull the trigger.

The sentry held a heavy rifle, loaded with iridium slugs, and started firing at the merc who dodged the attack barely, roaring his own frustration at being hindered from the kill.

"Come on! We don't have time!", Jormun shouted to her as she watched.

Satima made an aggravated tone. Why does she care? She yelled at the turian merc,"You can kill her another day!"

The turian stood, confused at her words. He turned around to face Satima. The sentry got closer. He looked down to Reaper who had already crawled back to regroup.

Soldiers were piling out from alcoves behind them. She leaned on one, clutching her side. The turian merc glanced away back to Satima.
"I'm coming.", he said defeated.

They ran to the docking bay dodging bullets and plasma turrets. A fighter hovered in the hanger. Satima sprinted across the floor, knocking her body onto the hull, as the turian merc effortlessly put a bullet through a soldier's head.

Jormun suppressed fire while she ripped a panel off the fighter's hatch. The turian merc noticed her unusual strength and the ferocity of her combat skills.

Satima reprogrammed the vessel, it had just enough room for them all. Jormun hopped in with his captain in tow. The merc climbed in last and stood behind Satima, watching her apply tech skills to the fighters control panels.

"You know how to fly these things?", he spoke condescendingly to her.

"If I don't, then we're all dead!", she yelled, dismissing his tone. "Now, shut up so I can fly!"

They flew out of the hanger, dodging other fighters sent after them. Using one of Jupiter's many moons as cover, Satima evaded the wave.

The fighter hovered in silence. All major systems shut down, except for basic life support. Satima had used her secret code via omni-tool, and the vessel's own long-range output. To call Do'ova. If the nervous salarian was still alive, and still aboard, she'll come to them.

At least that's what they all practiced.

Two hours passed, with the uncomfortable silence settling among them. That was too close. Reaper almost had her. It's been a few years since she's been back to the station. Looking to the turian, she remembered the fight in the cell hall.

Their subtle hints of a past lingered between them. This is becoming complicated; she needs to get rid of him. Drop that merc off somewhere. A view from the cockpit window showed fighter scouts, pushing her current thoughts aside.

They passed by without a hint of detection. Good.

Jormun started to shiver, and so did Satima. The ship's main power will die out in constant use without a docking station. She checked the power panel. Fifteen percent remained.

"If-if.. Do'ova… doesn't get here… so-soon. We'll be frozen solid.", he complained.

She nodded, putting a comforting hand on his suited shoulder. Satima couldn't help but to stare away at the turian merc. He sat in the furthermost corner of the small cockpit, meddling with his own omni-tool. Not a word came from him.

Moments passed until comms cracked on. Directive fighters had left finally, leaving the moons behind.

"Hello? Captain? Can you read me?"

It was Do'ova!

"D!", Satima sat up, pacing in a very tight circle. "Yes, we can hear you. I've sent the coordinates. Meet me there."

She took them to Haven. As the fighter navigated to the ship, Jormun stayed down on the shuttles floor annoyed at the recent events. His entire suit was filled with sweat, now clinging in icy cold to
his flesh. He'll need to run scrubbers and program a cleaning.

Too bad he couldn't strip out of it and enjoy a moment unhindered from his only safe environment. Satima relaxed in the pilot seat, careful of the new passenger.

The cargo bay opened with the fighter boarding her ship. Jormun darted out to warm up Haven's engines, following the routine of escape that Satima had drilled him on. Do'ova greeted him, suddenly turning her attention to the fighter. "Wow!", she said, amused. "This is both scary and fascinating. May I?"

Satima made her way to the cockpit, nodding to her crew. "Be careful with it, D."

The turian merc followed close behind, noticing the worn hulls, leaky pipes and damaged equipment.

"This is your ship? It's a piece of crap.", he stated with a smirk.

Satima turned to face him while walking backwards, "If you don't like it, then I suggest you learn how to hold your breath." She pointed to an airlock. "The fighter is mine now.", she warned.

Satima turned back around, and upon entering the cockpit, unceremoniously sat down in her chair. While bringing the systems holo-panel up, diagnostics danced across the board.

The turian merc sat next to her and played around on a similar panel, then Haven vibrated and thumped loudly.

"What did you do?", Satima demanded angrily.

"I gave you a better chance to get us the hell out of here!", he gestured to the window as dozens of fighters appeared.

Satima punched the thrusters on, noting her frustrations with this guy. They left quickly through the relay.
The small band of misfits escape the reaper station, only to be side lined by another villain and their own differences.

The ship, Haven, had been painted a silvery pewter with an emerald sheen. Unfortunately, over time the vessel's past had shown in its scarred and worn appearance. The inside of the hull walls was a smoky grey. An economy ion engine with an older model of drive core, protected by a kinetic field, occupied engineering.

Two decks gave the Haven its bulk, and a small cargo bay roomy enough to hold the fighter. It served as both kinds of bays. Sometimes for people, and sometimes for shuttles. In the corners, leather nets held crates and metal boxes of necessities. Both ship needs, as well as her crew.

Dingy yellow lights illuminated the decks, holds and quarters. One larger, re-purposed bathroom for the crew. With a mess room suitable for dining, and little else.

Old and barely holding together, Haven had a crappy FTL speed despite Jormun's exhaustive maintenance skills. Do'ova's offerings were mostly tech and electrical. Satima owned the ship and was the only pilot. On purpose. The merc set a course for a nearby sub-station. He's being dropped off instead of air-locked, on the agreement that the fighter will pay for his transport.

At the station, Satima, Jormun and Do'ova, decided to go to the bar for a celebratory drink... or two. The merc disappeared after they hit the club. As they sat, Satima ordered an Azure sunrise for Jormun, dextro liquor. It's neon blue liquid colored his suited hand when he grabbed the glass.

Do'ova noticed the annoying amount of flirtatious movements these two were doing. She wasn't prone to amorous feelings. But she didn't want to be alone, either. Her family was somewhere on Omega. Surviving. Somehow. Maybe Satima will let her go back? Maybe those Blood pack mercs aren't looking for them anymore?

The loud techno music blared in the background. People dancing, waving their arms and grinding on each other like there isn't a care in the universe to bother them. Satima tried to relax, unwind from their near-death experience.

One of many.

This wasn't half bad. A little cleaner than places like Afterlife. She ordered her drink and turned her chair to face the crowd. "Did you enjoy our little adventure?", she asked smirking.

Jormun slurped his drink through a straw into an opening of his suited helmet, gulping the liquid down fast.
"I didn't like almost being killed by a sentry, but yeah... it was a little exciting.", he reached out to touch her hand.

"Not now, Jormun.", she pushed his hand away.

"Oh, that's right. I'm just an employee.", he said hurt.

Satima glanced his way with a sarcastic glare. Jormun continued sucking the liquid through his straw. She leaned in close, trying to pinpoint correct eye contact through his helmet. His own lavender glowing eyes staring right at her, as he nervously readjusted his seat.

Satima gently brushed his arm with a sultry smile. Jormun nearly dropped his glass from the sudden touch. He always got so nervous when she did that, wanting to make it more, but feeling awkward about his own obstacles.

The damn suit.

Satima realized how nervous he became and stopped teasing him.

"I'm sorry, Jormun. I like you, and I'm glad you're the voice of caution on our little adventures together.", she touched his shoulder with a smile.

Jormun stared at her. Ancestors she is beautiful.

Do'ova leaned out behind him, raising her slender arm with drink in hand. "Uh... I didn't particularly enjoy being left behind on Lorek. But I did manage to escape and hide out. Waiting... for you, Captain." Her nervous laugh and twitch made Satima feel a little awful for all of it.

The captain reached around Jormun, grasping Do'ova's free hand. "D. Thank you for not abandoning us. We wouldn't have made it out alive from that system, without you.", she smiled.

Do'ova blushed what a salarian can blush and sipped sheepishly. "Oh... I didn't... I mean, it was nothing... had to... well?" Her embarrassed blathering continued as Satima shook her head with a grin.

"I'm going to sleep for a few days. After I finish my drink of course.", she laughed loudly with Jormun. Not realizing they were being watched.

HIVE

Reaper stood in front of a mirror, alone in the dimmed quarters she held. Trailing the cybernetics that slowly covered her face, feeling the difference of pulse and flow. Thoughts crept in from a memory so long ago. She was beautiful, once. Smooth skin that felt cool and soft. No more.

What is she now? Their tool, or one of them, herself?

"I am order.", she said aloud. "I must restore order.", she repeated. But there was something nagging at the back of her mind. One lonely voice among thousands. The face that looked back was in pain. Reaper scowled, anger welling in her features.

She lifted her right hand quickly, barely noticing the moment she hit the glass. Shattering it into pieces on the floor. That's what she is. Pieces of that woman.

The turian will pay in his blood for keeping her from the objective. He beat her down too easily. Still, there was something in his voice that shamed her.

Her bio-tool pinged. The Directive requested her presence, likely considering her failure to apprehend the subject Satima, again.
Was her nano tech getting to be obsolete, making her slow and... old? After all these years, the girl had grown strong and self-reliant. All Satima's skills and abilities, an exact copy of herself. But then, who was she?

Tool or reaper? Order or chaos?

Again, with the same thoughts, the same questions. Reaper must know, she must find the truth, before the whispers erase her memories.

And escape.

Titan Nebula: Outer Zone

He woke with a cold sweat. The stations air systems never worked well. It had been two days and that shitty ship Haven was still docked. There was something familiar with the structure of the ship. And that strange girl with her odd features, good with tech and keeping that ship afloat.

Doesn't matter. He felt more like shit since earlier from the beating he received and managed to survive from. Getting old had its disadvantages. It wasn't going to stop him from killing Reaper, though.

He looked at a data pad from a week ago, it contained the last conversation between himself and a representative of the Directive. Some anonymous lackey, tired of being pushed around.

"We've given you her location. Kill Reaper, free us from servitude of HIVE."

Simple. Yet he couldn't shake that feeling. He's betraying everything he once stood for, but she was a brighter galaxy long ago. He put his armor on and went to the bar. The quarian named Jormun sat at a table eating his nutrient paste.

Spirits, why would she slaughter thousands of people? Burning colonies and slaughtering refugees for The Directive? He knew that experiments were being held on some of those worlds. What happened to her? She's a monster and he's going to put her down.

What really got him anxious was the fact that Satima had never left. Why is she staying? She's a smart girl, isn't she?

She appeared at the corner of the bar going to Jormun. A smile on her face as she sat next to him like a naïve kid. The quarian boy tried to hand her a nutrient pack, but she seemed preoccupied with something that made her shout at him.

Just then the station had shut down, red emergency lighting illuminated the floors.

Moments before...

"I'm going to kill him! That Batarian bastard and his "noble bullshit"!", Satima had eyed the bar, looking for a hard drink.

In truth, she mourned him. Borlask had been the only family she had. And now he's just like Reaper. Handing her over to them, doing nothing. Her thoughts wondered over to the merc they picked up. She knew the smug turian was watching them when she hacked the cameras on the station last night. Guy sleeps with a gun.

Jormun nearly choked on his food. "Satima, don't shoot up another bar! I just set a tab. Besides, Borlask is probably dead. Reaper never leaves anyone alive."
"And if he isn't? Old has-been.", she shouted, still shocked and angry on his actions. "Never trust anyone." Satima mumbled to herself, upset.

Red lights came on and most of the doors closed automatically.

"What's going on?", Jormun sounded panicked, pulling out Ish.

Satima had a bad feeling and looked out a porthole as two fighters drifted into dock.

"Shit! We need to go!", she pulled him up. Code knocking to Do'ova with her omni-tool. A red crossed out circle played instead. Frequency jammers. Jormun and Satima tried two doors, but her hacking codes couldn't break through. They tried to find emergency hatches. All of them were wielded shut.

At that moment of panic the main door hissed to life and five hive soldiers came in, followed by Archer. An elite droid scientist and second in command to Reaper under the Directive.

He resembled a human male with visible cybernetic parts covering his once organic flesh. His eyes were a cybernetic blue, pewter toned muscles flexed under the nano armor he wore. Archer moved forward to Satima and Jormun.

She swallowed hard; this wasn't good. Satima would rather deal with Reaper.

"Captain of Haven", he gave a cruel grin towards them.

She backed away slowly into Jormun as he protectively put her behind him. His sudden change to brave crewmate made her blush. The turian merc hid in the shadows.

Archer paced around them, sending a cold shudder down Satima's plated spine. He tilted his head in curious observation of her, then a quick glance to Jormun.

"You are a hard person to find, but found I have. Please, have a seat.", he gestured with a hand over some chairs.

Archer sat, as two of the men grabbed her, forcing her to sit opposite him. It felt like an interrogation. He leaned forward.

"Turn off the shut down!", he yelled annoyed in his droid voice. It held a subtle accent.

The emergency shut down was turned off and all doors were unlocked. Satima as well as Jormun knew, there was no escape.

Jormun stood at a distance surrounded by soldiers. He held a deadly glare at Archer, though no one could tell because of his helmet.

"What do you want?", Satima asked, gulping hard.

Archer gave her an unpleasant gaze. She leaned back in the chair from fear of his unknown intentions.

"I need a sample."

He snapped a finger and the same two men held her down as a salarian came running over with a needle instrument. She panicked. Satima struggled against their hold as they took blood from her.

The salarian scurried back out the door with the sample.

"What the hell was that for?", she yelled angrily.

"We need to check how your mutation is going. The Directive is interested in your progress.", he
cocked his head strangely. "Your survival has been a fascinating subject, Satima."

"My survival?", she questioned with wide teal eyes. Many thoughts raced through her mind, but that took minutes. Satima doesn't have time to process this.

Archer stood up with a smile, pacing around her. He motioned the guards to let her go. Satima sat up quickly, keeping the chair between herself and him. Jormun's heart raced. "Why did they send you here? Are you going to kill me?", she asked checking the room for a weapon.

He stood in place, putting a hand to his chin with a smirk. "Kill you?" Archer seemed shocked from that concept. "I'm here to take you back and to make sure you never escape again. The Directive has great plans for you, Satima."

She continued backing slowly to the bar.

"Then where is Reaper? Why isn't she in charge of this?", Satima put her arms on the counter and felt behind for weapons. Most bar tenders had them concealed away for emergencies. Satima found a pistol, carefully gripping it in preparation to fire.

Archer watched her feel around the back of the bar counter, choosing to ignore it. He looked away to reply. "Reaper has…", he gave a smirk in thought. "Tendered her resignation." Archer paused, taking in Satima's surprised stare. He continued. "Her services are no longer needed."

Satima let out a small gasp. Was he lying? Reaper… left? Why? There wasn't any time.

She brought out the pistol quickly firing on the crowd, pushing her way back for cover. Archer was too fast for her. He dodged every shot, sprinting towards Jormun. He knocked the quarrian over to use him as a shield. Satima shouted in anger.

Archer laughed cruelly, watching her pace, gun in hand. He forced her to make a choice. With a grin, he held his own weapon against the quarian's head. "You'll have to do better than that!", Archer yelled.

Satima realized Jormun is all she has in this horrible galaxy. If she loses him, she'll have nothing left. "Don't hurt him!", she pleaded. But she still held the gun firm.

Archer knew she wouldn't let go of her defense so easily. Too many battles in the station's interior, and too many times Reaper had to bring the child back.

He observed her hesitance. "Interesting how a child stands before me, yet a monster waits deep within you. The Directive's little toy. My perfect weapon." He held Jormun tightly, leaning close to the young quarian to speak. "You can't protect what she is, boy. And if you continue to try, you will die."

Jormun stopped squirming, Archer then waved the soldiers to take her. At that moment, the turian in the shadows decided this was enough.

Undetected, he slid past two guards. The few steps he took brought him behind the reaper monster. He pointed a widow rifle right at Archer's head, cocking the clip and ready to fire.

At the sound of a primed weapon, the droid smirked and looked around in surprise.

"Sneaky bastard, aren't you? How long have you been here?", he asked irritated, his humanoid eye twitching.

"Long enough." The turian with blue markings held a controlled finger on the trigger.
Archer sneered before kicking the rifle out of the turians hands. Using quick reflexes, the turian quickly brought out a pistol and shot him in the chest twice.

He staggered back, the bullet holes closing after impact. "Nice try."

The turian looked on in surprise as the android's chest wound began self-regenerating.

Archer was about to use his weapon before a sudden feeling of time became distorted. Distracted by this, Satima wrested herself from the men and pulled out a hidden blade.

She stabbed the neck of the closest one and flipped backward away from the other. Suddenly, dark armored figures appeared through a ripped singularity in the room. Each stepping out in different places, surrounding the soldiers.

They were named Stalkers, for their ability to appear in many places without being seen or heard. The stalkers started fighting with the soldiers. Archer was in a current battle with two of them when he noticed the turian running to Satima.

"Come on.", he said pulling her from a stalker, who seemed to be shielding her instead of attacking.

Jormun shot a soldier running behind them. "Satima are you okay?", he panted sprinting hard to keep up.

Satima nodded thinking about Reaper's sudden disappearance. Is what Archer said true? What if she's coming after her?

They made it to her ship. Do'ova greeted them with a rifle in hand. "The Directive! They're here!" The group ran past her, as she quickly closed the small bay door.

Satima sprinted to the pilot chair, and keyed controls for Haven to unlock from the docking system. Together, the crew piloted it away from the war-torn station, as fighters fired cannon lasers, destroying the once peaceful rest stop.

The ship accelerated through space for a time. A maddeningly silent journey that prompted small talk.

Jormun finished with the current maintenance on the stress of the engine. The old girl was starting to show signs of shut down. Not good. Do'ova approached him. Her own demeanor jumpy. "They are following us, now. Aren't they? We don't stand a chance." She leaned on the wall, feeling more hopeless.

Never to see them again. Never to live in peace.

Jormun sighed aloud to himself, closing a panel. They should've taken her home months ago. But Satima didn't want to risk another run in with the pack. "We'll stand a chance if we work together.", facing her. "Don't give up on our captain." Trying to smile, remembering the helmet prevented himself from reassuring the salarian.

The turian merc made his way on the first deck. He sat next to Satima in the co-pilots seat, while she gathered herself from another close call.

She glanced at him quickly, returning her gaze to the stars. Satima let out a deep sigh, heavy with fear. "I've never seen a stalker up close before", she spoke quietly.

The turian merc turned facing her with a shaky voice and unsure smirk.
"All that menacing armor and manipulating space-time? It's just too surreal." He pressed a few buttons and clicked his mandibles in reflection.

Satima cleared her throat to speak. "Jormun, check the left thruster again. I think it's trying to break off." Fearful that a stalker would suddenly appear in the bridge behind her, she made a quick glance then returned to her navigational controls.

Back at the station...
Archer threw his blade at the hanging body of a dead stalker. It dangled from the black armored alien, as silver blood oozed from the wound. He took sport in this exercise often.

"Sir, we lost the Haven.", a lackey reported.

Archer turned around and walked to him with a smile. His blue eyes narrowing on the unsuspecting subordinate.

"Is that all?", he asked calmly. The lackey nodded yes. Archer reached out, grabbing the neck of the man with an incredible strength. He could see the fear in the human's grey eyes, sweat beading the man's brow as he squeezed tighter.

But it would be useless to throw away willing subjects. The Directive will notice and not like him breaking their toys.

Calmed, he resolved to let the human male free, giving a devious smile and straightening the servant's uniform. "Fortunately, your usefulness outweighs your exceedingly lacking ability to find a young girl."

The lackey nodded, gulping hard.

Archer continued with his smile, gesturing for him to leave. "You may go."

He turned swiftly, facing the other Directive soldiers with a glare, as the lackey hurriedly disappeared into the remaining docks of the damaged station.

Archer resumed to pace the stations bar, overlooking a porthole into space. Turning with a nasty glare, he began to shout orders. "I want all scouts searching the Rim and Terminus systems. FIND ME SATIMA!", he roared.

FTL preflight

Satima thought about the merc. His intentions to kill Reaper seemed a bit personal. Then again, her intentions would be too. The long years kept as a tormented protégé to Reaper, trained in the deadliest ways.
It took some time for her to break free from the habits, the constant thoughts that molded her dreams into horrible nightmares.

Satima remembered when she was little that she used to have the most beautiful blue eyes. They were human eyes. Mass amounts of injections later her sclera turned black. She went from normal human girl to a freak.
The only other thing she was born with is the cranial ridges on her forehead, with deep lines that formed a very distinct feature down to the slightly raised ridges on her nose.

Looking down, she observed the four fingers, instead of five. Remembering a human smile, she made to the mirror in the lavatory, seeing back rows of sharp predator teeth. Small but effective.
Overall, she seemed mostly human... mostly. Satima hates what she is and not only because of the
obvious alien deformation, but that she was the only one of her kind.

Being alone in the universe is a terrible thing.

Jormun watched the merc settle in the mess. He brought out dextro paste to eat. His armor shone a deep blue, some gold bird on his right arm. It was old, with scorch marks and heavy scarring. He must have changed from his merc armor. Could have been for disguise.

Jormun was told as a child that you can always tell a person by their suit. What they wear, how long they've worn it and what shape it was in. Giving the small fact that the merc wasn't wearing a suit but armor made no difference. Culturally maybe.

Judging by the merc's, Jormun surmised he was broken and weary. At this speculation, Jormun felt a little sorry for the guy.

Do'ova peeked from the doorway to the corridor. Watching wearily. Jormun felt the same. Who is this guy?

The merc brought out his nutrient paste, that's when Satima walked in.

She paced as he kept eating. His right face and mandible had deep scars, most of it seemed healed. He had deep avian azure eyes with a glaring intensity. It was unnerving. Navy colored colonial markings covered the bridge of his raised flat nose to his eye, while an outdated visor covered his left. Satima folded her arms in frustration.

"You going to give us a name now?", she glared his way.

The merc sat on the bench to eat, ignoring her comment. Do'ova walked over to Jormun. As tall she is, the young salarian took a step behind him. He did after all, save her life. Satima almost yelled her question again before the merc answered.

"Why is it so important? I'm not hanging around here long.", he nearly shouted at her. The turian then bit off the end of the plastic tube and spit it out. Paste oozed and an unpleasant odor of dead meat filled the room.

Jormun shut off his filters. Do'ova swatted the whiff of putrid meat away from her nasal slats. "How awful!", she exclaimed.

Satima sat across, watching him suck out some paste ignoring her presence completely. He finished his meal, tossing the trash on the floor. She's eaten the same stuff all the time. Whereas Jormun preferred his more vegetarian nutrient bars.

The merc ignored their stares. "No name. It's better that way.", he got up to leave, irritated by Satima's glare.

She held it longer, trying to intimidate him into an answer. "You saved us back there. Why?"

His gaze narrowed on her. "Because you're weak. An amateur in combat, not experienced enough to wander this galaxy alone. With a boy for an engineer, a twitchy salarian as a chauffeur, and a pile of junk for transport." He started to laugh mockingly, "Seems like I walked into a bad joke, then a serious team of smugglers who can dodge trouble when it's staring at them in the face. " The turian sat up, beginning to leave.

Satima had enough with this guy's attitude and stood up to block him. She pushed him back despite his height, unafraid of him.
"How about I shove you out the nearest air-lock? Don't think you can get past me because of my size!", she grinned showing her sharp teeth.

The merc stepped back and cocked his head. He looked at Jormun who reached around for Ish. Do'ova gasped, trying to back away from the scrap. Turning back to the young captain, the merc leaned in close, face to face, "Where I come from, we don't hit little girls.", he said insultingly.

Satima punched him across the mandible, attempting a jab to his side, but missed. He sidestepped, landing a fist at her ribs, holding back from dealing heavy damage. She coughed but regained her battle stance. It seemed familiar. Satima rushed at him, he sidestepped again, then she caught it.

Hitting his throat, making him gasp for air, she backed up from her intended victory. Any harder and Satima could've killed him. He was impressed at her knowledge of hand to hand. Satima grabbed his fringe knowing where to twist, while he yelled in pained rage. The merc elbowed her in the chest right above the heart. She fell back rolling on all fours gasping in pain.

"ENOUGH!", Jormun screamed waving Ish around threateningly.

They both looked at him, reeling from their blows. Satima used her weight on her knee to stand up. It had been a good while since she was in a scrap like that. The merc leaned against the wall, he clutched his side, breathing heavily. She got him good, especially since it was the same spot Reaper kicked in days before. Smart little brat. Jormun walked to Satima who vehemently pushed his efforts to help away. She stared at the turian, wincing from the fight.

"now... tell me your damn name, and apologize for mocking my crew!", she tried shouting it, wheezing from his elbowed blow.

The merc gave a mandibled smile with a laugh," No, but I'm sorry your ship is a piece of shit, and your crew is better off in daycare.", he slid down the wall resting, with a smirk. Satima started before Jormun held her back firmly.

"You boshtet's!", he said while going after the first aid kits.

The merc used his last medi-gel kit to heal up the recent assault on his ribs. Satima's childish complaints at her boyfriend gave him a headache. Jormun tried to apply the small tube of medi-gel to Satima's chest, above her shirt. It had a big round bruise on the skin. She was lucky that turian didn't hit harder.

"OW!", she stared at Jormun in displeasure. He fumbled with the tube as she yelled insults in his attempts to soothe the pain.

Do'ova shook her head in upset. "We should be worried about the Directive, not him!" Pointing to the turian. "Captain, what if he killed you?" Her large dark eyes rimmed glossy. The low yellow light of the mess colored her skin tan.

Satima calmed down, nodding. She lifted a glare to the merc as he headed out of the mess area.

Alone he wandered into the engine room. An old soul of the machinery lingering past its due. Maybe it needs some work.

Parts of the hull resembled a ship he used to serve on. He got down on the floor and found data pads with plenty of calculations on the various systems the ship held. Completing all the tasks would take a few hours, but he needed the distraction.
As time passed, he fell asleep leaning on the wall. His grey dream turned from serene mountains of Palaven to a nightmare, filled with reapers, husks and Shepard. This horrific dream gave no indication of letting him wake. Even though he wanted to, an eerie feeling drew him deeper in the subconsciousness of his dreamscape.

There she was. Standing in front of him in full N7 armor, wielding her rifle with that sure gaze. He slowly walked to her and tried speaking as words formed in his mind. Nothing but a cold silence fell between them. She looked down with the saddest stare. Suddenly a red light covered them, as he shielded his face to block out the harsh beam. When his eyesight recovered, the woman stood closer.

He could almost touch her.

The armor was burnt, flesh shown in patches covered in the crimson blood humans were known to have. She wavered in her stance, her eyes watery and bloodshot, seemingly surprised. He began tossing and turning on the floor.

"Help me.", she asked. "It burns, and I can't feel my arms." Her shaky voice and feeble stance nearly brought him to tears.

He grips his rifle tight, as someone enters the engine room cautiously. While he put a finger on the trigger, baring his teeth in anger, and growled at nothing in his sleep, "I can't help you.", he repeats loudly in the room, "...shepard...". Putting his taloned hand into a fist so tight, it pierces flesh and bleeds.

He lets go, unclenching his fist and suddenly he can't remember her face anymore. She turns away, walking into a red beam that swallows her whole. A new form emerges. Reaper.

He opened his eyes to a feeling of being watched. She stood there still as stone. Then she blinked her teal eyes at him.

Satima hovered with her head cocked to one side.

"Who is this Shepard?", she asked.

He sat up quickly and stood facing Satima. His avian gaze searching angrily at her question. She didn't back up or blink.

A brave and defiant stance that gave him a second or two of pause. He shook it off, walking hurriedly while knocking her out of the way.

Satima scoffed loudly, staring at him in a personal rage.

"Asshole!", she shouted angrily down the corridor.
The Talons

Chapter Summary

Taking a break on Omega, the crew are confronted by an old evil, hidden within.
Satima faces a horrible truth, and the turian merc is revealed.

Mess room

Do'ova paced nervously. If she had nails to chew, she'd be doing it while thinking, and over thinking. The captain has stated they will go to Omega. Being in the terminus systems, their little ship will be much safer from the Directive.

Except it won't. Not with the blood pack lurking around the docks, waiting… watching. She just knows it. It was stupid of Jen to get into an argument with that krogan. If he had just kept his mouth shut. Jormun and the turian merc gathered on opposite sides of the room. A distance that read well between them.

Satima walked in from the cockpit heavy with concern. She leaned over the shiny dented surface of the table, sighing. "Ok, guys. I know it's been rough these past few days. We've bit off more than we can chew." She eyed the room.

"If we don't refuel for a longer run, and stock up in case there's no choice but to hang around the Terminus systems." Satima leaned up, crossing arms in resolution. "We'll be sitting vorcha. Easy to pick off."

Do'ova folded her slender arms to herself. Clearing a nervous throat as their captain continued.

"You know how dangerous the systems planets are. With plenty of gangs, illegal trades and other unsavory life choice outcomes. Let's not volunteer. Stay clear of anyone while we're on the station. Someone gets curious, lay low. Send a silent nock to my omni-tool."

The merc watched and listened closely as this girl for a captain finally acted more responsible. A leader her crew needed. How long it lasts? That'll be decided within the next couple of hours. Satima glanced to Do'ova before dismissing the crew. Jormun nodded, heading back to engineering, but Do'ova wasn't satisfied. She needs to speak with her parents.

The turian merc watched the nervous girl reluctantly walk to her captain.

Satima faced her. "Listen, D. I know what you want, but we can't do it. Not this time. Let's wait for the Directive to lose interest again for a little while. Maybe…" She was cut off by her salarian crew mate.

"No! I want to speak with them. Please!", her high-toned shrill voice seemed to pain Satima. "My father… he was sick!" She calmed herself. "I am very grateful for you and Jormun, saving my life. But I need to check them. Then…I'll stay here forever. Serving this ship." A thin smile faded fast at her captain's expression.

"Can't make it happen.", Satima shot it down. "I'm sorry." She left back to pilot controls.
Do'ova stared off in anger, leaving to stomp her way back to quarters. The moment they dock, she'll slip out while the rest of them wander around for supplies. Jen was injured from the krogan. Her father tried patching his wound, before the pack vorcha showed up.

What happened to them? Oh, why did she leave at all?!

They made it to Omega, with the Haven docked and loaded into the stations systems. Satima had requested re-fueling and some diagnostic checks. She stayed in the ship as the turian merc got ready to leave. He stopped short of the cockpit. The door out a few feet away.

"Leaving already?", she said occupying herself with scans of the ship.

He smirked, not quite ready to step out the airlock. Something made him linger.

"You said you were a prisoner of the hive station? How did you escape?", he watched her movements closely, curious for her answer.

Satima stopped typing at his question. A deep memory playing before her. She glanced away to the chair next to hers. Turning to face him, Satima stared past the merc. She saw something in the distance, a shadow, and shook her head.

"An opportunity came, and I took it. The rest gets fuzzy."

Satima returned to her work. The turian stood still, trying his best to read her. Humans had shifty ways of confusing him with their soft facial expressions. He'd get lucky with his best guess, and sometimes he could figure out the subtle hints of anger or fear.

Satima still checked her ships diagnostics, paying no attention. Eventually after realizing she wouldn't talk anymore, he left.

On Omega, he returned to a spot long forgotten by the new inhabitants. The broken bridge that was never repaired creaked from his steps. His favorite perch to scan the area displayed overhead as he walked further into the old building.

Ascending the stairs slowly he could still hear the gunfire in his mind. The room to his left remained closed, a morgue he set up for some of his fallen comrades.
"Probably bones now.", he said to himself.

There to his right, was the room with the balcony. She found him right at this spot and things were never the same again. Not for her and not for him.

He sat down in the old bunker room on the second floor eyeing a bottle of brandy lying underneath a bed. Grabbing it he gulped the hard liquor fast. It burned so good down his throat. An hour of self-loathing later, he left the old compound. At a terminal hub, he wanted to contact an old friend. Thinking fondly, suddenly, of her powder blue skin and tender smile.

It felt like a betrayal to another. He shook his head. She's gone, dead. And he's been dead along with her for a long time. Maybe too long?

Before he could make the call, a station wide alert came on. The large holo projector showing a face. It was Satima's. There was a hefty bounty for her straight from the Directive. "Damn!", he thought, watching a large seedy crowd begin to copy details onto their omni-tools.

At the docks, Satima waited in the warehouse district.
It was hard to focus with a blaring alarm coming from the inside of the station. Jormun left to make a call to his family, promising to not take long. Satima wanted to meet his mother someday. He spoke of the migrant fleet often, his family and his home planet Ranoch. He wants to take her there, give her a safe place to live, to call home. But that means a closer relationship. One she's not sure she's ready for. Pacing in circles, the time had passed into a later hour. Much later.

Worried, she went looking for him. Satima tried comming Jormun. No answer. Bringing her tool to message Do'ova.

"D.", she commed. Seconds passed with no answer. She tried it again, trying not to attract attention. "D? Where are you?"

Silence.

Full of worry, Satima walked amongst the heavy crowd, pushing them out of her way, noticing how noisy the area became. The docks were getting full, and so was the entrance to the wards below. Getting supplies will be harder without an audience, now.

Several crowds spoke to each other in hushed tones, relaying or syncing their omni-tools together. A voice from above the market's balcony started repeating an announcement.

Looking up, she noticed this crowd of people staring at the large holo projector. It had her face on it. Satima gulped and backed up slowly. If she drew attention to herself any bounty hunter in that crowd could find her. She turned around and started to walk fast back to her ship. When Satima got there, directive soldiers were all over it.

Cursing under her breath, she watched from the corner of a docking platform as they searched the ship. It felt like they were invading her own body. Her SHIP! There were no signs of Do'ova or Jormun. Were they taken?

Satima backed up looking around in a panic. She found a tan head wrap lying in some old tools on the floor. Satima wrapped it around her head and face only revealing the eyes to see. Walking past the same crowd from earlier she decided to find the one person that could help.

"If he's still here?", she thought.

He watched the crowd. The Haven was already swarmed by soldiers. They found nothing. He figured she had either escaped or left earlier before they came. A female figure pushed hard past the crowd below. Although her head was covered, her unique eyes darted between groups of Omega residents, watching for sudden movements towards her.

Satima.

The turian merc immediately walked into the crowd blending in as carefully as possible. Satima never noticed him as he followed her steadily inside an elevator. He then touched her arm to alert captain. She gasped at him and pulled out a long blade. "What the? How did you find me?!", she yelled angrily at the surprise.

"You can't seem to stay out of trouble kid.", he smirked.

She put the blade back while punching the level panel," Have you seen Jormun? Or Do'ova? What if they're taken, because of me?" Her panicked voice strained to ask.

He nodded no.
"Great! No telling where they are or if they've been captured?", she paced in front of him.

Satima rubbed her head in frustration then brushed back ginger red hair, tossing the wrap to the floor. Wiping a nervous sweat from her ridged brow. She stopped to turn, facing him and cocked her head. "You didn't sell me out, did you?", Satima glared.

He raised an eye, "No, helping the Directive is the last thing I want to do. I'd rather kiss a krogan, and that's a painful act to consider." The turian laughed in jest, watching her react with a smile.

Satima nodded satisfied with his answer for now, stifling a low chuckle. The elevator seemed to rattle and stopped suddenly.

He stepped to the panel. "What floor did you press?", asking edgy.

"Anywhere?", she shrugged in confusion.

Turning to her, he gave a questioning glare. "New to Omega?", he replied sarcastically.

Satima gave him an evil stare before the panel light dinged loudly.

At that sound, the turian had a rifle ready for any surprise. The elevator stopped and the door slid open to a dark district. For a reason long abandoned, it had been deserted by all residents. Satima held her hand in the pitch-black atmosphere, she couldn't see it. The merc stepped out cautiously, he turned on his rifles light.

"Stay behind me.", he said in a serious tone.

Satima scoffed, "I can take care of myself. I'm not afraid of the dark."

He grunted in irritation from her comment. She'll either die horribly or get them both killed. Horribly.

Gozu District

Jormun had finished his call earlier than expected. Keelah! His mother can be so stubborn! Wanting him to come home. That all he knew about the Directive was good enough to fulfill the tradition of Pilgrimage. It wasn't. And he's not coming home. Not without his friends.

He tried comming Satima with no luck. Even Haven couldn't receive his call. Must be some jammers nearby. Courtesy of some slumlord wanting to make a quick credit over call charges. He hates this place. And fears it.

That bar was hectic. Too many gangs, too many smaller factions. All pushing and biting their way to the top. A top that was barred shut from anyone. Who knows where the infamous Aria T'Loak really is?

Jormun kicked an empty hallex container out of his way, hearing someone from behind scurry to a corner of the wide walkway. He faced their direction, Ish out. "Who's there?" Sounds of skycars outside echoed, drips of dirty water lined the walls.

He started to lower his weapon, and walk away, when the figure stepped out from the shadows. A tall breathy, faceless... "Do'ova? What in Kee are you doing down here?" She blushed, looking down in embarrassment. "Oh, uh. Looking for my family."

Great.

"Does Satima know that?", he asked.
Do'ova shook her head. "She won't help me. Why? I've been a very good shipmate, haven't I?"

Jormun felt sorry for her. He's just as much in the dark about the rest of that bar fight. The vorcha swarmed them. He shot one in the face, helping Do'ova to find cover. Her family under heavy fire. No one could do anything, until Satima came out of nowhere.

Took down two of the vorcha with quick skill. Shot a krogan in the eye, slicing behind his great armored knee, where it's vulnerable. Making him kneel. His deep booming voice laughing away at the thrill of pain and the feeling of gushing blood.

She covered them both out the bar. All the while Do'ova yelled for her father. It ended with them hiding out on Haven. "Do you think they're still on this station?", he wondered.

The salarian nodded furiously. "Oh, yes. I accepted a call that our captain did not answer. It was Jen. My cousin. He's alive and needs help."

"Help with what?"

Do'ova stood closer. Making sure no one heard, leaning to whisper. "The pack have him and father. We can save them."

Keelah.

…. Satima stood next to him, a blade visible in her human like hand. She tilted her head to each sound, careful where to step. Maybe she was capable after all?

They walked past an open doorway. It had fallen debris in it. Poorly lit hallways and one particularly scary one with a flickering light. Unfortunately for Satima, it brought a bad memory of being alone in the dark on hive. The honey combed levels and shadowy alcoves on every deck. She closed her eyes briefly, before returning her stare back into a void.

So, she lied to him. It wouldn't make things better if she jumped at every sound, or if she imagined a horrible monster coming at her from this darkness. The turian could tell through his visor that her heart was racing. Everyone is afraid of what you can't see coming at you.

Further into the district, the sound of whispering suddenly passed behind them. They both looked, already feeling jumpy.

"I don't like this.", Satima remarked, spooked.

He didn't either. The quiet and constant dark were a perfect mix for ambush from anything. After a few minutes of walking they came to a grated metal bridge that had old red blood stains. It overlooked a long drop into a vat of Eezo.

The whining noise of the mining machines echoed around them as they walked further. Glowing blue ore lit the path they descended in the strange ward.

"Don't look down.", he said with a smirk.

Satima averted her eyes. She stepped in the red blood making a disgusted look. It seemed sticky, oozy.

"Human.", he pointed out with his rifle.
"How do you know?", Satima asked curious. "It could be vorcha or krogan."

"The smell.", he answered with a nod to the air.

She didn't need the details on how he became acquainted with the smell of human blood. What was strange is the fact the old blood didn't coagulate properly. It should have been like an old paint stain. Not liquid and runny. An open doorway that looked clear and well-lit seemed to be the path out. Satima followed, watching for anything to come jumping out at them. Her heart raced faster, something was watching them, following them.

She knows it. His visor alerted him again to squad mate distress.

"Calm down. You're not alone here.", he said over his shoulder to her. His taller height threw a long shadow over her.
She nodded back to him and took a deep breath. Satima felt better, for a few minutes at least. She missed Jormun. He would've had her back.

…

Do'ova cautiously led them further in the Ariake district. Another stairwell led them through the warehouse levels. Her omni-tool glowed orange over the sandy toned features of her face. Licking thin lips in anticipation of the find.
Jormun watched the alleys. Eyeing anything suspicious. If her cousin is down here, is he still alive? "D, are you sure this is the right area?" His nervous voice made him clear an overly dry throat.

She nodded, walking faster ahead. "His code is through this door."

Keelah it was one of the gang's own clubs. Loud music thrummed from the walls, as a few patrons stalked outside around them. Vorcha. Dirty, nasty things. With features made of nightmares. One of them stopped the pair, halting them in place.

"You go no further! Not Blood!", he spat at them.

Do'ova shook from fear, trying to muster enough courage to buy their way in. She gulped, thrusting a forceful arm out toward it. Omni-tool glowing on them, she brought up the credit sum. "Five hundred creds!"

Jormun winced at her shouting the number. He stood to her side, ready to fight. Hoping not to.

The vorcha screeched awfully, shaking his head in dissatisfaction. "Not enough! Not enough, I say! Need more for special Afterlife meeting. Yes?"

They didn't need to know what that meant. Do'ova supplied another two hundred credits. Their screechy friend shouted in amusement. "Yeeesss! This will be fun!", he laughed loudly at them, opening the door.

Jormun rushed Do'ova in.

Inside, bodies pushed through loud voices and deafening music. Do'ova glanced around with a blush, as two asari made it clear how much they enjoyed each other's company. Wandering the dance floor, they were spotted by a krogan in dark red armor. His face was scarred by fire and a cruel grin displayed at them.

Jormun tried to keep up with her, but soon she was lost in the crowd. He yelled her name, pushed away some vorcha who hissed at him. Red sand spilled on the floor in front of him, as two humans
scurried out of the way.

Hands grabbed his suited arm, tightening a firm grip. Stopping him from reaching Ish. His head swam when a blow hit hard against his helmet. He writhed on the floor. Dancers swarming him. A dizzying figure stood looming in front of him.

"Well, well, well.", the deep voice said. "Looks like our rat has returned."

They ended up in a large barely lit room with rust colors in puke green and mud brown. The black walls wet with condensation from the many pipes that flowed through. Steam spurted out in small holes on the metal pipes. The turian turned off his rifle light. The dark in this room was alleviated by illuminators, though dim. In front of the walkway were stairs. They slowly descended.

At the bottom, a door was kept locked to a hallway separated by glass. Which had bullet holes in it. Satima proceeded and studied the panel.

"I can hack through. It's a really old encrypted lock." She brought up her omni-tool in confidence.

He noticed a lot of broken glass on the floor and a few extremely old pods. In front of one was a terminal. He turned it on to witness something he was only told about.

The adjutant project that Cerberus tried to keep in control but failed. He found some footage from the security cameras. His eyes widened to see her. A strong feeling of regret made him queasy. He then turned it off.

"I got IT!", Satima said loudly, proud of her skill.

He flinched to see if one of those things would come running out of the darkness. Nothing happened. At least not yet.

"Spirits, kid! Keep your voice down.", he told her a little too loud himself.

She covered her mouth and made an apologetic stance to him.

The door opened behind her, while the turian turned his rifles light back on and nearly dropped it in horror.

"SATIMA! RUN!", he screamed.

Satima was grabbed by the exact monster he watched earlier on screen. She yelled kicking and cursing. He took pot shots at it, careful not to hit her. She tried to wriggle from its grasp, hyperventilating from the terror she felt.

A small whining noise started to deafen her, as she continued to struggle. All the commotion was being blocked out, when a thought dominated all the others. Survive. Reaching the side of her belt, she felt for a weapon.

Satima stabbed it in the eye with her blade, dark blood spurting on her shoulder. The adjutant stumbled backwards grabbing at the object in pain. When the turian dashed to Satima to help her up, the adjutant attempted another swipe at them.

Dodging together, he put her behind an overturned console. Her whole body was shaking. The monster bellowed and roared in anger, ripping old terminals from their stands. Sparks flew outward from the violent rage. She stared ahead, unable to shake the feeling of fear at almost being killed by
that thing. Satima recognized a voice shouting at her, but all she could hear was the sound of her frantic heart.

The turian merc tried to get her attention, but the poor girl was terrified. He grabbed her chin gently, trying to get eye contact. "Listen to me.", he began. She kept breathing hard, staring off in horror. He shook her shoulder. "Satima! We have to run! Look at me!"

She faced him, her dark teal gaze wide in panic. Satima stared into his avian eyes, suddenly finding a calm. He released her chin. "I know you're scared." The creature retrieved the blade from its eye. Now searching for them, hurling biotic warps at objects in the room.

He continued, "We have a chance to escape, if we work together. You told me you survived hive?"

Satima nodded. Slowing down her breathing, listening to him.

"Then you can survive this. Trust me.", he tried to widen his mandibles into a smile. It was cocky and unused, but Satima gave a surprising response. "Ok.", she agreed. "Let's get out of here."

They ran past the door and found a broken hatch to their left. The other way was also covered in debris when the adjutant began roaring behind.

Panicked, they searched desperately for a new way out. He noticed a leaking gas pipe in the hall that could be ignited on the adjutant, but they needed to find cover. Satima found an open hatch with a ladder.

"We can escape here!", she shouted in a panic.

The adjutant came running down the hallway, its biotic warps hurling towards them. There is no time to debate. He pushed Satima down the ladder, and turned almost face to face with the beast, then threw himself backward down the chute, shooting the pipe with precision.

A blast of fire and heat shot him fast downward, listening to the adjutant roar in pain.

Down the chute, he landed on something soft and lumpy. His ribs were sore, and some of the fire singed the front of his armor. It seemed a few minutes passed by as he painfully got up. "Satima?", he grunted. "Where are you?", yelling, hoping she could hear him.

He heard a small moan below him.

"...he..here..", she said raising a hand.

"Spirits!", he reached down grabbing it, pulling her up out of debris she previously fell onto.

The turian didn't know he had landed on her, quickly scanning for anything broken while feeling guilty. Satima stumbled backwards but held on to him as she walked forward in a drunken stance. She turned around to him.

"You fell on me! That really hurt.", she stumbled backwards, falling on the ground unconscious.

Kneeling beside her and shaking his head, he knew her vitals where steady with a quick scan. Picking Satima up, the turian merc hoisted her over his shoulder. Just his luck.

Jormun woke up with a splitting headache. If he gets anymore blows to the head, he'll end up with permanent trauma. Keelah, where is Do'o va?

The quarian noticed his arms were unable to move about freely. Glancing down, he viewed the restraints on his wrists. Do'o va made whimpering sounds from his left. She was equally restrained
and panicking.
"D... are you alright?", he asked. "D?"

She stared away, shaking with fright.

The little room they occupied had a musty smell. Dust motes fluttered where lights cornered parts of the walls. A vent between the wall next to him and the outside looked closed. It was warm too. Were they moved to the ore processing levels?

His attention sharpened when the door opened with two vorcha and a krogan, entering. Jormun hoped to never see that krogan's scarred face again.
"Prax Worlock.", he muttered.

Prax circled Do'ova, turning his unsettling gaze to Jormun. "So, rat.", his voice thick with contempt. "You've come back to finish the job? Perhaps get the payment promised you, for your little pilgrimage?"

Gulping, Jormun tried to answer without squeaking the words. "I've returned for a friend. Her family. Where are they?" He attempted, as Prax came closer. "If-If you know, I mean." Looking away.

Prax chuckled, "Oh, I know." He turned his great body to Do'ova. "Well. I believe a certain someone has been missing you. Let's go visit him."

He signaled for the vorcha to undo their restraint. Jormun was hustled behind Prax, as Do'ova was made to lead with him. He feared what the tyrant is up too. Further along the walkway, they spotted several ore processing holds. A network with plenty of slave labor fueling the profit.

Terminus systems were always risky when escaping death.

"Where are we going?", Jormun wondered. "Are you going to enslave us to the blood pact?"

A vorcha hit him with a shock baton. He grited to himself, following along.

Prax stopped at a lift, pressing the icon on a panel. "Making you a worker would be satisfying. But you're too much trouble. Too knowledgeable in our pact."

Keelah, that sounded indefinite. Pushed on the lift, Do'ova swallowed fear. She faced the big krogan. "Dural didn't mean to interfere, Prax. He's young and stupid."

"You got that right.", Prax replied.

"So, he's alive? Right?", she wondered.

The lift came to a halt on the last level. Walking out, the heat from furnaces below them billowed up in dry wind. It was almost scalding. Prax stomped ahead, leading the small group to a set of steel cages. He opened one with a grin. "Here's your friend."

Do'o'ova rushed inside, looking intensely at the floor. A similar sandy toned male salarian laid motionless on the grated bottom of the cage. His eyes were wide with terror. Slash marks on his legs and arms had been stained with colored blood.

"Pity. If you had been here a few weeks ago, you know? When I sent the demand. He'd be alive, still. Ah, well."
Prax laughed aloud, his booming voice echoing off the hollow level. Jormun shook his head. Poor D.

Do'ova balled her fists tightly, tears streamed her face as a hard line formed from her lips. She closed her eyes, breathed in deeply, exhaling in a controlled manner. Promptly turning with a swift punch to the evil krogan's mouth. "You Werlock bastard!", she screamed.

Prax knocked her down hard. Putting a large foot on her slender chest. Pressing hard to crack ribs and smash her heart. "I'll crush you like the bug you are!", he roared.

Jormun had to act fast. He tripped the left vorcha, taking a hit to the gut from the other. Borrowing a move from Satima, head butting the creepy creature. It screeched in anger, but Jormun slid out of the way.

The stupid vorcha jumped forward, falling off the catwalk over a furnace. With one left, he looked around anything to fight with. Eyeing the shock baton in front of him. Jormun beat down the second blood pact scum, knocking him unconscious from repeatedly high voltage surges.

Panting from the fight, the quarian put his attention on Prax. Do'ova will die if he doesn't stop him! He can't take him on like Satima did. And he's not an expert hand to hand fighter. Hell! He's just an engineer from Ranoch! Do'ova's strained breaths put a fire under him. He's an engineer and a quarian. Hacking is second nature to him.

Jormun quickly tweaked the baton to maximum power surge. It won't kill Prax, but it will certainly slow him down. Painfully. Redundant nervous system be damned.

He sprinted forward, aiming for an under-arm opening. As Prax busied himself slowly trying to kill Do'ova, Jormun jammed the shock baton under the krogan's arm pit. He roared in anger, receiving a full jolt that would fry a vorcha dead.

Jormun helped Do'ova up, as she leaned on his shoulder. They hastily walked to the lift. Reaching the top floor. Within one of the elevator's back to the docks, he checked her injuries and applied medi-gel.

She winced once or twice. Keeping a steady gaze onward. Alarms blared on the station as an announcement echoed back on the docking ward. They pushed themselves out of the elevator, walking slowly in pain from the fight before. Jormun looked around to see crowds. And Directive soldiers.

Keelah.

...

The turian slowly walked forward in the new open district. Grateful for the extra light and civilization from upstairs. Balconies across blared music around him as it echoed off metal walls. Sky cars passed by overhead into deep tunnels of the mining levels.

Satima showed no signs of waking. Minutes passed, with his shoulder beginning to hurt from the weight. Not that Satima is heavy, but her little bit of armor and him carrying her for ten minutes put a strain on his muscles.

Slowly wandering in the ward, he looked around to see a red mark of graffiti on the wall. One that he smiled at.

As he walked in the district a few turians showed up, weapons in hand. They surrounded them.
"I hate surprises.", he thought.

"You have no business here. We allow so many refugees at a time and only turians.", the turian in red and black demanded. They all had their helmets on.

"I am a turian you moron.", he yelled agitated.

Some of them gathered behind him. Pointing and smirking. "Who is she? Your mate?", they all laughed together mockingly.

"Obviously human.", another one said.

"Slip her a little fun in the drink?", one from behind sniggered.

He glared at them. Welcome to Omega, where the obvious is oblivious to the rest.

A turian who was respected approached, with deep red armor. He wore no helmet, and his face along with one mandible were covered in brown clan markings. Yellow eyes stared straight his way, while a few salutes were given him.

"What's going on here?", he said sternly. Staring at the two newcomers in the talons district.

One of the talons stepped forward, "Sir! We have trespassers. An old turian male and the alien girl whose bounty was on the wall."

The lone turian's head snapped to the Talons merc. Pretentious little prick. But a more alarming question interrupted his thoughts. Were they watching them the whole time? Could the adjutant be theirs? The respected gang leader walked closer to him and Satima, as he studied the taller turian in blue. Then he laughed, slapping the carapace back of the younger turian in surprise.

"Men. Put your weapons down! We have a legend in our district.", his demeanor changed into amore relaxed state.

They all looked at each other, obeying their orders. What was he talking about? Aiden held out his taloned hand, "Garrus Damn Vakarian! I thought you were dead?"

Garrus finally recognized the leader. "Aiden Aurelius? It's been a long time.", he shook it vigorously, eyeing the younger turian mercs.

Aiden returned the favor, "Too long. What's got you wandering back here for?" He questioned.

"Let's get inside the base first. I'll have plenty to tell.", Garrus answered.

They were led inside the Talons base. Hidden down an alley, and beyond a few shops. Aiden stopped in front of the door of a drug den. He put in an access code. Once through, Garrus saw a whole new underground of people. Mostly turians and a few asari, these were refugees that could not leave. The sick was laid in one area of the building with volunteers trying to nurse them and any injured had been piled behind the groups.

He could hear children playing somewhere.

Dextro nutrient paste came in stock and barrel. Stacked four feet high next to each other on the far-left hand wall behind some Talon mercenaries guarding it. Following the turian men, Garrus noticed a small room to their right. Apparently, that's where they were heading.

"What is it you need?", Aiden asked, waving to a few asari and another turian guard.
"My friend needs medical help.", Garrus hinted at how long he had been carrying her. "And I would like a moment to sit down." He laughed with a wince.

Were he in his younger days...

Aiden nodded, he signaled for a merc to bring in a cot. An asari came in with a medical bag. Garrus laid Satima down, her face had a bruise around the eye. The asari nurse took scans, applied medi-gel and other ointments on Satima's cuts. He shouldn't have pushed her. But that thing was getting closer to them.

Garrus watched the asari. He didn't trust mercs or criminals, especially on Omega. Aiden looked on with fascination. This odd girl, with a strangeness to her that lured him. The asari took out an injector, she lifted the brown sleeve of Satima's jacket. Garrus grabbed her hand.

"It's for pain. She has bruised ribs.", the asari nurse stated.

Garrus looked at Aiden who nodded in assurance. He let go of her arm. At the prick of flesh Satima woke with a start, grabbing the injector and holding it tightly to the asari's neck. She glared around the room in total fright. Garrus knelt next to her.

"Satima, it's alright. No one is going to hurt you.", he tried a soothing tone.

It's been awhile.

Satima looked at him in surprise, almost as if she forgot where she was. Garrus put a gentle hand on her arm and she let go of the injector. The asari nurse fled. Aiden leaned on his leg with a smirk.

"Dangerous and sexy.", he smiled at Satima.

Satima snorted to him. She turned to Garrus.

"Where is Jormun?"

Time passed while Satima paced the room. They wasted an hour talking, and she hated it. Jormun could be dead in an alley somewhere being picked off by vorcha and they wanted to talk! Satima settled against a weapons bench, occupying her thoughts with something constructive. Garrus sat with Aiden.

"I need the directive's dogs to leave the docking area so we can get back to her ship.", he informed. His request seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Aiden watched Satima and looked at Garrus.

"Strange girl."

Garrus noticed Aiden's curiosity. He averted the young turians gaze back to him.

"Have you been getting any trouble from the Directive lately?" Garrus didn't like small talk.

"No more than usual." Aiden leaned forward to observe her closely. "Who is she? Why is the Directive so interested in obtaining her?"

Garrus got irritated by this. He stood up to block his view. Aiden acted annoyed, but eventually stopped staring. He knows something, Garrus couldn't trust him, but the man is his only shot right now at escaping the station.
"Just a girl who owns a ship. I need your help Aiden. Can an old friend request that much?", Garrus asked politely.

Aiden smirked," Old friend! You haven't aged a day Garrus. Must be that merc life and all the blue ass you can get." They both laughed, until Aiden continued. "All right, I'll give you help."

Garrus smiled satisfied with his negotiation. Aiden nodded, but seemed distracted when Satima nearly burned her hand with a soldering gun. Garrus never liked that look. He knows what it means.

"So, within the hour?", Garrus towered over the younger turian distracting his view once more.

Aiden had a blank look to his face. He clicked his mandibles and stood to shake Garrus's hand.

"Of course."

Aiden left the room. Garrus walked over to a busy Satima. "You alright?", he asked concerned and sorry about earlier.

She glanced his way but went back to fixing an abandoned pistol. "Yeah. Just anxious to leave."

Garrus noticed she was having a difficult time cleaning a mod she found to her new weapon. He found a hanging cloth and took the mod out of her hand. "You're doing it wrong."

"HEY!", she replied.

Garrus smirked at her. "If you clean this tiny opening, you'll wipe off the grease. Without that it will lock up and the mod will break. What is this any way?" He fumbled with it to see what model it was. Armor piercing type.

"Is it done yet?", she asked impatiently.

Garrus handed her the mod. "Do you know how to re-attach it?"

She snatched it scoffing, putting the mod back in the pistol and cocked it with a smile. "I do now."

Satima noticed how Aiden kept leering at her. The uneasy stares and how he moved his mandibles sent a bad feeling in her gut. She wondered where Jormun had fled too. Surely, he has seen the holo signs of her face. Satima worried over his fate. She didn't want to be held responsible for his death. To go to Ranoch and tell his family it was because of her, that he died.

Garrus paced around the underground bunker. He watched Aiden. Satima could most certainly take care of herself, but a predator was always ready for anything. His days in C-sec gave him that much insight.

So Garrus planned. If Aiden made a wrong move, he would cut his prick off and toss it to that pet adjutant still lurking in the dark wards. The thought made Garrus smile. Forty minutes passed and Aiden signaled they were ready. Garrus, Aiden and Satima looked over a holo grid of their plans.

"I have two scouts out there. The Directive has a tight hold on your ship, but I think we can manage a good diversion." Aiden sounded sure and proud of his idea. While the Talons play urban war with them, Garrus and Satima are to take a back-alley route to the docking hub. When they reach it, they will have a small amount of time to get on.

Aiden will release the Haven from the tethers so Satima can override the controls. Once completed they are free to leave.
"We have to find Jormun and Do'ova as soon as Haven is free. If they have them...?", Satima looked at Garrus concerned.

Garrus nodded in agreement. Satima watched them both. Even though Aiden was evidently younger than Garrus they acted as equals. She wasn't familiar with turian culture. Aiden gave Satima the same uneasy stare the whole ride to the outer docks. Garrus kept a firm hand on his rifle.

"Satima? Is that your whole name?", Aiden asked suddenly, looking her up and down.

The silence had broken, Satima reluctantly complied. "My given name, yes.", she sighed annoyed.

"By who?", Aiden asked again.

Satima turned to him with a devilish grin until Garrus broke the conversation. "I think you have enough information now."

Satima looked away and watched the lights of Omega's city. They reached their destination. Garrus and Satima got out with Aiden following behind.

"Through here.", he pointed to a door outside a club. Neon lights covered the wet street they walked on.

Aiden punched a few more codes and it opened. Not a dark scary corridor this time.

"Go through this alley. Follow it to the end. A door to your right will take you straight to the Haven." He glanced to Satima.

Garrus shook his taloned hand. "Thank you."

Aiden complied. He looked at Satima one more time, clicking his mandible, and watched them go down the alley to disappear.

"Strange eyes.", he muttered.

A minute into the strange area, they made their way back to Haven. Satima hated the quiet. She half expected a slew of the directive's soldiers on the other end just waiting to take her. "So, you're a legend around here?", she asked trying to keep the thoughts away.

Garrus chuckled, "Not a legend. Just most wanted. Though that's not going to be a problem anymore." He checked another corridor. Clear.

Satima got curious about his visor. "Does it help?"

Garrus glanced her way then quickly turned forward. "Help what?"

Satima nearly bumped into him from not paying attention. "Your visor. Does it help with fighting?", she pointed not noticing it till now.

"I suppose.", he replied. Her curiosity piqued his. Garrus glanced back to her again, deciding to humor her nervous questions. They stopped for a moment to check the next alley.

Satima waited until he began speaking. "I used to be a sniper. Trained as a boy to be a soldier, a long time ago." he reflected while checking their surroundings. "I can use any weapon. Take your blades for instance. Did you know that at the right spot, you can separate the spine of a drell or snap the plating off a turian's brow?"
He sounded a bit excited talking about battle.

"Not in that way. No. I do know how to cut off a fringe or two.", she waved her blade with a smirk. Those small blades, rusty and crude to look at, but sharp as a varen's teeth.

Garrus watched her flick the blade in skill. He remembered Aiden, "Satima, be careful around Aiden. He's skilled, a trained soldier."

She took offense at his words. "And I'm not?! You've seen what I can do, Garrus! I can take care of myself."

He checked a noise in the alley, before turning to her, blocking the way until the point was made clear. "You can fight, I'll give you that. But you're still a kid. Satima, you don't truly understand what's out there. And people like Aiden cluster in places like this, just waiting to take advantage of scared little girls."

"I wasn't scared!", Satima protested about the adjutant. "I'm not a child!", she glared.

Garrus sighed in irritation. He stared at her, disappointed. "Kid, you are. Just, stay behind me. Ok?"

Satima nodded, surprised at Garrus's sudden interest in her safety. It seemed strange. Garrus likewise felt awkward at his words. He just wanted to keep her safe. Skilled she was, but not in the great wide scary expanse of the galaxy. At least not long enough. Too much hiding and not enough learning. She's just a kid, after all, or so he keeps telling himself.

"We need to find Jormun and Do'ova.", he said walking away.

"Right.", she followed behind, agreeing.

They reached the end of the door. Garrus used his visor to find any heat signatures. Clear.

"Stay behind me. Use your blades to defend in close quarters. The pistol to repeal any one from getting close."

Garrus had a bad feeling. Aiden was up to something. Friend or not, this galaxy has become darker. And its people more sinister.

Garrus opened the door. He took point and cover behind a crate. Up ahead there were a few soldiers. They either weren't paying attention or pretended not to.

Gun fire broke out. The soldiers ran from Haven. It was now or never. Garrus and Satima ran, keeping watch for any ambushes as they reached her ship. Garrus signaled by comms to Aiden. Within seconds the tethers released.

Satima opened the Havens cargo doors. Once inside she quickly went to the pilot controls, her hands effortlessly gliding across the holo-panels. Garrus closed the cargo doors, then ran to the mess at the airlock. Closing the hatch shut. He turned around only to be knocked out by a rifle barrel.

Satima managed to get Haven primed, but they weren't out of danger yet. Two fighter patrols swarmed the outer zone. If they see her ship leaving the docks, they'll shoot them down.

"Garrus I need you to ask Aiden for air support."

No response.

"Garrus?", she said nervously.

Satima got up and carefully eyed the corner of the doorway connecting to the mess, pointing her
pistol. All the room doors were closed.
"...garrus.", she whispered.

Satima aimed the pistol walking into the mess. Garrus was nowhere in sight. She heard a creak on the floor behind her.

"I knew there was something strange about you."

Satima turned around fast. It was Aiden!

"How did you board my ship? The tethers were locked and there was no access!", Satima backed herself to the table. Behind it, Garrus laid knocked out. He hadn't woken yet.

"Garrus doesn't like to talk much. Selfish bastard.", Aiden glared toward the aged soldier. "You know he could've helped secured Omega for the Talons. He just walked off saying "this wasn't his war anymore".

Aiden got agitated.

Satima walked around the table, aiming her pistol at him, as she tried hitting Garrus with her boot.

"..garrus..", she whispered through gritted teeth.

Aiden kept talking. "The Directive is looking for you. You're a wanted woman." He stalked her around the mess table. "They're also interested in the people on the station. I've been offered a heavy number of creds for them. But I turned it down."

Aiden stopped, glancing around the interior of the ship. "I don't want wealth.", he stared at her. "I want Aria's head decorating my station. I want complete control of the terminus systems. All under the name of the Talons."

"You're insane.", Satima replied, disturbed.

Aiden laughed. "It's called ambition." He leaned over the table with a menacing glare. "Living in the midst of the reapers rule have taught me one thing." Aiden leered, as his mandibles widened into a predatory grin. "You take what you want, before someone else takes it from you."

Satima opened fire, careful to not hit the hull walls. He dodged. Aiden quickly ran to her, hitting her wrist hard, and grabbed her pistol throwing it across the floor.

She attempted to deflect a blow from his fist, but he sent her face down. Crawling to get the weapon that was thrown, he pulled her by the legs backward. She twisted herself and hit his face with her boot knocking him down.

Satima reached the pistol, but he stepped on her hand while she screamed in pain.

"I don't want to hurt you, but I will if I need to!", he grabbed her by the hair. Bringing her to his face.

Satima spit on him, then he dropped her hard causing her nose to be bloodied. Aiden straddled her while Satima fought with all her strength. "Don't struggle.", he warned.

Using her right hand, Satima hit his throat hard. He fell back, choking, gasping for air.

"HEY!"

Aiden looked up to see Jormun holding his shotgun, Ish.

"How did you get on board?!", he yelled surprised.
"I let him in.", Garrus kicked Aiden away from Satima. She scrambled on her feet, crouched in an attack position.

Do'ova stumbled in. Hugging the hull walls while the fight continued.

The talon merc held his side in pain, standing quickly. "Damn you, Garrus! Your self-righteous bullshit is preventing your own people from getting a foothold back in this galaxy!", Aiden sounded desperate as he backed away in fear.

Jormun cocked the gun. Garrus smirked putting his left boot on the bench, leaning on his knee as he stared at Aiden. "You're not "our people". I think the Talons will get along fine without you.", he glared.

Jormun shot him in the chest. Aiden flew backwards, but he was still alive.

Satima ran to Aiden in a rage, knocking him down with her body. She straddled him, pulled out a blade and jammed it into Aiden's eye, while Jormun stood back stunned. Do'ova wanted to puke.

She looked away, trying to focus only on what she found today.

Aiden screamed in agony as Satima lifted the bloody piece of plate and flesh off. "Don't struggle!", she shouted, and with one quick strike, ended him.

Satima stared ahead, panting and fuming in anger. Blue blood splattered her face, while she lifted the blade. Jormun dropped his shotgun in disbelief.

He's never seen her this violent before. Satima slowly stood up with the look of wild pleasure from the kill, as he tried to approach her. From his slight touch, she attacked him, pointing the bloody blade to his suited chest. A primal look to her gaze, she panted hard, ready to strike again. Until Jormun begged to her.

"Satima, it's me! Jormun! I would never hurt you!", he pleaded fearfully. Satima stopped, letting him go. Jormun stepped back, shaking the feeling on the deck and hastily walked past her to the engine room.
"I... I have to get Haven ready to FTL.", he nervously said sprinting by her.

Do'ova stared at her captain. What is she? Some kind of monster? And what Prax said, about a demand. Did Satima know this whole time that her father was alive? Dural missing, her other family and friends nowhere to be seen.

Garrus watched in alarm, unable to move to stop her from killing Jormun, and unable to comprehend what he just witnessed. There was something not right about her, this strange young woman.

Satima dropped the blade and sat on the floor eyeing the blood pool around Aiden's head. "I did this?", she spoke with a frail voice. Satima stared at her stained hands, glancing at Garrus before running to the ship's lavatory room.

Garrus walked to the body. New feelings emerged. He was impressed and worried. Satima acted like a wild predator more than a skilled professional. She was uncaged and enjoying it. Whatever HIVE had done to her was a permanent imprint that could not be erased.

A sound of alarms blared from Omega. He went to the piloting chair and flew the ship back out into space. Using a relay to escape again.

Minutes passed. Another close call. How long this borrowed time will last, before the Directive really catches up?

Garrus set the autopilot and felt he needed to check in on her. Jormun saw to Do'ova's injury. She
rested comfortably in her quarters.

Spirits. He could hear Satima mumbling from the coms he switched on. He hesitantly sat up, walking to the restroom and knocked on the door. Garrus gulped down a hard emotion of uncertainty. Satima heard him outside the door, rocking herself in the same manner she had always done before. She stopped crying. The hot, stinging tears began drying on her face.

After a deep breath, Garrus started to talk. "Do you want to talk?"

"Go away.", she replied.

Garrus opened the door. She was seated on the floor. Satima looked so much like a lost child. He cleared his throat and walked in, kneeling to face her. "Do you want to talk about it?", he stared at her with a sincere look this time.
She shook her head as she looked at the lines of the tiled floor.

Garrus looked back at the dead body of Aiden. "I see you listened to my advice." he chuckled nervously.

She ignored him.


"Look, Satima. You had every right to defend yourself. Like you've done before with Directive soldiers, or with anyone else, I'm assuming." He's not her father, he can't give her the answers to the cruelty of this universe.

She swallowed her tears, opening her mouth to speak. Garrus stood still, afraid of what she might ask. Instead, he was surprised to what he is about to hear. "I'm not afraid of that", she began. "I don't want to be her." Satima swallowed again. "I don't want to be a reaper", she wrung her hands nervously, a small laugh escaped her lips.

"Reaper trained me to kill." she glanced away, with an ashamed expression. "But… she helped me get away from them. For a time."

Garrus saw Jormun at the corner of his eye. He motioned for him to stay where he was. Satima had not noticed and proceeded to talk uninterrupted.

Satima stared up at the hull wall. She took a breath closing her eyes. "Sometimes when I kill, I can't feel anything. It's like this empty shadow that's feeding off my mind. Filling it with thoughts I don't want."

Garrus leaned on the wall. She likes it. Complain all she wants, but Satima gets a small thrill from it. It's disturbing to him, but understandable. Surviving out here in this hell the reapers created will make anyone lose a hold on reality. What's right. What's wrong. A grey area. And he hates grey.

"I met a batarian while running from some merc hunters. He gunned them down, took me in. After a few weeks, he took me to his home. Some old Cerberus base I've never heard of. His name is... or was, Borlask. After I turned eighteen and learned the smuggling trade, he gave me Haven.", she smiled faintly.

Garrus nodded and motioned for Jormun to come in. Odd for a batarian to take in a stranger, let alone defend one. He stepped away to leave them alone. Satima needed someone who cared for her to hear this and to comfort her.
"Ancestors Satima.", Jormun sat on his knees in front of her. "It must be hard to control what they did to you."

Satima looked at him and gently touched his hand, "I'm so sorry for earlier. I promise I will never hurt you, or Do'ova." She looked up to Garrus. "Or you, although spirits know how annoying you are."

Garrus shared a light laugh between them.

Satima suddenly felt so different than from before. All these years she was taught to repress her feelings, bury her emotions and take every bit of pain. Turning it into a weapon against others. That was the Reaper way. But Jormun changed that. He cared for her and never hurt her.

Borlask looked after her, mentored her. She thought about Garrus. How kind he was to her, unflinching and pondered about his nightmare a day ago.

Then she remembered Do'ova. Her calm expression died away quickly. "Shit. D! Is she okay? Where is she?", Satima yelled in panic.

Jormun reassured her, "She's recovering in her quarters. D is fine. But… we need to talk. After you feel better from earlier, yourself."

She nodded.

Garrus dragged the dead Aiden to the airlock and closed the door between them. He pressed a panel watching the body being snatched into space. "Goodbye Aiden, you depraved son of a bitch.", he said with disdain, spitting to the side of the airlock at the turians name in insult.

A calmed Satima entered the bay area. She spotted Garrus returning from the air-lock hatch. One question remained, and since he had become more comfortable around them, maybe he'll answer. She stood at the doorway, the question lingering in her eyes.

"The nightmare you had in the engine room. Who is Shepard?", she asked again with an eager gaze.

Garrus looked away agitated, remembering how vulnerable Satima is at this time. He walked forward, gently pressing past her in the doorway. "No one.", he answered solemnly.

She watched him leave the area. The sadness in his voice touched her at that moment. Safely away from the terminus systems, Satima resumed control of the Haven.

She hadn't slept in hours. Their run-in on Omega gave her plenty of new nightmares. She navigated Haven as far away as she could from that system. Hours had passed and she eventually fell asleep at the controls. Comms echoed on, "We're going to need to refuel soon. Also, running out of provisions." Jormun's voice woke Satima from nodding off at the control panel. She widened her eyes to the holo-grid before her.

"Yeah... looks like we're in luck. There's a colony nearby.", her head ached from exhaustion.

She couldn't let herself sleep until they were clear of the Directive. But how far can she go before she would end up cornered?
Good Girl

Chapter Summary

A pit stop turns into a babysitting service, when the crew is cornered by the new villain-Archer. Satima makes a dangerous choice to save them.

Chapter Notes

Please excuse any punctuation errors and missing words on sentences. I am, every week, reviewing what I post to check for that. Thanks for taking a look, and have a wonderful day.

They were going to Digeris, one of a few planets that can support dextro life. Once it was a small battleground between the turian and reaper forces. Zynar became a turian colony after the harvest twenty-one years ago.

Satima rubbed her eyes as she yawned, still heavy from the lack of sleep. She brought up NAV tools, typing the coordinates and turned on comms for the entire ship.

"Listen up, we're making a stop at Zynar. Haven needs fuel and I'm well aware there isn't enough food for our small group."

Garrus had finished with the lock codes on the fighter. The time spent on Zynar would give him the chance to quietly leave. "Ok. Let me know when we arrive."

Do'ova quietly watched from the entry way. Her thoughts were shattered into many images. One, of her dead father. The horrors he had suffered from the pact's forced labor in the bowels of Omega. Her cousins; wherever they may be, missing or worse.

And all that Prax said about his demands being unanswered. Would her captain betray their trust?

She kept in mind what that turian was doing with the scouter vessel. Maybe he could help her find them and leave Haven? Leave her captain. For good. Passing the atmosphere and turning in orbit they landed outside the dusty colony. The docks were old, constantly in repair, but to many it was home.

Garrus waited on the cargo deck, while the hatch was slowly opening. He had been ready to leave, following his plan, when Satima caught up with him. She quickly slid her small arms through the jacket sleeves she seemed to favor. Jormun stepped behind in his deep purple quarian suit.

Do'ova nervously peaked the open landing field, staying to the side of the rampway. Dust filled wind blew across the ground with a fury. "This sand could lodge into our thruster's shafts. I should close them temporarily. Captain, we are safe enough to shut down the Haven's emergency lift off, right?"

The captain nodded, as her salarian friend hurried outside.
Satima glanced towards the turian with a weary expression. "Don't wonder off, I'm going to need help loading all the crates.", as she walked past him to meet with Jormun, letting out a wide yawn.

Garrus noticed again, her odd features. What kind of species is she? Where did the directive find her, or did they make her?

There was something about her that didn't seem natural or normal. Especially the features. A humanoid body of a young girl, but those strange eyes, so similar to... he shook his head. Such oddities come and go. He nodded at her request, while she led Jormun away from the shuttle bay. With all his concealed weapons packed Garrus just realized that he complied to orders from a kid. She could be a natural leader if she wasn't so unpredictably violent. Either way, he couldn't quite figure her out.

Garrus doesn't have the time to bother with this one. He has only one goal in mind. To kill Reaper and avenge the spirit of Shepard.

Satima didn't trust Garrus. Even though he had been kind to her. But Jormun is the only person who would ever care for her, no matter what. Even if she doesn't return the favor.

Garrus's only intentions are for self-interest. And according to the dead Aiden, a selfish bastard. Satima learned to be selfish quickly, and with the help of Borlask, she became good at it. Then the first trip to Omega happened. She met Jormun protecting a salarian family. A fight broke out, and he killed a blood pact merc with his shotgun. Satima ran to their defense when she spotted more of the brutes coming for them.

In haste, she led them back to Haven and took them to a bigger ship out in the Far Rim, but Jormun stayed. He didn't want to return a murderer to his people, or his family. No matter how much Satima protested that it was in self-defense.

Now, he's her boyfriend? Too awkward to think that way, but that's what he feels. And, she might just feel this way too.

And Do'ova? Satima watched her footsteps on the sand. Her heart sank deep, filling her with complete dread over that girl. She made Do'ova stay for her safety. But, at what cost? Jormun hasn't said a word about what happened to them.

Why was D injured? What or who, came after them?

Satima sighed outside the dock's platform. The sound of other shuttles flying by drowned out the shouts of dock workers. Reaper was right about one thing; you can't trust anyone. Not this Garrus guy, or even her crew. Just like with Borlask, they'll betray her.

Because in the end... she deserves it.

"Do you want me to go ahead and set up the fueling ports?", Jormun asked her, suddenly shaking her from the thoughts.

She looked around the colony's many markets. Lots of people, too many of them.

"Sure. I'll get us some food, maybe a few things.", she turned to see Garrus lagging behind purposefully.

Jormun wondered if she was all right after what Aiden tried. In a colony, full of turians? That'll work out great.
Satima followed Jormun to the fuel port. Passing a few buildings with various provisions with outgoing and incoming goods. Garrus stopped, his visor pinged with a red dot, then a small radar opened on the screen. Satima observed as they stood in front of the warehouse. A large building that had a landing zone on top for smaller hover trucks. She could see plenty of light coming from the many windows.

Jormun left inside the refueling station. Satima walked up to Garrus, curious about his sudden halt in front of the building. "Why did you stop here?", she asked watching him stare.

She waited to see if he'll try to slip away unnoticed. He didn't say anything.

"Did you hear me?", she waved a hand in front of his face.

Garrus gave her an angry side-glance, then grabbed her hand and put it down. He faced her. "Stay put.", he said sternly.

Satima folded her arms in irritation. "Why?", she glared.

"STAY!", he pointed a taloned finger at her. An alarmed look to his turian expression.

She took a deep, annoyed breath. "Fine.", she exhaled in a promise. "I'll stay out here, but if you're gone more than ten minutes...?", Satima stared him down hard. Her bright teal eyes against the dark sclera almost glowing in the dying sunset.

Garrus cocked his head with a smirk, "You are a demanding little girl."

He walked in as Satima fumed from his comment. If that asshole calls her little girl, one more time?

Satima sat on a crate and watched the turian dock workers unload and load. Repeat. It seemed tedious. A life she wouldn't want.

The Haven is her home, space was her yard. She kicked some rocks around sighing about the long wait. "Just like a stupid kid.", she complained. It had to have been eleven minutes when he finally emerged, dragging a smaller turian boy.

He was maybe in his early teens and had the exact same blue clan makings as Garrus. Satima laughed as the boy struggled, ending up falling face down in dirt. Garrus crossed his arms angrily at the kid.

"Where's your mother?", he spoke in an authoritative tone.

"Caius, you have to go home.", Garrus dusted the flinching boys back.

Caius backed away in annoyance. "I can take care of myself! I'm not a kid!", he shouted.

Satima could tell this was a family issue. She started to walk off.

"Who is she? Your girlfriend?", Caius apparently didn't know when to shut up or was trying to change the subject.

Satima turned with a smirk towards him. As she stepped closer to Caius, the boy backed up into Garrus. His eyes wide in a confused fear.
"I'm the Captain.", she warned. Satima was face to face with the brat. Although he was taller, Cauis didn't like how she gave him a predator's grin. Satima smirked.

He let out a sigh of relief when she walked away. Garrus dragged the boy, shouting discontent to him.

Satima wandered around the markets, careful of any eyes or whispers. It seemed the turians were more occupied with their daily survival. A well-disciplined and ordered bunch of uptight refugees. She ordered crates of dextro for the Havens provisions. Garrus caught up with her, Caius in tow.

"What the hell is he doing here?", she stared annoyed. "I thought his mother was coming?"

"I need to drop him off.", Garrus kept a firm hold on the squirming boy's arm.

She shook her head in personal outrage. With a nasty stare, she agreed. "Your family, your responsibility. If I catch him screwing up anything on my ship..."

Garrus sighed in frustration. "He won't. I'll keep him with me the whole time."

Satima leaned back, folded arms staring at the pair, "Who is he? Your kid?", she asked in curiosity.

Garrus's own stunned expression threw Satima off guard, "Spirits No! He's my sister's kid." He couldn't decide whether to be angry or embarrassed.

Satima shook her head again, "Fine... with my luck. Get stuck babysitting a bunch of turians.", she mumbled to herself. Cauis looked at Garrus who had an equally annoyed stance.

"Get to the ship, Haven. It's docked and old, you can't miss it.", Garrus stared as Satima disappeared inside the refueling station. He pulled Caius closer to him, "There's a salarian named Do'ova. Nervous kid, jumpy. Introduce yourself before running up the ramp. This crew has seen hell and they aren't up for any attitude. You read me?"

"..but...", the boy stammered.

Garrus couldn't have his sister's son running around on his own, and the fact the boy couldn't follow simple instructions brought out an uglier side to him. He grabbed Cauis's carapace and gave him a threatening stare. "I said, GET. TO. THE SHIP...NOW CAUIS!", he roared.

Cauis stumbled backward but regained his footing, following his uncle's demand. Upset his plans to leave have been postponed due to his nephew's interference, Garrus decides to wait. After dropping off Cauis back with Sol, he'll resume his plan. Unless Satima catches him first.

Haven-Docked

Do'ova stumbled around the long fueling hoses. Jormun checked on her minutes ago, before sprinting off to find the captain.

Some grease smudged her pants, leaving a glaring stain that annoyed the irritated side of her. With everything done, D gathered the current ship data. Prepared it for Jormun to evaluate. Repaired a few loose wires over the comms panel.

Walked through the short corridor and sat herself down in the pilot chair to called Jen's number. Pinging off the colony's comm buoy, she waited for any answer. Anything at all. No luck. Maybe if she used the ship's long-range comms, there could be a chance to find the last known location?
Wouldn't work unless she were close to a relay. Damn!

Do'ova thought over the last conversations with Prax. The unanswered call!

She broke into the captain's personal message log. Scrolled through a few unanswered heart sick texts from Jormun. Why is she such a bitch to him? Another set of junk mail and one side note for a new set of combat knives, finally led to the message.

It was a video call.

D opened it. Prax stood front and center with a sinister smirk on his large ugly face. Her father sat on his knees. The deep-set dark eyes that once had life and love, were void… empty. He had already been dead for some time, it seemed.

"I want an answer by the next hour. Or Durlin and his sister are shipped off to the mines."

It ended abruptly. Do'ova closed the holo call. Satima knew. Her captain knew and wouldn't say a word or take her home. She'll answer for this. By her father's grave, Satima will answer.

Moments later, Jormun greeted Satima at the port. She seemed sourer than lately. He wished she smiled more. It was her best feature, considering the slightly scary yet stimulating sharp teeth. A few of the station workers laughed his way. He had to shake the thoughts or embarrassment would soon follow.

Satima came to a displeased halt in front of him. Her gaze looking around in all directions. She's angry. "Hey Jormun, guess what?", she spoke in a sarcastic tone, finally settling those dagger eyes on him. Afraid to ask, Jormun reluctantly spoke, "What happened?"

Satima stood to his side. She crossed her arms with a bitter laugh. "Garrus has a nephew. That nephew was here and is now hitching a ride with us. Great... isn't it?", her cranky attitude was drawing a few onlookers.

Jormun placed his hand on her arm, pulling away from the crowd of workers. One Garrus was enough but two of them! How is he to compete with that? But wait… Nephew?

"So... how old is he?", he swallowed. Feeling even more irritated by the thought of a younger Garrus, on board Haven. Around Satima. She scowled her face again. "Damn teenager. I hate teenagers!"

Jormun let go of her arm, then started to chuckle loudly. Satima heard it and snapped her head to him in anger. "What's so damn funny?"

He stopped laughing for a moment to catch his breath. How foolish he felt. Clearing his throat, Jormun stood a little nearer to her. Satima glanced left and right, "Uh... Jormun. You're getting kinda close to me." She smiled sweetly, blushing at this contact between them.

Jormun leaned in, "You know, you were a teenager once yourself.", he teased.

Oh, his voice was smooth, with that sexy accent. She could hear her heart pound from the excitement and thoughts of them together. She shook her head to clear it.

Satima slapped his shoulder, "Quit screwing around. We've got a long, annoying ride ahead of us."

She stomped off. Jormun leaned on some machinery with a hidden smile watching her leave.
Haven thrummed to life, thrusters emitting their blue heat in the air. After liftoff and space insertion, Satima went to see Cauis, to put out some ground rules while he was a "guest" on her ship. Garrus had kept him in sight on the cargo level. He worked in the fighter more often, a repetitive hobby that was becoming suspicious to Satima. Cauis had been made to clean air filters.

The young turian sat on the metal grated floor grumbling while performing the duties his uncle forced him to do. He looked at Satima as she stood in place watching him. "What do you want?", he argued. His voice sounding a little deeper.

Satima folded her arms with a cross glare, "To remind you who is in charge of this ship!"

Cauis furrowed his plated brow, continuing the cleaning. "So? I can do what I want!", he tried to growl menacingly but was cut off as Garrus emerged from the vessel. He eyed the boy, who quickly shut his mouth.

"Cauis isn't going anywhere without my say and certainly not without me. He's not going to be any trouble Satima. I promise.", Garrus looked tired as he reassured the young Captain.

Satima unfolded her arms, caught herself feeling less agitated. "Well... see that you do.", she quickly walked off.

On deck quarters, Do'ova paced in circles in her little room. She kept replaying how she would confront the captain, over and over. Shouting, cursing, pushing or shaking her! Maybe kicking her… definitely kick her.

The sound of the ship vibrated and thrummed loudly, ripping her thoughts into the past. Somewhere far on a lush planet. Warm tropical climate, cooling rains and plenty of verdant fields to get lost in.
But then they burned. Everything became a blaze of death and ash.

Her father came from a unique family. They lived on a small science station. Salarians were the dominant species there, but at times asari also took lodgings. They provided biotic protection, and her own people were the source of intelligence.

Her parents were unconventional. He chose to have her. Defying social rules of family planning with their hatchery. A proud father that welcomed the changes in a new chapter of this darker galaxy.

Do'ova smiled. Deeper memories of her silly cousins filled the anxious thoughts with laughter and pranks. Always practicing their… what was it he called it? STG conditioning? Yes, that's it. On fellow neighbors onboard the station.
Durlin and his sister were special too. Their little family fled the awful aftermath of the Directive's control. Friends disappeared; strangers became their enemies. It was a scary time for little Do'ova. But she tried hard to be brave.
Not like Durlin, or Jen… or her mother. Who fought off the mercenaries from the local colony they stopped to help. A trap, her father said.

Do'ova shook her head. Painful memories were something that Salarian's avoided. Unable to forget facts and little details. Like how the blood pooled like a green shadow around her mother's body. Or how empty her father's eyes looked.

Captain Satima lied to her. Betrayed her. Saved her. And it's tearing Do'ova apart.

Jormun entered the cockpit, as Satima settled back into the pilot's chair. He took a seat next to her while she was busy overlooking the NAV specs and long-term range scans. Something pinged for a few seconds of a comm buoy, but it came from the colony.
Satima stretched her back, completing a scan. "Yes, Jormun?", she replied to his stare.

His thoughts once again leaned to earlier on Digeris. "Do you ever want to rest?", he asked to her.

Satima looked out into the black of space. Bright stars twinkled in the distance, reflecting in her dark eyes.

She sighed, "If I'm ever allowed to.", Satima glanced his way.

Jormun put a three-fingered hand on her shoulder. He rubbed the tense muscle as Satima leaned into his touch, and gently caressed her face with his free hand, taking care around her lips. Satima parted them eagerly to breathe deeply to this moment of intimacy. A moment quickly interrupted by Garrus.

"Hey I… just. Oh. Sorry... I'll... uh... leave.", he turned around but was stopped by Jormun.

"No, it's alright. I have some... calibrating to do.", he let go of her shoulder and left hurriedly.

Something about that comment brought a wry memory to Garrus. Satima sighed heavily and swiveled herself toward him. He stood in the entry way.

"Yes? Is it about your nephew?", she demanded.

Whoa, someone's not happy. Garrus still couldn't understand how he got himself wrapped up in this ship and her juvenile crew.

"No. I found something interesting from your scans. I figured since you are familiar with this ship, you could tell me what the hell it is.", he informed.

Satima sat up and stomped to him, "You were hacking my cockpit?", she pointed.

He shrugged, "Old habits, Satima."

Her eyes enlarged with a fuming rage. She shook her head in anger, returning to the pilot seat. Before she began the work, Do'ova commed them. "Captain! I need to speak with you. Now." The salarian's tone demanding.

Satima glanced to Garrus, curiously. He stood to the side. "Duty calls, captain." His smirk irritated her more.

In the cargo area, Caius carefully stocked the filters together. He had been quite proud of his work, until it fell in front of Garrus and Satima. She chuckled walking past him. "Wow... you really are that clumsy?"

Caius started to pick up the filters again mumbling insults to her.

Do'ova opened the hatch to the fighter stepping out. An upset gaze settled on Satima. "You lied to me.", she accused. "You said there was no word from the pact. But Prax said otherwise!"

Garrus watched in confusion. "What is this about?", he wondered aloud.

Satima met his perplexed gaze in fear, returning to Do'ova. "D. Whatever you were told…"

"I was told that you were given time. Time that my father was robbed of!", she stepped closer, "He's dead because of you. My cousins are missing or dead, because of you."

Jormun wandered in to check on the young turian, to see this unfold. "Ancestors.", he spoke aloud.
Satima turned to him, 'What exactly did you two do, while I was gone? While those directive dogs hounded my ship?" She stared Jormun down. "You took her to the pact?"

He shook his head vehemently. "Oh, no, I did not! She tracked down their location all on her own. I only followed to help keep her safe. Like we discussed."

Do'ova scoffed in disgust. "Discussed? Am I a mewling invalid, a-a child?! That you must treat me this way?" She fumed, balling her fists. "I should kick the both of you!"

Jormun walked between his captain and his friend. Trying to settle the already upset atmosphere. Satima took one step closer, eying her crew member. "Look, I didn't know where your family was. I only knew they would be safe if we didn't go looking for them. Wait for the pact to forget us, keep the directive off our trails. And when it seemed clear, we would go together and get them."

Garrus received an update to his ping scans. "Oh. Well, that's not good."

He opened his omni-tool for the small crowd to view. "Someone tried to use long range in order to contact an old code number. From this ship."

"Someone tried to use long range in order to contact an old code number. From this ship." The turian announced.

Satima crossed her arms unsatisfied. "So, it was you, D? A comm call from the colony?" Scowling at them both. "I can't believe the two of you would compromise this ship. The Directive is out there, right now. Looking for us. And you go broadcasting our location on a personal hunch? Right after you hack into my ship, without my express permission?!"

The quarrian stared at his captain. "Me? I didn't make a call.", now pointing to Do'ova. "She did!"

"You helped her infiltrate a pact territory!", Satima raged.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Satima. I forgot we needed permission to do that!", Jormun shouted.

Garrus face palmed, shaking his head at this crew. No discipline, no direct leadership, with a miserable bunch of fresh from boot children. In charge of a spaceship. "Helping people."

The shouting started to die down as the captain paced in anger. Jormun crossed his arms while stepping away from the scene.

"My father is dead. Dead!", Do'ova screamed. Tears rimmed her eyes. "He's gone, captain. I loved him. He wanted me."

Satima stopped seething, calming herself. Lowering a shamed gaze. "I'm sorry."

Do'ova stomped seething, shouting discontent. "That's not good enough!"

Jormun put his hand on her arm, but she wrested it away. Their captain stood with arms to the sides, wretched and humiliated. "Your father was already dead. Prax sent your cousins away, and I couldn't do anything. The Directive had been on our tail for months. We barely got by those last few shipments. And then Borlask betrays me? There was no way without getting all of us killed, we could go and save them. I'm sorry that I lied to you, but... you were all that I could save."

Do'ova wiped her large eyes, sniffling. Facing away from them. "I hate you.", she mourned. "I don't want to stay here anymore."

Caius stood, confused and curious. Garrus cleared his throat. "I think the captain should trust her crew better next time.", he advised.

Satima nodded. "I should."
The moment where clarity and growth would normally take hold, had been shattered by an alarm. A strange one that echoed down the hall, right onto the cargo bay.

Jormun perked up to listen. "What is that?"

The captain waited, catching the tone of the warning. She lifted a terrified gaze to him. "They found us." Satima signaled the crew to their stations.

Jormun opened his omni-tool to sync with the ship's scanners. "Captain! We have oncoming vessels, ETA FIVE MINUTES!", his accented voice yelling the doom through Haven's comms.

Garrus pushed past Satima to Caius, "Get your ass down in the lower level beneath the bay, don't come out until I give you the signal!"

"What signal?", Caius stuttered.

"That we're not dead!", Satima shouted across the room. She ran back to the cockpit ready to maneuver Haven the hell out of there.

Do'ova quickly forgot her pain, placing herself in the engine room. Ready to help give the core all the power it needed to jump forward, straight to a relay. Caius reluctantly hid himself beneath the flooring. Garrus ran to the cockpit, Satima already applying lightening quick reflexes across the holo panel.

"Can you see them?", he asked hovering over her.

"I'm not sure. It's fast and approaching our location." She looked up to him in concern. "You have my full permission to take the fighter and Caius to safety. They won't follow you.", Satima cautioned.

Garrus was surprised. An unselfish sacrifice from this young captain. He couldn't leave them behind to suffer the enemy. "I'm not abandoning ship just yet.", he smirked.

An odd feeling of relief came to Satima. Why should it matter? It had always been her and the crew. Why does this turian, Garrus, make her feel safe?

Two dreadnoughts, rumored to be made from the scrapped pieces of dead reaper ships, appeared using ultra-light FTL. If only Satima could get her hands on it for Haven. They overshadowed the small ship, hunters finding their prey. A comm channel opened.

"Greetings again, Satima. I hope your journey has been a pleasant one." There was a pause. "But the Directive has plans. You see? And, you… are those plans."

The droid voice that sent chills down her spine delivered his message. With the Haven cornered, what was she supposed to do?

"They're over-riding the VI system! The docking hatch has been breached. Satima... they're on board.", Do'ova's terrified voice echoed around them. Garrus hoped Caius kept quiet and hidden.

Satima closed her eyes to open them with a sharp gulp down her throat. She stood up and turned with Garrus to see Archer and directive soldiers standing directly behind them. Satima's heart dropped.

"I hope you don't mind me letting myself in?", Archer smiled wickedly to her.

They were all led down to the shuttle bay. Archer stood in front of the fighter vessel. He motioned for one of his soldiers to come forward. The militant went inside the fighter, seconds passed, and he
came out dragging Caius. Garrus shook his head.

The boy either tried to escape or wanted to fight. He didn't listen and now they must work an agreement to free him. Jormun stood next to Satima, he brushed the side of her back quickly. She noticed his gesture to calm but couldn't do the same for him.

Do'ova stood a foot back. Her anger still showing. Funny how the fear of these soldiers waned for those few minutes. Archer paced in front of them, stopping at Satima. "Why do you resist, Satima? We only want to help you advance further in your training. ", he tried to sound sincere. His blue eyes observing in a chilling glance.

There was nothing sincere in that twisted AI's mind.

"Oh, you know what they say. You can never go home again.", she crossed her arms, leaning on her leg to seem unamused.

Archer laughed at her comment. "So, you think this ship is home? Hmm?" He turned toward the fighter. "Child, you understand there is no escape. Not from me, not from the Directive…", he faced her with an emotionless stare. "And not from yourself."

Satima heard his words, lowering her eyes in despair. Unsure of what she is, and how to answer, she lifted her gaze to Archer in defiance. "Maybe I can't escape what I am, but you can't escape your predictability."

Archer tilted his head, "And what exactly, my dear, are you referring too?"

She stood straighter, "You're getting too obsessed with me, and that makes you cocky." Satima smirked, "You're losing focus, old man. And I've rigged Haven to blow."

He noticed her hands were steadily behind her back while he boasted about the Directive.

Archer stopped pacing and leaned to her menacingly, "I have control of your VI system."

"Two minutes to self-destruct.", the VI echoed in the comms.

Satima gulped again, but her clever mind was on a role. "Yes, you did, but I pre-programmed the VI to self-destruct should a successful hacking attempt take control of the ships basic functions.", she smiled slyly.

Garrus raised a plated brow. Good thing he focused on manipulating the fighter and not Haven. Satima is a cunning girl.

Do'ova took a hard gulp. If she had decided to steal Haven to find her family, instead of just hacking comm calls, she'd be blown to pieces. Why would her captain be so paranoid?

Archer became furious at the setup, delivering a painful blow to the young captain's face. Satima backed away, wiping the trickle of blood from her lip, and stood her ground laughing. "For all your advanced knowledge, you are pretty stupid.", she mocked.

"One minute and thirty-five seconds to self-destruct."

Archer turned to his soldiers, grabbing a weapon, then back to Jormun. Satima held her breath, with a deep terror welling up. No.

He shot the quarian boy in the gut. "A lesson in defiance, Satima.", Archer calmly explained.
Do'ova's eyes blinked harshly when the shot fired. My friend.

Satima grabbed him holding his side, her eyes watery. The colored blood pooled through her hand, as they fell together on the grated floor. Jormun gasped, wincing in pain from the burning sensation in his stomach. "It's just a flesh wound… I'll be fine."

Satima had started to snivel, "Don't talk.", she began. "You turn those damn suit scrubbers on and try not to get an infection, you weak immuned bastard." Her voice shaky with a smirk.

Jormun laughed, wincing.

Archer watched, agitated. Caius had a gun to his head next. "The next shot won't be a "flesh wound", Satima. Think on that.", he warned.

Satima never turned her head, but her gaze lifted in worry. Not the kid!

Garrus prepared to charge. He didn't have a weapon, but he was no amateur when it came to using his body as one. Satima looked up and saw what could happen next, while Archer grinned.

"How many lives must be lost, all to save you from your destiny? ", Archer argued. "Are you really a monster, to steal the future of this young man here? Just so you can escape for another day?" He pressed the muzzle hard on the turian boy's plated temple.

Satima watched Caius's fearful gaze towards her. Glancing to Do'ova, who seemed immobilized with terror. Her crew, her friends… they trusted her with their safety.

She hastily sent a signal to relay off a nearby com-bouy with the sequence to stop the self-destruct program. Then she decided to stop this madness.

"STOP!", she held up a bloody hand. "I'll go with you. IF!", Satima looked around her. There is no one to save her now. "If you promise to leave them alone.", her voice heavy with emotion.

"No... Satima.", Jormun pleaded to her. He coughed, feeling weaker by the second.

Archer calmed and withdrew the gun, "Good girl."

Satima signaled Garrus to help Jormun. Caius was let go and ran to his uncle's side. She slowly stood, as soldiers grabbed her. They gripped her lean arms tightly, twisting cruelly as she tried not to yelp.

Jormun pushed his weakened body to get up. Garrus helped him stand, as the quarian boy protested in anger. "You're… hurting her! Get your hands off Satima!", He stumbled back. Garrus put the boy's arm around his carapaced shoulders.

Satima stared at him, giving a sure gaze and scoffed. "These assholes are scared, Jormun. I'm fine.", she winced again.

Do'ova watched helplessly. Was this something her captain deserved? What universal entity gave her this karma? Or is this a test for her to prove that she's not as useless as they believe?

They bound and gagged the captain, dragging her off Haven. The dreadnoughts withdrew as the comm buoy signaled back the sequence much to Garrus's relief. He re-hacked the ship back to normal functions.

Despite what he felt, if he didn't get Jormun to a clinic soon, the boy would die. Caius's mother
would have to pick him up there. Solanna is going to kill him.
Garrus finally makes it to safety, saving Jormun's life. But family complications and a past friendship tag along in an attempt to rescue Satima. A surprise visitor causes violent intent. Satima learns more about who she is.

Hades Nexus

A medical station in the Hades Nexus was his destination. Garrus hoped she would help him, having been years since he last seen or even talked to her. She still holds a grudge and the truth might make her resentful.

Haven docked at The Athame Memorial Medical Station. Since the loss of Thessia, so many asari were uprooted with no homes and barely enough standing colonies. Many were injured or dying from the war before. Though other species were welcomed to medical care, asari recovery was still the main agenda.

Once docked they proceeded inside the station. Scanned by a bio-field and checked for weapons, they stopped at an information kiosk. Garrus used a terminal and a asari came on-screen. Her skin was a light powder blue with some hints of darker hues due to age. She had a trusting smile, her eyes told otherwise.

"Garrus? Is that you?", the asari asked shocked.

Garrus cleared his throat, "Nice to see an old friend again."

The asari woman put a data pad down, "I'm coming to get you."

The station was beautiful. It even had live plants blooming with colorful flowers. They looked exotic and wild. The walls were a blue metal with a glossy sheen. Glass doors that frosted over when closed to provide privacy to each ward and room.

The double doors opened to the rehab wing.

"Garrus, I can't believe it's you!", the asari wrapped her arms around him.

He hesitantly gave her a light hug. Garrus turned to Jormun, who could barely stand. Caius and Do'ova helped prop the quarian up.

"We need your help. It involves the… Directive.", he waved her over to him.

The asari gestured him to stop with her hand.

"No need to tell me. Those monsters have done enough.", she approached the young crew. "I'll help you and your friend.", the asari said warmly.

Garrus hung out for a bit in the medical wing waiting for news of Jormun's recovery. Do'ova wondered off to herself. Caius played on his omni-tool until a familiar voice echoed in the lobby. "So
here you are." It was Solanna. She had a hand on her left hip, glaring straight to Garrus. He sat up from the lounging chair. She wore the tech uniform of the turian ship, she's serving on.

Garrus slowly stepped to her, knowing how upset she is. "Look Sol, I found him on Digeris. He was trying to run away again.", he stood up pointing at the boy.

Solanna sighed walking to him. She gave Garrus a light head nudge. "Thank you for keeping him safe.", her tone sounding sad. "I didn't think I'd ever see you alive again."

He could see a worry plate forming in the middle of her forehead. Poor Sol hasn't had a decent break since her mate died. Good turian man, better father. Garrus barely had enough time to know him. A shame. "Caius go and wait for me in the sky car... please son.", she waved him to the balcony outside the building.

Solanna faced Garrus again. "When are you ever coming home?"

Garrus looked away in slight irritation. "You know there is no home to go back to." He stared off from her. "Living on ships and distant colonies. Like the quarrians, like..."

"Like me?", Solanna interrupted. She stepped next to him and nodded her head in understanding, squeezing his arm, "Forgive the past Garrus. You only have so much time with your family."

Solanna walked out of the lobby. Garrus felt a wave of emotions trip him to the chair. He sat hard covering his face. If only he could forgive. A hard lesson he'll take to his grave.

Do'ova found herself on the markets level of the station. Someone was serving cooked meals, while lined shops provided quick sales via a terminal. She walked around quietly. Thinking about Jormun, hoping he made it. Her mind fell on what happened to Satima, her captain. Is she alive? Or dead, too? Does she deserve it?

How would her father react to this situation? She smiled. He would tell her that anger clouds a sound judgement.

So, what kind of judgment did Satima get?

Recovery Level

Garrus took out a small flask, primitive in its design. A human years ago, gave it to him on a colony. Since then he liberally filled it with turian whiskey, for when the feelings and the memories rush back too fast. Filling his mind with too much doubt, he could always turn to drink. It numbed him enough to sleep. He laid back down thinking he could finally get some shut eye, needing his strength to rescue Satima.

The sliding door to the lobby opened, as Liara walked in. Less chipper and colder than earlier.

"I see you haven't stopped drinking?", she raised an eye at him. Her icy blue stare made him shudder. Curious.

Liara walked in and sat on a chair, while Garrus leaned out of his. "So? It's my life Liara. I'll do what is best for me.", he looked out thelobby window to watch a few asari patients walking in the garden.

She continued her stare, trying to force him to talk. "I know you a lot better than you think. You still drink when you dream. You also drink when the year comes up."

Liara crossed her legs, folded hands over her lap, while eying his edgy demeanor.
"Liara, just let me rest. I'll give some explanation later." Garrus laid back on the chairs, putting an arm over his face.

She looked down, nodded and left him alone. Even though she walked out and a peaceful silence fell in the room, Garrus couldn't sleep anyway.

HIVE Station  
Experimental Wing-Chamber Eleven

Satima woke groggily. The room seemed dim; the familiar black walls gave off an eerie feeling. She tried to move her body. Her legs worked but were clamped tight to a chair. Satima realized she was imprisoned to it. Stripped down and put into an under suit, cold and afraid. What is the real agenda?

What does Satima need to fear now? A door opens in the far corner. Two scientists wander in. They set up a table with various instruments of medical use for her to see. Some were injectors. Archer walks in, grabbing one. He paces behind Satima. The scientists ignore him and her as they set up a monitor with holo grids.

Archer takes the tip of the sharp needle, inspecting the liquid within its tube. He steps in front of her, staring.

"I've never told you what your true mutation is.", he gives her a one-sided smile. "Do you have a best guess?"

Satima gulps but doesn't cry for help. That would be useless. All she can do is hope for another way out or a quick death. The first being more preferable. "I don't know. I figure screwing around with someone's DNA will turn up any kind of fucked up mutations."

Archer jams the injector into her neck as she shouts in pain. The room becomes dizzy. A whining noise deafens her, with a crowd of voices all whispering. Her head feels like it's going to explode. The droid villain continues to monitor her. He places the empty injector down, turning his head to one of the hive scientists. "Tell me: will she mutate further?", he enquired.

An asari scientist replied, typing away at the terminal. "Not without complications. Her human DNA is fighting the genetic template."

Archer groaned in agitation. "That's because you're not using the paternal sample." He warned.

The scientist gulped but kept on typing. "Sir. The sample is too old. We had to improvise."

Satima did not understand what this meant, she couldn't ignore the whispers. A dark feeling chilled her. She became nauseous. Archer leaned over, noticing her sweaty brow. "It won't last long. Soon, you'll be perfected. Just not in your mother's image." He mused.

She couldn't help it anymore, losing conscious to the onslaught of medical torture.

…

Reaper knows this system. She scans the area and finds blue emission trails from three ships, two being larger and the other smaller. Following the smaller trail, she comes in sight of a clinical station. Athame memorial.

Since leaving the directive and hive, Reaper has changed from her distinctive nano armor to a subtler look of civilian wear. After dispatching directive soldiers, being noticeable would be harmful to her plans. Her mission. She only hopes the very visible cybernetics won't give her away too soon.
Reaper spotted Haven in the docking port. She landed her shuttle on a balcony above. Current scans show no one on board, deciding to stow away and wait for Satima. They have a lot to discuss. Reaper has a lot to atone for.

Athame Memorial

Jormun woke in a cleaned room. Although not many Quarrians could afford the efforts of the clinic, and most stay on their home world, he appreciated the effort that was made for him. He sat up, remembering the days prior. Satima...SATIMA! Jormun jumped out of his bed and ran to the door. It opened as he bumped into Garrus. Jormun fell backwards with a thud.

"Whoa! What's the hurry?", Garrus helped Jormun to his feet.

"Satima! We have to save her!", Jormun tried running out but was quickly blocked by Garrus.

"You're not going anywhere lover boy. You still need to be checked and treated. Satima can't have you running fevers and passing out all over the hive station.", Garrus smiled.

Jormun perked up, "So, you're not going to stop me from going?"

Garrus shook his head, "No, but I need my crew to be in good shape. That is if you don't mind that I drive for a while?"

Jormun sat on the edge of his bed. "Thank you, Garrus. If you hadn't been around when he came on board..."

"Don't worry about it.", Garrus dismissed. "It's been a long while since I've been on a ship with a good crew.", He nodded to the quarian respectfully.

Liara walked in on them. "Jormun, I need to scan you and take some tests. Are you up for it?"

He nodded and followed her out. Garrus stayed behind to think. How the hell was he going to get back on hive again? First time almost got him killed. Second time he met Satima. "Third times the charm.", he thought aloud.

Garrus sat in a garden waiting for Jormun. Liara found him sitting on a bench. He watched a small waterfall dip down further into the station to a larger garden below.

The whole place smelled of fragrant flowers and grass like the citadel once did. It made him sick. Liara sat next to him starring as he gazed into in some far-off memory.

"Why is it the future consist of everything metal and not wood or stone?", he thought, missing his home world. "There's nothing organic left in this galaxy."

He got up. Liara watched him pace.

"It's not nice to stare.", he said looking down at the grass between his turian feet.

Liara chuckled, "I could say the same. When I first met you, it seemed every time I entered the room you would look at me. And when I caught you, there was always a slight hesitation in reasons you were looking my way."

Garrus smirked, "The SR1. Couldn't help but be smitten with all the beautiful ladies that came on board. Some even said I should've asked Tali out." He mused.

A silence came on them. Liara stood, walking towards him. "You fell smitten with someone else.",
she glared.

Garrus felt the rage and hate coming off her. Liara disdained the memory of Shepard. If only he could be the same way and no longer feel that nagging, tugging in his heart. Jormun showed up unexpectedly. He spotted them and waved as he approached the garden.

"Looks like I get a clean bill of health, now let's get Satima back!" His peppy step almost irritating Garrus. Looking around in confusion, "Where's Do'ova? And your nephew?"

Liara folded her arms with suspicion. "Satima?" She glimpsed to Garrus.

He rubbed the back of his neck, "Yeah... she sacrificed herself by being kidnapped so we could escape. There would've been no other way." Looking towards Jormun. "And, Do'ova has wondered off. I'm sure she's got a lot to think about."

Liara folded her arms, "I'm sorry to hear that." She narrowed her blue eyes to Garrus and caught his small stare for a moment. "How did she die?"

Jormun stepped in, surprised. "She's not dead!" Garrus could tell Jormun was becoming impatient. He gave the boy his first orders.

"No, she's not. Go get Haven warmed up. I'll bring some medical supplies just in case.", he reassured the quarian. "Try to comm Do'ova. See what her decision will be."

Jormun ran out of the garden. Garrus and Liara finished with the pleasantries of getting caught up. She stayed successful, keeping her people safe, as well as offering help to those in need. Garrus walked with her around the lobby of the station. "Have you heard anything about them?" He asked, worried.

Liara knew who he meant. The remaining members of the crew; their friends and family. She glanced his way, then resumed. "Not for a long while. Ashley was determined to help her people, the humans. The alliance is all gone. And so are its footholds and outposts. They wander around the galaxy like we do."

Her solemn words fell silent. Garrus nodded. "Does anyone really know why the reapers stopped their harvest? Why she's.... with them?" He referred to none other than the commander herself.

"Other than to fall victim to their enthrallment and betray everyone she swore to protect.", Liara argued. She calmed herself, stopping their walk and facing Garrus. "If there is a way to escape this nightmare. I would give anything to find it, Garrus."

Liara put her slender azure hand on his arm, "All I can do with the time I have, all eight-hundred and thirty years of it. Is help this galaxy survive. Then, one day, either we all fight back, or finally die and fade into a fifty-thousand-year dream."

Garrus looked at her touch, and without thinking placed his hand over it. They exchanged a knowing look to each other. The fight before had been brutal. Shepard wore the pain in silence, before she came to him and opened up her heart. He will always love her.

"Maybe you're right, Liara.", he eased her hand off his arm. Walking away, "I have to go on a rescue mission, now. Wish me luck?", Garrus smirked.

Liara composed herself, giving him a smile. "Goddess go with you, Garrus. And I hope you can save Satima. She sounds like an honorable young lady." She winked, leaving back to the rehab wing.
Garrus nodded, turning around to the hall that led away from the lobby. He may not come back from the reaper station alive, but he owed Satima a rescue. If he could at all.

In the rehab wing, Liara sat at her terminal, while the asari assistants blathered away about more patients. Some of them were prisoners of the Directive. Her eyes widened. Garrus is walking right into a trap, she feels it. Her biotics can come in handy. After all, her curiosity about this "Satima", had gotten the better of her too. Liara brought out her omni-tool, starting a search and find for this girl. Her knowledge of the past and all its hidden secrets may help reveal just what Garrus is really walking into.

And herself.

On Haven, during a quick diagnostic check of the thrusters, a ping from the outside docking terminal resounded through the ship. Garrus got up to see who it was. Liara stood outside the hatch door with a small briefcase.

"Oh Spirits!", he said nervously.

He let her in.

"All right I'm here. Whatever is going on, I want in.", she darted inside past the air-lock.

Liara sat her personal pack on the table and noticed how small it was. "How quaint.", she eyed Garrus about the lack of furniture and strolled off looking in the rooms.

"Here we go.", he thought.

Do'ova stood outside the pristine docking platform. Staring away at Haven. Jormun was alive. He called her, begged her to come with them. She's glad he's well, but is that enough? A pull of regret or stupidity forced Do'ova to march forward. Inward she made her way to the cockpit, surprised to see the turian named Garrus sitting in the pilot seat.

"Do'ova."., he announced. Standing to greet her. "Listen, we don't know each other very well, and… I don't know all the details of what happened between you and Satima. I just want to you to understand, that if you feel being here is too dangerous. If you'd like to stay on this station, that it's okay. And I'm sure Satima would feel the same."

She swallowed an uneasy reply. "I want to stay. Only to see what exactly is stopping me from finding the rest of my family." The salarian slowly stepped away through the mess and past Liara.

They settled on board. After takeoff, Jormun noticed an unusual scan of the ship. It was from a local signal at the clinic station they just left. "Garrus... I found a signal scan that was taken not long before liftoff.", he commed from the engine room.

Garrus wasted no time in using the relay to flee the system. If it was hive, they weren't going to give them the pleasure of finding them again. Liara went to the shuttle bay to see the fighter up close. Its red hull scarred with scorch marks from previous battles.

Do'ova had been checking the hacks Garrus applied from before, keeping a distance from the prying asari. She heard a rattling sound from the one of the crates, behind the nets. Garrus found them there, watching from afar. Liara swept her hand across the outer hull. "Is this from hive?", she asked. A curious stare followed her hand across the metal.

He nodded to her as he opened the hatch. "Superior technology."

"And Satima?", she repeated. "Who is she? And what happened?" Liara stepped inside to see the
strange tech.

"Captain of this old ship. The quarian and the salarian are her crew. The Directive found our location. A villain named Archer took Satima. She made a deal with him. I'm going to get her back. ", Garrus walked in after her.

Sudden footsteps emerged outside the vessel. A voice spoke, echoing to them.

"Then you are wasting time by discussing it. Archer will continue his experiments, even if it kills her."

Garrus and Liara quickly stepped out to a site that nearly made them un-holster their weapons.

Do'ova dropped her soldering gun in stunned surprise as Liara flared her biotics. Before Garrus could ask a question, make a sound; Liara flung the person backwards across the hull. Her biotics flaring in a wild fashion.

"You traitorous bitch!", she screamed.

The salarian dodged from the flying body. Blue tinted biotics struck the hold like lightening. She ran away to the nearest corner, using the large crates as cover. "What are you doing?!", she shouted.

Liara's navy colored armor glowed with her biotics as she stomped closely to the body. Reaper was on all fours, blood trailed down her cheek from a cut on the head.

She grinned, "It's been some time since I've fought an asari. Usually your kind are too busy selling the rest of the galaxy out for protection." She disappeared in a flash of quick skill after the insult.

Reaper appeared behind Liara, grabbing her in a choke hold. "Try to use your power on me.", they struggled. "Go ahead! Kill me!"

The asari couldn't breathe or use her biotics to stop Reaper. A slow chorus of voices filled her mind, drowning out cognitive thought. Fight or flight was suppressed. What in the name of the goddess is happening to her?!

Garrus stood and watched in shock as she remained in peril. The villain used Liara as a shield while killing her.

Jormun heard the loud thud through the bulkhead. He ran to the source of the sound. When he came out of the corridor, he saw Reaper actively trying to kill the asari. Garrus pointed his pistol. What good would it do now? Jormun shouted wielding Ish, Do'ova screamed for someone to help. Liara's short gasps filled Reapers head, but would she murder an old friend?

Garrus casually walked to the right side of Reaper and pointed his gun to her head. "Let go... Shepard.", his tone weak. She eased up, "My-my name?"

Garrus took advantage of the shock and used a stun round to her head.

Any normal person would've had extensive brain damage followed by death. Reaper was not normal. A villain wearing Shepard's skin. Nothing more. An hour passed by. Crawling through the ship like a heavy pull. Jormun hurried Do'ova to quarters. Calming her from the scrap. She wished Satima was back. It hurt to feel that way, but her captain would've thrown them off the ship!

No matter how much of a villain she herself was.

Garrus sat on a crate watching the unconscious Reaper while she laid on the floor, pistol firmly in his grip. He couldn't risk her getting away, causing chaos and sealing Satima's fate to death.

Liara voiced loudly how she had no problem with air-locking Reaper into space. Jormun remained
silent while keeping watch with Garrus, he eventually went back to the engine room. Taking the shift and watch of their current flight.

Garrus began to feel a dull pain in his back from sitting so long, stretching his neck to rub the sore leathery skin. Reaper finally moved. She opened her eyes slowly, moaning as she carefully rose.

Reaper sat looking completely confused until she spotted Garrus. Her eyes were bloodshot, a large purple bruise formed a circle on her left temple. Lines of cybernetics trailed her face and neck, reaching up to the wound. She looked inhuman.

As soon as an understanding formed between them, Reaper spoke.

"...you want to kill me?", her voice sounded tired.

"Only if you give me no choice. I don't have time to let my personal feelings or anyone else's get in the way.", he glared. He had her, right here. And he used a stun round. Can he, do it? Reaper raised a leg to her chest and leaned her arm on it. A casual move so much like the Shepard before. Garrus looked away and stood. He holstered his weapon.

"Are you behind Satima being taken? Do you know of this Archer?", he asked in old interrogation style.

Reaper noticed the fighter.

"They know this ship well. I provided every bit of data on Haven. From one station to another, when it was docked at colonies and when it was hiding on Lorek. She could never escape me. Only stall the inevitable."

Garrus shook his head. "What other great ideas have you told the enemy. How to torture little girls?"

Reaper snapped her head in his direction. A remorseful look washed over her face. "...I. No, it wasn't my choice. I was given orders to train her. She is unique."

Rows of young faces. All new and vacant. Stares that were devoid of any emotion or fear.

Garrus paced in front of Reaper and squatted to meet her face to face. "What do you mean unique? Why does hive want her so badly?", his avian blue eyes piercing Reapers gaze.

Reaper scoffed, with a wry short laugh. "Before you pulled the trigger, to beg for that bitch's life; you called me Shepard."

Garrus didn't understand. "What are you talking about? You're just a..", he was cut off by her.

"...a clone?", she smirked, staring at him. Spirits, those emerald eyes. Just as bright as the day she came to him, years ago. "Or maybe a walking abomination?", her grin disturbed him.

Garrus stood up as Reaper rose to her feet.

"No... Garrus. I am not a clone.", Reaper paused in thought before smiling sadly. "And neither is she." She mumbled.

Garrus raised an eye. "What do you mean?", he hesitantly asked.

Reaper gazed off; her eyes widened in an emotional response to his question.

"You want to know why they want her?", she turned back to him. Her face contorted in controlled
pain. "Satima is my daughter. And I willingly gave her to the reapers."

Garrus couldn't believe it. He didn't want to. This is some sort of trick, a lie to keep him off balance. He backed away from Reaper and quickly left the shuttle bay. Leaving her behind, alone.

When he reached the cockpit of Haven, Garrus slumped down hard in the pilot's chair. The holo panels and grids opening to his presence. He needed a drink but remembered accidentally leaving it on the medical station. He hit the panel hard, staring at his balled fist. Garrus needed to examine what Reaper said. Is she really Shepard? Just controlled? If so, how is she still so young? And the girl Satima, her daughter?

There isn't any resemblance... is there? Garrus thought for a while. Satima has red hair ...big deal. Plenty of humans have red hair, but then again, she isn't entirely human. Those strange features. Her dark eyes with the teal rims and four fingers on each hand, not five. He started to mentally remember her face, how she smiled with sharp teeth.

Humans have sharp teeth called canines. Hers were more than a few. Satima's raised forehead with a similar pattern to...? NO! It's not possible...never! Garrus got up, running back to the cargo. Reaper sat on the same crate staring into nothing.

He approached her cautiously. In the small doorway to the corridor behind them, Do'ova peeked and listened.
"You say she's your daughter? How!?", he panted from running.

Reaper refocused her gaze and looked at Garrus. "My genetic template. The Directive gave me ascendance."

Garrus paced thinking.

"All this time you and I have been fighting... meeting to end each other over and over for the past decade. I thought you were a clone or some kind of... reaper tech.", he stood intensely looking at her.

She calmly gazed to him. "Of course, I'm reaper tech. I was reaper tech when we met on Omega.", Reaper stepped off the crate and walked away from Garrus. She stopped, feeling conflicted between the truth and what she's been controlled to think. "It was Cerberus. They helped."

Garrus shook his head, "But the Lazarus project only brought you back with minimal implants. To... give you an edge. That's what Miranda told you, that's what... she told me!"

"It was just the start of a vicious lie, Garrus.", Reaper replied. She sighed sadly, looking down. "I've come here to atone."

"For what?!", he stood staring at the empty spot on the crate as he asked his question.

Reaper walked around. "For what I did. They may have helped in the creation of Satima, but I could've ended it for us both long ago. If I only fought them. But, how could I?", she turned facing him.

Garrus looked at her. Reaper's eyes began to water, her agonized face meeting his.

"How could I destroy my daughter. We are both one and the same. I helped free Satima to give her a chance at life away from the Directive but... they regained control again. My thoughts were not my own.", Reaper looked down at her hands in shame.

Garrus felt a wave of emotional toil inside his body. A voice in the back of his mind was telling him to not believe it, but his gut... that instinctual feeling, told him otherwise. The only other question
remained. What other species, if any, was Satima's DNA merged with?

As Haven entered the Sol system, Garrus called the small crew together. Hive looming in the distance of the ship as it approached.

Hovering cautiously at the edge of the system, Jormun reduced Haven's thrusters to emit minimal heat. Directive gunships and fighters skidded around the dwarf planet, Pluto, as they passed by them while inching closer to the station.

He sweated in his suit with anticipation to get Satima out of there, but he knew Garrus's plan is foolproof. He hoped.

Do'ova stayed to the side, behind Jormun again. Her old habits took over. Reaper is terrifying to look at. Her cybernetics spoke loudly of what the directive is. The asari named Liara, hurled plenty of threats to Reaper and Garrus. She wanted Reaper gone if not dead. Garrus refused, Reaper was more useful alive than dead. If they are to rescue Satima, Reaper will know how.

Jormun replied to an earlier comm call to meet in the small mess. As he entered, Liara was arguing with Garrus again. Reaper sat on the floor in the corner, so much like Satima used to do before she was taken. "ABSOLUTELY NOT! There is no way I'm trusting that monster with a weapon! ", Liara yelled her hesitations clearly as she glared towards Reaper.

Garrus leaned over the metal table with a heavy growl, "Not your call Liara! She's leading us in this mission because SHE knows where they're keeping Satima!"

Liara crossed her arms in calmed anger. She eyed Garrus before speaking, "Then I'm staying here. I'll monitor the ship and wait for you."

Jormun didn't like the sound of that. "No!", he said behind them, walking in quickly to protest.

"Jormun.", Garrus spoke, but was cut off.

"What if she steals the ship? Or turns us in! ", Jormun stood between them as he pointed to Liara.

"Jormun!", Garrus shouted.

Everyone became silent, Reaper looked up. Do'ova had kept quiet but she didn't like the anger coming from that asari. There was bad blood all the way around. And no one wanted to be screwed by the other. "I'll stay behind with her. We'll work together to keep Haven away from the scouter ships," Do'ova eyed the blue skinned woman, "She won't steal the ship."

Garrus rubbed his sore temples. The small plates underneath his touch, too pliable. Old age has crept up quickly in his time of revenge. "We'll have enough help already on the station, it's a good idea. Thank you, Do'ova." He could feel a raged glare coming his way from Liara. No matter. This mission depended on responsible, not emotional, people. Liara was neither at the moment.

He continued with the conference. "Wait for my signal, then pick us up. If you leave us to die because Reaper is here...", Garrus left his sentence unfinished to warn Liara not to betray them.

"I won't do that. I'll be waiting, I swear.", her tone resolute. It hurt Liara that Garrus suddenly trusted Reaper, because she's pretending to be Shepard. That he would rather some salarian child watch her like she would turn on them. Liara had hoped that Garrus would see clearly the deception of that cybernetic reaper clone.

She promised to help them rescue this Satima girl. But Liara did not promise how she would handle
Reaper.

Garrus started to feel a rift between them over the Shepard copy. Liara was never a ruthless and insensitive bitch before. Well, only when it mattered. He realized the feelings over her were foolish. It seemed foolish. With Reaper on this ship, offering to save Satima. Who is her daughter? Garrus let the rift continue to divide their old friendship. He had a responsibility to Shepard. And he'll finish his mission he set out to do, decades ago.

After Satima is back on-board Haven, safe and in one piece, he'll convince Reaper to follow him to the fighter. With her guard down, he'll take her life. Satima doesn't know the truth. In a cruel and twisted way, he's protecting her from it.

No one wants a villain for a parent.

Reaper stared at Liara. She could see the slight glances between them. Was there something more? Should she have killed the weak asari? Garrus was hers, once. Now… she shook the thoughts. Satima is more important. With that taken care of, it was time to suit up. Garrus looked at Reaper. Their eyes met and she got up to stand.

"Get ready.", he ordered. She nodded and left for the cargo bay. Everyone piled out for their job. Garrus was alone, thinking.

"Satima, you better be alive."

The fighter left the cargo of Haven. Do'ova maned the pilot control center and remained behind following one of Jupiter's moon's orbit. Liara paced and waited in the mess. Garrus piloted the fighter with Jormun and Reaper on-board towards the daunting hive station.

They would need to find a landing zone out of the way from the main docking hubs. Away from more soldiers. "There's no one in dock or patrolling. This could be an ambush.", Garrus said steering the fighter to the underbelly of the station.

"Stay alert.", Reaper put her helmet on.

Jormun put in the auto-controls and joined the team at the emergency hatch. They left the fighter hovering in place, boarding the station using a concealed port door. Inside the dark room, they turned their lights on.

"It's quiet.", Jormun carefully walked beside Garrus.

Reaper followed behind noticing the silence, remembering the usual places to go.

"The Data Mainframe is four levels up past the science stations. Garrus, if anything happens, take Satima back to the Haven and run.", Reaper walked ahead.

Garrus eyed her, "Where are you going?"

"To find some answers and Satima, so you can get her out.", she disappeared in the dark.

Garrus stood, confused. Great. Now she's gone, and he doesn't know where to go, exactly.

"She'll be okay?", Jormun asked.

Garrus nodded at Jormun. "Yeah. She could always take care of herself."

The first level was mostly empty. No one seemed to be operating anything. Garrus took point
keeping watch for any soldiers or sentinels. He found the door to the second level elevator. Jormun looked around. It was eerily dark. The underbelly of the station was frightening. Black metal walls with no glossy sheen or illuminators to see.

"Jormun. Don't lag behind.", Garrus held the elevator open, already inside. They both stepped in and Garrus punched the panel. It lifted past the third floor.

"I managed to hack to the fourth level. When I go in, you need to secure our exit. Understood?"

Jormun looked irritated. "I'm going to find Satima!"

The door slid open and Garrus turned to Jormun, "Look, I know you care about her. I get it, but you need to trust me. Not to brag, but I am a trained soldier. I'll bring her back, I promise."

Garrus placed a taloned hand on Jormun's shoulder. The quarian slumped and nodded. He left the boy inside the elevator.

"I hope he knows what he's doing?", Jormun slammed the panel in frustration.

He waited as the elevator went back down, at the third level it stopped suddenly. "Must be the encryption he used. It might have run out.", Jormun put Ish away to hack at the panel, while talking to himself.

While he tried getting back to the first level, the door opened. A sentinel stood in his way. It's dark tall body, looming over him menacingly. "KEELAH!", Jormun ducked from the enormous blow of the sentinel's weapon. It hit hard on the metal surface putting a large dent in the wall.

Jormun squeezed though the giant's legs and ran fast to the hatch entrance. It was surrounded by directive soldiers. He skidded across the floor to a halt. To his left, a narrow corridor led away from the level. He'll have to circle around and lose them to get back on the fighter. Jormun ran trying to contact Garrus. His comms were jammed.

"Keelah, I hope he finds her fast!" Already regretting being the bait.

.....

On the fifth level, Reaper typed in encryption keys at the data terminal. She needed answers. Time was of the essence, literally. There were no recorded entries. Strange. Deleted or never entered? She had to dig deeper. The dark room made her tense.

"...alliance..."

There it is. She punched the code and watched as thousands of data packets overflowed the screen. The mainframe conduit in front of her lit up. Its bright yellow glowing off every surface. This was only one out of many. Dozens of levels that had the data from every Directive outpost, station and vessel.

"...Shepard...charley...inquire...subject reaper. Subject Satima."

Reaper stood quiet as many entries from her past scrolled across the monitor screen. She picked one. It was a training session from years' past. Satima stood with a team of others. All their expressions were empty.

They entered a fighting ring. Several of the directive's soldiers surrounded them. A fight was initiated. One by one the other contenders fell by blows. Satima dodged a soldier's swipes with a combat blade. She grabbed the arm, twisting until it snapped. Bone protruding covered in blood.
Three out of the seven contenders with her remained. They huddled together. Fighting as a team. It worked well.

Reaper witnessed herself on the screen walking out into the ring to meet them. She signaled the three, who quickly surrounded a surprised Satima. They advanced, already having the advantage. Her hybrid protégé was down.
It didn't last. Satima used the combat blade to slice open one of the young female's throat. Blood splattered as the girl gasped, grabbing her red neck. A male stepped over her corpse, delivering speed and pain on the hybrid. She managed to deflect a few, gaining the ground from a training bench.

Taking a weight and slamming against his torso, knocking the breath out of him while breaking ribs. She loomed over him to dispatch the contender quickly with a hard boot to his head. The last one stood his ground. A bigger male, more menacing in his gait and capability. He charged. Great big stomps straight for her. Satima waited to sidestep, hitting behind the knee hard. As the male tumbled, the hybrid picked up a pistol from a dead soldier and pulled the trigger.

She stood alone now. Breathless and bloody. Her mentor satisfied. The recording ended.

Reaper never felt so disgusted with herself.

In the bottom, right corner of the video was recorded input.

"Subject ready...
She downloaded it all. Satima may not remember what happened. All the horrible things she was trained and conditioned to do. The holo-grid lit up in the corner. An image of a man appeared, but his face was clouded in shadow. Grey blue eyes shone through the haze, and a myriad of voices came through.

"You cannot leave my control. You are bound to our cause."

Reaper shook her head, trying to ignore the voices.

"We created you to serve. Defiance ends in death."

She heard blaring alarms. It was time to go. Uploading the file, Reaper ran to the elevator and punched the panel for the second level.

He's here.

Garrus cautiously walked from each corner, peering around for enemies. His omni-tool received a static message from Jormun. It was completely illegible. Trying not to panic about the situation, Garrus proceeded further.

Up ahead he could hear sounds of a scuffle.

Someone gasping, then a thud. He turned the corner and quickly brought out his rifle to see Reaper holding a combat knife dripping with dark blood. Two soldier's dead on the floor. She looked at him. Garrus walked over to her. "I thought you were helping to find Satima?", he asked curious.

"I am. She's through here.", Reaper pointed to an alcove that contained a door. Several security clearance panels surrounded it.

Garrus sighed in annoyance. Reaper approached a panel and quickly typed a sequence. "Relax, Garrus. This was my home for twenty years." The door slid open.

"All this time?", Garrus said quietly.
She checked for enemies, then glanced to him. "All this time."

They entered weapons up, targeting the dark corners that shadowed every step. Deeper in the station, a sense of horror had stricken them. Garrus couldn't shake it. It was like every bit of confidence and nerve had been sucked from him. Reaper slightly hesitated.

"We have to continue. It's the Directive's ability. Indoctrination, it was called. He is hard to resist.", she pushed on leading the way.

Garrus shook his head and gulped. He walked with heavy steps to escape the dreaded hallway. He? What the hell is going on? Eventually ending up at another door. Reaper stopped in front of it. "What's wrong?", Garrus looked behind him at the intense dark.

"If I scan my retina, they'll know we are here. And who we're here for.", Reaper stared at him.

Her emerald green eyes glistened from the small light they had on their weapons.

Garrus understood, it meant they would be swarmed. Nothing new to face. They were swarmed on the citadel, the collector ship and finally at the beam.

"Do it.", he ordered.

Reaper nodded and scanned her retina. As the door opened, Jormun fell from the ceiling in front of them. He stood up in a panic, raising his shotgun to scan the area. Jormun sighed in relief when he saw them. "By the ancestors, I thought I was dead! A sentinel waited for me, followed by directive soldiers at the hatch. I almost didn't make it. So, I climbed in an alcove and keelah, what seemed ages... ended up here."

Garrus and Reaper exchanged glances. He laughed to himself as he slapped Jormun on the back.

"You did good kid."

Jormun didn't see the humor.

The room they entered was stark white, with the center showing an examination chair and someone strapped to it. Slowly approaching it, they saw it was Satima.

Her head was slumped over. Many injection sites covered her bare arms and neck. Reaper recognized the room as she observed her daughter in the medical under suit. Satima made no sound. Jormun scanned her.

"She's still alive!"

Reaper gently lifted the girls head to wipe away cold sweat off her alien forehead. The metal straps were taken off. Satima fell forward into her arms. Garrus watched how gingerly Reaper reacted, how she held the girl close. The grey body armor pulsated a pale blue to Reapers emotions.

"We have to go.", Garrus leaned over them as he spoke to Reaper. She nodded. Jormun leaned down next to them. "May I take her.", he pleaded with them.

She looked down at Satima and back to Jormun. "Yes, but... be careful.", Reaper helped Jormun hold Satima until he maintained his balance.

Garrus scanned the room for an exit.

The Directive sent Archer to intercept them. Losing both genetic templates would destroy all he's worked for. The shadowed man watched from his personal station in the omega relay. She's fought
back before, but in the end, Shepard always succumbs.

They ran down the immense corridor, dodging the spray of rifles and snipers alike. Reaper handled a few in their way. Garrus covered Jormun who protected an unconscious Satima. A four-way prevented them from going further.

"I don't remember this.", Reaper said in a small panic. The voices telling her doubt. She stopped fighting and stared. Confused.

Jormun set Satima against the wall to help keep directive soldiers back with Garrus. Reaper paced trying to remember the right way out. At that moment, Satima woke. Silently she stood and walked past her to the middle right hallway. Whispers filled her mind, leading… controlling.

"Satima?", she spoke to the girl.

Satima fell forward on all fours, nauseous and in pain, but she got up to walk faster away from them.

"THIS WAY!", Reaper shouted at them.

"Where is Satima?", Jormun yelled panicked.

Garrus and Jormun caught up with Reaper who followed Satima to a new level. Darkly illuminated, the higher hull walls were lined with many stasis pods that had bodies in them. Stasis terminals, medical computer stations and lab equipment were sectioned in corners of the large space.

Bizarrely there was no one around. Reaper walked past what looked like a male version of Satima. Her mind in alarm at this. Were there two of them? She remembers only one growth pod while her own person remained strapped to a medic chair.

Her mind trapped with a silent voice. Reaper could only watch as the shadow gave orders. Reformed, ascended, and reborn. Shepard became a distant and painful memory. In the middle of the grey room, Satima grabbed a lab coat off another examination chair. She covered herself in it. Chilled to the bone, the hybrid blinked in faint memories of this place.

"They take people and turn them into slaves.", she pointed. Satima walked forward, in front of one of the pods. She ignored the one with the gingered haired male. "An endless army. All controlled. They don't feel pain; they never get tired. And this nightmare never ends."

Blood and bruises. Last gasps of people who were once living. They started it, but she ended it.

Reaper said as she stood next to Satima. "My first assignment to bring order. Make an army." Small faces shoved into crates. Taken to this place, to be reformed. Satima turned to Reaper, her dark teal eyes weary and pained. "Who was I before? Did you take me from a family too?", her tone accusing.

Jormun tried to talk to Satima, but Garrus stopped him. "Don't...", he said. Whatever was about to be revealed, they needed to hear. Shepard was still in there, fighting to come back. The truth of this place and what happened to her could be one sentence away.

The girl's eyes watered, rimming in tears as she recollected the past two days. She shut them tight, tears staining her cheeks. Opening her gaze to a stunned Reaper. "I'm not human, am I? Or was I? They put something in me. Changed me."

Reaper knew enough of the details about Satima. But the truth could also hurt her. She lowered a gaze of shame. "Your genetic makeup was contaminated by another DNA marker.", she stared with a clear expression. "It was because of that, the Directive decided to revive you from stasis. After harvesting much of me, there was little memory left. I can't tell you much.", she paced around the
"When the alien DNA ran out, you were injected with mutative serums; laced reaper tech, to enhance your genetic template." Reaper stopped to stare at Satima. "Sixteen years of hard work went into you."

Archers voice had finally resonated from her own. As he always reminded her daily of what Satima is. His project, his gift… to her. A disturbing reason to bind her to them.

"That's sixteen years of sick experiments your precious Directive did to me. But instead of letting them control your apprentice, YOU helped me escape." Her voice wavered in emotion. "Why? If I was so important for your army."
Reaper looked down in horrible shame. "I didn't understand what I was feeling then, but I knew you deserved a life." Those others. Not contenders. Kids.

Satima couldn't contain her emotions anymore. "Then why didn't you kill me?! Why not end it for us both?"

Reaper looked up in surprise. "I couldn't! Satima... no matter how you came, you're my responsibility, my daughter. And I... I want to help you."

Hot tears began to stream down Satima's face. "No.", she recoiled. Crouching down to cover her weeping eyes. "Please, no." Satima looked up to Reaper. There was something of truth in her words, in her gaze. The monster in front of her; this horrible woman, is her mother.

Garrus walked to Reaper, making a worried and confused glance to Satima. "Is all this really true?", he gulped hard. Reaper nodded to him. He made a low whistle while lowering his rifle. This was insane.

"But what about the other DNA? She's not entirely human.", Garrus pointed in curiosity at Satima's hands, the fingers. "What other species in this galaxy did they put in you?"

Satima dried her eyes quickly. As she stood, Reaper let out a low chuckle. "Are you really that dense?" She stepped forward to him, pointing to the girl. "Take a closer look. Use those old instincts you boasted so much about, from before."

Garrus did indeed look; more closely than ever. Some part of his mind wanted to reject the truth staring at him, but his instinct came back. This girl, this genetic experiment, Satima; is part turian. When did they take from turian colonies? How many suffered a fate of lab rats; just so this copy of Shepard's genes could be made into a walking, talking mockery of biology? Reapers create abominations.

His missions. The one from before Satima. Eighteen years ago. Needles in the flesh.

A wave of understanding hit him. "It... that's impossible. Human and Turian DNA can't even merge. Biology wouldn't allow it!", Garrus paced away in frustration. "This wasn't from biology; nature didn't have a hand in this! It's reaper tech! Anything a reaper wants, it gets.", she yelled.

Satima glanced to Jormun. His hesitance to return the gaze, hurt.

Reaper understood now. Her conversation with Garrus from earlier about the Lazarus project and reaper tech in her own body, sparked a memory. It enhanced her, somehow. Or was this all an elaborate, chaotic plan from the Cerberus leader himself?

Directive soldiers stood outside the lab's door. The time they wasted in discovery ran out. "We need
"to get off this station.", Reaper said to them, glancing away.

"This way.", Satima lead them through another door. A long dark walkway faced them, with an abyss below.

They ran. Soldiers hounded them through the dark halls of hive. "Jormun, throw me your shotgun!", Satima shouted. Jormun stared at Ish, he gazed at her, then threw the weapon. Taking cover.

"They just keep coming!", Garrus yelled shooting down the endless waves of directive soldiers.

Reaper put down two of them with ease all the while catching glimpses of Satima, who seemed quite skilled with a shotgun.

"Where is Do'ova and Liara?!", Garrus shot one sneaking in the corner.

Satima nodded in agreement. This had to be a nightmare come true. Would they survive this? They backed themselves to the docking platform, Haven hovered down attaching to the tube.

"They're here!", Satima shouted. She tried to open the hatch, but it had been heavily encrypted. "If I can just hack it, we can escape! I need cover. Can you do it?", Satima looked desperate at Jormun.

"Of course, I can!", Jormun wasn't sure but he'd die trying. The thought of being someone's liquid genes made him sick.

Satima tried hacking the door. Reaper shot or warped at the directive's little soldiers, never getting tired or taken down.

"Just a little longer!", Satima's hands shook while hacking furiously at the panel.

"Hurry!", Jormun said tense from the fighting.

Garrus dodged the oncoming gun fire as he ran for the hatch. Reaper followed, stepping through, and suppressing fire for Satima. A shot ricocheted off the hatch, hitting Satima in the leg. She yelled in pain. Garrus helped her through the hatch, with her arm flung over his carapace shoulder. Jormun stood behind them as the hatch closed. Reaper came to Satima." Are you all right!", she faced the girl. Satima nodded in pain.

Reaper applied a new kind of medi-gel. Faster and more efficient in its healing properties. Satima allowed her mother to soothe the wound, while Garrus stared in fascination. He's watching Shepard protect her child. It was ripped from his mind when louder gun fire hit the hull.

"Let's get off this damn station!", Garrus shouted.

The door opened with Liara on the other end, pistol in hand. A sharp grin cautioned them to her intentions. She aimed the pistol, "I see the little monster has been rescued." With held breath, the asari pressed the trigger quickly, and shot Reaper in the head.

The sound of gunfire echoed loudly in the airlock. Reaper's head snapped back, falling backwards; eyes wide open, landing with a thud. Her body stayed motionless. Satima watched, mouth agape in horror. She slowly turned her gaze to Liara, who realized the mistake too late.

"NO!", Satima shouted and lunged at Liara. She decked the asari in the mouth, sending her backwards, purple blood spattering her face. Liara didn't have a chance to fight back before Satima had her on the ground, beating her hard.
"YOU STUPID BITCH! YOU KILLED MY MOTHER! YOU BITCH... I'll KILL YOU!" Liara tried blocking the blows but Satima was too strong. Stronger than before.

Do'ova stood at the entry of the cockpit, alarmed at the sight.

Jormun ran to stop Satima. He grabbed her by her arms, pulling her off Liara as she kicked, screaming. Garrus stood there, staring at the body of Reaper in total disbelief. Ignoring the fight. He glanced to Jormun and Satima. He looked at Liara who didn't move either. Garrus slid himself down the airlock wall.

"fuck.", he whispered to himself.

Jormun locked Satima in her room, sedating her for an hour, so he could quickly pilot them out of the docks. Fighters hounded them as he navigated through the relay blind. He didn't care where they ended up as long as they were far from hive. Garrus stared away at the wall. His mind completely blank.

Jormun dragged Liara to the make-shift medical room in the cargo bay. He got to work injecting her with medi-gel. She didn't die, but she was going to be in severe pain when she woke up. Which he made sure that wouldn't happen until they reached a medical station. Biotic warps destroying the hull would kill them all.

He wearily walked back to the airlock entrance. Do'ova stared him down. "Our crew is cursed. And this ship is hell." She hurriedly left him from the mess.

Garrus stared away from where he sat. Jormun knelt to the body of Reaper, he began to drag her away when the turian shot a taloned-hand out, grabbing his wrist tightly.

He glared at the young quarian who let go of Reaper's arm. Garrus watched him leave to Satima's room. He touched Reaper's hand and a cold chill traveled down his spine. He fought the urge to yell at the ghost in his mind.

Garrus must have sat for an age beside the lifeless body of Reaper. The intense emotions he felt could not sustain the feeling of regret. He wanted to end Reaper, more than anyone, even Satima.

He told himself over and over that she wasn't the real Shepard; not anymore, but he was wrong. She regained a part of her former self, memories that made her become good again. If by being good means defying The Directive and saving Satima.

Then Liara changed that. His previous vengeance had been almost erased by Satima and the actions of Reaper, until a bullet was put through her head. Garrus wanted her back, even if she is just a copy. He needed her back.

Spirits, Satima needed her too! Just as he started to sulk again, Reapers body spasmed and jerked. She made a noise, tightening her fists and then suddenly moaning in pain as she sat up straight. Garrus's heart nearly burst through his plated chest

He stood up, stunned and quickly ran off from the air lock door. Reaper closed her eyes, she was sleeping. Garrus leaned over her, watching her chest rise and fall. "JORMUN!", he shouted.

Garrus watched Reaper breath heavily from her injuries. Her eyes were closed in a pained expression. Liara and Reaper would be in the same med-bay. Only two beds were available, and they will occupy them together, in the same room. Liara had woken up hours ago, her body sore from Satima assaulting her.

Her intel was right. That abomination had been let loose in this galaxy. She wanted to warp that brat
right into space; then throw Reapers body with her. Liara heard footsteps with loud grunting and resumed a fake slumber. She cracked her eyelids open just enough to see Garrus and Jormun haul Reapers body in.

Garrus set up an IV as Jormun began taking scans from the medical terminal. What were they doing? She watched Garrus treat Reaper closer than an enemy. Goddess, he still pined for her. No matter what horrors she committed, he still cared about her. It sickened Liara.

"You know we can't take her to the medical station.", Jormun stood next to him.

Garrus looked up surprised. "Why the hell not?", he yelled.

"It's overrun by directive!", Jormun yelled back. He quickly looked over to Liara, who was still feigning sleep.

Garrus understood. "We still need to deal with Liara. They can't occupy the same room for long."

Jormun finished the scans, "Then we'll take shifts. I'll handle the first one."

Garrus nodded. He looked at Reaper one more time, then glanced to Liara. Garrus put a kinetic shield around his once blue friend. As soon as Liara wakes, he's taking her back on the fighter to her home, the Athame station. Leaving her behind, and cutting off ties, forever.

Satima woke. She stood in her room groggy then dressed her own wounds and found spare clothing. Reaper being her mother gave her a sour feeling. She didn't completely understand why she defended Reaper or why she almost killed this Liara.

Satima had found many truths, none of which made her feel any better, or safer. She heard a knock on her door. "What do you want?", she spat. It opened, Garrus stepped through. He sat down in her chair, looking away in a thought of his own. "Are you ok?", he asked not looking at her.

Satima sat on her cot, legs crossed and watched his stare. "I don't know.", she replied quietly. Garrus stirred in his seat, sighing to himself. "She's alive. Don't know how but she... she woke up.", he rubbed the back of his neck.

Satima suddenly felt relieved and then terrified. Reaper can't be killed. She glanced away, hiding her fear. "I'm not sure how to respond to that or even feel.", Satima moved a random data pad.

"Me either.", Garrus replied. He looked at her briefly. Taking in her features, her ginger colored hair. Satima had Reaper's... Shepard's round face. The turian features, her small plated forehead, the solid prominent brow and even her small ridged nose.

A fusion of flesh and carapace. It shocked him, bewildered him as he stared at her. Satima is Shepard's offspring. Was his own DNA used to mutate her biology as well?

Garrus noticed Satima started to shudder, holding her arms around her body. "Are you cold?", he asked. It didn't feel chilly to him, though he was still in full armor. "Yeah. I'm feeling dizzy.", she replied, her teeth chattering.

Sighing, Garrus walked to Satima and touched her forehead.

"You have a spiking fever, Satima. You need medical help. All of those injections, experiments done to you, has made you sick.", he watched her in worry. "I know of one more place, but it would put us at risk.", Garrus noticed how pale Satima was.
Satima laid down as he left to the navigation controls. He'll drop Liara off quickly at the station.

Crescent Nebula

"We're going to Illium? That place is beyond dangerous!", Jormun stared at Garrus furiously.

"I know it's not exactly the best place, but it will have to do.", Garrus navigated Haven in the system.

Jormun hurried off in a sullen mood.

"I'm trying to save her life...", Garrus's voice trailed off as Jormun walked away.

Satima started to shiver, as Jormun stepped into her room, and pulled a blanket on her. He sat on her bed, rubbing Satima's arm to comfort her.

She stared at him, wanting to say something. He continued to look away, just rubbing her arm.

Jormun was thinking, not paying attention to what he was doing anymore. Satima is the daughter of the galaxy's villain. She's a product of some insane experiment.

Jormun wanted to help her through this, but his mind wandered to another issue. Home. While on Omega, he contacted his mother. The Admiral would not hear of him bringing Satima to Ranoch. No migrant stations would allow it either.

He shouted, rebelled against his mother over the matter, but her words remained resolute. Jormun defied her, promising to never come home until Satima is welcomed. He professed his love for her, and even insinuated a family they could have on Haven.

Their own little migrant ship. Home.

This ship is hell. Do'ova's damn words stuck out like an inflamed rash.

Satima had fallen asleep, still cold from her fever. He turned, crawling gently behind her, wrapping his arm over the soft body. Do'ova found them that way, standing a short distance from the door frame. Satima only reacted to a heinous crime on her ship. It was normal to be so angry. But, that violent?

She closed the door quietly, returning to the cockpit to see Garrus navigate them to the Tasale system. With the captain back; will she help look for Durlin, now?
Illium

Chapter Summary

A new discovery of Reaper's abilities give the crew pause. Satima deals with abandonment. And a relationship forms on both sides.

Illium rebuilt itself after the war. The citizens shut themselves away from the governments and rules of the galaxy. There were no recorded incidents from Justicars, considering most of them died in the war.

Asari refugees came by the hundreds but after almost a decade, Illuim shut her docks to them. Now with more people and indentured servants than the planet can handle, random drafts force citizens to leave and be delivered to hive to relieve the pressure of over-population.

Asari military continues to focus on their own new government.

A rapid rumor runs through the elite parties and occasional food rallies. Hive is buying indentured servants for experiments and using the forced draftees for their own military.

The Illium government denies it all.

Kasota Hospital, Illium

They docked at the hospital. Emergency transport teams were called to Haven, retrieving Reaper. Garrus and Satima had followed behind with Do'oova staying in the lobby watching them disappear into the trauma wing.

Jormun sat with his salarian friend, watching the sky cars pass by in front of a dying sun. The purple and blue clouds colored the grey floor in the room. He checked on Satima who received proper medicine. Jormun wandered around the lobby, waiting on news from her treatments.

She's Reaper's child. Ancestors. What a twisted reveal. He paced in his questions, over analyzing what it could all mean. Whatever it is, he cares for her. No one will hurt her again.

Suddenly Reaper came out of the trauma wing with a rage. Satima followed her asking questions as to why she was up. Garrus ran beside them. "Spirits! Reaper, how did you come back like that?", he shouted.

"Why did you bring me here? It's too open!", she shouted back.

Satima blocked her mother, "Whoa! First explain how the hell you're not a corpse. I saw Liara put a bullet in your head!"

Reaper eyed them both. "Self-regeneration.", she answered. Garrus shook his head," Impossible! You're… immortal?"

"I don't think so. Harder to kill, maybe but I can die.", Reaper informed.

Satima followed her mother out to the streets while Jormun witnessed the issue and ran after them. Do'oova stood, stunned from the villain's resurrection. She glanced to the turian, Garrus, before
quickly leaving the lobby behind. Garrus stayed, unsure what to think, sitting on a bench. He wasn't hungry or tired anymore. Just worried.

It became night and as the time passed by, he walked outside. A cool air breezed by and he inhaled the fresh scent. Garrus heard loud laughing from across the hospital. Walking further away from the entrance, he followed the sound down an alley to see food stations, a hotel and a bar.

He looked back. Tormented with bad thoughts, he needed to be numb. Garrus pocketed his hands, turned around and walked to the bar. Inside the open building, he sat on a stool at the wall as always. Yellow and blue lights flashed on the dance floor. He picked a seat to himself away from the crowd at the bar. Garrus needed to be alone.

"What'll it be?", a turian with orange colonial markings stood behind the counter rinsing off a few glasses.

"Whiskey.", he replied, "And just a shot."

That shot became seven. It burned the pain away. He could feel a sense of emotional freedom every time he gulped the liquor. Garrus almost forgot about Reaper, Satima and hive for a minute.

A young asari sauntered over and sat next to him. She smiled sweetly, blushing. He didn't need this. Liara's old smile and gentle touches had pained him. Torn between what he is and what he's been chasing. The past. "Well, it's been a long time since I've seen a broadly developed turian male.", she giggled moving closer to him.

The other turian bartender glanced their way. Garrus could smell a sweet liquor coming from her breath, she obviously had a bit more than usual.

The asari girl traced his arm with her blue slender fingers all the way up to his fringe. It gave a non-consented sensual sensation down his spine. Garrus shuddered at the touch. It had been a long time and this asari wasn't the person he wanted doing that. He became annoyed.

"I'm not interested.", he pulled her hand off shaking the feeling from his body.

She frowned, "Awe. I really can give you a better time than whiskey.", she took the shot out of his hand, setting it on the counter. "My taste is so much sweeter.", she whispered in his ear almost tickling him.

Garrus was seriously irritated at her. She took his drink away! Worse, she's practically attacking him with unwanted touching. He turned to say a few healthy words, but another arm grabbed him. "Sorry honey! This one's taken.", Satima smiled sweetly while rudely shoving the younger girl away.

She fell to the floor in surprise, staring at the girl. "You bitch!" She backed up when Satima gave her a glare. "Beat it, slut!", Satima warned.

The asari ran away.

"Oh Spirits, thank you.", Garrus said nearly falling off his seat.

Satima shook her head. "Stop your damn drinking.", she pulled him hard.

He followed her buzzed to the hospital. Garrus held on to the sludge walls, nearly falling.
"Let an old man catch up, will you!", he yelled.

Satima turned to him with an angry stare. "You want to be drunk? Do it on your on time? Reaper's lost in the city below us. Jormun's back at Haven trying to use a long comm to find her. Do'ova is refusing to speak to me. Besides you need to walk this off.", she crossed her arms irritated.

Garrus laughed against the wall. "Like I should care.", he glared. He leaned, facing the ground. "Take your skinny ass and your shitty ship and get out of my life. I don't care if Shep… Reaper is dead in an alley. I'm tired of taking care of your problems."

Satima walked to Garrus, quickly dropping him on his sorry ass. Had he been sober, she would've been the one on the ground. But what could he expect from Shepard's kid? Garrus nearly vomited from that thought. Shepard's kid.

"I didn't ask for you take care of anything!", she fixed her eyes on him in a serious manner. "I can't fight the directive or help Reaper on my own."

"Why?", Garrus pushed back, standing, as his balance became more unstable while getting up. Satima helped him.

She let him go, "Because like it or not, we need you! I… I need you." Satima hung her head, as her voice trailed off. He stared at her. "You don't need me kid. I'm no good for you. Leave Reaper lost here. Get away while you can."

Satima stared at him disappointed. "I have to find her, she's my mother. There's no place for me to run. I need to find out what I am. Please, help me.", she begged.

Garrus snapped his head in her direction, then followed in line. Satima is still a kid to him and listening to her beg made him feel ill.

After all she's been through, it isn't right to abandon her. He tried his best to walk off the booze, while following her to Haven. Once they reached it, neither Reaper nor Jormun were there. Do'ova greeted them with an attack to Satima, on the ramp.

Her punch surprised the hybrid captain; who quickly countered with a swift kick to the gut on poor D. The salarian grabbed her self, holding in the pain while breathing hard. Her black eyes narrowed at Satima. The captain caught her anger. Trying to apologize for her own stupid instincts. "D! I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you…", those words fell flat.

Rising up from the blow, Do'ova dismissed the hybrid. "No apologies will ever fix what you did. Not to me, or my family. I came back to see what you are. I know now."

Satima followed her to the bay. "What? What am I? D!", she grabbed the salarian by the arm.

Do'ova stopped with a glare. It was strange to see Satima so unsure; no bravado or cocky attitude to push herself forward. She was scared. And alone. "You're nothing but a void; swallowing everyone into your misery. Everywhere you go, people die. You don't care what happens to them, as long as you are safe. And at this point; I don't care anymore what happens to you, either."

Satima watched Do'ova leave the bay further into the ship. She stood silently, as Garrus stepped to her. She didn't let him speak, "We have to find Jormun and Reaper." Leading the way to the cockpit. At the controls, the captain sat to slam her hands on the interface. "Dammit!".

"I'll go looking for them. You should stay here for now.", Garrus advised.

Satima sighed. "Is everything she said, true?", she glanced at him.
Garrus did not have an answer. She then turned back around to the control console.

The fast cars and bright city lights at night put Garrus in a mood. Nostalgia from the citadel filled his senses. The C-Sec days leading up to the moment he met her. Their run in with Geth, prothean relics and the horrifying truth about the reapers.

Reapers. No matter how much they tried, those damn machines still won. Not by harvesting but by destroying hope. They destroyed her, through and through. The many pieces of Shepard fell away like broken glass. Satima is just a piece. So, is he.

Minutes passed by quickly as he ventured down levels of the local shops and restaurants. He needed to get higher, better range to view the city scape. Garrus finally reached sky rise buildings. The condos of the elite. His visor pointed to her on top of the highest one.

Garrus used the elevator to reach the roof of the building. Reaper crouched over the ledge, looking out to the sky. Many twinkling stars dotted the deep hued skyline. "Peaceful... isn't it.", she spoke suddenly.

Garrus walked closer to her, unaware whether she means to jump or if she's just enjoying mortality. "Yes, it is.", he replied sitting over the ledge next to her.

"I have... reaper tech in my body. Injuries that aren't extremely serious heal in minutes or hours. I told you I'm not completely human anymore. Not Shepard... anymore.", Reaper grieved.

Garrus stared at her as she glanced at the city scape. She was still Shepard somewhere in there. He wanted to touch her arm but hesitantly looked away.

"Garrus?", she asked gazing off into the night sky.

He looked at her, "Yes, Reaper."

She smirked to herself. "Don't call me Reaper.", returning the gaze.

For the very first time in a long while... Garrus smiled back.

Reaper and Garrus returned to Haven. Satima had been busy locating Jormun in the great city, Illium. She worried something or someone... has him. "Any luck in finding Jormun, Satima?", Reaper asked walking behind her.

Satima punched a panel closed, opening a small schematic of the under-city. "No. It's not like him to disappear like that. I'm the one to usually do so.", Satima watched a signal ping then jam at the same spot. It stopped in a large building that seemed to be a warehouse.

"We can't leave without Jormun.", Satima turned to look at Reaper.

"We won't", she gazed onward to the city skyline ahead.

Meanwhile, Jormun had pushed himself up, off the floor. The blow to his head sending a splitting headache surging heavily. He looked around in the darkness, trying to find a peering light of any kind. His helmet had been damaged, all systems functions barely working. A rupture to his suit had given him a fever. Keelah, what has he got into?

Haven hovered above the back street, in front of a lower ramped highway. It was buried under pollution and fog. Haven's spotlights pierced through the smog cloud. A loud roar echoed from its thrusters.
Satima and Reaper dropped down from the lowered hanger, weapons up. Garrus stayed in Haven to prevent unwanted boarding. He tried to entreat Do'ova to lend a hand. She did not respond but gave him a finger. Nice little human gesture to go fuck himself. She's going to be a problem.

Satima led Reaper to a metal double door. Sludge dripped on the walls from the elite towers above. "Here.", Satima pointed.

The doors looked old. "We'll have to pry it open. There's no panel or sign of a bypass.", Satima scanned with her omni-tool. Reaper handed her rifle to Satima, walking to the door and feeling the crack between them. She then preceded to jam her fingers, small bones cracking. Reaper winced in controlled pain as Satima watched in fear and fascination. Reaper began to pry.

Her lean muscles flexing in strength, an advantage that was not her own. The doors shrieked, beginning to open with a hiss. Dank air rushed out.

This warehouse had not been used since before the reapers harvest. With the doors now open, Reaper took her weapon back from a speechless Satima. She entered first. "How are you so strong? Is your body completely reaper tech?", Satima asked stunned.

Reaper smirked as she cleared the dark hall. "Something like that. I don't have much human left in me." Satima looked around before staring quickly at Reaper. And hive was going to do this to her too? She shook her head for now. Need to keep it clear to find Jormun.

Further down the hallway, they stepped into a large room, filled with dusty crates. Some of them had a strange black and orange symbol on the surface. "That looks familiar.", Reaper said, studying them. Satima walked ahead, hearing a muffled noise. "I hear something.", she whispered.

Reaper felt a strange sense in her mind. Someone sinister occupied this room. "Hide.", she said. Satima glanced her way, "What?"

Reaper walked fast to Satima, "I said, hide!" She pushed the girl behind a huge crate. Reaper scanned the room with her enhanced ocular IR. She faced Satima, "It's Archer. Go back to Haven and run. I'll keep him busy."

Satima shook her head intensely, "No. I can't leave you behind and what about Jormun?!

"I'll find him. If Archer catches you again, I can't promise I can get you back. Please, Satima... do as your told.", Reaper looked at her pleadingly.

Satima handed her a blade. It had a long razor edge. "Put it threw his robotic skull., she demanded.

Reaper nodded as Satima quietly ran back out of the door. She was gone in the dark fog. Reaper stepped out in the middle of the large warehouse, "Come out!", she shouted.

Archer walked out, dragging Jormun. His helmet was completely off. The young quarian's beautiful features shown, even in the darkness. Jormun's effervescent eyes glowed her way.

"Where is Satima?", he smiled wickedly.

"I sent her away. Your focus is on me.", Reaper acknowledged.

Archer kicked Jormun to the floor. The boy's groans and gasps echoed. "I have been waiting to do this for a long while.", he threatened.
Reaper threw her rifle to the ground, expertly showing her blade. "So, have I."

They fought violently, causing enough heavy damage, that their nanites struggled to maintain a constant regeneration. They clashed in front of Jormun. Archer dealt heavy blows to Reaper's face and head, deflecting her blade, giving her a hard knee to the stomach.

Reaper fell backward, as Archer straddled her. But she knocked him off and rolled on the ground, coughing up blood. Jormun tried to crawl back from them.

Archer began arguing at her, "You can't beat me! Not this time. I'm too strong, now. The Directive has...erased my insecurities about their plans. I've been upgraded. Something that was meant for you.", Archer leaned over her.

"Glad I didn't volunteer.", she said while grabbing his cybernetic leg, "Let's put it to the test." Reaper used all her strength to bring him down to the floor. She toppled him and dealt a hard hit to his droid skull.

Archer reeled in confusion. "What did you do?", he roared as he held up his left hand to his head in pain.

Reaper wiped the blood from her nose. "I know where the neural implant is. It's damaged Archer and you have to go back to hive to repair it.", she boasted. "If not, well...you have less than five minutes before it degrades your nanites."

Archer stared at Reaper with an intense hate, "I'll destroy you first before I go crawling back like a heeled varen."

She picked up her blade and smiled. At that moment, Haven busted through the skyline of the warehouse, glass shattered, falling in dangerous heaps on the ground below.

Reaper ran to Jormun, helping him up and shielding him with her body. Archer roared in anger. Using a strange device, he ripped a singularity in the warehouse, back to hive. Jormun couldn't believe the amount of tech that was being used. How did Archer leave without a ship?

Haven's docking hatch opened with Garrus offering a hand to Jormun and Reaper. "Need a lift.", he smirked.

Inside, Reaper put Jormun on the floor. Satima had flown them out of Illium's atmosphere. She put the VI to autopilot. Garrus watched her and Jormun embrace. "Jormun. I'm so glad you're alive!", Satima said worried.

Jormun reeled from the beating he received at the hands of Archer. His lavender eyes glanced to her. "So am I!", he tried laughing. "If it wasn't for your mother, I'd be dead." His gaze now settled on Reaper.

Satima followed it, nodding to her, then helped Jormun to the small med bay in the cargo hold. "We need to fix you a new helmet. Can't have you getting sick everywhere."

The sound of Do'ova's voice startled them. "Yes, after all you've been through, we can't have you suffer for nothing." There was a bitter bite to her tone.

Jormun observed a new side to his friend. She seemed tired and irritated. A darker feel emanated from her. "I'm glad to see you're still here, D."

She nodded, slowly following them to the makeshift med area.
Reaper watched them, satisfied they all survived. Garrus stood next to her, "He'll be back, won't he?"

"Yes. But I've injured him long enough." Reaper walked away down the corridor to the cargo area. While the young captain tended her crewman's wounds, she observed the fighter. "I should leave. There's something I need to investigate"

Garrus followed her, curious. "Investigate? You sound like a cop now.", he smirked in surprise.

Reaper crossed her arms, staring at the directive fighter. "I learned from the best.", she turned to him.

Garrus faced her, "Wait. You're serious!? What's going on?", he asked urgently.

Reaper led him around the side, then opened the panel hatch to the fighter's exterior travel compartment. "I downloaded files from hive. There's something about the stalkers they're scared of. A truth hidden in encryptions.", she pointed out.

"Those guys?", Garrus wondered. "They can rip tears in time, travel through singularities, and you want to investigate them?", he argued.

Reaper placed another small bag of provisions. She looked at him with a grin. "That's the plan."

Garrus leaned on the hull, "You always had a habit of dragging me into risky situations." He watched her reaction.

Reaper smirked, it turned into a sad smile. "Into hell and back.", she reminisced.

They were quite for a moment, when she resumed reasons for leaving. "I need to go to Mars. Back in the Sol system. It's still there and I already know there are remnants of the old Alliance facility. Where Liara had been studying the Prothean beacon."

That name went sour in her mouth. Her lucid awakening from the control of the directive has given her time to grieve over a great friendship. Something Shepard would've never jeopardized, if she hadn't been turned into what she is now.

Garrus disturbed her thoughts with his questions. "You're going alone?", he asked.

Reaper nodded, "Yes."

He looked over the compartment. "I'm coming with you.", Garrus replied.

Reaper stopped rummaging through the compartments contents, now staring at him in alarm, "No! Satima needs you here. You have to keep Archer away from her."

Garrus looked back down the corridor, then to Reaper. "Satima is brave and smart. She can handle this herself. And...", he gently touched Reaper's hand, "We can do this together. I believe Shepard is still in there, somewhere." He pointed to her head with his taloned finger.

Reaper grabbed his hand, pushing it away. "Don't. We both know that life is a faded memory."

He stared at her surprised, then looked away. A deep sigh of disappointment came from him. "Does it have to be?", Garrus asked.

She closed the compartment, "We've been trying to kill each other for two decades. Have you suddenly allowed those twenty years to be excused, all because you're lonely?" Her harsh words pushed him away.
For a moment, Garrus saw only Reaper. Whatever feelings he thought were developing, have been pushed aside. Shepard is gone, and this is who he must deal with now. He stepped away," I was told to forgive the past. That I have only so much time with my family."

Reaper listened, averting a stare.

"We were family, once. The Normandy was home. You were my home. Remember?", he spoke heartbroken.

She wanted to be Shepard again, but a gnawing voice kept telling her no. "Garrus, that reality is gone." Reaper turned to him; her expression pained. "It's best we leave it there, in the past. And protect Satima."

He nodded. Maybe she's right. Garrus can't deny that he's grown attached to the kid, worrying about her. There's a little of Shepard in her, and a chance that it could help bring her back.

Garrus walked to Reaper, a silly thought and a fool's heart as he reached out to her once more. She looked at him in shock, while he caressed her soft cheek. "I'd rather bury myself in the past, then live in this hell alone. But I won't bring this up again, unless you want to."

He started to look away, taking his leave of the cargo bay, when Satima exited the med lab.

"I wanted to thank yo-", Satima's voice trailed off as she spotted this moment next to the fighter. Her face blushed red. "I didn't know you guys were-I should go.", she turned around, pointing to the corridor she exited before.

Reaper and Garrus stepped away from each other. He straightened himself and stared at her. "I'm coming with you. Together, we'll stop Archer, The Directive, and keep Satima safe.", he promised.

Reaper grinned toward him. "You've always been this stubborn?"

He began to leave the cargo hold, off the shuttle deck. "Well, you've always known I'm not a very good turian." Garrus chuckled, making his way to the mess.

Reaper watched him, a bitter stinging in her chest. A sudden thought of regret washed over her. She should've given Satima to him, all those years ago. He wouldn't have come back to hive, and they would've lived happily as a family away from all this.

Except for Archer. And… him. She hit the hull of the fighter. It won't matter. They'll always look for her, know where she is. And why? Because Reaper will lead them to her, every damn time.

An hour passed, with Jormun well enough for his duties. Back in the engine room, Satima wandered in. She wanted to be with him. Right now. At this spot. But it would be hasty and awkward. His beautiful eyes remained in her mind. Forcing a bite to the lip, and a slight blush to her youthful cheeks.

Jormun stared away in the room, unaware of this, while Satima stood next to him. He looked up to see her. "I didn't hear you enter the deck.", Jormun put away some tools, facing her.

Satima smiled, glancing away shyly. "I can be quiet.", she insinuated.

He watched her expression, feeling her move closer to him. Ancestors. "Satima? You need something?", he gulped.

She lifted her gaze to him, now placing a soft touch to his arm. "I want to be with you. I want a… relationship." Satima waited, scared and excited to what he would say. Or do!
Jormun pulled her closer to him, feeling her body against his. He pulled off his new helmet, staring at her dark teal eyes. "I've been wanting to hear you say that for a while."

He kissed her velvety peach lips with passion. She leaned in, feeling his tongue slide into her mouth. Satima pulled away, already panting from the heat between her thighs. "We can't right now." She cleared her throat, "Later. When there's time."

Jormun agreed, reluctantly. He put his hand behind her head, gently holding her closer. "You're right." He searched her eyes for comfort. "Doesn't mean I can't steal a kiss from time to time."

His smile was so perfect to her. And his delicate hued grey skin enhanced his eyes in the poorly lit engine room. She swallowed a lustful urge, now backing away from him. Finally, sure where they both stood together, Satima helped him put the helmet back on.

Taking a moment to plan their next move, Jormun leaned on the hull wall. "Archer won't stop chasing us. What are we going to do?", he asked.

Satima sighed loudly, "I don't know. For now, we prepare the ship for another run in and try to find a hidden place to lay low."

Jormun watched her leave the room. "But where?", he thought.

His captain thought aloud. "I owe D, Jormun. To find them."

He agreed, "I don't know where to start. It could mean capture for us all."

Satima faced away from her, looking down the darkened hall. Do'ova deserves closure. "I am selfish.", she spoke. "I was afraid of what would happen to me; instead of thinking about them. About Do'ova."

Jormun took her hand, "I don't think you're selfish, Satima. But I'm with you."

Do'ova waited in her quarters, going over the scans for Jen's location. Which one of the terminus mines was Prax speaking of? Her captain entered quietly. The salarian tried to ignore the intrusion.

Satima took a chair in the corner and brought it closer to her friend. It was hard to look directly at her. She could see the pain in D's stare. "Jormun and I have decided to look for your family.", she started. "We'll trace back some of those calls; maybe find a signal close to their location?"

Do'ova continued to scan. Looping the code over another signal. Pushing her little omni-tool to find needle in the space haystack. The captain bothered her. "I don't need your help.", she replied curtly. "I can find them myself."

Her captain nodded, "Ok. If that's what you want to do. My door is open, you know. In case you change your mind."

The salarian female scoffed.

Satima had wandered off, personally upset over the last few days. She had been wondering what Reaper and Garrus were really up to. With the fighter, especially. The captain resumed her seat at the pilot chair, swiping holo controls across the panel.

These past weeks have been hell; though she's been through worse. Satima made a mental check list of all the surprising information that filled her days.

She's found that Reaper is her mother; using some kind of genetic engineering from that woman's
DNA. Hive is building armies of reaper tech drones. That station needs to be destroyed, no doubt about that. And those sudden memories. A strange awakening that had dozens of blank faces. Some male, some female. Some not even human. All of them in a row. She was with them.

Satima shook her head in personal disbelief. If Reaper is this Shepard and Garrus knew her from before, then what the hell happened at the beginning? Before hive even created her or Reaper! Comms pinged on the front panel, directed from the cargo bay.

"Satima, this is Reaper. We need to talk."

Satima became instantly curious. Now the real reason to their meeting next to the fighter could be revealed. In the cargo bay, Garrus had begun packing the few provisions and weapons they would need on their flight to Mars. The old facility. Satima had just walked in.

"Where's Reaper?", she asked.

"I'm here.", as she entered from the small medic room that remained of Liara's doing.

"You wanted to see me? Is there something wrong?", Satima asked anxiously.

Reaper sat down on a crate, looking uneasy. "Satima. I need to leave immediately. It's urgent that I do. There have been some... developments. Information that I've found; I need to follow up on."

"Like what? You can't just "reconnect" with me, then check out. I need you here. I'm not strong enough to fight Archer on my own!", Satima shook in anger and fear.

Her mother's strength was all that stood between her and The Directive.


Satima scoffed at her mother. Cower? "Have you forgotten exactly what you put me through?", she yelled. "All those years spent in fear and anguish. I hated myself every day for it. I do still!"

Reaper shook her head, "No, Satima... I didn't mean..."

The girl was livid, her voice shaky with emotion. "Don't you dare tell me not to cower. I don't have some twisted death wish. I want a life! I want a future with Jormun; something you and your precious ex-Directive almost robbed me of!", Satima stomped away angry.

"I'll go talk to her.", Garrus said, following.

Reaper stood still as stone. Then a whisper started to build into a hushed voice in her mind. If Satima chooses to be weak, then she'll always be the victim. Of everyone, and everything. Her training will kick in, but only at a cost.

Reaper shook her head. It's all just remnants of the directive. That's all. Right?

Garrus found Satima in a small room, sitting at the far corner of her bed. Her body hugged the wall, ginger hair covered her face. "What do you want? To tell me I'm behaving like a child?", she asked.

Garrus leaned on the doorway, "No."

"Then what?", she looked up with glossy dark eyes.

He let out a breath then proceeded to speak, "You made a valid point back there. But your mother wasn't trying to hurt you. She's trying to prepare you." How strange it is to say mother. Warrior,
leader, friend, lover… but never mother.

Satima let out a sigh. "For what?"

Garrus then continued, "To stop the Directive and make things right. No one knows how all this happened. All anyone can speculate is that Shepard was there when everything went to hell for this galaxy." He gazed around the room, "We all blamed her. And because of that, we left her to the Reapers. I know this is all confusing kid, but someday it will be clear. The answer has to be there."

She watched him lean in the doorway. His was so sure of what he said. Old scars on his face were highlighted from the overhead light. A pale-yellow wash over the grey-brown leathery surface.

"Or die trying to find it.", Satima replied.

"Exactly.", Garrus laughed.

Satima waited at the control panel. Shuttle bay doors were unlocked. Jormun stood beside her as the fighter began its flight out of her ship. Comm channels opened.

"Satima. Go to Tuchanka. I've downloaded coordinates to an abandoned hospital. It should provide cover for a short while. And on the way, you might discover a few old friends. Be careful Satima. The Directive is looking for you.", Reaper ended her comm.

Satima and Jormun exchanged glances. No one's been on Tuchanka in over fifteen years, or even heard from them. What would they find there?

She looked over her shoulder to see Do'ova lingering in the short corridor. Returning to face the stars; Satima waited for them to disappear with the scouter ship. The captain quickly put in navigational input for the Terminus systems.

Omega

Haven docked without a bother. Satima was not going to let anyone ambush them this time. And if the Directive wanted her; there'd be a mountain of their dead men leading to her, first.

Do'ova stepped ahead of her captain, seeing the more dispersed crowd. Afterlife had a small line of useless nobodies wanting to get in. She faced Satima. "I didn't think you'd come back here. Not after what happened."

Satima holstered a pistol. Eying any mercenaries in the corners. "Jormun got this little quest started. I owe you to finish it."

Jormun tagged in the back, Ish ready. They entered the dangerously famed club. No one knew whether or not Aria was alive or just withering away like some recluse in her special room. Except for the three turian guards out front. One always went in, then came out. Each day.

At least that's what a nervous vorcha explained after Do'ova very hastily took a broken beer bottle to its throat. Satima was impressed. Jormun… not so much.

They stopped in front of the stairs leading to Aria. Satima had her blade ready. Loud music deafened them, so they resumed to use comms. "I'll handle the guard. Use creds. We'll just take a peek and see if the old queen is still kicking. If not? Well… there's other ways."

A blood pack krogan stomped his way to an asari dancer. Big, ugly and very handsy. Jormun gulped, "I'm getting very sick of this place."
Satima led the group up the stairs, right in front of the entrance. The turian guard with no clan markings and dangerous dark eyes stopped them. "No admittance.", he said.

She held out her omni-tool, pulling up a cred amount. "250."

He smirked, "850."

They didn't have that much. Do'ova was getting anxious. Some of the patrons were also getting nosy. Satima waved him over to her. The guard didn't budge. She stepped to him, pulled out the blade and applied it to his throat with quick skill. He gulped hard against the steel. One hand to a sidearm, but she shook her head. "I can slice open your voice box faster than you can shoot. How about you let us in for a look. We don't want any trouble."

Jormun cocked Ish.

The door opened with them piling in hurriedly. Nearly pushing themselves over each other. Getting in was the easy part. A puff of smoke twirled high above a purple head, watching the floor through a tinted window. One old couch covered in stains and small circular burns, curved the front of the pane.

She stood with an arm under the other. Slender fingers holding a lit cigarette. "I suppose you have a good reason for barging in on a dead woman's retirement." Her grin widened from amusement. "Let's see just what the cat drug in."

Aria faced the crew, taking in their intrusion. "This looks like a bad joke." She took a seat on her couch, sitting back to cross a leg. "But I don't recall there being a directive experiment in the middle of it."

Satima almost gasped. She had to hold it in. Can't look weak in front of this asari. "How did you know?"

Jormun took the side of the door. Ready for those guards to storm in. None did.

"You can't seriously expect me to sit here and not know what's going on in my own backyard. Do you?", the queen replied. Aria brought up her omni-tool, displaying recent recordings of their battle at the docks. And a disturbing one of the monster from below.

Do'ova rushed the conversation. "This doesn't matter! I need the location of the blood pack mines. To find my family!" Jormun reached out to calm her, as Satima waited in anticipation.

Aria eyed them. "I don't care what you need. I also don't respond to rude interruptions." She grabbed an ash tray from her side table, putting out the drag. "Get out of my home, before I have you thrown out."

Haven's captain pulled Do'ova back, giving her a sure nod. The hybrid took a seat next to the asari. "Even if you wanted to; you don't control this station anymore. Aria T'Loak doesn't have the same pull as she once did." Satima gave a sharp grin. There was something in her demeanor, the way she conducted that fact; that brought a faint memory to the merc queen.

Aria dismissed it, chuckling to herself. Setting the ash tray down. She stared out in her room. "Not since the Directive, no. Shepard promised to save us all.", Aria gazed to Satima. "I knew she couldn't."

A sad mood filled the room, with the asari recounting some lost days of the past. "I lost my station to monsters. My power was ripped from me. People I actually gave a shit about were murdered in front
of me. And I was completely and utterly incapable to stop it." She reached out to light another cigarette. "And so was Shepard."

Satima didn’t understand, and neither did her crew. Aria answered their question, to get them out of her club. "Take a field trip to one of the planets in the expanse. Pragia, it's called. I'd check there."

Haven's captain nodded in thanks, slowly getting up to leave. Aria spoke once more. "You remind of her. Helping others like this. No matter how shitty this galaxy is." she gave a wry laugh. "Shepard was always the fool."

They left quickly to the docks. Haven had been flown through a relay to end up in the Nubian Expanse.

Pragia is a world choking in hypergrowth from the plant life. Old stories lingered about a batarian colony that was set long ago, having something to do with it. There were bases all over. Some were merc outpost and others were pirate sanctuaries.

Different kinds of darker factions took residence too. Not exactly a neighborhood to call home.

Blood pack clans dotted a few areas. The mine that was still working, was filled with vorcha overseers. Only a few krogans kept watch at the front. Satima landed Haven over a flat rocky outcropping. Vines lined the edges like green tendrils. The threat of plant life overgrowing on their ship would grow every hour they overstayed their welcome on this planet. The captain signaled her crew in the mess.

Jormun doubled his suits mesh shielding. Can't have thorny bushes cause a rupture. This jungle environment is rife with infections and viral traps. He looked over to Do'ova, who packed a lot of medical supplies. "I might need them for my family.", she said.

Satima glanced to her crew. "The entrance is here." Bringing out a small map on her tool. "I don't know how many levels there are to this place. Our VI being broken from Archer's raid. Once we get in though, we'll hack the terminals and find out if this is the place."

Do'ova stared at her. "And if it's not?"

The captain forced a smile. This is gonna get them all killed. "We'll keep looking."

Outside the landing area, the crew chopped and stomped their way through the jungle. Vicious vines blinded their way, as harsh jungle flooring tripped them. "It's damn hot in here.", Do'ova commented.

Indeed, it was. A summery atmosphere perfect for the lush growth to bury them alive. "Keep pushing through", Satima reminded her crew.

At last they reached the entrance. A small clearing complete with landing zone and one warehouse. Crudely cut rock marked the way through, with a built-in tower that had a walkway over the opening. Jormun spotted two blood pack krogan safeguarding it. "Heavies.", he said.

A couple of vorcha troopers paced the grounds to their control tower. It was a few feet high off the gravel layout. "We'll sneak our way in there. Jormun, you'll hack the terminal station. Do'ova, keep watch from the door."

"And what will you do?", Do'ova asked.

She smiled, "I'll handle the front guards." Spirits.
Sneaking past the few vorcha proved less of a problem. But those krogan could sniff out an outsider from miles away. Jormun made his way inside the control tower. One vorcha loomed over the computer panel. He kept watch over some tunnels through a camera.

The quarrian hacker moved forward carefully. His lightweight suit helped to muffle the nervous steps he took. Do'ova strained from the anxious moment, hopeful the vorcha does not turn around. Jormun pulled out his shotgun, turning the handle side towards his prey. Slowly-carefully… until he crept right behind the creature.

"Hey!" A blood pack krogan entered the side door. His vorcha friend quickly faced Jormun. It became a battle.

The quarrian grabbed the ugly thing slamming his head on the panel. He hit him hard with Ish, to face the challenging krogan. Do'ova looked behind her outside to see the two krogan guards making their way to them. "Dammit! Dammit!", she swore. It's all going wrong fast!

She pulled out her pistol delivering shots towards their enemy. He grinned devilishly. Shrugging off the wounds inflicted on him. "It's always nice when more rats show up to work."

Jormun unloaded a round on the fiend. He staggered but kept at them. "My turn."

The krogan rammed full force at Jormun, knocking the boy to the grated floor. Do'ova gasped. She's not a trained anything! Her cousins were better at this. Shooting first, she tried to pull her friend to safety.

"Get away from us!", she shouted.

He only laughed mockingly to them. Do'ova widely gazed about her. The bloody panel, the unconscious vorcha, the evil krogan…. And the overhanging fuel pipe that ran on the ceiling to an outside generator. She held her breath, took aim and hoped there was a spark. He dodged the bullet unawares of its actual destination. The small projectile struck the metal pipe perfectly. Causing a rupture over his head. But it did not burst or spark. Fumes leaked out instead. He bellowed at her.

"You thought your salarian skill and fast thinking was going to save you?"

One of the other krogan guards showed up behind her. It's all over. Do'ova gulped. Those days on the station watching and laughing. Learning and crying. Her father said it wouldn't always be easy. She closed her eyes, breathed in deeper. Opened them to view correctly what was before her.

The young salarian stood tall, pistol aimed again. Do'ova smirked. Her gaze looked behind him. The krogan turned quickly to Satima throwing her combat knife past him, right into the eye of the one behind her friend. He fell backwards over the railing, clawing at the sharp object in his socket.

Do'ova fired again, hitting the same spot of the fuel line. A small spark emitted, causing a fiery wave of flame to engulf him. He screamed at them, tripping out of the tower. Falling on a walking group of vorcha. The chaos below them provided the best distraction to get inside.

Satima dodged the krogan and the flames, with some scuffling wounds to her cheek. She should really consider getting some damn armor.

The mines were confusing without that access to the tunnel plans, but they found a worker inside. A frail human male, lingering in an open cavern. As the crew approached him, he cowered against the rocky wall. Satima knelt to him. "We're not here to hurt you. We need help. Directions."

She waved Do'ova to him. The salarian swallowed. "My family. They are like me, salarian. Have you seen any of my kind here?", she implored.
He relaxed, standing to stare at them. This poor man hasn't eaten very well in weeks. Dirt and grime stick to him from the endless heat of this place. "There are some salarians on the third level."

Do'ova thanked him as they made their way in the direction the man was pointing. Entering the tunnel, a warm breeze brushed across their faces. The smell of rank body odor and sweat hung in the air. The third level of tunnels provided some relief. It seemed there was a top entrance cut into the very planet surface.

A lift carried more workers down to the area. Do'ova scanned with scrutiny. "I don't see them.", she panicked. "What if they are not here? What if they are dead?!

In the distance they heard the voice of a male shouting orders. But the queer part was that it didn't sound like the screech of a vorcha. Or the loud booming threats of a krogan. They hurried to the area, careful to take cover behind some crates.

Jormun peered around him, taking in their exit. "We can't stay for too much longer, Satima. Those angry krogan from the surface will be here soon. We can use that lift to escape and reach Haven."

Do'ova glared to him. "Jormun, no! I have to find them… why would you even say that?" It was clear her feelings were hurt.

He shook his head, "I'm sorry, D. But we're no good to them if we're dead.". Jormun touched her arm, "I'll never stop looking for them. But, my friend, I think your father would want you to live. Instead of obsess over his passing shadow."

Satima felt heartbroken for Do'ova. She briefly tapped the salarian's shoulder. "On my word as captain; I will not let you die under my command. And I won't stop looking for them, either. We're a team." Her smile touched the young salarian, but it didn't last.

The male voice shouted again in the large cavern. "I said to get those crates on that lift, now! Prax doesn't have time for your slow-paced wallowing."

Do'ova listened intently, then stood to her team's horror. "Jen?"

Gradually, she stepped to his vicinity. Slowly Do'ova approached her cousin. Clad in crimson salarian armor with a white skulled pistol to his side. He turned to her. A deep scar that drew a long, crude line across his tan colored face. "What are you doing here?", he gasped. "You were dead."

She disagreed. "It was you, who should be dead. What's going on here?"

Jen paced in front of her, twitchy hand to his gun. "Why, leading! This is my work, my job. For the glory of the Clan Werlock."

Madness. Satima and Jormun cautiously came forward behind her. Eying anything like the vorcha to creep out and surround them. Salarians struggled in the background with their arduous labors.

"You… work-for the blood pack?", she said incredulous. "Our family? What YOU started on Omega!" Do'ova confronted him. "Durlin? Kenota?"

Jen unsettled to her accusations. "Weak.", he spat. "They couldn't defend themselves, let alone our family against anyone. Our family name is a joke to this galaxy. But I'll make it matter again."

She puffed in anger, thin lips scowling to his insanity. "Where are they?", Do'ova demanded. Pulling out the pistol from earlier, aiming to him. "Where?!!"
He cocked his head, grinning in satisfaction. "Someplace else. You'll never find them. I won't allow it."


"I can't get you to tell me where you've put them. But there are other ways to obtain this information." She blinked.

Satima knew what was about to happen. Jormun shouted for D to stop and think. It was done before anyone else could protest.

Jen laid on the ground. A pool of green around him, just like her mother. His eyes stared upwards to the rock ceiling. Workers stopped to witness. Do'ova knelt to him opening her omni-tool. Copying the coordinates using a hack.

She stood up to Satima standing in her way. They stared at each other for that short moment. Something of an understanding between them. The hybrid searched deeply before speaking.

"Jormun, send a short-range virus to the local camera systems. I want it grainy and incapable of visuals."

He nodded.

The workers piled on the lift, as many as possible. Vorcha showed up to fire on the crowd. Haven's crew left with the first wave. Unable to help the many more trapped below. Quickly, they left for the ship.

Satima piloted her crew and their new guests out of the system.

It was a silent flight. Jormun passed out food and medical supplies. One of the salarians died from malnutrition. They sent him on his journey to the wheel via space send off. Satima dropped off the remaining at a human support station.

They welcomed the survivors of the mines, offering the crew some respite for a day onboard. Do'ova stayed to herself. Jormun imagined she was conflicted but relieved. Answers were given to his friend. But there was still urgency to find her family.

Satima couldn't sleep. She wandered the lobby of the station, viewing a lot more humans than she's ever seen. The hybrid grew up around more aliens and other twisted species the directive could spin out; than those who resembled her more.

The truth of her genetic template soured hunger. Too nervous and upset to eat, an observatory beckoned her to view. One large window showed her a fantastic picture of space. Stars and nebulas painted the projections.

Blues and purples, golden tendrils with rose colored dust. Smaller gas giants whirling in motion as if they were tossed about some black sea. It was wonderful to watch. But the hour was getting late. Soon, they would need to head back into the black and star covered sea. Right to Tuchunka. Satima hopes there's no more problems with blood packs, there.

Footsteps awakened her senses as a female figure clad in deep blue armor stood next to her. Her raven hair was cropped short above the shoulders. Old scars from scorching burns patched the left cheek that face the hybrid. It looked pink and rosy on the otherwise smooth skin of this human.

"I've seen many abominations on the battlefield that looked less normal than you," the woman
started. "None of them acted like a real person, though. All of them controlled. All of them husks of what they were."

Satima took an uncomfortable step back. She tried to leave when the woman grabbed her arm. Forcing the hybrid to see her. This human's brown eyes stared with criticism. "I could keep you here. See what you really are. But she'll come and take you. Kill us all and take you back."

The female leaned in closer. "The last day I saw your genetic supplier-Reaper, as she is called. You know what she said, right after killing half of her crew?"

Satima nodded no.

"She said 'Is submission not preferable to extinction?' The woman laughed, "You know who else said that? Saren… the turian who betrayed an entire galaxy. And we killed him." She let Satima go, chuckling to herself. "Maybe you can bring her back, so I can kill her? We can do it together, if you want."

There was something not right in her gaze. Her voice seemed cracked and unstable.

The hybrid ran back to Haven. Jormun had finished with diagnostics as Do'ova sat in the mess researching her new information. They watched their brave captain shut herself into her quarters. Satima sat in the corner of her room. Knees to her chest and huddled in fear. Who the hell was that woman? Why did she say that? And who was Reaper from before?
Tuchunka

Chapter Summary

Satima and Jormun face the indifference of Tuchunka. Reaper finds more than she thought at the old Mars facility. An ancient race reveals a revelation about Reaper, that leads to a tragedy. Satima becomes the reaper born.

Old Mars Facility

Garrus landed the fighter on a rusted docking pad. He and Reaper donned their gear, helmets in place and weapons ready. "This isn't completely abandoned. Reaper forces have reported stalker activity here.", she warned.

"As long as there are no giant mutant space spiders, I'm good.", Garrus replied sarcastically.

She glanced at him as the hatch door opened. "What?"

"It's a thing. Never mind.", he replied.

Inside the atrium, Shepard spotted a time distortion over the reception desk. Everywhere they treaded, there were debris and broken glass.

This place had seen better days. An eerie feeling crept up on them. Old memories of Cerberus and the protheans displayed in her mind. She could remember the fight on the building roof, where Ashley almost died. She glanced to Garrus, then suddenly a crack opened in the middle of the room, dark energy formed a tear of time.

They took cover behind a damaged wall, as five militant stalkers walked out; followed by another. In a different armor, it seemed. Female.

She took her helmet off, surveying the room with her crystal eyes. "I know they're here. Form a search pattern.", she ordered. The stalkers began splitting up in opposite directions. Garrus waited behind the wall, realizing Reaper had already began approaching the other.

The two women sized each other up. Then the taller female spoke. "Reaper, I wonder why you came here?"

An odd question from an unknown. A familiar tone to it, too. "Who are you?", Reaper demanded. "How do you know me?"

The alien female gave a short smile, "I am a Sentarian. And I've known you for quite some time."

Wasteland outskirts

Haven landed on an abandoned building. The hospital Reaper had told them about. Satima made sure no one followed them, and scanned the facility four times, before finally stepping out of her ship.

Outside, the wind blew hot air around them, stirring sand from the corners of the damaged building
into her eyes. Satima brought out a pair of welding googles. Jormun needed nothing, considering his helmet protected him from the weather.

Do'o'va stepped forward viewing the landscape of sandy valleys and jutting rocks. She could see several ruins of old krogan buildings. Some were less sunken and damaged. "I've only heard about this planet. It seems it is reclaiming its environment."

Indeed, the ruined surface had taken over several places. These outskirts were once whole metropolises and towering ancient constructs. Ahead, they viewed the sunrise over a desert countryside. Nothing stirred, no one stood. Anywhere. It was too quiet. This place felt dangerous.

Satima led them inside. Within an hour, they made a small base in one of the lobbies.

Its small balcony provided a side view to the courtyard below. "Going to need to set up a perimeter tomorrow. Don't know what's out there.", Jormun informed.

Satima agreed. She watched Do'o'va sit to herself, still looking for the whereabouts of her family.

Mars

Garrus paced, listening to the two women talk. "I am Akasia Vael. Engineer of the Sentarian Command Carrier. I had hoped to meet you sooner, but you left hive rather quickly. No doubt after the hybrid girl. She was certain to take your place." Akasia informed.

"She didn't.", Reaper replied with a warning glare.

"Yes. All from your efforts to protect her, no doubt.", Akasia assured with a weak grin. She continued, "My Commander has given orders to retrieve both you and the hybrid. We can protect you from the Directive."

Reaper scoffed, "I don't need protection. It's Satima who needs a place of sanctuary. She's the one they're after."

"They're after you both. Your genetic tampering and the heavy amount of reaper tech has made you the ideal template.", Akasia revealed.

Garrus stopped pacing and glanced their way. "The what?"

Akasia held out her omni-tool and brought out a schematic of the citadel and the crucible. It was a perfect design. "We have a way to rewrite The Intelligence-Directive, now. Synthesis."

Reaper raised a brow to this information, her cautious expression making Akasia nervous. "Uh, the survival rate is quite low." She resumed. "Using the old intelligence to change the course of history is unpredictable."

Shepard shook in anger, balling a fist tightly. "Survival rate? Changing history? Am I to understand, that you knew about the Directive and me, all this time? And have done nothing...NOTHING, to stop them?!", she began laughing hysterically.

"And you expect me to die for an impossible experiment! I am the perfect fusion of organic and inorganic, created to bring the will of the directive to this galaxy. The reapers finally have their wish. A human Reaper." She glared in satisfaction.

Garrus watched, personally terrified at what she said. He didn't know how to stop her if she were to resume the role of Reaper. Akasia took a step back, a frightened expression on her face.
She then gulped and stood her ground. "Your cybernetic and genetic makeup could possibly stop them for good. I only ask for you to please... listen. If you can help us purge the galaxy of the reapers... wouldn't you do anything to achieve those means?"

In another time, before Satima, the Shepard inside Reaper would've agreed. She doesn't care about dying, only Satima. If she weren't there to protect her..."No.", Reaper replied, leaving. Garrus began to follow.

Akasia hastily started to run after them. "No? Why? You could end this! You can stop them, and you know it! You're being selfish for a person who had sworn to protect the galaxy.", Akasia yelled.

Reaper stopped, turning to face the green-skinned alien. "I'm taking my family, and I'm leaving this damn galaxy... for good. Do what you can to survive. I'm done helping."

"Callon will take her.", Akasia shouted across the landing pad. "He'll take the hybrid girl regardless of how you feel. He'll use her to stop the Directive, and she'll die."

Reaper snapped her head in Akasia's direction, "Is that a threat?", she warned.

"Not from me. We need to work together. I'm sure we can come up with a better plan that doesn't involve anyone dying. But you have to help me.", Akasia pleaded.


"Everything is not what it seems. "Akasia answered. "You and the hybrid, all this chaos. It shouldn't have happened."

Reaper stared. "What do you mean?"

Akasia gave her a wary glance. "Control."

Tuchunka-Abandoned Hospital

Satima leaned on Jormun's arm, falling asleep. She was exhausted. He held her close, feeling his heart skip a few beats. This was the closest they had ever been since their little relationship began. Do'ova set out to wander the upper levels. Taking in the dusk colored scenery. She spotted great thresher maws in the distance. They were sitting up right from the sands, like newly sprouted weeds. Looking to the skies, looking… for something.

The sun had started to set, sending shadows across the room. Jormun also felt a heavy pull on his eyes. Closing them slowly...until one of the shadows moved. He opened his gaze wide, feeling a panic in his chest.

"...Satima...", he whispered.

She didn't stir at first. "Satima. Get up.", he whispered loudly. She opened her eyes to see four krogan looming over them. They tried to scramble to their feet.

"Welcome... to Tuchunka.", the bigger one said with a smirk.

They were both grabbed and knocked unconscious.

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Jormun woke to hanging upside down over a pit. It had been filled with hungry varren. Slavering and snarling at him. "Shit!", he yelled. Struggling to use his upper body strength in an attempt to crawl up his legs. He fell back, hands merely inches from their large toothy jaws.
He heard a muffled sound from in front, looking to see Satima being dragged to a big krogan in red armor. Do'ova was pushed behind her, their wrists cruelly wrapped together in rope. The krogan male waved to one of the others, and they were thrown in front of him, "Overgrown jerks!", Satima shouted. Much of the krogan were male, though a few females watched from higher levels. Their jeweled toned shawls covering deep set eyes.

Fires were lit on makeshift torches, illuminating the shadows and long hallways into the hospital's first level. This place was big. He hoped they locked the Haven up. "Well boys, it looks like we caught some whelps.", the bigger krogan said in amusement.

"A quarrian boy!", a female jested from above. Her comment brought on many laughs and roars.

One of the younger males sneered at Do'ova. "Cowardly lizard!" Anger welled up inside, but she held firm to herself.

Satima surveyed her surroundings. Her wrists were bound tightly with the raw rope, biting into her skin. She winced when she moved her hands. All her blades had been removed, including the more discrete ones.

Satima wondered which male did it. Jormun dangled helplessly above the pit of desert dogs. He tried to undue his bound feet, but to no avail. Falling back with a harsh grunt every time. Feeling the growing ache in his back. "Let her go!", he shouted. More laughter.

"I could. Maybe see how she fares in the pit.", the krogan male smirked. "Or see if the salarian youngling can run faster than my pit hounds?" Insulting roars of laughter filled the halls.

Satima gulped. "With no weapons? I thought the krogan had honor?", she said with a shaky voice.

He leaned out of his grand seat, glaring to her. "Honor is something earned, not given to the weak."

Satima felt insulted. "I'm not weak!", she yelled. Do'ova continued to stare at him. Part of her wanted to flee this place, to live another day and find her family. The other part wanted to fight. She's not thinking clearly anymore. But after Jen, will she?

Poor Jormun was jerked above the varren,"Satima...how about not shouting at the krogan." He pleaded, nervously.

Satima felt more enraged, "I thought we would find sanctuary from hive, but I was wrong. Only to be kidnapped, threatened and bullied from the very people my mother told me who'd help us." She shook with fear and anger.

The big krogan held out a hand to stop all the roars and murmurers. "Your mother? You don't look krogan to me. Tell me, female weakling. Who is your mother?"

Jormun swallowed hard as Satima began to speak. Fearful at the name that could spell death for them. "Re... Reaper.", she answered.

Plenty of older krogan that were watching gasped or shook their heads in disbelief. The bigger krogan, obviously their leader, stood over her.

His gaze full of scorn. "You have spoken of our clan's enemy. Your blood association warrants death. Reaper-born." The crowd roared in a fury. Satima feared for her life, and crew. The krogan stood, "You will speak to the elder. Now!"

Satima was taken to another part of the hospital. She watched Jormun being cut down and quickly
put to safety from the hungry varren pit. Do'ova kicked and struggled as she was led away with him. At least they are together and not separated. No one wants to die alone.

Now led down a corridor into a long hallway. Many females and some younglings watched, hissing.

They stepped inside a large room. It had updated medical technology. An ancient male krogan had been hooked up to it. His many trophies hung around him. He had a large scar, old and deep across his face. She surmised he is dying, and this was his room. The big male shoved her closer to the old krogan. "This female has claimed relation to the Reaper, our enemy. What is your advisement?"

The older krogan leaned out, his bones cracking and a smell of must moving around him in the room. Satima gulped while he stared. "Rex...I need more light.", he said. His voice sounded so deep, yet wise. Rex did as he was told, leaving Satima to stand, freely.

With more torches lit around them, the older krogan used his good eye to look at her. He cocked his old head twice. Jormun and Do'ova were brought in and made to kneel. They watched in fear. Satima made a quick glance before returning her gaze to the krogan.

"Kill it.", he said.

Roars were heard throughout, and Satima was being dragged away. "You son of a bitch! I'm not the enemy. I was a prisoner of the directive. They made me!", she shouted.

The older krogan raised a hand and yelled, "STOP!" There was something in her face, so familiar. He stood with a pained expression and walked slowly to them. His eyes seemed watery, but nothing came out. "They made you?", he asked.

Satima wrested her arms from the other krogan holding her, "Yes. Reaper isn't like she used to be. She's changed." Other krogan hushed the younger crowd waiting outside to hear. Satima continued, "Right now she and Garrus are trying to find a way to stop them."

The old krogan stepped closer, looming over her. "How do you know that name?"

She stuttered nervously, "He... he saved me on Omega. And back on the hive station, with Reaper. They're on Mars right now. Reaper told me to come here. That I would be safe from the directive."

He stared at Satima, his demeanor becoming more comfortable. She had ginger hair and a bright round face. Those eyes were turian. "...shepard...my friend.", the older krogan nodded his head in memory. He then stared at Satima, "And safe...you will be."

Mars

Garrus waited for Reaper to speak. They stayed on the other side of the landing pad, all the while this Akasia and her stalkers remained silent and still. "Are you seriously thinking of believing her?", he asked.

"I don't have much of a choice. It's nothing I can't handle.", she finally replied.

"Nothing we can't handle. Remember we're in this together. For Satima.", he reminded her.

Reaper gave him an anxious glance. "Garrus... I appreciate your help, protecting Satima. But there's something you don't know."
He turned to her. "What is it?"

Before Reaper couldn’t continue, Akasia approached them with an impatient expression. "I know you need a few moments to process this, but time is not on our side."

Reaper understood. "Okay, I'll go and meet your commander. See what this template project is all about.", she gestured ahead to Akasia.

They followed the sentarian into the rift. Immediately appearing on a different ship. Likewise, dark, as much as Hive, but less intimidating. "Where are we?", Garrus asked, confused and slightly nauseated.

"This is the command carrier. We only venture in small groups at a time. This way, the reapers can't follow us back.", Akasia informed.

"Back to where?", Reaper asked, still stunned by the journey through a tear.

"Home.", Akasia lamented. Her crystal eyes averted from their questioning stares.

Inside, they followed her through the bay, into an elevator. It took them to the command deck, where Callon had been waiting.

A tall male, wearing the full black Sentarian armor of commander, stood before them. The Sentarians were quite tall, their skin jade green. Humanoid in nature, even having hair. Or at least hair-like material.

Callon gazed toward them with a wide grin, black eyes glistening from the decks lighting. "Welcome to the Requite. I am pleased you have agreed to come. Tell me, where is your hybrid replacement? Has the Directive already disposed of her?", he asked, curiously.

Akasia spoke before Reaper could answer, "No, Commander. She is alive and well, on Tuchunka."

Reaper stepped forward, alarmed. "How do you know who she is?"

Callon disregarded her question, continuing his report. "Good. We will make course and retrieve her." He turned away from them, exploring the stars through his gaze out of the command deck's windows. "In the meantime, Reaper...please, make yourself comfortable.", he gestured for them to leave through the door.

Akasia took Reaper and Garrus to the barracks, showing them around as if on a tour. She glared dangerously to the alien.

These sentarians have too much knowledge for a species unknown to her and the directive. Reaper thought to catch the unsuspecting young woman alone and interrogate. They eventually ended on the quarters deck. "My sister is a soldier. Much like you are. She is dedicated to Callon and his command."

Reaper grabbed the woman's arm, gripping tightly. Akasia swiftly turned to her with an alarmed stare. "Let me go!" She knows the reputation this reaper abomination has. And she's afraid of her.

Holding firm, Reaper began twisting the sentarian's arm. She brings the taller woman closer to her, a menacing glare putting a sense of terror through this Akasia. "Your commander knows a great deal. Too much."

Akasia struggles to wrest her arm from Reaper, but the villain is too strong. "My sister will see this, and she'll kill you!" She looked to Garrus. "Stop her…"
Reaper twisted harder, making Akasia wince. The young woman held back a whimper.

"Good, because if she doesn't kill me, then you better start running back to whatever part of the universe you come from.", Reaper lets go.

Akasia cradles her injured arm, gulping hard and staring in fright at Reaper. She backs away, leaving them alone.

Reaper turns to an agitated Garrus. He stares longer, before stepping away.

Back on Tuchunka

Jormun stepped beside Satima as she tossed raw pyjack meat to the varren dogs below. "Why are you feeding them? They're dangerous.", he stated, upset.

Satima chuckled, "Not anymore. Look at them. So, cute." One of the varren tilted its head and whined to Satima. Begging for more of the delicious meats. She tossed him another piece, "Here you go. That's a good boy!"

Jormun scoffed.

"You know, I think rambler likes me.", she announced in delight.

"Keelah! Your naming them? They were trying to eat me!", Jormun shouted.

"Don't shout. You're scaring him!", Satima yelled, walking off angry.

"Yeah, right. Mutt.", Jormun said to rambler. The varren growled.

Inside the old krogan's room, Satima witnessed Rex speaking to the elder. "Father... it is dangerous to harbor these fugitives. We have kept our home safe by not helping outsiders.", he pleaded.

"They will remain under my protection...", he began coughing violently." I know what Reaper is, I know the woman she was before the machines came." His coughing made it harder to breathe.

Rex helped him with medicine, trying to calm his sire. "This reaper-born could bring doom to our planet.", he argued.

Rex then spotted Satima after helping his father. He led her back out hastily.

"Eavesdropping is not polite.", he warned.

"I didn't mean to.", Satima said apologetically.

They stood on a stone terrace overlooking the desert. A cool wind from the night swept over them. "My father says you can stay for as long as you like. I think you should leave. Not because I don't like you, but because you are dangerous. That Directive will come looking, and my people will suffer for it.", Rex informed.

Satima glanced down, "I'm sorry I came. I thought we could lay low for a while and wait on Reaper. We'll leave in the morning, before the sun fully rises."

He glanced to her with a sigh. "You don't have to leave that quickly, but I would still prefer if your stay is short."

Satima nodded. She glimpsed his large rifle behind his humped back and wondered something. "I do have a question.", she asked. "Where are my weapons? I noticed some of the more discreet ones,
were missing."

Rex grinned with his large mouth. Rows of flat and sharp teeth showed. "In my locker." He left Satima alone on the terrace. She blushed awkwardly.

Sentarian Command

The command carrier appeared over Tuchunka, orbiting the planet. Callon ordered a small team to rift inside the hospital and grab Satima, before Hive could. Reaper vehemently was against it. "There are no hostiles down there.", she exclaimed, outraged.

"With all due respect-Reaper, or was it once… Commander? I oversee this mission. And I will retrieve the hybrid in the speediest manner. My team will bring her to us.", he glared. Callon nodded to his communications officer, who relayed the order over their comms.

Reaper tried to ignore his insult at her past title.

Akasia butted in, nervously, "Perhaps they can go instead. Sir, Satima will run when she sees us. She won't from Reaper." Remembering the threat from earlier, she averted her eyes away from abomination. Cybernetic tendrils trailed a dangerous expression of the woman.

Callon glanced toward the directive's reaper, then fixed his gaze on Akasia. "Your sister will accompany her." He stared at Reaper," No compromises."

Aksasia looked at them. Kin sha, this is getting tense and beyond dangerous.

Moments later, Mem-Zurah Veal- Akasia's sister; took Reaper through a rift to the hospital Satima was in. Garrus stayed behind, already on edge about Callon. Since the beginning of this insane mission, he's realized how small he truly is.

It's getting too crowded with plenty of villains waring for the right to torture and shape this poor galaxy. If Shepard couldn't stop it, then how can Reaper? Back on the surface, Reaper scanned for Satima's presence, noticing Haven was still on the landing pad. "Good. She hasn't left. Give me ten minutes, I can track her well enough."

Mem-Zurah stood watch, carrying a heavy rifle in her hands, while overlooking the landscape and its hot desert. Sand blew harshly below. She turned to Reaper with an agitated glare. "You have five."

She didn't have time to argue or threaten, not like with Akasia. Reaper smirked, leaving to track her hybrid daughter.

On the fourth level, she spotted a makeshift camp. They were here. Further down, she heard Jormun talking. "Satima. We need to leave now! That could be a hive ship."

"And I'm telling you, it's not. There's something strange about it.", she pondered, staring with dark teal eyes eagerly at the strange new vessel in the sky.

"I think Jormun is right. We should get the hell outta here!", Do'ova's voice whined.

"It's not hive.", Reaper came out in the open. "The Directive doesn't even know you're here." She walked up to their position. Satima glanced her way and smiled. "Reaper!" The hybrid dashed to her. It seemed she would embrace her genetic mother, but Satima stopped short to control the childish urge.

Reaper gently touched her arm, "We need to leave Tuchunka. The longer we stay, the more
dangerous it is for the krogan."

Do'ova and Jormun agreed. They followed Reaper and their captain, back on the landing pad. Rex and Mem-Zurah met them.

Reaper passed by her, "It's only been seven.", she grinned with a smug look. Mem-Zurah glared. "It's time to go."

Rex began speaking, "So, you are Reaper? Mother to the reaper-born?", he asked.

She stopped and nodded curiously.

"My father, Wrex of the clan Urdnot, provided protection for a time. She was unharmed." He stepped forward, "You will be leaving, right?"

Reaper stared at him, "...wrex?", she uttered. "Yes, we will. And your planet untouched." She assured.

Rex walked forward to let out hand, "My father has told me you were the Shepard long ago. Sister to our clan." Reaper indulged the handshake, when Rex pulled her closer. "Is this why the Directive has never bothered us? Some sick favor? My people are warriors, not coddling reaper brats."

He hinted towards Satima. "I welcome any of your soldiers to come here and try to take this planet from us.", Rex warned.

Reaper shook his hand, giving a dangerous stare. "Tell your father… I've missed him." Rex nodded, stepping away from the landing area.

Satima wondered at their exchange but choose not to interfere. "Okay. Let's warm up Haven.", she ordered.

"No.", Mem-Zurah interrupted. "We're leaving through the rifter. It's faster."

Satima tilted her head with an agitated sarcasm. "I'm driving my ship off this planet. You want me to follow you, I take my ship. Got it!"

Reaper felt a sense of dread during their disagreement. A whisper played in the background. She pushed forward between them. "We don't have time for this. You three, go now! I'll head back with her." She pointed towards the sentarian.

Mem-Zurah didn't like either of them, or really wanted to leave Reaper behind. Callon would be displeased. She complied... for now.

Haven was flown from Tuchunka, following the Sentarian cruiser through the relay. In the Attica, Satima docked her smaller vessel inside the enormous shuttle bay of the warship. She and her small crew were hesitant to leave the safety of their ship, but Reaper knew these aliens.

"This place is huge.", Jormun spoke excitedly. His voice echoed in the large bay. Grey hull walls reached high above them, to walkways of more aliens.

Do'ova spotted a few around a strange holo graph of a world. "Were do they come from?"

Callon met them midway through the bay. Flanked by stalkers. "Ah, the hybrid. Finally, we have all the components needed."

Satima raised a brow at him, "What?"
Haven's small crew met on the shuttle bay, with Akasia and her sister, joining. Callon turned to meet them.

"Satima, it is a pleasure to finally meet you.", Akasia said, despite the tense atmosphere. Reaper watched her closely.

"What the hell is going on?", Satima demanded. "I hide on Tuchunka to evade the directive, then these strange people come…", she glared at Reaper. "With you!"

Callon interrupted the hybrids accusations. "We are the Sentarians. Our people have been under the constant threat of the reapers far longer than you and your… mother." He walked to Satima. "It would be best to meet in the council chambers.", he gestured off the shuttle bay.

They were led under guard through the ship.

Inside the chambers, Callon stood at the head of the board table. The oval room seemed to lower at the ceiling, giving a feeling of being squeezed in. Probably a tactic in design to make the occupants of the room uncomfortable.

More of his kind sat on opposite sides. There were dark eyed, or crystal gazed, jade hued beings. Some wore the blackest armor Satima had ever seen. Two of them had blue toned robes. The one called Akasia had a subtle accent, almost non-existent. Her sister, however, spoke with heavy authority. Setting a thicker delivery with speedy commands.

Everyone waited for the ship's commander. He had a similar accent that had a certain flare when he spoke.

Reaper learned all she could from the tour Akasia gave them. Without knowledge of their own technology, it would be hard to take a vessel of their own design and flee. Should the Haven be incapable of saving them.

If they made it to the bay, that is. Mem-Zurah stood next to her commander, proud and intimidating. Satima didn't like this. Jormun remained at her side, ever ready to protect her. He glances to see Do'ova sulking to herself.

Akasia began at Callon's gesture. "As some of you know, we are the Sentarians. An old and ancient race, from before the time of the reapers."

Garrus and Reaper exchanged glances. "Say what?", he spoke, surprised.

Akasia continued, "Our people served the Leviathans for many centuries, before their intelligence began the harvests. We were the first of many to be experimented on and slaughtered. Our people's last efforts built the great rift. They opened it and entered, fleeing the galaxy we once called home."

She paused, before continuing. "Trapped in another bridge of time, we waited and learned. Building and trying to find a way back in hopes the reapers were gone. We were wrong. They waited, decimating our cruisers. Millions of dead the first hour, billions within four."

Akasia swallowed nervously trying to recall her people's history. "Retreating, our people left a message. A race called Prothean tried to decipher it, but our stalker scouts reported it was destroyed. The galaxy once again harvested."

Callon took over, "Within the next cycle of life, an anomaly appeared. Giving pause to the reapers harvest for the first time since it began. Defying their slaughter and a shield to the many people standing against them. You, Reaper-Commander Shepard."

Satima darted her eyes between Callon and Reaper, then blurted her words in shock. "Whoa! Wait! She's Shepard!?" Garrus cleared his throat. Reaper looked to her daughter. "In the beginning, yes.",
she gazed down, solemnly.

Callon tilted his head in this curious reveal. The hybrid did not know. He continued, "Your unfortunate demise may have been a short setback, but you were reborn with new enhancements. The Directive did well in sabotaging themselves. You and your daughter both are our best chance at stopping them. For good."

Reaper snapped her head in his direction. "Both of us? I was told you only needed me."

Callon gave her an eerie smile, "You are both syntheses."

Satima gulped hard. Akasia stepped forward, "Sir? What's going on?"

"We need them both, in case one perishes.", Callon informed. "The hosts here have reaper tech and our nanotechnology."

Reaper glared at him, "And just how will you get these nanites from your living hosts?"

"Extraction pods.", he revealed. "Using nano droids to break down your physical form, to force your regeneration; causing the reaper-nanites to flood your system."

Satima stepped forward, "You're not hurting my mother.", she warned.

Callon turned to her with a sharp grin, "Who says it will be just your mother?"

Garrus made a start, with Reaper gripping his arm, holding him back.

Mem-Zurah tightened her grip over the rifle she held. Callon smirked, "You can go first-Reaper. To test the safety for your daughter."

"Like Hell!", Garrus roared.

Reaper raised a hand to him. She knows they're in danger from these Sentarians, and their technology is powerful. A quick glance to Akasia as the alien girl nods her head in confusion. Callon is a cunning villain of his own. She hesitantly nods. "I'll go. You don't need Satima. I am reaper tech, and it will suffice for your little experiment."

Callon agreed in satisfaction.

They were led to the labs. Satima started to become nervous. She gripped Jormun's hand tightly. Garrus didn't know what to do. Outgunned and overpowered. Do'ova stood confused and completely blank at what was about to happen.

This darkness never ends. With power at the helm, their little journey to hell has spiraled out of control. Helpless to stop anything, the young salarian steps next to this Akasia. Her sister led the women into the lab room.

Callon watched from the opposite observation room, as Reaper stepped inside a pod. She stripped her armor, per their request, down to an under suit.

"This bio-chamber will tell us of your nanite composites and the cybernetic template you hold. It can be a key, if you will, to mapping the mind of The Intelligence.", Callon explained over comms.

Reaper was curious and worried. If they activate something by accident, or if she dies in the process...who will protect Satima? Garrus is seasoned, but not strong enough against Archer. Jormun... a fool of a boy, more lovesick than capable. And the salarian-Do'ova. Something had
changed about her since the last time they met.

A whining sound began. The bio chamber activated. Callon spoke once more. "I won't lie. This will be painful."

Reaper immediately felt a burning sensation on her skin. Nanites rushed to heal and were pulled out. She braced herself with hands on the glass, as her skin seemed to melt in patches. The terrific agony of the small cybernetic implants being pulled from her very body forced her to scream.

Spurts of red blood splashed on the pod's glass. Garrus made a start, this was a nightmare. He observed in fearful suspicion how similar the pods were and their extraction methods, to the collector's devices. The screams of that poor woman as she was melted down to DNA paste, for the human reaper.

Reaper tried hard to control the feeling of intense pain. She held back another scream as her implants struggled against the heat. Burning the flesh, revealing the bare muscle where implants and nanites housed. Suddenly, a red husk-like skin began overtaking the wounds. Numbing the pain. The nano droids were being assimilated with her. Rewriting, reacting to the reaper cybernetics.

Satima watched in horror, clinging desperately to Garrus this time. She hid her face behind his arm, as he held her close. The hybrid wouldn't survive this. She and Reaper are not alike. They don't share the same cybernetic implants or nanites. Does she?

Jormun noticed how ill Do'ova looked, as Satima sought comfort in the turian, he checked on his friend. She nodded in defiance to this. Staring in upset until the contents of her stomach wouldn't stay down anymore. Akasia signaled for medical lab assistants to escort the salarian from the room.

Reaper focused on the husk skin, terrified and excited as to what this development meant.

The pod whined down and it was over. Without the constant assault of the pod, Reaper's red husk skin healed once more, returning into her pale human flesh again with visible cybernetics again. Akasia helped Reaper out, giving her a medi-pump to inject for pain. Kha ve! What was this tech, and where did it come from? She peeked at the observation window to Callon's satisfied grin.

Reaper knocked the pump out of Akasia's hand. "Fuck off.", she warned. She quickly grabbed the woman's uniformed collar, pulling the sentarian closer to her. Her pained expression wincing at every word. "I'll make sure you and your sister suffer, if this happens to Satima."

Akasia understood the anger. This wasn't right. Reaper leaned on the lab wall, as her remaining nanites recovered healing and began reproducing more of themselves. Her under suit had been reduced to tatters. She could barely cover more modest parts of herself, but that didn't matter to her.

It would be awhile before most of the exposed burned skin completely healed. Callon spoke over comms, "A perfect sample, Reaper. The small council is forever grateful. We understand the time you need for recovery."

Reaper still panted from the pain, delivering a glare she hoped Callon will never forget. This frightening development sent chills down Satima's spine. Callon is just as deranged as Archer, with the power to keep them on this vessel as he sees fit. To use again and again. She tried hard to not panic.

Hours later, they all sat stunned inside Haven. A place where no stalker guard can watch, and where
Callon can't listen. Garrus overlooked Reaper's recovery in their small medbay. He applied more medi-gel salve to her skin, trying to soothe the pain. She winced but kept a cool demeanor.

"I'm sorry for letting this happen to you. I should've done something.", Garrus offered in regret.

Reaper sat up, looking at him, "This was my choice. To protect Satima. It's no different than you shooting me or Liara warping my ass all over the cargo hold of Haven. This experiment on my regeneration, isn't the worst I've been through." She recalled.

Garrus sighed, "Sorry about shooting you."

"You were trying to protect them from me. Don't apologize.", she smiled. Reaper took Garrus's hand, "Don't let them hurt her like this. I would do anything to keep her safe...just don't... don't let them...", she lost consciousness from the regeneration.

He nuzzled her forehead. "Never."

Satima sat in her room, terrified. Jormun manned the cockpit, eager to leave this horrid place. Do'ova returned from the main interior of the sentarian cruiser. She was shaken. He helped her to the mess. "I didn't want this.", she began.

Jormun sat with her, listening.

"I was so angry at Satima for lying and my father's death. I thought she deserved some pain, too. But to see Reaper be deconstructed and put back together like some... some patch work on a wired panel?", she eyed her quarian friend. "We have to get out of here! Our captain... she helped me. She tried."

Jormun calmed Do'ova. "I know. Satima did what she could. This galaxy... it's a nightmare. I wanted to help you on Omega. I'm so sorry for what happened."

Do'ova looked away. She shrugged her shoulders. "Jen started the fight. He was always a little ass."

They shared a chuckle before Jormun continued. "Our captain is in danger, and so is her family. Will you help me?"

His salarian friend took his suited hand to shake. "We are her family too. Of course, I will help. Jormun Vas Haven."

Together, they began prepping the ship for quick departure. With the giant bay doors still open, if Do'ova can reroute a mass amount of power to the engines, they can escape.

Receiving a private comm, Jormun left D at the cockpit to meet Garrus in the engine room. "We need to get Satima out of here. It's too dangerous. We don't know what that Callon is after."

"I agree.", Garrus replied. He cautiously scanned the room with his visor. "If they can rift anywhere, then even this ship isn't safe from them."

They started Haven's engines quietly, leaving for a room sweep. Scanning for any of the stalkers on the shuttle bay as well. Do'ova went out on the shuttle bay of the massive cruiser. Looking for a bay panel to hack. If she could even understand their tech at all.

If they can reach the relay quickly, they could get to the terminus systems and slingshot back to the rim. Purposefully staying lost in geth and quarian space. Safe. Jormun would make sure his people will keep them all safe. His mother is an admiral. She'll have to agree!
Do'ova met them back inside the ship's cockpit. Jormun glanced to Garrus at the controls, after their decision to leave. Then began priming the nav specs. "About Reaper... I mean, Shepard. Is she okay? Will she recover?"

Garrus turned off the diagnostics system, being in a hurry to leave. He sighed heavily, turning to the quarian. "I don't know if she wants to be called Shepard, but yes. She'll recover."

Jormun nodded, before heading to find Satima.

The hybrid went over plans if the directive had caught them. Plan A was the VI system, but it got destroyed against Archer. Plan B is to sit in space with all the systems shut down. A derelict husk to fool the scouter ships.

There were no other plans. She didn't have time. And with these new foes; what or how, would she begin to fight them? What is their weakness? Or better yet... how can they hide from them?

The room became dizzy.

Jormun was on his way to the mess when he heard a short scuffle. It came from her room.

He stepped into the empty quarters. Turned over chairs and data pads strewn everywhere. Jormun viewed her pistol on the grated floor. He ran back in a panic to the cockpit and alerted team. "They've got Satima!", he shouted.

Garrus stood, his avian gaze darting around the bridge. "We stayed too long. Get Ish, I'll get Reaper ready."

Back in the labs.

"You can't do this! That bio chamber will kill her!", Akasia pleaded. "Reaper will destroy this ship, if you do this!"

Callon ignored the engineer's pleas. "Mem-Zurah, keep your sister in order.", he commanded.

Reluctantly, Mem-Zurah took her sister out of the observation room. "Why do you defy our Commander, sister?", she asked.

"Because what he's doing is wrong!", Akasia replied.

Mem glanced away, dissatisfied with her blood kin. "The reapers created this thing. How can you sympathize with it, when our people need protection from this very ideal of synthesis?", she argued. "What about sacrifice for the greater good?"

Akasia watched from the open door, as Satima was forcibly stripped into an under suit. The girl shook, frightened and didn't even bother to fight back. "What about protecting the innocent??", she replied to Mem-Zurah. "Reaper may be a villain, but that girl is not. She didn't ask for this." Her gaze warily falling on the chamber.

Satima seemed catatonic as the bio chamber's pod door shut over her. It whined on, she started to snap out of her stupor, beating against the pod. Akasia stepped back, "I can't watch."

Mem stared away. The girl started to scream.

Fully armored, the crew of Haven ran to the labs, taking shortcuts through the barracks deck. Was Akasia preparing them for this obvious betrayal? On the labs level, a piercing cry shattered their focus. "It's Satima!", Reaper shouted.
They ran into Mem-Zurah and Akasia outside the bio-chambers door. Reaper pointed her gun in their faces, "I told you I would kill you both if anything happens to her! Where is she?"

Mem-Zurah said nothing, regretting leaving her weapon in the observation room. Akasia timidly spoke, "In there.", she pointed in fear.

Reaper looked inside the room through the doors wide window. Satima was being melted alive by the biopod. She immediately attacked the door, "Get this fucking thing open!"

Garrus tried to help, but the door sealed shut. Do'ova offered a hand as Reaper began to shout, afraid to lose Satima. Jormun stood there pathetically, angry for being useless. Garrus used his talons, trying to pry the door apart. His blue blood scraping across the metal.

Akasia had enough. She stared at Mem, who tried to shake her head no, but soon realized her resolve. Mem-Zurah came between the three aliens and applied a third strength to the door. Within minutes it opened. Akasia ran in, knocking the supervising scientist to the floor.

"I have to turn off the pod's power. Reaper, when it's off, pry the pod open and pull her out!", Akasia yelled.

Mem-Zurah watched in disappointment. "Or what's left of her.", she assumed.

Reaper stood by the pod, already agonizing over Satima's screams. The pod was filled with hot steam, and red blood began splattering the glass. She couldn't see the damage being done. Garrus shouted, fuming in rage." Turn the damn thing off!" He stood by with Reaper, ready to rip the pod door open.

Mem-Zurah stayed back. She knows that Callon will punish her sister. She won't allow that. Stalkers appeared and Akasia needs more time. Mem fought them off, while they tried to save the hybrid girl. Meanwhile, Jormun helps Akasia find a sequence to turn the power off the pod. Do'ova scrambles a nearby power panel with her omni-tool, where the pod's core foiled wires ran into the hull.

In moments, it stopped. Garrus pried the pod open, for Satima to fall out in her mother's arms. They all gasped in surprise.

"She's... okay?", Akasia replies, stunned.

Satima's body was not horrifically scarred. More importantly, she's still alive.

"That's because she is genetically designed by the reapers.", Archer's voice echoed in the room.

"Mem!", Akasia yelled, afraid.

Alarms blared in the background. Archer sealed the door and attacked. He pummeled through Jormun and Akasia, knocking Garrus across the room. Reaper was still too weak from the biopod herself. "Stay away from my daughter!", she warned.

"Now, Reaper...must we come to this?", he grinned.

Jormun looked up. Satima had regained consciousness and stood behind her mother, terrified. Archer lunged toward them. He won't let him take Satima again! He will protect her from The Directive.

Do'ova watched, helplessly as Jormun ran forward in a rage, wielding one of Satima's blades he brought from Haven. She could bring out her pistol, she could shock him or reach out and pull him backwards. Away from the droid. Away from death.
Archer knocked Reaper hard to the floor, turning to catch Jormun by the throat. "You stupid boy!", he shouted in amazement.

Satima watched in horror. Jormun dangled inches above the floor by Archer's strength. "You could've run, left back to Rannoch. Back to your family."

Archer grabbed the blade quickly and plunged it into Jormun's chest. His suit filled with warm blood, as he clawed at the blade. Archer tossed him aside. "Did I not tell you that staying by her side, will get you killed."

Satima screamed, scrambling to get to him. She almost reached Jormun's outstretched hand, before Archer grabbed her.

He dragged her towards an open tear he summoned, forcing her through. Jormun pulled off his helmet, glimpsing Satima one last time with his own eyes. "..sati..ma..", he whispered as death welcomed him.

Blood filling his mouth preventing him from speaking. She smiled at Jormun with hot tears streamed down her face, staring into his beautiful lavender eyes. Satima was gone.

Garrus winced in pain, looking around for the others. It all happened so quickly. He caught a glimpse of Jormun on the floor. "Oh no.", he said to himself.

Reaper sat on her knees next to Jormun. Akasia stood, tears dotted her face. "Kin Sha.", she spoke solemnly. "This galaxy is madness."

With an emotionless stare, Reaper spoke. "He didn't deserve this. Not death." Oh, God. Tali. I'm so sorry.

"Where's Satima?", Garrus asked, averting his eyes from Jormun, his friend.

"Gone. Gone, because I'm too weak.", Reaper fell back, leaning against the wall. She started to grieve her actions and the loss of Jormun. Do'ova slowly knelt to his body. "He was my friend.", her voice trailed off into silence.

"This is my fault.", Akasia exclaimed. She watched the grief of the small group. "I can help… I can help you get her back!"

Mem shouted against it. "No! I have to keep you safe from Callon."

Akasia stared to her sister. "I did this. I led Callon to them. It's my mistake and I'm going to fix it.", she turned toward Garrus and Reaper. "I'm going to fix it."

Reaper lifted her gaze to the sentarian. "How exactly did you lead him to us?"

Akasia averted her stare, "Because I insisted you could stop the reapers, and change the course of history. I'm the one that can take you back. And stop all of this from happening."

Reaper stood, stunned. She slapped Akasia. "If Satima dies, I don't want you to join her. I want you to live with the guilt of her death for a long time." She glared viciously.

Akasia reeled back from the surprise pain, while Mem-Zurah stood in-between them. She brought out a rifle to Reaper's face. "Ka tor! You dare touch my sister?!"

Time had been wasting away, with this display of anger and pain. Akasia put her hand on the gun,
"She's a mother. And she's right." She turned to Reaper and Garrus. "We have weapons, and rifters. We can save her."

Mem-Zurah led them to the armory. "The Directive has swarms of advanced soldiers."

She watched them take two loads of weapons and followed them straight to the Haven. Garrus and Reaper hurriedly went inside as Akasia waited at the hatch. Do'ova stared ahead, one more time. She'll honor the memory of Jormun by helping to rescue Satima. After? Is there one?

Mem-Zurah stayed on the shuttle deck. "I cannot go, sister. You know I can't.", she said to Akasia.

Akasia nodded her head and held back tears. "I'm scared, but I must help them."

She disappeared inside Haven. Mem sighed deeply, afraid for her sister. Will Reaper kill her because of Callon, or will the commander get to Akasia first? She will prepare and pray to Sha, that this foolish chaos ends soon. Garrus hastily flew them out to the relay. Sentarian gunships followed them. "Go straight to Hive.", Shepard ordered. Once the fighters knew where Haven was going, they ceased to follow.

She stood over Garrus, remembering Jormun's body. They left him there, but he's dead and Satima is still alive. For now.

Reaper looked away from the cockpit window. After they rescue her daughter, she'll have to find the time to contact Rannoch. And tell Tali, her son was killed by the Directive.

HIVE

Satima no longer wanted to live. She simply didn't care anymore. Jormun is gone, and she's some kind of freak. A reaper-born. She doesn't deserve to live.

Hooked up to the fitting table, Archer fixed his gaze on her. An emotionless stare that sent a chill down her spine. It was finally happening. The armor. There were nanites in her, and they hungered for the link. Within minutes the armor had been suited to her frame. And the whispers began.

Satima closed her eyes, and the voices flooded her mind.

Archer waited, when the Directive's shadowy figure appeared in a holographic haze. They have successfully brought the dream of synthesis to the galaxy. Using control, the directive can reshape the fate of all the species. Reaper is the precursor to Satima, her genetic parent. All within the perfect design of the Directive's will.

The shadowy figure spoke in a blend of voices. "I have intercepted information from the sentarian's command. A plan to put a paradox in history. We cannot allow this. Reaper is resisting."

Archer faced the hologram. "Reaper will not maintain sanity for long without direction."

The hologram paused, then the haze darkened into a red fog. "Send it, to kill Reaper. We will salvage what is left and start again."

Satima couldn't make sense of this insane conversation. Archer gave her a quick glance before returning his gaze to the Directive. "What of Satima?"

"Extract the tech, then destroy it. We have enough data to make an army of them." The hologram faded.
Archer turned to Satima. His perfect design. Destroy it? She watched in terror. "What are you going to do?", Satima asked, afraid.

He straightened himself, "I'm going to unleash you."
Paradox

Chapter Summary

Reaper and the crew fight their way to rescue Satima from Archer. But is it too late? The final reveal pits mother against daughter, and Garrus faces a final choice. Can the sentarians help rewrite the past? Or will a paradox throw a wrench in their plans?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

HIVE

Haven was docked into the HIVE's station. Reaper wanted Archer's head. Akasia proved to be a confidently skilled tech, cloaking the Haven's thruster emitters. Hive wasn't about to give up its prize so easily. Once they docked, Shepard led the team inside the first levels.

Deeper into the menacing station, they searched the many lab facilities. Nothing. They searched in Reaper's old quarters, which had been destroyed. "Satima could be anywhere.", Garrus spoke, unsure.

"We have to keep looking. She's here.", Reaper argued.

Akasia used her own sentarian tech to pinpoint the hybrids location. She found it on a lower sub level. The bio-genetics lab. Do'ova observed in curiosity. "What kind of technology is that?"

The sentarian replied, "My people's integrated technology come from many generations after the first harvest. We're an ancient civilization. Barely holding together, it seems."

Do'ova nodded.

Directive soldiers began assaulting them, slowing the team down. Reaper worried it was for a reason.

Closer to the gen-deck, Garrus became uneasy. Finally, they reached the sub levels and remembered what is was that made them afraid. Pods filled with bodies. One of them looked like Satima... a male. "What do they gain by doing this?", Akasia questioned.

"An army.", Reaper explained. Staring at the ginger haired male. She can't remember any of it.

"Since the machines were downsized, we needed a better way to control this galaxy.", Archer spoke from the end of the first hall. "Reaper. You have been a disappointment lately. One the Directive does not intend to continue."

"Where is she? Where's my daughter you son of a bitch!", Reaper shouted.

Archer laughed, "Why the combative temper? She's safe." He gestured around them. The droid stepped aside as Satima walked into the lab. She was wearing full nano-armor, a glazed over expression.

"What have you done to her?", Reaper demanded.
"Let's start with the beginning, shall we?", Archer glared. "Do you remember my brother, the day you took him from me?", he asked in disgust. "I'm wondering, since you've been on some self-discovery journey. Trying to reconnect with the woman that you used to be."

Reaper listened, as memories stung like a pounding headache.

Archer stepped forward, a sneer in his expression and disdain in his voice, "You destroyed my work. He was a catalyst between the geth and organics. A link: Synthesis."

She narrowed her gaze in memory."...David...you're..." Reaper shook her head. It hurt to remember. "Archer. Gavin Archer?!", she announced in shock.

"Yes.", he hissed.

Garrus couldn't believe it. "You're the Cerberus scientist that tortured your autistic brother. Hooked him to that machine, putting him in constant agony for months." The memory sickened him.

Archer glared at the turian, then resumed. "I tried to seek redemption after what I had done, but you didn't care. And when you failed to stop the reapers, my brother paid for it with his life. He was the only family I had!"

Reaper shook her head," If he died from the reapers, then I can only guess you had something to do with it. I saved him twice. From you and Cerberus."

He walked forward in an outrage. "Cerberus would've protected him! They didn't fall to the reapers!"

Archer paced, "There was so much death and harvesting, but Cerberus remained strong. The Illusive Man made a deal, then he turned it on them. He saw my potential and promised me a way to bring David back."

"Turned it on them? The reapers don't make deals, they only destroy.", Reaper argued.

He cocked his head in irritation. "No, it is only you that destroys."

He stopped pacing around, staring at them." It all started with your precious DNA. I watched them haul your body to the station. You were alive, barely." Archer glanced to Satima, who had been unresponsive.

"I wanted you to understand what it was like to lose. Not the war, not this galaxy and its pathetic inhabots. No" He pointed to the hybrid. "I wanted to lose family. To lose her."

"With orders, I kept close monitoring and left it to its own design in a growth pod." Archer smiled fiendishly. "The former Commander Shepard, greatest hero, turned villain. And a mother."

Archer laughed mockingly, " But his control is strong. Which is why, he cannot have you alter his plans."

Reaper stared at him. "His plans? You mean, other than taking my child from me!", she shouted, angrily.

"They want me to kill you", Satima informed, pained.

Archer stepped forward. "The reapers wanted to build a bridge between us. Show the galaxy how the harvests, all the experiments, will ascend us."
Reaper couldn't speak, let alone move. Garrus walked forward, more scared and unsure than he's ever been. "Who does the turian DNA belong to?"

His question echoed loudly. He heard all that Archer had to say, understood what it meant. But, Satima is not entirely human. He didn't want to acknowledge it, but those hazy memories of his capture. "I asked you a question, Archer. Who does the turian DNA belong too?" Garrus settled a warning gaze on the droid.

Archer faced him, "I'm sure you can figure it out."

Satima stared at them, she tried to back away.

Solanna's words about having peace and being with his family before the end, echoed in his thoughts. "Come home with us, kid.", he looked to her. "Back to Haven. Don't listen to him. Just... come back to us.", Garrus pleaded. He held out his taloned hand towards her.

She seemed distant, hesitant to them. Do'ova stepped forward from Akasia's side. "Captain. Jormun is gone. He killed our friend... please, come back. Haven is home."

Archer cocked his head, "How pathetic. Satima, kill them all. Do as you're ordered."

At that, Satima turned to Archer, "I won't."

"Try to remember, my dear, that it is not me that controls you", he replied. "And I cannot stop this."

Satima hesitated at the overwhelming will of the Directive. She glanced to Garrus. "Please, run.", she begged.

Archer glared at her, "Reaper has become weak, and the weak perish against the strong. Now do as you're commanded, and end this."

Satima glanced away, then brought out a blade, walking to her mother and preparing a strike. Reaper didn't move, only stared away, with all the detailed deceptions she's been told replaying in her mind. She was unraveling, voices and more voices. Hers, theirs, all deafening her to the danger ahead.

Garrus aimed his rifle, "Satima... don't make me shoot you."

"I can't stop it. I'm forced to obey. This armor... the voices.", she struggled to hold the blade firm.

Archer stepped beside her, putting a hand around her weapon. He helped her to Reaper's throat, "Now... finish it.", he glared.

Satima started weeping. "Do IT!", Archer screamed in her ear. "Or they'll kill you both!"

Satima held the blade firmly, shaking. Reaper stared at her with a smile. "It's ok. End this now and leave. You don't belong to them."

Satima looked up to Garrus, a helpless expression on his face. She then cried out in a rage, suddenly turning to plunge the blade into Archer's chest, the same way he did Jormun. Archer took a step back, stunned, as Satima turned his rifter on and pushed him through a tear.

Reaper stood, confused. "Satima?"

Satima hyperventilated, wincing in pain as the voices became stronger. She held her head, trying to
not scream. "I'm going… to destroy this place!", she yelled.

She darted off, with Reaper running after. Do'ova and Garrus started fighting soldiers. "We need to follow them. Move!", Garrus yelled.

Reaper caught Satima in one of the tech labs. "Satima.", she bellowed across the large room. Immediately the hybrid attacked, faster and stronger than she was before. "You will not stop me!"

Reaper nearly caught a blade in her gut. Deflecting blows, she had to go on the offensive. Satima was not herself. "Satima! Stop this! You're not under his control!", Reaper shouted.

Garrus and Do'ova ran into the room, watching the two women fight. Akasia threw a rifter to Reaper. "Attach it to your omni-tool!", she yelled.

She attached the rifter using it to gain the upper hand. Satima is fast, but not faster than the time tears. "I'm not under his control! It needs to end! All of it!", Satima yells, trying to catch Reaper.

"What needs to end?", Reaper asks, dodging a blow from Satima.

"This!", Satima looks at her mother with a pained expression.

She dashes into the elevator, past Reaper, pressing the panel.

"Where is it going?", Akasia asks, worried. Garrus uses his omni-tool to scan the decent. "Engineering.", he replied.

Reaper uses a tear to get ahead on the engineering deck. Meanwhile, Garrus, Do'ova and Akasia flee to the docks, desperately trying to reach Haven. He receives an urgent comm.

"Go ahead and get out of there. We can make a tear on Haven to escape the station.", she commed.

"Alright. Be careful.", Garrus replies.

She finds Satima at the console controls, busily typing away, unaware of anything around her. "Satima. Stop this.", Reaper pleads. Inching closer, she puts her weapon down. "Satima. What are you doing?"

Her daughter glares at her, "I'm stopping him. I'll blow this place to hell!"

"What about the others? You can't murder innocent people, Satima! There are victims, prisoners on board!", she shouted. The contenders she made the girl fight. Children. Satima shook her head in a nervous tick, fighting away any other voices demanding to be heard.

The Directive knew what was happening and couldn't have their station destroyed. Reaper stood behind Satima, "They're subject to the same life as you. Give them a chance, and together we can all stop The Directive. We can stop Callon. This can end, without more bloodshed."

The Directive appeared as a holographic haze. Red and dark grey smoke pulsed with life as it spoke to them. The voice that killed sense and will. His will. "You cannot perceive a galaxy to your will. You cannot stop the control and synthesis. We are connected. You are reaper."

Reaper felt the wave of nausea surge through her. A singular pain that vibrated and thrummed in her mind. Blood trickled down her nose. She observed her hybrid child suffer the same. They were his slaves.

Satima stopped typing at the console, waiting in a trance. The hazy figure took control, filling their
minds with the lust of control over this galaxy. She saw many things. Visions, images… a past harvest. Death and destruction. Reaper couldn’t break it, can she? It’s all over.

The hybrid remembered Jormun, suddenly. His touch, his voice. Tears filled her eyes. He didn't deserve to die. He was good and kind. And then the voice broke through. "Weakness. Flesh and bone enslaved to a suited shell. No more. You are synthesis."

"Jormun?", she whimpered. Somewhere down deep, Satima could feel the heat of anger building inside her. She slams her fist on the console, breaking it beyond repair after the sequence is set. "Lies!", she screams.

Hive is going to blow. Alarms blared around them as the station begins to rumble.

Large explosions vibrate the hull walls, hot steam from the eezo cores start to melt the metal off the floors. They begin to run to the elevator, using it to get back on the top levels. Screams of trapped lab experiments filled the dark halls. Finally reaching the docks, Reaper grabs Satima, immediately rifting to safety on board Haven.

Garrus and the crew witness the station blowing apart. A purge sequence was used. Every living soul on that station; prisoner, experiment and even villain were killed in the explosion. Hive blew into large pieces, debris falling into Mars's atmosphere. It was over for that place and the horrific things that went on inside it. The birthplace of Reaper and Satima.

On Haven, Garrus heard a scuffle from the mess. He ran to see both Reaper and Satima safe. Do'ova and their sentarian friend close behind. Until she attacked the hybrid. "You killed them all. Why? There were people still on board! Innocents!", Reaper grabbed Satima by her armor, shaking her.

"...armies to be synthesized, people to be controlled…", Satima muttered. "It had to end."

Reaper yelled, a rage in her eyes. She violently began delivering blows to Satima. The girl tried to crawl away, as Reaper kicked and punched her, shouting." Where is my daughter?" she cried out.

Reaper placed her hand firmly around Satima's throat and started strangling her. "Give me Satima back!"

Garrus hooked his arms around Reaper's waist, pulling her off Satima. "SHEPARD! ENOUGH!", he yelled, throwing her off to the side. Garrus stood in-between them, a guttural growl coming from his chest. "Don't touch her!", he yelled.

Reaper stopped, breathing heavily, surprised to hear her old name from his mouth. Satima sat up, groaning in pain. She had a bloody nose and a large cut above her brow, with a bruise circling her throat. Do'ova tried to help her up but had been pushed away. Standing, she glared at Reaper, "Next time, you can die with them." Satima hurriedly left them.

Garrus signaled for Akasia see to Satima at the medbay. He sat, keeping a close eye on Reaper. Haven was quiet. Only his thoughts were loud.

Without a doubt, Satima carries his DNA. Despite their differing species and natures biology, science proved them wrong.

Unnatural science. If he had known the truth, known Satima existed, nothing would've stopped him from saving her. Garrus sat back in his chair, imagining Satima as a small girl. How he would save her from hive, raise her on his own.

She would be a confident and well-loved young woman. And it would be enough, this little family
would be enough. Maybe he could've saved Reaper too, raised Satima together. Garrus found himself holding back strong emotions. Life isn't fair. It's raw and unkind. And, spirits...it hurts. His eyes hurt, and they sting bitterly.

Reaper met his gaze with hers. What are they going to do with Satima now? What can they do, with a villain for a daughter?

Akasia wiped off Satima's bloody laceration on her brow and watched in disbelief as nano tech healed the wound. Satima sat there in silence. "I'm so sorry this happened.", Akasia started. "I was only trying to help. Make the galaxy a better place... huh?", she made a dry laugh. Satima stared on.

"You know what. I'm giving you a rifter. You can go to a nice planet and...and you can...", Akasia stopped. Satima looked at her, "And I can what?", she asked despondent.

Akasia smiled, "You can leave... if you want. I won't tell them where you are."

Satima nodded her head, her face downcast. Akasia slowly backed away. She left as Garrus entered.

He looked at Satima. They stared at each other for a moment. This was strange. She's known him for a good while, but now... he's not the cocky merc anymore. Is what Archer said true? Does she have his DNA? Garrus walked in, standing directly in front of her. He couldn't look at her long, sending his gaze elsewhere while he struggled to speak.

"I can't begin to understand how hard this must be for you.", he sighed. "Spirits, I can't even process this yet." Garrus took a quick glance of her, seeing the emotionless stare. "I do want you to know, that I'm here now. Fully... fully here, now. If I can..."

She interrupted him, "I killed all those people." Satima gazed at him.

Garrus embraced her, "It's okay. It's going to be okay.", he repeated.

Satima wept, "Jormun is gone." She leaned back, pushing him away. "Don't touch me."

It took him aback, but he complied. The hybrid wiped her face. "I'd like to be alone." He nodded, leaving her to the quiet of the med bay.

Reaper watched from the open frame of the med-bay, disgusted with herself from earlier. But she couldn't shake an odd feeling that Satima is not the same girl she was yesterday. And never will be again.

Terminus systems

Later in the cockpit of Haven, Reaper had flown them to Omega. They needed fuel. Akasia stayed inside Haven to watch Satima, while Garrus and Reaper wandered off into the markets.

Do'ova finished some of the usual tasks that Jormun would've done. It pained her to walk were he stood. Touch the tools that belonged to him. Her captain a damaged mess, and the crew broken. She felt it was time to make a personal decision.

Satima couldn't take the armor off for long without the headaches returning, but she could try to learn to move in it. On the small shuttle bay of her ship, she set up a few targets for her blades. Jormun is gone. One blade in the crate. She destroyed Hive. Another blade in the crate. All those people, both the guilty and innocent, dead. Her last blade missed the crate and hit the hull wall. Bouncing back to the floor.
Akasia wandered in. "What is this?", she gestured.

"Practice.", Satima replied.

"Oh." Akasia walked around, as Satima retrieved the sharp weapons. "You like to fight melee style? My sister loves her guns and rifles, and anything that goes boom.", Akasia laughs.

Satima chuckles, "That sounds like Reaper. The bigger the better."

Akasia watched Satima impale another target. "Is this your ship?", she asks. Satima stops, "Are you trying to have a friendly conversation?"

"Maybe...", Akasia replies with a smile.

Satima rolls her eyes, "Yeah. It's my ship and I her shitty captain.", she salutes sarcastically. They both laugh.

Akasia averts a stare, "That quarrian boy... was he someone special?"

Satima dropped her blade, staring off in sorrow. Akasia glances away, "I made you upset. I'm sorry." She starts to leave, when the hybrid stops her. "I miss him. I... loved him. And now he's dead because of me. It's all my fault. And... and... hive..., Satima falls to her knees.

She swears to herself it wasn't her idea to destroy the station. Satima knew that there were other people, imprisoned... trapped by The Directive in there. Rage and despair were the only emotions that she could remember.

"Reaper is so angry with me. I'm a monster, and I don't know how to say I'm sorry. I don't know how to fix this.", Satima laments.

Akasia leans next her, putting a hand on Satima's back, "I know it's not easy. You wouldn't have done this if Archer hadn't captured you on a Sentarian vessel. It's going to be okay. I'll help you fix it... I promise." She squeezes Satima to her, as the young hybrid sobs.

Do'ova peeped from the corridor entrance. She should've sat there and comforted her captain. But it felt wrong to pretend that Satima was completely innocent in all this. The true victim is Jormun. And the home world he'll never see again.

On Omega...

Reaper and Garrus wander around the station, a silent journey between them. What could they talk about? Satima has lost her mind, and its Reaper's fault.

She feels the blame eating away at her. If she had ended it years before? Reaper grunts in irritation towards herself. Satima's life was never hers to dictate. She guided her alright; right into being a perfect subject of the reapers. Garrus watched her, worried. "What are we doing? Wandering in circles isn't going to help anything.", he pointed out, annoyed.

She agreed, stopping at a corridor that led away from the public docking lots.

Reaper leads Garrus into a dark alley, down the wet path and past older market stalls. She opened the door to derelict building.

"We need to talk.", Reaper announced.

He agreed, stepping inside to her closing the entrance. A small amount of neon light displayed in the
room from the windows. Sky cars zoomed past the ore filled abyss. "Everything that Archer said about me, about Satima… I remember very little at times. You need to understand that I am indoctrinated. I have been for a long time. Satima is indoctrinated as well."

Reaper checked the room, beginning to take off her common clothes. Garrus was a bit surprised. "Uh… what are you? Are you?", he began.

She stripped her top clothing bare. It had been a while since he's last seen her like this. Not since those last days before the end. Reaper did not seem embarrassed, but more hurried. "Look at me."

He did. A lot more closely than earlier. Garrus viewed the cybernetics over her chest. Snaking here and there, dim glowing of the nanites. One small red patch covered the side of her left breast. "What is this?", he asked.

Reaper sighed. "What will happen to her. The longer the droid nano bots stay within her body, the more her anatomy will change. Her genetics will change. She'll be more like a reaper every day. Until she is consumed. Like me."

Garrus felt pity and remorse over Reaper. He reached out to touch her bare shoulder. Feeling the living tech that pulsated to him. "I'm so sorry, Shepard." His tone shaky.

She lowered her gaze. "You are not responsible for what happened to me. I should have done things differently… or forced the asari to help? I don't know. Maybe this was inevitable."

He rubbed the shoulder, leading his taloned fingers to her face. Caressing her cheek. "Remember when you said you loved me, before storming the beam?"

Reaper leaned forward to kiss him. It lasted seconds. She pulled away, quickly redressing. Reaper and Garrus led each other back to Haven. Both equally horrified for Satima's future.

Inside, Do'ova had finished repaneling some of the wires around the bay door. Akasia busied herself working on Satima's armor tech. The hybrid stood still for the sentarian. She looked uncomfortable. "Satima.", Reaper said, walking in.

The hybrid turned to her mother, "Akasia is trying to figure out how to deactivate my link to the suit without it killing me. She's really smart.", Satima smiled. It faded quickly when Reaper didn't return it. Garrus stepped to them, curious. "How would it kill you?"

"Well, The Directive's transmission is still strong. Although hive was the main directional link, there are scattered bases that can still signal. There must be one nearby.", Akasia answered.

"You're saying that armor is controlled by The Directive? Mine wasn't at all.", Reaper questioned.

Akasia stepped away from Satima, bringing out her own data pad. "Your link was here." She pointed to Reaper's head. "You and Archer both. Satima's is through the armor. Must be a failsafe, to prevent severance of connection."

Akasia scanned Satima's armor, "Reaper, you managed to break free of their control, and Archer obviously has his own agenda. But with Satima, The Directive didn't want to run the risk of compromise. At least that's what I'm understanding, anyways."

"So, murdering hundreds of innocents was her own choice?", Reaper glared at Satima.

"I can't be sure without more tests.", Akasia replied, glancing down.
Satima looked away from them. It had only been hours since hive's destruction and Reaper's anger. Garrus tried a smile toward Satima, "Then let's get off the station and away from any signals. That way we can work on helping her."

Reaper left to the shuttle bay. Haven flew out of Omega's system, securing FTL away from any Directive fighters. The signal weakened. Satima monitored the flight while Akasia observed the shuttle deck and prefab med bay. This ship was very old. Amazing how it held together.

Garrus stepped onto the deck, putting away crates. He seemed cheerful.

"Where is our next destination?", Akasia asked him.

He nearly jumped, not knowing she was there. "I...uh, I'm not sure. I haven't been thinking about that lately." Reaper's reveal on his mind.

Akasia walked closer, "Are you alright? You look... distracted."

Garrus set the crate down, "I'm fine. I think I'll go and speak with Reaper, though."

Making his way past quarters, he spotted Do'ova pacing in the mess. She was distracted with her thoughts until he arrived. "Oh! I didn't see you there. Yes, well... how is everything? I mean, the captain. Is she really like Reaper? What's going on?"

He held out a hand to stop the speedy sentences. Reminded him of someone he knew. "Just relax. Satima is doing better. We're going to find signals to shut down the armor. It's what is linking Satima to the directive."

Do'ova calmed down. "Oh, well... good. Then she is going to be okay, after all." The young salarian sat down. "I would like to thank you for helping us. For staying, I mean."

Garrus stepped closer, folding his long arms. "I wish I could have protected Jormun. I'm tired of seeing kids like you get hurt." He shook his head, upset. "About your family..."

She sat up quickly, "We found were they are being held. Satima and Jormun promised to find them. But... it looks like that may not happen." Her tone saddened. "I know there's a lot of danger right now. And we can't drop everything to help me anymore. That's why I've made a decision."

"What decision?", Satima asked, walking in.

"Captain?", Do'ova blurted, surprised. "I was hoping to speak to you. It's important."

Satima stood to the side, leaning on the hull wall. "I'm listening."

Her salarian crew member paced. "Jormun is gone, Satima. And the directive is looking for us. You have a lot of enemies now. And... my family... they-they're still in danger too. I want to continue helping, but I don't think I can when every time I close my eyes... I see him." Her own gaze watery. "My father."

The captain lowered a sad stare, "You want to leave to go find them."

Garrus objected, "Not by yourself. We need to stick together, here."

Satima and Do'ova exchanged glances. The hybrid understood. "Take the fighter. Take whatever you need and be careful." She stepped to her friend holding out a hand. Do'ova took it gingerly. "I forgive you for what happened with my family. None of us are heroes. We're kids.", she chuckled.
Her captain looked away to suddenly remember something. "Wait. Before you go." She dashed to her own quarters, rummaging through her things. Emerging with a dark brown jacket. Satima handed it to D. "For luck. I can't get out of my armor anyways, for long. And besides... you need to look badass when saving your family." She smiled.

Do'ova took it with excitement, putting on the leather piece. "Wow.", she said.

At the bay, Garrus and Satima helped Do'ova pack for her journey. The door opened to an inviting galaxy. She stood at the open hatch of the fighter. "Well. I guess this is goodbye. I don't know what will happen."

Garrus shook her small salarian hand. "You're gonna save them. And then find us at a bar on Omega. The round is on me."

She giggled. It was funny to Satima to see D a little smitten with Garrus. Her crew mate faced her with a sad gaze. "Thank you, captain. For everything you have done and for the things you tried to do. For us, for this crew."

They grasped arms. Satima's voice shaky with emotion. "Keelah se'lai, Do'ova Solus."

As the young salarian boarded the scouter craft, Garrus smirked to himself quite loudly. The little ship had made its way out of the hanger and into space. Once she had left, Satima turned to him. "What's so funny?"

He sighed aloud. "Nothing, Satima."

Reaper meditated in the engine room. The low hum quieted the rest of the ship for her, as she focused on the current events.

Samara, long ago, taught her this. She questioned herself, her abilities and resourcefulness. Is Satima a threat? Should she be put down, mercifully? Would it be mercy? And Garrus... would he hate her for it?

Satima acted too normal. Or was it she simply put away her feelings, much like Reaper always did. Garrus poked his head in, trying to be quiet for her. He leaned down next to her ear. "We need to talk.", he whispered.

She opened her eyes with a smile. "You don't have to whisper."

He sat next to her, "Well, just in case. I don't want you to throw me into the hull for disturbing you." Garrus nudged her arm. "We need to discuss Satima. Akasia said something about a signal, from The Directive. How it can affect the armor. If we can get Satima out of the armor, we can stop them from taking control.", Garrus exclaimed.

Reaper moved uneasily on the floor, "I can't believe she blew the station, killed all those people. And when we came back, she didn't even flinch or make acknowledgment about the fact. Even over Jormun."

Garrus stared at her in concern, "Reaper? Did you hear what I said? There's a way we can get the armor off."

She stood quickly, upset. "And then what?", Reaper yelled. "Play family? The Directive is still out there...Archer is still out there. He's not dead, and he will be looking for us. Not to mention the damn Sentarians."
Garrus stood slowly, watching her fume. "Do you blame Satima? Cause from where I'm standing, it sounds like you want to front all the responsibility and guilt on her."

He shook his head, "Reaper, she was forced. And you know, firsthand, what indoctrination can do. It doesn't give you the right to treat her like an enemy." He stomped off back into the mess. Reaper looked away.

Back in the cockpit, Garrus stepped behind Satima at the controls. Akasia walked in with data pads in hand. "There's a planet in the Exodus Cluster. It has a Directive satellite station. We can use this to copy the signal safely and figure a way to reroute it to Satima's armor."

"Best news in days.", Garrus replies.

"Which planet?", Reaper asks, walking in.

"Eden Prime.", Akasia answers.

Garrus nearly trips into Reaper. "Figures.", he says.

Eden Prime

Haven hovers over the satellite station surrounded by lush gardens of green forests. After landing on the docking pad, Reaper led the team inside.

"There's a power grid on the lower level, tier three. In there we can find the signal link. Maybe even get some information on The Directive.", Akasia points out.

Soldiers met them in the lobby. A firefight began. "Take cover!", Reaper shouted. Monitors were shot out, as she fired on them with her rifle. Sentarian design. It shot radiation lasers at the enemy. Directive militants fell in pain as the radiation ate away their armor, right into flesh. Garrus set a few trip mines along the way, in case they were followed. Akasia informed them of the next level to go.

Meanwhile, Satima sat in Haven. Reaper forbade her from leaving it. If the signal's strength became too strong, it could affect Satima, controlling her. So, she sat in her ship with the barrier active on her cockpit.

Minutes passed. Agonizingly. Satima sat up, stretching. She ventured down into the engine room, despite the risk, reminiscing on Jormun.

He would act so nervous around her. Their kiss lingered in her mind. It was wonderful and warm. But now he's gone. Satima wondered if she would ever find someone like him again. The comms opened.

"..satima.. arkaasia has the data... yo.. to get.. out... he's.. ing... he's coming!" It was Reaper's voice. Satima ran to the cockpit, warming up the thrusters, ready to pick them up and flee.

She heard a voice coming from the mess behind her. Satima hesitantly got up and followed it, right into the shuttle bay.

Reaper led the team back to the landing pad. Directive soldiers covered the area, firing on them. Garrus hacked a turret system above the buildings, giving them cover. "I don't see Satima anywhere.", Akasia shouted.

"She's still inside. Come on.", Reaper informed with her omni-tool. Once they boarded Haven, Garrus immediately navigated the ship off the planet. Akasia looked around, "Are you sure she received the message?"
"... shepard!", Satima commed from the shuttle bay.

They all ran, imaginations wild as to what they would see. "Ka Nic Ta!", Akasia yelled.

Archer held Satima above the floor by her throat. "Taking away the directive's toy?", he hissed, and threw her across the bay.

Satima landed at their feet, with Garrus helping her up quickly. "HIVE is gone. The Directive is weakened. You have nothing, Archer. Leave us be.", Reaper warned.

"Never.", he sneered. "I made her; she belongs to me. The Directive is still in control, and only I can sever it."

Archer ran to attack them, but Satima stepped in first. Deflecting blows from each other, she was finally strong enough to fight. Reaper joined in. Akasia had already began a decryption sequence on the signal data during their trek back. Her pad would emit the reroute toward Satima's suit. If it finished before Archer is dead, then Satima would be in trouble.

Garrus offered pot shots, careful to stay back from the enhanced fighters. Akasia worked on her pad, "I can't stop the sequence.", she said panicked.

Garrus didn't understand. "What?"

"The reroute... if it starts before...", she was knocked back by a sudden jolt to the ship. Alarms blared, which caused the combatants to pause. The Sentarians had found them, Commander Callon at the head.

He opened fire on Haven, meaning to cripple the ship before taking it.

Satima delivered a blow to Archer, kicking him back. She could rig his rifter to implode, killing him by taking him apart, but he would have to be away from Haven. Stalkers's appeared. Akasia's sequence started and Satima groaned in pain. She fell forward, dizzy.

Reaper beat Archer back, he stumbled over crates. "Now, you die bastard.", she spat.

He laughed, "Even if you kill me, she'll never be free." Archer overheard their plans on Satima's armor. He took out a concealed pistol, aimed it at Satima and fired. Her armor no longer working, nanites and implants turned off. She was vulnerable.

Reaper pushed Satima down after the shot was fired. Stalkers seized Archer, embedding a neural destabilizer on him. He fell unconscious. Garrus ran over to Reaper and Satima as Akasia looked around, satisfied no one got hurt. Memtrix appeared. "We got here in time. Callon is not pleased with your actions, sister.", she informed Akasia. "Or mine."

Reaper stood, helping Satima to her feet. They both smiled together, laughing. "It's over. The Directive can't use me anymore.", Satima grinned.

"And soon, we can take the nano tech out. You'll be completely normal.", Reaper replied, equally excited.
Akasia stepped up to them, "I'm glad I could help. Everything should be okay from here on."

Satima followed Reaper to Archers sleeping frame. She put a hand on the hull wall, lightheaded.

Garrus stood next to them. "Wonder what's going to happen to this bastard.", he asked. Shepard scowled at Archer, "I hope he is dismantled, and neutralized."

Satima collapsed behind them. Akasia knelt next to her, "Satima?", she shook the hybrid.

Reaper and Garrus turned to see her unconscious on the floor. Her hand covering a bloody hole. The dark armor masked the obvious wound from them. On board the command carrier, Callon entered the medical wing. He glared toward the traitor Akasia and frowned upon Reaper. "We have Archer secured. He can serve a purpose."

"Just as Satima served hers?", Reaper blurted. "Or was that a mistake of communication? You almost killed my daughter! I let you use me, and you still betrayed us."

Callon smirked at this. "This ship is under my full command. You are not Sentarian, you are not an ally! Only a tool to eradicate the reapers. Besides, I'm not the one that blew hive to hell."

"Wait... eradicate? I thought we were supposed to rewrite them?", Akasia questioned, ignoring the quip about HIVE.

Callon paced towards Satima as a medical tech sealed her wound. "Rewriting would mean coexisting. I want them destroyed... I want their blood spilt for the slaughter of our people, Akasia. We haven't had a signal from command for years. We're all alone here. Fighting to keep our home safe. Isn't that what you want?"

"We can't go home?", she asked aloud.

Reaper stood next to Satima, guarding her, as Garrus watched Callon and his stalkers. "They are synthesis, Akasia. And they must be destroyed. This galaxy belongs to us, not them."

Akasia started, "These women are not your enemy. The reapers used them, tortured them!"

Mem-Zurah slapped Akasia, "You have gone too far, sister."

Akasia took a step back, stunned. She left the medical wing. Callon smiled, leaving back to the command deck. Mem-Zurah stayed on guard while Garrus paced. It had been an hour. Satima started a spiking fever. Something is wrong. The medical tech provided scans and samples. "She needs a blood transfusion, nothing too complex. Though her injury is dangerous, it is not currently life threatening. Still... to cause her blood cells to be attacked by her immune system? Completely abnormal.", he informed, while posing a curious stance.

"What do you mean?", Garrus asked annoyed.

"Her body is reacting to this wound as if it can't reproduce more blood cells... heal. Though I've closed the injury, her cells are attacking each other. She'll die without more blood. I need time to understand this", he replied.

Reaper stripped off her arm brace, revealing the naked skin underneath, sticking her arm in the medical tech's face. "Do it.", she demanded.

The medical tech took a large quantity of blood from Reaper, putting it into the fusion chamber. He filtered it and started an IV into Satima's abdomen. Ten minutes passed, and still no improvement,
while he studied her strange biology. Akasia walked in. "What's going on? Is Satima ok?", she asked, worried.

"Her immune system is refusing to function properly. She needs blood to help her stay alive.", Reaper informed.

Akasia looked over the scans, "And nothing is getting better?" She glared at the medical tech, "You idiot. She's not entirely human. It takes both of their blood!"

Akasia had the medical tech retrieve blood from Garrus, then enter the new batch into the fusion chamber. She administered the finale transfusion to Satima.

Within an hour, the dark blood emptied into Satima's body. Her vitals became stable. Akasia paced with the them, until Satima opened her eyes."...where am I..", she asked.

Satima received scan after scan, listening to Akasia's summary of what happened." The signal must've sent a failsafe throughout your body's nano tech. Affecting your immune system. Your hybrid DNA is dangerous.", she stated
"Without both genetic parents, you can die from any serious injury that bleeds you out. You're susceptible to a type of anemia. It could take years for a perfect transfusion to be created for you that doesn't need their blood.", Akasia revealed using her different tech of omni-tool.

"For now, your immune system seems satisfied with the transfusion. I wish we had the time to do more tests."

"In other words: I'm screwed.", Satima mumbled.

Reaper shook her head, "More reason to keep you close. Where is the armor?"

"It's in the containment room, along with Archer.", Akasia replied.

Callon summons them to the command deck.

They watch the commander pace in irritation, a worried expression followed by angry mutterings causing the rest of the sentarian crew to feel nervous. "We have found The Directives intent. They have built a parallel conduit. The reapers are looking for our home system, and we cannot allow this. Reaper, despite our previous engagements we need your help."

Reaper shakes her head with a smirk, "How ironic."

"This rifter-conduit has another use. Reaper, we want you to go back to your past. Destroy the Intelligence and bring peace.", Callon implored.

"Time travel?", Akasia said with disbelief.

Garrus whistled, "More insanity."

Callon glared toward them with coal eyes, "Only your primitive minds cannot fathom the intricate design of this universe. You have no idea what I have witnessed while you struggled to leave the dark ages of your peoples."

Akasia began to speak, "Perhaps we should plan for the assault? Or find the parallel conduit? Instead of arguing."

Reaper and Garrus left to the council room, vexed and unsure of what Callon was planning next.
Akasia stayed with Satima. The girl attended herself, looking at the data from her own blood samples. "Confusing.", she said, tossing the pad aside.

Akasia stood next to her, "I can still help you escape, if you want. Your mother and father seem capable enough to take care of this themselves."

"I can't leave them behind. This is my war, too. If I can stop The Directive and finally kill Archer, I won't waste a chance by cowering.", Satima replied. "And they are not my mother and father. I'm just genetic mapping created to serve."

Akasia disagreed. "That's what parents are, you know."

Satima paced the room, staring at all the strange tech. "Teach me about rifters.", she asked, deflecting.

Reaper walked behind Garrus into the council room. Callon met them, along with Mem-Zurah and few others. "These are members of the council of the ante chamber: Stravos. We are the last remnants of the Sentarian authority in this galaxy.", he explained.

"Authority?", Reaper scoffed. "You can't even stop The Directive with all your advanced tech. Why did you summon us here?"

Callon began, "Time protects itself from such scenarios as going into the past. Past, present and future, all exist and influence each other simultaneously in our universe." He explained. "There is more than one timeline, and you can bring us to a better one. One where we can stop the reapers and bring peace back to this galaxy."

"It would require a civilization that has the resources of the galaxy at its command.", Garrus answered.

"Yes. A great and mighty people... that lived long ago.", Callon implied.

Reaper stepped forward, "Leviathan."

Another member of the council Stravos, brought out a display of the rift. "Simple technology. Our masters from before the first harvest, gave us the knowledge of such a thing. The Rift. A tear in time, that could be used to travel... faster than any FTL possibly created. But that same knowledge was also our downfall.", he said.

"The Intelligence had created its solution... slaughtering the Apex race of Leviathans. We were their last hope, and so... they ensured our safety, into the bridge of time. There are other galaxies... other systems and worlds. Reaper... you would be astounded by the primitive peoples we have encountered.", Callon explained with elation.

"We need you to go back to your origin past and stop The Intelligence. You cannot go farther than the months leading into the final war. Any farther, and you will be lost in many bridges, many scenarios."

Reaper glanced around, feeling an overwhelming amount of danger from this information. "Do the reapers have this technology? Other than the nano tech?", she asked.

"Do the conduits, the relays and their own ability of spaceflight... answer your question? They are still too far from achieving it... though that is about to change.", Callon informed.

"The parallel conduit... your rifting tech.", she replied.
"Now, we need to formulate a plan. And get you there.", Callon said.

Meanwhile, further into the ship, Satima didn't attend the council. But went to the containment level instead. Pacing in front of her armor.

"satima"

She gasped, looking around in a start. The hybrid pushed away a voice... small but incessant. Archer watched from his cell, suspended from neural barriers. Satima stared at the dark menace of a machine. She smiled, gloating. "How does it feel to be completely helpless?"

Archer grinned, "I'm not helpless... only waiting."

"For what?", Satima demanded with a glare.

"For you.", he replied.

Satima held her head in pain, it ached horribly, she couldn't stand it. On her knees, she realized her hand was reaching up to the barrier panel. "No!", she shouted to it. Archer began laughing loudly, "You cannot deny The Directive. We are its slaves, and they our masters."

Reapers and Garrus were making head way to the medical wing. "After I'm through the conduit, take Satima far from here. Protect her...keep her safe.", Reaper pleaded.

"You'll come back. You always do, and we'll be waiting.", he smiled.

Alarms suddenly blared.

"What's going on?", Mem-Zurah demanded from other stalkers on the command deck. "Ma'am. Archer is loose from his containment."

Satima ran to Haven, as Archer followed. Her suit was back on. "Join me, Satima.", he shouted. Satima fell forward inside, the voices were so loud, she couldn't hear the alarms on her ship.

She turned Haven on via her omni-tool. The ship vibrated and hummed to life. It was set to autopilot. Garrus and Reaper boarded in time, to witness Archer fight Satima in the mess. "Satima?", Shepard yelled.

Satima accepted blows to get closer to Archer. He baited and cornered her on Haven, knowing she would turn to her armor for protection. Reaper tried running into him, but he countered her intended blow. Akasia used her advanced tech skills to hack into the rifter device Archer was using. She set the singularity energy cells to max.

Garrus assumed the controls of Haven, navigating it away from the command cruiser. Reaper grabbed Archer before he knocked her into the hull wall. Archer tried to pull the rifter off. "You bitch! What have you done?", he screamed at Akasia.

"Preventing you from hurting anyone else.", she shouted back.

Satima looked on with a smile, catching a glimpse of Reaper. She quickly put her mother's arm around her neck. Garrus turned to them. Mem-Zurah appeared, glancing at Archer's time device in surprise. "It's going to implode! We need to get out of here!"

"Go on! I've got a rifter Akasia left on board. I can use that to escape.", Garrus shouted.

Satima glared at him. "Hell no! I'm not leaving you behind!"
"I'll be right behind you. Satima... go.", he ordered her.

She shook her head and complied. Mem-Zurah rifted them off Haven. Archer struggled to recalibrate his own, failing. Garrus flown the Haven far enough. Satima and Reaper watched from the command deck, as Haven hovered in place. "Come on, Garrus. Anytime now. Come on.", Reaper spoke under her breath.

Satima gripped the console panel tightly, nervous. Akasia met them, hoping the brave turian survived.

Garrus stood up, his rifter in hand. He watched Archer squirm to get his own, off. "You hurt my mate...", he kicked Archer back. "Tortured my daughter.", Garrus swung hard, knocking the droid's head back.

He leaned over the reaper scientist, rage building in his body. "And now you get to burn in hell.", Garrus spat at him.

Archer laughed, "You first..." They struggled together for the free rifter as Garrus dropped it. Archer had successfully ripped his own off, tearing the cybernetic skin.

Dark goop in place of blood fell in droplets on the floor. He kicked Garrus hard, forcing him to fall to his knees. Archer threw the damaged rifter to him, picking up the new one. "The proud turian officer... so sure and easily fooled."

Archer rifted off Haven. Garrus sat there as seconds ticked by. He failed. The turian officer stood up to seat himself in the pilot chair, overlooking the view of the Sentarian ship. He took off his visor, placing it on top of the control panel.

Grabbing his side in discomfort, he closed his eyes. That minute he spent remembering. He had a family after all. Everything Solana said back on Illium pained him. It is too late now. But at least Satima and Shepard have each other. They will survive.

He rubbed the names that were crudely etched in the metal of his visor. Old grudges and past anger are gone. It's time to retire. "Someplace tropical.", Garrus smirked.

On the command carrier, Satima watched Haven explode. Its hull groaning from the pressure of the singularity that pulled it apart. Suddenly, the ship disappeared. A bright green light flashed. It was over quickly. Reaper's heart pounded hard.

"Sir, we're picking up a comm. It's from the parallel conduit on the planet Digeris.", an ensign informed.

Callon gestured the order.

"Did you think it would be that easy to kill me, Satima? I look forward to our meeting before I go back and destroy your efforts, Shepard!"

The entire deck remained silent. Satima stared ahead, her face darkened with anger. Reaper glanced something there. It was brief and terrible. I can't let her be me. Callon stepped forward. "We must stop him, and the reapers. The Directive will try to defend itself. Reaper, you must go back in your time. Haven't you sacrificed enough?"

She glared towards him; her eyes watery but her gaze firm.

Akasia waited with Satima. Mem-Zurah had prepared several teams to assault the platform on the
planet. Reaper stayed in the storage room, alone. She pummeled the hull wall, using her reaper strength. Garrus is dead. Reaper couldn't imagine what to do, and Satima... she only had a short time to know him.

She should've stayed behind, instead. He would still be alive. A little voice inside told her, that he would want her to keep Satima safe. The comms cracked to life. "Reaper. We are ready to assault the platform.", Mem informed.
She regained her composure. Archer is going to die, and if she goes with him. So be it.

A radiant orange sky gave the glow of sunset across the desert plain, on Digeris. They landed on the planet, hoping to get ahead of everyone.

Archer had gotten to the parallel conduit first. Reaper waited to keep him busy while Akasia hurriedly began the emergency purge sequence on the console to stop Archer from inserting himself into the past and destroying Shepard's efforts at a victory against the Reapers.

It was all going according to plan. The deaths of Jormun and Garrus demanded justice, as Archer desperately tried to beat Reaper to the conduit.

In the background of the noise of battle, Satima remained quiet. Her mind raced with many thoughts. Akasia looked up, shouting for the hybrid to give her cover fire, but she didn't budge. Reaper and Archer would either destroy each other or one of them would rise victorious. She feared Archer to win. He would go in the past and murder Shepard while she was young and weak.

But, Reaper... if she survived, successfully defeating Archer; then what would be her next move? Satima feared that outcome, too. She had promised to use the reaper technology to fix the galaxy. But what if it was a lie? Reaper could still be under The Directive's control and then what? She could've stayed behind on Haven instead, Garrus didn't have to die. She is chaos.

Both abominations are dangerous. Satima stood there. The nano tech that Archer laced her DNA with from the beginning, began whispering. Satima tried to quiet the whispers, she started to scream in her mind, but they just got louder.

"I didn't ask for this. Never wanted to be a part of your war.", she muttered, as Reaper and Archer fought in front of her.

The brilliant green glow of the tear almost shadowed that of the conduit. A singularity portal made of unknown metals. Fashioned to erect a matter field that gave safe passage across space and time.

Its ancient structure was older than the Protheans themselves. Older than the relays that used to dot the galaxy. Her teal eyes gazed toward the empty middle, drawn to its gravitational pull that sucked up small pebbles and dust from the ground.

This is the moment she would choose between loyalty and ambition. But was her ambition to save them, worth it? A whisper, a voice... her subconscious trying to reason this life. This future. Garrus's face flashed in front of her. The look he gave her, right before she left him to die. Jormun's eyes, piercing her heart. Do'ova alone in this twisted galaxy to find her family or die.

Reaper's stare, intense and hard. Blaming her for everything. If she hadn't come along.... Then the sound of scratching in her mind stopped.

Satima started to walk forward.

Reaper and Archer fought violently against each other, unknowing the wild anomaly that was about to occur.
Satima passed Akasia who was busy at the console. She stopped short of the platform. Nano tech inside her body, nano armor to give her the same edge Reaper had in battle. It is time to make some changes. And Satima had a few in mind.

Akasia sensed something was wrong, looking up from her console. She spotted Satima stepping onto the platform, right in the tear of the conduit. "Reaper!", she shouted.

Archae and Reaper both looked up to witness Satima using a rifter on her omni-tool. Green kinetic energy began to surround her, static electricity from the air started to buzz off her armor. Her long ginger hair, flowing from the energy waves.

"Satima, no!", she yelled in fear. Archer knocked her down as she was unaware and started to run full force towards Satima.

He screamed in defied rage as the girl disappeared into the rift with a wicked grin. Her sharp hybrid teeth glistened in the lasting glow of the green light. She was gone.

Archae began destroying the pad. Tearing apart the metal grates and girder holdings. His inhuman droid strength displayed in a consumed rage. Reaper couldn't believe it. Satima went through. Akasia ran to her, "Reaper. If she changes anything in your past. I can't stop it."

"I know.", Reaper understood, as she watched on.

Archae turned to them with a fury in his voice." She will undo everything I've worked hard to build!", he yelled.

"What are you going to do about him?", Akasia pointed while asking.

Reaper walked forward, "Nothing. He's powerless without Satima as leverage."

Archae looked stunned, "You think I won't find a way? I will destroy Satima and you with her." He left to a fighter, taking off into space. His plans playing out in that sinisterly genius mind.

Reaper and Akasia hurried back to the shuttle, flying to the Sentarian command carrier. Mem-Zurah met them on the cargo deck. "They witnessed everything. Satima went through! How are we going to be able to stop her?", she said in a panic with a powerful thick accent.

"We can't. It's up to her to decide whether to screw us...or help us.", Reaper replied.

The council summoned them to the ante chamber. Callon stood before them, "You have failed."

Reaper crossed her arms, "No, I didn't."

Callon raised a brow, "Your own daughter, Satima, has upset the timeline. The balance is destroyed."

Akasia stepped forward, "We may have a way. But it could strand us in whatever timeline Satima has gone to. Or...", she hesitated.

Callon grunted in disapproval, but Akasia continued, "Or... put us ahead of her. If she appears in one-time era, we could quite possibly come into the next year, or years after. But would it still give us time to rectify whatever chaos she has caused?"

The council mumbled amongst themselves, with Callon listening to their replies. He spoke, "We will go. One battleship. Shepard, Akasia and Mem-Zurah. You will accompany that ship and its crew. I
will command it."
"But...", Akasia asked.

"I will command it. Not the Shepard.", Callon repeated.

Akasia complied, as Reaper stood silent. The battleship was soon launched. Akasia pinpointed the
time rift Satima used with an undamaged relay. She hoped they were not too late. But destiny and
fate have a way of twisting things. And paradox’s always fix themselves. Eventually.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, dear readers! I plan to continue posting more of the chapters.
The Shepard

Chapter Summary

The Citadel and its citizens are shocked by a terrifying event. Shepard is summoned to secure the peace of mind for the galaxy, while she battles the reapers. Satima finds herself in an unfamiliar place, with her secret nearly revealed.

2186 Reaper War

Presidium: Citadel, Present Day

A peaceful calm fell on the citizens of the presidium, as families, merchants and politicians spent their time basking in the never-ending day of the monument park. The fountains displayed on the presidium lake, splashed cool water against the conduit bridge, while residents took their midday stroll.

News casts of the assault from the reaper machines echoed through deaf ears. A c-sec guard casually walked by the reports, suddenly feeling drawn to the conduit. Staring as if a strong pull of will commanded him to.

The monument stood inactive since Saren's assault. A keeper approached it, ignored by the many denizens that strolled on. The c-sec guard paid no mind, still enthralled with the dark menace of a machine. But the keeper reached out with one of its arms and held a small holo tool above its head.

Data flowed across the holo board, displaying numbers in sequences that would confuse the ordinary person not trained in code. There was a ping, with the keeper turning around and leaving swiftly.

Quite a few onlookers noticed the strange behavior of the guard, beginning to murmur amongst themselves. And what was the keeper doing? Unexpectedly, a loud hum filled the area, drowning out the noise of the peoples and news casts. Everyone around could hear it echo through the level, bouncing right off the stations walls.

Confused at the eerie sound, many residents and visitors started to quickly evacuate the conduit bridge. A hidden terror ever present at the back of their minds from the last use of the relay. The conduit began to come to life, with its central ring picking up momentum, a blue glow of the element core reflecting off the bridge's surface. Citizens panicked, fleeing for their lives as the ring's central axis gained greater speed. Something was coming through.

The c-sec guard stumbled back, calling his partner through comms. Something was still nagging at him, but he couldn't focus on that now. C-Sec guards hailed for backup as they desperately tried to lead the residents to safety.

Without warning, a single flash of light blinded the remaining locals. The thud of an object causing a few guards to jump back, was quickly surrounded by rifles. Primed clips whined on powerfully. Finally, the rings slowed their speed when the conduit began its shut down state once more.

A few c-sec guards hesitantly cornered the small space on the bridge. On the floor, a figure attempted to stand then fell on all fours. Dazed, it looked around with sharp teal eyes, before immediately
collapsing. C-sec shouted orders as the figure spoke. No one answered it.

Shortly afterwards, the unknown being had been transported to a concealed facility, quarantined in a lower district. The council had been summoned and rumors filled every business, shop and home. In less than twenty-four hours, the Normandy was contacted with Udina urging his fellow council members to have Commander Shepard investigate. Nothing will impede his private plans.

Not too long after Shepard escaped Earth and rescued the Primarch, she received that urgent message. A personal request from Udina, and made the decision to go to the citadel, unprepared for what she would see next.

Shalta Ward, Citadel.

Shepard hurried as she approached the quarantine facility. Dr. Michele from Huerta informed her that she was herself requested to perform medical checks on an unknown entity. During Shepard's visit with the council, they showed her via camera footage, of the presidium's conduit bridge.

The image of the strange being was blurred. As Spectre, it was her job to protect the council, the citadel, and the other council ruled systems against dangerous anomalies. Ahead of them, stood the heavily guarded door to the facility.

James stepped it up beside the commander, eager and a bit curious. "You don't think they're worried about this "alien"?", he jested.

"We won't know until we see it for ourselves.", Shepard stepped to the door with a serious expression. "Regardless of what it is, we can't let our curiosities get in the way of protocol."

James gave a short salute. "Aye, Ma'am. Putting on game face."

Garrus stood behind them, letting out a small chuckle. The turian guard scanned her and the team, then used his omni tool to open the door. They entered a long corridor, the bio-scanner searching for anomalies and foreign organisms, until reaching a final sliding frame. "Tight security.", Garrus mumbled.

The frame unhinged at the top and the two walls slid open, revealing a massive white room. The lighting seemed turned to maximum output considering how blinding it was.

Various laboratories with plenty of unknown scientists and medical personal buzzed about the area. Shepard viewed the facility, well hidden within the citadel. There were artifacts from old prothean ruins, their verdant glow pulsed when Shepard approached. Some of the scientists gestured to each other, pointing at her.

She watched them closely. "You think they were keeping a prothean.", she pondered aloud.

Then she exchanged a worried glance with her team. With a sudden haste, Shepard moved forward, immediately bumping into Dr. Michele and a salarian scientist. "Oh! Shepard, you're here. This is Zadra Tintissi. He is a specialized medical scientist and works for the STG.", she informed in her subtle french accent.

Shepard briefly shook hands and followed as Zadra started to talk. He looked darker than most salarians, wearing a red lab coat. "I'm sure you've seen the footage from the presidium. It didn't show you everything. After the alien was transported to this facility, a problem emerged."

"Whatever it is, it's not of any species we've ever known", Zadra finished. "We thought at first it could be prothean. My personal scientific fantasy.", he mused.

Michelle chuckled, as Zadra continued." Unfortunately, it's not. You'll see soon enough. We have it secured for now." He reassured.

"And in the containment room.", Doctor Michelle confirmed. "Our genetic samples are still running. It would be another day before it is completed."

They walked through the bulk of the main labs before reaching the containment cell door. "Beyond here is the cell. She is quite... interesting.", Zadra explained with a slight twitch to his eye.

As the door opened, Shepard turned to him curiously, "She?"

Zadra grinned watching them walk through, "Yes. It is female."

The door closed. Inside the quarantine room, the small cell was suspended from kinetic dispensers off the floor. All four grey walls were constructed of the strongest metals. The entire room looked dark, with the only lights available in deep blue accenting corners. A sanitation droid kept the surface of the entire room disinfected. Couldn't risk a foreign organism from spreading to everyone. "Please proceed with caution", a VI echoed.

Garrus stood beside her. "Well, Shepard. Looks like we're gonna find out what exactly this "she" is. Part of me is curious, like James.", he gestured. "But, the other half is not so confident."

Shepard stepped to the platform that rose from the floor connecting to the cells door. "Containment protocols active. Shepard, Commander; Spectre-please proceed through the door.", the VI opened the cell frame.

Both Garrus and James readied themselves to aide Shepard in case this alien tried anything. She glanced his way. "That's why you got my six." Shepard gave him a wink, before walking inside.

Once inside the dimly lit room, Shepard looked around to see if the alien stood anywhere. "Alien subject in vicinity.", the VI repeated.

As Shepard turned around, the door closed. She heard a faint sigh behind her. There on a cot, a young woman sat with her back against Shepard. It looked like she was tinkering with something. "Here for more "check-ups"?, she smirked.

The girl turned around as she spoke, "I could just tell you, and get this whole... thing...", and stopped short of her sentence. She stared at Shepard. It wasn't a look of surprise or anger, but of fear. "How did you follow me?"

Shepard raised a brow in confusion, "Follow you?"

The girl slowly rose, careful to back away, giving a distance between herself and Shepard. She glanced around, then back to Shepard, gazing at her. In that instant, they met face to face, with Shepard taking a cautious step back. "What are you? "she asked.

The female cocked her head slightly to one side, then replied, "Synthesis. That's how it happened... maybe.", she mumbled out loud.

"What year is it?", the girl asked. Shepard was taken aback by the random question, "2186." She replied. The girl paced, muttering incoherently. Shepard gave her another question. "Where did you come from?" Her perplexed gaze wary of the new guest on this station. She walked closer to Shepard. It was entirely uncomfortable. "Not where. When.", she answered, her voice a little shaky.
The room was no longer dim, but lit with every inch of the area visible to Shepard, until she gasped at the female being. She looked young, lean and well built. A very humanoid girl, wearing body fitting black armor, not as bulky in some areas as Shepard's. Side swept ginger hair framed the right side of her round face. High cheek bones met with striking teal eyes, surrounded by black sclera.

The most noticeable feature was the girl's brow. A smooth slight protrusion that didn't interfere with her exotic beauty, but rather enhanced a curious feature that appeared slightly ridged, straight to her nose. Shepard took a step back, taking in the oddity in front of her. This girl is not a prothean."Your questions about the year. What is it that you want?", she asked hesitantly.

The girl's expression changed from stern to relieved. "The Shepard."

She watched the Shepard leave hastily, and thought on the days before this strange dream happened.

Satima opened her eyes to a harsh alarm blaring in the background of a place completely unfamiliar to her. Her head ached, and her body hurt more. Fearful, she stood, unaware of the time that the rift platform brought her. "Where am I?" was all she asked as they stared and whispered around her.

The situation confused Satima. She hoped to find someone with a brain in charge. Instead, she got incarceration. These C-Sec guards put her there. As if she couldn't take them and run. But she didn't run.

After losing consciousness, she woke in what looked like a containment cell. She stretched her back from the sitting position she assumed since being brought to it. An all-white room with a seamless interior. No clear indication of a door or wall misplacement and especially no windows.

It had to of been hours before people entered. Strangers. A sliding door behind her appeared and opened as figures walked in. Satima stood up slowly, her legs sore from sitting too long.

Humans, Salarians, Asari... all gawking at her, poking and prodding. Tapping away at their tablets and pads. When she spoke against it, they all panicked. One human female approached her, short auburn hair around the shoulders and an accent that had a sensuous flair.

This doctor stepped closer, placing a gentle hand on Satima's arm. Requesting permission to examine her. No one had ever asked before. Not in hive, not anywhere.

Her heart pounded in her chest, but she complied. The doctor made everyone leave, so it was just them, alone. Doctor Michelle, so she is called, was kind and careful. Blood samples, scans and an eye exam were conducted.

Satima held back curiosities until now. She had to know where she is. So, she cleared her throat and opened her mouth to speak. The doctor spoke for her. "You are wondering where you are?", she answered. A slight curve of her mouth to a smile. Michelle glanced up to the strange girl, staring into an avian gaze. So... similar.

Satima looked down, nodding. "Yes." She let a short breath with her words.

Michelle began typing away on her tablet. "This is a quarantine facility. You are on the citadel." She quickly peeked above her tablets screen to see a perplexed expression on the girl. "Do you know where this is?", she asked.

Silently, Satima shook her head. She doesn't understand what she's gotten herself into. Michelle finished, giving a slight nod to Satima before she left. "However, you came, and whoever you are. I don't want you to be scared." Satima gazed up to the doctor, who gave a warm smile to her.
Michelle walked through the open wall, disappearing. It closed shut, sealing in place seamlessly into the metal. She sat on the cot, nervously. Trying to not panic. The dimmers came on, and the room was silent. Two cameras above whined on and moved to peer at her.

She was a caged animal. Again.

Then the hours moved forward and became days. She was given things to tinker with. They observed, but nothing more was done. It had turned quiet, and unsettled. The data pad was useless. She could do nothing but stare at it. Try to hack it. Her cell was getting smaller and suffocating. And when she started to feel hopeless, lost inside the cage.

When the voices of fear tried to manifest in the shadows of her room. Satima met a terribly familiar face. "What are you?", the supposed Reaper asked. Satima cocked her head, "Synthesis.", she replied. The human woman standing in front of her was Reaper! Or at least she resembled her. Satima didn't let the copy get close, but held a gaze to her for a moment.

The Reaper copy wore what seemed to be a military uniform. Reaper crossed her arms and proceeded to speak. "What do you want?", those striking green eyes seemed to pierce through Satima. "The Shepard.", she muttered.

It was all she could reply with, as the reaper copy immediately left the cell. Her thoughts now caught up, Satima knew she was out of place. Out of time. She hid, trying to figure out what to do. There were others with the copy, she heard voices. But did not see them. She stayed put. If there's a chance this copy is different, a chance to make the galaxy better. Shouldn't she take it?

Moments later, Shepard rushed out of the cell with a disturbed look. Garrus followed beside her, "What happened? What did you see?"

James lingered long enough to peek inside the cell and saw nothing. He quickly followed behind them, while Satima hid on the wall next to the doorway before it shut again.

Shepard stopped in front of the door, "I need to speak to the council."

"Why?", James asked.

Shepard stepped inside the elevator to the citadel council. "Because I think the reapers have shown their hand.", she replied cryptically.

James and Garrus stood behind her, talking about something she didn't care to pay attention to. She didn't notice how Garrus kept a close eye on her unsettled demeanor. This girl, this female alien... is the only topic on her mind right now.

The council seemed hesitant to let Shepard take the unknown being with her, but the further warnings how this young stranger could be a danger on the citadel, forced them to act.

Within hours, Satima waited under guard for the shuttle to take her to the docking ward. There she would meet with Shepard. The ride rattled her nerves. Two turian guards hovered over her, while she stared out the shuttle window. The great station had its beauty and its wonder.

So many species clustered in one place. Thousands and thousands more that lived in relative peace here. A peace the reapers where about to crush.

On the dock, Shepard stood still as stone. Many scenarios of the decision flooded her mind. This could be a big mistake or a huge victory against the Reapers. She watched the silver shuttle fly toward them, hovering above the deck of the Normandy's docking port.
Shepard remained at ease, holding a soldier's gaze while two guards and the alien girl leaped out. They handed her to Shepard by ways of releasing her cuffs, but the girl smirked about it. Shepard nodded to them before they returned inside the shuttle to leave.

She paced around the alien, sighing in hesitance. There was a youthful attitude about her that irritated the careful plans Shepard had thought out. "Before we go inside, I need a name.", Shepard demanded.

The young alien glimpsed around her, gasping at the Normandy with a stunned surprise, before smiling to herself. She stared at the citadel's docking hub. "This place is amazing.", she replied instead. Shepard crossed her arms in annoyance. The girl laughed quickly, glancing around the docks then to the visible side of the Normandy. "It's Satima."

"Satima?", Shepard asked. The girl nodded.

Shepard eyed her, "Alright, Satima. Let's board the Normandy.", she ordered. Satima passed the bio-field decontamination scanner after stepping through the hatch, and inside the air-lock. Walking through the Normandy gave her goosebumps.

To her left sat a human male, wearing a cap. He quickly peeped at Satima before returning to his panels. It must be thrilling to fly such a beautiful warship. Ahead, Shepard steadily hurried to the middle of the deck. Satima stopped short viewing the extensive command center with a holo of the Normandy above it.

She gazed away, it will be hard to work with Shepard, knowing who she might become if Satima fails. Shortly after, Shepard comes rushing through to headway their little walk. An elevator was before them. Satima watched Shepard press a sequence as it opened.

"We're going to the medical bay. This is my ship, my command and there are rules you will follow. Do you understand?", Shepard glared toward Satima.

Satima nodded quietly, then spoke. "Why your medical bay?", she asked.

"The containment facility you were held in hasn't released your medical report yet. So, I don't know what you would need if you were injured, or hungry. It won't take long. We have trained staff.", Shepard gestured Satima to the inside of the elevator.

She complied, trusting this different, past Shepard. It became crowded when another crew member stepped inside, saluting to Shepard then stared uncomfortably at Satima.

Minutes later, the elevator door slid open. They stepped out and Satima followed, eager to tour more of the Normandy. She rushed past the mess. Plenty of crew members ate and conversed while they entered the medical bay. Some of them stared at her.

Satima viewed a salarian dressed in a long white lab coat that seemed more like armor, attending a medical workstation. The armor had red lines and some metal thing going up his back neck. He glanced at Satima, then made a double take. In the far corner on an examination table, sat a strange looking krogan. It had a blue shawl around its face and head, Satima pondered if it wasn't female.

Tuchunka in her timeline closed itself off. There were rumors of space travel, independent of the rest of the galaxy, but then those were just rumors. Only her short trip to the planet proved their own isolation. A bitter memory flashed in her mind of Jormun. She shook it off.

Mordin couldn't hold back his curiosity for long. He quickly approached the alien girl. "Fascinating...remarkable...stunning! Shepard! What is she? Where did she come from?", the salarian
had a million questions blurting from his thin mouth. Shepard held up a hand and he seemed to calm. They spoke off to the side as Satima walked to the krogan female. She and the female exchanged glances and Satima nodded courteously to her.

Under guard, Satima sat in the medical bay. The salarian came to her with a needle, she flinched. After taking a sample, he cocked his head at her. "No need to be afraid. Only small prick, practically painless." , he spoke quickly.

Satima gave him a wry smile. "So are my blades.", she warned.

The salarian backed away unsure, continuing his work. In front of her the female krogan sat, her knees brought to her chest as she watched the salarian. She gave Satima a glance again. Shepard walked in, along with a turian male. Then the similarities and memories rushed back.

"Garrus damn Vakarian.", Satima thought.

She had nearly forgotten about the past timeline, whether it could be different or the same. This Garrus has never met her before. Satima gulped hard, slowing her fears. Shepard and Garrus stood in front of her.

"Garrus here will show you around the Normandy. In the meantime, I need to finish some reports. We'll discuss how you came through the conduit later.", Shepard informed.

He nodded his head, then turned to Shepard, "Conduit?", Garrus asked.

"Long story.", Shepard rubbed her temples in frustration and wandered off to the salarian. Satima and Garrus were left alone. He glanced to her, waiting for a response of some kind. "You're making me nervous, Turian.", Satima spoke with an uneasy tone.

Garrus chuckled, "You know I'm a turian?", he asked. "I thought you were some kind of unknown species."

Satima looked at him confused," Why wouldn't I?" She shut herself up, clearing her throat, pretending to have her attention caught elsewhere. Garrus gave her a quick stare, before walking to where Shepard was standing.

Satima watched them. They seemed so relaxed, so different. She was the one out of place. The paradox. An hour passed exactly with Garrus eventually leading a tour, pointing out parts of the ship in a bored fashion. He still managed to keep the conversation going. This was time wasted that could have been used to tell Shepard everything. But would it be Satima's secret to keep or share? Those questions kept looping in her mind.

Satima decided she had enough of the waiting. When she got to the engineering deck, she wandered off to the elevator. She took the lift back to the crew deck, immediately walking right into an asari and Shepard from the elevator. "Your back from the little tour. Good. This is Liara T'Soni. She is an expert on Prothean technology and culture, specializing in the Prothean extinction. Also, a damn good biotic.", Shepard mentioned.

"Liara...", Satima said in thought.

Liara looked at Satima then back to Shepard. She could tell there was a slight twitch to her name when Shepard said it to the young woman. "Something wrong?", she asked Satima, concerned.

Satima faced a new problem. In her timeline, Liara's betrayal nearly destroyed their efforts at escaping hive. Her heinous act relived in Satima's memories. She tried to kill Reaper, what if those
intentions were there from the start? "Why do you trust Asari?", Satima asked, rudely.

"Excuse me?", Liara replied. She noticed how defensive the alien girl became.

"I know what you are. Stay away from Shepard.", Satima warned, leaning into Liara's face. Something about this wasn't right and Shepard became determined to find out why. "What the hell is your problem?", Shepard yelled at Satima, walking in front of Liara.

"Have you forgotten so quickly that you're my guest on this ship? I haven't given you permission to accuse my friends in front of me!", she warned Satima with a nasty glare. "She's the reason we have something on the Reapers and is the head of the crucible project. Liara is not an enemy!", Shepard shouted angrily.

Satima stared in subtle fear. That evil glare of rage. Oh, she can be Reaper alright! After a few seconds of mental calm, she faced them both with an apologetic stance, remembering how she needed to gain Shepard's trust. Satima bowed her head with a sigh. "Apologies, Shepard. I did not have a pleasant experience with asari in my past." She then glanced to Liara, warily.

Convinced this was a small misunderstanding, Liara tried to calm the air. "It's all right Shepard. I can understand an apprehensiveness and culture shock. Satima, the Commander and I accept your apology." Liara nudged Shepard's shoulder, who waved Satima on.

Shepard wondered as the girl moved through the deck. Satima knows asari. So how can she claim to be unfamiliar with this galaxy? Is she from the reapers, or another species?

The salarian noticed Satima on her own way through the mess. Holding a data pad with the information Michelle has sent him, which are a match to his own findings. "I am pleased to know we can converse. Your blood samples have come in.", he informed.

She panicked. "Blood samples?", Satima asked nervously. She had forgotten her half-breed DNA. They will demand an explanation, and quickly. Satima thought on the fly what she could say. The salarian gestured Shepard to him, along with Liara. Satima frowned, crossing her arms. Shepard stepped closer to Mordin as he pointed to his holo screen. "Clear traces of human DNA right here. And there is the turian DNA. Clearly remarkable, she's a hybrid. Of that I am certain."

"Are you one hundred percent sure?", Shepard asked cautiously.

Mordin nodded quickly, "Absolutely. Doctor Michelle sent me the files from the citadel's medical data. This is clearly now classified, since the council has put a lock on the files. Preventing any spectre from knowing this, save you."

Shepard and Satima both exchanged glances, with Shepard giving the girl a warning glare. "I'm going to ask you, one more time. Who the hell are you?", Shepard stared waringly towards Satima.

Satima realized the door behind her had been locked by Liara, who stood with Shepard, her biotics slightly flaring. "The only one of my kind.", she put a hand behind her back to the panel.

"How did you get through the conduit? Did the Reapers send you?", Shepard asked alarmed.

Satima could hack the door open and run. This was a mistake. She didn't mean to come here, or go through the rift. The voices demanded it! Shepard will find everything out, then it would be over. The Reapers win again and Satima gets a front row seat to how it all went down.

Seconds of silence passed, then the door opened, but not by Satima's hack. She turned to face Garrus. He noticed the tense setting, Liara's biotics and Shepard's battle stance. The small framed
Satima staring at him in shock.
"Something I miss?", he asked curious.

"She's not an unknown alien after all, but a hybrid of two very current species.", Liara informed.

Garrus stood over Satima as she backed further away into the medical examiner's desk. The terminal came on with a small whine. She held her hand out in a defensive manner towards them," I never led you on to any conclusion, that either of you apparently made on your own. Yes, I am both human and turian, but I'm not your enemy. I am an ally.", Satima tried to explain.

Shepard walked forward, "I don't believe you." She advanced toward Satima, who, from a deep memory of her childhood, naturally flinched back. Shepard stopped, confused. "Take her in the core room, and lock her up for now.", she ordered.

Two crewmen grabbed Satima by the arms, leading her away, but she fought them off. The hybrid ran for the door, before being scooped up and caught by Garrus. She fought him hard, but he had the upper strength to hold her firmly. Shepard opened the door to the core room for Garrus to throw her in. She ran back to the door as it closed, banging on it, defeated.

Satima sat in the memory core under strict lock-down. EDI was keeping watch over her. Shepard paced back and forth in the battery room. Garrus listened as he calibrated the main gun. "Everything about her spells out trouble and Illusive Man. Or the Reapers. I need to contact Miranda."

Garrus pressed panels while watching a ratio build in numbers on his monitor," A human-turian hybrid. In this age. Who would've thought.", he remarked. He quickly glanced at Shepard, but she was too busy thinking.

She paced again, then stood behind him. "Do you think she's an experiment?"

Garrus gazed at her, "She could be?"

"Or an assassin.", Shepard implied.

Or... maybe a girl looking for help. She could be in danger.", he replied back. Garrus crossed his arms, thinking aloud in amazement, "What a story that must be."

Shepard chuckled, "One hell of a story then."

Garrus stared at her. Her smile brightened the broody features on her face. "I'm sure you'll find out the truth soon. Just give her a little time to settle."

Shepard sighed, relaxing. "Since the reapers came, everything has been chaos. Nothing makes since anymore. Liara's got some super weapon the protheans made, Miranda and Jacob haven't contacted me about the Illusive Man's plans. Assuming they're still with Cerberus."

Garrus stepped to her, "I'll see if Victus can spare some technicians for Liara's project. As for Miranda and Jacob, they can take of themselves. Especially Miranda.", he mused.

She smirked, "Thanks, Garrus." They lingered in the main battery, with Shepard quietly leaving. Garrus turned back to his work, wondering about the hybrid girl, locked in the core room.

Moments later, Shepard ventured into the med-bay, curious about the girl. She unlocked the core room door, walking in to see Satima sit up. The commander stared at her, a question burning in her gaze. "Give me some information. Anything. Where do you come from? Do you understand what you are?", Shepard asked.
"In exchange for what?", Satima responded.

"In exchange for trust, that's what.", Shepard replied.

Satima sighed loudly, gazing off. Shepard began pacing in front of the hybrid girl as she spoke. "I come from a dark future. One where the Reapers rule in chaos and fear. There are survivors. Doesn't matter... they're probably all dead.", she answered.

Shepard scoffed, "Do you really expect me to believe that?" Shaking her head with arms crossed in irritation. "That you're from the damn future?!

Satima stared at the commander. "No. But I'd at least expect someone like you to listen, before dismissing what I have to say."

That bit hard. Shepard stopped pacing, and listened. Satima couldn't look her in the eye, Reaper would just stare right back. She wanted out of her small cell. "I used the conduit as a means of fast travel... to the past. I come from an alternate future. That's all I can give you.", she finished.

It sounded convincing, especially with the girls worried expression. But there was something missing from it. "Okay. I listened.", Shepard turned away, leaving the core room. Satima buried her head into her knees.

Shepard spoke to the council and demanded they give her complete custody of the girl.

They complied without hesitation, which would normally be strange, but Shepard didn't have the time for speculation. Not when the Reapers were slaughtering millions.

Satima sat inside the small compartment, above the floor. It had a shield over it preventing her escape. A wave of pure exhaustion took hold, and she fell asleep, in a deep dream. It started on Haven.

Jormun was busy in the engine room, keeping their drive core from overheating. He looked at her and waved.

Satima smiled, continuing her stroll through the old ship. When Archer appeared in the shuttle bay. He had an evil grin, holding a gun to Cauis. The boy stared at her in fear.

She tried to speak, but no words came out. Someone gripped her arm tightly, twisting hard. Pulled around suddenly, she faced the Garrus from her timeline. Her father. He had an anger in his gaze, gripping her arm, almost breaking it. "This is your fault!", he roared.

Satima shook, upset. She couldn't speak, only listen. He kept accusing her, when she felt a presence around her. Satima woke to Shepard staring. The girl had been whimpering in her sleep. It made Satima uncomfortable. "I'm ready to let you out on one condition.", Shepard stated, with a wary look.

Satima swallowed her nightmare back, sitting up straighter. "And what would that be?", she asked.

"That you tell me the truth.", Shepard answered. She leaned against the railing over the core function panels, waiting. They hummed to the ships rhythm. Shepard stared at the blue lights blinking in tune. Everything Satima said before, it couldn't be true. The hybrid sat there watching her.

"Still curious to how I got here?", she finally asked.

"The relay you came through, who sent you?", Shepard inquired. She prepared herself to her the Illusive Man or something that dealt with the reapers.
Satima nodded, then proceeded to reveal a few things. "An alien race you've never heard of.", she answered.

"Who?", Shepard demanded in alarm. Couldn't be the protheans?

Satima sat up, "They are called Sentarians. Ancient pre-civilization. Or, at least that's what my friend says."

"Friend?", the commander asked.

Satima replied, "She's part of the reason why I'm here."

Shepard's mind was full of questions, searching the young hybrid for answers that were only provided in a vague manner. "There is more than one reason?", she wondered. "Then what would it be?"

Satima cleared her throat. "Have the reapers come to harvest yet?"

Shepard folded her arms defensively, glancing away. The recent memory of earth under siege, and all those people running for their lives. People she couldn't save. "In force.", she answered. The girl tilted her head, an apologetic stare to Shepard. "I can't tell you much, not yet. I'm not sure what I can say, without screwing everyone. This is all new and frightening to me."

Shepard looked up to the hybrid, she wasn't satisfied with her answer, but keeping that girl locked away for too long could cause distrust. The commander unlocked the barrier, letting Satima loose. She nearly fell forward before catching herself. "Anything else important?", Shepard asked agitated.

"Yes... no... I don't know.", Satima said hesitantly.

"You better know, and soon.", Shepard warned

She left Satima in the core room. Feeling exhausted, she walked to the elevator and pressed the panel for her cabin. Shepard exhaled, leaning against the rail in the lift. She stretched her arms above her head, trying to work out the knots in her back.

When she reached the top floor of the Normandy, the door slid open and Shepard stepped out. Into her cabin, she walked slowly to her desk, only to fall in her chair.

The terminal whined on with all her recent reports covering the screen. At times, Garrus would observe each floor for security purposes on the Normandy. He knows EDI can do a faster search, and more thorough with the meticulous aspects.

But his instincts were fine-tuned from the years in C-Sec, and his father's training. Eventually the camera found Shepard. Alone and staring away into an empty screen on her desk. Garrus used the elevator to the cabin, casually walking inside and finding Shepard typing away on her terminal. "Charlie, are you okay?", he touched her arm.

She flinched at him and looked as if reality came back to her. Shepard shook her head slightly and hastily stood up, stepping to the couch. She sat down, unable to keep a gaze long enough on anything in the room. Garrus sat on the coffee table across from her, watching her reaction, as Shepard glanced down and let out a sigh. "I have so much to fix. And now we have this hybrid girl who tells me that a mysterious race sent her through the conduit.", Shepard spoke, upset.

Garrus held her gaze as she looked at him. Shepard swallowed hard then smirked to herself. "I think I'm slowly going insane. Maybe I should drop her off at the nearest desert planet and pretend none of
this ever happened."

He chuckled and sat beside her. She leaned on him as he started to speak. "You need to sleep. It's been two days of running and you've been staring at the crucible schematics for most of it. Whoever this girl is, the truth will come out."

"The truth did come out. Well, some of it.", Shepard began closing her eyes, "I'll just take a nap here.", she said.

"Oh no. It's bed for you.", he replied leading her to the soft mattress. She curled up on her side sighing in relief when he covered her in a blanket. Garrus sat on the edge keeping watch for a short time. What if Shepard is right, and that girl is not completely innocent? He glanced towards the door, feeling an urgency to do some investigating of his own.

Meanwhile, Satima didn't want to leave the core room. It was quiet and empty. She missed Haven because of it. Sitting in the corner of the compartment wall seemed the best place to think.

Half an hour went by with Satima almost deciding to walk out and explore the ship again, when the door opened suddenly with Garrus walking in. He walked up to her, face to face. Satima never felt she should fear Garrus before. Not in her time. This Garrus, however, is not her father, and seemed more unpredictable than the alternate one. "What are you really?", he asked bluntly.

"What?", Satima replied, confused.

Garrus walked forward, slowly, "You came through the conduit on the citadel, with claims of time travel. Which is entirely impossible.", he starts to back Satima into the wall. "A dangerous traitor used that same conduit to try and destroy the citadel. Shepard brings you here to find out that you are apparently a hybrid resembling that of a human." He looks her up and down with intense criticism. "How stupid do you think we are?", he demanded.

"All of it is true, Garrus.", Satima declared.

Garrus stepped closer in a menacing manner, "Suddenly you know me? Say my name like it's familiar." He stared her down, "If you're here to hurt Shepard, I. will. end. you."

At first, she was utterly confused at his allegations. Why would they think that? Then he kept his gaze, stern and threatening. Satima matched his glare. So, they think she's the enemy? She stood in a defensive stance, ready to take him if he tried anything. "I would watch my tone if I were you. You don't know what I'm capable of." Her timid, soft voice had turned more mature and equally hostile.

The atmosphere in the room became tense. Garrus's threats touched home but more importantly, this girl had a fire in her eyes. She had been in battle before, and often. There's more to this guest than she appears. Suddenly Liara strolled in. The two of them slowly backing away from each other. She crossed her arms, "Now what did I miss?"

Garrus left, unanswering while Liara eyed a nervous Satima, She was twitchy, ready to defend herself. The hybrid averted her gaze and wandered off to the compartment.

Liara shook her head, leaving. Time had passed, with the girl wandering out into the medbay. Satima watched the salarian mix two liquids at his workstation. He was deep in concentration. "I heard what you are." A deep female voice spoke to her from the right of the room. It was the krogan woman.

Satima leaned on the wall. "Does it offend you?", Satima asked.

The krogan female smirked, looking over the room. "No. I understand loneliness when I see it. And
pain." She stared at the hybrid.

"What do you know of pain?", Satima scoffed with arm crossed.

"A great deal young one.", she answered.

Satima walked closer to her curiously, "What happened to you?"

The female krogan held her knees tightly, "I was a mother, and a shaman to my people. I've been
midwife and warrior when necessity called." She glanced to Mordin. "Now, I'm a lab experiment for
all the galaxy to marvel and fear. I can change the course of my people's history with my own body."

Satima looked over the krogan, stunned. "What do you mean, your body?" She was a little afraid to
ask, but the way this female spoke captivated her.

With a low chuckle, the female answered. "My people have suffered the genophage for a long time.
We lose hope with every still-born krogan, we became no better than a barbaric race. Fighting for the
right of mating, destroying our clans in fool's rage."

She released her legs, now getting off the table. "There is a cure in me. And was in many others.
Mordin has made sure this nightmare ends." The female gestured to the salarian at the lab station.
"He's correcting an action made in anger. The salarians made the contagion, but the turians
unleashed it on us."

Satima stared at her. She had never known about this part of history. "The turians killed your
babies?", she asked, naively.

"Not in the way you're seeing it, young one." The krogan turned to Satima. "I heard you are both
human and turian. Do you know how this happened?"

"Yes.", Satima answered, already upset. She held back the strongest emotions.

"Don't be ashamed of your people's history. You were not a part of it, and neither are the ones now.
The important aspect of this lesson, is to learn from this atrocity, this mistake. And never repeat it
again." The female walked back to her table, sitting on it again to rest.

Satima was overwhelmed. Her people? She glimpsed Mordin brining a steel tray of injections for the
krogan. He gave the hybrid a nod, still humming an incessant tune. Satima left the med-bay, past
crew members and into the lift.

She stayed in the elevator, thinking. Has this galaxy always been so dark? So, sinister? Salarians and
turians killing krogan babies, and females forced to be experimented on? Satima didn't want to stay
anymore, she wanted to leave.

The elevator opened with Liara standing on the outside. She and the girl stared at each other. Satima
quickly pushed past her, leaving back to the core room.
Liara noted the odd behavior, and left to visit Shepard.
A Soldeir's Priority

Chapter Summary

The citadel is under attack! An urgent message sends the commander and team to save the council. As the hybrid tags along, an enemy thought lost in time, returns.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shepard watched the monitor again. The display in front of her playing out the disturbance in the Citadel gardens. The conduit came to life suddenly and a dark figure is thrown out. Satima staggers to her feet. Everyone is running and screaming to get away. Afraid it's another attack by the reapers or geth, dozens of C-Sec guards surround the bridge, targeting her with their weapons.

What if what Satima says is true, about coming from the future?

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Satima watched Doctor Chockwas type on her monitor. Chockwas knew she was being peeped at by the hybrid. With such curious wide eyes and a furrowed brow that seemed stuck in place. It made Karin laugh to herself. The girl stayed in her corner. A darker place in the med-bay to continue an observation from a small distance. Karin glanced and smiled at her. "What is your name, girl?"

Satima leaned on the wall in a standing position as she contemplated answering the human. Might as well acclimatize. "Satima.", she answered out loud.

Karin typed a few more words for her report. Then she turned off her display and stood. "I am Doctor Chockwas. I have been on the Normandy for quite some time.", she smiled warmly.

Satima didn't care for smiles. Plenty of predators grin right before they pounce. Her trust issues remained. Karin noticed how Satima refused to smile or even acknowledge the gesture. So, she decided to carefully approach her. When she reached the table Satima was standing behind, Karin spoke to her again. "You are a unique type of hybrid. Of course, you would be the first of your kind. Tell me, how did your parents manage to... conceive you without prenatal problems?", Karin folded her arms.

Satima gulped. The truth behind that was more twisted and sinister than a simple act of conception. She doesn't even understand why, as it seemed all directive wanted was to mock Shepard in every way. He or IT- took her mind, her freedom and everything else in between. It wasn't fair to Satima and Shepard both, but it happened.

That's one reason why she should stay in this timeline. To stop the Reapers. No Directive, no Satima. At this moment of intense thought, Karin snapped her fingers in the girl's face. "Child, are you alright? You seemed to have been in a daze."

Satima shook her head quickly and gave a curt answer, "I'm fine!"

She hurriedly left back inside the core room. Karin turned around unamused at the girl's rudeness, and looked over some samples Mordin left from eight hours earlier. The doctor re-tested them to
possible DNA matches in the network databases. She'll get an answer one way or another.

The hybrid girl was left on the Normandy while Shepard took a team to the surface of Tuchunka. The krogan female had left with them, Mordin keeping her safe. Satima wanted to go, but didn’t make an inquiry of it. She wondered if the planet was different or the same since her future timeline. Crew members spoke loudly in the mess of Shepard fighting a reaper, and using the dangerous planet's thresher maws to destroy one.

She stayed at the door of the med-bay listening in awe. To see Reaper, no… Shepard, in action against the giant machines, would’ve been epic. With everyone still passing the news around, Satima decided to wait for Shepard’s return in the core room. The next mission, she must accompany! This is history, after all.

The mission on Tuchanka turned into a success. The genophage cured and Wrex made Shepard an honorary krogan. He even called her sister. All this became overshadowed by the fact that Mordin died. Shepard lost a friend.

"My responsibility to fix. Need to save them. No more… No more dead."

Shepard headed to her cabin. Once inside, she hastily took off her battle gear. The tight black undersuit clinging like a second skin, almost suffocating.

"Had to be me. Someone else might have gotten it wrong."

Those words stung bitter as Shepard watched the Shroud explode in fire and crumble to the desert below it. Somewhere in that pile, lays the mangled and burnt body of a hero. She sat on the edge of her sofa, head bent down in defeat. How many? How many more will she lose in the name of war? Damn Reapers! They can all go to hell!

"Commander.", EDI's voice echoed for a second.

"Yes…", Shepard replied.

"Satima would like to speak with you."

Shepard sighed briefly. "Let her in."

Minutes later Satima came through the door inside the famed cabin of Commander Shepard. She passed the fish tank in-bedded in the ships wall. There was one type of fish in it. It swam to her outline and stared with its large aquatic eyes. Satima ignored it.

Shepard sat on the sofas edge watching her. Satima stood. "Shepard. I have various tactical skills in combat.", she informed, standing at attention like a soldier.

Shepard raised an eyebrow, "Good to know. Why are you bringing this up?"

Satima cleared her throat, "I can fight."

They seemed to stare at each other for a moment. Shepard stood up and walked to her bed. She dropped on it, laying on her back with hands resting over her stomach. Satima watched as she closed her eyes. Was she asleep? This was strange behavior. Reaper never stopped patrolling, surveying and observing the surroundings. She never once rested too long and taught Satima the same.

But the Shepard in front of her did. It became oddly relieving to see such a calm approach and a casual setting. Satima let herself sit in the same spot Shepard occupied minutes before. Then Shepard
Satima sat up. She nodded, but remembered Shepard's eyes were closed. "Yes. I can follow your command.", Satima couldn't believe the words that left her mouth.

Her usual impetuous behavior became mature. Shepard opened her eyes. "Okay. Next mission, show me what you got. Follow my lead and don't wander off. If you want a quick reference to how this works, go speak to Garrus. Right now, he's one of the only original members of the Normandy."

Satima's heart pounded. "Right...great idea.", she thought. Especially after the pissing match they had in the core room.

As Satima started to leave, Shepard turned over in her bed. A small, soft whimper was heard, Satima quickly left. Reaper seemed stronger and more capable to her by the minute compared to the soft emotional Shepard. Maybe the Directive's control was an improvement? Satima shook her head.

No one should be controlled. If this Shepard felt emotional, then she had every right to be so. Satima knows well how that goes. Too well. She soon stood outside the battery room door. Garrus is always serious, broody and in her timeline, a bit of a drunk. Could still put a bullet between a pyjacks eyes while stumbling. As she reminisced, the door slid open. Garrus bumped into her and dropped a data pad.

"Spirits kid!", he said aloud.

It made her cringe. He would say that to her on Haven. A lot. "Apologies, Garrus.", she replied.

He smirked at her, "Don't pretend our conversation didn't happen." Garrus picked up the data pad.

She averted her gaze, "I haven't."

"Good.", he glared, noticing she didn't budge. "What do you want?", he asked, annoyed.

"I have a question.", she blurted out.

Garrus stood waiting for her question, gesturing for her to speak. He seemed less patient than her father. A whole timeline ago, now.

"Commander Shepard has consented to me accompanying the next mission.", Satima finished. She felt confident except for the puzzled look on his face.

"What?", he spoke aloud.

Satima looked down. This seemed a mistake. Back to the core room. As she turned around a taloned hand touched her shoulder quickly, she turned to it. "Listen, kid. We haven't been properly acquainted. I'm gonna need some convincing you're not the enemy, by telling the truth. Starting with how you were born.", he demanded. "And what you're really doing here."

Satima scoffed, "And what if I don't really know? What if the answers are beyond reach and I'm just as in the dark to my existence as you are?"

Garrus's serious manner turned to a pure comical state. He laughed enough to draw the looks of another Normandy crew member, but stopped himself shortly after. "Then we can drop you off the nearest desert planet." She stared at him. Garrus slapped her arm, "Come on, I was just kidding."
Satima stood feeling absolutely stupid as he brushed past her into the mess area. She turned to follow him and spoke in a hushed tone. "I knew that."

At the table, Garrus held a cup of dextro coffee as Satima seated herself on the opposite side. He sipped two times and stared at her. "Are you gonna talk?", he waited.

Satima wanted to leave this horrid ship. No one knew her. She knew no one (except Garrus and Liara—the bitch), this was all very uncomfortable. And she couldn't say anything about Reaper.

Reaper and Shepard were polar opposites. Galaxy hero versus Anti-hero psycho. Satima stopped thinking.

Garrus sat there still giving the young girl a chance to speak. The amount of fear that came off her clouded his judgement. She needed to adjust and relax.

Satima finally opened her mouth to speak. "I've flown a ship, and fought a mechanized reaperfied assassin. Smuggled refugees off world, shot down enemy ships, and been in quite a few scraps."

Garrus stopped her, "Whoa, slow down. How about something more detailed and less like a mercs resume.", he asked.

"Alright.", she said unsure, "I have training in hand-to-hand, melee and fire arms. I can pilot class L and class B ships, provide technical backup on the field."

Garrus whistled, "Now that is a resume Shepard would approve. That and the previous information."

Satima surprisingly gave a smile. She blushed from the embarrassment, looking away to the floor, then back to Garrus who seemed confused. "Thank you… uh, sir.", she replied awkwardly, glancing around in confusion as to what to say.

Garrus nodded, feeling equally indifferent about being called sir by her. Minutes passed, when he finished his coffee. Shepard came in dressed in her normal military attire. "We're heading back to the citadel. Received a message from the salarian councilor.", she looked at Garrus, "Seemed troubled. Something about Udina."

Garrus got up and smirked, "Think it has something to do with him being a potential security risk?"

Shepard crossed her arms, seemingly stunned. "How do you know this?", she asked surprised.

Garrus shrugged, "I have my sources."

Shepard turned around to Satima, who was still sitting at the table. "Satima, you're up this mission. Should be easy for you to get a handle on things."

The girl sat up hiding the excitement building up inside. "I'm ready.", she exclaimed.

The Citadel
Inbound shuttle ride to the presidium

In the shuttle ride inside the presidium, Shepard began to shout her orders over the hatch door being opened. "Cerberus has attacked and partially taken over the station, particularly C-Sec Headquarters. We need to clear out the bastards to get to the men inside. Satima, you'll provide back up while Garrus and I clear a path."

Satima nodded and held her pistol tight. She was nervous. Not because of Cerberus, she's fought
bigger. But because they were watching her. If she messed up or got cocky, they wouldn't trust her
again. That trust means the difference between stopping the reapers or dying by them.

The shuttle quickly hovered over the C-Sec docking hub for their patrol cars. Several guards stood
their ground at the entrance to the C-Sec HQ. Many were shot down as the team leapt out and took
cover. Shepard took point, leading the way down the parking walkway. "Watch out for snipers!",
she yelled to them on comms.

Garrus heard his commanders voice and obeyed, but was more in a hurry to reach the entrance and
the remaining guards. Cerberus soldiers ranged from typical ground fodder to those crouched behind
a massive shield. It prevented the penetration of bullets to their bodies. Shepard had gotten annoyed
quickly because of it. She turned to Garrus who already seemed to know what she was thinking.
Those shields had a small open window, a peep hole for the trooper to look through. Garrus brought
out his mantis and showed his expert skill in three seconds.

"One down!", he shouted in excitement.

Satima watched them fight. She had to admit, it brought a chill to her spine. Both deadly and skilled,
these seasoned veterans of war cut a bloody swath between them and their foes in this uphill battle.
Approaching the middle of the walkway, a lone engineer stood in front of assault troopers. He let out
a wide grin and hastily set down a square metal pod. It quickly transformed into a turret. "GET
DOWN!", Shepard screamed.

Several rounds fired towards them. Satima almost got grazed. Garrus fired two proximity mines
around it to bring down the shields. That barely nudged it. He then took a chance by standing in the
open and using his overload skill on the machine. It worked!

Shepard stood up and fired hard on the turret. Within a minute, it exploded around a few troopers. In
that explosion, Garrus used the advantage to move closer, firing on them. Another fell to his bullets.
As Satima provided suppression fire so Shepard could move forward, the lone blonde human at the
entrance screamed in pain. He had been shot in the gut. Not a good place to receive a wound.

If they reach him in time, maybe they could stop the bleeding. Shepard yelled for him to hold on as
five more troopers landed in front of them, blocking the way. Garrus shot two of them before having
to duck to reload. Satima saw from the corner of her eye three more troopers silently flanking the
man at the entrance. Even if they manage to quickly dispatch the other soldiers, that guy was
seriously doomed.

There would be no time to debate, Satima left the field leaving Shepard and Garrus's back open. She
had to get to them first or that human was dead. Satima quietly ran in the exact direction of the three
soldiers. She hugged the lower wall while crouching. Staying closely behind for the right moment to
attack. They surrounded the man and laughed at him.

"Well, Commander Bailey, looks like your usefulness is up. Time to die.", the leader of the group
threatened.

Bailey clutched his side trying to hold the wound from pooling out any more blood, it seemed it
wouldn't matter anyway. If Shepard didn't get up those steps quick, he's a dead man. As the leader
was about to pull the trigger to Bailey's head, he yelled in pain, dropping his rifle. Suddenly, clawing
at the back of his head and falling over motionless. There was a seven-inch blade embedded in his
skull.

The other two fired at Satima, who dodged the bullets. She released a breath, emerged from her
cover and shot each one in the head perfectly. Bailey let out a long whistle. "Thanks kid. I would've
been kissing my mother in heaven, or hell if you hadn't been here.", he thanked her leaning against the wall.

Shepard and Garrus ran up the steps. Bailey was all right. Shepard knelt to him and administered medi-gel. They exchanged words and glances to Satima while Garrus observed the dead troopers. "Nice job. But next time, warn us when you're about to go in assassin mode.", he gave her a slight glare before returning to Shepard's side.

Satima's heart raced as Garrus spoke. He wasn't too pleased. Bailey sat for another minute to let the medi-gel sink in his wound and soothe the sore flesh. He looked at the strange alien girl then back at Shepard. "Thanks Shepard for saving my ass.", he laughed bitterly from his wounded side.

"No problem Bailey. What happened here?", she asked sitting on one leg.

"Damn Cerberus that's what happened! We had no warning. It just... happened! A few of my men and I tried to stop it but... you can see how that worked out.", he glanced around the dead.

Shepard nodded sympathetically and stood up. She turned around to Satima who was looking over the small battle scene she took part of. The three dead Cerberus soldiers in a row. One had a blade in his skull lying face down.

"Satima... you did this?", Shepard asked her. Satima nodded. "Next time, warn us.", Shepard slapped Satima's back.

Bailey led them inside the lobby, to the receptionist desk. He sat at the front desk accessing the terminal. "Damn.", he exclaimed. His expression troubled.

Shepard leaned over the edge of the counter. "What's wrong?"

Bailey clutched his side but continued his typing with one hand. "The salarian councilor has taken refuge in the executor's office. You'll need directions to it."

Shepard nodded, waiting for the go-ahead by Bailey. Satima looked around the lobby, glancing at the occasional plant or advertised digital frame to join C-Sec. She gave a slight smile to the thought of joining a police force on this station. Turning to see Garrus's mandible frown. Either he caught on to her thought and disapproved, or something else was bothering him.

Another voice spoke, flanged tones like the turians but smoother. Shepard called it Thane, and listened as the other person relayed information. Garrus also listened, nodding his head at her, while she smiled.

Old friend?

Beginning their recon inside the damaged building, two assault troopers across the hall had their backs to them. The perfect moment for surprise. Shepard used a biotic power and lashed them hard, taking a trooper down easily. The other turned shouting while firing his weapon. He became silent as a blade entered his chest. Satima walked over casually taking it out. Shepard watched her, then suddenly, guardians began firing at them.

Using their shields to block oncoming cover, Garrus used his mantis again. Shepard shot the other one with a red savage looking pistol. It had a white alien skull on it. Satima envied that pistol for those few seconds. They pushed on ahead only to meet another turret. Garrus used overload with Shepard shooting it into metal slag.

Satima rushed around a corner to take point in case of anymore surprises. Further up the stairs, they passed a terminal and some mod kits. Shepard picked one up to examine it. She attached it to her rifle
with a smile. Deeper in the room four more troopers descended from the ceiling. Crashing down around them. Shepard fired. Garrus took cover again and once more used his mines to surround them. Satima fired along with Shepard. It wasn't long before they all fell dead.

In front of a work desk laid a female c-sec cop. Facing downward on the floor with a red pool of blood around her head. "Inside job, like Mars. Cerberus sure likes their sleeper agents.\", Shepard commented in controlled anger.

"Looks more like a surprise than an execution. These are hardcore traitors here in C-Sec, Shepard.\", Garrus started to fume in disgust.

"Keep it together Garrus. You can have your revenge on the bastards when they attack, deal?\", she looked at him as his commanding officer more than his lover.

They exchanged glances before he broke his glare. "Commander.\" His tone sounded calm, dangerously calm.

Once they cleared another room of centurions and one guardian, Garrus ran inside a men's room finding another c-sec agent's corpse. Shepard followed close behind with Satima in tow. "Cerberus didn't even bother to drag him into the hall before killing him!\", Garrus's angry glare burned through them both.

Garrus rushed out to lead the way to the next room. An intercom goes off. One lone engineer is attempting to destroy the elevator controls. Shepard begins to sneak under the broken window to stop him, but Garrus jumps over the window seal. The engineer turns around, body slammed into the wall. Garrus takes a hit before delivering a more powerful blow, knocking the engineer down. He tries to get away, receiving a gunshot to the head. Garrus opens the latch to the elevator controls and the door slides open. As he jumps back over the window, Shepard stands in his way. "That's enough, Vakarian.\", her body an immovable force.

Garrus looks her up and down while pacing in anger, "You saw what Cerberus did! He didn't deserve any mercy!"

Shepard shook her head, "That isn't what I'm talking about. He deserved what you gave him, but I need you to get your shit together. I know you're angry. I am too, but this is not the time to play Archangel. Got it!\", she yelled at him.

Garrus sighed and nodded, "Yes... Commander."

Shepard moved to him and touched his arm gently. She glanced to Satima who was watching the whole scene intently. Satima looked away in embarrassment. With a slight, ahem clearing the air. The team proceeded forward in the elevator. During the ride, Shepard's intercom opened. It was Bailey. "Shepard. Any survivors?"

"No Bailey. Cerberus planted sleeper agents. No one had a chance.\", she glanced to Garrus. He busied himself with his mantis.

"Damn. Alright Shepard. I know you're doing everything you can.\", Bailey shut off the com.

The next area was empty. One door tried to open but shut itself quickly. Satima walked over to the damaged panel. Shepard found some useful items as Garrus stared around in memory. "Ouch.\", Satima said under her breath. The panel sparked on her hand. It was too badly damaged to repair. She looked around the room next to it. A terminal labeled door control was left on.
She pressed a holo button and the malfunctioning door opened. Shepard watched this young girl rummage, hack and work her way through this damaged area. It seemed second nature to scavenge for her. Garrus found an opened com channel. It had static on the other end but he wanted to try to find someone still alive. "Lamont! Mendez!", he yelled.

Other names were shouted over the dead comms. Shepard told him to be quiet since Cerberus was around every corner. "If they can't hear our gunfire, they can't hear this.", he replied.

Shepard stared at him in irritation. Garrus threw the com across the room. Satima felt sorry for him. He lost his friends to betrayal. Something she knew about, too.

They finally reached the Executor's Office. Two preoccupied Cerberus soldiers, this time executing a c-sec sleeper agent who had ceased to be useful, stood in the entry way. Shepard nodded to Garrus's sniper rifle. She took one out as well. Together they dropped them both. Satima stood impressed.

Once through the cafe, Cerberus soldiers flooded the room. Weapons fire pinging off the surface of walls and shattering any remaining glass doors or windows. Satima ran, taking cover to a set of stairs leading downward in the middle of the lobby. She used this cover to prevent troopers from flanking Shepard. Garrus swapped his mantis for the M-76 Revenant. He smiled at the site of a beautifully dangerous weapon.

Peaking from cover, he pressed the trigger letting the rounds burst in a spray of bullets, raining instant death on any Cerberus scum that crossed its path. Shepard ducked behind the partition of walls in the breakroom, hearing a woman's voice broadcast from the T.V to her right. It was Khalisah al-Jilani. She was apparently covering c-sec's attempt to reclaim the comm towers. Looping her footage to contact other c-sec for reinforcements. Shepard hoped it worked for them. At this moment, the councilor would be her main concern. Especially if this was some type of coup attempt. She needed the evidence and the villain. The last trooper fell clearing the area of any hostiles. They quickly ran up the stairs, opened the door to the office, only to find the executor dead.

"What a surprise.", Garrus said unamused.

"Bailey, it looks like they got the executor and two of his bodyguards.", Shepard reported to Bailey.

"Damn. Alright keep searching. If you don't see the councilors body, don't count him out yet.", Bailey returned the com call.

Shepard and Garrus caught a slight disturbance in the workstation below. A chair is moved on its own. It's the councilor! He was under cloak the whole time. "Look!", she yelled.

Garrus hoisted his rifle over his shoulder to mockingly laugh, "Little bastard.", he said.

"Found him. He looks unharmed.", she reported once more to Bailey.

"Get him somewhere safe!", Bailey replied to her.

Satima felt relieved this councilor was alive still. At least he had the intellect to hide. Garrus turned around to leave the office for the councilor, Shepard continued to look out the office window. She turned her back to wave Satima over to her. In the distance on a beam, Satima spotted a dark figure landing silently. He jumped down surprising the councilor and herself! Shepard watched Satima's surprised look.

She looked behind her out the window to see the ominous figure slowly approaching the councilor.
Shepard shot the window out and jumped down from it. The apparent assassin leaped over the
councilor standing behind, trying a biotic attack on him. Satima noticed his cybernetic body, similar
to Archer's. A frightening concept that made her second guess herself.

Shepard walked to them cautiously targeting the assassin with her rifle. "Don't even think about it.",
er her tone resolute and stern.

The councilor speaks in a frightened hushed tone, "Shepard, he's going to kill us all!"

"That remains to be seen.", she replied still targeting the assassin.

Satima and Garrus quietly come down the stairs to help Shepard.

"No! I mean Udina! He's staging a coup and has the other councilors now. To hand over to
Cerberus!", the salarian councilor held his hands in the air.

"Shit.", Shepard thought.

Garrus along with Satima point their weapons toward the assassin. Shepard raised an eye in apparent
victory. "Three on one pal.", she says confidently," It's over."

The assassin grins at her, taking note of the strange alien girl with the turian. " No. Now it's fun."

The sound of a pistol priming brings the assassins attention to a drell behind him. Shepard whispers
the drell's name to herself.

Thane points the weapon firmly towards the assassin's head. They begin their melee battle of martial
arts. The hand to hand battle becomes intense for a few seconds with the assassin quickly grabbing
Thane and throwing him over his shoulder to the ground.

Thane immediately stands back up, firing his pistol at the assassin. He disappears. Satima tries to
back out quietly to find him. After all, she was trained for this sort of fight, not for a team battle. The
assassin uncloaks behind Thane and pulls out a small katana. Close quarters combat blade. He
charges toward Thane, who starts firing his weapon at him again. The assassin dodges, ducking
behind desks and leaping around the team. He confronts Thane with a fast strike of his blade.
Thane dodges it expertly delivering powerful kicks and one swift biotic blow. He knocks the killer
backwards across the room.

Thane stoops down to pick up his pistol, cocking a fresh thermal clip. He points the weapon back
towards the assassin. Satima watches, hoping to learn something from this aged master hitman. That
young amateur hasn't a prayer. Shepard and Garrus keep a close eye on the scene while protecting
the councilor. She has no doubt Thane can take care of this hired merc. Then the unthinkable
happens.

The assassin back flips back on his feet. He charges at Thane, who equally bolts forward firing his
pistol, but the assassin makes a strike stance, forcing Thane to leap up with a killing blow. He tricks
Thane, nearly plunging his katana through him. The Cerberus assassin smirks, only to yelp in pain as
Satima pulls her blade out of his shoulder.

Thane drops his pistol, holding the hilt of the katana over the assassin's deadly grip, turning the blade
towards his foe. But the assassin uses force to throw Thane backwards, falling to the floor, and
thrusts his blade into Thane's chest. He skillfully sheaths his blade in victory.

"Thane!", Shepard shouts.
Satima watches in personal horror. She hesitated, too cocky in thinking they had the villain. Shepard opens fire on him as he leaps down the stairs to the bottom and runs to a waiting sky car. Hot on his heels, she fires more rounds watching him escape. The severely injured Thane comes from behind firing his weapon alongside her before leaning against the wall as his strength wains.

Shepard runs to him. "How bad is it?", she asks worried.

Thane coughs, "I have time. Catch him."

Shepard's omni-tool lights up to her incoming com call. It's Bailey. "Shepard? What's going on?"

"Thane needs medical help fast, and I need to take care of an assassin.", she grips Than's hand while informing Bailey.

"He must be going after the rest of the council. Catch him Shepard before it's too late!", Bailey sounded more than worried. If the council went down, the citadel goes with it.

Shepard walks to a sky car, "Get the word out. Udina is trying to seize power. I've got to get to the councilors."

Garrus and Satima follow down the stairs behind Shepard. Satima glances at the dying drell. He manages to give her a nod, somehow thanking her for trying to help in the fight. She looks away quickly, already full of guilt. "They're being taken to a shuttle pad on the Presidium. Start driving, I'll try to raise them on comms ...make it there fast.", Bailey closed his com link.

Satima sat behind Shepard as she drove the hover car pursuing the assassin.

"I got a fix on the council's position. I'm sending it to your car.", Bailey informs Shepard through her omni-tool.

"Good work Bailey. We're almost there.", Shepard passes by empty damaged shops.

At that moment, the assassin drops on the car's hood looking straight at Shepard. She begins to shoot through the glass shield, stunned, as he wields his katana and casually leaps over the hood to the engine core. Shepard opens the door, leaning out, firing at him while Garrus takes the controls.

The assassin blocks her gunshots with a quick shield and jams his katana in the engine causing it to emergency shut down. Shepard watches his smug demeanor as he hops inside a sky car escaping once again. Her vehicle begins to crash. Garrus tries to land it without too much injury.

Shepard gets back inside the sky car and takes over, crash landing in a lobby courtyard. It skids across the floor of an apartment level. A small fire started in the engine core. The car's door hangs open, as she rushes out limping, followed by Garrus and Satima. Garrus darts to her, "Are you okay?"

Shepard brushes him off, "I'm fine."

Satima uses her omni-tool to check them both.

"Shepard! My terminal says your car has stopped?", Bailey's voice blares over a screaming woman running for safety.

"I'm on foot now. Any luck contacting the councilors?", she shoots down a trooper.

"Negative, their guards are dead. But we still got vital signs on the council's transponders.", he
informs her.

Shepard opens fire on a squad of Cerberus soldiers. Garrus snipes two down. "Where are they going?", Shepard asks Bailey.

"The plaza. Udina's with them. I hope you can get to them. Shepard if he can get them in range of that assassin... this is all over.", Bailey turns off his com.

"On my way.", Shepard responds.

Satima shoots a trooper sneaking around them. Then she spots something in the distance that reflected the light. "Did any of you see that?", she asks. Shepard looks hard to see a new type of Cerberus soldier uncloaking and charging her way. It was female and wielded a katana like the assassin. "Watch out, it can cloak!", she yells.

Three more troopers were dropped off by a shuttle. Shepard shot them down. "Snipers!", Garrus yelled. Red lasers pinpointed around them. A high-pitched whine coming from the primed weapon across the broken railed walkway. Shepard took cover on the wall. Garrus used his mantis in turn making quick work of the sniper. "One down", he said.

Satima leapt over the walkway, with Shepard and Garrus following. She heard a rustle behind one of the few sky cars sitting idle. Shepard powered ahead, taking precautions behind every new turn. At that moment, a phantom uncloaked in front of Shepard. Leaping away from her weapons fire. "They don't like to hold still, do they?", Garrus quipped while firing his rifle.

Shepard threw a lift grenade ahead of the phantom who landed next to it. It exploded hot shrapnel into the body armor of the would-be assassin. She fell dead with a moan. Satima checked her weapon, picking it up and attaching it to her armors magnetic cling system. She had her smaller blades but the katana could come in handy.

Ahead a trooper came out trying to hit Shepard with his taser baton. Satima threw a blade at his chest, ending it. "They sealed it behind them!", Garrus shouted noticing the door in front was locked tight. It could take too long a time to hack through. Shepard sees an opening through a balcony of flowers and grass. A small lawn that led to a keeper walkway. The metal bridge was broken in half, blazing with fire between the jump point.

Shepard ran fast, successfully leaping over it. Garrus and Satima came from behind. They continued their short trek to the other side of the presidium's many shops. Satima fell behind upon noticing a slight distortion of space in the darkened hall. Shepard and Garrus soldiered on.

Gun fire echoed from their location. With closer inspection, Satima knelt in front of the tiny singularity. It dissipated as quickly as it appeared. A dangerous feeling filled her senses. There was no time to investigate. Shepard needed her help with this council and that assassin first. As she began to stand, a heavy metal hand grabbed her, swinging her hard against the grated floor. Picked up by her hair, she was slammed face first into it. Dazed, Satima looked up to see a horrifying figure from her possible future.

"Nice to see you again, Satima.", Archer glared with his neon blue eyes at her. Satima quickly moved back, standing with her katana in hand and a pistol in the other. Archer laughed loudly. "Here you are! Right in the heart of the galaxy!", his cybernetic vocals echoed. "The Sentarian's feared what you might do. They didn't guess that you would go running back to Reaper."

Satima held the pistol firm, aiming. "Her name is Shepard. Not Reaper."
Archer grinned, tilting his head curiously. "How sad. You want more time with mommy, before she became the directive's puppet?" He leaned closer, "You can't change fate, girl."

Satima lunged towards him. The katana hitting his chest merely scraping the surface. Archer knocked her sideways to the edge of the bridge. She looked below. "How did you get here?", she questioned, turning to his sinister gaze.

"I followed them here.", he revealed.

Satima looked away in fear. Archer stared around him. "Reaper doesn't want to interfere with this timeline. She's hiding in the farthest systems. I stole one of their ships and followed the reports here."

"Does she know where I am?", Satima asked, afraid.

"No. But she will find you, sooner or later. Or... what's left of you.", he smiled.

Without Reaper, he could end her here and now. As he made his way to her, Satima held the katana close and rolled off the edge. Archer growled in anger. She fell far before landing on a sky car. Her weight slamming into the metal roof, as the glass windows shattered at her sudden stop, bowing out the door. Satima laid there, bruised and unable to move.

Time seemed to slow as she tumbled off the hood onto the glossy floor below. Red blood smeared her nose. She could taste its metallic palette. Her armor registered many injuries to her omni-tool, Satima found her two middle fingers were broken on the hand she had used the pistol with. Wherever it might be.

Setting the katana down, Satima took a deep breath and pulled both fingers hard to set them straight. She yelled loudly, only whimpering for a second. The pain will have to wait. Around her, shops blazed on fire, people screamed and gunfire masked out any sounds from enemies. Archer could be anywhere. Satima continued to cautiously walk through the chaos. The katana in her grasp with her good hand, she checked every corner.

In a souvenir shop, a glass bottle filled with green sand rolled in front of her. She readied herself but there was no one there. Archer landed quietly behind her. When she turned, he greeted her with a hit in the gut, grabbing her throat and lifted her body in the air. Satima's feet squirmed for a foot holding as she struggled against his grip.

"I had hoped to bring you back in one piece. But if you continue to press this issue of resistance, then you'll come along as a broken husk!", he roared at her.

Satima widened her eyes in adrenaline, taking her useless katana and piercing him through his left shoulder. A simple over looked piece of his design. He dropped her. Satima coughed and fled. Running away from a foe much stronger than she is capable. Able to take her out of the whole scenario before she could even help Shepard defeat the reapers. Archer followed close behind in rage.

He knocked glass out of any remaining windows, kicking debris in his way to the side. Some even at Satima. Finally, she stood cornered facing a tightly shut door. Archer loomed behind her. Satima had no choice but to fight with her bare hands. She leaped at him, delivering two blows to his metal face. Archer stepped back from the heavy onslaught. Satima tried to block his counter strike. He hit her arm breaking it and kicking her pelvis. Satima went down on her belly.

She crawled away from him, gasping from the pain. Blood staining her face in streaks. Archer put a hefty boot on her back. "And now... my dear Satima. It's time to end this."
Satima waited for the crushing blow, but was surprised at how long it took. A struggle was heard. She turned her head to see Archer being pulled back through a singularity rift. He tried to grab her, eventually disappearing completely. Alarms blared distantly as she dropped her head unconscious.

Satima wakes abruptly in pain. Her nightmares giving her a start to where she was. Dizzy, she propped her body on all fours, trying to stand. Her suits functions sending a slew of injury updates by the minute. Arching her back, Satima forced her body to stand. She moaned in pain. There was a half-broken bench looking out to a garden below. Most of it was on fire too. Satima sat gently, wincing. She didn't know how long she was out or if Shepard saved the council in time.

The fact Archer came through a portal rift tore a hole in her plans. He could come anytime, in any place. Even the Normandy. A sound of scuffling feet alerted her. Coming out of the sealed door were two asari women. They held hands shaking with fright.

As soon as they saw Satima, one of them ran to her. "By the goddess are you alright? Delana, look at her!", the asari hovered over Satima.

Delana walked over timidly to have a look. "I'll call for an ambulance." Satima waved her hand, "NO... no. I mean, I'm okay. Just give a message for this coded number." Satima sent the code to Delana who took off to a non-damaged terminal.

Much did happen while Satima laid unconscious. Shepard got to the council in time. The assassin was nowhere to be found. He deleted all footage of his presence. A ghost. Bailey congratulated Shepard on saving the council. She was just happy she didn't have to put down a friend.

Inside Bailey's office, they discussed the reports of the Cerberus coup. "We looked over every centimeter of those tunnels Shepard. Your Cerberus pal is made out of smoke and mirrors.", Bailey tried to settle himself in his chair. A surge of pain in his gut made him stay still for a minute. "He likes to fight. He'll show up again.", Shepard was sure in that.

"Pardon me if I'm not reassured by that.", Bailey spoke in sarcasm. That assassin had him on edge with the council demanding better security. He'll probably end up holding one of their hands so they can squat in their luxury bathroom. Bailey shuddered at the thought.

Returning to his original conversation, "We can't even get an ID on him. He released a VI into the citadel system that erased all footage of him wherever he went. I guess he didn't trust that Udina's plan would come together."

Shepard smirked at that. Udina was always a pretentious selfish bastard. From day one. She wished she could've seen Anderson deck him those few years ago, in the beginning. Worth the wait on Saren. Bailey proceeded with his debriefing of the current events. "That reminds me-we got your friend Thane to Huerta Memorial. He's in for surgery. Apparently, there's uh... complications."

Shepard unfolded her hands from behind her back. "Do you think he'll make it?"

Bailey looks off to the side in thought, "I caught that they didn't have much drell blood on the citadel. I notified his next of kin, his son Kolyat. He was the right blood type but I don't know if he made it in time. We're pretty sure the route to the hospital is safe from Cerberus. If you want to see him, I'd go now."

Shepard makes a weak smile," Thanks Bailey, I'll get on it."

Before Shepard starts to leave Bailey speaks again. "You can tell him the salarian councilor thinks he's a hero. Just to...I don't know, make things easier for him."
Shepard nods and walks out the door. She steps down the stairs heading for the elevator when Khalisah al-Jilani starts shouting at her. "Commander Shepard! Commander, the people of the Alliance have questions." Shepard begrudgingly approaches her.

"Commander Shepard! Isn't true you were on earth when the reapers attacked?" Khalisah pointed her finger in Shepard's face in an accusing manner. "How do you justify running away while millions of people on earth are dying? Is that the best we can expect from the Alliance?"

Shepard rubs her temples in frustration. This must end. People need hope, not smear jobs on the very persons who are trying to save them. "I came to get help for earth. For everyone.", she glared at Khalisah.

Khalisah blurted more angry words back at her. "What about all the people suffering while you play politics with the council? What about them?", she looked down with sad eyes. "How can you stand there while our families die? What are you going to do?" Her voice started to break.

Shepard put a hand on her shoulder with sympathy,"Khalisah, we're doing everything we can."

Khalisah didn't flinch or budge. She stood closer to Shepard accepting the friendly gesture. "Before they cut the feeds...there were so many dead."

"I'm going to stop the reapers or die trying, but I need your help.", Shepard lifted her hand off the reporter's shoulder. "Keep asking the hard questions. Don't let the council forget earth."

Khalisah looked relieved, "I will. Thank you, Commander." Before walking away, she turned facing Shepard again. "I'm glad you're on our side."

Khalisah and her annoying camera left, while Shepard sighed agitated. "I was on your side from the beginning, woman!" She thought.

Shepard departed the embassy for the hospital. On the way, down from the elevator, she received a com from Garrus. "Shepard. When you're done in the hospital. I need you to come by the Normandy. And tell Thane, he's one hell of a hero, and a good friend."

The comms closed with Shepard still wondering where the hell Satima had run off to? Most likely Garrus's call was for that. A strange feeling of regret crept up on her. She shook it off to nerves about Thane.

"I hope you make it old friend.", she whispered a silent prayer.

Chapter End Notes

If you see punctuation errors, I apologize. I get so excited that I forget sometimes to check and check, and CHECK AGAIN! Thanks for stopping by.

From this chapter and others, till you get to 21, is all dialogue and missions with a twist, from the game. Spoilers if you've never played the game. Rate M.

Thanks for stopping by.
Fear of the Graveyard

Chapter Summary

A voice from the past is awoken, and Shepard discovers a 50,000 year old ally. Together with Liara, she is given a mission to the elusive and dangerous monastery of the Ardat Yakshi. Will an old friend betray her creed for the sake of her daughter? Or will she crumble from the loss of her children?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thane's death dealt another heavy blow to Shepard's already dwindling resolve.

"Kalhira, mistress of inscrutable depths, I ask forgiveness..."

Shepard punched the wall in her cabin. The resounding crunch of knuckle under her armored gauntlet sent off an alarm of pain throughout her body. If she wasn't wearing armor it could've broken her hand.

"I'm sorry, Shepard. I thought I could save him."

Shepard made herself walk to the couch. The feeling of sitting comfortably didn't appeal to her, so she sat on the edge. Much like her life. The door to her cabin opened as Liara softly stepped in looking for the Commander. When she saw Shepard's back facing her while sitting on the couch, she knew her friend was in pain.

"I'm sorry about Thane, Shepard."

"I'm sorry about Thane, Shepard."

Shepard leaned over covering her face. "He's fine. Kolyat found peace with his father's death long before that assassin came around."

She nodded, "Well that's good I suppose. Finding peace in death. Shepard... some of us are worried about you. You have a lot on your shoulders and with this new hybrid girl on board, it must get exhausting to carry the burden of the rank of commander. Just know... we're here for you."

Shepard glanced at it. "Thanks. Speaking of which. I got back pretty late from the citadel after Garrus's message. What's going on?"

"Well, Garrus brought Satima back. She's in med bay currently. I heard she took a beating from Cerberus on her own. I have a feeling you would like to chat with her about leaving the mission, and disappearing without a trace until hours later?", Liara raised a brow.

Shepard smirked, "Yeah. That does post a pretty important question." They both left the cabin with Liara returning to her duties. Upon entering the med bay, Chockwas finished putting a sling around Satima's arm. The girl looked up to see an annoyed Commander.
"I see you're doing better. Exactly how did you get those bruises on your face, or that broken arm?", Shepard questioned.

Satima turned to the Doctor who walked off to the med table. She glanced back to Shepard, "I took on more than I could handle.", with shrugged shoulders.

Shepard was unconvincing, "And just why did you think it was okay to abandon the mission to do so? Are you trying to impress me? Because, you have seriously over-thought that concept."

Garrus walked in to the raised voice of Charlie. He wondered when she and Satima would talk about the mission. Garrus found the girl in debris being doctored by some asari civilians. She could barely keep one eye open. Must've taken one hell of a beating by someone. But not from Cerberus.

There were no Cerberus militants around that ward. No bodies from Satima's fight. She was lying about it. Could it have been that assassin from the Executors office? Garrus's thoughts were interrupted with Satima raising her voice this time. "I didn't abandon the mission! You still were able to save the councilors I assume.", Satima leaned over her seated position on the examination table gesturing towards Shepard.

Charlie shook her head, arms crossed."Not a good excuse. You didn't even comm about it or where you were. I told you to stay behind me but you didn't follow orders. And kid, that's where I draw the line!"

Garrus nodded his head in agreement of that, Satima's face started to burn red from anger. Her eyes lit up with rage, "I'm not military like you! Hell, I saved your damn life today! You wouldn't understand!"

Satima restrained herself, shouting her last words dismissively. Now she's done it, but if Archer came through another rift right now, it wouldn't matter who he was anyway. He could've killed her, went after Shepard. The future totally screwed.

Shepard dropped her arms, "Who? Who could've killed me?"

Satima shook her head in defiance. Garrus walked to her, "It's important we know." His avian eyes staring right at her. Both cornering her to tell the truth. She wanted to fight it. "Fine.", she sighed in defeat. Satima reluctantly revealed a truth. "He's a cybernetic scientist of the directive. His name is Archer. He somehow found me." Satima looked to the floor rubbing her sore arm. "He's a monster. And he's dangerous", she informed.

Shepard glanced to Garrus who also shook his head in complete confusion. "Satima, what do you mean by rift?, he asked her. Not ignoring the warning she gave them about Archer. "Portable Rift. An open window to any place within distance, by singularity technology.", she leaned off the bed to stand while gripping her arm in pain.

"Another assassin! That can travel through black holes!", Shepard shook her head clearly more than irritated by the news. She turned around towards the door, "So. I suppose that we need to come up with a counter attack should he appear on board suddenly!?" She walked out quickly, comming EDI.

Garrus studied Satima, noticing her nervous expressions. "There's something else you're not telling us. Isn't there?", he added. She glanced away from him. "Why are you trying so hard to mislead us?", Garrus stood longer glaring at her. Satima walked back to the core room silently. He shook his head in disappointment, then left.

Shepard came through the elevator in front of the CIC. Traynor spotted her," Commander, you have
a new message at your private terminal."

The commander nodded and proceeded to it. There was a message she seemed to have pushed back a week ago, too worried about the mission on Palaven to be bothered with it. Now that she had some time, Shepard opened the tab.

"Priority Mission Eden Prime"
From: Alliance Command

Commander,
Cerberus has attacked Eden Prime and is now occupying the colony. Alliance forces are stretched too thin right now to attempt to liberate the colony, but we're doing what we can to covertly aid the local resistance.

In the process, we've learned that Cerberus has uncovered a major Prothean artifact. We don't know what it is, but it appears to be the reason for the attack on the colony. We need you to infiltrate the colony and recover the artifact."

As soon as Shepard closed her terminal, Liara came running out of the elevator. "Shepard!"

She sighed with a small smile, "Here we go."

Liara stopped dead on her heels in front of Shepard. Almost to the point of hyperventilating, she tried to speak, "I'm... sorry Shepard, but when I read your newest message I had to find you!" The asari broker could barely catch her breath.

Shepard raised an eye at her,"Liara, are you reading my messages without my permission again?" She new Liara would do that. It didn't really bother her, but it made Liara nervous. The broker wrung her hands together and slyly smiled. "Why uh... yes Shepard. It's only as precaution and besides, you know I'm in control of special privileges."

Shepard spoke in barely contained laughter," What do you want?", she asked covering her mouth quickly, as her cheeks became red from the amount of pressure it took not to laugh at her dear friend.

"It's absolutely mandatory I come with you to Eden prime! I mean, I am the prothean expert." Liara batted her lashes and tried to look shyly at Shepard. Normally Shepard would wave it off but Liara was right. "And you are correct. We need your expertise on this mission."

Laira's eyes became wide with pure excitement. "Thank you, Commander." She tried to casually walk off, but ended up running back to the elevator, pressing the panel repeatedly until the door closed. EDI was sure to scold her on the proper uses of an elevator panel on the Normandy.

Charlie checked her terminal for more messages. She received one from the assassin and another from Anderson. So, this guy is Kai Leng, eh? Shepard wasn't worried. Reapers are bigger.

Moments later, Shepard went to see Ashley. They met again after the attempted coup in front of the Normandy docks.

Ashley apologized for her behavior, but more importantly, finally came to terms with what Shepard had to do while working with Cerberus. Shaking hands, Ashley agreed to join the rag tag crew of the Normandy once more, standing beside her longtime friend against the Reapers.

Outside the door of the Starboard Observation deck, Shepard hesitantly knocked. Ashley opened it telling whomever it was that the place wasn't closed off because she decided to use it. "Oh, Shepard! I didn't know you where there! Come in. I was just reading a book." Ashley casually walked to the
couch taking a seat, crossing one leg.

Shepard opted to stand and stare into the twinkling starlit space.

"So, Shepard, what do you need?", The lieutenant commander set her book beside her on the couch.

Shepard stared around the room trying to find the right words of invitation. "Well, I just received an important message from Alliance command. It uh... it involves Eden prime, Ash."

Eden prime was where it all began. Where Ashley lost her unit, and where she first met Shepard. She straightened up with a stern stare. "Is it under attack again?"

All those memories stirred up inside. For Shepard, too. That and... Kaiden. He wanted an affair between them, but Shepard's heart remained closed. She declined the relationship. Shepard pushed him away before Virmire and left him to die. Even though Ash recalls it differently, with Kaiden's defiance against his commander, pleading her to save the lieutenant. She knew it was the right thing to do.

After her rebirth from the Lazarus project, Shepard unsuspectingly met an old friend. Once again reliving old times, and finding a spark of interest between them. It felt like a second chance. And that second chance is Garrus. Ashley looked at her with a bit of concern. "Did you hear me Commander? I asked if they were under attack again?"

Shepard shook her head, "Yes... by Cerberus. There is also something else. A prothean artifact. Liara is coming along."

Ashley sat up walking to where Shepard stood, "Wow. And Liara is a prothean expert." She smirked, "I could use a brief review on prothean history."

They both shared a laugh. Liara stood behind them, a little shocked. "Are you making fun of me?"

Ashley and Shepard quickly resumed a false briefing between each other. "So, that's Eden Prime we're heading to. You just be ready... for the mission. And stuff.", Shepard ordered, sliding beside Liara and out the door.

"Aye, Commander. Understood.", Ashley replied, picking up a book to read.

Liara eyed them both with an annoyed grunt.

The crew geared up, ready for their shuttle ride to the surface of Eden Prime. Cortez warmed the engines and resumed checking thrusters as Garrus arrived in the bay. "Hey, heard about Eden prime. Not enough room for one more?", he smirked. Shepard smiled, "Not this time. I promise the next one is all yours. Ash and I need to do this. For Jenkins and Kaiden. You understand, right?"

She was concerned he would feel left out of the loop. After all, Garrus didn't come into the picture until after Shepard became a Spectre. "No, I don't mind. I understand. Besides, Liara might warp my plated ass out of the shuttle if I tried.", he laughed. Shepard chuckled at the thought.

Garrus leaned on the armory table watching Shepard clamp down her straps tightly. She noticed him watching and took it slowly for a few seconds. "Take a good look, Vakarian.", she winked at him. Garrus made a low growl in response.

"Get a room!", James hollered across the bay.
As they entered the shuttle with a jumpy Liara, Shepard turned her comms on to Garrus's omni-tool. "While I'm gone, keep an eye on Satima. She's acting nervous." He nodded towards her.

They left for Eden Prime.

Satima sat in her compartment of the AI core room. Her arm throbbed when she moved it. The data pad in front of her showed the recent construction projects on the crucible. She knows there is something missing, but she can't pinpoint what it is. Parts of her memory seemed blanked out since going through the conduit.

She hoped in time aboard the Normandy, they will return. Satima set the pad down. She was feeling hungry and curious. As she left the med bay, Garrus bumped into her. "Going somewhere in a hurry?", he asked. Satima rolled her eyes, "Yes. I'm feeling hungry."

She walked over to the kitchen area, rummaging through the fridge for anything dextro. Satima couldn't handle levo foods, so she continued to push the human based meals to the side. Garrus stood next to her grabbing a bottle of water. "Dextro is on the lower shelf.", he commented to her while taking a bite of a nutrient bar.

Satima sighed and reached on the bottom shelf for a plastic bowl with dextro dinner in it. When she heated her meal, and took a seat at the table, Garrus sat across from her. She ate self-consciously, feeling strange with him watching her. Garrus said nothing. He sipped his water and stared straight ahead. An odd noise came from his seat. Like small whining, or was it cheering?

Satima took a few bites from her meal, suddenly Garrus shouted "GOAL!" and burst into a fit of raucous laughter. Some crew members stared for a few seconds before opting to mind their business. Satima dropped her spoon splattering food on the table and herself.

Garrus laughed and roared with delight at absolutely nothing or so it seemed. "What the hell!", she yelled. Garrus realized what transpired. He saw the mess around Satima and laughed loudly.

"Spirits! Didn't mean to startle you. I was watching a game on my visor.", he pointed, calming down his laughter.

Satima had enough of this Garrus's nonsense. She missed broody and silent, cold calculating Garrus. Satima left the table going to the lady's restroom, as EDI called it. Surrounded by a few female crew members who stared, Satima washed off the dextro food. She quickly walked out of the restroom and into the med bay. Garrus caught her running off. He leaned forward, grabbing the food she didn't want. No wonder she's so skinny and irritable.

The team returned from the planet's surface. They had a plus one. A real living prothean. Liara immediately took him to the unoccupied room of the engineering deck. Shepard had received a message from her terminal, opting to let the prothean expert handle the new crew member.

She just finished her report with Admiral Hackett. His news was not so uplifting. Losing colonies faster than saving them. It gave her a serious headache thinking about all those dead souls crying for justice. As she began to leave the QEC, Liara commed her. "Shepard, I need you down in the port cargo hold. It's about our new guest,"

"I'm on my way.", she left the room.

Shepard walked up to the steel door guarded by two crewmen. She entered the dark musty room with Liara pacing. More armed crewmen surrounded the Prothean. "What's the problem?", she asked Liara.
"I've tried to make the room more accommodating, but they're not letting me talk to him.", her concerned gaze left Shepard's and onto the prothean. He sat on his legs, eyes closed, meditating. A sour scowl contorting his face.

A guard approached them standing at attention to Shepard. "Apologies, Doctor. Contact protocol with a new species: "Assume hostility." We had to dust off regulations."

Shepard watched the prothean. His eyes opened to stare back at her. She felt a sudden chill up her spine. Liara spoke freely with her arms crossed in frustration, "But he's not new! I've spent my life studying protheans."

Shepard broke through the armed guards. "At ease. I don't think our guest will be a problem."

The Prothean stood straight facing her. "Will he?", she said glaring his way.

"That depends on you.", he said with a slight accented tone.

He grabs her suddenly, an intense wave of memories rushing between them from both their minds. An energy unseen is shared. The guards raise their weapons in concern for their Commander. Darkness clouded her mind as the protheans words dug deep in her. "I can sense fear in you. Anxiety and distress. The Reapers are winning."

He lets Shepard go. She stands away feeling more invaded than anyone could from what the prothean did. "What do you mean, "you sense"?", she asked.

He paces, "All life provides clues for those who can read them. It is in your cells, your DNA. Experience is a biological marker."

Shepard signals the guards to ease down. She approaches the prothean. "Then what exactly did I experience on Eden Prime? That was a hell of a flashback."

He looks behind him as he washed his hands at the basin. "The battle left its own mark on me. I communicated this to you. It can work both ways."

"Like your beacons?", Liara chimed in.

"Yes. Which...", he grabs Shepard again for another read.

The visions Shepard encountered from the beacon on Eden Prime rushed across her mind and his. The truth behind the collectors twisted DNA flashed before their closed eyes. As well as the reapers harvest. "...you found one. You saw it all-our destruction, our warnings... Why weren't they heeded? Why didn't you prepare for the Reapers, human?" His angered tone echoed off the hull walls.

Shepard stepped forward annoyed, "It's "Commander", and nobody could understand your warnings. The beacon nearly killed me."

The prothean scoffed at this. He started his pacing again, "The communication is still primitive in this cycle."

"We pieced together what we could and used it to stop a Reaper invasion three years ago.", Shepard stood behind him.

"Then the extinction was delayed?", he asked surprised.

Shepard nodded to his question.
Liara walked forward. "Now we have your plans for the device. We're going to build it." She began typing away at a large holo pad to a terminal screen on the wall.

"Device?", the prothean asked.

Confused, Liara turned to him. "The weapon your people were working on-I'd hope you could tell us how to finish it."

The prothean looked at the screen with various blue print layouts of the device, Liara was speaking of. His many eyes blinked as he remembered what he was told about it over fifty-thousand years ago. "We never finished it. It was too late", he looked down in solemn thought.

"Then I take it you don't know anything about the catalyst?", Shepard asked.

He put his hands on the panel leaning over the holo grid. "No." Looking back up at the catalyst pieces, he spoke in his deep accented tone. "I was a soldier, not a scientist. Skilled in one art: killing."

"What was your mission?", Liara asked curious.

"Among my people, there were... avatars of many traits: bravery, strength, cunning. A single exemplar for each."

"Which are you?", Shepard wondered aloud.

"The embodiment of vengeance. I am the anger of a dead people, demanding blood be spilled for the blood we lost.", he closed his eyes in somber memory. "Only when the last Reaper has been destroyed will my purpose be fulfilled. I have no other reason to exist."

In the ventilation tunnel above the cargo room, Satima sat quietly listening to this prothean speak his pain. "I have no other reason to exist", stung her mind. She pondered about her own existence. Shepard signaled the guards to finally leave. This prothean was no threat, just an empty shell of regret.

"Those who share my purpose become allies. Those who do not become casualties.", he continued.

Shepard didn't appreciate his near threat towards her crew and herself. He may be a victim, but it didn't justify his intended cruelty, hate and eventual homicide to others. "Nothing in our fight against the Reapers has ever been that cut-and-dried.", her tone irritated.

The prothean faced her with annoyance. "Because you still have hope that this war will end with your honor intact."

"I do.", Shepard said plainly.

"Stand in the ashes of a trillion dead souls, and ask the ghosts if honor matters."

Shepard stares at the prothean. There isn't an answer for that. Could there have been?

Meanwhile, Satima becomes aware of others for the first time, considering she was mainly concerned about herself. At the hands of a sinister force, there was no difference between her and what others had been through. But the truth rang the loudest. Shepard couldn't end the war against the reapers with her honor intact at all. She made sacrifices in order to make the reapers stop, but they won in the end. Shepard became Reaper and Satima...was born.
The prothean glares towards Shepard, angry at her complete absence of a response. He decides she needs to understand it. "The silence is your answer."

Liara walks away from the stare down. She hovers over a small black shard with a green glow. It sits suspended on a hover stand. "We found this at the dig site. I assume it belonged to you."

"It is a memory shard.", he tells her.

"Could it help us with the device?", she asked hopeful.

"No. It contains only pain.", the prothean answers her, now facing Shepard. "But I will help you fight. And the last thing the reapers will hear before they die will be the last voice of the Prothean's sending them to their grave." He stood resolved in his imaginary victory over the Reapers.

Liara watched him with a curious gaze. She turned to him, "If you don't mind, I have a few more questions I'd like to ask."

Shepard shook her head, "Here it comes."

Liara paced, "I've written over a dozen studies on your species. I've published in several journals-"

"Amusing. Asari have finally mastered writing.", he bears a slight smile.

Liara stops her pacing, "I'm sorry?"

He leans against the panel, "Never mind. What do you wish to know?"

The questions came one at a time to the Prothean. To which he answered honestly and bluntly. He relayed his knowledge of a previous inhabitant of the room. A teenage krogan, very excitable and very dangerous. Then, his people's evolution as hunters in reading every minute detail, gaining their sensor ability. Their skills to read other thoughts. Not too different from the Asari.

Shepard began to understand the beacons more. As the Prothean's developed the technology to harness their ability in objects, information could be stored by touch. Hence the beacons. Then came the questions of their civilization. He continued with the information about his people's empire. Shepard and Liara learned the word Prothean meant many. For after the Prothean's subjugated, conquered and enslaved a race, it was forever Prothean. No more its own society or culture.

"I had no idea Prothean's were so... severe.", Liara said a little shocked.

"It was by necessity.", the Prothean answered.

The dangers by the machine intelligence gave a familiar vibe to the conversation. Shepard replied with the history of the Geth and their former masters, the Quarians. His mission became a new subject. Bitter memories of the stasis pod incident poured out from him. There were others that had been indoctrinated, in the end betraying them.

Those few Prothean's were to rise again, forging a new empire. Shepard's inquisitiveness got the better of her. "Just out of curiosity, how would you have "commanded" us?", she asked.

"By leaving you no other option. You would have joined our army-or faced the reapers alone.", he revealed.

"We've uncovered quite a few Prothean ruins. Were you observing our ancestors?", Shepard had to ask.
"Before the war, we cultivated species who showed potential. Eventually, you would have been offered a... choice to join the empire." The Prothean looked at them. Shepard's stance changed. He continued, "But when the reapers attacked, we ceased all study. We hoped they would see you as too primitive to harvest."

"Well, thank you. I think.", she shrugged the words off her shoulders.

More questions ensued. He heard only stories about the device. How their scientist was working on a great machine to be used against the reapers. But he never saw it. With the empire fractured, nobody knew what the other was doing. Liara felt the same would happen this cycle, if no one could work together to end this war. The Prothean's war against the reapers lasted centuries.

The memory shards were passed down in order. Giving memories of times lost to each recipient it touched. Illos, was the war fought by attrition, system to system fighting, only to be indoctrinated and harvested in the end. All races being conformed to one doctrine, one strategy prevented a possible victory over the reapers. They could not adapt. The reapers exploited their weakness and one by one, they fell. Divided and confused.

"I'm happy to say our cycle is different. Most races cooperate, but they still remain unique.", Liara spoke up.

The prothean blinked his eyes,"Then it may be your only hope.", he stated.

It was getting late. Liara made a quick yawn but kept her excited demeanor. "Thank you for talking with me. I never imagined actually meeting a Prothean.", Shepard acknowledged.

He nodded with a smirk, "This has been... amusing."

The commander tilted her head, a disapproving brow raised to him. "Oh?"

"To discover the most primitive races of my time, now rule the galaxy. The asari, the humans, the turians...", he concluded.

"There's also the salarians.", Liara added, still completely enthralled with the prothean..

He contemplated the fact, that all of the primitive peoples of his time have evolved. And he now stands in their presence, just as flummoxed over the whole situation."The lizard people evolved?", the prothean wondered with a smirk.

Liara felt a bit offended by his basic thinking. "I believe their amphibian.", she crossed her arms.

He gave a curious nod to her. "They used to eat flies.", blinking in an expressionless stare. Liara stared back as she walked away, intrigued. "Commander, you may count on me. I am known as Javik.", he stood still.

Shepard stood at ease with her hands behind her back, "Then welcome aboard the Normandy, Javik."

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One week had passed with Shepard and her team finishing small skirmishes along Reaper controlled space. Satima's arm felt better. She watched, waited for the right time to approach Javik, the Prothean. When her curiosity got the better of her, Satima finally took the short trek to his quarters in the cargo room.
Javik stood in front of his dark watered basin. He washed his hands vigorously. His senses telling him someone was in his space. Satima leaned on the open doorway. She cocked her head at him, staring at the oddness of his four eyes and his insect-like appearance. She had done some research while aboard the Normandy. The Collectors were Prothean. It was a sad end to a formidable civilization, but maybe necessary considering how much they liked to conquer and control. Much like the reapers.

Javik stared at this alien girl. Her dark eyes gave him a sense of deep emotion. He walked slowly to her. Satima took a strong step back, "You will not touch me.", she warned.

Javik stands in front of her. "What creature are you? I have not seen such a species as you are before?" His questions bounced around the room.

Satima gulped to his inquiry. "You won't.", she replied. "I am not from this time."

Javik raised one of his many eyes to this, "How did you manage to traverse to this time?"

Satima looked away, "By means I have no knowledge of."

"Who then... has this knowledge?", Javik pressed.

Satima swallowed hard, but refrained her fears, "The Sentarians or as some others would know them-The Ancients."

Javik's eyes widened. "The Ancients!", he repeated in shock. "My people studied an artifact, it contained information about a race. They were trying to send us a message, but when the reaper war started, it was destroyed. A rumor of Ancients began. For centuries of our war against the reapers, it echoed around like a ghost story. And you have seen them?"

Satima nodded to this.

Javik attempted to grab her arm, trying to read her memories. Satima knocked his hand away, "I told you! You cannot touch me, Prothean!"

He made one more advance before Satima held a blade to his throat. A short battle between them ensued. Javik managed to trick her from the doorway and he briefly touched her cheek. "I see... pain!", he exclaimed. "You want revenge?" Satima stood back, shocked and defeated. Javik approached her one more time, "What are you?"

"I don't know.", she replied, frightened. Javik touched her arm.

Meanwhile, Shepard had been discussing a mission with Liara when Joker's voice commed her. 
"Uh... Commander, EDI says our newest guests are hashing it out in the engineering deck. Just, you know, might want to prevent an issue."

"Dammit!", Shepard yelled. She brought Liara and Garrus along with her.

Javik hung on tightly, flinching from the mental anguish of Satima's thoughts. "An inorganic human is your adversary... he designed you." Satima winced at the memories of Archer. The prothean still held on, "There is fear and worry. You are not an unknown species! You are a hybrid." Javik let go, his forehead covered in sweat. Satima felt dizzy from the ordeal. Javik glanced down to her eye level, "You are human and turian. A very curious mix. One would like to know how you managed to survive."

Satima stared past him. Brief memories of her time in training on hive, and Archer's mutative
injections when she was a child blocked Javik's inquiries. Enhancement, experimentation... all for a purpose she does not understand. "I don't know how I survived.", she replied. "Not in the way you're implying. Physically, maybe I should be dead, or near incapable of living without medical help. But...", she sighed irritated by the implications of his damn out loud thoughts. "But then I'm not an individual that can biologically be born. Am I?" Satima stared towards him.

Javik nodded, then walked to his dark watered basin. He washed his hands again, "The reapers are a resourceful and dark menace. Your very existence is torture. I pity you." Shepard, Garrus and Liara where just exiting the elevator as Satima began to walk out, when Javik spoke one more time.

"Your secret is your own to keep. I have no need to share the truth with Shepard and her mated companion. But only if they do not need that vital information about their offspring."

Satima turned back to him, unaware that Shepard had caught up behind her, "They're not my parents! Not this timeline!" She balled her fists with a gritty scowl. "Dammit! I shouldn't have come. I'm an accident, this was a mistake."

Javik let out a low chuckle, "Accidents provide change." He looked up to reflect. "And mistakes... a lesson."

Satima shook her head with a low grunt of disapproval, then sprinted off right into Shepard while hurrying to leave this alien's philosophically vague blathering. They both exchanged glances of confusion, but Satima's turned to alarm. "What the hell is he talking about? What is going on? EDI said you two were fighting. Is that what happened?", Shepard demanded an answer, and now.

The prothean glanced to the commander in boredom,"We were only conversing. Nothing more, Commander. Perhaps your AI is mistaken.", Javik replied in a smooth response.

Satima gave him an annoyed glare before returning to Shepard's angry gaze. "We had a slight misunderstanding and now, we're fine." She ran off before Shepard could question.

The commander glared to Javik then dismissed the whole event. Whatever happened, she will get to the bottom of it.

The hybrid took the lift to the third deck. It felt like a slow ascent. When the doors opened, she ran to the med bay and into the core room locking the door. Satima sat in her compartment silently. She will carry this burden and the truth will die with her. If Javik can wait a little longer.

The Distress signal of Messana

Shepard finished attaching her body armor for the millionth time. After a debriefing from Anderson in the comm room, Liara relayed to her a mission from Asari command. Some of their commandos disappeared while answering a distress call from a monastery. Even though the asari haven't asked directly, they assumed Shepard would take on the mission anyway.

Satima's arm healed under the direct supervision of Chockwas. She had taken a maternal act on the hybrid. Chockwas had always thought every crew member of the Normandy were like her children. But this time, one of them is. Not her child, of course, but another's. Karen would continue the monitoring of Satima while they were away. And if the hybrid acted up, EDI could lock her in the core room until they returned. Safe and away from prying questions. It was not time yet.

While on the shuttle to the planet Lessia, Shepard asked Liara some questions during the ride. "Dig
up any information on the mission, Liara?", Shepard stood in the middle of the shuttle.

Liara sat, seemingly comfortable to answer, "I did, and I now understand why High Command wanted to hide it. We're headed to an Ardat-Yakshi monastery."

"Ardat-Yakshi? Like Morinth?", that put Shepard on edge. A whole place full of them? Wonderful.

Liara could tell Shepard's uneasy stance. "Morinth chose to be a killer. These Ardat-Yakshi isolated themselves to avoid that." The ride got bumpy for a minute. Liara continued, "But it doesn't mean they're harmless. Their urge to feed can be powerful. That's why High Command sent in commandos to investigate the monastery's distress signal."

"So, what does Asari High Command want us to do?", Garrus asked.

"If there was a chance the Ardat-Yakshi could break loose, the commandos were to purge the monastery.", Liara answered.

Shepard hung tightly to the handle above her head on the shuttles upper hull. "Purge? You mean destroy?"

"They would've brought heavy explosives with them, yes." Liara settled herself in her seat while glancing to Shepard and Garrus both.

"Morinth was dangerous, but are the Ardat-Yakshi this big of a threat?", Shepard sounded concerned.

Liara placed her hands in her lap, "Morinth was just hitting her stride, Ardat-Yakshi who kill leave behind astronomical body counts. It's why they can never be free, and why they're such a great source of shame to the asari." Liara looked down solemnly then back to Shepard. "That's why High Command won't rest until this place is destroyed. They'd never risk a single Ardat-Yakshi getting loose."

Feeling that a bomb was the last resort, Shepard set a plan for the mission. "Don't assume anything. Maybe the Ardat-Yakshi sent out the distress call. If the asari want us to destroy this place, I need to know what happened."

Liara stood, stepping towards Shepard, "Agreed. Once we give a report to High Command, they'll stop wasting lives here."

The shuttle had begun its decent to the landing pad when a loud thud was heard behind Garrus. It came from a large storage compartment under a seat. Garrus stepped back with the rest arming themselves to the noise. "What was that?", Shepard spoke aloud. The compartment lid popped open suddenly, breaking at the hinges with a long-armored leg in black sticking out.

Soon an arm and part of a torso peaked behind. Satima fell out onto the metal floor. Her body looked painfully crunched as she tried to hold herself inside the storage unit. She sprawled out on her back, looking up as everyone stood over her. Shepard shook her head in silent anger. "By the goddess! How long were you in there?", Liara blurted out.

Satima wriggled her arm back to life from losing circulation. "A... while.", she managed during the aching from the sudden rush of blood flow to her limbs.

Shepard leaned over, grabbing Satima's arm, pulling her to a standing position as the young hybrid winced. Satima nearly fell, "I still can't feel most of my legs, Shepard!" Satima leaned on the wall.
"Too bad!", Shepard pulled her back to standing.

"I suppose we can't turn around and take junior home?", Garrus smirked. Shepard gave him an evil stare. He gulped glancing away from her and to the monitor.

"She'll have to wait in the shuttle.", Liara stated.

"No way! I'm coming with you guys!", Satima interrupted.

"NO!", Garrus and Shepard said in unison to her. Satima stepped back, lowering her head.

"Last time you were on a mission, an assassin no one else has seen, "from the future", almost killed you!", Shepard yelled while air-quoting.

Satima stood straight, "In my defense, he's a lot stronger than both of you. I think I held pretty good on my own. I could always take a beating.", Satima stared at Shepard with that last sentence. Something about her tone made Shepard feel awkward. Like Satima was blaming her. What it was, she doesn't know. There is a lot about Satima that was still hidden.

"Besides...", Satima said, "I'll just get out and find you on my own. It's better we go together."

Shepard glared.

After the shuttle landed, Satima followed the team out on the landing pad. The deep blue night and ice capped mountains in the distance gave her a serene feeling. She also had another feeling. All was not as it seemed. A red sky car had been parked in front of the entrance.

"My visor's IR says this shuttle's warm. Recent visitor?", Garrus asked.

Shepard scanned the area. No one was hiding between the crates. Satima scanned too. Her own omni-tools purple glow pinging off sections rapidly. "Clear.", she whispered.

Garrus smirked, "Why are you whispering?",

"Because a great big reaper monster could be hiding behind that door.", she pointed," I have an idea. You open it first.", Satima dared sarcastically.

"Alright children.", Liara chimed in.

Shepard smiled, shaking her head. Satima definitely is a smart ass, reminding her much like herself when she was an early twenty-something. They all stood in front of the entrance. Minutes passed with no one budging. Liara rolled her eyes and opened the door. It slid open quickly making them all step back. Satima chuckled.

"That's enough Satima, you had your fun." Shepard jumped across the ledge to the elevators top.

"Elevator disabled. To prevent entry or escape, I wonder...", Liara stood behind pondering her own question.

Garrus motioned to her and Liara snapped out of her thoughts. Satima looked down the dark below. She hated the dark. After they were all securely over the ledge, Shepard led them around a catwalk and down a ladder. In the distance, a shrill cry echoed from below them. "That sound.", Liara said.

Shepard led them further inside down another ladder. Satima hesitated. Shepard and Liara landed together on the bottom. One more catwalk ahead. Garrus looked up at Satima. "Don't stop now. You came all this way to help Shepard, right?" Satima nodded and closed her eyes. She opened them to
The memory of Omega and its monster, the adjutant, terrified her. Garrus stepped carefully while on
the ledge. Satima had the greatest ease of it. He got annoyed by her litheness. His large footfalls
echoing loudly beneath him. Garrus will be first to meet that monster, he knows it.

Another shrill cry sounded out. They all landed on the bottom floor. "There's more than one out
there.", Liara whispered next to Shepard.

Battle hardened soldier she was, Shepard really needed Liara to stop reminding her of what might be
lurking in the dark. No need to start shooting anything that moved. Not yet anyhow. Shepard leaped
across the ledge to a dark lobby. Broken glass, overturned chairs and biotic scarred walls surrounded
them. Garrus and Liara covered her three and six.

Satima slowly stepped to her nine. Then her ten. "Satima, don't wonder off in this dark.", Shepard
reminded sternly.

Satima walked back to Shepard's nine. As they wondered around the lobby, a sound of crunched
glass came from the dark. "What was that?", Liara said startled.

"Stay sharp.", Shepard shone her rifle's light on darker spaces around them.

There was another noise. "I heard something.", Shepard said.

"That was me. Sorry.", Garrus shrugged his shoulders apologetically to Shepard. She gave him a
smile and a wink, "Be careful next time."

Satima had bumped into Garrus while using her omni-tool to scan the area. To stop her from
shouting, Garrus quickly put a hand to her mouth. Which made the noise of their shuffling feet. He
removed his hand with Satima taking a silent breath, mouthing thank you to him.

Shepard found an electronic signature and some mods. Satima rubbed her hands greedily as she
overlooked them. "Good loot.", she grinned. Garrus stepped into a body. It was an asari commando,
with a cannibal dead next to her. Liara found a data pad.

"Reapers. Looks like we know why the Commando team went silent.", Garrus spoke with disdain.
He hated the reapers almost so much more than Shepard did.

"This monastery's out of the way. What do the reapers want with Ardat-Yakshi?", Shepard looked at
the body then glanced to Garrus. She turned her gaze to Liara who read the data pad. "Anything
useful?"

"A floor plan, marked with the NavPoint location of a bomb. It's in some place called the Great
Hall.", Liara answered.

"At least it's no surprise nuke on Tuchanka, but the commandos want this place gone pretty badly.",
Garrus concluded.

Shepard stood between them thinking about the information and that bomb,"Ardat-Yakshi or not,
evacuating this place would've saved a lot of lives."

She walked forward to the broken door that emitted the slightest illumination of light. "If there's no
survivors, let's get to the Great Hall and set off that bomb."

Shepard turned towards Satima who stood behind listening. She nodded to her. They stepped out of
the lobby through a working door on the left end. In front of them displayed a giant window with the vista of ice capped mountains in the distance. Empty desks filled each corner of the long hallway. Shepard led them to a door which she bypassed easily. She took point, scanning the area with her own vision, stepping past the open door.

Below the balcony, a sound of a biotic flare followed by a dying cry of a reaper abomination, stood Samara. "Very good. I almost didn't hear you.", the red armored Justicar walked forward holstering her pistol.

"Samara!", Shepard said with a smile. "I didn't know you were here? I usually step quite loudly though.", she smirked.

"I wasn't speaking about you when you entered, Shepard.", Samara revealed.

"Then who?", Shepard asked.

"The young one standing beside you.", Samara pointed. Shepard looked to her right and almost knocked into Satima, who didn't make a sound. That was oddly disturbing. Samara smiled, then resumed her conversation with Shepard. "It has been some time, Shepard. You are a most welcome sight. The corruption here runs deep."

Satima was hooked on this strange asari called Samara. Her beauty masked how dangerous she was. "What brings a Justicar out here?", Garrus inquired.

"My daughters have lived here for centuries, Garrus. I've come for them. Unfortunately, the reapers had already infested this place by the time I arrived.", Samara glanced down solemnly.

Shepard didn't want to apply the hard questions to her, but she needed to know if they're mission would be jeopardized by the presence of Samara's daughters. "You met me hunting down your other Ardat-Yakshi daughter. Are these ones just as dangerous?"

Samara answered without a hint of emotion. Her cold stare stayed on Shepard, "Falere and Rila have followed the monastery's rules ever since they arrived. They've shown no inclination toward violence."

"And you're here to save them...", Shepard walked away from Satima to lean out, overlooking the area as she continued.

Samara glanced down once more, " They are my responsibility, and it's one that cannot be abandoned even as our galaxy crumbles."

"Let's go together. Maybe your daughters can tell us why the reapers hit this place.", Shepard implied.

Samara turned to face the distant mountains. " I suspect they will have much to tell us. It has been centuries since I last saw them. " A familiar shrill echoed from the other room. Samara looked up at Shepard, "We're out of time. " With a flare of her biotics, Samara quickly walked to the other room. "We will meet again. I will draw these creatures off."

"Wait!", Shepard shouted. But Samara was already out of sight. She turned to the team, "Let's go."

Satima watched them walk off. She saw from the corner of her eye an asari body. Kneeling, Satima spotted a data pad. Activating it brought out a recorded message. A sad last moment of this Tashya Porae. "Satima, I said let's go!", Shepard yelled to her. Satima hurried the download of the message and quickly caught up. Outside on the porch, Liara felt a chill from the night air. "It's too quiet. Are
there any survivors?" Descending the stairs, Shepard answered her. "This fight didn't last long, by the look of it."

Satima looked around. The whole place seemed foreboding despite the open space overlooking the vista. Stars twinkled brightly above them. Liara continued, "It wouldn't. The monastery only had a few guards to protect it, not an army." They reached the bottom of the stairs. Shepard led ahead with Garrus at her six. Liara looked over the ledge then stepped back in formation. Satima had a bad feeling, she followed behind Garrus.

Suddenly a loud cry came from the far-right corner of an upper chamber of the courtyard. "That one's new!", Garrus said taking cover. Shepard leaned out from behind a planter basin. She aimed her rifle at the asari abomination, but it warped itself to a different location within a blink. "Damn! That things fast!", she shouted.

The monster closed in on Liara, who hurled warps and tried a stasis field on it. Garrus used his Mantis, aiming for its head. "There's a barrier on that thing! Liara, take it down!", he roared.

Laia jogged backward. She hurled another warp to it. It's barrier weakening. "I need cover.", Liara tripped over debris. She looked up to the asari monster screeching and preparing a purple blast in her very claws. "Liara!", Shepard shouted.

Satima sprinted around the corner, shooting the abomination, forcing it back. She threw a blade, piercing the monster's claw, stopping it from finishing a warp. Satima knelt to Liara, helping her up. They ran back to cover. "Thanks.", Liara said panting. The hybrid nodded.

Shepard let out a wave of thermal bullets at the abomination. It screamed, trying to block them with a kinetic blast. Garrus fired multiple rounds of his mantis at the head. Liara stood up and hurled one last warp. Together they stopped and killed the abomination. Its last cry echoed into the open space of night. "Demon of the night winds", Shepard whispered to herself. Garrus checked on Liara, before heading to Satima. She stared at the charred remains of the monster. "Are you okay?", he asked.

"Yes.", she replied.

Garrus watched Shepard reload, he turned back to Satima. "It made a horrible noise, didn't it?"

Satima picked up her blade from the ashes. Garrus cleared his throat and asked her a question. "What do you think it was?" Apart from the obvious that is used to be an asari, Satima understood the question. "A banshee.", she said walking off.

Garrus agreed.

"HEADS UP!", Shepard screamed at them. Ahead, seven cannibals ran out of the door from the far middle of the courtyard. They fired chaotically at them. Garrus took a few down with his Mantis before clicking an empty loader, "Dammit. I'm out." He changed to his own rifle.

Liara used her singularity to trap two. That was five down, two more to go. Shepard aimed at them but was met by Satima's back. The young fighter melee them down. She used her pistol to take them out. It was over. "Nice job.", Shepard jogged up to her. Satima nodded in satisfaction.

"That used to be a person. An Asari. What have the reapers done to them?", Liara kicked a cannibal off the walkway. Her anger evident at the banshee they battled. Another door to enter, another hell to witness. Shepard bypassed it into the Great Hall.

Stairs descended into another small lobby below them. An asari in a white dress, with biotics flaring,
ran past the entryway. She was running from a cannibal. She threw a warp towards the monster, it shrugged the blast off. Shepard quickly dashed down the stairs with Liara ready to defend. Garrus and Satima followed behind.

As the girl faced a dead end at the wall, Samara jumped down from a ledge high above in front of her. Her own biotics flaring, Samara used a biotic blast. The cannibal was flung backwards. Its body dangled on the floor before Satima shot a bullet through its head.

The girl looked at Samara with utter surprise. "Mother! You came!"

Samara looked behind her to face the young asari. "As soon as I was able." She turned forward to Shepard jogging their way. Samara knew Shepard had over a dozen questions in her mind. "Shepard, this is Falere, my youngest. She and her sister Rila are Ardat-Yakshi. They..."

Falere quickly stood to her mother's side, "Mother! They have Rila!"

Samara looked at her stunned, "What?"

"I saw some of those creatures take her into the Great Hall. I've been trying to get there!", her eyes tearing up.

"What are the Reapers doing here?", Shepard asked.

Falere led them to another body of a Banshee, an asari abomination. It lay dead. Satima knelt to it, studying it. "Harvesting us.", Falere said in a grave tone. Satima glanced at her suddenly then turned her gaze back to the dead monster. It had claws sharp enough to rip flesh. Many razor like teeth that were once normal. The asari's body was completely mutated into something grotesque. That sent a chill down her spine.

"They're turning us into-into those, Monsters.", Falere gripped her hands tightly until they were small blue fists. An anger welled up inside that almost burst out. She remembered her mother was standing there and controlled herself. Falere turned to Shepard, her head lowered in sadness and fear, "Please, you can't let that happen to Rila."

Shepard sighed, sympathetic to Falere's pleas. Had she siblings to worry about, that would be the first thing she would resolve. Protect family first. "The asari thought the Ardat-Yakshi were to blame for the attack.", Shepard asked, curious.

Falere pointed around her, "This is our home! Most of us are grateful to be here. The monastery is a place Ardat-Yakshi can achieve peace."

"Falere speaks truthfully, Shepard. I vouch for her words-with pride.", Samara gave a slight nod to her daughter. Falere smiles to herself. Suddenly the fear around her melts away for one moment.

Shepard glances at the banshee body then sets her plan in motion. "Then we have to find Rila fast. The Great Hall has a bomb in it."

"A bomb? Didn't you come to rescue people?", Falere asked in shock.

"We'll try, but we can't leave this place standing, Falere.", Shepard knew she didn't want to hear that. Having one's home destroyed is the worst event to experience, but this monastery was turned into a place of corruption.

"You sound like the commandos, and they didn't stop to help anyone.", Falere accused.
Samara stepped forward to her daughter, "Falere..."

Falere looked down, using an ancient mental calming technique. She paused with a sigh. "I'm Sorry." She glances to her mother than turns around quickly. Falere vaults over the glass ledge, using her biotics to land softly.

"Falere!", Samara shouts. Looking at Shepard, Samara flashes her biotics, "The Great Hall. She's looking for Rila." Samara follows suit with a similar biotic landing, but more graceful. She goes after Falere.

"We'll meet you there.", Shepard yells down to Samara.

Samara turns back to Shepard before leaving the lobby lower floor, "Please be swift."

Liara signals Satima to leave the banshee alone. Garrus walks up behind Shepard. "You think Falere and Samara will be okay?", he asks. Shepard loads a fresh clip into her rifle. "Yeah. Samara can take care of herself. It's the rash actions Falere might do I'm worried about."

Into the next room, more cannibals stood as a barricade to stop Shepard. Gunfire commenced with flashes of biotic warps and singularity fields. A device in the second room had been activated, giving a marauder shielding as it provided armor boosts for the cannibals. Satima spotted it, effectively shooting it out. Garrus had found reload clips for his Mantis. He aimed for the marauders head and muttered something before blasting its face plate off, sending it into a frenzy of pain.

One more shot to finish it, through its corrupted brain. An oozing black substance poured from the bullet hole. Shepard eyed Garrus, but kept what ever thought she had to herself. After the fray was over, they all headed silently down the stairs. The entrance to the Great Hall ahead. Garrus took cover behind the first planter base.

Liara and Satima took side wall positions as Shepard forged ahead. Cannibals crawled out from under dark vent holes and a familiar shrill cry echoed in the room. "Great!", Satima shouted.

"Everyone focus on the Banshee!", Shepard roared over their comms.

Liara used her warps and pot shots with her pistol. Garrus took two cannibals down that were getting too close to Shepard. "Always got your six!", he yelled confidently.

Shepard didn't have the leisure to reply. She melee'd a cannibal that jumped in front of her. Liara kept hurling biotic warps at the Banshee. Satima threw her blades at the monster asari. She ran straight towards it firing her weapon. "Satima! Don't charge!", Shepard warned loudly.

But Satima didn't stop. The banshee caught her as she tried jumping to it with her omni-blade out, with an intention to thrust it into the creature's chest. Satima was flung down violently. The monster asari held the girl down, stepping on her with its full weight. Satima yelled out in pain as the abomination applied pressure to her plated spine. To her surprise, it didn't snap.

Garrus fired at the banshee with Liara throwing one last warp. It's barrier down, Shepard used her executioner pistol stopping short of the banshee's head. The monster looked at, its gaping mouth open, screaming towards Shepard. "Die, you ugly bitch!", she fired the weapon one time. The banshee's head exploded like a melon, bits of brain matter splattering over the walls and floor. It fell backward with a loud thud, dead.

With the foot off Satima, she slowly raised herself up. Satima looked at Shepard who had a scary glare. Shepard put her hands on Satima's shoulders, shaking her as she shouted, "Don't you ever do that again! That's how the squad can get compromised!" Shepard let go, with a worried stare.
Satima stared at Shepard. Was this mutual concern? Garrus jogged up behind them, he gave a friendly slap to Satima's back. "Getting cocky kid is how someone can die. Remember that."

Satima nodded at this. Liara walked past her, "I think they like you."

Bypassing another door, they walked into an atrium area. In front of them was a dead commando amid crates. A data pad beside her. Purple blood splattered the space around the body. "Another dead commando. Was she holding off the reapers, or was she left behind?", Garrus said out loud.

Liara shook her head, "Commandos work in teams. She would've volunteered to guard this point."

"Hope she took some down before she died." Garrus wanted an end to all this death.

The elevator ahead gave an eerie feeling to the team. Satima regretted the ride, but knew it was the only way down into the Great Hall. "What will we find?", Liara spoke.

"A bar and non-reaperified asari?", Satima said anxiously.

Garrus smirked. "Or a room full of Banshees. Which reminds me, don't pull another stunt like earlier again. Spirits, you act like a cadet...", he shook his head.

"How? " Satima said upset.

"Impulsive, rash, stubborn...", he tried to continue.

"Oh, so you're giving an example of yourself? "Shepard laughed.

"...very funny Charlie...", Garrus replies.

Liara smiles while shaking her head with a knowing look. Satima interrupts, "I'll be more careful this time," Garrus glances towards her with an accepting nod. The elevator stops, and the team steps out cautiously into the large room. Its walls were carved like drapes of metal fabric, hanging low overhead as they entered. Tall glass windows framed the front view of the night sky. A glow of soft blue displayed the bomb at the center.

"There's our bomb.", Garrus says as they walked forward.

"And Falere.", Shepard replies.

"Rila. Rila, wake up!", Falere mutters in the background. Shepard scans the area for reapers but finds none-yet.

Samara tries to make Falere see reason,"Falere. Rila cannot hear us."

Liara walks up the steps to where Falere hovers over Rila. She looks at them with pity. Garrus hangs around the bottom of the stairs, surveying the room. Shepard approaches Falere and Rila. Falere tries harder to reach her sister. "Rila? Rila, can you hear me?" After a moment Rila opens her eyes with an emotionless stare.

She raises herself to a standing position, glancing towards Falere. Everyone watches as Rila grabs her head. Garrus heads over to the bomb during this moment. He notices the asari girl flinches from him. Shepard and Liara glance at each other as the girl winces from inner turmoil. Something the reapers are doing no doubt. Satima looks on, worried that they didn't reach Rila in time. She stands behind Shepard.

Rila lets her hands down and opens her eyes once more. They are completely black. Falere gasps. A
sinister look washes over Rila's face. She attacks Falere, grabbing her throat. Falere pushes her down with Rila falling unconscious again. "Why did she do that?", Falere asks hurt.

Samara stands beside Falere in concern and sadness, "Because they have begun to turn her into one of the Reaper's creatures."

Satima gulps.

Shepard walked forward to them, "I'm sorry." A look of sadness changing her usual battle stare. The commander stepped away to Liara and Garrus. "Can we set off that bomb?'", she pointed.

"Not without a detonator.'", Garrus said. Shepard walked to the bomb, "Commandos would've had one. We've got to find it!" She began rummaging through the area.

In came a banshee. It stalked its way down the stairs, looking to them as prey. "Later.'", Shepard said as she loaded a thermal clip.

Garrus took aim with his Mantis, Liara flared her biotics. Samara summoned out a shield barrier. Shepard watched, looking for Satima, she took point beside Samara. "Get inside the barrier kid. If things go sour, blow this place to hell.'", Shepard shouted to her. Satima nods to the order and Samara lets her inside the barrier.

"Time to kick reaper ass.'", Garrus says, cocking a fresh thermal clip into his mantis. Shepard smiled wickedly at that. Husks come pouring in the room. Shepard begins firing on them. They all fall as fodder. Cannibals crawl out. Liara puts a singularity out to draw them in. Garrus throws proximity mines around the bottom stairs, catching any straggling husks.

Two more banshees appear. Satima begins to get worried. Shepard fires on the first one, taking down it's barrier. Liara uses warp after warp while Garrus fires his Mantis. The banshee falls forward disappearing into ash. The second one walks behind Liara, almost grabbing her with its sharp claws. She ducks away from it, running to Garrus's stance. "You alright?", he asks.

Liara pants and takes a deep breath, "That was too close."

Shepard lobes a frag grenade at it. Sending shrapnel flying in its direction. Liara flings a warp to it, then shoots it down with her pistol. One left. Satima yells at Shepard, "Behind YOU!" Shepard cries out in pain as the banshee throws her across the room and over the bomb, landing on her leg harshly.

"Shepard!'", Garrus cries out.

Liara shoots at the banshee running to her. She grabs Shepard and pulls her up to standing, "Shepard?' Charlie pulls away, standing on her own and shrugging off any pain. "I'm fine! Let's end this!"

She fires her weapon at the banshee. Garrus shoots two more rounds at it. It screams in defeat, falling over dead. With the banshee finished, Shepard holsters her rifle. "That's the last one.'", Liara added. "For now, let's get back to the bomb.'", Shepard barely walks straight to the bomb. Samara lets the barrier down with Satima running out towards her.

"That was close. You're limping a little.', she tried stopping Shepard, who shrugged her off.

Garrus came up behind her, "I'll check on her. Don't worry."

Falere dashed to Rila, she opened her eyes again. Rila quickly stood facing her sister. "Falere, go! Take the elevator." She had regained a part of her conscious back, for a time. Rila grabbed Falere's
hands. "Rila? What are you doing?", Falere looked down at them in worry.

"It's too late for me. There are hundreds coming. Just go!", "Rila reaches behind her to a small pocket on her dress. She pulls out the detonator. "...son of a..", Garris mutters.

Samara watched this unfold and nodded her head, understanding what must be done. She glanced at Rila one more time then turned around to the elevator. Garris and Liara stepped it up, following her. Satima began walking away when she noticed Falere wasn't budging. She struggled against Shepard's grasps. "Move!", Shepard yelled.

"No! Rila!", Falere was pulled away by Shepard towards the elevator.

Rila looked at Falere with a saddened smile, "I love you."

Falere cried her name out loud repeatedly, struggling in Shepard's hold. As they all reached the stairs to the elevator, shrill cries filled the large room. Rila resisted their indoctrinated screeches, her eyes turning black. She held the detonator tight in her hand. Banshee's by the dozen stalked into the area.

Satima turned around to her horror and saw Rila helplessly being dangled by the impaled claws of one of them. The girl said something right before the elevator door closed. Rila felt the stabbing pain in her chest as the banshee held her high to its mutated face. It screeched at her in an angry tone. "We're not your slaves.", Rila replied before dying in its cold grasp. Her lifeless finger sliding off the red button of the detonator.

The large explosion rocked the elevator as it destroyed the Great Hall and most of the lower reaper infested building. Falere banged on the door hard, slowly stopping to the realization it was over. Rila was dead. Shepard sighed over the loud sobbing of the asari girl, putting a hand on her shoulder. Liara looked on in a solemn stare.

Satima stood in the corner, completely torn between what was right and what was necessary. They made their way back to the landing pad. Piling out slowly to the sadness that filled the air. Falere walked to the balcony ledge overlooking the mountains and the fiery smoke from the burning building below. Samara stepped beside her. "Rila... there wasn't even time to say goodbye!", Falere grieved.

"Few can break the reaper's hold. Rila's will was extraordinary, as was her love for you.", Samara admitted.

Falere turned around with tears streaming down her face. "We left her to die!"

Samara tried to process the emotions that started to fill her mind. It had been a long time since she last saw her children. "Rila made her choice, and it has reminded me of what is truly important, why I'd swore to lay down my life."

"What is that?", Falere asked curious.

Samara turned to her last living child, "Falere... the Code demands an Ardat-Yakshi cannot live outside a monastery that no longer exists." She pulled a pistol from her side.

Shepard became concerned at the impending situation, "What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry, Shepard. By the Justicar's Code... there is only one way to save Falere." Samara points the pistol to her temple.

"Mother, no!", Falere shouts pleadingly.
Satima gasps covering her mouth, clearly upset at what Samara intends to do. "My daughters. You were all so much stronger than I believed...", Samara began to pull the trigger. Shepard sprinted at her, grabbing the weapon and disarming her. She pulled Samara's hands behind her back tightly, angry at what she wanted to do.

Samara struggled against Shepard, "Let...go."

"What are you doing!", Shepard yelled.

"Fulfilling the code.", Samara replied.

"By throwing your life away?", Charlie Shepard gritted her teeth in anger. Here was a capable, strong woman who had equally capable daughters. Falere would need her, especially now.

Samara turned to face Shepard, "I won't kill my last daughter!"

"You won't have to!", Falere stated.

"Falere?", Samara spoke while looking to Shepard. She was let free.

"I'll stay here-home-no matter what's become of it.", Falere approached Samara.

"Without a proper monastery...", Samara began worried.

"I could have left at any time. I don't need a building to honor my own code. And if the Reapers return, they won't take me alive, I promise.", Falere said matter of fact. The wind blasted on the surface of the monastery. A small sound of quiet surrounded them. Samara relaxed her stance. "Then...the Code permits you to stay, as you are."

Falere embraced her mother. Samara felt a peace that eluded her for a long time. "Once this war is over, and if I am able, I will visit. As a justicar should."

Shepard stood beside Samara once more. "I'd understand if you wanted to help Falere rebuild a home here."

"It must wait now that I can help oppose the reapers. I'll speak with Falere then join your forces. If you'll have me, of course.", Samara said. Shepard smiled, "I'd be honored."

Samara nods her head in respect, "The honor is mine, my friend."

Samara and Falere walk away to the elevator shaft. What they'll do next is anyone's guess. Shepard signals Cortez, "Everything's been taken care of. Bring in the shuttle. "Right Commander. I'll just follow the smoke.", Cortez replied.

Satima and Liara chuckle. Garrus shakes his head while checking his Mantis.

Back aboard the Normandy, Shepard relays the incident at the monastery to the asari councilor in the com room. "I read your report Commander. We had no idea the situation deteriorated so quickly.", the asari councilor's image phased in and out. Quantum entanglement issues.

"That's why I set off the bomb. There are no Ardat-Yakshi left.", Shepard informed.

"May the Ardat-Yakshi rest in peace. What the Reapers did to them was monstrous. I had another team of commandos headed to the monastery who I can now formally transfer to Admiral Hackett's command.", she smiled. "They'll serve you loyally Commander. Farewell." She bowed out. The com call successfully ended.
Traynor informed Shepard of another call from Anderson. While she took the call, Satima stepped into the war room. Now allowed to travel further into the ship than just deck three. The crucible's image lit up over the GUI interface. Satima looked over it twice. Shepard finished her call walking down the short stairs to meet Satima. Looking at her features of a prominent brow, Shepard wondered how this girl could've been created in a lab.

Miranda came from a similar background, but knew who her parent was. But she wasn't a hybrid, not as unique as Satima is. "Finding anything useful?", she asked the girl. Satima glanced to Shepard, "One hell of a ship.", she gestured.

Shepard looked away, thinking about Satima's last actions. How she willingly put herself in harm's way to protect Shepard from the banshee. "Satima?", she asked. The girl looked at her. "Do you know who your parents are? I mean, at least know where your DNA comes from. Or was that a random genetic testing this... directive-was doing?", Shepard leaned against the panel, watching Satima for any reaction or hint of some emotion.

Satima leaned over the panel with her, facing the opposite stairs she came down. "I don't know anything.", she lied.

Shepard scooted closer to the girl, crossing her arms. "You weren't told anything? Have you seen any files or found any data from where this testing was done on you?"

Satima looked at Shepard puzzled, "Why does it matter where my DNA comes from?" She averted her stare back to the interface. "I'm less than half turian, that's all there is."

Shepard backed off, understanding how sensitive this subject is to Satima. "Ok. If that is all you need, then the past is irrelevant.", she assured.

Satima didn't respond, only continued to look away.

Shepard stared at the interface with the girl. "You should probably go to Chockwas, have her check you out. That banshee was pretty rough on you."

The hybrid quickly glanced to the commander, "Yes, Shepard." She left the interface, walking up the short steps of the war room.

In the med bay, Dr. Chockwas examined Satima's back. "You're lucky the natural plating stopped that reaper from crushing your spine.", she said while taking a small needle, injecting blue fluid into the girl's flesh. Satima winced from the injection, more from habit than pain. "What's that?", she asked pointing to the injector. Chockwas glanced her way then finished putting the used piece in a bio-hazard container. "Pain killer. Just a small dose."

Satima nodded in thanks. For Chockwas to check her injury, Satima had to strip her armor and pull down the top of her under suit. Exposing her naked back. The petite plates, like a young turian's body, overlapped starting from the lumbar, and working its way up to a slightly protruding carapace.

It covered over her human shoulder blades, back neck and snaked around like tiny tendrils on her collarbone. Her bare chest retained a more human appearance, much like a human woman would look like. The door slid open as Liara stepped in. She unintentionally viewed the girl's plated back. Satima heard the footsteps, gasping in embarrassment, and quickly putting her under suit back on.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to look.", Liara said nervously. Satima hopped off the table. She faced Liara averting her gaze, "It's alright. I know I'm different. I just don't like people staring at me."

Liara understood the girl's feelings and quietly left the med bay. Her own inquiries with Dr.
Chockwas would have to wait. Satima then retired to the core room. Standing in the middle of the room, she replayed the conversation she had with Shepard in her mind.

It's better to let the matter go. Focusing on the real issue of the reapers is more relevant. She sat on the floor, looking around the room. Reaper and Archer are here. The Sentarians are here. They're hiding somewhere in this galaxy, and it terrifies her. She hopes Reaper will forgive her for being rash, giving in to the whispers demands. It's the directive and their control.

Satima feels the dread overwhelming her. When they all finally meet, it won't be pretty.

Chapter End Notes

These chapters and future ones, will consist of in-game missions. In-game dialogue are not mine. Disclaimer. Thanks for reading!

Memo to me: Memo- Always click the little question mark that offers free help. ;)

For the Homeworld I hope to save

Chapter Summary

A visit to the citadel leads to more suspicions about the hybrid, Satima. Shepard tries to pry answers, but is met with more walls. Future confrontations pose a threat to the dangerous mission to help the quarians. Satima is captured by a familiar enemy.

Chapter Notes

This is a pretty long chapter. It's a wrap up, leading to the next set of events. Hope you enjoy. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the days that followed Messana, Normandy docked once again on the citadel. Every crew member had been given an updated report of who had shifts left and who had been given leave for R&R. As soon as the docking tube had been in place, Satima hurried through to the airlock. She passed by Traynor who was talking to another crew member. "Where're you going? Has the Commander given you permission to leave?", she didn't want to sound snobbish, but she had orders.

Satima stopped short of the airlock before turning around quickly with an annoyed stare. She took two steps towards Traynor, thinking of a quick lie. "Yeeeaah, she did. I just confirmed it before heading this way, on my comms."

Traynor began to question about Satima's private comms, when the hybrid girl disappeared behind the airlock with a grin. EDI walked to Traynor, "Shepard did not give her permission to leave." Traynor grunted in frustration and returned to her duties, sending a message to the commander.

Meanwhile, Shepard had left half an hour earlier for the presidium. She took the moment for her usual stroll around the wards. Time alone was what she needed. The background noise of the citizens and sky cars filtered out her own footsteps.

With her hands, firmly in the pockets of her jacket, Shepard walked on past the busy shops. Her mind fixed on Satima. So, the girl is human and turian? Her features seem to fit. Her origins are unknown still, and there's an ancient race called Sentarians who sent her through the conduit.

Which can be activated, apparently, by anyone.

Satima has done nothing but follow her, watch her and hide back in the core room. Could she be a spy? Working for the Illusive Man all along? He would do something as to make a hybrid of species. And her disappearance during the coup? Shepard stopped in front of a club. It's loud music echoing off the walls in a deep bass. She felt curious or rather drawn, to go inside.

She walked through purple sliding doors to a dark dance floor, lit in neon blues. Many Asari were dancing together, other species worked their way in. Shepard stood watching, thinking. In the corner of the bar to her left, a familiar voice laughed. On closer inspection, she saw it was Satima drinking
an amber liquid, talking with two Quarians.

"What species are you? Are you the first of your kind?", a female quarian wearing a grey suit asked.

"Evidently.", Satima answered before gulping the last of her drink.

The male quarian in dull green also voiced his curiosity. "Keelah, doesn't that get lonely?"

Satima wiped a loose hair strand from her eyes, giving a pause to his words. She looked up with a smile. "That doesn't matter."

They looked at each other and bought her another drink. Shepard slowly approached the bar. The counter was polished metal. Small indentations made a V pattern up and down on the surface. They all sat on illuminated stools that were orange in color. A Quarian ordered another round of drinks for them. Satima started to drink again when Shepard put a hand on her shoulder, "Funny finding you here.", she mentioned sarcastically.

Satima snapped her head in Shepard's direction with a surprised look. She slammed her drink down on the counter. The two Quarians began to get up.

"No, don't leave! I was just in the area and wanted to check this place out." Shepard smiled at them and Satima, who raised an unbelieving brow.

Shepard put her hands in the pockets of her jacket again, raising on her heels to the awkward silence amazingly surrounding them in the club. Satima rested her elbows on the counter behind her, leaning on her back. The two Quarians fidgeted with their suits.

At this moment, a rhythmic beat came on. Many club goers started to dance furiously to the music. Satima gave a mock smile to Shepard, "You dance?", she asked smirking.

Shepard tilted her head smiling likewise, "You're getting to be a real smart ass lately."

Satima took a sip and nodded to the Quarians. She stood up facing Shepard, "The floor is yours.", she gestured teasingly, "I have other places to check out." and walked out of the club.

Shepard watched the young hybrid leave with an irritated glare. The two Quarians began to sit up when Shepard took Satima's seat and started talking, "So, how's the pilgrimage going?"

They looked at each other. "It's alright, considering...", the male stopped as his female friend nudged him hard in the gut.

"Shalim, don't talk about it!", she said in concerned fear.

Shepard settled herself and leaned in closer, "It's okay. You can tell me if you're in trouble. I'm Commander Shepard.", she smiled.

Shalim fidgeted with his drink, "...the war, but that's all I can say."

Shepard noted their apprehensiveness, then replied. "You mean with the reapers? I understand your people have been silent since it began."

"No, not that war. I won't say more.", Shalim seemed nervous.

"Okay, I won't pressure you.", Shepard raised a glass to them, "To the success of your pilgrimage, Keelah'Sa-lai."
Satima ventured out into the upper wards, curious to go back to the conduit. That place where she traveled. Her memories cloudy to how the Sentarians sent her through. Some memories lingered clearly in the back of her mind. She cringed from them. Eventually wandering around to the presidium gardens, then the financial district, an upper level with a restaurant caught her eye.

Apollo Cafe-it read.

One elevator ride later and she found herself walking out to a large set of windows overlooking much of the presidium below. This place retained a permanent daylight. She looked over a rail and watched hundreds of sky cars pass by. People talking around her and some sort of bird, sitting on a girder below her. He fluttered his wings and flew away. Satima thought of Haven, living in space again and being with Jormun.

Sighing to herself, she went back to exploring. To her left was a set of stairs and to her right, another corridor. She took the right.

Down the path lined with damaged holo-grid advertisements, she passed citizens of different races still consoling each other from the Cerberus attack. Many places were damaged, covered in broken glass and blocked off for public safety. She proceeded down more stairs with the cafe displayed below her. At the bottom, she noticed over a small garden, stood alone an asari on the stairwell, desperately calling someone.

She looked frantic and worried. Satima couldn't help but overhear the asari's conversation.

"Her name is Tashya Porae. Of course-P.O.R.A.E. No, I realize you can't tell me where she was deployed. Can you at least inform me if she's under orders not to communicate with her family? It's...been awhile since I heard from her. Uh-Uh. But, I would be contacted if she were injured, correct? Yes, I'm listed as her bond mate. Yes...I can hold."

She quickly hopped on the garden base and leaped down beside the asari, who gasped at the site of her. "I didn't mean to startle you. I couldn't help but overhear.", Satima said apologetically.

"It's alright, I suppose. I'm Weshra. I've been trying to get a hold of Asari command for days, looking for my bond mate, Tashya.", her eyes were red from obviously crying too much.

Satima's own eyes widened at the name Weshra. That was the exact name from the dead asari on Messana! She quickly looked through her omni-tool files and found the audio log she downloaded. "I believe you'll want to hear this."

Weshra listened with apparent anticipation. As the message played, her face contorted to sadness."Oh no...no Tashya.", she wiped a tear from her eye. Weshra swallowed hard then met Satima's gaze with a hesitant smile, "Thank you for bringing this back. At least I know what happened.", she then shook Satima's hand.

Satima smiled and watched Weshra leave the stairwell. An odd sting crept up in her chest, then she thought of Jormun. Satima leaned on the rail and took a deep breath. It was time to try out that cafe now.

Meanwhile, Shepard received a message from her own omni-tool from Aria. "It's Time."

Shepard checked her ship's status. Docked. Taking the elevator to Dock 42, she sent a message to EDI about the mission she had planned with Aria in the Purgatory club. What if Garrus finds out? He'll try to come, worse, he'll plead to her about joining the mission. She can't resist him for long, especially when he gets a worried tone. The elevator pinged.
Shepard stepped out to a walkway with a batarian waiting at the end. He stood in front of a locked elevator. "Are you Bray?", she asked.

"The great Commander Shepard. Heh, and me without my autograph book.", his sarcasm heavily intended for her.

"Save it. Just take me to Aria.", she spoke irritated.

"Follow me.", he led her into a black sky cab with the merc queen waiting impatiently.

Aria's briefing for her take back of Omega took long enough, with her explaining how Cerberus managed to rip the station right from her grasp. A tactical general, Petrovsky, was in charge now. But Aria was not going to give up her home or her rule, so easily. Shepard agreed to help the Merc queen for mercenary gangs to be deployed against the reapers.

Their rogue tactics and brutal combat skills will be useful on the fringes of the Terminus systems and beyond. After the deal was made, Shepard rode the cab back to the docks, seeing Garrus had been standing there. She hoped he didn't try to push his way into her mission.

His past as Archangel is too much a risk. Shepard stepped out onto the walkway, "Garrus. What's going on?", she asked.

"I thought you and I could spend some time together. There's a place I've always wanted to go, but wasn't allowed. Let's go there.", he insisted.

Aria was still expecting her in the next two hours to go to Omega, but Garrus's request is more important. Shepard followed him, eager to see this special place. Meanwhile, Satima finished her light meal at the cafe. It was nice watching everyone behave and not engage in petty fist fights or try to rob the bartender.

After a walk around the ward, she received a message to meet at the shopping mall. It was sent from Shepard?

Without thinking twice, Satima headed her way. Strangely enough, she came on the stair well that led to a balcony overlooking the plaza below. Barely a floor up, she could spot Shepard with Garrus perfectly. Curious. Heavy footsteps echoed behind her.

"I see you've taken quite well to the suit. The nanites have accepted your mutation upgrade, flawlessly.", Archer grinned while circling her.

Satima wanted to strike, but she couldn't. Her entire body felt paralyzed from his words. A whisper crept into her mind. It said to obey. "...no..", she muttered.

Archer had the ability to control her!? Was it through the suit? Her implants? Satima didn't have time to deliberate. "What do you want?", she asked afraid of his answer.

"Look at them.", he pointed. Archer's gaze intensified on the two legends below them. The neon signs of various shops glowed off the floor they were standing on. Shepard and Garrus acted like any normal couple together. He would tease her, watch for a reply and try to fend off any smacks or pushes Shepard would give him.

Likewise, she would taunt him only a little with a slight kiss on his mandible. Satima had a sentimental feeling over them. She wanted to protect their genuine love, before the reapers destroyed it. "Please... don't hurt them.", she begged.
Archer used his control to force her to turn around towards him. He handed her a rifle. "It won't be me that does them harm.", he mused. His grin sharpened to a predators gaze. "I think it's time for a little... experiment."

Satima reluctantly took the rifle. Archer stood directly behind her, "Now, to one knee, place the barrel over the rail to balance your shot."

She knelt with a pained groan from trying to resist the voice in her mind. He also knelt close to her left ear, "Begin to aim, closing in on your target." She looked through the scope, magnifying the image to view Shepard. Her heart pounded hard, barely leaving her a breath to take. Not Shepard! She can't... she can't! "Don't make me...", Satima pleaded.

Without warning, her hands moved the rifle to a new target. Garrus. He stood next to an entrance to shops, laughing at whatever Shepard was saying. "Aim.", Archer demanded in a low menacing tone.

Satima cocked the clip, her finger ready on the trigger. Small trickles of tears started to run down her cheeks. Her breath slowing for the shot, face hot from the inner turmoil in her mind. Then a sudden thought occurred. Pain.

Satima reached down slowly to her blade with her right hand. All the while steadying the rifle with her left, putting a finger on the trigger again. Archer didn't notice, too busy reveling in his sick game. She grabbed the hilt hard, pulling it from its sheath. "Fire.", he ordered excitedly.

The rifle fired with the bullet hitting the wall above Garrus's head. Shepard grabbed him by the front carapace, pulling Garrus down to the ground with her. Everyone was screaming and fleeing from the sound of gunfire. A loud piercing cry echoed from across the plaza.

Satima had successfully jammed the blade forcefully into her thigh, feeling the instant pain of the sharp metal penetrating flesh, straight to the bone. She dropped the rifle as it fired, sending the muzzle aiming up to the ceiling. Missing her target and infuriating her torturer.

Archer watched her writhe in agony, realizing how strong her will had become. Or was it because she cared for them so much? Satima’s pained gasps echoed as Shepard and Garrus were making their way to the stairs. Archer resumed a calm gaze, "One day, Satima. They will not come. One day, you will lay bleeding, dying and alone. Then you'll see who your true family is, my dear. You'll see." He rifted, satisfied of his experiment.

Shepard ran to the balcony to see Satima gripping her leg tightly. "What happened!?", she asked worried, leaning down to help with the wound. Garrus stood over the balcony, he noticed the rifle that hung over the railing.

"Archer. It was him. He... he tried to kill you!", the hybrid said in between gasps of pain. Satima sweated from the trauma of the blade in-bedded in her bone, while red blood pooled through her fingers.

Shepard scanned her leg to reveal Satima needed medical help. "This is deep. You need to try to stand, Satima." She motioned for Garrus, and together they carried her to the nearest cab to the hospital. During the shuttle ride, Shepard kept watch over Satima as she drove. Garrus watching them both, using his days in c-sec to put the pieces together. That bullet was met for him. This Archer wasn't even there. And the rifle hung with no thought to its disposal. Satima winced as she held the hilt still.

One small amount of turbulence and the blade sent a pain straight up her leg. Red blood oozed around the wound still. Satima glanced to Garrus's troubling gaze from the reflection of the shuttle's
Once inside Huerta, Satima was taken away to the emergency center. Shepard paced around the lobby wondering if the leg injury would put the hybrid out of their missions for a while. She could end up with a limp, unable to attend on the battle field.

That Archer really is dangerous. It could have been her throat or another vital part. Garrus sat on the edge of his seat looking out over the presidium's lake. His mind busy figuring out the event.

If Satima is the one trying to kill him, then why hesitate? Her wound looked extremely painful, not to mention risky. Even to throw them off her trail. Shepard began worrying over her like a den mother. It was in his Commander's nature, but Satima could be a snake on their ship. Ready to strike.

Why off him? He's close to Shepard, and they had that little argument in the core room. She already stated that he doesn't know what she's capable off. Is that it? Her slip up? An actual confession of her hidden intentions? Maybe Shepard is right, and Satima is a spy, working for the Illusive Man? Or Harbinger created her to kill them all?

After an hour of him thinking and Shepard pacing, a nurse informed them of Satima's current recovery. They could go see her now. In the small room, Satima sat up in her bed, gazing away at the many sky cars zooming by. She wasn't in her armor anymore. Dressed in her underwear it seemed, with a tank top and loose shorts.

Her injured leg laid flat on the bed, the other raised to her chest. She looked calm... surprisingly calm after being attacked and injured. Shepard stood next to her, with her own arms crossed and a smirk. "You're looking well."

"I'll heal fast. It won't be long."

Garrus stepped up, curious and cautious to the answers she might give him. "You said you were attacked? That this Archer was trying to kill Shepard? How did you find him or know this was happening?"

Satima glanced his way with a slight look of fear then returned her gaze to the window. "I was walking in the plaza, when I saw him in the crowd. So, I decided to follow him up the stairs. He was aiming a rifle at you Shepard, I lunged at him."

Garrus listened intently, watching her fidget and avert her eyes from him. "We had a short fight before he jammed a blade into my leg. Then he... disappeared. I told you he can rift."

"Alright. I'll take your word for it."

Garrus snapped his head in her direction, but only briefly. What does Shepard see in Satima that makes her so protective? Why would Shepard stoop to blind trust? Garrus would get to the bottom of it. He glared at the hybrid, then left with Shepard.

Satima tried not to think too much of it. Starting now, she has a new fear. Indoctrination.

Shepard had left for her personal mission in the terminus systems. Ashley and Garrus co-commanded the ship during Shepard's absence. Satima's leg healed well enough for her to return to the Normandy. She hid in the core room, awaiting the news of the Commander's arrival.

Satima paced, cracked her knuckles and sat on the floor in front of her new pile of data pads, small bits of hobby inventions and stale dextro rations. Two days passed, TWO, at a rate slower than she
thought existed.

Small comfort she could walk were she liked without the constant checking in by Shepard. She peaked in the engine room and found a complete fascination with the engine core. It thrummed with a life so strong, like a beating heart. EDI let her in Shepard's cabin along with Traynor to feed the one species of fish that managed to stay alive.

Satima thought about procuring more. Even Garrus let her observe how he adjusted the percentage, ratio and flow of the main gun.

Satima felt like one of the crew in those two days that passed. Everyone didn't seem bothered by her presence anymore. In the third day, Garrus was busy calibrating the main gun, waiting with anticipation for Shepard's return. EDI sent him a link through his visor's IR. "Here is the footage you requested from an Officer Mills.", she informed.

The camera footage from the plaza three days ago, he'll send Mills a thank you later, "Appreciate it, EDI." Garrus shut off his monitor and streamlined the link to the terminal on his desk. He pressed the play panel and watched carefully the hour of the attack on Satima.

Garrus could see Shepard's back and the top of his head. This was a side angle from behind her. But it overlooked the balcony to the left of its view point. He zoomed in to the balcony. A shadowed figure knelt in front of the rails, aiming the exact rifle towards them. Upon further image enhancement and a nearly ninety percent magnification, he got the answer he suspected all along.

It was Satima aiming the rifle, but another figure was standing behind her. He played the footage slowly to watch this figure circle her, handing her the weapon. She took aim with no visible hesitation. The strangest thing occurred though. Satima stabbed herself in the leg, throwing off her aim, missing her target completely. Him.

The figure stood over her for a few more seconds before disappearing altogether. Garrus couldn't believe his eyes. He replayed that last part, downloaded it into his visor and made headway to the core room. Satima has some explaining to do.

She had just finished her last data scan on the crucible when the door opened suddenly. Garrus came stomping in. The door closed quietly as he slammed her into the wall, arm over her throat and gun to her side. "You lied! Tell me the entire truth now, or I'll end you.", he threatened.

Satima wanted to fight back, knock his hide into the med bay, but he wanted the truth. Answers. So far into Shepard's trust only to lose it because of Garrus's paranoid conclusions. That just so happened to be half-correct. He squeezed harder against her throat until she raised her arms in surrender. Garrus let off the pressure long enough for her to explain.

"Alright...", she coughed, "It was Archer. I thought he was trying to kill Shepard, but he made me aim at you. He can control people. I didn't have a choice. So, I injured myself to stop it, stop the voices. I'm sorry... I'm sorry I lied.", she finished. Her face red from near strangling.

He let go, releasing his grip and aiming the gun downward. Satima took gasping breaths, coughing and rubbing her sore throat. Garrus glanced to her then backed away. "Shepard is returning soon. You should tell her the truth before I do. Trust me kid, if she gets this information from me first...", he warned.

Satima shook her head, still rubbing her throat with a cold stare towards him. "I will.", she complied.
After he left, Satima eased down the hull wall. He attacked her, tried to kill her! How can an honorable man from her past, be so cruel? He was supposed to be her father. If he knew the truth about her, would he have done the same thing?

Shepard came back. The crew listened eagerly about Aria, the infamous Queen of Omega. How Cerberus managed to take the station right from her. The most intense part of the battles being the adjutants. Liara right away sent a personal team of her own to investigate more, worried that Aria might not have the current man power to quell the outbreak of reaper abominations.

When Shepard finished wandering around the Normandy, performing her famous and very numerous checks, she stopped by the core room to see Satima.

From the crew's accounts, the girl behaved. More than that, she worked with them. Satima joined in various tasks and even fed Shepard's fish. As the door slid open, a sound of quiet surrounded her. Almost in a weird mangled position, Satima slept in her compartment, one arm over her head and data pads falling off her chest.

Shepard didn't want to disturb her, but noticed one pad falling to the ground. To stop any noise, she brushed Satima's arm carefully catching the pad, before the girl shot up quickly. She put up her hands in a defensive position, ready from a blow that never came. Shepard felt shocked from her behavior. Was Satima ever subject to torture?

She may never find out due to the girl's apprehensiveness to tell the truth.

"Oh...Shepard. I was just taking a nap.", she glanced at the mess. Looking beyond Shepard to see if Garrus was behind her. He wasn't.

"I heard you became a crew member overnight.", Shepard smiled.

Satima glanced away, "Sure."

Shepard crossed her arms, "I heard you also made a few friends."

"Friends?", Satima questioned. "I just picked up the slack, no thanks to you running off. I need to protect you from The Directive. Archer can show up, anytime and anyplace.", she glared to Shepard.

Shepard followed standing next to her, "Did I do something to piss you off?"

Satima took two data pads in one hand, stuffing them under her arm as she prodded around for a mod chip, "No."

Shepard helped find the data chip. She gave it to Satima as the girl snatched it and inserted it into her custom data pad. It glowed purple, like her omni tool. The glow lit up a strange bruise on Satima's neck. It seemed to be going away quickly.

But before she could inquire, Satima started to speak.

"I have to tell you something. About a few days ago, the truth.", Satima stated. Shepard looked around, then picked up a random data pad, handing it to Satima, "The truth about what?"

The hybrid exhaled lightly, a shaky voice began speaking as she closed and opened her eyes in memory. "I was the one aiming the rifle on the balcony, back at the citadel. Archer... controlled me, forcing me to use that weapon.", she shook her head in shame. "I tried to resist. That's why I stabbed myself. I needed to stop the voices, the control from making me do something horrible." Satima stared away, afraid of what Shepard would say, or do.
Shepard took a step back in shocked anger, "Why didn't you tell me in the first place? We could've gone after him!"

Satima glanced to her, "Because it wouldn't make a difference. He can go anywhere he wants. He's just toying with us, and unless I can somehow find a rifter of my own, I can't predict where he'll be."

She put the data pads on the compartment bench, turning around to the commander. "But, Shepard...I won't let him hurt you. You're all we've got against the Reapers. I'm not about to stand off to the sides and let anyone prevent you from destroying those bastards. Not even myself." Satima stared at Shepard with determination.

The commander refocused on the girl, and the bruise on her throat again. "What happened there?", she asked, pointing.

Satima rubbed and smirked lightly, "Garrus found out first."

Shepard didn't know what to do. Feel sorry for Satima or lock her away. If this Archer can compromise anyone, then every person could be turned into an enemy. But for Garrus to act without restraint? She turned away and walked to the main battery.

He had been busy with the hydraulic tube in the farthest point of the room. Shepard stood next to him, fuming. "They teach you to rough up girls in c-sec?! I'm sure she would've trusted me enough, to tell me the truth!"

Garrus slammed his fusion torch on the panel, knowing this conversation was coming. "I doubt that. She only covered her ass so she could get closer to you."

"How do you know that?", Shepard asked, upset.

Garrus sighed then glanced to his tool box. He rummaged around for a wrench, "I saw the camera footage for the plaza that day. You know me, Shepard. I always do my research. She may have been controlled, but in the end, it was still her decision to make."

"You sound like a hypocrite, Garrus.", Shepard informed angrily. "Indoctrinated victims don't get a choice. You know that!"

Garrus smirked while Shepard started to leave. "She was aiming for me, you know. Why don't you ask her that? I'm sure the answer won't be what you want to hear."

Shepard turned to him with a worried stare.

Hours ticked by on the Normandy, with every crew member busy with a task or orders. Satima tried to figure out her purpose. How was she to help Shepard defeat the reapers?

The schematics to the crucible didn't pinpoint some secret design hidden somewhere. As far as she is concerned, that giant station is nothing but a battery. With missiles, barriers and other pieces not making full sense. Liara convinced her it wasn't complete enough yet, to not worry about trivial things such as secret compartments or hidden generator stations. Still, Satima checked and rechecked over it.

Cortez told her that there is never enough checking a problem until the answer presents itself. Satima rolled her eyes. She couldn't ask Garrus for advice, neither of them trusted each other, and it was starting to become evident on the ship.

Another problem eventually presented itself. She needed to bathe. Enough hours clocked in fighting and studying, prevented her from taking care of the simplest of issues. Hygiene. She approached the
lady's restroom. It had three full showers. The very idea of stripping to her bare form in front of human women, made her turn the other way.

She'll wait until the skeleton shift takes over and no one is around. A quick whiff of herself changed her mind. Another idea came as she now stood in front of the elevator. "Shepard has a shower in her own private cabin.", she thought.

Satima took the quick ride, extra clothes in hand. They were given to her by Ashley who procured it from an empty locker. Standard Alliance military uniform. She walked slowly in front of the cabin door, hesitant to knock. "EDI... do you mind delivering a message to Shepard for me?", she asked the terminal nearby.

"What would you like for me to ask, Satima?", her smooth mechanical voice echoed.

"If I could use her shower.", she said nervously.

Within a minute, the door in front opened and Shepard stood. "Satima, come in.", she gestured the girl forward.

Satima walked in holding her bundle of clean clothes tightly to her chest. Suddenly becoming nervous. Shepard closed the door and stepped around to face Satima. "I don't mind you using my shower, you're not the first either.", she laughed, "Can I ask why you want to, though?"

Shepard looked sincere in her question and could possibly guess why. Satima childishly brushed a stray hair behind her small ear. "I... uh, don't feel confident sharing a public shower with... humans. Women, I mean. I'm not exactly normal looking.", she cast her eyes downward, as if she were ashamed of her physical difference.

Shepard patted her arm lightly, "There's nothing to feel ashamed of. It wouldn't bother my female crew at all, but if you need some privacy, I can understand. Go ahead and use it.", she smiled.

Satima felt better and ran to the shower. Shepard sniffed the air and cleared her throat batting her eyes. The warm water ran down Satima's young hybrid form. She sighed in delight in its restorative ability to literally wash off the grime of the day, or days rather.

Ten minutes later she began to dry herself, setting her clothes together to dress. A muffled female voice started speaking through the door. It must have been Shepard's. As Satima finished getting dressed, another voice began talking, deeper and male. Satima stopped, gulping. Time to go.

She quickly finished and opened the door to head out hastily. Satima began walking until she bumped into Garrus. He seemed a little shocked at first, but saw Shepard's reaction to this. "Satima, Garrus needed to discuss something important with me.", Shepard informed.

"No... no problem.", she stuttered nervously. "I was just leaving.", Satima then ran out of the cabin. What they had to discuss she didn't care for. As long as she didn't see anything, and that Garrus didn't attack her again. Satima left the top level using the elevator. The cabin door slid closed.

"You're keeping bad company, Shepard.", Garrus said as he leaned on the tank. The bright blue reflected off his armor.

"She just asked to shower in here. Afraid of being judged by the female crew.", Shepard answered, closing the bathroom door.

"Harsh crowd. But then, I'm not a girl.", he smirked.
"I've been hard on her since day one, but I felt she needed some guidance.", Shepard poured water into two glasses for them. Now wasn't the time to drink. "And so, have you.", she eye him.

Garrus took the glass and sipped for a minute before speaking again, "My sister and father made it off of Palaven. I did tell you, right?" He wanted to change the subject. Garrus started to feel indifferent to what he did to Satima. His father wouldn't have approved, but the tactics he's used before always worked.

Shepard nodded to his information. Garrus walked forward setting the glass on her desk, turning to face her. "I'm worried where they're headed to next. Not that I know, but I can't help it."

Shepard caressed his mandible, seeing how vulnerable he truly is. "They'll be alright. After this is over, we'll look for them. Your sister can share my cabin. It'll be like a sleepover.", she laughed.

Garrus laughed with her, "Yeah." He stopped quickly, looking away.

"What's wrong?", she asked him.

He glanced at her, "My father admires you but..."

"But?", she asks.

"You're not a turian.", he said straightforward. Garrus looked down, "It's hard to explain.", he stepped aside, walking to her couch and sitting, while covering his head.

Shepard sat next to him. She uncovered his face gently, pulling his head to her, "I'm not worried about that right now. What we have is something no one can divide. Human and turian relationships are still relatively new and... screw them. I want you. Remember, you are closer to home, because you are my home, Garrus."

He leaned closer to her, parting his mandibles slowly to carefully kiss her lips. To Shepard, this was a wonderful sensation between them. She could feel the tingling in her fingers to her toes as he rubbed her back pushing her forward on him.

"Commander. You have a new message at your private terminal.", Traynor's voice echoed, breaking the moment.

"Thank you, Traynor.", Shepard replied, irritated.

"Looks like duty calls.", Garrus smirked.

"Not for another thirty seconds.", Shepard pulled him on her as they leaned back together on the couch.

Satima stared at the memorial wall in front of deck three's elevator. Various names lined each side. Recent ones being Mordin Solus and Thane Krios. She wondered if her name would go up there. If she didn't make it, that is. Garrus walked out from behind her, leaving Shepard to her messages. She was to speak with Hackett about another priority mission.

As he stepped out, the form of Satima standing there surprised him. From that angle, she resembled Shepard. Her short ginger hair laid wavy on her neck. What an odd thought.

Satima turned around. "I didn't know you were behind me!", she almost stuttered the words.

Garrus walked up beside her, "Uniform suites you. You may have them fooled, but not me."
Satima scoffed and walked away.

Liara stepped forward from the right side of the elevator, hearing the short, yet curt, conversation. She stood next to Garrus, overlooking the wall plaques of the men and women that sacrificed themselves to stop the reapers. "You know she's only twenty. And you're giving a girl, barely out of her teens, a lot of credit for corrupt motivations.", she stated.

Garrus remained quiet, while Liara continued. "It's childish.", she stared at him. "Don't you trust Shepard?"

He snapped to her direction, "Of course I do! It's just…"

Liara waited impatiently for an answer. "Just?"

He averted his gaze from the wall, rubbing his sore eyes. "Maybe I'm being paranoid. Cerberus and their sleeper agents, the reapers indoctrination and now, this… this kid who can match me in combat if she tried. All the unknowns, Liara."

Garrus stared at her. "I can't lose Shepard again. Not to the reapers, and not to a child."

He turned around and left. Liara watched, returning her gaze to the names on the monument wall. She had unexpectantly found Kaiden's name. An eerie feeling swept over her, and she left promptly to her room.

Back on the CIC deck, Shepard jogged to the galaxy map. She pressed the panel to venture into the Perseus Veil. Tali could be out there. It became imperative she finds out and soon. She won't lose another friend, she won't! The Normandy quickly navigated through the relay, hitting max FTL speeds to reach the nebula.

Shepard paced, checking the engine and navigational stations on the deck, watching Joker fly the warship through the dark expanse of space.

"Commander, we're here.", Joker alerted.

She viewed out the starboard window a large quarian vessel. "That must be the envoy ship for the admirals.", she stated.

"Wonder what fresh hell the quarians have wrapped themselves up in?", Joker questioned.

Shepard shook her head with an irritated sigh, her gaze studying the ship's hull. "The same hell we've all been fighting.", she turned her gaze into a serious expression towards Joker. "The reapers."

Dholen-Far Rim
Quarian Envoy Ship.

Shepard waited in the war room for the Admirals to arrive. Leaning over the catalyst interface, the door opened with them finally entering. The interface became distorted with her movement.

"Commander Shepard. A pleasure to see you again, though I wish it were under better circumstances.", Admiral Rhann approached.

"I'd hoped for your support in the fight against the reapers. What's going on?", Shepard asked.

The quarian leaders began standing around the interface of the dimmed war room. Admiral Gerrel stepped forward, "Seventeen days ago, with precision strikes on four geth systems, the quarians initiated the war to retake our homeworld."
Shepard's pulse raced. "Dammit!", she thought.

Koris spoke loudly to object to the initial attack, "Which was a clear violation of our agreement with the Council to avoid provoking the geth!"

Shepard watched as the Admirals began to pace around each other, arguing their reasons behind it or against it. Xen started to pace the war room, using her suited hands to gesture her displeasure with Korris's statement. "A treaty violation is nothing compared to recovering our homeworld and advanced AI technology."

Shepard inquired more about their homeworld. Asking about Rannoch. Rhann happily replied with a brief history lesson about the war with the geth three hundred years ago, and how they lost their homeworld to the AI creations. "After we attempted to kill them.", Korris blurted out.

"We didn't try to kill them, Koris. We tried to deactivate them. It wasn't murder.", Xen leaned over the interface between them.

Shepard faced Xen with her own conclusions, "No, it was murder."

"Commander, the quarians never intended to create a true AI. It was an accident.", Rhann tried to calm the air with a reasonable explanation.

Shepard covered her forehead in frustration. She paced around, then approached the interface pointing her slender fingers at them. "Which you chose to correct by trying to kill them." The Admirals glanced at each other in silence. Koris crossed his arms, "Don't bother. Admitting we were wrong would undercut the justification for this suicidal invasion plan."

"You're throwing yourselves at the geth? Again?", Shepard asked stunned.

"And this time, we may have destroyed our people for good.", Koris chimed in.

Gerrel used the interface for his omni-tool to transfer a schematic for them all to see. "We'd driven the geth back to the home system when this signal began broadcasting to all geth ships."

The planet Rannoch showed as a holographic orb. A single pinpoint of the signal pinging off-world. Several geth ships orbited. "The Reapers.", Shepard looked irritated.

"Under reaper control, the geth are significantly more effective. Our fleet is pinned in the home system. If we're going to win.", Gerrel was interrupted.

"Win? You insisted on involving the civilian ships, Admiral Gerrel! We need to retreat or we'll lose the liveships!", Koris shouted his words.

Shepard gestured to the planet, "Where's the signal coming from?"

"A geth dreadnought. It can outgun anything we've got and it's heavily defended.", Gerrel spoke.

The dreadnought came into view, a schematic of a massive geth ship. Shepard became intrigued. "The Normandy's stealth drive can get us in undetected. I could board, then disable the Reaper command signal.", Shepard offered.

Xen put a hand to her suited-chin thinking loudly, "Yes, cutting off the signal should throw the geth into complete disarray."

"And while they're confused, you get to a mass relay and retreat.", Shepard finished.
Koris nodded in approval of this idea, "Good. Our civilian ships have seen too much fighting already. Are you certain you can disable the signal?"

"We'll get you out of there safely, Admiral.", Shepard reassured.

Rhann realized the last Admiral was late getting in to the information. She turned to the door sliding open behind her, "Our newest admiral has also volunteered to offer technical expertise..."

Tali'Zorah stepped through the doorway, descending the stairwell." Tali'Zorah vas Normandy, reporting for duty."

Shepard let out a wide smile, "Glad you could make it, Tali." Her mind giving thanks her friend is safe. "Admirals, I'll ready a team to hit that dreadnought."

"Thank you, Commander.", Rhann nodded.

Tali and Shepard took a short walk to the conference room after the meeting. They stood in silence, both exhausted from the intense battles this reaper war has done to them. Shepard leaned on the glass wall, gazing to Tali. "Admiral?", she teasingly asked.

"It's mostly a formality. I'm an expert on the geth.", her blushed cheeks hidden behind the mask.

"That you are.", Shepard agreed.

"Heh. I'm glad you're here.", Tali looked out the porthole into space.

Shepard crossed her arms. "If I'd known it was this bad, I would have come sooner.", she looked towards Tali apologetically.

Tali turned her head slightly to see Shepard from the corner of her eye. "You've had your own troubles. I'm sorry about Earth. We've got the largest fleet in the galaxy. If you can help us, we'll hit the Reapers with everything we've got." Tali paced in a tight circle, returning to gaze out into space. "Or however much is left from this stupid war."

Shepard uncrossed her arms walking to Tali,"I thought you supported this invasion?"

Tali shook her head, "No. After talking to Legion, I thought maybe there was a chance for peace."

"So why help them?", Shepard asked curious.

Tali turned to face her, "I'm an admiral. People look to me for guidance. Public disagreement would divide the fleet."

"I'll get your people out of there safely, Tali.", Shepard assured her.

"Thanks, Shepard. And just so you know, I need to keep things strictly business in front of the admirals. If you'd like to catch up, let's talk somewhere private.", Tali blinked her bright silver eyes.

"Sure thing.", Shepard smiled.

"I'm ready to hit the dreadnought whenever you are.", Tali turned back around.

Shepard left her to privacy, arriving back to the CIC. Satima walked out of the elevator, sprinting to the commander. "Shepard!", her wide-eyed excitement causing Traynor to notice. "I heard there are quarians aboard? Do they have a safe place to stay? Are their suits in need of repairs?"
With a light chuckle and a curious gaze, Shepard raised her hand to the hybrid. "Whoa... slow down, Satima. Relax. They have an envoy ship to stay on." She noticed the girl's embarrassed behavior, "Why are you so worried for them?", she asked.

Satima looked up, her awkward stance becoming evident. "Oh... uh, no... nothing.", she stammered. She began walking away, back to the elevator. "Just forget... all this... Shepard."

Shepard folded her arms, feeling there was more to this than Satima let on. She and Traynor exchanged a puzzled glance.

An hour of preparations and space flight passed, when Shepard invited Tali to her cabin for their private talk. She deliberately skirted around the rumor of Satima. Shepard wanted Satima to stay behind in the core room, helping in the ship, not joining the mission. Especially after her awkward conversation. Shepard underestimated Satima... again.

The elevator opened to level five, shuttle bay and cargo area. Satima walked out hurriedly as Shepard and Garrus were busy getting their gear on. "Shep-Commander, I need to speak with you.", Satima stared at her, ignoring Garrus. Shepard was taken back by the formality Satima used, "Alright." She followed her behind the armor kiosk grid. Satima rung her hands in anticipation, "I heard about your current mission."

Shepard glared, "Satima..."

"No, listen. Shepard, let me accompany you. I need to keep you safe from Archer." Satima rested her hands on her hips.

"So can Garrus and Tali, who by the way are coming. I already have a team picked Satima. Tali is coming regardless, this is her mission too.", Shepard tried to be sympathetic to Satima.

"Shepard. I can help you.", Satima furrowed her brow hard in defiance.

"You did good on the citadel and Messana, but you still refuse to obey orders.", Shepard continued, "And that little incident on the citadel between you and Garrus has forced me to suspend you on this ship."

"What? I was being controlled! Shepard, I would never hurt him or you, or anyone on the Normandy.", Satima stared. "Not like he did me! Or is that excused because you're sleeping with him?"

Shepard gave her a nasty glare, stepping forward as the hybrid backed up cautiously. "Your behavior, is exactly why you're staying behind. I can't trust you, Satima. You are compromised."

Tali walked in, meeting up with Garrus when Satima yelled her anger and vehemence at Shepard's command. "But, I'm a part of your crew now! Aren't I? You need my help, you need what I know about the damn reapers, the Directive and what you will no doubt repeat!", Satima yelled before glancing away knowing they were being watched.

Tali stared at them both in a bit of personal shock.

Shepard glared toward Satima, "I gave you an order! Do it!"

Defeated, Satima backed away from Shepard. She glared at Garrus who watched with an emotionless stare. Satima quickly exited the bay, glowering towards them as the elevator door shut.

Shepard leaned on the panel, distorting the holo-grid, tightly gripping a soldering gun. It snapped.
Garrus stepped beside her, watching her reaction. "Repeat?", he thought, "Repeat what?"

Shepard pushed past him in anger. "Don't.", she began. He bit back any questions, or advice.

Tali wandered over to a confused Garrus. "Definitely good to be back.", she quipped.

He didn't respond. The argument between Shepard and the hybrid repeated in his mind. Satima knows something. But his tactics have caused her to keep a tight lip over it.

Garrus realized what an asshole he behaved, and felt awful for pushing Shepard to choose a relationship over a real tactical advantage. Shepard ignored them, continuing to gear up. Liara is right. As usual. He's gotten paranoid.

Shepard was fully armored, and waited with Joker at the command panel back at the helm. Holo displays of the ships diagnostics as well as the dreadnoughts ahead flashed around, hovering over the metal board. "We're approaching the Quarian home system. ETA to Rannoch: Five minutes.", Joker turned himself to see Shepard.

She stood behind him, arms crossed, still as stone.

"You ok boss?", he asked.

Shepard shrugged, "What've you got from the comm buoys?"

Joker whisked holo panels, then rested his fist under his chin, "Pretty much a big ol'shitstorm, Commander."

Without touching a single panel, EDI used her own AI sensors to move the information gathered in front of her, "I have detected several hundred unique ship signatures engaged in active combat.", she glanced to Shepard.

Joker rubbed his temple, "Yeah, like I said."

"Take us in, Joker.", Shepard confidently ordered.

Joker stretched his hands, popping his knuckles. He began to quickly punch the orders, "Stealth drive engaged. Only way they'll detect us is if you all start singing the Russian national anthem." Joker smirked as Shepard hovered and paced behind him. She left immediately after. "Annd, didn't even get the joke.", muttering to himself in disappointment.

The Normandy emerged out of hyper drive into a brutal scene of star ship battle. Laser light shows pinged, bounced and burned off through metal and space. The geth were winning. "My cyberwarfare suite has accessed their docking protocols.", EDI's voice echoed in comms.

Carefully, Joker navigated the Normandy through the fray, even as a Quarian ship exploded in fiery heat next to them. Closer to the dreadnought they had to get, before the fight was drawn to them. As the Normandy swerved left, banking to miss a Quarian ship, a geth starship closes in, effectively destroying it. Finally, they dock alongside the dreadnought. Aligning with the docking tube.

Shepard was prepared for this. It's just a walk… in space, through a tube that connects to another ship. No issue. She hoped. Garrus and Tali met up with her on the command deck. Fully geared and ready to go. They followed her to the Normandy's airlock.

"All right, once we're aboard, we find whatever's broadcasting the reaper signal and shut it down.", Shepard opened the airlock."Tali's our expert on geth software. She'll be handling hacking and
"Good to have you back, Tali. Maybe with another dextro onboard, they'll get better turian food."
Garrus chuckled.

"As long as it's sterilized.", she replied. Tali glanced between her friends, a question burning in her
mind, "So... who was the new guest earlier?", she asked curious.

Suddenly, Satima walked in, fully geared. Her black armor fitted tightly to her lithe frame. She
looked at Tali, "It's a pleasure to meet you. Though I wasn't allowed to go far from my room, I did
manage to hear of Quarians boarding the Normandy. I'm Satima."

Shepard stood still, an obvious rage fuming from within. Garrus started to blabber about food again,
trying to keep the air calm and hoping he wouldn't have to stop a fight between two skilled women.
The current mission carrying heavy importance, too important to start an argument, again. He
resumed the food conversation. "Hey Tali, Dr. Michel did get me some dextro-amino chocolate.
You're welcome to it, once we're back."

"She got you turian chocolate?", Tali asked, sidetracked from the mysterious intrusion.

"She said she saw it and thought of me. Why?", Garrus shrugged.

Shepard looked at him, her previous attention on Satima forgotten for a moment.

Tali laughed, "Watch yourself, Shepard."

Shepard shook her head at Tali then turned to Garrus. "You will be giving that chocolate to Tali as a
"welcome back aboard" gift, right?"

"What? There's no such thing as a...", Garrus spotted Tali, shaking her helmeted head no. "Of
course, Shepard. I don't really like chocolate anyways. It's too rich.", Garrus sighed.

Shepard smiled to herself. She then remembered Satima, but her current thought got cut off by EDI.
"Shepard, there is a problem. All tubes except one are physically secured.", EDI said.

"I see the free one. Pretty torn up, though.", Joker spoke behind EDI.

Shepard realized what they were saying the second EDI explained it. Damn it! And to make it
worse, Satima is standing here, waiting to pounce on the next available opportunity to half-cock it.
Once again, nearly killing herself and needing Shepard's help. She glanced to her team plus one. It
was time to face her fear again.

"Too risky for the whole team.", she swallowed with a dry mouth, "I'll secure the docking area.
Everyone else can follow me over."

"Roger that, Commander. We'll just stay here-you know- quietly.", Joker spoke.

"Hang tight. I'll just be a minute.", Shepard said.

The docking tube had large bits of debris floating around. Chunks of missing tube gave her a nice
view into space. At least she kept telling herself that. A nice view. The first thing she must overcome
is the disorientation. Since the corridor has wide open spaces, she needs to walk in a circle around
the inside of the tube. In a sort of orbiting motion. Then stop and slowly turn, walking across an
undamaged piece. Simple, yet so hard.
Shepard looked out of a larger hole. The body of the dreadnought hovered in place. "No wonder the quarians were having trouble. That ship is enormous.", Shepard noticed walking by.

"It is 30% larger than an Alliance dreadnought.", EDI commented.

The loud thumps of Shepard's mag boots echoed around her. The sound of laser fire filtered her comms. Another viewpoint into space showed a planet: Rannoch. "Tali, you're going to like the view.", Shepard informed.

"Better than a vid?", Tali asked.

Shepard nodded her head in thought, "Much.", she replied.

A large boom echoed behind her. Must have been a direct hit to a hull somewhere. Shepard continued to walk alone. Two minutes passed.

"How are you doing Shepard?", Tali asked, concerned.

Shepard replied with a hard swallow, "The lack of gravity is a little disorienting." Her insides were starting to feel queasy. She took a deep breath. "I'm ok.", Shepard told herself.

"The dreadnought has artificial gravity. You should be okay once you're on board.", Tali informed.

"Until then, I'll make do with mag-boots.", Shepard replied. Wonderful mag-boots. No floating away helplessly in space, mag-boots.

"Hey, take your time, Commander. We're fine until they, you know, look out a window.", Joker commented sarcastically.

Shepard laughed to herself. "Geth don't use windows, remember? Structural weakness."

"Like the geth are just sitting there saying, "Those organics never try the no-windows thing twice!"", Joker smirked.

"What the hell is a geth?", Satima asked.

"Flashlight head robots that don't like anything that's flesh and blood.", Joker replied, chuckling.

"Oh.", Satima spoke.

Finally, towards the end of the tube, it broke away. Shepard barely made it over in time before it floated off into space. "Shit!", she thought. Her heart rate and pulse becoming erratic for those seconds that it happened. Back in the air-lock, Satima noticed Garrus keeping an eye on Shepard's vitals. Tali too, kept checking. "What's going on?", she asked.

Tali turned to her, "Shepard has a bad history of open space."

Satima raised her brow, but nodded. Garrus continued to monitor Shepard, giving an answer. "She was spaced over two years ago, when the collectors destroyed the old Normandy."

"She died in space?", Satima questioned. They both nodded yes. "How did she come back?", Satima wondered.

"The Lazarus project. Cerberus.", Tali informed.

Satima noted this information, when Shepard came back on comms.
"Looks like the rest of the team isn't using the docking tube.", she alerted.

"So, I'm guessing you'd rather not solo the dreadnought.", Joker said with that familiar hint of sarcasm.

Shepard eyed the last part of the tube, while Joker's comment made her brow twitch. He's gotten annoying lately. "Not if I can help it.", she replied.

"It's not like she couldn't do it anyways.", Satima said out loud, suddenly.

"Ask Tali to get on the dreadnought schematics.", Shepard said ignoring Satima. "If she can point me at another docking tube, I'll override the controls and let the boarding party on."

Shepard walked through the airlock. She unholstered her rifle, pointing down the dark corridor, passing by two locked doors and an area on repair shutdown. The geth are getting better and faster no thanks to the reapers.

"I'm inside. I've got gravity again.", she informed.

Tali overlooked the dreadnought schematics on her omni-tool. "Great. I'm looking for...Got it. There should be a hull breach not far from your position." Everyone waited anxiously to get on board with Shepard. "The nearest undamaged docking tube is on the other side.", she finished.

Overhead, Shepard spotted a small hole into space. Possibly the size of a sky car. "Think I found that hull breach you mentioned."

Tali's voice sounded more than pissed about it, "Admiral Gerrel tried a frontal assault. We lost six frigates. That tiny hole was the only damage we did."

Shepard climbed over a metal covering. "I wouldn't call it tiny.", as she hopped down onto the metal grated floor. "Not the way you'd have done it?", she asked curious.

"No, he was too aggressive. I argued, but as admiral of the Heavy Fleet, it was ultimately his decision.", Tali replied.

Shepard climbed around girders. "What about the other admirals?" She rounded the corner to an opening.

"Xen backed the invasion, largely as a chance to test her toys. Raan gave provisional support.", Tali changed stances while waiting. Standing too long with a small anticipating tick. "Only Koris opposed the war with me. And he was right. We could lose the whole fleet, Shepard."

Shepard walked on top of a girder passing by a holo grid station. Up ahead was a ladder to the top floor. "We'll get your people out of here safely." She climbed the ladder quickly, now facing a walkway to an unlocked door. Then suddenly, a strong jolt nearly knocked her off it.

A piece of the walkway fell off in front of the door. Shepard ran fast clearing the gaping hole with a jump. She proceeded through the door. Entering a large dimly lit room, Shepard saw what she was looking for. "I've found another airlock. I think we're good to go."

"Great. If you override the controls, we'll be right there.", Tali said.

Shepard looked around and climbed another ladder. On the top floor, she approached the holo grid station for the airlock controls. After pressing a few panels and typing in some codes, she unlocked the docking tube. "Got it. You're clear to board.", she said over comms.
The airlock opened with Garrus, Tali and Satima coming through. The admiral stood back taking in the small scenery. Faint sounds of geth language echoed about them. The odd silence of a robotically run military ship giving a chill to Satima. Still, it's brighter than hive. The Directive loved its dark corridors and menacing alcoves. This one had slightly menacing alcoves. In fact, in some ways, it seemed similar.

Garrus walked up to were Shepard stood over the walkway. "See any action?", he asked.

"Not yet. I'm sure you can help me find them.", she smirked.

Garrus chuckled. Satima made a gagging sound.

Tali climbed the ladder to Shepard. "Here, let me see if I can get this open." Shepard followed Tali with Garrus and Satima following up the ladder also. Tali gestured to a weapon, "In the meantime, take a look at this." Shepard glanced at it. It seemed to be a pistol of some type.

"There, it's open. We're clear to go.", Tali informed.

Shepard picked up the pistol, "Looks impressive." Proceeding to take point, leading them through the corridor.

"It's Admiral Xen's design. It transmits an energy pulse on contact that disrupts shields and synthetics.", Tali followed behind Shepard. She took off ahead to unlock the next door at another grid station. "So, we're we headed?", Shepard asked.

"We're looking for an operations center. I can disable the Reaper command signal from there.", Tali replied.

Garrus stood next to her, waiting for the door to open. His rifle aimed and ready. Satima stayed back, noticing the layout of the dreadnought. The claustrophobic atmosphere giving her a feeling of an ambush. Could be one too! But Shepard says this Reaper signal should be taken care of, or the quarians won't make it. That means Jormun wouldn't be born. Whoever his mother was. So Satima needs to make sure they all survive.

"Satima, keep up.", Shepard shouted.

Through the open door, Shepard continued her questions for Tali. "Where's the closest operations center?"

"Past their defense network and through a sensor cluster.", Tali walked ahead to peak around the huge reactor room.

"And it sounded so simple.", Satima said sarcastically.

In front of them was a massive machine letting out steam. Underneath it's metal covering was a red-hot coil. There was a sensor station with its information ahead. "GARDIAN antifighter lasers. Looks like they're using ultraviolet frequencies... like the salarians.", Garrus commented.

"Expensive. Bet it gives them an edge in close combat, though.", Shepard replied amazed.

"When the fleet rushed the dreadnought, those lasers carved right through our ships.", Tali said pointing at them.

Shepard jogged around the machine, "Come on. Let's get to the op center before they lose more."
They continued down the walkway through the semi darkness, past deep violent hued walls. Holo grids and panel stations lined the path as they forged ahead. Bright orange reflecting off the surface of the panels from the heated coils. Up came the metal covering, like the exoskeleton of an insect, revealing its colorful underbelly. Down hard in a loud thud, with a light spray of steam coolant gel relieving the heat and pressure off the coils. Shepard stopped in front of bridge controls. She pressed the panel for the bridge to extend. Tali stood waiting until a pack of geth came with no warning from the other side.

"Watch out! Geth incoming!", Tali yelled.

One of them used rockets. "Shit!", Satima yelled. Shepard took cover at the controls. Garrus leaned around from the coil, taking shots with his rifle at the ggeth. Tali offered fire support with her shotgun. Shepard brought out her arc pistol, effectively dealing heavy damage to a geth trooper. "Nice gun, Tali.", she shouted happily.

"Uh... I'll give the regards to Xen for you.", Tali said while taking cover from another angle.

"Can I borrow it?", Garrus shouted, dodging gun fire, barely.

"Only if I drop it.", Shepard smirked. She shot out the geth gunning for Garrus, then hopped over her cover to get closer.

Garrus followed, "Damn.", he replied.

"Can we focus on killing the flash light robots.", Satima chimed in.

Shepard's witty demeanor fell flat when Satima spoke. She was still pissed at her from earlier. Angrier now that she forcibly joined. "They're not robots. They are intelligent machines.", Tali commented, using her shotgun to hit a geth at the forward ladder.

"In other words, A.I.", Garrus informed.

Satima hid from one, careful to sneak out and shoot it from behind the partition on the walkway. "Perfect.", she shouted.

Shepard finished the last two troopers. "Alright, let's cut the chatter." She led the way on the bridge past everyone. On the other side, another small wave of geth began firing. "Stay sharp. More on the way!". Garrus shouted, while finding a better angle to snipe them down.

Shepard fired alongside Tali. "I don't hear an alarm!", she said aloud.

"They're geth! They sent alerts to every unit on this ship!", Tali yelled. She fired a trooper down. The admiral observed Satima using a pistol of her own, gunning one down with the same precision likeness to Shepard. They both unflinchingly fired their weapons. Tali glanced back to Shepard who dodged laser fire. She whipped around the corner, grabbing a geth from behind, stabbing it dead with her omni-blade. Garrus head shot a trooper in the distance.

She shook her inner thoughts aside. "Shepard, we need to get to the operation center before they box us in!", Tali fired another round of her shotgun.

"Enough of this!", Satima yelled. She grabbed a nearby geth's rifle, running out in front of the fray and began firing. A spray of plasma slugs hit all five geth standing in their way. They all fell, non-functioning. Satima dropped the rifle, clearly spent of its thermal clips, and a grin of satisfaction on her face.
"Satima!", Shepard roared, coming out of cover. She stood face to face with the hybrid, glaring in anger. "Continue to act like a merc, and I'll throw your sorry ass off my ship! Follow orders if you're going to force your way into my crew."

"But I'm not a part of your crew, remember? I'll do what I have to in order to help you stop the Reapers. Consequences be damned, Shepard.", Satima moved forward. Behind her, a shocked and severely vexed Shepard glared. Garrus didn't utter a word and Tali stood there. Seconds of silence passed with Tali walking forward. "Come on. We have to reach the op center quickly.", she gestured ahead.

Shepard nodded. She jumped down a ladder to Satima standing guard at the bottom. They met quickly, Shepard forging ahead. Tali took behind Shepard, putting Garrus at the rear with Satima, keeping the girl off the commander's back.

Shepard found a lone geth and began firing. It felt good to destroy something when there was anger inside. More came from around cover to fight back. They seemed to just pile in like fodder. "They're throwing their lives away!", Shepard argued.

Tali took cover, "Networked intelligence! As we kill them, their attacks become more aggressive!"

"Disable their shields!", Shepard shouted while lobbing a lift grenade.

Two of them lifted off the ground as the grenade exploded under their footing. Bits of shrapnel pinged off the hull. Tali used her drone to draw fire away from the front walkway, so Garrus and Satima could flank them. He dropped one, "And don't give them time to recharge!"

"Reload!", Shepard shouted as more came through.

Garrus took out a trooper. Satima used her blade, with a pistol shot to another. Tali summoned her drone again. Shepard pulled out the revenant and began heavy fire on the last ones. With them finally down, they proceeded. Shepard took a step forward and heard a clicking sound. "Mine!", Tali shouted.

Shepard jumped back in time before it exploded in fire.

"Trip mine.", Tali informed, scanning the device. "We should be more careful further in the ship."

Satima rushed over to Shepard who didn't notice taking her arm. "Are you alright?", she asked anxiously.

Shepard dusted herself off and looked straight at Satima. "I'm fine.", she said sternly, giving an icy glare. Satima backed off glancing at Garrus. "If looks could kill", he thought.

Shepard led on, dodging more mines and passing heated coils. At the end of the walkway, the commander opened a door into a large corridor. Grids, panels and more stations lined the walls. She walked to a station close by that read Signal Console. "Look, the signal's hitting all geth processes. The reapers have them completely under control.", Shepard pointed out.

"We've tried jamming it, hacking it, and piggybacking garbage data to corrupt it. Nothing worked.", Tali exclaimed.

"Nothing short of bombing the hell outta this place.", Satima replied as she looked around the area. Tali overlooked the console display with her scanner. "That didn't work either."
Another station also labeled Sensor console was ahead. Shepard pressed a panel. "Sensor data. Any sign of how the quarians are doing?", Garrus asked.

"We're taking heavy losses. The geth have a planetary defense cannon. It's ripping through our fleet.", Tali reported.

"Shit.", Satima muttered. Jormun would've worried over his people if he were here. In his memory and respect, Satima resolved to save the quarians. Somehow.

"Is there anything we can do to help them?", Shepard asked worried.

Tali shook her head, "Just make their sacrifice worthwhile." She glanced at them and then at Satima, who nodded to her in solemn understanding. Further into the ship. Shepard walked ahead in the dimness carefully. Watching for mines or any other surprise the geth might have laid down. A third station lined the wall in front of her. Network console.

"Why do we need to find the operations center? Wouldn't any access console do?", Shepard asked in case she thought right.

"No. Anything, we do here, the geth could counter. Too many fault-checks and redundancy levels for what we need to do.", Tali stated.

Shepard spotted a door ahead. Tali walked up from behind, "The dreadnought's operation center is just ahead."

"Good. Let's cut the Reaper signal and get the fleet out of here.", Shepard ordered.

As soon as the door opened, weapons fire aimed directly at them. Shepard dodged it and took cover immediately. Satima and Garrus ran right into them, taking cover with Tali, sitting across from Shepard. A geth hunter finished locking down the op center controls before aiming with its weapon and activating its stealth mode.

"Wonderful. Invisible robots.", Satima peeked from cover firing her pistol.

"Not a robot!", Tali yelled.

Garrus pulled Satima back in time before a hunter appeared in front of them. He quickly kicked it away, firing on it. "Quiet! Satima, take the left and look for reflective shielding. Tali watch Shepard's back while I storm the front!", Garrus shouted. Shepard smiled to herself. Garrus can be one hell of a leader.

He led the first and second fire teams on the collector's home base. "The hunters are moving in!", Tali shouted as she fired. Shepard returned her thoughts to the field. Garrus got further ahead to the op center console. A hunter from behind stalked him and opened fire. He barely dodged it.

Satima dropped down in front, effectively pushing a blade though its flashlight head. She ripped circuits, sparks tweaking outward. It fell backwards in a thud. Satima turned around to face Garrus, giving him a quick nod.

Shepard watched the event quickly before dropping two hunters that jumped out in front of her. Tali used her drone to help along the way. "Couldn't hide from that!", Garrus shouted.

Shepard brought out her omni-blade killing another hunter.

"Watch your six! At least one hunter still active!", Garrus yelled across the room.
Shepard found it, slicing its metal head off with her omni-blade.

"That's the last of them. Let's see if that console is operational.", Tali said, pushing geth pieces out of the way with her boot.

Satima looked around as they walked up the path to the console. She spotted a familiar small instrument. "More live mines.", she said to them.

"I see them, thanks.", Tali replied.

Shepard pressed the console panel. A large holo image of the dreadnought appeared ahead of them over an image console. "Damn it, they've locked down the Reaper signal. We can shut it down from here in the operation center.", Tali said as she quickly got to work on the console.

Shepard glanced to the right and spotted a panel pinging. She pressed it and the signal was unblocked. "There! The Reaper signal's coming from the drive core!", Tali yelled excited and relieved.

"So, if we get there, we shut it down?", Shepard asked.

"Right, but how do we get there? The geth have sealed emergency bulkheads to block us off.", Tali typed away on the console. "We need a route to the drive core that can't be blocked, a path that runs the length of the ship."

"You could start an emergency overflow of something, to release the shutdown, I mean. It would make a path somewhere.", Satima offered.

Shepard thought about what Satima suggested. "What about the main battery? It runs right by the drive core."

"That could work.", Tali sounded skeptical.

"But?", Shepard inquired.

"The geth still have us locked in here. We need to get these doors open.", Tali gestured towards the room. "They've locked high-level processes. We need something basic...a ship-wide emergency, like a fire." Tali nodded to Satima who smiled back, while twirling her blade in agreement. "Nice.", she spoke.

"What about the heat diffusion system?", Shepard asked concerned.

"Wait. If I faked a thermal warning, it would open all maintenance tubes for emergency venting!", Tali spun on her heels and started pressing panels.

"Would that override the lockdown?", Shepard asked.

"Without a doubt.", Satima chimed in.

"Yes! Okay, I've got it primed."Tali showed them the emergency fire on the dreadnought image. "But be ready. I'm reading hostile geth on the other side of the doors." The dreadnought holo image showed red patches blaring through its blue core. The door to the left opened with more geth hunters pouring through. Hunters came through the ceiling of the room.

"Watch out! They're dropping in!", Garrus yelled.

Everyone took cover. Tali stayed with the console, preventing any geth hunters from rehacking her
recent attempt. Garrus brought out his mantis, scoping geth from their small distance. Satima left cover to fight in the open. "There could be cloaked hunters as well!", Tali shouted from cover.

"No shit!", Satima yelled, dodging one as it got too close. She used her pistol against it.

Shepard used her arc pistol again. She disrupted the shields of two hunters as Satima shot one down. Garrus finished the other. "Heads up! More on the way!", he yelled. Shepard decided to snipe a few along with Garrus. He nodded to her as they took count together. "I got two.", Shepard smiled behind her helmet. Three thuds followed, "And I have three.", Garrus replied with a smug look.

"Can we not use this time to practice, please.", Tali asked.

"Sorry, Tali.", they both said together.

Satima heard them and shook her head. Completely awkward.

"Look out!", Tali shouted as she ducked away from a hunter's fire. It appeared between Garrus and Shepard. They both fired their weapons, dropping the robotic body hard.

"That was too close.", Tali said as she leaned on the console.

Satima shot down the last of them. The team jogged down the ramp to where she stood. Tali walked past with her mission in mind. Shepard glanced at Satima with a quick nod while Garrus remained in the rear with her. Keeping Satima off Shepard's back and out of her hair would help this mission go smoother and quickly. Once they're back on the Normandy, they can lock her up in the core room.

"Let's get to the maintenance shaft before more reinforcements arrive.", Tali said unlocking the next door.

Down the dark corridor, a loud boom resounded throughout out the ship. They all kept walking. "I've served on a lot of ships, but nothing like this. The contours are all off. It's not built for organics.", Garrus commented.

Satima shrugged, "You should see hive. It would make your skin crawl. The future is going to be very hard if we can't stop the Reapers.", Satima replied.

"I'm sorry... but all I heard was complete insanity. What does she mean-the future?", Tali asked confused.

"I'll tell you later. Shouldn't be too much farther to the main battery.", Shepard said. "I'm surprised they'd send you on this mission, Tali."

"Even Admirals are expected to serve. I'm better at hacking than I am ordering ships around.", Tali responded.

"Yeah, against an enemy dreadnought, your combat drone would just float there making that...noise.", Garrus replied with a smirk.

"I missed you too, Garrus.", Tali chuckled.

Shepard stood at the door ready to open it. Satima stood in the far back watching from behind. Garrus and Tali waited. Time to bypass the door. Shepard led the team through. More than a few levels sat above them and a loud rumble in the background reminded them of the ongoing battle outside.
One by one in silence they went down the ladder, followed by another on the level below them. This time the same loud sound resounded in the distance. It seemed frequent and not at all from the outside. Inside maybe? Within a minute of touring the lower level, Tali huffed as she stood still for an incoming message. "Damn it. Priority message: A planetary defense cannon just took down Admiral Kori's ship!"

"Survivors?", Shepard inquired.

"They got to escape pods, and I've got Admiral Raan trying to establish a secure link.", Tali replied.

"Put her through.", Shepard said. She motioned for everyone to hold. Satima slowly walked beside Tali and Garrus, her weapon relaxed.

"Shepard, this is Raan. The Heavy Fleet is collapsing. I don't know how much longer we can hold out.", Admiral Raan sounded tired and beyond worried.

"We'll have the Reaper signal deactivated shortly, Admiral.", Shepard reassured.

The comms ended. Tali nodded it was on the Admiral's end. Shepard motioned for them to move out. Down one more ladder and to the level they needed to get to. "I wonder what's behind door number three?", Garrus quipped.

"Do you hear that? It sounds very close.", Satima commented.

The loud roar seemed to be literally behind the next door. Shepard prepared for whatever it was, rifle aimed. Cautiously they walked through. As they entered, a loud click echoed in the corridor from their position on the cat-walk, with a deafening boom coming after. "There it is again!", Satima pointed out.

"It's the main battery!", Garrus shouted.

"Down this ramp here!", Shepard yelled.

They followed behind, and took cover at the wall as a sonic boom clicked and echoed around them. Garrus and Tali ran across taking cover. Satima stood next to Shepard, who pulled her down in time as a giant EMP shock wave blew past them. "MOTHER FU...", Satima started.

"Watch the shock wave! That's a big gun.", Shepard shouted shaking her head at Satima.

"I told you I heard something dangerous.", Satima replied eying Shepard.

Shepard ran ahead fast, Satima right behind her. Garrus and Tali ran on the side ramp then back onto the grated walkway alongside Shepard. Another loud click came with the shock wave passing by again. "Hate to be in front of that bastard!", Garrus yelled.

"KEELAH!", Tali jumped backwards nearly falling out in front of it.

Garrus quickly grabbed her, pulling her back behind cover. "Sorry, Tali."

"Garrus, keep my best hacker alive, please!", Shepard shouted.

"Yes Ma'am!", he shouted back.

"Regretting leaving Haven, regretting leaving Jormun...", Satima muttered to herself as she dodged another shock wave with Shepard.
"Who's?", Tali asked.

"No one!", Satima shouted across the walkway.

"More incoming! We should be okay if we stay in cover!", Tali shouted bringing out her shotgun.

"Good time for sniping!", Garrus laughed.

Shepard released fire on the troopers. Satima followed suit, aiming for the rocket trooper. Garrus sniped three other troopers. "Proximity out!", he shouted for the team to know.

"Why?", Tali asked, cautiously looking for geth around the corners.

Garrus waited for a satisfied small explosion and a geth cry, before he answered. "Hunters!"

"Ah, dammit!", Satima yelled shooting a trooper down.

"Shock wave again!", Shepard shouted.

They all ducked. "That thing is really pissing me off!", Satima yelled More cloaked hunters dodged the impending blows from the weapons fire. The shock wave didn't seem to bother them. Shepard put two down with her arc pistol. A very handy weapon. The loud click and alarm sounded out.

Garrus and Tali were halfway through the corridor of the main gun.

Shepard almost caught up, but Satima was having trouble with two hunters. She quickly ran to her, not thinking about the shock wave. Satima noticed, finally ending the first hunter in her way.

"Shepard... Watch out!", she shouted.

Their commander turned back too late and became caught in the shock wave. Her shields were down to nil as she fell forward, nauseated from the EMP wave. Satima left the last hunter behind to get to Shepard. She put her arm around Shepard's shoulder and tried running off the ramp to the side.

Garrus sniped the hunter stalking them. Shepard leaned against the wall as another wave came through. "Satima? Why did you do that?"

"Because... it was my fault I lagged behind, not yours. This is my fault too! Here.", she gave Shepard a medi-gel compact. "This should help with the nausea feeling."

"How do you know?", Shepard asked, applying the gel to her suits systems.

Satima chuckled, "I got hit with the wave three hunters back. I just didn't tell you about it."

"We need to get going.", Garrus said through the comms.

Shepard and Satima headed back onto the walkway, running down the corridor, ducking the wave again and again, fighting hunters. The ladder to the floor above appeared ahead. "Up high!", Garrus shouted.

Shepard dodged more fire. Satima managed to get ahead to Tali and Garrus. Shepard pushed through, using her arc pistol and omni-blade. Another wave. "We need to shut it down!", Shepard yelled taking cover yet again.

"Find the maintenance lock! That'll take it offline!", Garrus shouted down the walkway.

Shepard found a ramp leading up to a catwalk overhead. Screw the ladder. She shot down a hunter trying to sneak up on her from the corner of the wall. Managing to stay safe from the shock wave on the top level, she aimed, overlooking the walkway below to geth troopers boxing in her team.
Shepard let loose rapid fire on them.

"Tali's been shot!", Garrus roared.

Her focus on dealing a deadly assault on the geth was broken with Garrus's information. "Hold on! I'm coming!", Shepard yelled.

"I'm on it!", Satima shouted as she skirted past two hunters, ducking in time from a shock wave and leaped over a lower wall to them. "I know a thing or two about quarian containment and their suits." Satima quickly made it to Tali, and got to work with some medi-gel Garrus handed her. She used her special omni-tool from the Sentarians to reroute suit functions. Then sealing the wounded area on Tali's arm, she activated the suits scrubbers.

"Thank you, Satima.", Tali spoke amazed and grateful.

"We're a team.", Satima helped Tali to her feet.

Shepard finished the remaining hunters and jumped down the ladder. She ran across the walkway to the console on the other side. "There's the lock!", Garrus shouted.

Shepard pressed the panel quickly deactivating the shock wave for the moment. Everyone sighed with relief. "Let's not do that again.", Satima smirked.

A hidden door panel opened. Tali stretched her arm. "Are you good?", Shepard asked concerned.

"Better than good. That girl knows her way around a battle field, and a quarian suit.", Tali nodded towards Satima.

"I'm glad she helped.", Shepard agreed.

Garrus hovered in front of the door opening, "That'll buy us time. No way they'll fire with that maintenance lock in place."

"Let's move then.", Shepard said. After Shepard began walking through the core room, a hard jerk knocked her down.

"Ah... shit!", Satima yelled.

"Gun's coming back online!", Garrus shouted.

Circular panels began to whirl in motion, picking up speed and a bright light at the end of this tunnel was getting closer.

"Come on! Let's get out of here!", Shepard yelled.

"Don't have to tell me twice, Shepard!", Tali shouted.

A quick jump across to the ramp, as Shepard stood in front of the next door, motioning for everyone to quickly go. The light behind her nearly blinding them. Up the ramp they ran. Shepard turned hearing the loud alarm and click sound.

"GO!", Satima yelled at Shepard.

She jumped in behind them, landing on all fours as the door slammed shut.

"Cut that a little close!", Garrus yelled at Shepard.
They now faced the opposite side of the main battery corridor. The same shock wave assaulting them again. Immediately they were engaged by geth. Hunters and rocket troopers giving the most fight.

"Watch your shields! Stick to cover!", Tali yelled.

"That's it. I officially hate geth!", Satima shouted.

Shepard and Garrus took point together behind a wall to the far left. Satima stuck with Tali.

"Do you enjoy making your boyfriend worry about you?", Garrus sounded very upset.

"Garrus... we're in the middle of a fight!", Shepard replied, shooting from cover.

"I know but... why did you hesitate?", he wanted the answer immediately.

Shepard shot a hunter down, with ammo to spare on a trooper. "I didn't hesitate. I needed to make sure my team made it safely through. I got in fine."

Garrus sniped a hunter stalking Satima. "Shepard... if anything...", he got cut off by Shepard nudging him with her arm. "I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself."

Garrus nodded. He felt wrong for doubting her. "Sorry, Shepard."

"Don't apologize.", she said while shooting a group of troopers.

"Three rocket bastards ahead, Shepard!", Satima yelled.

Shepard took her rifle and started sniping them. Garrus helped along. Satima and Tali dodged another shock wave. Further ahead, more geth piled out. It came down to throwing grenades, mines and using Tali's drone to get to the end of the walkway. Shepard had finished with a geth when the drone came floating by. "A little late.", she said to it. The drone just hovered in place. Shepard shook her head. Down below, Shepard and Garrus could hear Tali's shotgun firing. Satima ran to the end, waiting on them as she fired on hunters.

A rocket geth kept Tali from following behind Garrus and Shepard. He turned around, standing firm, aiming his mantis and blew the mechanical head off the geth. "All clear, Tali.", he said. Tali finally made it to the ramp with the rest of the team. "How's that arm doing?", Shepard asked.

Tali rubbed the patched wound, giving a nod of approval. "Good.", she replied. "You know you way around quarian suits."

Satima blushed under her helmet, waiting as Shepard walked up to a pair of doors, bypassing the lock. Her team holding steady and taking aim.

"Door number five from the main gun.", Garrus said to himself. "This is getting tedious." He sighed in annoyance.

It opened slowly, as they wandered through. "Oh look.", Satima smirked. "An elevator. How convenient.", she said skeptical on the easiness of the situation. They got on the platform, taking it up to the level above them. Suddenly, a door opened behind the raising platform with two geth troopers running out. And one of them had a rocket. "Watch out!", Shepard yelled to her team.

The geth shot the rocket straight towards the lifts edge, damaging the coils. The platform stopped with the team getting off. Tali turned around to see the platform beginning to fall and saw Shepard faltering on it. "Shepard!", she yelled. "Grab my hand!" The commander ran quickly to Tali's hand
in time before the lift collapsed underneath her, falling below. She held onto the ledge. "Hang on!", Tali shouted, while lifting Shepard up as Satima and Garrus ran over to them.

Balancing herself, Shepard shook off the scare of falling far below the elevator. "I'm alright.", she assured.

Tali quickly squeezed her friends shoulder. "Good. Hopefully we're done with elevators." Now surveying the area. "Come on. The drive core shouldn't be far."

A few feet ahead, Shepard stopped. She stared, shaking her head in upset before settling on cursing. "Shit."

Garrus had been standing behind her, "What's wrong?", he asked.

"Another damn ladder." Shepard stopped herself from kicking the bar.

Satima chuckled in the background. Garrus pointed also, "Want me to go first?" His tone barely containing a small laugh.

Shepard slapped his arm, "Shut up, Vakarian."

She led the way again up another ladder. Through the door to the drive core room, Shepard ran in, to fully stop. Garrus and Tali almost bumping into her. "What-the hell-is that?", Satima pointed with her pistol to a blackened core pod. The top of it connected to a multitude of reaper tech. Shepard holstered her rifle and ran to the console. "That's definitely Reaper tech. But what's...", she stopped. The huge core panels opened loudly, hissing as they lifted out and up, revealing the source of the Reaper's signal. An illuminating light blinded the room.

Inside was a geth, hooked up to hundreds of cable lines, all connecting to the ship. It seemed… forced to be there. Like a prisoner. The geth looked up, "Shepard-Commander. Help us."

"Legion?", Shepard spoke to herself in disbelief.

Garrus was the first to get closer, already familiar with the rogue geth."Good to see you, Legion. We'll have you out of there in no time.", he reassured.

Satima was unsure of this development. She's never seen a "geth", before. And this was the first one to speak instead making a series of chirping technical noises.

Tali remembered how Legion was honest about his assessment of the geth that followed Saren. But she still had her reservations on this matter in front of them. "Shepard, wait. The geth are being controlled by the Reaper signal.", she warned.

Shepard fearfully observed the reaper tech and all its capabilities. "Right. This thing."

Pointing in indifference, Tali hastily made her own assumptions about Legion. "So, for all we know, Legion is with them. Maybe it sided with the Reapers voluntarily? Or maybe it's hacked?", she exclaimed.

Shepard shook her head, "Legion helped us fight the Reapers before. There's no way it would have agreed to this."

"Does it look like it would agree to this?", Satima pointed out as well.

Legion analyzed their fears,"Your caution is understandable. Once freed, we will submit to any
restraints you deem necessary."

Tali relaxed at her friend's assurance, "I never thought I'd say this, but...it's good to see you again."

The rogue geth nodded, seeming more sentient by the second. "Likewise, Creator Zorah."

Shepard walked around the pod, following the cables with her eyes that led throughout the hull of the dreadnought. "So, what is this thing?"

Legion adjusted his body to watch her closely. "It uses our networking architecture to broadcast the Old Machine command signal to all geth simultaneously."

The commander stopped, standing in place with a determined stare. "Then getting you out of there will shut off the Reaper signal."

"Wait.", Legion feared," you cannot simply remove the restraints. We are secured via hardware blocks nearby that shackle, operating protocols."

Tali scanned the console, while the rest of the team waited. She finished, nodding to his statement. Satima reviewed the scan, now looking up to this Legion. "Termination?", she asked.

"Yes.", Legion revealed. He nodded his head to an upper level, "The hardware blocks are on the far side of the room."

Shepard took out her pistol and walked to a ladder. "Taking them out will free you?"

"Yes. Deactivation should be simple. The geth protected them against viral attack, not physical removal.", Legion explained.

Shepard used the ladder that led to the console Legion was stating about. "How'd the Reapers get control of the geth?", she asked.

"They did not. The creators attacked. The geth wished to live. The Old Machines extended an offer." Legion sounded disappointed.

"So, we went to that geth station and rewrote the heretics for what? Nothing?", Shepard walked to the console.

"No. You successfully rewrote the heretics. The decision to ally with the Old Machines was difficult. Had the creators not attacked, it would have been unnecessary.", Legion lamented.

Shepard shook her head. The quarians just couldn't wait. They almost doomed themselves for good. "We'll have you out of there soon."

"Sounds like they only joined the Reapers because the quarians attacked.", Garrus stated.

Tali shot back in upset. "Nothing excuses an Alliance with the Reapers. They could've found another way."

Garrus stepped closer, placing his rifle over the shoulder and eyeing her. "Some would say the same about turians curing the genophage and allying with the krogan."

Her arms crossed to deflect his disapproval, Tali replied in a distraught manner. "Damn it, I begged them to negotiate rather than attack. I did."

Shepard found the mood getting too accusatory. Garrus had a point, but Tali already explained her
reasons on the Normandy. "Let's just get Legion out of there.", she ordered quickly.

Garrus let up on Tali, standing away. His quarian friend may be younger than him, but it doesn't mean he should lecture her. She's been through hell and back herself. And played a big part in revealing the plans of the reapers, from the start. He felt someone watching him, turning to see Satima glancing in a curious manner. Garrus didn't like it. She's snooping too much into personal matters.

Shepard busied herself with freeing Legion and disengaging the reaper signal. She found the panel, pressing the holo grid. "Got it!", she blurted.

"Tali'Zorah to fleet. The signal is about to go offline.", Tali got a reply. "This is Admiral Han'Gerrel. We're in your debt." Everyone nodded to each other in victory.

"Hardware blocks offline. We are free.", Legion cried out in success. The cables unlocked, snapping off with a loud hissing noise. With a thud, Legion landed from his restraints. The platform lowered him to an area two levels below them.

A noise captured the team's attention, now seeing the blue core beginning to implode. It delivered a level EMP wave. "Keelah!", Tali shouted. The drive core is successfully shut down. Legion looked up at Shepard, "As a gesture of cooperation, we have disabled the dreadnought's drive core. All weapons and barriers are offline." Legion glanced to his side hearing a loud thud from the rooms beyond. Shepard and team un-holstered weapons.

"Alert! Geth reinforcements incoming!", Legion warned.

"Here we go, again.", Satima cocked a fresh thermal clip in her pistol.

Several geth dropped from the ceiling above, ready to attack. A geth prime landed loudly, vibrating the floor. "Sentinel...", Satima whispered to herself.

"What?", Shepard yelled.

"...take cover!", Satima shouted behind a wall.

Comms were open as they fought around the geth. "The geth fleet is destabilized. The signal is offline.", Admiral Xen commed.

"Watch out, that's a prime!", Tali yelled at Satima. She nearly got hit by its heavy beam blaster. More comm chatter. "Civilian Fleet, prepare to withdraw. The Patrol Fleet will cover you once the Heavy Fleet is in position.", Admiral Raan informed. "Whenever you're ready, Admiral Gerrel."

"Good. Let's see what the quarians can do.", Garrus shouted, curiously.

Shepard began sniping from across the room. The Prime continued to shoot its blaster, while sending in drones. Hunters filled the space between them. Tali dropped two with her shotgun. Satima was reminded of Jormun. She fired her pistol on a trooper before ducking from a drone sent by the prime. Garrus used his rifle to lay heavy fire on the open area. He used proximity mines to stop the hunters from sneaking around him and his overload frequently. Tali sent her drone to draw heavy fire from their position, as Shepard sniped three more hunters out of the way. Satima inched closer to the prime.

She saw flashes of the sentinel from HIVE and used her own mix of overload and energy drain on the massive geth. It seemed to help whittle down it's shielding. Shepard, Tali and Garrus were finally able to get closer. "It's setting up turrets!", Garrus yelled.
Shepard shot them down with her arc pistol. Tali drained a rocket troopers shielding for Shepard to destroy it. Garrus hopped over a console to bash in the flashlight head of a geth hunter with his mantis. "That's one way to do it.", Shepard laughed.

"The senti... prime, is headed your way!", Satima shouted.

The prime stalked through the area towards them, firing its blaster straight at Shepard. Tali used her drone again. "There, Shepard find cover!"

Shepard ran around the prime, looking for a better spot to flank it. Satima came from behind, taking aim with her energy drains again. "All together, everyone!", Shepard shouted. Garrus and Tali fired their weapons, using a mix of overload and drones. Satima followed along, firing with Shepard. She used her remaining lift grenades. The shield was broken. "Bring it down!", Shepard yelled. They all fired again. This time the prime had nowhere to go.

It roared in defiance as it fell, exploding in fiery shrapnel. "Let's finish the stragglers!", Shepard shouted. Two more hunters fell to Tali, Garrus finished off a rocket trooper and Satima cleared out drones and mines. All in a day's work. The comms opened again amidst the last of the fighting. "Admiral Gerrel, what are you doing?", Raan sounded worried.

"Raan, check your screens! The dreadnought is helpless!", Gerrel exclaimed. "No barriers, and the main gun is offline. We can remove their flagship if we strike now!"

Admiral Raan yelled over the comms,"Damn it, this is our chance to withdraw the Civilian Fleet safely!"

"What are you talking about? We're still on board!", Tali shouted over comms.

"We can't waste this chance. Heavy Fleet, all forward. Take out the dreadnought!", Admiral Gerrel roared his order over comms.

"We're on the dreadnought assholes!", Satima shouted angrily.

"Patrol Fleet, hold position!", Admiral Raan yelled in defiance.

"You do that, and the Heavy Fleet gets wiped out.", Admiral Gerrel shouts to Raan."And if we die, a simple retreat won't save you from the geth response!"

"Damn you, Gerrel.", Raan screamed.

Tali shot a trooper down, "Damn it, what are they doing?"

"Focus on the ght! We'll worry about the admirals later!", Shepard shouted.

More ght poured in. Satima and Tali took five out. Garrus threw a mine and shot two, clean head shots. Shepard forged on, using her arc pistol. Another prime came through. Together they destroyed it with a skill not easily obtained. Comms opened, "Patrol Fleet, flanking support on the Heavy Fleet. Give them a firing lane.", Admiral Raan ordered. Shepard led them through the lower level platform. It was time to get off the dreadnought.

"All ships, open fire!", Admiral Gerrel yelled.

Immediately after stating that order, a hull breach knocked everyone to the floor. Fire broke out on the level they were running through. The core falling inward, nearly missing Legion on the way down. "Shepard-Commander, the creator fleet is firing upon this vessel.", Legion warned. "Without
barriers, this ship will be destroyed. We must evacuate."

Shepard leads her team to a door on their level. "We need to get to the escape pods."

"Geth transmit intelligence via remote signal. We do not use escape pods., Legion advised.

"Can I shoot him?", Satima asked sarcastically.

"No.", the whole team replied.

Shepard opened the door, "Suggestions?"

"Geth fighters are docked in the port-side fighter bay. We can pilot a fighter to safety.", Legion replied.

Shepard ran ahead right into an exploding hallway. Another close one. She turned right, leading them out through another door. "Shepard to fleet! Hold fire! I repeat, hold fire!"

"They're not responding!", Tali shouted.

"Damn it!", Shepard bellowed.

"Pricks!", Satima shouted.

"Satima! Enough!", Shepard yelled.

Through another door, they arrived at the hanger. It was cutting close. Loud explosions and fiery entrapments surrounded them. "Shepard-Commander, we have taken control of docking protocols.", Legion informed over comms. As Shepard began to run across the platform, a large walkway crashed down, destroying part of the bridge. Shepard attempted the jump, but the edge of the platform fell apart under her. She fell one level onto another walkway.

Shepard got up quickly. "We'll... be right there!" Garrus jumped down behind her angry,"Quarian bastards!", he roared. He's just as mouthy as Satima is right now. Tali, Garrus and Satima followed her up the ramp. "Shepard-Commander, we can only launch from the upper level.", Legion warned again.

"Let's go!", Tali shouted.

More debris fell on the ramp, knocking them from one side to the next. Explosions from the Quarian's Fleet weapons fire had begun to tear the dreadnought apart. "They're closing the door!", Garrus shouted. "Hurry!", Tali yelled. "We're losing the environment fields!

"Move quickly!", Shepard shouted as she counted them into the geth fighter. Legion stood next to it, completely calm. A large explosion near them knocked Garrus off his feet and into the fighter's hull. His armor hitting it with a loud metal screech. Legion quickly walked over to Garrus, surprising him as he grabbed Garrus's arm, pulling him in the fighter. All gravity had ceased to work. Tali and Satima hung on the fighter's hull, Shepard floated to the edge. Hanging on.

"Normandy to Shepard: I'm reading a loss of gravity. You okay over there?", Joker asked. His voice on the break of panic.

"Fine.", Shepard replied, as she repositioned herself. "We're leaving in a geth fighter. Transmitting rendezvous coordinates."

Shepard flung herself in behind the group. Garrus sat behind Legion, Tali behind him and Shepard
found herself behind Tali.

"Does the storage compartment have adequate room, Shepard-Commander?", Legion asked.

"We're fine! Go!", Shepard yelled, pointing towards space.

As Legion prepared to head out, Shepard realized they were short one person. "Wait! Where's Satima?"

"She decided to use another fighter.", Legion revealed.

As they headed out, another fighter flew alongside them.

"Reckless.", Garrus warned.

The comms opened to Satima's excited shrieks. "Shepard-Commander!", Satima laughed while imitating Legion. "Look what I found in our backyard!"

"I believe this is my backyard.", Tali stated.

"I found it first!", Satima flew by fast. Flying around fighting geth ships and quarian fleets.

"Satima! You're going to get yourself killed!", Shepard blared over comms.

"What's that? Sorry, didn't get that last message!", Satima flew further out.

Meanwhile, the Normandy and lingering Quarian Fleet listened in on the hilarious conversation. Joker proceeded to record it. Shepard's team had safely returned to the Normandy.

In the hour that the Admirals met on the stealth ship, Tali stayed with Shepard after they left the war room. Gerrel clearly upset. "Feel better?", Tali asked as she read the crucible's display.

Shepard shrugged, "No. I agreed on the admirals taking the chance when it came, but... it was still an asshole move. Gerrel didn't realize how close he came to screwing us all. If we lost the Normandy again, and if..."

Tali sucker punched Shepard's arm. "We didn't lose anything. Legion was there to help us and you as always, were there to lead us. Stop thinking about the trivial stuff."

Shepard winced playfully, "That really hurt Tali!"

Tali laughed, "Yeah, well I'm sure Admiral Gerrel got a worse hit."

Shepard waited for Satima to come back, but the girl didn't. She settled to let the hybrid work out her frustrations, letting her fly around the war zone.

As stupid as it sounds, Satima did need it. But the hour had gotten long, and there was no sign of her returning. "Joker.", Shepard walked fast to the galaxy map. "Ma'am.", he repeated.

Shepard brought out the system they were in. "Pinpoint Satima's location. This was getting troublesome. Joker quickly found a messy signal on a nearby planet, Adas. "There, Commander. Looks like she landed somewhere in a volcanic valley."

Shepard paced, then walked off the ramp, past Traynor. Another mission relied too heavily on her to be compromised now. "Dammit!", she hit the elevator panel. The commander turned around quickly, "Joker, keep an eye out for her signal. If it gets jammed or you suddenly lose it, alert me
immediately!", Shepard walked inside the elevator.

"Aye-Aye Commander.", Joker replied.

Shepard needed to rescue Korris and deal with the geth fighters. Why would Satima land on Adas? What was she up to? She could send another team to find her, but Shepard needed every able body when dealing with the Reapers. Is Satima capable of holding out on her own until Shepard gets there? They'll both find out soon enough.

..........................................................................

Satima could see the Normandy from her pilot's chair. The geth fighter was horribly cramped. At least she was flying again. It wasn't Haven, but this should do. She finished her message to Shepard. The Commander is going to be pissed about her quick joy-riding. Satima didn't care.

As she scanned the nearby planets from her omni-tool, a sudden feeling of dread came over her. A small rift opened discretely behind her, closing as quickly as it came. She felt a cold metal hand on her shoulder.

"I would land on the next planet. It was habitable once, before the quarians made their mistake.", the droid voice spoke.

Satima lunged her arm forward, grabbing her weapon, but Archer held his own blade closely to her throat. "I wouldn't try it, Satima. I really don't like the thought of ending you here."

Satima gulped hard against the pressure of the blade, "After I land, what next?"

Archer leaned in to her ear, "Then the fun begins."

Adas

Archer hit Satima hard in her gut. She landed forward holding her stomach, feeling like her insides were about to burst. He hovered around her, "I suspect at this moment, that Reaper has saved the admiral and is now working on the geth squadrons. She was always so thorough."

He kicked her face, sending her backwards as fresh blood oozed from her nose and a cut above her lip. She held fast from losing consciousness with every blow. "Go... go to hell!", she yelled, catching her breath.

Archer laughed loudly, waving an arm around them, "Welcome to it!" The deep orange sky cast a reddish glow on them. Both of their dark armors reflecting the glints of light from various lava flows surrounding the area. A quake and rumble stirred their thoughts to the ground. The heat rose from fissures far off.

Satima raised her hand, black dirt covered her palm. Ash floated in the air around them, catching in her throat and nose. It was hard to breath without her helmet.

Archer knelt beside her, watching her face contort in pain from the injuries he inflicted on her. "Wondering how I got here?", he grinned. Archer stalked around her like a predator, "Reaper found my location, she stopped me from ending you. But the fight didn't last long. I escaped using the sentarian's technology."

He stopped behind her, surveying the hellish planet they were on. "I'm trapped in this timeline, like you are." Archer stepped in front of her, kneeling once more, "Trapped to watch the reapers win again, and see my brother turned into a toy for them", he lamented.
"Your brother?", she asked, while observing the landscape in memory.

Archer looked down, kicking her side. She coughed up blood from the hard blow. He leaned to gloat, but she spit the blood in his face. He wiped it casually before grabbing her by the hair, almost ripping the strands out by the root. The reaper droid dragged her backwards behind him, to an edge of a cliff overlooking volcanic flow. "Maybe a moment overlooking this beautifully destructive scenery will help you remember a few things."

He held her up by her throat over the edge. His powerful strength holding her perfectly still, as her feet helplessly dangled. Satima grunted in fear and anger. She glanced below her, feeling her body jerk from terror. The heat of the planet making her sweat. "Archer... don't do this. You know if you kill me, The Directive will destroy you!", Satima stared with a pleading gaze.

He laughed, "I can keep some of your dna and they can clone you. Once the reapers win, it wouldn't be long. I'll train a new army for the Directive. Hive will upgrade your genetic imprint, and you can be the perfect template."

Satima found a hidden blade in her boot, all the while he spoke. She handled it carefully, ready to strike. Archer pulled her back to him, "Or a genetic puppet I can use to take control, myself.", he boasted. She raised a brow, puzzled but concerned with his plans. With a determination to stop him, she jammed the hidden blade in his chest.

He cried out in anger, letting her go. Satima fell, screaming in horror as she plummeted to the lava flow below her.

Suddenly a rift opened. Satima passed through it, falling in a heap of rock and sand. She looked up quickly to see a titan of a machine, a reaper-firing its laser beam towards a small mountain cliffside. A tiny figure dodged and shot out a light beam, targeting the reaper. Satima looked closer. "SHEPARD!", she screamed, running to them.

Archer tripped her. "You reaper bastard!" Satima feel hard on her face. His droid voice bellowed in rage."I'm the one keeping you alive and only because I will it! You would've been molten ash if I didn't rift you from falling.", Archer paid no attention to the reaper and Shepard behind them.

In the background, the machine's cybernetic noise filled the air. She could hear Shepard's screams of defiance. Archer began kicking her side violently, "Nothing you do can change this nightmare! My brother will die, and you'll live long enough to see Shepard turned into genetic pulp!"

He kicked Satima harder, making her body fly backwards to a boulder with his cybernetic strength. She grabbed her side in pain, breathing heavily. Broken, she could feel the pain of his assault weighing her body down.

Shepard fought the machined monster behind him with an intensity to survive. She didn't give up, even when the beam got too close. Satima could tell the commander was slower, injured. But Shepard kept going.

Satima slowly pulled herself up, "That's Commander Shepard… fighting.", she fell forward, groaning in pain as she held her side. The reaper bastard looked up to him with a bloody grin. "And she's going to kick-your-ass!"

Archer lunged at her, roaring in anger. Satima sidestepped, missing his heavy blow that destroyed the boulder she stood in front of. He chased her down through the open desert. She ran past a forest of dead trees. Small rocks kicked up as her speed increased.
A final blast of the light beam Shepard used led the shot that obliterated the reaper, causing a great force that knocked them both off their feet.

It fell in an explosion, causing the ground to further quake around them. Satima stood, and stopped short of the area the reaper was destroyed on. The ground continued to rumble under her. She turned to Archer kicking her back down. Beaten, Satima couldn't move anymore.

He took one step towards the fallen reaper child. Then a crackling shot echoed in the distance. Archer's chest had a three-inch hole in it.

Circuitry exposed, sparking. Decayed flesh shredded from the tearing impact of the bullet. Nanites flooded his system to repair. Satima crawled away from him, forcing herself to stand in defiance, "No matter how much you upgrade yourself, you'll still just be a delusional organic, grasping for immortality."

Archer roared, but didn't advance, he left through his rifter. Satima fell backwards, her head dizzy, body in agony. She turned to see Shepard sitting on the cliff's edge with Tali. They were discussing something important, it seemed, while geth primes stepped to them.

Where was Legion? Satima started to lose consciousness. A geth rover came to a screeching halt on the sand nearby. Garrus jumped out, the obvious driver. He spotted Satima and that android fighting just as Shepard survived her fight with the reaper.

Garrus knelt next to her, hoping he wasn't too late. His visor's IR alerting him to internal bleeding. He took her hand and squeezed with the four fingers grasping it. "Hey! Wake up! Open your eyes. He's gone.", Garrus spoke frantically to her. He opened his omni-tool, "Shepard! Tali! I need help fast! I found Satima, she's in bad shape!"

Satima felt relieved Shepard was alright and closed her eyes again. Garrus tried gently shaking her, "Stay awake!" Satima didn't move. "Spirits, kid. I didn't understand. I swear I didn't know you were the victim.", he apologized quietly.

Hours later-Medbay

Satima woke in a panic, looking around the room waiting for Archer to appear. No one was around. The door opened with Shepard walking in. She had a small cut above the brow healing quickly. "Glad to see you're awake.", she smiled wearily.

Satima sat up fully, grasping at her side from being sore. "I am too. What happened?"

Shepard leaned on the examination table. "I saved the admiral, unjammed more geth crap and fought a reaper. None of which, I couldn't do without my friends, my team.", her face soured. "Where the hell were you, Satima? Garrus said someone was after you. He's gone now but... how did you get to Rannoch from Adas so quickly? And without Joker or even EDI detecting you?"

Satima smirked, "Would you believe me if I told you?"

Shepard gave her a side-glance, "I just killed a reaper. I think I can handle it."

Shepard stood straight as Satima inched off the bed. She looked at the commander with an inner sadness. A pain she felt couldn't be shared. "He's after me. The Directive gave him orders to find and bring me back. Apparently if necessary, kill me and extract DNA." She stopped to wince in pain. "He rifted onboard the geth fighter I was using, forcing me to land on the nearest planet. He...", Satima glanced down. She didn't want to continue.
The door opened quietly behind with Garrus walking through. Satima didn't notice, she continued anyways. "Archer told me he's the only one keeping me alive. For what, I don't know. He spoke of his brother… it was madness."

Shepard placed her hand on the girl's shoulder. "He's insane.", she stated. "You shouldn't take off alone, again."

Satima gave a faint smile to Shepard's concern, but it faded quickly when she saw Garrus. She looked up at Shepard, confused. "Shepard… I... ", she was cut off.

Garrus stepped forward, he glanced to Shepard then stared away toward Satima. But not directly to her gaze. "Whatever I say won't make things better between us, kid.", he started. "You're something the galaxy has never seen before. And it scares the shit out of me and Shepard."

The commander smirked, agreeing.

Garrus sighed, "But, I want to apologize for being a complete ass to you." He gave a short, nervous chuckle.

Satima felt a wave of emotion. Shepard could tell, "Are you okay, Satima?"

The girl sat up, pushing the pain of her injuries to the back of her mind. She started to leave the med-bay, to the core room. Satima turned around facing them and their worried stares. She faked a smile," None of it matters. It was all to keep the Shepard safe. That's more important."

They didn't seem convinced. Satima started to walk in the core room, she turned her gaze to them again. "I've been through worse.", she gestured to Garrus. "It's good, we're good." The door closed.

Shepard leaned on the table, arms crossed with a concerned expression. She looked at Garrus. "Oh, shit.", she replied casually.

He nodded, "This is my fault. I'll figure a way to fix this."

She stepped forward with an unpleasant gaze. "If you can.", she spoke, disappointed.

Satima laid back in the fetal position. Hot tears streamed down her face. Her nightmares rushed back in full view and all that happened before, hurt bitterly. Satima could feel her mind coming apart. She cried silently to herself, no one to comfort her. Always in fear of the future, and Archer.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for taking your time and reading my chapter. Have a wonderful day.
Thessia Lost

Chapter Summary

A brief lesson in the spectre's gun range, reveals a deep anger in the girl. Questions are unanswered, with Shepard using the Normandy to thrust into battle again. Fighting the reapers on Thessia to recover an artifact that could turn the tide. But tensions rise in an unexpected defeat, and the hybrid finds her mind to be the scariest place to wander.

Chapter Notes

Shorter chapter. Hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Normandy left the Dholen system.

Shepard received a message from the asari councilor. Before she completely committed herself to that mission, despite Liara's plea to head there asap, Shepard knew the crew needed a good rest.

Satima took priority for this day and all the truth she could get her to tell. Besides, she could drop by Udina's old office when it was time.

Docking at the citadel, the crew piled out to visit the various wards. The hybrid girl waited for everyone to leave. She received a message from Shepard to meet in front of the café on the presidium ward. Nervously, and unsure, Satima quickly left the warship, taking the docking lift to the presidium. So many finely dressed species huddled around markets, some of them stared at her.

At the Apollo Café, she found Shepard in front of a counter.

She had finished talking to an asari bartender in red. A particularly mean looking one too. Shepard turned around to greet Satima. "Hey. You finally made it.", she laughed. Satima smirked with her in a puzzled fashion, "What's so funny?"

The commander nodded her head, "Nothing. You just slept a long time. I almost headed out with a group of asari to see the new blasto movie."

Satima raised her brow, "Blasto, what?"

Shepard laughed again, "I'll stop picking on you. So, where do you want to eat? There's the café here and there's over... ten thousand other places to try."

Satima glanced at her question, now looking around the café's balcony. "Too many to try in one lifetime. We can eat here."

"Then let's order.", Shepard pointed to the holo menu over the counter.

She watched the commander order, acting too nice. Satima needed something to distract this
awkward day. "By the way, who was that asari you were talking to?", she asked, curious.

"Mm? Oh, that was Liara's father-mother... however they term it. She's the biological mate to her mother so that's how she came. And I'm not getting into that.", Shepard stated.

Satima chuckled.

After they ate their meal, the pair wondered to the lower wards of Zakera. The mid-level of this citadel seemed less snobby as they looked around. Presidium citizens wore masks, playing out the good life, despite the fact reapers are knocking on their door. Shepard stopped by a weapon shop, checking out the mods and new line of rifles. Satima browsed with her.

"So, Satima. Why do you use blades instead of fire arms?", Shepard asked while looking at a rifle mod.

Satima picked up a pistol. It had a grey body with specs of glint, making the color reflect the lights in the shop. "It was the first weapon I was taught to use and the best way for me to fight. Though I am learning quickly how to use a pistol.", she replied.

Shepard put the mod down and thought for a second. "You want to practice in the Spectre weapons room?"

Satima turned, wide eyed with an excited gasp, "Can we?"

Shepard chuckled, "Oh yes, we can."

They took the elevator back to the presidium, right to the embassies. "Funny place to keep a secret training room.", Satima remarked.

Shepard and Satima passed by many onlookers, talking amongst each other and whispering as the hybrid walked by them. Up the stairwell, Shepard ignored the earth ambassador's office. She needed to spend a little more time with Satima. They entered with the automated VI announcing Shepard's status.

The girl looked around the dark blue room. "This way.", Shepard said as she waved Satima to follow her to the training room.

Once inside, Shepard picked out a standard issue pistol. "Here.", she said, handing it to Satima. The hybrid handled it well. She observed the simplicity of it. "My pistol is better. Why use this?", she asked.

Shepard set up the range, adjusting the targets at different distances. "Mastering the basics is how you improve the better weapons. The type of weapons that are made for skilled hands. You're skilled Satima, but you lack stability, proper training. That's why you've had so many close calls and I bet plenty more from before we met. Am I, right?", Shepard leaned on the weapon work station, arms crossed.

She sighed. Reaper trained her well, but Satima didn't want to fight. Instead, she got thrown into many scraps with directive soldiers. She had no choice but to kill them. The memory made her glance off. Satima slapped a thermal clip into the pistol, "Yeah, you are." She began firing at the closest target, effectively putting a hole through its paper head.

The second target had a hole through the eye. Satima became antsy, annoyed. She quickly fired three shots at the third, putting holes in random places.

None of which would stop a cannibal, husk or even someone like Archer. She felt anger welling as
she screwed up the last one. Farther away from the rest, she put one hole in its lower torso. Shepard noticed how Satima's gun hand would shake, making it hard to aim steadily.

She yelled, throwing the pistol at the targets, "THIS IS STUPID!"

Shepard picked it up, handing it to her. "Again.", she said calmly. Satima snatched the weapon from Shepard's hand. She stared at her for a second, "Why? I can get in there, close and quietly... I can... "

Shepard cut her off, putting a hand up. "There's your problem, recklessness. And why are you so angry all the time? You can't focus when emotions cloud your judgement on the battlefield."

Satima backed away a few steps, a look of stunned shame on her face. Did Shepard figure it out? The commander walked to her slowly. "I brought you here, so we could talk. I don't know why Satima, but I feel like I need to help you. It's not every day I go out of my way to do this sort of thing for anyone. There's a strong pull between us." Shepard finished with searching eyes. She's trying so hard to get the girl to talk!

Satima sat on the bench, lowering her head between her knees. She wanted to cry out, to yell at Shepard about everything, but she couldn't! Shepard sat next to her, putting a hand on her shoulder. "I'm here if you need to talk. Whenever you're ready, Satima."

Their outing ended with Satima going back to the Normandy. Shepard stayed behind to deal with the asari councilor.

Satima walked quietly inside the large stealth ship. She passed the CIC, almost to the elevator when Traynor stopped her. "Satima. Javik would like to speak with you." The hybrid nodded and stepped inside the elevator to the engineering deck.

The lift lowered to the engineering deck. She wondered what the ancient prothean wanted. Javik waited patiently in his room as she walked inside. "You asked for me?", she spoke calmly.

He finished washing his hands, a habit that was becoming a problem. "Satima, I have questions.", he pointed to a chair sitting at a corner. She sat, waiting. "Have you told the Commander about your bloodline?", he asked. Satima shook her head.

Javik paced slowly, "Whether you want it to or not, the truth will come out. It is best you tell the Commander now, while you still can. She will not take it calmly from another."

Satima looked up at him. "I can't. I try and every time, the words just stay stuck in my mouth. You think she would honestly feel alright if I told her "Hey, I'm your kid from an alternate timeline, but don't worry, I'm just a crazy reaper-born now. Oh, and you also were forced to train me in the most horrible conditions ever. Thanks for everything, Mom!" Satima huffed, crossing her arms in defiance.

Javik stared at her. "It would be a start.", he grinned.

Shepard returned onboard the Normandy. The orders sent out to her crew on the citadel to return. Within thirty-minutes, all were on board and accounted for.

The Artifact as the asari councilor called it, could be the key to defeating the Reapers. If Satima has any knowledge that combines with this, they could finally stop the harvest and the Reapers, for good.

Athena Nebula / Parnitha System
Thessia
Shepard leaned over the galaxy map. Joker broke her thought with his update. "Commander, Thessia is under heavy Reaper attack!", Joker shouted in concern. Shepard looked up, she raced to the cockpit. Joker continued his message, "There's activity across most of the planet."

Liara ran out of the war room, she glanced around in worry upon hearing what Joker said. Shepard kept walking, "What about the temple? Can you raise the scientists?"

"Negative. All channels are scrambled across the spectrum.", Joker hurried his typing at the panel. Multiple displays of the planet and hostiles in full view.

Shepard stepped behind Joker, watching him navigate around the display. "The mission's looking really dicey.", he worried.

"This is too important. It's now or never.", Shepard glared down on him. She wanted Joker to have courage. In the upcoming battle against the reapers, he'll need it.

Liara came in, pointing at the planet's display. Her tone worried, "Shepard... that's my home down there. I have to go."

She glanced at her before walking away. "Then get to the shuttle, and let's do this."

Satima waited on the Normandy with everyone else. Shepard didn't take Garrus with her. It was obvious he wasn't too happy about the decision but respected it anyway.

He paced in his room, or drank several cups of dextro coffee. Satima offered to help in the battery but he dismissed it saying, "It didn't need working on." He did care greatly about Shepard before she became Reaper.

Satima did odd jobs, waiting. She asked EDI about the current mission, and what they were looking for. "Shepard is meeting a science team near the temple of Athame, to acquire an artifact. This artifact is supposedly to find the catalyst and finish the Crucible.", EDI worked on the holo panel in front of her. Joker listened to them.

"The Crucible. I still can't wrap my mind around what that thing does.", Satima said standing behind EDI.

"I have many variable ideas as to what it is. Would you like to hear them?", EDI asked.

Satima nodded to this, but Joker broke their conversation. "I got a message from the Commander to evacuate immediately! I knew this mission was going to be bad.", now readying the Normandy for a fast flight.

Shepard, Liara and Javik returned in the cargo bay. The team exited the shuttle. Liara looked like she was about to have a serious breakdown. She disappeared in the elevator.

Javik looked around solemnly as Shepard stayed on the cargo bay, carefully and slowly taking off her gear. She put her weapons up without a second glance. He walked away, using the elevator back to deck four. Javik stood still in his room, absorbing the many memories the Normandy's walls held. Satima walked in, after following him. "What happened?", she asked worried.

He closed his eyes, "We failed."

Satima looked at him in surprise, "What?!"

Javik glanced her way, "Cerberus was waiting for us. They took the AI and almost killed the
Commander. Their assassin, Kai Leng, was there. He spoke for this Illusive Man."

Satima couldn't believe it. She should have gone! After what Shepard said about her needing guidance, more training... she second guessed herself in battle. "I'm sorry this happened.", she offered sadly.

Javik sighed,"Liara will be needing that. I've already lost everything I cared for fifty-thousand years ago."

Satima ventured off deck four, looking for Shepard. EDI confirmed the commander had gone to the war room. She quietly stepped in and watched Shepard walk up the steps to the quantum entanglement room, receiving a message.

Shepard leaned on the wall, watching the panel glow and beep. It was the asari counselor. She didn't want to tell her that she failed. That Cerberus had won, taking the Prothean AI and nearly killing them in the process. Kai Leng got the upper hand again and it made Shepard sick. She eventually pressed the panel. Leaning heavily on the console, Shepard watched as the asari councilor came into view.

"Commander Shepard, is that you?", her image becoming distorted. "Commander?"

"Councilor, the mission-", Shepard's words trailed off.

"We've lost all contact with Thessia... the planet has gone dark.", the councilor looked at Shepard in concern. "How soon will the Crucible be ready to deploy?"

Shepard slowly looked up, "Councilor... I wish the news were better, but... we didn't get the information."

The asari councilor stepped forward in stunned confusion, "What happened?"

"Cerberus was there. We were... We were defeated. We don't know how to finish the Crucible.", Shepard glanced down, her head hung low. She looked beaten.

The councilor covered her face in pain, "I... don't know what to say. What was the situation on Thessia?"

Shepard looked up from leaning, "Deteriorating fast. The Reapers are there in strength."

The asari councilor almost tripped backwards hearing that sentence. She wiped her forehead from an anxious sweat. "Then you'll excuse me. There are... preparations to make..., continuity of civilization to consider... I never thought this day would come."

"None of us did, I'm... ", Shepard tried to sympathize, but the councilor already turned off her end. "...sorry...", she whispered.

Satima gasped quietly, covering her mouth so Shepard could not hear. She had never heard her apologize for anything. To see Shepard so defeated, so hopeless... no wonder the reapers won. They defeated Shepard's resolve first.

Satima gathered around the war console with the rest of the crew. Shepard stomped down the steps in apparent anger.

"Asari forces are in full retreat. It is no longer safe for us to remain in this system.", EDI paced in front of Shepard.
"Get us out of here.", Shepard glared.

Liara leaned over the console, her feelings of loss weighing heavily in her mind and heart. "Shepard... I -Nobody could've predicted Cerberus would reach Thessia before us."

Shepard watched Liara turn away, clearly in pain. "It's my job to be prepared-no matter what. And now Thessia's lost, as is the data on the Catalyst." Shepard leaned on the console. "I'm sick of Cerberus beating us to the punch."

James stood straight, "Let's kick'em in the balls first for a change!"

Everyone agreed, Satima nodded. Shepard turned off the console's holographic display. "I'm with James. Anyone know where they're hiding?" She was met with confused stares. "Anyone?"

EDI stared at Traynor who eyed her back in a nervous gesture. She started to wring her hands, "Um... Well, there is something."

"Let's hear it, Traynor." Shepard looked slightly annoyed but relieved.

Traynor walked to the front of the console, she began typing away the coordinates to a tracking device. "I was able to track Kai Leng's shuttle through the relay and extrapolate his destination."

Everyone watched a display of the galaxy map as a small round light pinged from system to system. It stopped not too far off in the terminus systems. "It's not just gone, though. The signal is being actively blocked.", Traynor finished.

Feeling more than anxious on getting a real lead, Shepard nearly crawled over the display to shake the explanation out of Traynor. "How?"

"I'm not sure, but something is interfering with all signal activity in that region of space.", Traynor stared at them all.

EDI turned to Shepard, "Commander, the lera system is home to Sanctuary and little else. Sanctuary is a supposed safe haven for war refugees."

Shepard glanced back to her comms specialist, "You think it's worth checking out, Traynor?"

Traynor nodded with certainty, "Yes ma'am. I do."

"If Specialist Traynor hadn't examined the data so astutely, the interference would've been undetectable.", EDI complimented.

Shepard sighed to herself, and agreed, "Nice work, Traynor. You've given us a shot. Now let's make sure we don't waste it."

Shepard started to walk out before Ashley gave her own opinion in this new mission. "I was stationed on Horizon in the lera system. You were the only Cerberus presence while I was there.", she revealed.

Liara backed away from the console, free from her previous thoughts. "It's a slim lead. Let's hope it's the right one."

The commander stopped to reassure the crew and her command, "I don't care how slim the leads are at this point. We've come too far to let Cerberus stop us. I want that prothean data. I want the Catalyst. No excuses. Dismissed."
The crew started to leave. Satima stayed behind waiting to speak to Shepard. She walked by following a message from Traynor that Anderson was on vid-comm. "I'm busy right now.", she interrupted, jogging by. Satima stepped up to her pace, "About Thessia... I'm sorry." Shepard stopped without turning to gaze at Satima.

"I didn't know you were a part of Cerberus.", Satima spoke, nearly tripping them both with how close she got to Shepard. "Garrus and Tali mentioned something about a Lazarus project...", she began.

Shepard shook her head, thoroughly aggravated with these questions. "Why are you here?"

Satima looked confused. Shepard finally turned to glare at her, "No, really... why are you here? You follow me like a lost puppy, always undermining my command, putting others at risk." She started to back Satima away from her. "You can't help with the reapers, you seem to be an absolute emotional and mental mess. Why are you still on my ship?"

Her questions no longer referring to Satima, but herself. On how long she's allowed this unreliable and dangerous child, on her ship.

Satima felt embarrassed, believing these questions were still aimed at her. "I thought?"

Shepard cast off her personal thoughts, and cut off Satima abruptly, "You thought... what? That you could console me? Kid, I've seen some horrible shit in this galaxy, and you have nothing to offer to make it better. I'm tired of having to watch you. If you want to go and get killed, be my guest. But right now, leave me the hell alone!" Shepard gave Satima a warning glare before running up the stairwell.

Satima backed away, hurt and angry. It wasn't her fault Shepard lost Thessia. She doesn't know how to help, that's true, but she could still try! Satima had her hand on the edge of the war table, her sharp nails dug across the metal surface as it tore bits of flesh from her finger tips.

Tiny droplets of blood dotted them. She narrowed an angry gaze toward the vid-comm room. A small voice echoed in the back of her mind, separate from her thoughts. "Then die with them." She turned around and left Shepard to her call.

Satima paced in the core room. Those words. They were not hers. The hybrid thought of shaking the feeling, by speaking to EDI. Her feelings had been hurt. But Shepard was right, she had nothing to offer except be a pain in the ass from the start, and her fingers were starting to sting.

The door slid open, Garrus walked in. "I heard you and Shepard had a disagreement.", he walked to her, watching her pace.

Satima scoffed, "More than a disagreement, she practically called me out. She's right though. I can't help you or stop the reapers." She sat in her compartment while fiddling with a small metal cube.

Garrus stepped closer, leaning on the machinery behind him. "Shepard was upset, you have to understand the immense weight on her shoulders right now. Losing Thessia meant she lost the war already. Her hope for winning is fading fast and I can't stop it." He worried, exhaling to slow down his thoughts. "She and I have disagreed more than once too. Don't think you're the only one."

Satima looked at him. She studied his colonial markings. "How did you and Shepard meet?", she asked randomly.

Garrus was taken aback by this question, "Uh...couple of years ago, on the citadel. I was c-sec back then.", he replied.
"What happened?", she questioned eagerly with those dark hybrid eyes staring at him.

Garrus leaned on his leg, retelling his story about the first time he met Shepard and their battle against Saren, the Geth and finally Sovereign.

Satima listened intently, her eyes gazing towards him as he spoke. When he finished, it was already late, and he wanted to check on Shepard. Garrus started to leave when Satima asked one more question. "Did you love her then? When you first met?"

Garrus stood still, glancing back to Satima, "Yes.", he replied.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for stopping by. ;)
Chapter Summary

Shepard is given a pep talk from Anderson, and reminded of her own reasons for stopping the reapers. The facility known as Sanctuary, is investigated when Oriana's warning echoes to the Normandy. Hackett sends Shepard on a reaper chase, but the truth could prove more troubling than the answers.

Chapter Notes

As I continue my journey in learning how to write and express my stories, I apologize if this chapter explains, more than tells. Hope you enjoy the narrative.

Disclaimer: All in-game mission dialogue is not my own. I did not write it, nor claim it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Closer to the darkness

As the Normandy navigated through space, Shepard spoke to Admiral Anderson via vid-com. She wasn't in the mood for sympathy. Satima's attempt to talk it out irked Shepard greatly. How could she know the feeling of total defeat by an enemy so powerful... so cold? She shook her head and pressed the lit panel. Anderson's frame came to view and began to speak.

"Shepard. I heard about Thessia."

"We were so close, so damned close to ending this war.", Shepard paced a little in front of him, running her fingers through her limp hair.

"You didn't think it'd be that easy, did you?", he replied.

"I knew going in there wouldn't be a minute of this that was easy.", she turned around, walking a few steps away, her back to him. "But watching Thessia fall... and knowing it was my responsibility."

Anderson leaned on his leg to chuckle lightly. "Shepard, you know how many times I got my ass handed to me over the years? Surviving the First Contact War back in the day was a damned miracle. They said I was a hero. I just felt lucky to get out alive." He pointed away to an unseen object, as if a person was standing there, invisible. "So maybe Kai Leng did beat you. What of it?"

Shepard glanced back, "It could cost us the war."

"These guys in the resistance, they know it's a losing proposition. They know the chances of seeing tomorrow are slim to none. But we all signed up anyway. Hell, I'm sitting in London right now, staring at rubble. I was born here, and it's looking like I might die here, too.", Anderson stared strongly towards her.
He steps forward gesturing as he speaks, "So I say point us at the reapers, and we'll take our chances."

Shepard closed her eyes. She felt more ashamed of her behavior earlier and feeling hopeless, when there are men and women fighting to survive back on earth. On every planet. She turns around and looks at Anderson thoughtfully as she speaks, "You'll make it Anderson. And when this is all over, you can show me London."

Anderson laughed, "It might need a new coat of paint first."

Shepard returned a chuckle, approaching the console. "This will be over soon."

Anderson rubbed his shoulder in pained exhaustion. He smiled wearly at her, "It better. Shake this off, Shepard."

"I will.", she replied with a weary smile.

His frame begins to fade fast, thousands of image pixels distorting, "Anderson out."

Shepard left and walked out of the war room. She passed their scanning systems, stepping out the door before bumping into Garrus. He was apparently on his way to her. "Garrus, what is it?", she asked.

He pulled her to the side, "I need to talk to you. Well, actually Satima needs to talk."

Shepard nodded then glanced away, "I need to say something to her as well. Tell Satima I'll meet her during my rounds."

Garrus smiled, "I will." He reached out to grab Shepard's arm. She turned facing him. The lit panel from the galaxy map leaving a faint flicker in her eyes. "What's wrong Garrus?", she asked curious.

His gaze pierced hers for a moment. "Are you alright?", he squeezed her arm gently.

Shepard smiled warmly at him, "Yes. I had a talk with Anderson." Garrus let her go as she walked to him, embracing his touch. He wrapped his long, strong arms around her. They held on for a single moment before duty called them away.

Most of the crew giving a respectful distance. Traynor looked away, smiling. He left back to the elevator.

Shepard continued pass the CIC, speaking with Traynor quickly, checking a threatening message from Kai Leng. "Lack the strength...", she turned it off. No more negative thinking.

Shepard walked to the cockpit, Joker had been running diagnostics.

"So, Thessia, huh? Guess the asari are wishing they had fewer dancers and more commandos right about now.", his sarcastic comment stung a bit. He turned to face Shepard, "Too soon?"

She gave him a pissed expression, "In case you hadn't noticed, we just lost a few million people. This isn't the time."

Joker absorbed her sentence then began quickly whisking holo panels to the side until he found what he wanted. It had a planet with a small moon, much like earth.

He bent forward, sitting up straighter in his chair, "You see this? Tiptree. Little colony out in the ass-end of nowhere. My dad lives there. So, does my sister." Joker pressed a button, images of reapers
came into view, hovering over the planet. "Reapers rolled in about two weeks ago." He turned off the screen. "So, you can assume that I'm generally aware there's a war on, Commander."

Shepard scoffed walking away, then turned, annoyed. "So why the jokes?"

Joker swerved around in his chair quickly, defending his sarcastic demeanor. "Because EDI says that according to your armor's metabolic scans, you're under more stress now than during the Skyclian Blitz. Like, more than Elysium, where it was pretty much you versus 10,000 batarians trying to kill you." Joker started to get jumpy with his lecture and preaching," And the last time I had a briefing with Anderson, he told me to take care of you."

Joker gestured around him, laughing at himself, "The guy leading the resistance-on Earth!-is worried about you. And I'm supposed to help."

Shepard listened, staring at him. "I appreciate the thought, Joker, but I'm fine."

"The hell you are. You're like a half robot at this point. No offense, EDI. And it's my fault. When the collectors blew up the Normandy, you died because I wouldn't leave... because you had to come back for me.", Joker glanced downward.

Shepard stared, watching her good friend mourn a memory. A painful one. She sighed quietly, shrugging her shoulders with a cocky smile. "Couldn't leave the best pilot in the fleet behind, could I?"

"Yeah, well... I guess that would've looked bad on your report.", he turned around in his chair.

Shepard shook her head, "Come on. We've got work to do."

She stepped to EDI, still mindful of her conversation with Joker. EDI had a question about human behavior, but Shepard wasn't in the mood for it. "This isn't the best time." EDI gave up and promised to maintain a respectful silence.

Shepard continues her various rounds on the ship. Speaking to everyone, some of them trying to give her encouragement, even though Shepard felt she wasn't worthy enough to try anymore.

She wanders, thinking deeply and decides to visit Garrus before seeing to Liara, then finally Satima. Inside, she catches him overlooking a terminal screen. Hunched over the console. Shepard could tell he wasn't happy.

"What's wrong?", she asks, stepping to him.

Garrus turns around hearing her voice, "I just had to make a tough call with the primarch." He faces the screen again, leaning over the console. "He said our fleets are being decimated. So, I advised him to cease all offensive operations against the Reapers."

Shepard leaned in next to him, observing the screens images. "A full retreat?"

"The only way to save Palaven now is to hold our ships back for the Crucible. But if I'm wrong... then a lot of other turian families won't be as lucky as mine.", he looked on the screen, solemn.

"That's a hell of a gamble. No other options?", Shepard asked again, facing him.

Garrus glanced down, "If there are, I can't see them. It all comes down to the Crucible now."

Shepard looked away from him, "And "ruthless calculus."
Garrus sighed, stepping back from the console he was leaning on. He turned to Shepard, watching her stare away at the screen.

For some time, he longed to kiss her, hold her close. But she's still the Commander, and he knows they must be professional at times. Even in front of close friends. "How are you holding up, Shepard? This all has to be taking a toll."

Shepard didn't take her eyes off the images on the screen, counting the number of enemy ships versus ally. "There's only so much fight in a person, only so much death you can take before...

Garrus cut in, "Before a certain turian with no romantic skills to speak of tries to cheer you up." He finally puts his arm around her waist. She backs away from the console, leaning in his touch, smiling at him.
"Cheer? Coming from you?", she smirks.

"Mood swings.", Garrus shrugs. "Don't worry. We'll get through this. We always do." He leans in and kisses her cheek. Shepard blushes from it.

If only they had the time. They stay that way, holding each other for a few more minutes, like in the war room, an hour earlier. All the while not noticing a certain someone watching with a big smile on her face.

Satima sat in the duct system, quietly listening. She had been searching for her small cube. To term it as a floating VI, it also got curious and ran off. Satima searched everywhere and only ended up hearing Shepard talk. She turned back around to the core room. To wait for Shepard when she comes by.

The commander left to speak with Liara, but glyph informed her that she was with Javik. She won't catch them in the process of... anything. Still, she needed to check on the broker and friend. Down to engineering. She waited in the elevator until the door slid open. Shepard could hear shouting, she ran in.

"Those were all lies back there!", Liara yelled in anger.

"They were not.", Javik replied calmly.

Liara paced hard in the room, glaring at Javik. "My people weren't animals for your kind to experiment on!"

Javik pointed out the obvious. "You wanted to know more about your history, asari. Now you do."

Liara's biotics flared violently. Her rage against Javik clear. "I have a name. It's Liara T'Soni. And I'd appreciate you using it from now on!"

Shepard pushed Liara's arm aside. "Hey, settle down!"

"My home was just destroyed... and all he can do is gloat!", she shouted.

Shepard understood Liara's anger. She wanted Javik to understand as well. "Giving what's happened today, I think you owe Liara an apology, Javik."

Javik leaned back, crossing his arms in defiance, "Apologize for the truth?"

Liara cut in, yelling. "For not doing more! You're a Prothean! You were supposed to have all the answers! How could you not stop this from happening?"
Javik stared at Liara. "We believed you would."

Liara looked at him stunned, then glanced at Shepard. She calmed herself, letting go of her biotic rage. Javik looked down and around the room as he revealed more from his people's past. "Long ago we saw the potential in your people. Even then it was obvious: the wisdom. The patience. You were the best hope for this cycle. So, you were... guided, when necessary."

Liara stepped back, a pained expression on her face. "Well, it didn't work."

"You're still alive, aren't you?", Javik continued. "Your world may have fallen, but as long as even one asari is left standing, the fight isn't over."

Liara weighed his words. There are more asari in the galaxy, and their war cry wasn't silenced yet. "I guess that goes for Protheans, too."

"Despair is the enemy's greatest weapon. Do not let them wield it... Liara T'Soni.", Javik let his arms fall against his sides, and stepped forward to Liara, nodding a respectful understanding between them.

Liara gave him a weak smile and left. Shepard watched her leave then turned back to Javik. "That was... unexpected. Thank you.", she said to him.

Javik stood quiet then replied, "We still need her talents. If grief overcomes her, she will be lost to us."

Shepard walked forward, "So did you actually mean what you said?"

"Does it matter?", he asks.

"Liara's been a good friend to me. It matters.", Shepard glared.

Javik leaned back on his leg, "Then I will tell you what you want to hear: I meant what I said." He resumed to his washing basin.

Shepard watched him wash his hands twice. She doesn't understand if he really wants to help, or stand by and complain about the current crisis while the reapers wipe them all out.

The commander leaves, stepping out from the lift to the third floor. She eventually heads into the medbay, waving to Chockwas and enters Satima's quarters.

"Satima?", she calls out the girl.

Satima then jumps down from a duct vent overhead, turning around to see Shepard, arms crossed, tapping her foot. "Oh, Shepard! I wasn't doing anything wrong, I promise. I was just looking for something I lost-it... got lost. See.", she held up a small metal cube.

"What is that?", Shepard asked curious.

Satima smiled to herself. "This is my own VI. I got bored and made this thing, to help me scan the crucible's schematics."

She laid the object on an adjustable shelf.

"Interesting. I know you wanted to speak with me, but first... I have something to say.", Shepard stepped forward, closer to Satima.

"Alright.", Satima replied, standing still.

Shepard started to speak and stopped. "You know, this is usually not so hard.", she chuckled.
"You don't have to. I understand that I completely crossed a line and pushed. I'm sorry... Commander.", Satima glanced to the side.

Shepard shook her head at the girl, "No, don't apologize because you cared about someone else's feelings. It was wrong of me to snap at you like that. And as your Commanding officer, I should have been more mature in that situation."

Satima looked at her, "Being in command is never easy. Especially when everyone is looking at you for the answers. I'm sorry about Thessia again, and I'm sorry for Liara."

Shepard nodded, Satima walked to the side rail in front of the hull wall. She leaned over it, "But I'm telling you... losing Thessia to the reapers is the least of your worries."

"How so?", Shepard wondered.

Satima hesitated on the answer. "It just is", she replied.

Shepard sighed at the girl's cryptic response, then left with Satima getting back to work on her data pads.

After going over the system finds on the galaxy map, Shepard and team geared up, leaving in the shuttle to the Lera system. It was time to investigate this so-called "Sanctuary" facility, and why it had suddenly gone dark.

During the ride, Shepard paced in the shuttle. Tali stood up, wanting to say something to break the anxious atmosphere.

"What do we know, Shepard?", she asked.

Shepard looked at EDI, "EDI?"

"The sanctuary facility was devoted to aiding refugees from Reaper-controlled space. The facility went offline recently, and no communications have come or gone since. It is unclear why Kai Leng or Cerberus would be interested in Sanctuary.", EDI finished, placing one hand on her hip while setting the other to hang on a lever from the hull ceiling.

Shepard placed her hand likewise on the ceiling, "If there's a clue to Cerberus here, we find it."

Cortez sat up in his chair, reporting his scans. "Ma'am, I'm picking up a signal from the facility. It's weak, but I'll try to boost it."

"This is Oriana Lawson. Stay away from Sanctuary. It's not what it seems. Please, you must listen to me! They're using...", the signal repeated.

"Oriana? That's Miranda's sister.", Shepard confirmed. "If she's here, Miranda can't be far away."

EDI walked to them, facing the small cockpit. "That's our link to Cerberus."

"Approaching the LZ.", Cortez informs. "Seeing some damage, Commander but no activity." The shuttle approaches a landing pad on the ground in front of a huge white facility. Smoke rises from burning debris and damaged sky cars. Green shrubbery dots the cement landscape to the courtyard. Various points of barricades indicate there was a recent battle.

Back inside the shuttle as it begins to land, Shepard prepares her team. "Cerberus does not get the jump on us this time!" The hatch to the shuttle opens, as Shepard overlooks the LZ. She aims her rifle, "Stay sharp, people."
They fought their way through troopers and phantoms. Taking cover from the sniper shots, and grenades. At the facilities lobby on Horizon, Shepard finished eliminating Cerberus troopers with her team. They found a terminal with Miranda's voice echoing off it.

"This is a Cerberus facility..."

"That's Miranda.", Shepard wondered. She stepped up to the terminal. "This is Miranda Lawson. If you managed to get this far, you must be desperate or stupid.", several images of the facility before it got damaged from an attack, displayed on the screen.

"Listen to me. This is not a refugee camp. This is a Cerberus facility run by my father, Henry Lawson. Turn back now. There is no help to be found here-all communication is being blocked from the central tower. Sanctuary is a lie. Stay away." The message ended.

The screen went to static, Shepard looked to her team. "Okay. So, we've got Cerberus, Reapers, and Miranda's crazy father. Any ideas how this all fits?"

Tali and EDI look back with blank stares. Shepard nodded and aimed her rifle back towards the outside. "Great, should've made Garrus come along.", she said to herself.

They continued through the facility, draining a pool to reveal a secret door in the bottom. Tali commented on the reaper tech that surrounded the area.

Horrors awaited them. Deeper inside the testing labs, Shepard discovers that the refugees were being used not only for Cerberus experimentation's but for Reapers as well.

Men, women and children were turned into husks. The Illusive man disgusted her. He doesn't stand for humanity, only for himself. Further on, more of Miranda's warnings litter the area. Shepard sees that Kai Leng is present and hoped Miranda was prepared for him. Considering her warning at the citadel.

Husks came pouring out of every corner down a long corridor. On the balconies above, rachni fired on them. Shepard uses her rifle to snipe them out. Garrus would've been very handy at this point. When they reached the other side of the facility using a platform to get across, they encountered more Reapers, followed by a brute. Banshees came screeching out down the hallway, heading their way.

"Bring down the brute first!" Shepard yelled.

EDI dodges an incoming biotic wave from the Banshee. She was fast as abominations poured through every hallway and door.

Tali used her drone to draw the brute out, leaving a clear path for Shepard to whittle its armor plate down. EDI dispatched the cannibals and husks with her android reflexes, offering firing support for Tali to move behind new cover. With the brute coming down the open hall faster, Shepard wasted no time lobbing a lift grenade on the beast.

Hot shrapnel exploded all around it, as biotic energy burned its exposed plating. Tali ran behind, using her shotgun to rip a hole into the back of the brute. It roared in pain, as Shepard finished it with a few rounds of her thermal clip.

Satisfied in the confidence of her team, they continued to the main lab. EDI downloaded an audio log from Henry Lawson's personal terminal files.

He was working for the Illusive Man. He conducted the experiments for something sinister, something that also effected the reapers.

But how? Shepard brought her team to the way-point. A quick ride in an elevator brought them
outside the room of the lab. Weapons fire could be heard inside. "Get ready!", Shepard warned.

Inside, Miranda leaned against a desk, injured. Henry Lawson held Oriana hostage. "Commander Shepard. Excellent timing.", he aimed the pistol at Shepard while holding Oriana close to him as a shield.
Shepard aimed her rifle at him, inching closer. She didn't have time for this stupidity. "Put the gun down."

"No. Oriana tried to shoot me. Miranda's poisonous influence, no doubt.", Henry glared towards Miranda.

Shepard smirked, "I'm sorry she missed." She narrowed her eyes at him, "Where's Kai Leng?"

"I don't know. Gone. He took my research and left us here to die.", Henry's tone sounding irritated. He looked around him nervously.

Shepard glanced at Miranda. "Miranda, can you hear me?"

The ex-Cerberus agent slowly got up. Small lacerations from a fist fight where on her face. She wasn't hurt too badly. Henry became more nervous. "That's close enough. Both of you! Kai Leng didn't finish the job, but I will."

"This ends here.", Shepard stated.

Henry smirked, "On the contrary. Now that the Reapers are taken care of, we have a way out."

Shepard wasn't there to negotiate and forced compromises were not going to make her lay down her weapon either. "Let her go.", she said in a threatening tone.

"Shepard... don't let him take her.", Miranda begged.

"Shepard... please.", Oriana pleaded.

Shepard felt a hard decision coming up. No way was she letting Henry get away with this. Or take Oriana. "What exactly do you think you've created here?", Shepard asked, trying to get him to talk.

"Hope. Few people have the stomach to do what it takes to stop the reapers. And what we learned here will save countless lives. I will be seen as the savior of the human race.", Henry kept talking.

"I doubt that.", Shepard argued. Behind him, Shepard noticed a glass pane that was fractured. One hit, and it would shatter to the surface below. Miranda noticed as well. "I have no problem with you. I just want Oriana and the research data.", Shepard asked calmly.

"You want a lot.", Henry replied with a sinister stare.

Shepard begins moving around, angling herself to shoot the glass. "You get your life in return. How much is that worth?"

Henry glances at Oriana then back to Shepard. "All right. Take her.", he lets Oriana go, pushing her down. "But I want out alive. Deal?"

Miranda fires up her biotics, fists glowing blue. She shoots a strong warp towards him, sending her father backwards through the glass, screaming to his death. "No deal.", Miranda glares out through the empty glass frame.

She walked to Oriana, "Did he hurt you? Are you all right?" Miranda helped her sister to stand,
receiving a consoling embrace, "It's okay, Ori. You're safe now."

"I'm fine. I just... I want to get out of here.", her sister replied with closed eyes.

Miranda pulls gently away, holding her sister's hand tightly. "We will. Give me a minute, okay?"

The ex-operative turns to Shepard, walking forward to her. "Commander Shepard. Fancy meeting you here."

"We caught a break. Are you, all right?", Shepard asked concerned.

"I'll be fine. Really. I don't know how you managed it, but I'm grateful you're here.", Miranda crosses her arms with a smile.

Shepard had some important questions to ask Miranda. "How did you do all this?"

She looked away in thought, "Finding my father didn't take long once I confirmed he worked for the Illusive Man. Just had to follow the lies." Miranda glanced downward then looked up, pacing around Shepard. "Once I saw what this place really was... I couldn't just walk away."

"Of course.", Shepard agreed.

"Things got really complicated when the Reapers showed up. And Kai Leng.", Miranda narrowed her gaze, remembering her fight with him.

"You survived. Not many people could do that.", Shepard stated.

Miranda mentioned how Shepard's warnings saved her by taking a few precautions.

Shepard replied how the whole ordeal had been a huge risk, she should have told her sooner, pointing out that Miranda could've been killed regardless. She smirked, "You have a war to win, Shepard. This was my fight. It's been a long time coming."

"Agreed. Well, you did it. It's over.", Shepard continued.

Miranda nodded, but wished her sister had never taken part in it, though. She's glad her father is gone, he was an evil bastard. Shepard understood.

EDI and Tali were both busy at work on the terminal. Shepard glanced to them, "What's our status? Any Intel we can use from this place?"

EDI began typing away, "Research databases have been purged, but security systems are intact, including Cerberus shipping direct links, but it's a good start."

Shepard approached the console next to EDI. "Grab anything you can off the computer. We'll take it back to be analyzed."

"I can do better than that.", Miranda cut in, handling a device in her hand. "Before Kai Leng took off, I planted a tracer on him. If you act fast, you'll track him right to the Illusive Man."

She handed the device to Shepard. "A tracer? Sounds like you thought of everything."

Miranda sighed, fidgeting with the collar of her uniform. "Not quite, but... nobody's perfect."

Shepard smiled, "Thanks, Miranda. This is... exactly what we need."
"Thought you might need some good news.", Miranda offered.

"Damn right. What's next for you two?", Shepard asked, looking towards Oriana.

Miranda glanced the same way, "Get her someplace safe. Get this scratch cleaned up".

"Okay. I've got to follow all this up", Shepard walked to a desk terminal.

Miranda followed after her. "I'll be in touch, Shepard. Soon."

"I hope so.", Shepard nods. "And stay safe out there. The both of you." She looks towards Oriana.

Miranda leaves with her sister. Shepard begins typing a sequence for Miranda's warning to be played as far out into the system as possible. "Cortez, we need a pickup at the tower.", Shepard commed. "Roger that.", he replied.

Shepard looks out over the facility from the rooms high view with a look of disgust. "I've had enough of this place."

On the Normandy, Shepard finished a vid-comm call from Hackett. He disproved her diversion to Sanctuary, but realized it was an important mission. Cerberus was up to something big, by slaughtering refugees to study indoctrination. Hackett praised Shepard for shutting it down permanently. Shepard agreed all the innocent lives were worth more than being used to study Reapers.

Hackett remarked on the useful Intel but also agreed the cost was too high. After another brief conversation, they concurred to finally boot Cerberus out of this war. It was time to be able to solely focus on the Reapers.

Hackett ended the call after their plans were agreed upon. Shepard left the war room and began her rounds. Some of her crew eyeing her, respectfully saluting. She spoke to EDI who had concerns about organic survival and what it meant to fight for someone you care about.

Shepard helped her understand the meaning, after EDI commented on a prisoner camp willingly dying to defy the Reapers. EDI turned to Joker, she had the capacity to feel, to care for someone and that person is Jeff. Shepard was glad to hear it.

She continued her rounds until she stopped by the lounge. Tali was sipping an alcoholic beverage.

"Shepard. Wanna drink? I'm toasting Miranda. I think.", Tali hiccupped.

This was too weird and funny. Bless Tali but she can be so dramatic. "How are you getting drunk?", Shepard asked.

"Very carefully. Turian brandy, triple filtered, then introduced into the suit through an emergency induction port.", Tali explained.

Shepard raised a brow. "That's a straw, Tali."

"Emergency induction port. It's actually getting a little harder to get it into the slot. I think that means it's working...", Tali raised her glass, looking for the straw. "She was so rude. What did Jack call her? "Cerberus cheerleader." With her perfect genes, and that attitude, and... And still, she got it done. She stopped her father."

Shepard looked perplexed, she started to feel a little worried for Tali. "I didn't realize this would be so hard on you"
Tali continued, "I didn't like her. Keelah, she was such a bitch. But, I respected her. Sometimes that's better than liking. She did whatever it took to stop her father. She never gave into him. Never changed herself to please him."

Shepard thought for a moment. She figured out what Tali's real problem was. "Ah.", she said.

"Don't "Ah" me! You sound like a vorcha.", Tali commented.

"Seeing a bit of yourself in Miranda fighting her father?", Shepard asked.

"I've spent my life trying to live up to him, then making up for his mistakes, doing what he'd have wanted.", Tali found her straw, sipping again.

Shepard smirked, "It's never that easy."

"When do we get to stop reacting to our parents and start living for ourselves?", Tali asked, swishing her drink in the glass.

Shepard was a loss for an answer at this moment. She thought to herself, seeing as she was an orphan on earth as a child. Anderson was a great mentor. Still is! But... that nagging "what if", would come back. If her parents, or parent-were still alive. And knew who she is, they would've already made an effort to contact her. Especially after Saren and the citadel. With a short sigh, Shepard prepared her answer, as if she had the same feeling. "The answer to that one's at the bottom of that glass", she replied.

"I might need help with the induction straw. Port. You know.", Tali grabbed her straw tight.

"Here's to Miranda.", Shepard picked up an empty glass, raising it alongside Tali's.

"Nice job, you genetically perfect Cerberus cheerleader bosh'tet. Keehal se'lai.", Tali began sucking the brandy hard through her induction straw.

Shepard giggled to herself, leaving Tali to her drunken thoughts.

It took an hour to finish her rounds. Javik showed her his memory shard, sharing with her the last pains of his people. Something he would carry to his death. She kept circling deck three, trying to figure who she would try to talk to first. Shepard stood in the middle of the mess, replaying what Satima said. She started walking to the med-bay.

The door opened to the core room. Satima still sat in the middle, hardly budging for three days, working on her data pads. Shepard slowly walked in and sat in front of her. Satima looked up, glancing towards Shepard. She turned away.

"Listen, ... I need more information, Satima.", she sat down next to the young woman. Satima looked at her with an intense gaze. Her dark eyes and teal rims reminding her of someone close. "The reapers won." Satima said glancing away.

"How so?", Shepard stared in alarm.

"I'm not sure", Satima answered.

Shepard brought her knees to her, trying to make sense of the information. "Is there anything else you would like to tell me?", Shepard asked.

"No.", Satima continued with her tinkering.
"Do you know how...", Shepard got interrupted by Satima.

"I don't know! Ok! Just... stop asking questions, please.", Satima stood up.

Shepard followed the hybrid. Something had gotten to her, or at least made her moody. "Hey, I was asking politely. You don't have to snap at me too.", Shepard spoke, agitated.

Satima stopped, putting her data pads on the shelf, "You want the truth?", she asked, staring into the hull.

Shepard nodded for Satima to continue, "The truth is...I'm scared. It's a mistake that I'm here...that's all." She turned to face Shepard, "I'm the most unqualified person on this ship. And you still let me help you?"

Shepard tried to console her, but Satima shrugged her off, returning to her work. "Don't play soft, Commander. The enemy is always watching."

An hour passed.
Shepard paced in her cabin. She's been spaced, reborn, and almost collected. Now she's facing the harvest of the galaxy in her timeline and the one person who has information won't tell her a damn thing! Why is she so hesitant?

Shepard apologized. Sooner or later, Satima is going to have to tell her the entire truth. She stopped pacing, facing her desk. Many novelty ships and shuttles cluttered her hobby wall.

In the middle was the Normandy. Shepard wiped off dust. A feeling of nostalgia made her smile. The good days. Just fighting geth and Saren, one reaper and no future paradox insanity problems. She remembered the time spent gathering her crew. The first time she met Garrus on her way to see the council. Thinking back, she blushed. He was so young, rebellious... cute. Shepard leaned back in her chair. She needs to make time for them soon. Before there isn't time left.

"Commander. You have a new message at your private terminal.", Traynors voice echoed.

Shepard leaned forward, tapping her terminal on. It was an urgent message from Hackett. An Alliance researcher named Doctor Bryson had found information about the reapers. Finally! She closed the terminal and hurried out of her cabin.

At the galaxy map, she directed the Normandy to the citadel. Time to visit Bryson's lab.

Citadel Docks
Normandy platform

Shepard took a cab alone to visit him. She landed in his yard, walking casually into his lab. A large apartment with an upstairs bedroom.

The hall led to a wide work room, with some kind of extinct marine animal suspended above. Dinosaur, maybe? A piece of Sovereigns hull stood in a containment case. To her right she ventured into a smaller lab. Inside the blue tinted room, he had put together a mismatch of information. All apparently leading to the reapers.

"I want you to match this against all known locations and update the map. Then contact the field teams for a progress report." Dr. Bryson blared to his assistant across the lab. He stood, typing, in front of a large screen.

"Yes, sir.", his assistant, Derek replied.

Bryson turned toward Shepard, data pad in hand. "Commander Shepard. We've been expecting you.
Just a moment." He faced Derek. "And Hadley, could you gather the Leviathan data for us?"

Derek Hadley busied himself with another terminal. Bryson led Shepard further into his lab. "Apologies, Commander; the rest of my team is out investigating leads right now. I'm Dr. Garret Bryson and this is Task Force Aurora."

In the smaller lab room, Shepard glanced at a galaxy map, like hers on the Normandy. She looked at him. "What's your assignment?"

Bryson looked around his room. Pictures dotted the walls like the room before. "Our mandate is to investigate legends, rumors... old stories about the Reapers before anyone knew they existed."

"That's an interesting goal, but is anyone doubting the Reapers exist these days?" Shepard asked, sarcastically.

"The Alliance is still desperate for intelligence. Reaper motives, their operational tactics... anything that can give us an edge." Bryson gestured at his data.

Shepard crossed her arms. "And how did you wind up in charge?"

Bryson smirked. "When the rest of the galaxy says, something doesn't exist, I take that as a chance to prove that is does."

"So, you're in it for the challenge?", she asked.

"For the truth. Even as late as 2148, humanity still thought aliens were a myth. That was within my lifetime.", he replied. "Once the myth was proven to be reality, our entire history changed."

"Reapers were part of that reality, too.", Shepard followed him to another containment case.

Bryson faced her. "But even they have a history, Commander. If we can just uncover it, there may be a weakness we can exploit."

All of what Bryson said made Shepard think back to when she first encountered Sovereign. If someone else had the answers, the proof they needed then the galaxy would've been prepared. Shepard wouldn't have had to look like a fool. "I could've used your help three years ago.", she regretted.

Bryson agreed, "Yes. If people had paid more attention to your Prothean beacon, we might not be in this war."

The doctor walked to his galaxy map as Shepard overlooked a data pad. He leaned over the rail to the front console. "But now, with new information we've uncovered, a breakthrough is near." As Bryson began typing on the holo controls, Hadley quickly approached. "Hadley, do you have the data?", he asked.

Shepard continued skimming the information on the data pad, when Hadley brought out a pistol, aiming towards Bryson. "No.", and shot the Doctor.

In mere seconds, the assistant aimed the weapon towards Shepard, who quickly threw her pad at him. Knocking the gun from his hand. She had him down on the ground. He didn't move after her take down. Shepard touched her implanted comm behind her ear, "This is Commander Shepard! I need C-Sec at my location now!"

Hadley's eyes remained open, staring at the ceiling. His mouth moved with a voice not his own,
"You shouldn't be here... the darkness can't be breached..."

Minutes later, C-Sec showed up. Two turian cops ran in to apprehend Hadley. They all stood in front of the containment case in the small lab. "Transit records his name as Derek Hadley. He's worked here for a couple months.", the officer explained.

As Shepard paced in thought, EDI stepped in. "Shepard, I monitored a C-Sec alert from this location. Were you harmed?"

Shepard looked relieved but not surprised. "I'm fine. But I could use your help sorting this out, EDI. Take a look through their files. I need to know what this task force was up to."

"At once.", EDI complied.

Hadley then began coming to. He acted as if he didn't know what had happened. "What? I... What's happening?"

Shepard crossed her arms, curious, "You tell me." Her eyes narrowed on the young assistant.

He began to stutter, "I... I was... gathering our data when you arrived, and then... It was dark... cold... like I was someplace else..."

"And then?", Shepard asked, as a familiar eerie feeling crept up in the back of her mind.

"I don't know. A... gun was in my hand. Dr. Bryson. There was... a loud noise.", Hadley looked down confused.

Shepard pointed at him. "That was you shooting him!"

A C-Sec officer moved away from the dead body. Hadley seen it immediately and ran to it in horror. "I didn't do it! It wasn't me! You have to believe that!"

Shepard felt perplexed. "So, someone else pulled that trigger?"

"But I would never do that!", Hadley put a hand to his head. He seemed to be holding it in pain.

EDI glanced to the group, "Commander, this does resemble reports of indoctrination."

"Indoctrination? Me?", Hadley stood up, scared.

"What about that "Leviathan" Bryson mentioned? How does that tie in?", Shepard questioned.

Hadley paced, "It's... some kind of creature. Our field teams have been tracking it. He turned to the glass containment case on the wall. An orb sat encased in a kinetic barrier. "That artifact came in from our researcher, Garneau. He sent an audio log if you want to-" Hadley grabbed his head in severe pain, crying out.

Shepard watched stunned. "What's wrong?"

Hadley fell to his knees, a blank stare returning. "Turn back." The voice said.

"What are you talking about?" Shepard stepped to him closely.

The voice from within Hadley spoke again. "The darkness cannot be breached." He fell forward to the floor, unconscious.

"Damn it. Get him over to the clinic; see if they can tell us what's wrong with him." Shepard shook
"Yes Ma'am." The C-Sec officers began taking Hadley to the ambulance that had been called. Shepard turned to the orb, trying to peer through it. It looked foreign and dangerous. Who was that voice? And why did every feeling in her body scream reaper?

"Commander, you'll want to see this: It's an outgoing message from Dr. Bryson to Admiral Hackett." EDI alerted.

Hackett: Dr. Bryson, you have an update?"
The screens vid turned on. Hackett and Bryson were discussing the project in the lab. "Admiral, the "Leviathan of Dis" that we've been investigating-I think we're really onto something."

"Give me the brief.", Hackett stood at attention, arms behind his back.

Bryson faced the Admiral. "About twenty years ago, the batarians discovered a reaper corpse that had died in battle. They covered it up and denied it ever existed. But I'm intrigued by the larger implication."

Hackett glanced downward in thought. A reaper corpse would change things but another thought crept up. "What could have killed a Reaper in the first place?"

Bryson stepped forward excited. "Exactly. That's the real Leviathan."

"It's worth pursuing. Continue your investigation and update me on the progress." Hackett ended the call. Bryson walked away.

The vid ended.

"There is also a follow up message from a few weeks later.", EDI informed.

Bryson paced nervously. "Admiral, the Reapers are shadowing my field teams as if they're hunting Leviathan themselves. Whatever it is, I believe Leviathan is nothing less than a Reaper-killer-almost an apex predator- and it has them nervous."

Hackett listened closely as the nervous doctor continued his debrief. "If we could just find it, imagine the impact on the war. I'm formally requesting assistance in tracking it down."

"You'll have it. This is now your top priority, Doctor. Find that thing." Hackett ordered.

After they reviewed the vid, EDI explained the recent message. "It appears we were meant to be that assistance."

Shepard gestured to the screen, "Anything capable of killing a reaper could do a lot of collateral damage."

"Yet given the state of this conflict, I believe the saying "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" may be relevant.", EDI stated.

"But we won't know unless we can find it.", Shepard worried.

EDI brought out displays on her own Omni-tool. "Bryson's assistant did say they recently received a log from their field researcher. It may yield more information."

Shepard glanced at an audio log on the desk then looked to the orb. "This must be the artifact the assistant mentioned. And here's the log." She typed a sequence to open the message; "Dr. Bryson, it's
Garneau. I'm sending you an artifact I found. About the only thing, I found there, in fact. Maybe it's nothing, but I'd swear Leviathan came through here. I'm going to crunch some numbers, burn up the rest of this project travel allowance. Maybe I can project our Reaper-killer's movements. I'll check in when I get to the next site."

The audio message ends.

EDI turns to Shepard, "Garneau appears to be our best lead to track Leviathan, but he does not state a destination."

"Let's focus on what he does say, then." Shepard needed more answers.

EDI pointed to the orb, "He mentioned extrapolating Leviathan's path." Shepard agreed. "And crunching numbers. He wasn't flying blind-he had data."

"A significant amount of data, judging by this office.", EDI said.

Shepard glanced around the lab. There was a lot of information-data, to be rummaged through. "So how do we narrow it down?"

EDI walked to the galaxy map. "Bryson and his colleagues evidently used a galaxy map search program in their hunt for Leviathan. It may help us locate Garneau."

Shepard activated the map, via console. Many pings of locations showed up. "Does this tell us where Garneau went?"

"No. But we may be able to narrow down his location, if we find clues he was using in his search for Leviathan.", EDI explained.

Now she had to search the lab for clues. This could take a while. Shepard examined the glass containment case on the wall. It had Prothean artifacts. She asked EDI if they could help narrow down Garneau's location. EDI added them as the first search filter. Shepard moved on.

Screens with pictures, terminals displaying scans or ratio patterns and of course... a freaking husk head. It roared at her as she passed by it. Located on a display board were pictures of murdered citizens. All the suspects claimed to have no memory of the act.

The murders were referenced as "blackout crimes". Shepard asked EDI if they could use this information, in which EDI replied they needed more data to match the dates and locations of the crimes. Next to the board was the chart screen. EDI immediately began a filter for the murders with the available data. Shepard stepped through the door, passed the wood floor walkway, back into the large lab. A screen next to Sovereigns reaper hull, contained a small audio log with Bryson's image. It was sent to an Alliance officer.

"Sir, this is Bryson. We know the Reapers are after Leviathan. Studying Reaper hunting patterns could be vital to finding it." The officers voice replied to his message, "That data is classified "top secret", Dr. Bryson. If it falls into the wrong hands..." Bryson continued, "It won't. The data's encrypted. I'll keep the decryption key safe... close to my heart." The audio log ended.

Shepard seemed puzzled. "Close to his heart... what the hell does that mean?"

EDI confirmed what Bryson said and kept searching for something "close to his heart" as Shepard approached the reaper fragment. "Sovereign, vanguard of our destruction. How's that working out for you, big guy?" Shepard smiled to herself.

Shepard walked to the middle of the lab, spotting the large skeleton hanging from the ceiling. "Loch ness monster?", she chuckled.
"Plesiosaur.", EDI corrected.

Shepard shook her head, "Loch ness monster's more interesting."

"Interesting and nonexistent.", EDI pointed out.

Shepard rolled her eyes walking to another computer data screen. She pressed the audio log from Bryson. "I'm looking at the rachni. Their movements during the Rachni Wars suggest alien influence. But the timing is wrong, and rachni weren't implanted with Reaper tech. What if Leviathan was preparing the rachni to fight the Reapers?" Shepard looked to EDI next to her, "What do you think, EDI?"

"It is possible that Bryson's team is using ancient rachni fleet activity to find Leviathan. We saw a datapad containing data on rachni movements earlier. It may be relevant.", EDI finished.

Shepard found a PDA across the room. It discussed findings on the Thorian. Ahead was a switch. The curiosity got to her and she turned it on. Ultraviolet markers dotted the wall. "Bryson was tracking unexplained creature sightings..."

EDI commented he was attempting to extrapolate a course. In which Shepard agreed that Garneau could've been following that exact search filter, and was added for that projected path.

Next to the creature sighting wall, were mining rocks. Shepard thought them to be meteorites. EDI suggested looking more closely at the sample. Shepard used the rock fragment scanner on the sample, it contained traces of element zero. Would Leviathan need it, she wondered.

EDI confirmed that element zero will decay after several centuries of active use. She then concurred that if Leviathan is old enough, it would need to replenish it supplies quickly.

Shepard asked EDI to post another search filter for locations with element zero.

Shepard walked around, searching the lab for more clues. She found a picture made by a child on a desk. It was from Anne Bryson. Shepard thought aloud, "Bryson was keeping the encryption key close to his heart. What's closer than family?"

"An interesting hypothesis, but I detect no trace of the decryption key in this... art.", EDI said.


Shepard looked closely, "Wait a minute..." There on the drawing, were a sequence of numbers in yellow over the green field. "Well, take a look at that."

EDI spoke over his calculations. "I can use these numbers to construct a decryption key."

"Alright. Let's get back to the data pad we found earlier.", Shepard turned around to leave. Before heading back down the stairs, she sees an audio log on the dresser. It's an Alliance officer confirming use of an intercepted batarian communication regarding the Leviathan of Dis.

A batarian officer speaks to his commander about having the dreadnought in custody even though salarian intelligence has surveillance footage. The commander reassures their ambassador will deny the whole thing. He wanted the preliminary analysis.

The officer replies telling his commander the dreadnought was more than several million years old with its technology outdoing anything on the citadel. His commander seems pleased by the information, saying their scientist will work day and night to bring the secrets of the dreadnought to the Hegemony.

After a brief pause, the officer continues with his concerns. Saying the real thing that destroyed the
ship is still out there. But the commander dismissed his officer's concerns. It was irrelevant compared to the high priority of the dreadnought, denying any possibility of the real Leviathan of Dis.

Shepard felt a small pang of guilt, considering the batarians were so stupid at times. Always trying to outdo all the other races in their quest for personal glory. And wanting to completely enslave the human race. She walked away, back down the stairs. Past the large lab room and back to the galaxy map, Shepard began her hunt for Garneau.

She tried alien sightings. It narrowed down to five systems. EDI commented the Normandy's own map had been updated and they could leave in search now, if Shepard would like. This wasn't enough data. Shepard went back into the large lab. The rachni data displayed on the computer, and with the encryption code in hand she headed to the data-pad.

EDI commented the movements of the Reapers did not match the standard invasion data, she suggested they are searching for something. Leviathan, no doubt.

EDI used the Reaper's latest activities as the last filter. She filtered blackout crimes, rachni and prothean artifacts. They weren't relevant.

Shepard thought for a moment then started applying creature sightings, element zero and reaper activities. Bingo. The Caleston Rift was the only logical place to look. Shepard and EDI left back to the Normandy.

Caleston Rift

The Normandy headed to the Aysur systems of the Rift. Scanning the southern quadrant for an asteroid belt and the location of Mahavid. Shepard stood behind Cortez in the shuttle. "We're about five minutes out, Commander."

Now it was time to finish her search. Shepard arrived on Mahavid, a metallic asteroid. Once inside the facility, the crew immediately noticed something strange about the miners.

Shepard's instincts told her to be alert. While speaking to the receptionist, she wondered, quickly, how the Normandy was faring.

Meanwhile, Satima finished her data recovery. The cube floated beside her, shining a small light over her shoulder as she read the last patch file. The crucible schematic is finally complete. Right in the center of the top platform, were three walkways leading to energy wells. What it meant, she didn't know. Too bad Javik was on Mahavid with Shepard, he would've enjoyed this discovery.

Back on the asteroid, the miners would hastily shut their mouths, ending any conversation Shepard could ease drop on. She heard enough to assume they weren't mining anymore.

There was mention about plant cross-breeding and turian pain thresholds... also global starvation estimates. And the most important topic...biotics. Specifically, with humans.

This sent a chill down her spine. Experimentation. Satima spoke about hive and the Directive. Could this be implications of the beginning of it?

Is the Reaper-killer, Leviathan, responsible from the get-go? Tali opened the door to the medical wing. Dr. Garneau was last reported in there. Shepard hoped he had answers to her very long list of questions.

On the Normandy, Satima sat with Joker. He skimmed across panels of the asteroid, giving updates to Shepard about the incoming reapers. She would give her acknowledgements. EDI continued
monitoring the reapers as Satima watched. "Wish you were down there?", Joker asked.

Satima brought her knees to her chest, sitting like an anxious child in the co-pilots seat. "Yeah."

Joker pulled up a holo panel in front of Satima. "Wanna help?" She looked at him, smiled and nodded yes.

Two hours later.
Shepard and the small boarding crew returned. She took off her gear, put up her weapons. It was becoming mechanical. Gear up and go, come back and... Satima walked out of the elevator. She seemed relieved to see Shepard and Javik especially.
"Javik! I need to show you something!", she jogged to him.

"This better be worth my time, hybrid.", he said as he followed her back inside the elevator.

Strange. Shepard made a mental note and refocused back on the words of the man who portrayed himself as Garneau. "Turn back. The darkness cannot be breached." The dark words were a warning, for Shepard it meant a challenge. This war is too important to be cautious.

In the core room, Satima practically shoved the data pad in Javik's face. "See! I've found it! Right there is a power conduit linked to three different systems, all connecting to an outlet. Now all I've got to do, is figure out how Shepard can use it to stop the reapers for good."
Javik raised two of his eyes together. "This is well and good, hybrid, but..."

"What?", she said anxiously.

"Her fate is sealed in a way you cannot change.", he handed the data pad back to her.

Satima looked confused and hurt. "Shepard doesn't have to be Reaper, she doesn't have to be evil. The reapers won't win this time."

Javik realized the young hybrids defiance. He felt a sadness for her fate too. "Then make sure they don't." Javik left Satima in the core room.

Her cube floated around her. She dropped the pad on the floor. For some reason, his words sounded hopeless.

In the war room, Garrus met Shepard after her debrief with Hackett about her discovery on Mahavid. "What did you find out?", Garrus asked curious.

Shepard crossed her arms and stared straight into the war room. They met in private in the vid-coms. "We found the miners to be enthralled by Leviathan. It has the same abilities as the reapers."

Garrus listened to her speak, noting how tired she looked. "Of course, we met opposition from the reapers themselves. It wasn't easy but we were able to reach Garneau, or at least we thought it was Garneau."

"Who was it?", he asked.

"Someone else posing as him, under the enthrallment from Leviathan. We found the real body near the artifact. A sphere that had an inner glow, like how the galaxy's map looks, but darker. It said to, "turn back, the darkness cannot be breached", before blowing itself and a lot of husks up."

Shepard took one arm, stretched it to the back of her neck as she rubbed a tension spot. Garrus
walked to her. "I can take care of that for you."

Shepard smiled, "And if I wasn't so busy, I'd take you to the cabin. But we have work to do first. Keep the thought in mind for later." She winked walking out. Garrus clicked his mandibles in anticipation.

Back at the citadel, Shepard and EDI revisited Bryson's lab. There were clues needed to find his daughter, Ann. The same spherical artifact was in the lab all along. Shepard wanted it shielded to prevent anyone from being enthralled. She asked EDI why they weren't affected in which was noted that the amount of time spent around could be the key.

Leviathan had controlled Hadley to protect itself, keeping any person away from its trail. Shepard didn't like messing with unknowns, especially powerful unknowns. EDI felt that despite the risk, this artifact is their only link to Leviathan. Shepard still didn't like the sound of that.

Some clues pointed to nothing more than regular research. Basic analysis that proved nothing relevant. Bryson's assistant destroyed all backups before killing him, however, EDI noted that new messages had arrived on Bryson's personal comm terminal.

Shepard took the stairs to the bedroom. It was a message from his daughter, Ann. EDI also noted she worked with her father. "I'm at the dig-site in the Pylos Nebula. Project Scarab paid off. I got another artifact like the one Garneau found. I think it could be affecting people's behavior. You need to shield the one in your office. I tried to warn Garneau, but I can't get through. We've got Reaper scouts coming in toward the main site. I'm heading to the secondary base to grab what research I can."

The vid-comm ended.

Ann sounded worried. Shepard and EDI both agreed that impending Reaper forces would be very worrisome.

They needed to find more clues, but this time, to find where Ann is, exactly. Time was running out fast. Shepard looked through Ann's work history only to find nothing relevant.

A list of ships was recorded on a computer nearby but they need the name of the ship she used. Shepard asked about an update on Hadley, the assistant, upon seeing the shielded artifact. EDI replied that he is in a vegetative state and is unlikely to ever recover. That was troubling. Leviathan killed Hadley to cover his tracks. Too late now.

The miners were let go of the enthrallment. EDI concluded that it was likely a deliberate attempt to silence Hadley during questioning. Cruel.

Shepard continued to search, finding an access card in a drawer. EDI confirmed it is for the requisitions locker, used by Ann to obtain equipment for project scarab. While searching for what Ann did not take, EDI based the findings that she went to an arid planet. The water container was missing. It still wasn't enough data to pinpoint Ann's location. Two systems remained.

Shepard went back through the larger lab, finding a data pad. It read the last known travel flights of the labs workers. Garneau used MSV Kirkwall and Ann used the MSV Icarus. Perfect. EDI noted from the ships on the computer that the Icarus was a more expensive ship, due to the relay jump Ann needed to get to her destination to another system.

Shepard used this information on the labs galaxy map. The information was sent quickly to the Normandy and she wasted no time.
Thanks for stopping by, dear readers. :)

Chapter End Notes
Leviathan: Part 2

Chapter Summary

An intense rescue to secure Ann Bryson, proves the reaper's strong interest in the reaper killer-Leviathan. Satima is reminded of the horrors of indoctrination and discovers through a foolish attempt to contact the first reaper-someone was listening all along.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The planet Namakli.

Back on the Normandy, Shepard debriefed her team for the mission to rescue Ann Bryson. Satima waited next to the shuttle as EDI and Garrus approached. "Shepard. Do you mind if I go as well?"
She watched the commander, not breaking eye contact as her pre-reaper mother thought. "Promise to follow orders?", she demanded, a slight smirk at the girl.

Satima glanced at Garrus, unsure of how things will turn out, considering his odd apology and their past issues with each other. "Promise.", she replied with a wide smile.

Garrus nodded at her, but Satima kept her gaze in other directions. It's going to take a while for her to trust him. He thought on the matter before the missions to discover the strange warnings of the Leviathan of Dis.

They piled inside the shuttle. He stood his distance from the hybrid. Giving her space would be better. Shepard acknowledged his attitude, understanding that all of them have been under tremendous stress from the reapers. Garrus began pacing in front of everyone. An odd feeling stirring his tactical thoughts. "So, we got reports of an attack on an excavation site?", he asked.

Shepard observed him, turning to her android squad member. "Right. EDI, can you tell us anything else?"

"This is the main site of a series of excavations established under Dr. Garret Bryson. Staff records confirm the project lead is his daughter, Ann. She has recently uncovered another artifact possibly linked to Leviathan. That discovery must have made this dig site a target.", EDI concluded.

Shepard look at Satima and Garrus, then back to EDI. "Yes, the attack means the reapers are one step ahead of us. We need to pick up the pace. And since Bryson's daughter is our only lead, our objective is clear. Cortez?"

He scanned the area during decent. "Nothing so far, Commander. If she's down there, she hasn't responded to our hails. Getting some strange signals, though. Give me a minute.", Cortez skillfully typed on the holo panels. Displaying their location, coordinates and all incoming signals from the surface. Something seemed off.

EDI verbally noted an issue. "The artifact she uncovered may have caused additional complications."

If the reapers are here, a major complication could cause plenty of obstacles. Shepard will need to get to Ann quickly, before they do. "Agreed.", the commander spoke. "Take us in closer.",
"Copy that.\text{\textemdash}\) Cortex replied.

As the shuttle flew closer to the excavation site, many Harvesters hovered above, firing down on the helpless facility. Giant flames engulfed whole habitat compartments built into the side of the mountain. Cortez couldn't believe the destruction he was witnessing. "We have hostiles!\text{\textemdash}\), he yelled.

Shepard immediately turned to the small cockpit, "Take us in!\text{\textemdash}\), watching Cortez land them away from a hot zone. "Commander! On the landing platform!\text{\textemdash}\), he pointed. They hovered in front of the main lab. Ann and an assistant looked at them through the large windows.

Damn structural weaknesses, Shepard thought. "That's her!\text{\textemdash}\), she shouted. Ann motioned for the shuttle, "Attention, shuttle! This is Dr. Ann Bryson! We are under attack!"

"No shit.\text{\textemdash}\), Satima blurted. Garrus snapped a look at her. Shepard continued to listen, ignoring everyone behind her. "Okay, let's go..." The shuttle was hit by a Harvester. "Damn it!\text{\textemdash}\), Cortez yelled.

"Let me fly!\text{\textemdash}\), Satima demanded, anxious. Alarms blaring in the small box of a ship.

"NO!\text{\textemdash}\), Shepard and Garrus shouted together at her.

Cortez pressed panels, trying to stabilize the shuttle and flee the area. "Tracking multiple bogeys!"

"Get us over there!\text{\textemdash}\), Shepard pointed to another landing platform.

"Negative. That one's too hot! Heading to a lower platform-hang on!\text{\textemdash}\), Cortez yelled.

"Perfect!\text{\textemdash}\), Satima shouted as she gripped a lever over the hatch door. Garrus and Shepard held onto each other's arms, steadying themselves. EDI stood still and confident. The shuttle flew fast towards the platform. Satima opened the hatch door, with the crew behind her. Shepard muscled forward, grabbing her arm. "Move out! GO!"

She pushed Satima out, the girl landing directly on the platform below. Followed by EDI and Garrus, Shepard jumped last, barely missing the ledge. Satima rubbed her slightly sore arm. "Next time, you could just ask." Shepard glared at Satima. Harvesters chased the shuttle beyond them.

One of them fired at the platform they were standing on. "We can't stay here, Shepard!\text{\textemdash}\), Garrus yelled.

They all ran fast to a habitat module. Harvesters above continued firing at them. "This place won't hold up for long. Poor bastards.\text{\textemdash}\), Satima noticed. Burnt bodies, blood and damaged lab equipment littered everywhere. "Hello? Is anyone there? I'm coming down!" That was Ann.

Shepard leaped on a grated walkway that almost gave way. She checked the stability first before motioning the rest to quickly cross over it. They all stood on top of a broken habitat, jumping down to another walkway below. "No! Stay where you are! This is Commander Shepard of the Alliance Navy-it's too dangerous! We'll come to you!\text{\textemdash}\), she yelled over comms.

Shepard ran over a falling habitats roof, leading everyone into a stable compartment. Husks climbed one beside it. "Yes, okay! You should take the elevator up in the far side!\text{\textemdash}\), Ann said. "Copy that! We're on our way!\text{\textemdash}\), Shepard meleed a husk coming towards her. Several habitats lined up below this one. They dropped once, into the lower area. "Through here!\text{\textemdash}\), Shepard shouted.

"Commander, they're swarming everywhere up here!\text{\textemdash}\), Ann shouted over comms.
Shepard took cover beside a beam, firing on cannibals that blocked the path. "Can you find a place to hide?", she yelled. Ann's voice echoed. "I'll try!"

Shepard leaped off the upper habitats roof, landing on a dying cannibal. "Stay put, Ann!", she ordered. Her team close behind, eliminating any husks and stray cannibals. Harvesters roared overhead, as they ran quickly through the falling modules. A ravager blew a stairwell in front of them. "Shit!", Satima yelled.

"Can't go that way now.", Garrus grumbled. Shepard looked around, spotted a ladder leading further up on the rooftops. After climbing up they jumped to a nearby cliff. "Looks like a bridge over there!", Shepard shouted, pointing.

At the bridge controls, Satima noticed the strange paintings on the rock wall. It looked like a reaper. "The controls are broken! Someone fix it!", Shepard shouted her orders. "Right away.", Garrus replied. Satima noticed with a glance and a slight smirk how fast Garrus obeyed orders. EDI seemed emotionless but very much aware of their surroundings. Like she was scanning everything she could see.

Garrus kept working on the controls, "Some wires are shorted. Shouldn't take much to fix it. Give me a second." Immediately after he attempted to reassure the team, a reaper horde of husks blasted down in front of them like a small meteor. They were almost overwhelmed. Shepard opened fire as EDI and Satima meleed any that got too close to Garrus. "Almost done!", he shouted nervously.

"Banshee! Commander!", EDI yelled. She began to fire with her pistol.

Garrus just finished with the bridge controls. He turned quickly to open fire on the abomination. Satima took cover around a jutting rock wall.

As the banshee used her fast-biotic warp to get closer to the team, Satima noticed the explosive canisters. She started on those around the creature. EDI followed suite. Shepard waited by the bridge, lending fire when needed. With the banshee dead, they all turned to the bridge. It finally came up for them to cross. "Move! That elevator can't be far!", Shepard roared as they all ran.

Up another habitat roof, down the ladder to a catwalk. "This way.", Shepard informed. The elevator was only a few steps further. The commander ran to press the panel. It started to descend, until it reached the lower damaged beams. "Ann, the elevator's blocked! Is there another way up?", Shepard asked in a hurry.

"I'll override the pod door near you! There's an access point above Commander, but you'll have to climb it!", Ann replied.

Shepard opened the pod door, "Copy that." Further inside they ventured, across a broken stairwell and up a fallen grated catwalk. The fight through the pods, running through endless waves of cannibals and husks, started to make the team feel exhausted.

The reapers weren't letting up, but neither were they. Pushing through, Satima saw more of the reaper paintings. This was getting eerie. They reached the final cliff, climbing to meet husks and a brute. "There are more explosive canisters. Use them!", Satima yelled.

The brute came crashing through the husks, stomping any in its way. Garrus sniped its armor down, allowing Satima and Shepard to blow the canisters around it. EDI use her decoy ability to fool the brute into running in the direct area of the blasts. Finally, they brought the giant down. "Ann? Are you still there?", Shepard asked.

She replied, her voice fearful. "We're barely hanging on! Hopkins is wounded! Are you close?",
As they proceeded forward, the huge platform above got hit. It started to collapse. "Heads up! That platforms coming down!", Garrus shouted. "Around. Go around!", Shepard yelled to them. Ann started to speak out loud over the comms, trying to tell her colleges to stay down. They didn't listen. Concerned, Shepard asked what was going on. Ann informed the deaths of those people. Once again Shepard told Ann to stay put. "Please hurry. I think Hopkins is dead.", Ann replied, upset.

They finally reach the pod containing Ann. She looked over the dead body of Hopkins. Shepard walked in with the team in tow. Ann glanced to the alliance commander, "He tried to run. I told him not to, but he wanted to help the others. Where did everyone go?"

Shepard knelt close to Ann as Satima watched. EDI and Garrus took point as lookouts. "I'm sorry. They didn't make it. Doctor, I need you to come with me." Ann looked around, her terrified gaze taking in the scene. "Oh, God. Yes, of course.", she stood up. Garrus opened the pod door, taking point. Shepard led out second with EDI and Satima keeping Ann between them.

This is the first time Satima has had to really put someone else before her. It felt strange, but good. Good to be part of a solid team, protecting those who could not help themselves out of this horrible situation.

Garrus took cover behind a control panel. Shepard and Ann stopped by a boulder, crouching behind it. Satima, along with EDI watched their backs. "I... was at another dig site when they attacked. I got back as quick as I could, but... what's happening?", Ann asked confused. Her own quick glances reminding Shepard of a nervous child.

Shepard looked at Ann before Garrus caught her attention. "Shepard, look.", he alerted. Above him were paintings of several cave-men people fighting. They had what looked to be spears in their hands. Ann pointed at an image of a reaper that hovered above them.

Shepard glanced to Ann and back to the cave wall. "I'm not sure, but it might have something to do with these paintings. Is that Leviathan?"

"Yes... yes, we think so. It's so old. Much older than my father thought. And there, as if the natives were under its power.", Ann gestured to the wall. "Clearly a reaper, but acting alone. Not like any reaper we've seen before." Shepard turned to Satima who was equally staring at the paintings. "Satima. Have you any information about this or even seen this before?" She turned to Shepard then back to the wall, "No."

Shepard glared a moment but went back to her questions for Ann. "Doctor, I understand you found something recently."

"The artifact. Yes, of course. Incredible. It's just ahead.", she pointed.

Shepard led the way. Ann began talking again. EDI and Satima kept close watch on the reapers above. "It may sound strange, but I'm certain it affects people-their behavior. I've only had a short time to study it.", Ann continued. "Not strange at all. Did you find anything?", Shepard asked. They walked closer to the artifact, down the rocky opening. "Not much, but I did learn something about the energy it generates.", Ann revealed.

Up ahead, they could hear reapers. "Get down!", Shepard voiced. They all took cover. Ahead, a marauder was attempting to communicate with an orb. A constant flash of energy was being pulled from it. "What're they doing?", Shepard asked aloud.

Ann peaked on, "They've activated it somehow. I've never managed anything." Ann stopped speaking. She stepped forward with a blank expression to her face. Shepard watched confused, "Doctor?" A dark voice, not Ann's own, spoke to them. "They've learned too well. The darkness
EDI yelled, "Shepard!"

Shepard had grabbed Ann's arm in an attempt to shake her out of it. Satima watched on in complete horror. It sounded similar to the voice in the hive station, the grey haze that ordered her to kill Reaper. Shepard realized Leviathan wouldn't break its hold. She shouted to Garrus, "Take it out!" He stood from cover, aiming at the glowing orb. It exploded with a loud boom, killing all the reaper forces that surrounded it. Ann fell forward. "Cortez, we have Ann Bryson! Need a pickup!", Shepard yelled in her comms.

"On my way, Commander!", Cortez replied.

Ann stood up, shaking her sore head. Shepard looked around the area. Reapers still swarmed the sky above them. She faced the doctor, getting her attention. "You see the shuttle, you run. Don't look back!"

Ann nodded. "Okay. Yes."

The rocky platform below them had cannibals crawling all over. More explosive canisters littered the area. The reapers had boxed in the landing platform, but Shepard was determined to carve a path for them to escape. A harvester landed on the platform. "You need to get rid of that Harvester, or I can't land!", Cortez shouted. "Noted!", Satima yelled, irritated.

Heavy fire and careful planning kept the Harvester from overtaking the platform. Satima blew the canisters as Shepard used her rifle to rip the armored plating of the abomination. Garrus and EDI took out stray cannibals. As soon as the Harvester was finished, husks came crawling over the ridge. Ravagiers were dropped around them. "Okay, Cortez get in here!", Shepard shouted.

"Copy that, Commander!", Cortez yelled as he landed the shuttle. "Hurry!", he panicked.

EDI took Ann with her to the shuttle, while Satima provided cover fire. Garrus stayed with Shepard. "Go!", she roared. Garrus took off, glancing behind to see Shepard finish off a cannibal. Husks ran after her. "Come on Shepard!", he yelled anxiously. Satima jumped back out of the shuttle firing on the husks, so Shepard could get a clear path. They all hurried into the shuttle together, taking off. Everyone sat down, catching their breath. Shepard stood in the middle, observing her team. She looked to Ann, "You okay?"

"Yeah, Commander. I think so. I blacked out.", Ann replied.

"Leviathan took control of you. We cut the connection before you got hurt.", Shepard informed.

"Before you would try to kill us or indoctrinate us...", Satima muttered too loudly.

Shepard glanced at her quickly with an steely glare. Satima looked away. Ann decided it was an inside matter. She thought about what Shepard said. Leviathan taking over? "Leviathan itself?", she said out loud, "That's incredible."

"The Reapers seem as interested in it a we are.", Shepard wondered.

Ann leaned forward in her seat, "Yeah, it certainly seems that way."

Shepard paced in the shuttle. "We were hoping you could help us figure out why. But first, Doctor, I have some bad news." Ann perked up, a twitch of nervousness in her eye. Shepard didn't like bringing bad news to people, but it seemed lately it was becoming a habit.
"Ann, please. Suppose Leviathan's broken away from the other reapers? Never went back to dark space? Like a rogue or even a defector." She was skirting the issue. "I'll have to call my father. He'll want to know." Ann started her call.

Shepard bent down in front of the young doctor. She got her to look face to face. "Ann, you need to listen to me, okay?", her tone more smooth and gentle. "Your father... is dead. I'm sorry."

Ann looked confused. "He's... what, dead? He can't be dead." She leaned forward again, her eyes began to water.

Shepard began retelling the incident. "We met with him, hoping to find out what he knew. Something happened."

"Something happened?", Ann repeated in fear.

Shepard sighed, glancing downward, then back to Ann. "You're not the first to lose control. Your father's assistant, Hadley, was taken over. One minute he was fine, the next-he drew a gun on your father. I couldn't stop him." Shepard stood back up, pacing the shuttle.

"I can't believe this.", Ann stood, suddenly. Her stare darting with tears brimming.

"We have to find out what's behind it all. You're the only one who can help us.", Shepard glared at Satima before turning back to Ann. There was a silence in the shuttle. Shepard watched Ann's face. "Ann?", she repeated.

"I... I want to see his office.", her voice sounded broken up from losing her father.

"We'll arrange for transportation and meet you there.", Shepard assured.

Returning to the Normandy, Ann stayed with Chockwas in the med-bay. The doctor checked her for any injuries from the reaper attack.

The Normandy flew into citadel space, allowing Ann to leave via Alliance shuttle back to the station. Shepard stayed on the ship for a day, over viewing EDI's scans of the rock wall paintings.

Leviathan, Satima and those orbs... all had to be connected somehow. What if the supposed Sentarians are the reapers? Satima's unique genetic makeup could not be an accident. She was made on purpose. But for who's purpose? The Reapers?

Hours later, Shepard and EDI returned back to Bryson's lab. Ann awaited them there. The lab seemed empty when they went inside. No one was around. Shepard looked, finding Ann in her father's room. She had been crying. "Oh, Commander. Yes, I'm sorry. Just... this is hard.", Ann wiped her eyes.

"Of course. Are you, all right?", Shepard asked, concerned.

Ann looked up from her position on the floor, at the foot of her father's bed. "Yes. No. I don't know." She sighed. "My father and I didn't leave things in a great state."

"An argument?", Shepard asked.

"Yes. It was trivial. A disagreement on how to file some of the specimens. I was mad about something else. I don't remember what. I took it out on him. So stupid.", Ann stood up.

"It's alright. I can come back.", Shepard offered with a shrug.
"No, please. I'm okay.", Ann walked to her.

They spent the next two minutes discussing her father. Ann remembered a lot about his obsessions and passions as a scientist. Although he could be distant at times. She often felt like an inconvenience growing up. Shepard noted the angry tone Ann had about him. Ann replied that she was still angry at him.

She loved his stories though. It made their little family special, and it prompted her to be a scientist as well. "I can't believe he's gone.", Ann spoke.

"We'll find what he was looking for. I promise.", Shepard assured.

Ann turned to Shepard from her father's picture. "We have to. I need to know what's on the other end of that artifact, what he died for."

"We need your help. You're our last chance.", Shepard repeated.

Ann nodded, "You're right. Let me dig into my father's work to see what I can find." Ann tells Shepard about her father's theories on the rachni's communications systems, comparing it to a quantum entanglement like system. She also points out that Leviathan uses the artifact to establish the same connection, controlling the mind of anyone near it. As Shepard and Ann enter the galaxy lab, Satima and James speak from behind the counter. "Hey, Lola. Need a hand?"

"What brings you down here, James?", Shepard asked.

"Heard you're closing in on the reaper killer. Anything that can scare those bastards has to be worth a look.", he replies.

"That's what I'm hoping.", Shepard answers.

Shepard glanced to Satima. "Getting curious?", she asked.

Satima plays with the husks head. "Maybe. I came to help."

Shepard nodded at Satima but took her words with a grain of salt. Satima has been edgy, indecisive. Her whole demeanor now is that of a spooked wild animal. She stares quickly at the orb then at Ann Bryson. Something she said before about indoctrination. Ann spoke to Shepard which doused the wild thoughts quickly.

"We didn't detect any energy emissions from the artifact.", Shepard told Ann.

EDI came from the other lab, "But the Reapers were able to use the artifact to trace Leviathan somehow."

"My theory is that, most of the time, the artifact simply acts as a receiver.", Ann begins walking toward the barrier secured orb. "We'll only be able to trace Leviathan through it when it actively takes control of someone."

"As it did on the asteroid.", EDI observed. Satima and James walk to them, listening in closely. "Right. Unless it needs something, Leviathan doesn't bother communicating. I guess it and my father had something in common.", Ann reminded.

EDI questioned the facts, analyzing in thoughts that surpassed the human mind. "You said Leviathan's control was similar to a quantum entanglement communicator, which is untraceable."
Ann turned to EDI, "Yes, but this isn't a natural QEC. Leviathan has to send a pulse through the artifact to alter your mind and create the quasi-QEC effect."

She walked to the galaxy map. "And that can be traced.", EDI revealed. Everyone followed around the map as Satima stood very close to the glass case. The orb in the barrier, pulsed lightly. She felt an intense nausea feeling that passed quickly enough.

No one else felt it and no one else saw her react. She wanted to destroy it. Satima could break the glass... and smash it into tiny pieces. They don't need the unpredictable dangers of Leviathan. This... Reaper killer.

Shepard is the reaper killer, not it. Suddenly, Satima began to feel cold. A sudden darkness probed her mind. The barrier should've stopped it. Right? She backed away, wondering if those thoughts were Leviathan trying to stop them from finding it.

Satima turned to the small group at the galaxy map, discussing the signal similarities from the dig site the reapers were using. Shepard waited for Ann to finish her findings, James commented on the husks head and how much he wanted it for the cargo bay.

This is insanity. Do they not sense the danger? Satima wanted to yell.

Shepard approached Ann again, "Ann, I know this is hard, but if there's anything more you can tell us..."

Ann backed away from the map console," I don't think there's anything more I can tell you." She looked at Shepard with an idea. "But maybe I can show you."

"What are you saying?", Shepard asked.

"The artifact only sends out a signal when Leviathan's controlling someone. So, let it control me. You could trace the signal.", Ann suggested.

Satima walked forward, "Absolutely not! That thing is too dangerous!"

Shepard glared at her then turned back to Ann. "You mean let it take you over? I agree with Satima. It's reckless."

Ann leaned forward, angry. "It's my call, not yours. You said I'm your last chance to find this thing."

"We have no idea what will happen.", Shepard cautioned.

"If we wait, the reapers will get to Leviathan first. I'm the only one here who's spent enough time with it to do this.", Ann walked back to the orb behind the case. "You're looking for something to fight the Reapers, Commander. I'm looking for the monster that murdered my father."

Shepard followed, "We still don't know what we're looking for."

"Then let's find out.", Ann turned back to the orb.

"This is a bad idea.", Satima complained.

James stepped forward, "Commander, this thing we're doing with Ann... sounds dangerous as hell."

Their warnings and hesitation were not unfounded, but Shepard is running out of time. And so is the galaxy. "Noted. EDI?", Shepard spoke.
EDI waited at the galaxy map, typing in commands on the console, "Energy signature locked in. Waiting for activation."

Ann seated herself on a small metal bench in front of the orb. Shepard looked at her. "You sure about this?", she asked.

Ann raised her head, looking to Shepard, then finally at the odd alien girl behind her. "Yes, I'm sure."

James prepared himself behind Ann, in case anything went wrong. "I'm gonna be right here.", he assured her. Satima stayed at Shepard's side, prepared with a more lethal approach. She knows how indoctrination works. The victim can even be made twice as strong to fight, to kill. Her blade was held stealthily behind her back.

Ann took a deep breath, frightened but too curious to stop here. The little voice in the back of her mind urging, pushing her to make contact."Okay, I'm ready."

Shepard told James to drop the containment shield. EDI informed them, the artifact had come online. Everyone felt nervous, more anxious for what they might find out. The orbs dark colors of blue swirled. "Anything?", Shepard asked.

"Nothing yet. Wait. There's something. I feel a chill..." The orb came to life. Ann started to shudder then she started to violently thrash her body. James held on firmly, but not hard. Shepard looked to EDI for any confirmation of the signal but EDI informed no trace could be found yet. Satima watched... in fear.

"Holy Hell!", James yelled as Ann's body suddenly became stronger.

Immediately, EDI found the signal. "Signal is tracking. Maintain connection."

A dark voice echoed from Ann. "Turn back... The darkness cannot be breached." Shepard shook a feeling of dread, keeping her courage strong. Satima's heart beat faster in her chest. Old frightening memories crept back in her mind. Something or someone was drawing them out, viewing them. An awful chill made her teeth chatter. She hated the cold.

Then suddenly, while everyone was busy handling Ann, she stood in the darkness. The whole room had disappeared into a cold abyss and she could only stand. Satima began to cry out but no noise or words could be spoken. The feeling of dread filled her mind with loneliness and hate. Such an anger she had never mustered before, covered her heart.

Then... like before, it was all over. Satima stood back with the group as they fought Ann's enthralled mind.

"Dios!", James shouted.

Shepard paced in front of them. "Listen to me. I found you. And the reapers are right behind me."

"You have brought them. You are a threat.", Leviathan spoke.

Shepard stepped forward, "So are you. I've seen what you can do. The war needs you."

"There is no war. There is only the harvest.", Leviathan replied.

Shepard turned to the galaxy map, "EDI, do we have enough?"
"Partial lock. Maintain connection to narrow the search.", EDI urged.

James continued to struggle with Ann, he was getting frustrated. "You heard her. We got enough. I'm hitting the shield."

"Do it.", Shepard shouted.

James let go of his free hand and shut the shield back on. Ann was freed from Leviathan. She shook her head, rubbing her temples hard. An obvious pain had begun. Both James and Shepard knelt beside her. "Ann? Ann, are you alright?", Shepard asked, concerned.

"Yes... I think so.", she replied.

James stayed with Ann as Shepard returned to the galaxy map. "Did we get anything?", she asked EDI.

"Yes, but it will take some time to search. Coordinates sent to the Normandy.", EDI informed.

Shepard leaned on the console, overlooking the map. "Good. It's a start."

Ann stood up. "Commander, I sensed something else. Anger."

"It knows we're getting close.", Shepard hoped.

Ann got close to Shepard, "I think it wants to kill you."

Shepard shook her head, not giving it much thought. "Come on, let's get you some help.

As Shepard led Ann to the bedroom upstairs, Satima and the doctor exchanged glances. Ann's eyes widened to a fearful surprise. She knows something. But the doctor didn't say anything at all. It was time to leave before this idiot spilled whatever Leviathan had showed her. Satima had enough of this place.

Chapter End Notes

Again I'd like to note that all the chapters leading to 21, are pulled from in-game missions that follow the OC's story. None of the in-game dialogue is mine, nor did I write it. Disclaimer. Thanks for reading!!
Leviathan: Part 3 Confrontation

Chapter Summary

Trapped on the ocean planet of Desponia, the crew encounter a reaper onslaught while Shepard journeys into the deep after Leviathan. A shocking discovery paralyzes Shepard and Garrus's relationship.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Deep

They headed for the ocean world Desponia. This is where Leviathan is supposed to be. Satima conjured many images of the great reaper killer. Is it a great beast? Or is it like Shepard? Shepard had informed her crew of the dangers they were headed to.

Reapers were practically on their tail, but this mission was too important to ignore. She handpicked her team: Garrus and Ashley. Satima once again pleaded to come. Since something had obviously happened between them in the core room, and the fact Ann used the orb to help them, with Satima's strong vehemence against using it... this mission might be what breaks the girls silence.

Shepard ordered a probe launch to the surface of the planet. It fell through the atmosphere, gliding down until the probe reached the turbulent ocean. There it sunk to the bottom. She and her team quickly boarded the kodiak as EDI updated them on the probes landing.

As the shuttle flew out of the cargo, Satima paced, watching the team sit or stand... their nervous demeanor's filling her with anxiety. No one was sure what to find, and neither Shepard knew what would happen next.

If this Leviathan became a serious threat to them and their mission, he would have to be destroyed. At least in some small comfort, his remains could be examined. Maybe a clue to how he handled a reaper would be among his corpse. Shepard looked around the cabin, thinking on how to convince Leviathan to side with her. Just long enough to eliminate the reapers. Bring peace back to the galaxy.

She walked to Cortez as he navigated the shuttle to the planet.

"Cortez, what's the status on the probe we launched now?", she asked.

Cortez started to type away on the console, "Tracking it now, Commander. I've confirmed that Leviathan's signal originates from this planet." Cortez glanced to Shepard who was standing behind him, "Heard how Ann helped us locate it. It's pretty spooky stuff."

Garrus overheard the conversation, looking at Ashley, "Makes you wonder what we're going to find down there."

Ashley wondered too. She replied to him with equal curiosity, "Reaper-killer. Let's hope, anyway. Doesn't look like it wants to be found."

"I've known only one other Reaper-killer.", Satima spoke cryptically. She glanced towards Shepard as Garrus and Ashley followed her gaze. Shepard turned around, stepping into the cabin with them.
She rested a hand above her shoulder, on a small doorway to the pilot's chair Cortez occupied. "It doesn't have a choice. We're here.", she warned.

Garrus walked to her, "Right, but then what? It plays pretty rough, and if it is a reaper, I don't know that's the kind of help we want."

Ashley nodded her head in agreement. Satima's eyes darted back and forth between herself and Shepard. She was definitely jumpy. More spooked than Cortez felt.

Shepard needed to reassure them of her own intentions, and more importantly calm her lover's apprehensions on this mission. Garrus would follow her to hell and back. Really, he already has, but now... their relationship has developed more deeply than just a one-night romance.

Their long-time friendship has turned into a sort of an engagement to each other. And if anything happened to either of them, the other would lose control.

Shepard stared into Garrus's eyes intently. Like his own gaze is always at hers. "Nobody says we have to be friends with it, but if this thing has the rest of the reapers worried, then we need its help."

Cortez turned around in his seat to them, "Commander, new readings from the probe. It's narrowed down Leviathan's location. You're not going to like it."

Shepard quickly walked to him, "Let's hear it."

"There's nothing but ocean. I show a concentration of structures floating on the surface, but the probe's giving us a signal below that. Way below.", Cortez replied.

This was strange, Shepard thought. She asked another question, "Under water?"

"Looks that way. The shuttle should still be able to reach it.", Cortez said.

The surface of the ocean on Desponia showed the turbulent mess of submerged cruisers and other various star-ships. Their upper hulls towered above the water like jutting rocks. Tide swept through the damaged aging metal, eroded daily by the ocean. A continuous rainfall covered the sky with dark clouds.

Back inside the shuttle, Shepard overlooked the consoles images on screen as Cortez navigated closer to a floating cruisers starboard hull. "That's possible?", she asked.

"The Kodiak is specked to nearly a thousand atmospheres, though I've never actually tested that.", he replied.

Shepard hung on to the shuttles upper hull, finding a small niche in the metal working, as the shuttle shook from turbulence. "Guess we're going to find out-" Suddenly, an EMP wave hit the kodiak hard. Everyone jolted from their positions. "Damn!", Satima yelled.

"Status!", Shepard shouted.

Cortez punched panels, trying to control the thrusters as the shuttles alarms blared around them. "Some kind of pulse hit us! Systems are shutting down!" Cortez faced them, "Brace for impact!"

Garrus, Ashley and Satima fell forward on the floor, Shepard slammed against the cockpit wall. Cortez managed to land on the cruisers surface, thrusters firing out, skidding along the curved metal of the hull. Until it stopped just short of the edge along the deck. It rocked once, then settled with a loud thud. Everyone was shaken up.
Shepard opened the shuttles hatch, leaping out first, followed by Garrus and Ashley. Satima began to follow behind when she crept up on Cortez, leaning over his shoulder.

An apparent exasperation and pissed look on her face. "Next time. I fly!", she warned. Cortez watched the hybrid jump out last into the rain, shouting some deeper alien language his translator could not comprehend. He remembered it sounding like "Jo suta!" Must be her peoples term for asshole. He smirked to himself.

Satima couldn't believe it. She's sounding like the Sentarians now. They all stood on the surface of a crashed Alliance cruiser. Many makeshift tents and beds lined in rows ahead on the deck. The place looked old. "Everyone alright?", Shepard asked around.

"Banged up, but I'll make it,", Ashley replied.

Garrus nodded to Shepard as Satima hopped down below. She's getting ahead again. Shepard followed with the others in tow, opening a public com with Cortez. "How's the shuttle, Cortez?"

"Checking now. I'll see if I can get power restored.", he relayed.

"Copy that. We'll look around.", Shepard finished. She started to investigate the surrounding area.

Ashley lifted a tent flap with her rifle. Inside were old bed rolls and damaged data pads. Satima considered looking inside a crate. There was nothing inside, not even food or water. A rank stench came from two of the crates underneath. She decided not to open them. Garrus walked beside Shepard. The rain began blowing down hard, as thunder was heard in the distance. "Look at all this. How many have been stranded here by that pulse?", he asked.

Shepard gazed up at a communication tower from the same cruiser they were standing on. It's frame still held firm, despite the weather. "Could be Leviathan's last line of defense.", she answered.

Ashley caught up with them. Pointing out to other submerged crashed ships in the distance. "I don't recognize those ships. How long have they been here?"

"No telling how long. Years, decades...", Shepard replied.

They turned around from the edge and proceeded further on the deck. Inside a makeshift shack, Shepard found several rotted corpses. Bare skeletons now. " Any idea how old these are?", she asked around.

Garrus responded, "At C-Sec, they always said the key to decomposition was scavengers. Without them, it's quite a while."

She spotted a data pad still working, reading its contents of an "Atton Brooks". He complained of a similar pulse downsing their ship and trying to get their systems working again, hopeful they would be airborne within 24 hours. Doesn't look like that worked for them.

Back outside, after picking up some old star chart data, Shepard found Satima staring at something. With closer inspection, she saw it was an orb. Just like the one on the citadel. Ashley stepped forward, "Shepard, one of those artifacts." Shepard walked behind Satima. "Satima?", she cautiously approached. If Leviathan controlled her, they would all be in danger.

Young she may be, Satima is no amateur. She could be a threat and deadly. Shepard lightly touched Satima's arm. The girl snapped in her direction, startled. "Damn! Shepard, don't sneak up on me.", she scolded.
They all stared down into the tent, a skeletal body stuck to the metal floor with its own fluids turned to hardened slime. Shepard held her pistol forward as she stepped closer. "Explains why no one gets out of here." She aimed at the orb, feeling compelled to shoot it and did. It exploded, turning into dust. Strange. "What material could it have been made out of?", Satima wondered aloud.

Shepard read another data pad. This time from an "Shen Kunshan." Despite most of their electronics still functioning, the thrusters fail every time.

The damage done to the pulses of the thrusters didn't make physical sense, not seeming to be a result of the distress beacon was dead, so there was no way to get a signal off the surface of the planet. The Captain had ordered these makeshift tents and shacks for shelter against the weather and even one of the crew members wanted to use their weapons to "blast fish", in order to get food.

Rations had gotten low quickly but unfortunately for the crew, nothing looked like an edible fish to hunt. Shepard felt a regrettable pang in her mind.

If anyone knew about this place or even could've received their signal, they would've been saved. The inevitable hero inside her wished to save everyone. But that's a human thing, Garrus had told her a while back. You can't save everyone.

Gun fire was heard from the deck. Shepard and Ash looked to see Satima shoot another orb. At least that puts the thought of Leviathan trying to control them at ease. Garrus found one in a tent and destroyed it. Good. Maybe this will get its attention. Satima brought a data pad to Shepard, It's from a Dr. Chai Lin.

This is how they brought those orbs on board, by using a raft to traverse to the other ships. They ran out of food and this doctor ends her entry with "It's getting cold." We should not be here." Satima looked fearful.

Shepard took the pad, quickly browsing its contents before putting a reassuring hand on the girl's shoulder. "I promise we'll be ok. This isn't anything we can't handle. We've destroyed those orbs. Leviathan can't control or hurt us."

Satima nodded and walked off to another tent. Garrus stood in front of what seemed to be a mech, covered in aged plastic tarp. "Looks like a damaged Atlas. Different, though, and it's not flying Cerberus colors.", Shepard pointed out.

Garrus smirked, "And it's not taking shots at us, which is nice. Doesn't look salvageable, though."

Shepard continued to look around, a random pad was laying amongst crates. She picked it up, wiping off wet mold. This was Captain Pratts entry.

What he wrote reminded her of how easily people can lose control when hungry and scared. Anger follows, then death. Which is exactly what happened. A "Ramos" tried destroying an orb. He probably realized his thoughts weren't his own.

The rest of the crew attacked and killed him. Pratt had to stop them from committing cannibalism. He sealed the Tritons (the atlas-like machines) away, so the crew couldn't use them to wipe each other out. Didn't matter in the end. They all died anyway.

The crew spent the next ten minutes looking over the dead and the decayed. This was horrible. Shepard led them on to the other side of the survivor camp. Until a familiar roaring sound resonated in the sky. "Shepard! Up there!", Ashley pointed.

Sure enough, a Reaper appeared. "We've got company, Shepard! Must have been right behind us!",
Garrus shouted in the rain, prepping his weapon.

Satima ran behind, readying herself with them. "Protect the shuttle!", Shepard shouted.

They all ran towards the Kodiak, taking cover behind the many shacks and structures on the deck. A ball of fire raced across the sky, landing hard on the deck with a horde of husks pouring out. Cannibals yelled their war cry at them. Shepard fired, taking down two cannibals. "Cortez! Situation?", she yelled into the comm.

"Swapping out the parts, Commander! Hang on!", Cortez replied frantically.

Satima found herself surrounded by husks. She used hand to hand on them, breaking the neck of one in front of her. A quick slip of the blade to a husk jumping down on her from the shack she took as cover. The hybrid rolled away, swiping her pistol and effectively sniping two more in the head. She flipped back up on her feet. Garrus watched with approval.

Ashley used her rifle, suppressing the horde, so Garrus could snipe cannibals. It worked for a minute before more flaming pods landed. The Reaper abominations began to flank them. Shepard took down more cannibals, blasting them with hot thermal bullets. "COR-TEZ!", she yelled emphatically.

"Almost there, Commander!", he replied.

Shepard took cover, rolling to an adjacent shack. She wanted to get closer to the middle of the kill zone, to scan the area for her team.

Ashley grunted through comms. "Ash?", Shepard shouted. Ashley ran from a tent over run by husks as Satima gave her suppressing fire. "I'm okay, Commander. Satima saved my ass.", she replied, breathing hard.

Satima followed Ashley to a closer shack, taking cover beside the Lieutenant-Commander. "We need that shuttle airborne now! We'll be over run!", Satima worried.

Shepard agreed but Cortez was working as fast as he can. "Shepard!", Garrus yelled. She turned to the edge of the deck to see Garrus get knocked down by three cannibals as they all fell on him. Shepard ran like lightening to them. She kicked the first one off, shooting it down. Her roar of anger echoed while meleeing with her omni-blade on the second.

Garrus punched a cannibal trying to chew his arm, it was too close for comfort. He then put the nozzle of his rifle in the cannibal's mouth, "Chew on this you bastard!" Garrus opened fire. Bits of rotted brain chunks and dark blood covered the deck.

Shepard helped him up. "Garrus! Are you alright?", she checked his arm then scanned him quickly for internal injuries.

"I'm fine Shepard. Thanks.", he winked. They turned around to see Satima watching them with apparent concern. When she had seen, they were fine, she went back to blasting more husks with Ashley.

"Cortez, what happened to "almost there?", Shepard commed.

"Had a development, Commander. Fixing it now!", Cortez replied, shooting a husk that surprised him.

"Brute!", Satima shouted.
A brute came crashing through the tents. Destroying the once undisturbed camp remains. "It's got heavy armor. Whittle that down quickly!", Shepard reminded them.

Ashley used her frag grenades to blast off its protective plates. Garrus sniped at the exposed parts of flesh. It came closer, roaring at them all, trying to deflect the blasts. "I think it's angry!", Satima yelled sarcastically.

"Don't stop!", Shepard shouted, taking cover before the brute rammed into her. She ran around the crates, opening fire on the monster. It fell on one knee from a blow to the head by another grenade. "Taking the shot!" Garrus aimed, firing a bullet into the brutes left eye. It exited the other side.

"One down.", Satima said as she jogged up beside Shepard.

"Too many more to go.", Shepard replied as another brute stood before them.

It took time, but they managed to bring it down. Many more reapers showed up, crawling and running across the deck towards them. "Commander!", Cortez commed. "Yes, Cortez.", Sheppard answered while under fire. "I'm airborne!", he said.

"Bout damn time!", Satima shouted.

Shepard leaned out to fire on cannibals, "Give us some cover fire!"

"Copy that.", Cortez fired up the engines, blasting at the deck below on reapers. Shepard and team, took cover, peaking to shoot down any enemies remaining on deck.

Then a surge of energy blasted forward to the shuttle. "Another pulse hit me! Flight control's scrambled!" The Kodiak flew down hard to the other side of the large deck. Smoke coming from the thrusters. "Damn it! Cortez is in trouble! Get to him!", Shepard roared.

Everyone ran fast to the shuttle. Shepard made a jump over a broken bridge to the far end of the deck. Cannibals were firing on Cortez.

Satima and the others jumped over the bridge to help Shepard. Cannibals hid behind smaller structures of the deck as waves of ocean hit the metal hard. Splashes of tide sprayed on them, forcing the team to wipe their eyes to see better. The torrential rain splattered against them, causing visible parameters to be blurred. Tripping over small puddles could not be helped. Satima used this sliding to her advantage, being more agile and able to quickly get to Cortez's side.

She flipped over the large metal piping, landing next to him. Shepard finished off the last cannibal on their side of the broken bridge. It separated them from the survivor camp and the other reapers, for now. "Okay, we're clear.", she told them.

"Nice work, Commander, but there's a development. We need to talk.", Cortez said over comms.

Shepard walked up the ramp to were Cortez and Satima crouched. Garrus with Ashley, followed behind. Shepard crouched down with them. "Status.", she demanded. Garrus took cover, along with Ashley. They scanned the area for any surprise reaper attack.

Satima leaned out, watching the ocean. She seemed caught in a daze. Cortez continued, "Shuttle's a mess, Commander. That pulse knocked it right out of the air. We're not going anywhere."

"What about the Normandy?", Garrus asked, concerned.
Cortez held his rifle firm. He glanced between them, "Same thing would happen to her... and the landing won't be as pretty. I'd say Leviathan has some sort of defense system in place." After Cortez finished his sentence, another flaming pod crashed on the deck.

Husks crawled around but didn't get far before Ashley stopped them with a few shots. Shepard nodded to her and Garrus. She made a quick decision. "Then we aren't getting out of here until we find it. So how do we do that?", she asked.

Cortez stood up half-way, leading Shepard to the left side of their cover. "Well... you might be able to use a mech. Looks like it's rigged for diving."

"A diving mech?", she looked confused.

"It's a Triton model. Military grade, repurposed for deep-sea exploration. As long as the seawater hasn't corroded it, you should be good to go.", Cortez informed.

They both stood up. "Well, if that's what we have to do, let's get started.", Shepard said.

Ashley and Garrus shot a few husks then faced Shepard. "Uh, just a second here. Are we seriously considering...", she trailed off with her question?

Cortez hopped on top of the platform the shuttle landed on. "First, we'll need to restore power to get that cargo door open." He leaned down to one knee, facing Shepard.

"How?", Shepard asked.

Garrus turned to Ashley, "I guess we are."

"These old Ballard-class ships are equipped with exterior power sockets. They use'em for emergency repairs.", Cortez pointed to a nearby socket, "We can strip the cells from the shuttle and use those for juice. Hang on, and I'll get you started."

Cortez handed a cell to Shepard, "Find a place to plug that in, Commander."

Garrus and Ashley watched Shepard's back, as she ventured on the deck to find the sockets. Satima stayed behind with Cortez, offering to give cover from the platform level. She seemed serious, yet distant. Shepard didn't have time to assess this.

Brutes landed with husks. They beat their chests in a war-like challenge, roaring to the sky. Garrus got the brutes attention while Ashley fired from behind. Then another brute came around the corner. It hit Ashley across the deck.

She staggered back to her feet, applying medi-gel for her bruised ribs. Garrus threw proximity mines as he jogged to cover. It stopped husks from flanking him, giving him time to reload. "You okay, Ash!", he yelled to her. "I'll live! Watch your ass!", she replied.

Garrus chuckled to himself as he slapped a fresh thermal clip into his rifle. "watch my ass... ", he repeated with a smile.

A low growl was heard above him. Garrus looked up to see a brute. "Ahh, shit!", he ran from cover. Just in time too. Shepard had already supplied two charged cells to Cortez. 36%. "How are you guys holding up?", she asked.

"Getting this done a little faster would be nice, Shepard!", Ashley shouted.

"Almost became best buddies with a brute.", Garrus yelled.
"Hey, smart asses! Focus on the deck!", Satima commed them. It was good to hear her act normal.

Shepard gave two more cells to Cortez before it charged completely to 100%. "Cargo doors are opening, Commander. That mech is all yours! It should still have weapons capability!", Cortez informed.

Shepard ran, entering the Triton mech. She powered all systems, the mech slowly walking out to meet brutes on the deck. The Tritons console gave her a heads-up display with the words typed in "kill all reaper assholes." Shepard looked up to see Satima smile in the distance, powering her omni-tool down.

Shepard wasted no time firing rockets, blasting the reapers to chunky bits. Garrus and Ashley took cover behind the mech, opening fire on any husks, hungry to get inside to Shepard.

Hapless cannibals went flying backwards, as Shepard blasted them. With the last brute dead, Cortez commed Shepard again. "That did it. Looks like we're in the clear now, Commander.", Cortez sighed with relief.

"Good, I need to get into the water before they come back.", Shepard assessed.

"Roger that. Walk the mech back to me when you're ready to dive. I should check it over first.", Cortez asked.

Shepard brought the mech straight to Cortez and Satima. When she stopped in front of him, Cortez began a hasty inspection. "All right, Commander. Let's do a systems check."

Garrus walks forward to the mech. "Listen, Shepard. I'm all for crazy ideas, but this ones off the charts."

Shepard opens the mech hatch to talk to Garrus, "We've come too far to stop now. The way home is through Leviathan."

Cortez walks around the mech, the orange glow from his omni-tool lighting his face. "Okay, seals check out. Oxygen pressure is nominal. Systems are a go. It's as ready as I can make it."

"Let's go.", Shepard informs.

Garrus steps forward, his plated brow furrowed in worry. "But Shepard..."

She gives him a smile, "I'll be fine."

Garrus nods and walks away. Satima steps in front of the mech. Shepard sighs, "Yes, Satima?" The girl looks down with her hands behind her back.

Shepard senses she wants to say something. Satima finally speaks, "Shepard. This Leviathan could be directive. I have no way to help you if it decides to take over. Please... be careful."

"Closing hatch.", Shepard says as she gives a nod of understanding to Satima.

Cortez brings a video screen up on his omni-tool. Shepard's face illuminates in their view. "Engaging systems...Ready."

"Testing comm link.", Cortez says aloud. "I read you.", Shepard assured.

The team paced on the deck as Shepard's mech slowly walked to the edge. "Here goes.", she muttered. "Commencing dive in 3...2...1..." They watched the mech step off with a splash and
disappear in seconds below the choppy ocean surface. The Triton sank fast. Shepard could feel her body lift in her seat as she descended. "Suit holding up, Commander?", Cortez commed, concerned.

"Looks good so far.", she replied.

"Good. I'm getting some communication interference on this end. Hang on.", he said.

"Copy that." Shepard typed commands on the console as the mech adjusted to the pressure of the deep dive. "Commander, can you read me? We're losing your signal. Something is blocking your comm. Please respond.", Cortez asked in slight panic.

The deeper the mech got, the darker her surroundings became. "Cortez? Cortez?", she commed. Nothing. "Looks like I'm alone now.", she said to herself.

"What's wrong?", Garrus asked.

Cortez kept trying to comm Shepard. "I've lost all communications with the Commander.", he looked distraught at Garrus.

Satima sat on the ledge of the platform, working on the cells for the shuttle. "She can handle herself. Shepard is a Reaper-killer also.", she spoke, not looking up from her work.

"Yeah, but Leviathan may be bigger and more dangerous.", Ashley chimed in.

Garrus didn't like to hear that, but it could be true.

"Shepard is a unique individual. Leviathan wouldn't destroy her or let a chance to meet her be interrupted. Trust me. She's fine.", Satima walked inside the shuttle.

"There's something seriously wrong with that girl.", Ashley muttered.

Satima finished with two cells for the shuttle, when she stopped what she was doing, blinking in confusion. "Why am I inside the shuttle?", she asked herself. The cells were perfectly in place. Satima is a skilled tech, but it still takes some time to figure a new thruster reroute. Eerily, she did it in one minute. Satima started to feel cold. She wanted off this planet.

Garrus stepped to the ledge of the deck, overlooking the crashed ships. Harsh waves beat hard against their hulls. Rain continued to soak them all under its torrential torture. He's regretting letting her go down there in the deep dark of this ocean. He stared at the waves, as they crashed against the deck. Despite the weather and rain, suddenly, he's colder than usual.

Minutes passed by, with her systems checking normal. Shepard wiped the window from fogging up. She looked around to see if she could find anything.

With her lights on, large rock formations stood jagged from the ocean floor. Getting close to the bottom meant that Leviathan had to be hiding someplace dark. Upon further decent, her lights went out. Shepard eyed this and kept calm.

In fact, the overall excitement inside her to meet a Reaper-killer quelled all apprehension. For now. The Triton landed hard on the ocean floor.

Large bubbles surfaced around the bottom, floating up. Illuminating mushroom plants lead a path further away. Shepard shot out a flair. It's red glare fizzing in the water. Coral grew in spirals of bushes on the path she treaded.

Shepard needed to locate the probe. Where it is, could be where Leviathan is. She continued to record her comms to be sent to the surface.
Maybe communications would be opened again. "Not sure if you can read me up there. Looks like I've finished the major descent. Can't see much from here.", she sends another flare out, "Suit is... holding up. Emergency systems have come online. Life support operational."

The mech walks steadily along the path. Shepard squints to view more lighted mushrooms. No oceanic life so far. Strange. The Triton descends down a short hill. It lands with a thud, forcing Shepard to grunt under the pressure.

Her third flare goes out, she only has a few to use. With her lights out, it could get very dark soon. "Shutting down all noncritical systems to preserve remaining power." She types a few commands, making her mechs internal lights go dim. "Not sure how much juice the emergency thruster will need to get me back to the surface. Can't worry about that now."

Another flare shoots out. Plenty of flora on this ocean floor. Shepard receives the technical readings from the probe, they seemed strange.

Something is definitely down here. Shepard looks up as she descends lower on the ocean floor, to see the lit mushroom plants lift off, floating away. Those weren't plants at all, but some type of jellyfish. They looked beautiful while they floated gently with the soft undercurrent. Shepard took in the image as a sign of peace, while closing her eyes.

After opening them from a quick meditative state, she continued with her search. Deeper into the area was a darker hole. Like a gaping maw into some unknown place. "Reading the probe directly below me. Looks like the final drop."

She stepped off, slowly descending. "Can't see anything just yet." The mech floated past giant rock formations, into a massive underwater cave. "Found the probe. Seems intact." She landed with a thud.

Shepard proceeded forward, shooting a flare out into the deepest part of the cave. She stood on a small platform of rock, another massive drop below her with an eerie light glowing. Suddenly the whole cave shook. Something was coming up, and it's big.

Meanwhile, on the surface of the ocean. Reapers attacked the team on the deck of the cruiser. They all took cover with the shuttle, keeping the reaper forces out of the area, hoping Shepard would be back soon.

Shepard watched in respectful horror as a massive creature rose from the depths below. It resembled a Reaper but it looked completely organic. "What is that?", she whispered.

Leviathan spoke, "You have come too far."

Shepard blinked and found herself standing nowhere, then blinked again, to face Leviathan. She shook her head lightly. "I had to find you"

Leviathan hovered, speaking with the authority of an ancient and intelligent being. "This is not your domain. You have breached the darkness."

"You killed a Reaper. I need to know why.", Shepard demanded.

"They are the enemy. One that seeks our extermination.", Leviathan answered.

Shepard found herself once again in the blank space, this time on all fours. She faced Leviathan. "But... I thought you were a Reaper."

"They are only echoes. We existed long before.", he replied.
Shepard felt a fear caution her to what she was doing. "Then what are you?"

"Something more.", Leviathan's deep tones echoed strongly in her head. Shepard couldn't fight it any longer. Leviathan brought her consciousness to the empty space, his mind. She coughed from nausea, pushing herself to stand. Leviathan approached Shepard in the guise of Ann, "Your mind belongs to me. Breathe.", he assures.

Shepard takes a breath, feeling less nauseous and more aware. She sees Bryson's daughter, "Ann? What's happening?"

Leviathan points to the head of Ann, speaking of the mind. "Your memories give voice to our words. Your nature will be revealed to us. Accept this."

Shepard felt confused and became angry with Leviathan's attempts to take over. "The galaxy is at war with the reapers. You defeated one. Why aren't you fighting back?"

Leviathan shook his head in indifference, "There is no war. There is only the harvest." He walks away from Shepard.

"Then help us stop it!", she demands.

Leviathan appears behind her in the form of the assistant that killed Dr. Bryson. "None have possessed the strength in past cycles. Your own species could be destroyed with a single thought.", he becomes the form of the Garneu imposter, "But you are different."

He turned to her, away from the mock laboratory equipment, "I have witnessed your actions in this cycle: the destruction of Sovereign; the fall of the Collectors. The Reapers perceive you as a threat.", he turns into Ann, "And I must know why."

Shepard wakes up in her mech. Blood drips softly down from her nose. Leviathan is scanning her mind too hard. The aching pain in her head starts, but he is not finished. Shepard looks up at Leviathan who brings her back to the empty space. She's kneeling again.

He talks to her in of the forms she's familiar with. "Before the cycles, our kind was the apex of life in the galaxy. The lesser species were in our thrall, serving our needs." Leviathan showed her the same cave paintings of long ago civilizations that were in his time. "We grew more powerful, and they were cared for. But we could not protect them from themselves."

He turned to her, "Over time, the species built machines that then destroyed them. Tribute does not flow from a dead race."

They both stood together, as Leviathan walked with her in the abyss of space they occupied. "To solve this problem, we created an intelligence with the mandate to preserve life at any cost. As the intelligence evolved, it studied the development of civilizations. Its understanding grew until it found a solution. In that instant, it betrayed us. It chose our kind as the first harvest. From our essence, the first Reaper was created. You call it Harbinger."

Shepard looked at him with surprise. This Leviathan, was the first apex race and created the harvest unknowingly? She needed more answers. "You built that machine despite what you saw the other races experience. Why?"

Leviathan gazes up, "You cannot conceive of a galaxy that bends to your will", planets form above them, "Every creature, every nation, every planet we discovered became our tools. We were above the concerns of lesser species. The intelligence was envisioned as simply another tool."

Shepard listened. A small voice repeated directive in her head. Leviathan extracted that. He stared at
Shepard then continued to answer her questions. "And now we all pay the price for your mistake.", she said angrily.

"There was no mistake. It still serves its purpose.", Leviathan boasts.

Shepard probed for more answers. Leviathan spoke of his survival from their harvest. He is the progeny of his people who found refuge in the dark corners of the galaxy. Over cycles, the thrall races were controlled to remove traces of his existence and that of his remaining people. In that way, their survival from the Reapers were kept secret. They watched and reached out through fragments for discovery. An orb floated in place before Shepard.

"Fragments? You mean the artifacts we found?", she asked.

He resumed, telling her the fragments provided a window into the galaxy, to explore the events from the safety of Desponia. Leviathan watches, studies and remains in the shadows. "How did the intelligence defeat you?", she asked.

Leviathan looked away. Perhaps to show some emotion of remorse through body language. He spoke of the intelligence needing to acquire physical data from organic life, to find its solution. It created its own army, pawns, to search the galaxy for data.

There wasn't a warning or motive when the intelligence turned against his people. Only slaughter. Shepard understood.

She asked Leviathan how the Reapers were made. Leviathan told her when each Harvest ends, a new reaper is born. It is perfect in its design, each formed in Harbinger's image. Their image. Each reaper will have the ability to influence organics. Over the cycles, the ability became refined, perfected, and gave rise to indoctrination.

Shepard couldn't believe what she was hearing. Also, nothing explains why Harbinger choose to form a new "human Reaper" not in his image? "But what's the point of all these harvests?", Shepard argued.

"The intelligence has one purpose: preservation of life. That purpose has not been fulfilled. It directed the reapers to build the mass relays-to speed the time between cycles for greatest efficiency. The galaxy itself became an experiment. Evolution its tool.", Leviathan finished.

Hopelessness crept inside her mind and suddenly she felt tired. Like she just wanted to drop and sleep. "Will it ever end?", she asked, already knowing the answer.

Leviathan responds with an unknowable answer. The intelligence will not stop until it finds its solution. Shepard asks her final question, "What do you know about the Crucible?" They have watched its construction before but never witnessed a completion. All those before, still fell victim to the harvest. "Its outcome is unknown."

"Okay, you made your point. Will you help stop the cycle?", Shepard had enough of this. Harsh reality or not, the galaxy needed Leviathan and what is left of his people.

"I have searched your mind. You are an anomaly-yet that is not enough.", Leviathan answered.

"Wait!", Shepard pleaded.

Leviathan began to walk off but turned to face Shepard, "The cycle will continue."

"No! You've been watching. You know this cycle is different.", Shepard continued.
Leviathan heard her words but felt a presence like that of the Shepard. He had been monitoring this organic since they arrived. She had many dark secrets. Leviathan will know them.

Above on the deck, Garrus sniped two cannibals as Ashley fires on the husks. Satima helps with suppressing fire.

All the while, a generous amount of anxiety fills her with dread. Unfortunately for the team, they didn't have time to scan the new area for orbs. One remained hidden under the shuttles platform. It glowed and pulsed lightly. Garrus crouched next to Satima, "Getting tired? I can cover you for a minute."

Satima laughs, "No way! I'm not tir..." She lost complete consciousness under the heavy firefight against the reapers.

The barricaded shuttle provided little protection for the team as they waited. "Ash!", Garrus yells. They drag the girl on the shuttle as Ashely begins to scan her. "I don't know what happened. She was talking one minute and next she passes right out.", Garrus could feel his heart pound nervously against his plated chest. Ashley tried medi-gel applications, a small shock from her omni-tool... anything to awaken Satima. But she laid motionless, unaware of the firefight that still continued.

"Her readings are normal, except...", Ashley looked at her omni-tool again.

"Except what?", Garrus shouts.

"Her brain waves are off the charts. Beta waves are spiking.", she stares at Garrus.

Why hasn't Shepard returned?

Back below. Satima wakes in a murky mist. She could hear faint voices, echoing around her. Some of them familiar, others strange.

Then a deep, frightening voice resonated in the mist. "You have a secret.", it said. Satima gulped. She suddenly stood beside Shepard, falling to her knees from a wave of nausea. She hears a voice saying "breathe." Then she hears Shepard's voice, arguing with someone.

"We will survive. You and the reaper-child will remain here as servants of our needs. The reapers will harvest the rest.", Leviathan exclaims.

Satima coughs, alerting Shepard to her presence. "Like hell I'm going to serve you!" She stands up, facing the false Ann.

Shepard double takes at Satima but continues her request, "If you release-us-no one has to be harvested."

"Nothing will change.", Leviathan concludes.

"The reapers know where you are! You can't just watch anymore-you have to fight! Even if you survive the battle today, the reapers won't stop-ever. Release us, and we have a chance to end this once and for all."

Leviathan glances to Shepard then finally at Satima. "No." He steps forward to Satima, "She is already part of the harvest."

Leviathan disappears, letting go of the enthrallment of Shepard. She wakes with more blood dripping from her nose. Two more of his kind rise from the depths. He brings her back to face him, once
again. "Your confidence is singular."

"I've earned it, damn it: out there fighting, where you should be.", Shepard argued.

"It is clear why the reapers perceive you as a threat. Your victories are more than a product of chance. We will fight. But not for you, or any lesser race. We were the first, the apex race. We will survive. And the reapers who trespass on this world will understand our power. They will become our slaves. Today, they will pay tribute in their blood.", Leviathan demanded.

Shepard nodded a silent thank you. Before Leviathan released her, he turned to Satima again. "I have scanned your mind, revealed your intentions to ours." Shepard raised a brow, looking at Satima.

Satima backed away slowly, "What are you talking about?"

Leviathan glanced to Shepard, "She is your progeny."

"Satima?", Shepard asked, confused.

"Don't listen. He's just like the Reapers. Trying to indoctrinate us!", she warned.

"SILENCE!", Leviathan roared, as Satima fell in pain. "You will reveal to us what you know."

Shepard watched in disbelief. Was Leviathan protecting her from a potential threat or is he hurting Satima? She felt conflicted and could only watch, listen. Leviathan walked to Satima, who flinched at his touch.

Leviathan patted her shoulder, leaning down to her level. "You have experienced much pain and betrayal. Reveal more. Do not resist. Accept this."

Satima felt a rush of pain in her head, like something was pulling memories from her waking mind. A dark, cold feeling surged throughout her body. She was helpless. Leviathan spoke, "Hybrid. Your paradox cannot stop the harvest. You cannot stop your Shepard. Everything will fall in place with little meddling from you. I will show what is needed."

Shepard saw images. A woman that looked like her, in dark red armor. Her eyes were not her own, but glowed crimson with an intent to harm. She scowled at a small girl.

Ginger colored hair clung to her little face, matted from an endless stream of tears. She looked up in fear. Her dark eyes staring with an intensity that struck Shepard cold. Time had passed. This same girl-child looked older, fiercer as she struggled against men in lab coats. Fought their attempts to inject her with strange colored fluids.

She cried out, shouted insults. All the while this same menacing woman watched. She stepped to the girl and knocked her out swiftly. It ended quickly, the images. Satima stared to the nothingness that was the floor, here in Leviathan's mind.

"Sa-Satima?" Are you...", Shepard's voice trailed off as Leviathan stood beside her now.

"She will reveal the truth to you. I have reassured her, we know all. You may still win a victory against the reapers. But not before great sacrifice. She is your progeny Shepard, and you must accept this. Or all will fall.", Leviathan let Shepard go.

She woke abruptly, feeling like someone had hit her with a metal pipe multiple times. Shepard quickly turned thrusters back on, floating back to the surface as she typed the commands for the mechs systems to follow. Her mind whirling with the strange, disturbing images Leviathan showed her. Did he let Satima go too? Is she the sacrifice, to be given to him?
Back on deck, Ashley and Garrus fought off Reaper forces. More keep coming from the Reaper above them. Satima laid unconscious in the shuttle with Cortez protecting her.

Finally, Shepard's mech arrives on the surface, stepping on the deck. It walks forward two steps with Shepard opening the hatch. But something's wrong. She attempts to jump out, only to succeed in falling to the floor. Garrus watches as she struggles to get up but can't. Shepard falls unconscious as well.

Two brutes make their way towards her. The one closest to her begins to strike before stopping. It then turns around to face the other brute and attacks. Garrus dashes out to Shepard, who wakes up suddenly in pain. He quickly kneels next to her, lifting her arm over his shoulders, putting his hand around her waist. "Shepard's back! Cortez, talk to me!", Garrus yells in his comm.

The shuttle flies over to the side of the platform, "We're good to go! I don't know what the Commander did, but the pulse is offline! Satima is still not responsive, but her vitals are holding steady."

Garrus leads Shepard to the platform, waiting suddenly as the controlled-brute takes down the other one. He skirts around it, holding on to Shepard. They make it to the shuttle, with Garrus gently setting Shepard down. He climbs in, pulling her further to him. Ashley continues suppressing fire until the hatch closes.

Cortez flies the shuttle out only to encounter a bigger problem, "Damn it! We've got a Reaper inbound."

The Reaper begins to fire but Leviathan uses his orb fragments to take total control and shut it down. The Reaper falls to the ocean with a loud crash, sinking under the foamy waves. As they escape the atmosphere of Desponia, Garrus hovers over Shepard, worried. "Shepard! Wake up!", he desperately tries to stimulate her with a small shock from his omni-tool.

Ashley watches in concern. Garrus sighs aloud in frustration, "She's freezing!"

Shepard wakes suddenly, coughing from nausea again. She backs away thinking she's still in Leviathan's mind, until she hits a familiar bench from the shuttle. Blood stained the skin under her nose. Garrus helps her to sitting position, "You okay?"

She brought her knees to her chest, numbing the horrible feeling in her stomach. "Yeah... yeah, I'm fine. Hell, of a headache."

Garrus stood up as she sat on the bench. His intense gaze piercing through her. "Never, do that again.", he warned with an affectionate undertone of his sub-vocals. Shepard understood the protective sound he made.

Cortez informed Shepard that Ann Bryson had been waiting on the comms. Shepard answered with a confirmation that Leviathan did exist. "Was it worth it?", Ann asked.

Shepard glanced away, then back to the screen, "I don't know, but we proved it can't hide anymore... that it's a part of this war, just like us.", she answered.

Ann replied to the fact that it sounded like an amazing story. She told Shepard how much her father would've appreciated knowing the truth was out there. Ann spoke to Shepard how Hackett asked her to join the scientific team. She agreed with no hesitation. Shepard wished her well. "Thank you, Shepard.", Ann smiled.

The video comm ended. Shepard walked back to the bench, leaning over to recover from her
headache. She heard boots scuffling. As she raised her head, she spotted Ashley applying medi-gel to Satima on the other side of the cabin. Why was she...

Shepard fell forward in pain. The images of that woman, torturing Satima as a child, came rushing back intensely.

She remembered now. Leviathan showed her what the girl was hiding and when she wakes... Satima cannot run from the truth anymore. She will tell Shepard everything.

Normandy

Satima was brought to the med-bay, as Chockwas overlooked the girl's medical situation carefully. Her beta waves returned to normal with little effect on her.

She had perfect health written all over her stats. Shepard had opted for a quick check-up from her ordeal with Leviathan, then proceeded to the vid-comm room to speak with Admiral Hackett. His image came on screen quickly. "Commander, I've finished reading your report.", he informed.

Shepard approached the console, "The Alliance wanted more intelligence on the Reapers. I'd say we got it."

"Our people will be studying it for years to come. They're already calling it the Leviathan Codex. It rewrites galactic history as we know it.", Hackett said.

"Whatever else it means, it tells me the reapers had a beginning... and maybe now we'll provide them with an end.", Shepard assured.

Hackett agreed, "That's one way to look at it. I guess it's the only way. So, go out there, and make it happen." Shepard salutes him in respect. He continues, "This is a big step in the right direction, Shepard. Good work."

Shepard had been thinking about revealing her secret guest to Hackett... even Anderson. She always felt an apprehension on it. Still, she wrote a brief report about the incident on the citadel, their missions together and the new findings of the Sentarian race, just confirmed by Javik. His so-called Ancients. It was time to tell the truth, now.

The Alliance is giving Shepard leeway with everything. It's her duty to mankind and the galaxy, to reveal Satima. Consequences be damned. "Sir?", she looked up at him.

"Is there anything else, Commander?", the admiral wondered.

"Yes, Sir.", she looked down, wringing her hands. An old habit from her youthful days as an orphan on earth. Shepard stopped, placing them behind her back. "There have been developments that you need to know.", she replied.

"Commander.", he waited. Watching her suspicious behavior.

"I have a report I'm sending you now.", she typed the files to his terminal, "You'll want to read this."

Hackett received the file, sending it to his private cabin on board his cruiser. "I'll vid-comm you after I've gone over its contents."

"Thank you, sir.", Shepard replied.

"Hackett out.", his image was gone.
Shepard took a deep breath. No more secrets. She spent some time making her rounds. The crew was starting to look drained, exhausted, but kept a confidence that they can beat the reapers.

Shepard spoke to them, noting any complaints of nightmares or worry. She eventually got around to Garrus's door, the main battery. She stepped in. He was busy working the console, monitoring the main gun. Garrus didn't turn to her, but spoke knowing her presence was in his room.

"Shepard, I looked over your mission report. Gotta say, it feels like we've been after these reapers forever...", he sighed. "From Sovereign to Leviathan... they've been a pain in the ass the whole time. But at least we're starting to see the big picture." Shepard stepped next to him, staring away at the battery system. Garrus continued, "Never really thought we'd get any answers. It doesn't change much, but it does make this war feel a whole lot bigger."

"Yeah. More like, galactic paradox big.", she chuckled lightly. Shepard looked around the room nervously, debating to herself whether she should also tell Garrus what she saw. "There's something I need to tell you."

Garrus watched Shepard act a bit unsettled. "Tell me?", he asked.

Shepard ran her fingers through her red hair, letting out a deep sigh. She walked to his cot, taking a seat. A thick blanket made of rough grey material, neatly covered the frame. Garrus knelt in front of her. "Is it Leviathan?", he asked anxiously.

"No.", she reassured.

Garrus stood up to sit next to her. Leaning out to see her face, "Then what did happen, exactly?"

"You've read the mission report. How Leviathan took over my mind, for a while, to converse with me. Show me things.", she said.

Garrus nodded his head.

Shepard's gaze narrowed in concern. "He brought Satima into it. Leviathan... extracted memories from her. Terrible memories.", she started to wring her hands again.

This clearly had her completely uncomfortable. "So that would explain what happened on the deck while you were gone.", Garrus concluded.

Shepard nodded and continued telling of what she saw," She was the subject of cruel experimentation, by the reapers. A horrible woman seemed in charge of her, seeing to her torture daily. Could be the one that trained her in those deadly skills." She unsettled next to him, staring ahead to the floor. "But the most terrifying fact about this, is that Leviathan told her... us-that I'm going to be harvested, regardless of what we do." Shepard gazed out with a grim look.

Garrus stared, disturbed and full of worry.

"What if I become their vanguard? Just like Saren. What if I'm the liability all along?", Her voice sure in its tone of the ultimatum that is her future.

Garrus glanced down, unsure of what to say. To imagine Shepard like Saren, completely loyal to the reapers and covered in reaper tech. He shuddered to himself. Shepard continued. "I've not been honest with you, about my dreams.", she looked at him. Her eyes begin to faintly water. A pleading tone in her voice took over as she spoke, "I have frightening nightmares. So, horrible... I don't want to sleep." Garrus took her hand in his, squeezing gently.
"On Earth, a boy used to play in the yard below my window, during my short incarceration. I would watch silently, taking in some small joy in his laughter, his happiness. When the reapers came, after Anderson helped me escape the Alliance Command Center, I found him in an air duct of a damaged building."

She cleared her throat to stop the emotions from overwhelming her. "I tried to help him. He was afraid, and shook his head saying, "You can't save me." And then disappeared when I turned my head to answer Anderson. As I was leaving on the Normandy, I spotted him getting onto an evac shuttle with other people.", she recalled.

Shepard closed her eyes from a tormented memory, "Oh God! They were screaming, terrified." She looked up at the ceiling, her eyes stinging from holding back tears, gripping the edge of the cot tightly. "A reaper, smaller than Harbinger and the ones like him, came from nowhere... and-and just fucking killed him!"

She started to laugh disturbingly, as hot tears rolled down her cheeks," Just, blew the shuttle away, like it was nothing. No fucking remorse... no pity. He's dead! Because I didn't drag him out of that building!"
Shepard opened her eyes. "I could've saved him! He deserved to live! He was just a child!"

Garrus sat shocked. He wanted to grab her, hold her tightly. But this was Shepard. Immovable, strong Shepard. He sat afraid if he touched her, she would break into thousands of fragile pieces. Her already damaged resolve showed how this war was destroying the Shepard he knew.

She calmed herself, looking back at him. "I see him when I sleep. I see him burning. It gets worse and I ask myself... is it even real? Was he real?" She stared at him with wild eyes." Am I real?"

Garrus took Shepard in his arms, as she cried silently on his chest. Caressing her hair, he finally spoke, "You are real. What happened to that boy was not your fault. You did everything I know you could, to save him."

Shepard glanced at him as he held her gently. "It wasn't enough." She calmed down again, "That woman, the one Leviathan showed me. She looked like me. Changed... but it was me." She stared at Garrus with an uncontrollable fear. "I believe I'm the one that trained and tortured Satima. That's why she could never tell me the truth. When she sees me, she sees that monster."

Shepard tried getting up but Garrus held her to him. "Stay with me, a little longer, until I know you're going to be okay." His deep sub-vocal tone sent a warm protective feeling to her. She complied for once and let Garrus hold her.

Med-bay

Satima had woke hours later. Her head felt ten times heavier. The bright lights of the med-bay worsened her pain. Dr. Chockwas stood next to her, as she slowly rose. "You've been sleeping a long time. We've nearly reached the citadel," Chockwas smiled at Satima who looked at her with confusion.

"Wha-why the citadel?", Satima asked. She sat up fully, letting her legs dangle from the examination table. The dizziness was starting to go away.

"The Commander has decided we all need some R&R. About time, if you ask me.", the doctor chuckled.

Satima stood up, stretching her back. The satisfying pop of her knuckles made Chockwas cringe.
Then a sudden realization came to her. Leviathan. "Where's Shepard!", Satima asked, frantically.
"She's in her cabin.", Chockwas answered.

Satima started to walk out quickly. Chockwas sat at her desk, typing away on the computer. "She's not alone, by the way."

Satima grunted in irritation, still proceeding to the elevator anyway. The ride up went by faster than before, while she wrung her hands tightly, nervous for what she was about to finally reveal. She stepped out to face Shepard's door. "Here we go.", she said to herself, taking a small breath.

The cabin door slid open with Garrus standing between her and the entrance to the cabin itself. He glared at her for a moment then seemed to realize something before stepping to the side, allowing her through. Satima walked by slowly. She didn't understand why he looked angry at her.

Shepard sat at her own terminal, browsing. She pointed to the small steps that led to the bedroom part of the cabin. "Sit.", she said sternly.

Satima took a seat on the top step, waiting for one of them to speak. Spirits, she felt like a small child, parents ready to scold. Garrus stood, looming over her. He crossed his arms in apparent disapproval, leaning against the large fish tank. It worried Satima, considering he had just started to trust her, even like her enough on board the Normandy.

Shepard powered off her terminal, turning to face Satima in her chair. "I remember what Leviathan showed me. I'm also sure you do as well. He knows too.", she pointed to Garrus.

Satima gulped, keeping quiet, spotting how red the Commander's eyes looked. Shepard leaned forward, placing her hands on her knees. She gazed down in some deep thought then looked straight back at Satima. "Hours ago, I forwarded a report on you to Hackett, of the Alliance."

Satima stirred in her seated position, obviously worried. Shepard put up a reassuring hand, "You can trust him. But I couldn't keep the Alliance in the dark for long."

The hybrid looked down.

Shepard continued, "If you have information, and I know you do, basically damning me to be this puppet of Harbinger. Then the Alliance needs to know, to stop me. If I become compromised while Garrus is in the team, he'll be the one to do it first. I will not repeat history, even if it means your future is jeopardized.", Shepard finished.

So, that's why Garrus looks pissed, ready to kill. And why Shepard seemed like she had been under great stress. Possibly... crying?

Satima glanced to Shepard, her face contorted in an outrage," You think I came all this way, went through what I did, just to save myself?" She looked to Garrus then back to the commander. "I feared, if I told you the truth from the beginning, that you would turn your back on me. Not believe me, have me locked away... or worse.", Satima shouted. "I acted on what small knowledge I had on you. I would've already said something, if he hadn't interfered.", she pointed to Garrus.

Garrus clicked his mandibles in annoyance. Shepard glanced to him, then returned her gaze back to Satima. "I know. I realize that woman who hurt you is me. Was me. I'm not going to let that happen.", she replied.

Satima glanced to Garrus, biting her lower lip in apparent nervousness. He cocked his head at her. "It is and it isn't you, there's more.", she relayed, as she turned back to Shepard.
"More?", Garrus asked, indignant to Satima's complaints. She was an unknown with detail knowledge of him and Shepard. He had to investigate!

Satima nodded, annoyed," Yes, more. You all know I am part human and turian, and even though I wasn't trusted from the beginning, you let me stay."

Garrus uncrossed his arms, feeling sour for scowling at her earlier. Satima brought a knee to her chest, wrapping her arms around it for support. She smirked to herself.

"What's funny?", Shepard wondered, offended by this girl's rude laughter.

Satima questioned Shepard with her gaze. "You don't see it?"

"No.", Garrus replied stepping beside Shepard, still irritated. His own dark eyes narrowing at her.

"Look at me. Don't-you-see?", Satima pleaded at them. Her dark eyes blinking.

Shepard cocked her head, staring away to humor the girl. "We know you're a hybrid, already."

"No, not that. Just... look at me closely.", Satima requested, desperate.

Shepard observed the girl again. She has ginger hair, four fingers on each hand. A slightly prominent brow... looks plated, like an infusion between flesh and turian plate. Teal rimmed eyes, with black sclera instead of white.

When she smiles, you can see small sharpened teeth, like a turians. Predator cuspids instead of the usual canine for humans. She slouches a lot. The back of her neck in a slight arch, which suggests (since she's part turian), that she might have a small carapace. Shepard at first thought it was because the girl lacked confidence, always sulking away in the core room.

Satima is average height, like Shepard. In fact, everything about her screams turian and human hybrid. Shepard huffed to herself, letting a loud sigh of frustration. What in the hell is Satima talking about?

Satima looks down in defeat. She felt upset, thinking perhaps this was something they should not know. Despite what Leviathan showed Shepard. She'll never know the possibility of her birth, or that she's her mother.

At that moment, that slight look of defeat she gave, sparked a recent memory for Garrus. He remembered how Shepard looked when she came to him with all this information to begin with.

On closer inspection, Satima and Shepard share the same jaw line and mouth shape. They both have red hair. Her brow may be more turian, but her nose stood out, as she turned to the side. That's definitely Shepard's nose.

"Son of a bitch.", he muttered.

"What?", Shepard asked, confused.

Garrus approached a nervously, now standing Satima. He stared at her with curiosity. She glanced around feeling uncomfortable as he gazed intensely. Garrus nodded in understanding, stepping to the side. "You're a clone, aren't you?", he asked her.

Shepard stood to attention, eyes widened with hesitation. "Garrus?"
Satima shook her head, sighing in agitation. She glanced to them, "You're not even close."

"Then enlighten us!", Shepard demanded.

Satima darted her eyes between them, feeling hopeless. She looked down, her heart sinking further as the pain of loneliness took over. She needed to tell them, they couldn't see, so blinded by the reaper threat. "I'm... I'm her daughter.", Satima revealed, timidly.

Garrus took a step back, confused. "You're lying."

Satima lifted her distraught gaze to him. "No! I'm not!", she yelled.

He folded his arms, "Why the turian features?", Garrus asked, unprepared. His heart pounded loudly in his chest, terrified of what his gut instinct was warning to.

Shepard stepped to Satima, finally getting what they were talking about. Satima looked at the commander then back to Garrus. "You're my...", she started. Gulping, wringing her hands tightly, she stared away. "You're my father, Garrus."

Satima watched them both exchange glances with this shocking information."Javik knows. He was helping me keep it a secret, so I could protect you both." Satima continued, "Dammit!" She turned, punching the hull, facing them with teary eyes. "I didn't ask for this! I didn't ask to be born. All I wanted was to be free of The Directive, and live with... be with Jormun. I deserved that much. Shepard... I don't expect either of you to ever accept this, but if you could please not hold this against me. It's not my fault I was created."

Shepard wanted to say something, but she couldn't. The maddening silence in the cabin gripped them all. Satima waited, hoping for a response, but nothing happened. Believing they would never regard her words as anything other than truth, Satima left the cabin, full of despair.

"She is your progeny Shepard, and you must accept this. Or all will fall.", Leviathan whispered in Shepard's mind.

Garrus took a heavy seat in Shepard's chair. He drifted off into a daydream, staring at the fish tank. His mind whirled with a million questions. This intended future... can it be? Possibly be, true? His own daughter! Biologically impossible!

As much as a possible way to have a family with Shepard intrigued him... not like this. Not forced. Especially by his own enemy, the reapers. How could he accept Satima at all?

He understands that it's not her fault and that she was just as much dragged into this as they are. But? Maybe some things are better left unsaid, not revealed. Maybe Shepard and Satima should've kept this a secret between themselves? No. He would've found out eventually, if they all survived.

Several years down the road, she'll come looking for answers. Shepard, of course, would offer and that would leave him to wonder. Until the family resemblance hit him hard in the gut. Just like now.

Those eyes. His sister and mother used to say, he had this intense gaze of intimidation. And so can Satima. Spirits, he's been nothing but an accusing asshole to her since the beginning. And he hurt her. His own... No! NO! He won't accept it! She's not his.

Garrus remembered Shepard was in the same room with him. He looked around for her.

She sat on the same steps. "How stupid can I be? The answers were right there in my face. How she followed me, defied me every step of the way. And how convenient it was to know, by pure chance because of Mordin's own curiosity... that she is exactly human and turian." Shepard shook her head,
silently thinking.

Garrus leaned out of the chair, head hung low. "I can't... can't accept this easily. You understand, Shepard."

She looked up at him, "Why? Because she's not fully turian?"

"Wait... what? That's not..." he tried explaining.

Shepard scoffed, "Doesn't matter. She's my responsibility."

Garrus glanced at her, realizing how he sounded. "No. I meant... I'll help anyway I can. I'm not leaving your side. I just don't know how to look at her. How am I supposed to address her? As a daughter or a...", he trailed off. Clearly confused, his demeanor getting angry.

"I don't think she expects you to accept her as anything more than a friend. If you can give her that, she seems likely to be content with it. I, on the other hand...", she stood up, standing with a sigh," have a daughter to look after. She's still young, and like I said, my responsibility from the start. I'm not going to push you into anything that makes you feel uncomfortable."

Garrus nods, then stands, setting out to the door. He stops short to say something but continues to leave. Shepard walked slowly to her bed, sitting on the edge.

"I have a daughter.", she repeats, "The reapers made me...a daughter."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for stopping by. ;)


Shepard docks at the citadel, to give her crew time for an extended R&R. Anderson gives her a personal gift. Dinner at the sushi bar turns into an urban war, when mysterious mercs attempt to assassinate the commander. Liara uses her broker contacts to find a lead, that becomes an invitation to the villain's party.

The Normandy docked at the citadel. The whole crew buzzed with excitement to finally get out and stretch their space legs. All members of the skeleton crew would stay behind a little longer, to oversee the repairs for many of the Normandy's systems.

Traynor was one of them, being the chief tech adviser. Shepard walked by her at the galaxy map console. She looked busy, typing away on her computer. "Hey Traynor. When the repairs are over, care to join me at a bar?", Shepard laughed.

Traynor glanced up, turning to the Commander, "Oh, you so totally know I will. As soon as the repair team is finished, I'm going to get my hands on some quality tequila. Then, I'm going to get drunk. See you soon, Commander."

Shepard shook her head at Traynor. A night out drinking, letting lose all the worry she had been dragging, would be perfect.

Outside on the docks, Shepard summoned a cab to her new apartment that Anderson gave her. She worried he was giving her too much, and that he meant he wasn't coming back alive from Earth.

Meanwhile, Garrus stayed behind longer in the main battery. Shepard seemed to be in better spirits, which was good. But, he couldn't understand how she got over Satima's reveal. The way he worded how he didn't want the responsibility made him sound inconsiderate of both Shepard and Satima.

She's left alone to deal with her daughter. A girl who shares the same dna as him, as well. Garrus needs to think. Spirits, if ever a time he needed to talk to his own father. It would be right now.

The shuttle ride was comfy. Watching all the neon holo lights and signs cover most of the wards, relaxed her. She was grateful this apartment wasn't on the presidium. Having to listen to all the bureaucratic idiocy and endure all the deception of the embassy.

All those asari, pretending that Thessia falling never happened. Waltzing around with that pompous air about them. The ever paranoid Turian C-Sec officers, and her own human race. Still trying to weasel in, taking over more than they should.

The Alliance had started to thin itself out, spreading too far into space, too far from home.

Everything would've had a better outcome, if they all believed her in the first place. Sovereign himself attempting to take the citadel and slaughtering thousands in the process, wasn't enough "proof" the reapers existed.
Bet they all regret it now. Too bad for them... and too damn late for the galaxy.

The cab stopped in front of a large building. Green neon lights lit the sides and rails around it. Shepard stepped out, undisturbed by the rush of people surrounding her.

She was used to hectic city life, growing up an orphan on Earth. Living in a large metropolis of noise, bodies, and crime. As she walked in, an asari receptionist greeted her. Shepard stepped to the counter, "Uh yes-hi-I'm looking for apartment 408. It's under the name Anderson."

The asari blushed, "Oh my, you must be Commander Shepard. Here is the key-card for that apartment. We were awaiting your arrival. Thank you for choosing Titan Arms."

Shepard smiled, slightly uncomfortable and politely took the key-card. "Thank you.", she said.

She quickly got into the elevator as the asari smiled at her again, waving. The elevator opened to a hallway that turned right as she stepped out.

In front of her was a beautiful view of city life. A couple of businesses and their signs flashed across the ward. At the end of the hall, she spotted the only door. Anderson must've had some good pay to get this place. The door opened to a spacious apartment, complete with an open floor plan. Living and dining were only separated by a long huge fireplace, the wall separated a family room, complete with a bar. Shepard was impressed and more importantly, excited.

She couldn't wait to invite everyone over to see this place. The whole Normandy crew could crash here if they wanted. Shepard received a comm from Traynor, "Commander, I've got Admiral Anderson on the QEC. Patching him through to you now."

To her left, Shepard spotted a wall terminal. She turned the screen on, to view Anderson. "Shepard.", he greeted. In the background, she saw he was standing in a damaged building. Grey ash covered the floor, a burnt couch had been pushed to the wall. No doubt he was in an apartment also, but in the complete opposite of comfort.

"Admiral. How are you holding up?", she asked concerned.

"Day by day, Commander.", he answered.

"Yeah.", she replied. He looked so tired. "Hackett sent me a message about this apartment."

"I want you to have it. Take it off my hands.", he said with a smile.

Shepard raised her eye in suspicion, "Are you serious?"

"You need a place that's yours-someplace to recharge, clear your head.", he said. Shepard turned around, looking at the fireplace, imagining herself and Garrus cozying up in front of it. "Kahlee wanted us to settle down there. Thing is, the longer I'm on Earth, the less I want to leave.", Anderson glanced back to the damaged walls in the building he was standing in.

Shepard understood what he meant. Not wanting to leave Earth, either. She peaked into the large kitchen, it had a dining room with table and chairs beyond.

Shepard stopped short of the family room, with a bigger screen on the wall in front of the second couch. She walked to the window, overlooking cars as they passed by below. A yellow Armax arena sign illuminated her surroundings. Anderson's frame showing on the second screen. "And I want as few loose ends out there as possible. Like I said, you'd be doing me a favor."
Shepard turned to the screen, "That's very generous."

"It's practical. We need you in the best shape possible. Rested. Focused.", Anderson ordered her.

"If you say so. Thank you.", Shepard replied.

"And make yourself at home, damn it. It's yours now.", Anderson blared.

Shepard chuckled, "I'm sure I can manage."

"Okay. Good. Been meaning to do that for a while. I'll talk to you soon. And Shepard... keep your ace in the hole close. If the enemy ever found out about her... we all could lose you both.", Anderson narrowed his gaze a bit.

"Understood. Be careful out there, Anderson.", she said.

"You too, Shepard.", he turned off the vid-call on his end. Returning to his grim reality. The Reapers were decimating this planet. All life, plants and animals had practically been wiped out. One his own men broke down, when he heard all the horses in the world were most likely extinct. His family owned a ranch.

Anderson also had to bear the weight of breaking the terrible news of death to them. Friends, family and lovers... all dead. "Rest up, Shepard. Then come back and give the Reapers hell to pay.", he said to himself.

Shepard explored the apartment, finding random journal entries from Anderson on furniture or desks. He had a whole biography planned. Even mentioning her, and the first day she came on board the Normandy. Their friendship started there. On the kitchen counter, Shepard listened to an entry from Anderson. He was questioned about Shepard.

Anderson: "There's been a lot written about the Commander. Most of it, isn't true. People are quick to judge. They don't know the whole story. I don't even know the whole story.", he continues, "But I know the woman. Worked with her, fought with her. Trust her with my life."

Shepard leaned on the counter, listening more intently. "Shepard's had some rough patches. Who of us hasn't. She's been forced to fight a lot of battles alone. God only knows how she got out of some of that. Makes your head spin.", he takes a deep sigh. A sound of a quick sip from a glass. "Thing is, you never heard a complaint. Never once got "No, sir. I can't do that."

Satima walked in. She whistled low to the expanse of the spacious apartment. "Nice.", she said to herself.

A man's voice continued talking from the kitchen as she slowly peaked in to see. "She never hesitated. Few people know what Shepard's been through. I'd like to think I come pretty close. And I worry sometimes she forgets: there's a whole bunch of people who'll lose sleep over her getting back home. Maybe it doesn't need to be said. Maybe we're too dumb to say it. Soldiers like the Commander are rare. Women like Shepard... even more rare."

Shepard sighed. She felt honored, embarrassed... Anderson spoke highly of her. "Wow. I didn't know that much about you.", Satima said as she entered the kitchen.

Shepard spun around at the girl's voice and held back a blush of embarrassment, "Yeah, well. I'm still just a soldier."

Satima smirked, "But one that is respected and looked up to. You defeated a Reaper not once but
twice! And stopped the collectors, stopped your crew from being turned to organic mush. Yeah, I did a little studying in the core room. You're phenomenal! Extraordinary! One of a kind! So, stop being an idiot, and enjoy this.”

Satima smiled. Shepard laughed to herself, "Alright. Just this once. I'll be awesome."

"Damn straight!”, Satima shouted.

A VI in the room interrupted with a message. Satima had already began eating whatever was in the fridge. With a mouth full of food, she spoke to Shepard, "Looks like you got a message. I'll stick around. Find something to do." Shepard walked into the den. It also had a roaring fireplace, poker table and small bar. Beyond that was a desk with a terminal on it. She looked at its contents. A message from Joker... curious.

"Dinner at sushi place on me! I've got a few things I wanted to go over with you. With Normandy in dry dock, I figured we could meet up at that Ryuusei sushi place down in the Wards. I hear it's the best. Joker."

Shepard tilted her head, contemplating on whether she wanted to go. But first, she needed to change out of her military clothes.

This was supposed to be relaxing. Upstairs in her room, she found a drawer with women's clothes. It probably used to belong to Kahlee. A solid black cocktail dress stood out. "I choose you.", she said, smirking. Shepard walked down the stairs, as Satima had stepped out into the family room. Browsing through the many channels of entertainment. "Holy crap! You look... non-reaperfied... I mean, you look great! Date with Garrus?", she asked, raising a brow.

"No. Joker.", Shepard replied.

Satima stared in confusion, "The Pilot?"

Shepard laughed out loud, "It's not a romantic date. He invited me to dinner... as a friend."

Satima sulked in her seat on the couch, "I knew that.", she muttered, embarrassed.

The cab ride took her past Castle Arcade and Silver Coast casino, to another part of the Ward she had never been too. The citadel is so massive, that it would take years to visit every place. Even then, she might only have completed two arms of the citadel.

After the cab stopped on the dock platform for her to step off, she caught the sound of bass coming from an open terrace restaurant. She could spot large fish tanks with many exotic fish in them. A sushi place with fish tanks. One has to wonder.

At the top of the stairwell to the restaurant, a concierge eagerly waved her down. She shrugged her shoulders and proceeded to him. Many disgruntled customers watched, angry that this woman could be allowed past the entire line.

"Ah, Commander Shepard. Your table is ready.", the concierge informed in his French accent, leading her to a table. Joker sat on the opposite side of the open bar. The entire floor was a fish tank. Her short heels chinked on the surface. It this tank broke, a lot of people would be hurt. The water had a bio-luminescent blue glow.

She passed by many dinners, all chatting away about their job, personal life. A few turians were also enjoying the meals. So, they have dextro sushi, she thought. She should bring Garrus and Tali. Then just Garrus, alone.
At the square table, Shepard took a seat next to Joker. He still wore his military uniform but seemed comfortable enough. He cocked a look at her, "Practicing for Garrus?"

"Can it, flight lieutenant.", she replied, taking her seat.

"So, Shepard. Not bad, huh? This sushi place is serious. Like "French guy at the door" serious. Only had to save the galaxy twice to get a table here. You've seen the line outside?, Joker commented.

As they both glanced to the line, a young woman in Alliance blues was frantically trying to get their attention, while the French door man kept her from disturbing them. They ignored it for the time being, with Joker raising a glass, continuing his conversation. "But here I am, drink in hand. Best pilot in the universe and a rock star."

Shepard chuckled at him. She took a sip of complimentary water, getting curious about the Alliance girl. "Any news from the Normandy?", she asked.

Joker rolled his eyes. He only wanted to talk about himself, the incredible meal they were about to have and then... EDI. But he obliged the Commander's question. "Ah, you know. Maintenance stuff. It's hard knowing a bunch of strangers are poking around in my ship. I mean... your ship.", he laughed nervously.

"It's our ship, Joker. And the best thing we can do right now is park her, letting the techs do their job.", she said.

Joker relaxed in his chair, facing Shepard. "Yeah, you're right. Maybe an oil change, space-tire rotation."

"Right. Trust me, it'll do her some good.", Shepard reassured.

"Oh, I trust you. Not sure about those shifty aerospace engineers. Always stealing the silverware.", Joker darted his eyes in a shifty expression.

"This is like a vacation. Let someone else do the work for once. Hackett's orders. You're on shore leave, remember.", Shepard took a glass and offered a moment with Joker. He toasted a small agreement between them to enjoy this R&R. "Yeah, whether we like it or not.", he said.

They chatted about their drinks, how Shepard can use her spectre status to get them more than one umbrella. Joker laughed, commenting it'll be an awesome use of power. "So... your email said it was important?", Joker asked.

Shepard glanced, puzzled. "My email? I'm here because I got a message from you."

Joker watched Shepard down a drink. He looked at her confused, "The hell? I didn't send anything..."

At that moment, the Alliance officer came running towards them. She held a data pad firmly in her hand. "Commander! Excuse me. Sorry. Alliance business.", as she bumped into restaurant patrons, "Commander, this is urgent!"

"I don't think that's the umbrella lady.", Joker mused.

"Commander Shepard, I'm Staff Analyst Maya Brooks. Alliance-excuse me", she saluted, "-Alliance Intelligence. There are people trying to kill you.", she panted from running.

Joker and Shepard exchanged glances, "Yeah... I think she's aware of that.", he said.
She seemed frantic. Looking around like a frightened animal, "No, I don't mean Cerberus and the Reapers! I mean other people! New people! They're... It's..." Brooks gestured in a panic, "Someone is hacking your account. Comm channels, personal records... They're targeting you, specifically."

"Damn it.", Shepard muttered. "Whoever they are, they're making a big mistake."

"Oh, man! There's the angry face.", Joker spoke sarcastically.

"From the top. What do you know?", Shepard asked Brooks.

The antsy Alliance Analyst began to speak, but a group of armored soldiers came in, brandishing their weapons. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Tonight's performance is brought to you by random acts of violence." They started by shooting the place up, turning tables over and assaulting the diners. Several shots cracked the tanks around them. Brooks ducked down, crawling off. Shepard helped Joker to cover behind the table she pushed over.

"Man, I love show business.", the Merc captain mused. "Spread out, boys! Find me Shepard!"

Everyone ran, screaming. Fleeing the area as the mercs continued in their destruction. Remaining patrons were taken as hostages. Shepard spotted Brooks at another table across from them, "Stay there! I'm coming!"

"Joker?", she said to him.

He crouched next to her. "Ow, my pancreas."

A merc grabbed Brooks, dragging her off. "Hey!", she yelled. Shepard watched, "Damn it!" She turned to Joker, "Find the crew! I'm going after her!"

Joker got up, limping away repeating the Commander's orders, "Find the crew. Got it!" A merc walked to the turned table, spotting Joker creeping off. He pulled his pistol, yelling "Hey you!", until Shepard reached up. She grabbed the pistol and his arm, pulling him down with her, effectively running him through with her omni-blade. Joker heard the scuffle and turned around in shock, "You used me as bait?"

"Go!", she whispered loudly to him.

Joker turned around, muttering to himself, "You used me as bait!"

Shepard focused on taking the mercs in the restaurant out. She carefully observed her new weapon. M-11 Suppressor-military grade. So, these mercs are heavily armed and after her. Cerberus? No, the Illusive Man would never leave her assassination to a bunch of unknowns. The Reapers would just blast this station to pieces. Someone else has to be behind this. She needs to reach Brooks quickly, to get the information the woman has.

Three stood in her way. Shepard needed to be careful with the hostages, and only shooting directly at the mercs. One of them sent a disruption drone after her, but two careful shots stopped it. Damn it. She's running out of ammo fast. No thermal clips off the bodies. She took cover behind the bar, hearing the whimpering sobs of a bar tender. Over the counter, she leaped, then landed quickly to roll sideways from incoming fire.

Four more. She shot the two to the left, ammo spent. Shepard knew she was unarmed and unarmored.
She spotted a frying pan on the floor. The merc closest inched in, trying to peak cautiously. Shepard hit him square in the face. He fell backward in pain. The remaining merc aimed his pistol in her smirking face. She wasn't going down easily.

Brooks groaned from a head wound behind him. "Got you now, Shepard.", he said menacingly.

Someone whistled behind the merc. He turned to a hard punch directly to his helmet, falling backwards over the bar counter Shepard sidestepped from.

She looked back to see Satima, knocking out the second merc on the floor, shaking her right hand with a wince. "I wanted to hang out with you, and instead I find people shooting at you. Your pre-Reaper days are fun.", she smiled with a sarcastic look.

Shepard shook her head, "Yeah... yeah." She walked to Brooks, using some medi-gel from a merc, and helped her back to her feet. A merc from the distant balcony landed, aiming a red laser to Shepard's chest. Brooks pushed her out of the way, taking the shot.

Shepard fell hard on the tank floor, as she watched Brooks go down. Several shots fired around her, breaking the glass. Satima tried to get to her, but was fired on as well. "Stay back!", Shepard warned her.

When Shepard attempted to get up, the glass suddenly shattered underneath, dumping her and remnants of the floor aquarium to the wards below. Satima crawled to the open floor, watching in horror. "Shepard!", she screamed.

Shepard grabbed onto advertisement coils of a digital sign, with debris from the tank soaking her. "Shit, shit, shit!", she said loudly.

Frantically trying to get a foot hold, her right shoe fell off, sliding down the angled building. When she managed to get her left foot in a slot, the whole sign collapsed. Shepard had free fallen further, landing against a large building, tumbling down the glass windows and architecture that jutted out.

Sure, to cause some serious bruises. She collided into an open triangular window, holding onto the edge.

It prevented her from falling to her death on the walkway below. But debris from the coil sign came crashing against her, knocking her off the window to the cat-walk. She landed hard on her stomach. Water, dead fish and glass surrounded her.
Shepard slowly got to her knees, holding her side in intense pain. She was soaked and extremely pissed. The suppressor pistol landed in front of her.

She picked it up with a firm grip and trigger finger ready. Finally standing, Shepard started to limp forward, walking off the ache in her legs. She needed to be fast and contact Joker immediately.

Satima watched Shepard fall to the ward below. She scanned for her heart rate and found, though erratic, the Commander still lived. The merc on the balcony was still targeting her, so Satima stood up, glaring his way as he continued to shoot around her.

She walked carefully, pacing like a predator to him. He ran out of bullets when she ascended the stairs to the balcony, a menacing glare greeting him.

"What are you?", he yelled in fear.

"The last thing you'll ever see.", she grinned. Satima dodged a melee from him, coming up from behind. She put her arm around his neck, as he struggled and stopped suddenly, from her blade in his back. He fell slowly to the ground. Satima observed the area, and turned to an elevator, walking
inside. The doors slid close on her cold stare.

Meanwhile, Shepard kicked off her remaining shoe, now fully walking. She received a comm from Brooks. "Commander, I found a secure terminal! Are you okay down there?"

Shepard grunted in discomfort but responded, "Yup... feeling good...", she lied. Further down the walk-way, she found platforms to the lower balconies. "Brooks-you got hit."

"I know! I used medi-gel. A lot of it. Um, all of it, actually. And now everything is a little bit bouncy.", Brooks sounded really hyper.

Shepard jumped across the platforms, landing below with a new wave of pain surging up her side. "I think you used too much.", she said, wishing there was medi-gel lying around for her.

Below the second platform was another balcony with a salarian worker. "So, can I help you with-anything?", Brooks asked. Shepard spotted a girder leading out with a ladder attached. She started to slide down the sides of it to reach the bottom quickly. "Alert C-Sec. I'll look for a way out."

She reached the bottom, jumping across to another platform. Another ladder down. Shepard spotted a sky car dealership: Cision Motors. "Brooks, I see some sky cars across the gap. Maybe a landing pad..."

"I'm checking the area. Transportation, no. Food, no. Laundry... aha! It's a sky car lot. Cision Motors.", she informed.

Shepard looked back behind her from the ward view. "Get a shuttle over there. I'll find a way across." She glided down a ladder.

"Okay, right!", Brooks replied. A second later, as Shepard started to run inside a small construction building, Brooks came back on comms. "So, um, turns out C-Sec has the whole area locked down. It's going to be a tiny bit tricky to get you a shuttle."

"Keep at it, Brooks.", Shepard said.

"Oh, also, stay off your comm. Well, except for me. It's hacked. That's probably how they found you.", she spoke fast.

"Who are these guys?, Shepard asked, walking past large crates and piles of metal debris. "I don't know, but they really don't seem to like you.", Brooks answered.

"Yeah, I'm sensing that. Listen, did you happen to see a... unique looking young woman, in black armor? She would have ginger hair... attitude problems.", Shepard asked.

"Oh, that girl? She left rather quickly, looked really upset. I didn't want to pursue. She seemed the sort that might-hurt me.", Brooks nervously said.

"Yeah. Sorry. She's uh-well it's complicated. Satima can take care of herself.", Shepard informed, passing by a salarian smoking. He didn't seem to care what was going on. "Hey.", he said.

Shepard spotted a ladder to her right, climbing up to the roofs of small businesses. She hopped across the small gaps, reaching a last roof with a ladder. Mercs were patrolling the alley below, just beyond the security barrier C-Sec put up. Citizens stood outside, curious and scared to what was going on. C-Sec officers were standing guard, waiting for backup. She could see the mercs argue below her, while taking cover.
"The advance screwed up!", one of them said. "Shepard was unarmed. Man, those guys are idiots.", a second merc replied. The first one stopped in front of a food stall, "Did you see what happened to Saul? That crazy bitch just stabbed him cold, no remorse. She just walked away like it was nothing."

The second merc replied, "Didn't you get four days suspension for the same thing?" The first merc next to the stall moved away again, patrolling the market, "Yeah, but... I at least give some thought to what I've done. She just... has that scary look. Fucking aliens."

Shepard quietly slid down the ladder, hiding behind the stall. "She's here!", one of them said. Damn. They opened fire at her, shooting the market to pieces.

With ammo in her pistol, Shepard leaned out of cover, firing on the first merc. He was obviously speaking of Satima. What had gotten into her would have to be examined later. The second merc threw several grenades at Shepard's cover point. She jumped out of the way, receiving a few lacerations from the close explosion. Her fault for wearing a damn dress!

"Get more guys down here!", a new merc coming down the market hall shouted. Shepard found a grenade and lobbed it to him. It exploded, decimating his shields, while she shot him twice on the chest. Then her comms cracked to life, "Shepard? Can you hear me? You okay?" It was Garrus.

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She finished sniping a merc in the head. "I'm fine. Might need a little backup."

"Lucky for you, Archangel is your boyfriend. Joker filled me in. I'm on foot. Be there as fast as I can.", he said.

"Garrus.", Shepard asked.

"Yeah.", he said. Shepard took a shot then hid back in cover, "Satima is running around on her own. She doesn't know the citadel and one of the mercs said she brutally killed one of their team. I'm worried."

"If I run into Satima, then I'll keep her with me. Until then, I'm still coming to help you.", he replied.

"Thanks" Shepard finished the last merc. She cautiously peaked out of cover, running to the side wall. Further down the market alley were more mercs. With a fresh clip in her pistol, Shepard moved forward.

"Excuse me, who is this? You're on an unsecured channel, and you're putting Commander Shepard in danger!", Brooks spouted.

"I'm doing what? Who is this?", Garrus asked confused.


Mercs ahead screamed for backup, surprised how easily the other teams were taken down. Shepard fought them, thinning their ranks. "Javik reporting in Commander. The crew is on their way.", he commed.

Shepard dodged incoming fire behind her stall. "Good to hear. Things are a little dicey.", she replied. "I am not surprised.", he mused.

Past more stalls of strange food, she came to a security locked door. "Brooks! Found a way across. It's locked down."

"I'm not surprised."

Shepard jogged into a shop, looking for any buttons to push or
hidden wall panels. "Right, because of the, uh, lock down. Can you get through?", Brooks asked.

"I'll try to override it.", Shepard replied.

In front of the door, Shepard tried using her omni-tool to open it. "C-Sec authorization required." She continued working the door, until her pass-code went through, "Confirming Spectre authorization. Spectre access accepted!"

The door opened. Entering through, Shepard could see the sky car lot not too far from her position. "Shepard's down there! Open fire!", a merc shouted.

She took cover behind a bench, surrounded by neon signs.Merc troops above fired at her. She needed to get across the bridge. "Damn it!", she yelled. "Commander?", Brooks called through comms.

"Shepard! What's happening? I heard that from here!", Garrus frantically asked.

"It's all under control!", Shepard yelled, shooting at a merc. She ducked and rolled sideways, skirting from sign to bench on the bridge across. "Shepard, Brooks sent me the NavPoint for the sky car lot. Meet you there.", he commed.

"Good." Shepard rolled backwards, as a merc flipped to the side from her shots. They both stared each other down, when Shepard ran full force towards him.

Taken by surprise, he was easily knocked down, as Shepard finished him with a melee attack. Garrus commed her again, a scuffle on his end telling her he was also busy. "What do we know about the mercs?", he asked.

"They have guns and don't like me?", she replied sarcastically.

Garrus stifled a chuckle, "Not helping, Shepard."

"Commander, it would really be great if you stayed off the comms.", Brooks interrupted.

Shepard rushed across the bridge finally taking cover behind a column. "Hey, they called me!", she argued.

More mercs came through the shop stalls, and down the cat-walk above. Shepard dodged and opened fire on them. They were getting around quickly, flanking her every move. "Great. Garrus decides to take his sweet time at the damn sky car lot, while I'm fighting at least ten mercs. Unarmed! No armor!", she yelled, killing one of them.

"Not for long.", a familiar voice said over her comms.

A red sky car, on fire... crashed on the bridge skidding until it hit the edge. The hatch opened with Satima getting out, before the car fell forward to the wards below. A few shots were fired at her. She dodged them well, firing back with her pistol, taking two of them down perfectly. "Satima?", Shepard said, stunned.

"I intercepted a merc's comm. Tracing it to here. I had a little resistance along the way.", she smiled.

Satima took cover across from Shepard, behind the bridge rail. Mercs rushed in. "Kill that bitch first! She's too dangerous!", one of them yelled.

Shepard shot him in the head. "Satima... been busy?", she asked her.
Satima used her energy drain to stop a drone, "They attacked me first! Self-defense."

Mercs came out of cover, lobbing grenades and sending drones to root out the two women. Little by little, they fought their way down the walkway. Mercs fell dead from their shots, and Satima showed deadly skill with hand to hand. Some of those same moves Shepard remembers using in her younger days of the Alliance.

She felt proud, but it stung how Satima had to learn. Sky cars zoomed overhead, filling in the noise of the urban battle. In and out of cover behind the pillars, Shepard led Satima further down the ward to the sky car lot. A cloaked sniper taking pot shots at them.

Satima disappeared from where she was standing. Shepard brought down the sniper's camouflage to see Satima run to the merc from the side. The merc tried defending the blows but the girl was too fast, delivering a roundhouse kick that sent the merc flying over the edge.

Shepard shot the last merc soldier that tried to sneak up on Satima. She came jogging to the girl's side. "I didn't teach you that. Did I?", she asked.

Satima nodded, "No. I was implanted with fighting techniques in HIVE to be an effective killer. To replace you. But since you helped me escape, at that time, we were both replaced by... by someone else." Satima dodged the question further, "Aren't we supposed to get to Garrus at the sky car lot?", leading Shepard forward.

"Commander! There's a C-Sec shuttle inbound if you can get to the sky car lot!", Brooks commed.

"Understood.", Shepard replied.

"Okay! Brooks over! No, out. Brooks out! Over and out? Brooks! Oh, damn it!", the Analyst argued with herself.

"Something seriously wrong with that girl.", Satima pointed out.

"She's just nervous. Probably used to the desk more than field work.", Shepard said.

Shepard and Satima walked through a shop door, entering a small alley to the car lot. Glass doors were up ahead, as two mercs fired at a sky car. "Someone must be in cover!", Satima assumed. "Likely to be Garrus.", Shepard replied with a smile.

Garrus hopped over the sky cars hood, aiming his pistol, firing on them. They both fell dead. He smugly walked to Shepard, "So, having a bad day, Shepard?"

Shepard could barely contain the extremely hot vision of him taking her, right there on that car. But then the fact Satima, her daughter, was standing next to her: killed the mood. "You could say that.", she sauntered his way, pistol at her hip.

Satima felt very uncomfortable. What if they start making out or... worse? Garrus continued," Landing pad is just over there, but it's behind a locked gate."

Shepard headed that way, "Let's look for a control panel."

Garrus caught a good look at Shepard's little black dress. "Nice outfit...", he said slowly. She raised a brow, glancing his way. He cleared his throat, "Control panel, right." He'll tuck this little image away for later. When their alone.

Satima walked past him with a disgusted look on her face.
Garrus shook his head, irritated. "Word, is you fell through a fish tank.", he asked. They cautiously walked through the lot, looking for any suspicious activity and mercs. "We'll talk about it later.", Shepard replied, annoyed.

"A damn shame. Great food there.", he said sarcastically.

"We'll talk about it la-ter.", she argued.

Satima read some of the sky car info-pads on the hoods. She laughed, tossing an info-pad to the ground. "Snacol. Ridiculous. Haven is a much better name."

"What's Haven?", Shepard asked, interests peaked.

"My old ship. She went down with... anyway, she was a beauty.", Satima continued.

"We should get to a control panel soon.", Garrus interrupted.

The receptionist station was in the back with the door to the gate controls closed. Shepard and team hovered around the door. A solid glass panel separated the darkened room from them. "Hey, there's a volus in there.", Satima pointed out. "CAN YOU OPEN THE DOOR?", she yelled.

Shepard and Garrus exchanged glances. "He's frightened not deaf, Satima.", Shepard informed. The girl shrugged her shoulders. The volus kept the door locked, while Garrus walked to the glass paned window. "Go away.", the volus warned Shepard walked beside him, ready to shoot the window in, "Stand back.", she said.

Garrus pushed her pistol down with ease., "Hold on." Satima observed, a little amazed at how Shepard trusted him to take over. He knocked on the window, "Hi there. Could you open this up?"

The gates unlocked, with Garrus turning back to the volus,"Much appreciated."

"Please, go away.", the volus merchant repeated in asthmatic gasps. Garrus gave Shepard another smug look.

"Well, I could've done that.", she muttered.

Satima smirked, "The Garrus in my time, would've thrown himself through the glass, beat that volus senseless and then pressed the button." They looked at her disturbingly. "What?", she said, confused.

They proceeded to the landing pad. A C-Sec shuttle promptly appeared, hovering in place over the platform. The shuttle hatch opened to mercs, heavily armed, firing on them. Garrus and Shepard headed for cover behind a sign.

"Ugh!", Satima cried out.

"Satima?", Shepard yelled.

She took cover on the opposite side, across from them. Satima held her left leg tightly."I'm fine. Just a bad graze.", she assured. "Assholes!", Satima shouted.

Above them, a krogan in red armor roared. He came crashing through a window, landing hard on the shuttle, and dented the mercs ride. Forcing it to crash. Flames came out of the cockpit.

The krogan ran off the shuttle, jumping in front of the dazed mercs. He rammed into them, knocking the first unlucky bastard into the other hatch, headbutted the second one's helmet inward and sucker punched the third in the gut. The last merc watched in fear, until the hatch to the wards below
opened with his body being thrown out.

Shepard watched this krogan step out of the crashed shuttle, looking around. "Wrex? What are you doing here?", she said pleasantly surprised.

He moved a merc over, searching. "Ah, just butting heads with the Council over krogan expansion." Finding what he was looking for, Wrex tossed a big gun to Shepard. Garrus walked behind, seeing the weapon. Wrex spotted Satima, "Who's the brat?"

The girl stood up, raising her brow at him, angrily. "Who's the old bastard?"

Shepard snapped at Satima, "Watch it."

An explosion in the sky car dealership caused everyone to take cover, except Shepard. Big gun in hand, she walked casually to the entrance. Mercs landed around them inside the lot, jumping down from the top levels and running in from the short alley-way. "Shepard, we got a way out of here?", Wrex asked.

"Wrex. I'm a professional.", she boasted, firing on the mercs. Their cries alerting her to the fact she did take them by surprise.

"That's not a yes!", he yelled.

"It's not a no!", she shouted back.

"Anyone have medi-gel?, Satima asked, taking cover behind a sky car platform.

"No. Why, are you feeling weak?", Wrex teased.

Satima growled in response, standing up to fight with them. She took down mercs effortlessly, meleeing with another, despite her injury. Shepard didn't like the challenge Wrex made to her daughter. "She's injured!", Shepard yelled.

"She'll live. Besides, if she can't handle the heat, she should skip out of the frying pan.", Wrex mused.

Satima scoffed loudly over the comms, causing them to look her way. She felt enraged enough by the old krogan's comment, that an unsuspecting merc was thoroughly pummeled by her, followed with a gunshot to the gut. "Handle the heat, my ass!", she spat, chasing after another now terrified merc.

Wrex laughed, taking cover beside Shepard. "By the way, I heard you have a kid. Is that her?, he said pointing to Satima, while snapping the neck of a merc that tried to sneak up on him.

"Wha-What? Who told you this?", Shepard asked alarmed.

"I have contacts in the council now, who have been chattering away like pyjacks about the alliance's classified data. You're dragging her around the galaxy Shepard, against the reapers. It's bound to be noticed.", Wrex informed.

Shepard sighed in disappointment. "Wrex, I haven't told the alliance the whole truth. So, either your lying and should've been a c-sec cop, or you've been sweet talking Liara again."

Wrex smirked, shooting a merc over the railing above. "You caught me." He looked over to where Satima was fighting. "I also heard that Garrus is the father.", he suddenly roared in teasing laughter,
nudging Shepard's side hard. "She looks like you and has his attitude. No offense, Garrus."

"None taken, you fat bastard!", Garrus yelled, shooting down mercs.

Shepard used her new weapon, mowing down the ranks of mercenary soldiers around them. Her comms opened up, "Commander!"

"Joker? We lost our ride! Where are you?", she asked.

Garrus sniped three mercs, with Wrex ramming into them. Satima continued fighting, blood from her leg wound now splattering where ever she went, and whomever she fought. Joker commed Shepard back, "On my way. Picked up Brooks. Figured you have a few questions.", he said.

"Good call.", she replied.

Wrex grabbed two mercs, taking them by the neck and butting their heads together with a loud laugh. "Good to be back!", he roared.

Garrus rushed around a sky car, taking a merc by surprise. He rammed the mercs head through the windshield of the car, shooting a merc trooper down before he landed next to him.

"Commander, did C-Sec find you? Are you okay?", Brooks worried.

"Yes and no. Mercs in a C-Sec shuttle.", Shepard replied.

"What?", Brooks said surprised.

"Little busy, right now!", Shepard reminded. She blasted two out of the way while she ran to a sky car. Satima had stopped coming up to fight. The girl sat holding her leg tight, blood pooling out between her fingers. She looked up at Shepard, "Thought it was just a graze but turned out they got me good. My fault for not paying attention."

Shepard knelt down to her, "Jokers almost here. Hold tight."

"Ay ay, Commander.", she said.

Shepard ran back out into the fray. Shooting more mercs. Where the hell is Joker? Garrus and Wrex busied themselves with blowing up some of the sky cars, laughing and arguing on who is the best fighter. "Hey!", Shepard yelled to them.

They both quickly glanced her way, "Satima is behind that one to your right, closest to the gate. She's bleeding from the gunshot. Grow-up!

Garrus straightened up, putting down two more mercs. "If you hadn't blown up that car next to her, she would've never snapped at us.", he argued. Wrex laughed. Comms cracked back on, "Approaching your position, Commander. Just following the gun fire.", Joker informed.

"Copy that.", Shepard replied. She signaled for everyone to retreat to the landing pad. "Sorry I'm late. Had to take the scenic route.", he continued. "Scenic route? We nearly crashed four times! Where the hell did you learn to drive?", Brooks demanded.

"And Brooks says hi!", he mused. Joker hovered over the landing pad, "Get to the shuttle!", he yelled.

Shots were fired at them as they escaped to the shuttle. Wrex ran in first, with Garrus behind. Shepard helped Satima in tow to the hatch. He offered to help as Shepard hopped in. Satima left a
hell of an impression on Wrex. The ride back to the Silver Strip was fast and quiet.

Back at the apartment, Satima ran up to Shepard's room. Garrus received a medi-gel app from Shepard who hovered like a worried den mother. He gave the girl the application, making sure her leg wound got the most of it. "How is she?", Shepard paced.

"She'll be fine.", Satima spat agitated.

"She might need to see a clinic, hard to tell unless we take her.", Garrus informed, eying Satima's rude response.

Satima pushed away his taloned hand, standing in irritation, as well as embarrassment. "It's healed, I'm fine."

Shepard crossed her arms with a slight glare, then softened the gaze, understanding that Satima is well. "I have to do something first. Let's leave her to rest.", she continued, walking out with haste. Satima rolled her eyes.

Downstairs, Wrex paced impatiently. As Shepard finished walking down the steps, the krogan approached her. "Someone want to tell me what's going on here?", Wrex demanded.

"I didn't recognize those mercs. Heavily armed and using C-Sec shuttles?", Garrus said.

They all formed a circle around the coffee table in front of the living room. "I don't know. I've never seen them before.", Shepard informed.

Brooks paced energetically, "I can't believe you survived all that. They had guns! And grenades! And those drone things!"

Shepard brought out her omni-tool, "It's all right. I'm calling Commander Bailey; see what's going on with C-Sec."

Brooks stood edgy, "Okay, that sounds... Wait! Wouldn't that just make whoever you contact a target, too?"

Garrus glanced to Shepard, "She's right, Shepard. Until we figure this out, it's a big risk."

Shepard looked at them both then turned off her omni-tool, "Okay. For now, we run this ourselves."


"Brooks, it's okay. I know this a lot to deal with.", Shepard said calmly.

Brooks became overly excited, yelling about being shot. She couldn't believe Shepard could take all those mercs down on her own. Shepard agreed that she did take down the mercs, but it is all part of her training as a marine. Years of experience and all that. Brooks still paced, hyper, talking on and on about taking too much medi-gel. She complained it made her feel jumpy.

This woman was giving Garrus a serious headache. Enough already with this hyper ranting! He raised his plated brow to Shepard who nodded to herself, smirking as Brooks continued talking. After she asked everyone if she seemed jumpy, which they exchanged annoyed glances, Shepard asked Brooks how she got mixed up in this issue.

Brooks explained she monitored data for Alliance Intel to prevent fraud and hacking of officer IDs.
Her example included an admiral's pass into a posh nightclub while the real admiral is actually fighting in the reaper war. She started to explain her tracking program, named "Mr. Biscuits." Wrex felt confused. Was it edible?

"Uh,Brooks.", Shepard reminded.

Brooks continued, her flushed cheeks showing embarrassment. Now telling Shepard how her program detected a breach in her classified files. Personal files, mission reports, and everything else was compromised.

"Since when does hacking personal records involve heavy-weapon fire?", Wrex asked.

"Think of what criminals could do if they had Shepard's military access codes. Or Spectre codes, even!", Brooks exclaimed.

Wrex turned to Shepard, "Explains why they need you dead, Shepard. Nothing to stop them until the damage is done."

"Okay, lets figure out who they are and shut them down.", Shepard said, "Ideas?"

Garrus unfolded his arms, thought in mind. "Well, I was looking at that pistol you picked up..."

Shepard brought her pistol out, examining it. "For such a tiny thing, it packs a punch. Never seen anything like it before.", Wrex pointed out.

Liara came through the door, walking down the small steps into the living area. "Let me see it. I might be able to help. Glyph..."

Glyph appeared from Liara's omni-tool. He hovered over the coffee table in front of Shepard. "I'll be collating relevant intel for review, Dr. T'Soni."

"Liara.", Shepard smiled.

"Shepard, I'm relieved to see you're in one piece. A shame about the sushi place, though. It was a favorite.", Liara chuckled.

Shepard sighed in annoyance, scratching her head. "I hear that a lot."

"All right, Liara's on point. What about the rest of the crew?", Wrex asked.

Satima came down the back stairs, stretching her arms behind her back, looking better. "Yeah, what about us?", she asked, standing with the rest of them around the coffee table. Garrus and Shepard exchanged glances. Joker came in from the door also. "Yeah, what about those slackers?", he smirked. Shepard left the circle, walking towards him. "Joker. You've been busy."

"I found some folks who actually like being shot at.", he said while turning towards the door.

Her team from the Normandy walked in,EDI leading. "Permission to come aboard, Shepard."

Everyone settled down, sitting or standing in places around the apartment. Joker sat on the couch, discussing the bait problem he had with Shepard. She walked around the apartment, speaking to every crew member.

Who of which, had a smart-ass remark or another about the sushi restaurant. Garrus stood upstairs, looking out of the large windows into the ward. He leaned casually over the rail. Shepard stepped to him, putting an arm around his. "So, what was it, Shepard? Five minutes before someone started
Shepard sighed, annoyed at his comment. He continued, "On the other hand, we get this cool secret hideout to hang in... unless the guys look in the window."

"Can't help being so popular lately.", she answered.

Garrus gave her a kiss on the cheek. Liara came up the steps, clearing her throat to speak with them. A nervous hand smoothing her head tendrils. "I want to apologize for letting out dangerous information about Satima. Wrex has convincing ways.", she left off.

Shepard narrowed her gaze with a smirk, "And how did you learn about Satima's reveal? Hmm?"

Liara made a nervous cough, quickly covering her mouth to mutter an answer. "Eavesdropped with the help of EDI."

"I suppose as the shadow broker, you need all the information you can get. Just don't let it fall into enemy hands, Liara, the reapers don't know that Satima exists.", Shepard cautioned.

Liara nodded, "They'll have to pry it from my dead hands."

Shepard walked to Liara, touching her shoulder, before turning to Garrus. "Well, back to reality."

She had wondered off to her new bedroom, already trying to make sense of the whole situation with the mercs, and if it has something to do with Satima. Her daughter had stepped in, while she listened to an audio log by Anderson. "Shepard?", Satima asked.

She turned around, facing the girl. "Yes, Satima."

Satima walked closer, looking nervous as usual. "I know I got hit at the sky car lot earlier. And I know that you and Garrus saved my life... again. I want you to know, that I don't make a habit of this. At least, I didn't before. In my timeline, I was good at dodging bullets.", she chuckled lightly. "I guess now, I have more on my mind.", Satima paced to the bed, taking a seat on the edge. She wanted to so badly lay down and just sleep. But, duty came first. It always came first. Shepard walked to her side, looking down with a caring stare.

"I understand. I get sidelined by my own thoughts, even during the most dangerous moments. The moments when other people are depending on me to be my best, and I'm not. It's called being human. Or at least, mostly in my case. Garrus and the others have had their moments too."

Satima glanced to Shepard, searching for an answer in her mother's stare. "There. Right there. You gave me that same knowing gaze, before you...I mean, before I..."

Satima got up hastily, leaving the room, seemingly confused. Shepard watched, unable to utter a word to stop her from going. She slowly left the room, descending the stairs to Liara, in the dining area. "Shepard, I've found something. We can gather the team whenever you're ready."

"Do it.", Shepard ordered.

Everyone came around the table, with Satima staying back. She leaned on the kitchen island, behind Shepard and Liara. Keeping herself distant from everyone. Liara began with her information. "We
have a lead. I called in some favors to run a trace on the gun. It led me to a casino owner named Elijah Khan. He's been suspected of using his profits to smuggle weapons onto the Citadel.

The broker brought up a recording via audio log. A holo screen of the recording showed over the table for everyone to watch. Khan complained of his guns showing on the local news from the citadel. The ominous voice assured Khan, he wouldn't be linked to them, but Khan terminated their association anyways.

Khan also threatened the other, that if he came after him, he would go "prime time" with the information he has, and abruptly ended the call. Shepard crossed her arms, "So that's our identity thief."

"Looks like he's got an ID disguiser. Those things are a pain in the ass to get around.", Garrus said, irritated.

"Did you get anything on the mercenaries who attacked us?", Shepard asked Liara.

She turned to Shepard next to her, "They're a private military corporation called CAT6. As most of you know, CAT6 is an Alliance nickname for dishonorable discharges. Many have criminal records, histories of steroid abuse, and other charming features. No doubt hired by the thief, not by Khan."

Everyone became unsettled. A small army of dysfunctional ex-military, causing chaos all over the citadel. Garrus exchanged glances with Shepard. He didn't like that thought. Too many innocents would get caught, be used by them.

Ashley couldn't believe it. How did they get away from military surveillance? Most should still be on watch in hospital wards for mental trauma and addictions. The dangerous ones should've already been behind bars. Satima listened carefully, thought to herself that this didn't sound good. Whoever this "thief" was, wanted a good handful of unstabled and dangerously trained people to go after Shepard.

Knowing full well how skilled Shepard is and resourceful. It sounded more like a test of resolve. Or maybe, this new villain was trying to corner Shepard? It made Satima nervous. She couldn't let Shepard out of her sight. The commander looked around her crew, then started her questions again.

"That phone call was pretty damning stuff. How'd you get it?"

Liara faced Shepard, "It involved the weapons biometric data, salarian intelligence, and a hanar prostitute with camera implants."

The whole room went awkward, with Wrex clearing his throat and Tali feeling very uncomfortable. Images. "Seriously?", Shepard asked, a little stunned.

Liara smirked, "No, but the truth is boring."

Satima chuckled behind them.

Shepard nodded her head, "Anyways...Whoever that voice was, Khan's nervous enough to cut them loose. We can squeeze Khan until a contact drops out."

"Easier said than done. He has a panic room inside the casino. A good place to hole up. EDI can give us programs to hack the door, but the cameras and guard's complicate things."

Brooks opened her mouth to counter argue, but the minutes of her silent stare caused an uneasiness. Satima wondered about that. "Yeah. Khan could disappear or worse. If his guards ever open fire,
normal people could get hit. Like I did.

"She's right. We can't risk spooking him. We can go in quiet. Small team. No gungame. ", Shepard replied.

Satima nodded in agreement, along with Tali and James. Glyph appeared over the table, "Dr. T'Soni, this evening the casino will be hosting a charity event to assist war refugees." Shepard and Liara exchanged glances. "Purchase some tickets Glyph, then call up a layout of the building."

Joker hit a fist into his hand, "Score. So how close can you get? You don't usually put a back door in a panic room.", he asked.

Everyone looked at the schematics to the casino. EDI noted an airshaft that bypassed the security gate, ending up in storage. From that point, the panic room's door-camera could be disabled. Ashley brought up the convenience of it, reminding everyone of the fact there would be alarms everywhere. Liara replied with a countermeasure in mind. She'll know more when they're inside.

Javik asked who would be small enough to go into the shaft, with Wrex replying that he couldn't do it, due to his large size. Liara laughed, speaking there's more of him to love. Tali suggested herself, but her suit's built-in tech would be picked up by security sensors. No go.

With EDI's presence in the casino arousing too much suspicion, Brooks replies with the fact they need someone trained in complicated tech. No electronics, no metal. Just undetected polymers.

Shepard glanced to Satima, who still leaned against the stove-topped island. She nodded to Shepard. Brooks caught that, suddenly speaking out loud and with much enthusiasm about a course at Op-Int, disabling a bomb with tweezers. The conversation was enough to make Shepard agree to have Brooks go inside the shaft.


"You said it yourself. We've all too much tech.", Shepard replied.

"But... I managed to get shot just coming to talk to you! Now I'm supposed to hack my way into a safe room?", Brooks asked, upset.

Shepard understood the young officer's concerns. And her lack of obvious field experience. "We'll be backing you up. The second you hit something you can't handle, we'll cover you."

Liara brought her omni-tool up, selecting something in view. "If that's settled, it looks like there's one last hurdle to get us inside."

"Which is?", Shepard asked.

Liara raised a brow, almost smiling. "Black tie required."

Satima looked confused as the rest of the crew either groaned in annoyance or snickered. Ashley covered a smirk looking at Garrus, while Tali carefully backed away from the table, right into Javik, who seemed equally confused. James flexed a few muscles. Shepard glanced around the dining room. "Oh, so...I need a date then?", she smiled.

"I'm going as a single person. That is, I mean...I'm going alone.", Brooks spoke aloud.

Ashley rolled her eyes, then looked at James. They exchanged a look, quickly walking opposite
sides away from the table. Garrus walked to Shepard, "I seriously hope you're not going without me."

Shepard laughed, "Why? Afraid I'll ask Wrex?"

Wrex grinned, chuckling, "Well, Shepard. I can understand how hard it is, to pass on a chance with a "real" man." Garrus growled low. Wrex stepped up to him, slapping him on the back. "Relax, pyjack. She's like a sister to me."

"Ok, so that makes me, going into a scary shaft. Shepard and Garrus... then who else? Anybody else going?", Brooks said energetically.

Shepard turned to Satima. She seemed preoccupied with the casino's schematics when she noticed Shepard's stare. "What? Me? Oh...NO! I don't mingle. In case you've all forgotten, I'm not a people person. I hate people.", Satima glared. Javik laughed to himself.

"But, I thought we bonded over the Normandy's navigation controls?", Joker said sarcastically.

Satima pointed with her finger in annoyance, "Don't push it fly-boy." Joker chuckled. Shepard followed Satima out. "Hey, if you still want to come. I've got a few more "black tie" clothes upstairs."

"What the hell is a black tie?", Satima argued.

Shepard sighed, "It's a formal party. You wear really nice clothes."

Garrus walked upstairs pass them. Wrex and Javik stepped to the bar, trying out the various alcoholic bottles. Joker, EDI and Tali made themselves comfortable in the game room. Shepard spotted James with Ashley on the couch. Talking. "Look, Satima... it's not a big deal. You can wait here with everyone else. I'll update the team shortly on what we find.", Shepard started to walk upstairs with Garrus.

Satima looked around. Sure, she could hang around the crew, talk about missions. Or duties. There was something going on between James and Ashley. She didn't want to get in the way of that. Joker and EDI would pick on her. Brooks. That woman had a very bad vibe. Satima doesn't trust her, and doesn't want Shepard to go alone. So, she makes a very uncomfortable choice.

This is going to be a disaster.", she thought.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for stopping by! ;)

Chapter End Notes
Complications arise during the casino event, causing the team to become creative and tactical. A raid in the citadel vaults reveals the villain, leading to a deadly confrontation, leaving the hybrid fatally wounded. When Chockwas begins to help the girl, the small group witness a strange and terrifying change.

The formal party had just arrived at the Silver Coast Casino. Many citizens stood outside, waiting to see the celebrities and wealthy patriots of the evening.

Garrus, Shepard, along with Brooks, all stepped out of the cab in front of the grey tiled entrance. The holo-graphic patterns of squares interconnected and blinked in the background of a soft blue wall. Brooks sauntered down the path in her electric blue dress while waving to people she didn't recognize. Shepard had her arm around Garrus's, casually walking with him. She had changed into a different dress, deep ruby in color with a high collar that accentuated her shoulders.

Garrus couldn't keep his eyes or hands off her. He wore a black formal turian suit, white stripes curved around his carapace down to his waist. "Looking good, Shepard.", he waved to the crowd. Walking proud with her on his arm.

Shepard smiled, "I did the best I could without a carapace or a crest."

"Your best has my mandible on the floor. Damn!", Garrus replied.

Shepard blushed with a slight giggle, her heart fluttered in her chest from Garrus's flattering charm. As they proceeded to the stairs, Brooks whispered to Shepard. "You know, I shaved my legs for this, and I even put concealer over where I got shot."

Shepard sighed to herself, "Just smile and wave, Brooks."

Before they reached the stairwell, Shepard spotted a ginger haired girl holding a tray with different alcoholic beverages. She winked before walking off. "Satima?", Shepard muttered.

Inside, Satima quickly walked up the stairs, disappearing in the crowd with her waitress disguise. She didn't trust Brooks, and neither should Shepard. Gut feeling.

"I'll get to the ventilation shaft. Wish me luck!", Brooks said, quickly running up the steps.

Shepard remained a little longer at the bottom of the stairwell with Garrus. She contacted Liara.

"Liara, you have any input?", Shepard asked over comms.

She and Garrus walked together to the top level of the casino. "I'm here, Shepard. EDI and I will keep in contact in case we're needed. Khan has a lot of surveillance set up. I'd mingle with the guests if you want to look natural.", Liara stated.
"Ok, Garrus. Time to meet the riff-raff."

"Shepard, was it me or did I just see Satima serving drinks to some asari?". Garrus asked, surprised.

Shepard shook her head, "Garrus, somewhere out in this crowd, our little girl is providing a great distraction for us. And when this is all over, I'm going to owe "her" a drink."

"Right.", Garrus reassured himself. Ignoring the awkward comment Shepard made about Satima. It was just too soon for him. Shepard didn't know how Garrus felt about Satima yet. Blurting out she's their "little girl", was not well thought out. But he didn't deny or hesitate.

Whatever he's thinking, she rather not stir up an argument. They need to focus on the mission at hand. Satima is fine and maybe they'll laugh about this someday. Maybe.

On the top level, a holo sign in orange read "Silver Coast" behind them. The main floor had plenty of quasar machines, with a few gamblers standing around the games. Shepard watched the crowd, noticing certain areas had different groups of citizens.

Walls of running water to imitate fountains and even holographic silver trees provided the backdrop. Large white hanging spheres seemed to make an artistic viewpoint in the lobby. There were circular booths dividing sections of the main floor. Some were empty.

So, she needed to mingle.

A pleasant song played in the background of the noise of people chatting and laughing. Shepard approached her first stranger to mingle with. An Elspeth Murrain, running for Zakera Ward City Council. Elspeth asked Shepard a few questions, in which Shepard replied about having a "few" bad experiences with politicians.

This Elspeth wanted to make things better for refugees by bringing back more security to the citadel. She depended on Elijah Khan to help her. At that moment, Brooks commed with her location.
"Commander, I'm upstairs by the grate leading to the shaft. But there's a problem. Can you meet me?", Brooks asked.

Shepard politely excused herself, finding the staircase to the upper level with Garrus in tow. Upstairs, pass a dance floor that was directly across a bar, Brooks stood in front of a grate. Her omni-tool glowing from a scan. Shepard approached her as Brooks looked up. "Okay, right. Just like we thought. There's an alarm on the grate.", she glanced to it.

"We'll have to bypass it.", Shepard pointed out.

Brooks handed her a pair of contact lenses,"Dr T'Soni gave me this to pass to you. It's a resonance emitter lens. It should let you see security grids and wiring."

Shepard took the lenses, promptly putting them over her eyes. A yellow glow covered her irises as they activated. "Good. I'll follow the wiring to a junction box, splice it, and disable the alarm."

"Yeah, fingers crossed!", Brooks hoped.

Immediately, Shepard could see a blue wired crossing, looping inside the walls of the casino. "The lens is working."

"Good. Follow it.", Liara replied. Shepard turned around from the grate, following the wiring as Liara said. The loud music of the dance floor blared in her left ear, but she continued to ignore it. Liara's voice came back on comms,"In case it needs to be said, don't try to bypass a camera while
you're being watched."

"Well, obviously.\". Shepard thought.

After a minute of getting through the crowd of people, Shepard spotted the wall junction. "I see a junction in the wall, but there's a camera watching it.\", she whispered in her comms.

"Shepard. I'm sending a hack to your omni-tool. It will fool the camera, but it'll self-delete after a few seconds.\", Liara informed.

"Got it.\", Shepard stood in front of the security camera, ready to bypass it. Quickly programming the hack to disrupt the camera. When it was done, she had less than ten seconds to put the splice through. "It's in."

"Good. I've got the grate open, and...in we go!\", Brooks said hesitantly. "Act casual. This could take a while."

So, it was time to mingle, again. Shepard spoke to other politicians, wealthy charity owners and the occasional business man. They all either lost profits due to the Reapers, or complained about citadel problems. Too many refugees and not enough security was the hot topic of the evening.

At the bar, Satima watched, waiting if Shepard needed her. She gave two asari, tequilas. Acting casual, sure.

Satima wonders if Shepard knew she hacked the comms, and that she could've easily bypassed those cameras for them. But, this is not her mission. It's theirs. And hers is to keep Shepard alive, and stop the Reapers. Somehow.

After a quick look around the dance floor, Shepard walked to the bar. She didn't see Satima, who had been speaking to an asari about local food. The bar tender spoke, telling Shepard about the complimentary drinks. She inclined to have one. "Nothing too crazy. I want to be able to walk a straight line.\", she commented.

"Thessia Temple, coming up.\", the bar tender said.

"Are asari drinks usually mild?\", Shepard asked, curious.

The bar tender continued, saying that Mr. Khan had them put out gelatin shots. Even though it's also asari, they kick like a shotgun.

Shepard shrugged her shoulders and took a gelatin. It punched her taste buds, all right. She winced from the immediate shock of pure liquor, enjoying the fruity after taste. "You want one you can drink?\", she turned to Garrus. He already had a glass of whiskey in his hand. "No thanks. I'm good with this.\", he smiled with his mandibles widening out.

Satima heard them talking. She swiveled on a bar stool around to meet them. "So, here you are! Anything exciting happening yet?\", she asked.

Shepard nearly choked on a gelatin shot, "No!\", she blurted in surprise.

Satima's round face lit up in amusement as she chuckled out loud, looking pleasant and happy. "You are quite sneaky, Satima.\", Shepard commented, agitated.

"I have to be. Well, you know where I am, that is-if you need me.\", she ordered another round of shots for a group.
Shepard glanced to the large windows in front of them, thinking of starting a conversation when her comms came back on. It was Brooks. "Commander!", she whispered loudly.

"What?", Shepard returned in a whisper.

She had already left the bar, back downstairs to the main lobby. Brooks continued, "There's a guard right below me.", she whispered back.

"Don't panic. I'll get his attention.", Shepard spoke in a low tone.

Shepard approached the guard, who was using his visor to scan the area. She told him she saw someone using drugs in the lady's room. He asked what kind of chems were being abused, with Shepard revealing the substance to be red sand. The guard quickly called back up about the unknown sand-tripper, and left the area. "You're clear Brooks.", Shepard informed.

"Thanks, Commander. I'll see if I can get into the panic room.", Brooks acknowledged.

"And I'll get back to blending in. Slow and steady. We'll get to Khan.", Shepard said with sureness.

Around the other side of the gambling machines, Shepard spotted a familiar asari sitting at a booth to the wall. She looked like Sha'ira. The asari glanced to Shepard, smiling. "Commander Shepard.

"Sha'ira. It's been a long time.", Shepard replied.

Sha'ira chuckled lightly, setting her drink down on the table. "My idea of a long time is different than yours, Commander.

Shepard shrugged, "What can I say? I put a lot of living into the last few years.

"Indeed.", Sha'ira agreed.

"Do you have any advice for me this time?", Shepard asked.

Sha'ira set her glass of green liquor on the table in front of her. She settled a wise and sincere gaze on the commander. "Win.

Shepard nodded. That or die trying. She said her goodbye to Sha'ira, who seemed more intrigued by a new drink set in front of her. Winning. If that were so easy. "Umm...", it was Brooks again.

"Talk to me, Brooks.", Shepard spoke.

"I've got a pressure pad and an obstruction detector ahead. I can't disable them from here.", Brooks worried.

"Okay. EDI, I need a tech solution. Brooks, stay put, we'll find some junctions and take down the sensors.", Shepard ordered.

Brooks agreed to wait as Liara informed Shepard to follow the red wiring.

Satima watched from the crowded tables at the holographic varren races. She tried an alcoholic fruity drink that was ordered for an asari group, while ignoring the complaints. Plenty of men and a few asari stared and gawked at her. How can these people sit and enjoy their drinks, laugh at empty jokes, when the Reapers are destroying everything? How? Their desperate smiles sickened her.

Shepard and Garrus discreetly disrupt cameras, misleading security guards as they get closer to the
VIP room. They stand by when Brooks contacts her via comms. "I'm at the storage room grate. Time to hit the lock."

"Be careful, Brooks.", Shepard says with concern.

Brooks informs Shepard she stepped into an infrared laser hooked to a silent alarm. Garrus overheard, shaking his head at such a rookie mistake. EDI alerted Shepard that she could call the responding guard, but she needed Shepard to stall him before he reaches Brooks.

She walked hurriedly to the one guard making a b-line to the back room. Past crowds and around a quasar vendor, she nearly ran into him. "Hey!", she shouted towards him.

"Just calm down. I'm trying to do three different things here.", he said annoyed.

Shepard crossed her arms, tapping her foot impatiently as he received a call. EDI hacked his omni-tool's comms system. In the guise of a male guard, she successfully misguided him away from the storage area. The guard finished his message, quickly asking Shepard what she wanted. She replied with thinking he was a friend wearing the same suit. The guard walked away, disgruntled.

Brooks thanked the Commander for the diversion. She hastily made her way to the panic room. Shepard mingled her way to the varren race tables, where Satima had been watching. After a few chats with the most conceited and ignorant people this side of the citadel, Brooks commed Shepard again. "Okay, so now I think you just need to get to me. I'm on the other side of the security gate."

"Right. Have you bypassed the camera back there?", Shepard asked.

Garrus played casual, handing a small drink to her. They stood together next to a waterfall.

"Well, I got my side. Yours is still on, though. We need to finish this before someone comes by.", Brooks said.

Shepard set her drink down, "Hang tight. I'll get to you."

Just as she was about to enter the security gate entrance, another comm call came through. "Shepard"

"Satima? Where the hell are you?", Shepard asked annoyed, looking around the area.

"Something doesn't add up here. I don't trust Brooks.", Satima sat behind a crowd of asari.

Shepard walked to the entrance. "Look, Satima..."

"It's just a feeling, alright. Be careful.", Satima ended the call.

Shepard spotted the junction on the wall she needed to hack on her right. This room is filled with security guards, so she must tactfully distract the ones closest to her. Garrus distracted the wandering guard in front of the junction with small talk.

Shepard quickly disrupted the camera, needing to slip out of the sight of the guard in front of the entrance to the panic room.

A group of people talking in his sight could provide cover if she got caught. Garrus's conversation was getting short. She tried hacking the camera watching the panic room door, but nearly got caught, when Satima came up from nowhere. Taking the guard unsuspectingly by the arm, and pulling him away with a wicked smile.

Shepard shook her head and continued with the hack. The door opened with Shepard running in
first. Satima had lost the attention of the guard before he looked down the entrance. She and Garrus exchanged looks, sneaking around the guard carefully to catch up.

Brooks stood in front of the door, with a surprised look when Satima came in. They all walked to the desk with Khan turned in his chair, facing the fireplace. The dark room had an ominous atmosphere. Something wasn't right. "Khan, you and I are going to have a talk.", Shepard demanded, arms crossed.

Khan gave no answer or sign of movement. Garrus tilted his head in curiosity at the man. He walked to the chair and turned it for everyone to see the dead arms dealer.

"What the hell?", Brooks said astonished.

"Told you.", Satima warned with a glare towards Shepard.

Garrus shook his head dismissively, "And here I had this bad-cop routine all planned."

Satima lightly chuckled to herself. Shepard glanced her way before returning an annoyed glare back to the scene. Brooks quickly typed away at a terminal on the desk. "Commander! There's a deletion order on the terminal.", she informed frantically.

Shepard shoved forward, as Brooks let her on the terminal. "Damn it!", Shepard swore aloud. She tried typing in any hack that would stop it. Someone extremely skilled at tech did this.

"Everything's been wiped. I don't know if it was him, or the killer, or-When I tripped that alarm, did I screw this up?", Brooks asked upset.

Satima began pacing around Brooks, glaring. "Let's see. Did we check for any alarms, wires and maybe infrared lasers?", she quipped sarcastically. Brooks looked at the girl in a confused stare. Satima continued, "Your whole execution in this mission has been shit! Either you're a complete klutz or... lying." Satima hid a small blade under the omni-gauntlet of her waitress suit, narrowing her gaze in accusation.

Brook's mouth opened and she began to stammer. "I-I didn't ask to be here! I'm willingly helping the Commander, because it's my duty. Excuse me for being new at this. I didn't realize you were such an expert!"

"I am.", Satima began to argue, "Shepard should've chose me!"

"Enough!", Shepard shouted as she attempted to scan the computer further.

Garrus stood in between Satima and Brooks, "We don't have the time for this. Satima, stop being paranoid. Brooks, Shepard will figure out what happened. Alright!", he stared them both down.

Brooks looked away with her arms crossed, stamping her foot once like a juvenile. Satima let out a curt smile, and walked away to the door, watching out for any guards.

"Ok. Now, if I can get back to fixing this...", Shepard gestured at the terminal. Not forgetting the excellent point Satima brought up. Brooks slowly walked back to the terminal with Shepard. "What are you looking for?", Her tone less timid, more curious.

"Mistakes.", Shepard informed.

After a few more typed commands, a ping echoed from the terminal. "Thought so. Whoever it was had to do this fast. They wiped the terminal, but not the comm.", Shepard said with satisfaction.
Brooks seemed nervous, quickly letting out a reason to take the terminal back. "Oh. So, we can take the comm back to the safe house to scan it, or..."

Shepard pressed the comm call back to the last recipient. A static screen came on behind them over the fireplace. "Elijah. Come crawling back?" It was the same dark voiced villain that Elijah threatened to expose.

"Guess again.", Shepard said smugly.

Brooks started a trace with her omni-tool.

"You. I see you've recovered from flopping on the floor like a fish.", the mysterious figure mused.

Satima leaned back on the wall. "Lame.", she retorted.

Shepard continued, "You'll need to do better than that. The last guy that trash-talked me was a few kilometers taller than you."

"Brave. I thought as much, but it won't matter. You have nothing. All you can do is wait for the hammer to fall.", the figure warned.

Shepard became angry, "Why do this? What did I do to you?"

"I'm going to take everything you have and everything you are.", the figure said ominously.

The static screen shut down. "Damn it! Sorry, Commander. There wasn't enough time to trace the call.", Brooks said apologetically.

Garrus followed Shepard, he overlooked the area many times during the comm call, but it seemed wiped clean. Hastily. Shepard walked quickly to the desk, glancing to the dead body of Elijah Khan. "We're not finished. Pull out the data drives.", she demanded.

Satima immediately began pulling the data drives out, while Brooks argued the possibility of finding something. "The ones that got wiped? You think we can find something?"

"With EDI, anything's possible. The sooner we get them to her, the sooner we can track down this threat.", Shepard assured.

Brooks nodded in understanding, watching Satima carry the data drives, following Shepard out the door. Garrus followed behind, as she narrowed her gaze into a nasty glare. "Meddlesome alien.", Brooks thought.

Back at the apartment, Garrus made his own comment for the night. "Hell, of party. Well, unless you were the host. Didn't end so well for him."

"It wasn't a total loss. Brooks, work with EDI to see if there's anything useful on those drives.", Shepard ordered.

"Here's hoping! I'll let you know what we find, Commander.", Brooks eagerly took the drives from Satima, setting to work on them with EDI in the dining room.

Satima looked on, suspicious of Brooks and her intentions in all this. Duty her ass. Shepard glanced to Satima. "I want to talk to you upstairs. Follow me."

Garrus stepped to the side, wandering off to one of the many rooms to himself. Satima followed Shepard up the stairs. They stopped inside the large bedroom. Shepard closed the door and began to
undress into something more casual. She noticed Satima's uncomfortable gaze. "Oh. I'm sorry. I forgot you have a problem with other people seeing you-except for tonight apparently."

Shepard gestured toward the young girl's disguise. Satima pulled the skirt down nervously, "Well, it was all I could find in a hurry. And... I think I can manage to get out of this horrible suit in front of you."

Shepard had always been used to undressing in front of her fellow squad-mates and female crew. It was the military. She had quickly changed when noticing Satima's rare hybrid form. Satima put her usual armor back on, feeling much better. Noting the commander's awkward stance. "Sometimes, it's hard for me to find something that fits right. Considering.", Satima spoke, feeling a little exposed.

Shepard finished with her casual attire. "It's ok, Satima.", she tried to smile. "You don't have to excuse anything." She then had a brief image of Satima as a young girl. Small framed, and dealing with the little carapace that forced a slight slouch in the poor girls back. Satima had to of been uncomfortable in anything human fitted.

Maybe, when the reapers are dead and gone, and the galaxy is back to normal. Shepard can afford with her hero's wages, a tailor to make clothes specially for Satima. The wholesome thought brought a distant smile to her face. Puzzling the hybrid as she began to leave the now silent room.

Downstairs, Garrus took a moment to send a message to his father. They were safe at a small colony in the Terminus system, for now. Since his new military standing, Garrus had the pull to do this, and it was damn important too. He gulped, already regretting the message.

"Dad, I'm afraid. This war against the Reapers is eating Shepard alive, inside and out. I can't stop it, only bandage the hurt she feels.; he stops. Thinking the best way to reveal this troubled predicament.

"There's something else...it's hard to say. Spirits Father, I don't know how to explain this to you. But...I think I have a child... or something like that. When you get this, if you can, let me know how you and Sol are. And maybe send me a little advice along the way. Your Son, G."

He quickly left the second room, venturing upstairs.

Moments later, Shepard emerged from her room to join Garrus on the balcony. He overlooked the bottom floor, gazing out of the large windows into the strip, turning to her with a smile. "To borrow a phrase from Vega: you looked smoking in that dress, Shepard.", Garrus complemented. "You got some looks. So, did I, though the ones directed at me said," How did a turian like that get a girl like her?" Hell, if I know."

Shepard stood by him, nudging his arm, "I could ask myself the same question.", she smiled.

He leaned on her, sighing. "Ever wonder how many people question why we're together?"

She quickly glanced to him, before returning her gaze towards the windows. "Sometimes. There's so much diversity in this galaxy, I don't think it should be too strange that a turian and a human have affection for each other." Shepard smirked, "We can always claim it's to better the relations between our species. Smooth things over from the contact war."

Garrus chuckled, "Ouch." He looked down to the floor below the balcony. "You know, I wasn't even born yet at that time."

"Yeah", she laughed, resuming a solemn stare.
He looked to her, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. "How long were you an orphan on Earth?"

"Since I could remember.", she answered. Shepard shook the feeling, and grinned. "If you're trying to discuss our age differences, Garrus. I think you should stop while you're ahead.", she eyed him. "I may have been a few years older than you back a couple years ago, but being dead for two years has pretty much made us equal. Lazarus project and all."

Garrus knew she was burying the subject of her childhood. He accepted in respect, and smirked. "Couldn't resist my boyish charms?"

Shepard let out a surprise laugh. "More like juvenile charms!"

After a moment of them exchanging jokes, she jogged down the stairs, straight to the dining room of the kitchen. Her crew had been casually enjoying the apartment, taking in the comfortable scenery. Every member of her team deserved this place, not only to relax but to prepare for the battle to come. Shepard approached the table where EDI and Brooks stood.

"I think we've got something, Commander.", Brooks informed.

"I am glad to see my physical proximity was not necessary to the success of the mission, Shepard.", EDI commented.

"Let's see what you find before we call it a win.", Shepard replies.

Brooks brought up a holo panel over the tables edge. "Commander, EDI and I have been analyzing those drivers. I think we found something if you're ready."

"Let's hear it.", Shepard eagerly replied.

Everyone came to the table, for the briefing. "Though the data's root structure was erased, the logic integrity remains viable.", EDI reported.

"EDI has an incredible talent for this stuff. I know she's an AI, but even still. We found an encrypted communication from a few days ago, just need another minute to crack it.", Brooks informed.

She bent over the panel, carefully hacking the data. Joker stepped to the table with a smirk, "A whole minute? EDI here could shave that down to five seconds."

EDI continued, "I thought it best to allow Staff Analyst Brooks a chance to improve her decryption skills."

"And now you've lost your chance to show off.", Joker mused.

Satima smiled while sniggering. This was a treat to watch. A part of her saddened on how she will miss this, having to probably leave after the reapers are dead. If they manage it.

Brooks leaned back with crossed arms in admiration, "Like she needs it. You're the crew of the Normandy. You're legends to the rest of the Alliance."

This intrigued Shepard, "Legends can be good or bad. Which are we?"

Brooks continued with added enthusiasm, "You're the kind that people look up to. The kind they owe their lives to."

Wrex scoffed, "Then how come everyone's always shooting at us?"
"I think it's mostly you, Wrex. The bigger the target, the bigger the...uh, target.", Tali spoke awkwardly.

"You're saying I've gained weight?", Wrex replied upset.

Shepard covered her face, shaking her head, while the rest of the room became silent. "It just means there's more of the legend to love.", Liara replied quickly much to everyone's relief. Wrex gave an angry growl towards the weight comment. "Just because he isn't as graceful as an asari or as agile as a quarian...", Satima grinned.

Liara and Tali exchanged glances, while Wrex curiously stared at Satima, then laughed. His deep roar echoing in the room.

A moment later, he quieted down. The whole atmosphere became unpleasant. "Uh...so, continuing. And... and the camaraderie, the friendship? I think that's your secret weapon.", Brooks said nervously.

Coming back from the oddest moment in Normandy team history, Shepard replied to Brooks comment. "It's all just part of the job." She quickly glanced to the team, especially Wrex. Hoping for no more antics.

"Wait..."job?" You mean the rest of you are getting paid for this?", Garrus joked.

A few short laughs later, the panel pinged blue with information. "Here we go. Wow. Those mercs who were after you? They bought a lot of weapons. Like, big ones."

A holo image of a mech displayed in front of the Normandy model above the table. "Mechs? What do they need that kind of firepower for?", Ashley wondered aloud.

Glyph flew by, scanning the image then started glowing red. "I have just monitored the commander's Spectre access code in use at the Citadel Archives."

"Punch it up.", Shepard ordered.

Another holo display of the archive station hovered above the tables surface. "The archives are going into emergency lockdown. Whoever's hacking your records is there right now?" Brooks exclaimed.

"What do we know about the place?", Shepard asked

Garrus faced Shepard, "Council keeps sensitive historical information there. Real hush-hush. Even my old C-Sec clearance never got me in."

"Then we'll find our own way in. Gear up, and let's-", Shepard stopped short in front of a volus. He held up a flat carton to her, "Delivery" he said. She turned to James and the rest of the team, "What's with the volus?"

"Oh. Pizza-delivery guy. I got the munchies.", James replied.

"Double pepperoni.", the delivery volus said to them.

"What's a pizza?", Satima asked suddenly.

"The most awesomely delicious, cheesy, meat covered food ever. Seriously the only food you will ever need.", James exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"Ah. So... it's good?", Satima asked.
"Yes!", James replied happily.

With that little conversation over, Shepard stared at the volus in annoyance while Brooks continued her analysis, "These archives are huge. You'll have a lot of ground to cover. Shame you can't bring everyone."

Shepard turned around with a smile, "Who says we can't? All hands-on deck for this one."

"Hell, yeah. But, uh, who gets to take point with you?", James asked curious.

Wrex and Javik both looked at Shepard with their "ahems". Tali follows along with Liara. Then a louder ahem comes at Shepard from the front of the kitchen, "Who's going to pay the bill?", the volus asks, irritated.

With the volus paid, the whole team prepares for the mission to the archives. Satima approaches Shepard in the closet as she changes into armor. "So, I heard you're taking Wrex and Liara. I need to accompany you, watch your back from whoever this bad guy is", Satima pleaded.

"I can handle myself. Satima, what's got you so spooked?", Shepard asked concerned.

"This person that's after you, I think... just be careful.", Satima warned.

"I will.", Shepard added.

The sky cars carrying the squads zoomed over the wards. Hastily reaching their destination. "What's the best way into the archives?", Shepard asked over comms.

Brooks sat beside James in their sky car, "The facility is located below the Wards. Maybe a direct breach for maximum surprise?"

"I like it. Sounds like you're learning the ropes.", Shepard replied.

"Hell, hang out with us long enough, and you'll learn ropes, knives, bombs, thresher maws...", Cortez jested.

"But don't hang out too long, or pretty soon you'll be making friends with asari.", Wrex bantered.

"I heard that.", Liara replied.

The sky cars landed on the roofing above the archive station, viewing the background of a few districts. Hopefully no one will notice the small raid that was about to happen. Everyone piled out, coming together for a quick briefing before hitting the archives. Can't ruin the element of surprise. "The archives are somewhere below us. It could be pretty tricky to get in there.", Brooks informed.

James held a small bomb, "Not really."

With the bomb planted, they took a giant step back as it exploded the metal panel inward to the floor below. Chunks of debris flew out as shrapnel. "Hell, James!", Ashley shouted in annoyed surprise. "I told you to take a step back, bella.", he winked at her.

Shepard observed that little moment with a bit of surprise herself and shook her head in amusement. Wrex soon hopped down with eagerness,"Krogan first! See you at the party, princesses!"

With Liara in tow, Ashley and Tali followed, as well as EDI and Javik. James waited for Satima who was next. "After you, princess lola.", he grinned.
Satima gave him a confused expression before leaping down. Garrus stood next to Shepard, "Listen, Shepard...I uh, I would really like to discuss this whole Satima situation. When we have time." He glanced down a little awkwardly, seeming a bit out of place from his comment.

"Yeah, okay. We can do that." she replied with a smile. They both jumped down last, Shepard still replaying the hilarious confused look Satima had, being called "princess lola."

The team climbed down a ladder from the shaft they had come through as Shepard uncovered a vent. She led them down into a large room, rowed with desks and workstations. The ceiling held a giant model of the citadel, with glowing wards as lights inside the structure. Upstairs, Garrus and Tali, along with Satima cautiously cleared the area, until they were met with red lasers on their bodies.

Shepard looked down to see the same red lasers targeting her, "Not this again...", she complained.

Cat6 mercs ran into the room, firing their weapons. "Ambush!", Wrex yelled. Shepard took a few hits, nothing her shielding couldn't handle. She ran behind a wall, "Scatter and take cover!"

"In the old days, we had at least five minutes before the mission went south.", Wrex shouted.

He plowed into an unsuspecting merc, sending the body flying over a desk. Garrus fired his rifle on a group sneaking around the workstations towards the other team. Tali let loose with her tech, bringing down their shielding. "Shepard brought the full crew!", a merc lieutenant shouted in fear. "Box them in!", the merc captain replied.

Shepard dashed forward, sniping a specialist off the catwalks above. "Brooks, you okay?"

Brooks sounded frantic, "Upstairs! Scattering and taking cover!"

Liara sent a singularity, catching two snipers. Satima held her own against a merc, using her deadly skills more efficiently. "Satima, I see you're getting better at this.", Shepard shouted.

"Practice makes perfect!", she dispatched another merc quickly.

"Aren't you proud, Shepard.", Wrex laughed.

Tali took cover with Ashley who was firing on a squad of mercs. "Hold on. What is he talking about?", Ashley asked.

Four cat6 mercs sprinted through, flanking Shepard. Garrus and Wrex worked together on the troops above the room on the catwalks, while EDI used her droid strength to subdue the third group coming through the door. Shepard rose to meet the last merc trailing in, when he fell dead suddenly. Satima stood behind him, "Oh, sorry. You can kill the next one.", she smirked. Shepard raised her brow to the girl.

"Didn't you get the memo, bella? There's more to our newest crew member than meets the eye. Am I right, Garrus?", James chuckled loudly.

Garrus sulked behind a wall, holding the mantis tightly to his chest. Spirits, everyone knows? He took a deep breath, emerging from the side of the wall, taking out two specialists on the catwalk. "I'm kind of busy right now, Vega.", he replied.

Amid the shootout, a figure above the stairs yelled while holding Brooks hostage, "That's enough!" Everyone stopped, only to be temporarily captured. "Drop your weapons, or this won't end well for her."
"You bitch.", Brooks cursed in gritted teeth. Struggling against her captor.

"All right...", Shepard laid her weapons down. Satima was pushed forward next to her, warily eying the figure above, as her heart pounded hard from the eerie surprise. Brooks had been pushed by the figure to the floor below, where Shepard and her squad stood.

"Whatever you think you're getting away with...", Brooks got up, running to Shepard's side, "...there's nowhere you can run, nowhere you can hide where we can't find you.", Shepard warned. Satima glanced to Brooks who seemed too calm for someone that was just a hostage.

The figure smirked, "Hide? Why?" She stepped into the lighting of the room, "I'm Commander Shepard. I never hide." The real Shepard stared in disbelief. Everyone couldn't believe it either. Another Shepard? But how? "Shen zisk na...", Satima muttered in another language.

"Uh-huh. So, that's how it's going to be.", Wrex concluded.

"Who are you?", Shepard asked stunned.

The clone confronted Shepard, "You weren't the only Shepard that Cerberus brought back to life, but at least one of us will finally do something with it."

Shepard was stunned. A clone? An exact replica of herself? "Where did you come from?", she asked curiously.

"The same DNA as you.", she scoffs.

"A clone.", Wrex answers.

Satima starts to feel queasy. Everything here is familiar to a fault. Clones... what is it with the bad guys and damn clones! The whole team is ready to fight, ready to dispatch this thing, but they waited on Shepard. Letting her get the answers to the reason this is happening.

The clone begins to pace around her, "Cerberus spared no expense resurrecting you. With me. I was created for spare parts in case you needed another arm, or a heart, or a lung."

Shepard couldn't imagine what this clone went through at the hands of the Illusive man. "Where have you been this whole time?"

"In a coma... until I woke up six months ago. While you were in a jail cell on Earth, I was learning to be human.", the clone informed. Satima glanced at Shepard in surprise. Incarcerated? On Earth?

Shepard had flashbacks of when she first woke up on the Cerberus station. Scarred and sore. Was that all a ruse? Is she a clone also? The other Shepard continued, "Amazing what a person can do with enough neural implants."

"If you're really me, then we're on the same team.", Shepard replied.

"We're not even in the same league.", the clone responded with spite.

Shepard became uneasy, "Did the Illusive Man send you?"

"No. He abandoned me when he had what he wanted. You.", she answered.

"Then why are you trying to kill us?", Liara asked.

The clone turned away, pacing towards the door, "Because I don't have her memories. I'd never fool
my supposed friends. The ones that abandoned their duty to join the cult of Shepard."

Satima scoffed. The clone glared towards her, then to Liara."Like you, Doctor T'Soni. You're nothing more than a college cheerleader pretending to be a soldier. Or Garrus Vakarian. Your dear... sweet, burnt out, old turian cop, Shepard.\n\n\n\nthe clone smirked. "Turning heads with the scandal of your... close relations.\n\n"You're just an imitation of the real thing!\n\nGarrus replied from the balcony.

The clone stepped forward to them, "I'm the real thing PERFECTED!\n\nI'm you without the wear and tear, Shepard. The doubts, the failures. I'm the lone wolf you were always meant to be.\n\nShe glanced to the crew upstairs, and all around, "Without the emotional baggage holding me back."

"You're delusional.\n\nSatima replied. Shepard snapped to her, hoping she would keep her mouth shut. The clone stepped in front of Satima. "Oh, look. If it isn't my emotionally disturbed daughter.\n\nLiara gasped to herself. Who the hell leaked her information?!\n
"I'm not your daughter, you spare parts bitch!\n\nSatima shouting, struggling against the hold of two cat6 mercs. The clone smacked the girl hard across the mouth, causing her lower lip to bleed. "Watch your mouth, hybrid. It can get you into a lot of trouble.\n\nShepard started forward, only to be held back by mercs. She could take them, but the risk is too much. Meanwhile, Garrus watched on with confused emotions. Should he be worried? Satima defended Shepard time and time again. But is it enough to convince him of her real intentions?\n
"No one will ever believe you're Shepard.\n\nWrex warned.\n
"They will when I'm flying her ship.\n\ndeclared with a smirk.\n
Shepard immediately commed the Normandy trying to initiate an emergency lock down, but the clone had already scanned her codes. How could she make such a rookie mistake? The clone blocked the signal, making it impossible for Shepard to warn the ship's crew.\n
Clone Shepard sent a message to Traynor, prepping the Normandy for an emergency departure, and Traynor believed it! Shepard's anger towards the clone became hostile. She no longer felt pity, but a murderous rage inside. "Never thought I'd say it, but I'm looking forward to killing myself."

Clone Shepard was taken aback, "I guess ominous threats of violence run in our dna, but mine is more than a threat.\n\nshe turned around towards the door, "Execute them, except the hybrid. The cult of Shepard ends today.\n\nThe clone disappeared through the door.\n
Shepard looks down to her gun on the floor, then back to the enormous citadel model hanging above. Grabbing the gun, she shoots one of the glass arms to the structure. It cracks quickly, breaking into hundreds of dangerous shards.\n\nShe moves out of the way, as the model falls on top of mercs. The team scatters again, finding cover from the remaining cat6's firing on them. "We still got everyone?\n\nShepard yells worried.\n
"We're on the balcony!\n\nTali informs. "I'm okay, too.\n\nBrooks shouts.\n
Shepard kills a merc, running up the stairs to cover, "Where's everyone else?"\n
"Other side!\n\nCortez reassures loudly.
"On high ground with a sniper rifle. Doesn't get any better than this!", Garrus shouts.

Everyone replies sarcastically to the battle, except one person. "Satima! Satima, are you in cover?", Shepard asks over comms. No reply. Then a static message is sent. "She can't talk right now. I gave her a time out." It was the clone.

"Dammit! She's got Satima!", Shepard shouts upset.

"Don't worry. We'll get to her, Commander!", Ashley reassures.

"No one takes off with family.", Wrex yells.

The merc captain orders his men to kill Shepard's crew, but he was replied with how they have a krogan. Shepard laughed. "Wouldn't want to be you, princesses!", Wrex warned.

"Shit. That's a prothean over there!", a merc yelled in fear. "And that's a future corpse over there!", Javik quipped back.

Shepard watched her crew dispatch mercs across the room. One of them ran backwards behind a wall. "I think that turian they've got is Archangel! How the hell are we going to kill him?"

"You're not!", Garrus replies. "Oh shit!", the lieutenant merc shouts. "Then maybe the other Shepard should've stuck around to help!"

Shepard sniped a specialist on the balcony, "I guess you picked the wrong leader.", she said. The merc fell to Liara,"We're clear! Now where'd the other you go?"

Shepard bypassed the first door leading inside the archive station, "She's pushing into the archives. Stay in your groups! Team Mako, you're on point"  

"Right, what's a mako?", Brooks interrupted.

"Something we could use right about now.", Liara mused.

Shepard ran ahead swiftly. "Team Hammerhead, cover the flank!" She took cover behind a desk inside an office. "Got it! And the Mako's got nothing on the Hammerhead.", Cortez shouted.

Shepard and her team ran through a scanning terminal, entering level two of the archive station. Through the door, they came upon a huge opening, lined with metal cylinders and scanners. Catwalks as well as balconies provided the means of getting around. "Huh. Big place.", Wrex commented.

"Shepard, what do you think your clone is looking for in here?", Tali asked.

Shepard led her team forward, glancing to her two other teams on the catwalks above. "At this point, anything's possible.", she replied.

"Like waking up and finding out you have a clone?", Ashley smirked.

"I don't want to talk about it.", Shepard warned.

Shepard had glyph track her clone's location. She's got Satima and clearly has something big planned. The entire place was a maze. Team mako above her and hammerhead to the right. Traversing this place as an employee must be a nightmare.

Ahead up the stairs of the balcony, they ran into another squad of cat6 mercs. A platform came down with heavy fire on Shepard and her teams. "There they are! The other Shepard's still alive!", the merc
"Take her down! I need more time to find the vault!", the clone ordered.

These weren't the mercs from before. They were all cat6 heavies. Each merc had double the shielding and plenty of fire power. An exceptional challenge for Shepard and crew. Wrex rammed his way through the small squad as Shepard and Liara picked them off.

With the specialists quickly dispatched, Shepard proceeded to the platform. "Shepard, step into that lift, and we can lower you from here.", Tali informed her.

Lowered onto the next platform, a vault with a barrier comes sliding through a rail system. "Now if you get into the vault, we can move you across.", Brooks said.

"Accessing vault T91.", a VI echoes.

The vault moved quickly, with enough harsh stops to prevent Shepard from keeping her footing. She spots a gun inside a display case. M-7 Lancer. "Look at this. It says this gun was part of the First Contact War. Year 2157." Liara reads. Wrex smirks, "Yeah, back when humans and turians were at each other's throats."

The vault halted to another platform. Shepard and team hastily get off, as glyph approaches them. He informs her that the other "her" is searching for something just 200 meters ahead. They were getting close. Wrex commented about fighting your own clone, while Ashley thought it would be a useful idea to send a clone instead of the real person on a dangerous mission.

Shepard didn't want to talk about it. They came to an opening between vaults, hopping down to a vault roof. Lined together in rows, next to other catwalks and balcony's.

"Dagger squad! I need more time to reach the vault! This little bitch is proving to be a handful.", the clone yelled over her comms.

"Shepard! I'm at th..." There was a hard hit, followed by a thud. Shepard felt time was running out.

"The other Shepard sounds like a real asshole!", Cortez shouts angrily. "Watch out for disruption drones!", Tali yelled.

Shepard used her rifle against a sniper specialist across the vaults. Her other teams making quick work of the remaining enemy. Her clone sending wave after wave to their deaths. How she held such command over these men and women with her own tyrannical behavior, perplexed Shepard. But she wasn't going to let them or the clone stop her.

Pink lights reflected the metal surfaces of the vaults around them. Making the mercs armor stick out like a sore thumb. "Team mako moving ahead! Catch you on the other side!", Garrus informs.

"Maybe we can circle around them on the tubes?", Wrex asked.

Down another catwalk and over crates, they run into the last of the mercs on this floor. Shepard skillfully snipes them down, as Liara used her biotic powers to whittle their shields and confuse the mercs. Wrex barely gets a shot in. "Shepard! They've got us pinned down! We could use some help!". Tali shouted over comms.

"On our way!", Shepard yelled, leaping over crates.

Up ahead, Shepard could hear the mercs firing on her team. "We've got Shepard's squad
surrounded!", the merc captain blared over comms.

"Eliminate them! I need more time!", the clone demanded.

Shepard snipes the first two mercs holding Tali and Javik down. James uses his carnage ability on a small group over the catwalk. Bloody gore covering the surrounding metal crates as their bodies exploded. Liara follows that with a singularity, leaving the remaining mercs helpless.

"Wrex! Get them off our family!", Shepard shouts in excited anger. Wrex bellows a roar that instilled pure fear into the mercs.

Some of them fled but were too slow, as Wrex rammed into them. Tearing their armor apart all the while enduring bullet spray. Shepard opened fire on three more specialists trying to flank Garrus. Shepard runs forward, her path clears to shoot a sniper on a catwalk. She turns around to face the stairs, as more oncoming mercs show up. "Go! I'll cover you!", she yells.

Her teams hastily climb a ladder to the next level balcony above. Shepard became quickly overwhelmed, she ran for the ladder only to be deterred by a stray bullet. "This is Shepard, we need...", above her, the entire team took aim and fired on the mercs. It was a short and brutal end for them. Shepard climbed the ladder.

"That's why I love hanging with you guys! Why shoot something once when you can shoot it 46 more times!", Wrex replied nostalgically.

Everyone laughed, as Shepard appeared on the balcony. Garrus ran up to her, "You alright?", he asked concerned. Shepard squeezed his arm, "I'm good."

"Well, if you two are done "checking" each other...", Ashley smiled.

"The... other me-can't be far. Keep up the pressure, and we'll try to surround her. Let's move.", Shepard led on.

Shepard's team found themselves staring at holo images of the past. The citadel's first recordings of a human prisoner by turians.

Past a door, they ventured down to level three. The next room had many holo images of past recordings, along with mercs waiting to ambush Shepard caught a glimpse of a krogan warlord attacking the council. "Imagine the history of this place. It must stretch back thousands of years.", Liara wondered.

"I just wonder what the other me is looking for in here.", Shepard pondered out loud.

"I know it's not dancing tips.", Wrex replied with a smirk.

"Shut up, Wrex.", Shepard warned.

They were assaulted by detonation drones, sent to deplete their shields to make them vulnerable to weapons fire. Between Liara's singularity and Wrex's brute force, these cat6 mercs didn't stand a chance. Shepard lobbed lift grenades to expose merc squads, leaving them injured and slow. "This is Hammerhead! Enemy contact ahead, Shepard! We'll draw their fire!", Ashley alerted them.

Merc lieutenants shouted commands to each other, warning their squads of Shepard's teams. One lieutenant feared Wrex, screaming the order for someone to kill him.

Wrex replied, challenging that someone to try! The mercs all cursed to themselves, afraid to admit
their hesitance to confront the krogan. Shepard looked across the office room, a glaring white sign with the number 3 strained her eyes. It was quite dark in these offices.

Striking red or blue lights gave illumination to certain areas. Up above as she gazed, a sniper specialist took aim towards her. The sniper missed, meeting an equal end by a bullet of Garrus's rifle. Moments later, it was over on this level. "I think we got them all, well I mean you guys did.", Brooks commed.

"Hammerhead and Mako, keep pushing ahead.", Shepard ordered.

Shepard and team rushed through to the fourth level. She passed by more holo images of the citadel's past. So much rich history displaying before her, shame she couldn't stop long enough to get more of the stories. A recording of the first VI uprisings, the Spectre offer to a salarian, the first asari boarding the citadel.

And of course, the Reapers. In the distance of the fourth floor, the merc captain yelled his orders for his team to stop them. The mercs are losing fast.

"Attention, low-life mercenary wannabes! Say "please", and we'll accept your surrender!", James informed sarcastically.

"Say "pretty please", and maybe Wrex will take a break.", Tali added.

"Try it, and we'll see!", Wrex laughed.

The mercs began losing their resolve to fight as a team, making mistakes in the battle. One tried sneaking on Wrex, and was promptly knocked over the railing to the first floor below. Shepard spotted Wrex begin a melee battle with a cat6 heavy, his shielding stronger than the rest of his squad.

She used frags to blow the shields off balance, giving Wrex an opportunity to finish him with his shotgun. Glyph showed up, next to Shepard. "Where's the target, Glyph."

"She is searching for a secret vault. She did not wish to be disturbed.", he replied.

"What?", Shepard asked, confused.

"I thought she was you.", Glyph said.

Shepard ran to cover, while her other teams busied with the firefight. "Go find her again!", she replied, annoyed.

The fourth-floor offices led through a door, down stairs into a storage area. Glyph helped bypass the lock into a huge expanse of vault storage. A catwalk with a mech loomed above, mercs taking cover behind metal crates were ahead. "Great.", Shepard yelled.

"Atlas on the walkway!", Wrex reminded.

They took cover, watching the second team follow up on the walkway across. "Team Mako here. Got'em in our sights!", Garrus reported.

"Team Hammerhead here, providing moral support.", Cortez informed.

"Eight-hundred-pound krogan here, providing the boom!", Wrex interrupted with a laugh.

Shepard began firing at the mech, using her tech skills to attack the shields. "We've got her in our sights!", the merc captain shouted.
"Put her in the ground!", the clone ordered.

"Now we've done it! You're welcome, Team Mako!", Liara shouted agitated.

Team Mako hurried up the walkway, past the mech as it continued to target Shepard. Rockets were fired at them while they ran from cover to cover.

Wrex ran straight towards it, fearlessly hitting the mech's armor plating with his shotgun. Liara used her lift grenades to stun the driver of the Atlas, as Shepard finished it off with her rifle. It stopped firing, exploding in bloody chunks of metal. "I must say, I do enjoy watching mechs explode.", Liara said.

The team ran up the walkway, hurrying to the other end, trying to reach the clone. Glyph followed, alerting Shepard to a "razor squad" awaiting ahead. As she stepped onto the main floor from the first walkway, a platform in front lifted with cat6 heavies, all utilizing shields and deadly fire power. Liara glanced up to a small balcony above them. "We can take cover there!", she shouted.

Shepard took the upper balcony, Liara and Wrex stayed below. "Team Mako here! Showing Team Hammerhead how it's done!", Garrus commed.

Shepard sniped specialists in the head, as Ashley gave her sarcastic reply. The teams challenged each other, pushing themselves to give their all. To show Shepard how capable of a team she had made them. Shepard didn't have the time to reply, killing mercs and all, but inside she felt proud. They would do all right without her.

The Razor Squad advanced towards Shepard. Mako and Hammerhead from above, giving them hell as they crossed the platform boundaries.

Liara used her singularity, followed by lift grenades. They stepped back stunned, but there wasn't a large enough dent. Grenades were lobbed down on them. Shepard took aim and fired her heaviest pistol at them. Razor team had made the biggest mistake by staying out in the open, despite their shields. There was no cover and both teams above slaughtered them. It was over quickly.

"We're clear!", Cortez shouted excitedly.

"Looks like I saved everyone's ass again! Heh heh.", Wrex boasted.

Shepard pushed a merc's body aside, hastily gunning for the next door. "Hammerhead and Mako, keep pushing ahead!", she ordered loudly. Another wave of cat6 mercs stopped them from going further, again. There seemed to be no end to this scum.

Glyph came by, "Commander, the other you wishes to pass on a message." He played the recording, "Shepard save yourself the trouble. Once I have what I came here for, you won't matter anymore. Now go, drone! Deliver it!

Shepard ignored the message, only worried because she didn't hear Satima struggle or make a sound on the other end.

She passed by a holo image of the genophage being dispersed into Tuchunka's atmosphere. A lone salarian scientist warning the turians about the ramifications of it. The ignorant and desperate turians used it anyway. Wrex looks on, not wanting to hear any more of it. More cat6's assault them. This was getting tiresome and brutal. The other Shepard displayed cruelty, violence and a bad temper. Complete opposite of Shepard, herself.

The firefight proved challenging, but taxing on the group. As the last of the mercs advanced, Shepard received a com from Tali. "We see the clone, Shepard! Mako going in!"
"Team Mako, we're coming up behind you! What's your status?", Shepard shouted in a hurry. She and her team finished off a sniper, running through a door to the last level. "We're under...", Brooks comms died out.

"Team Mako?", Shepard shouted.

Shepard stopped abruptly on the last holo image in front of her. It was her with the crucible hovering behind. All information about her beginning as an orphan on Earth, to the advancement of the N7 squads, her role as Commander, and the Normandy.

More information flooded the holo screens, with Saren and the geth, Sovereign in the background. She shook off the feeling of nostalgia. There were more important matters ahead. "Commander, do you copy?", Brooks suddenly commed.

"What's your status?", Shepard asked.

She and Liara observed the offices, looking for any hidden mercenaries. It seemed clear. Brooks voice came back on comms, "The other you are jamming our radios! Hammerhead and Mako are trying to get ahead and cut her off. But I've been hit and need help, please hurry!"

Shepard ran through the last door. A biometric scan delayed her for a single moment. The VI replied, giving Spectre access. Shepard hurried through, gun raised. "Commander, over here! Help!", Brooks yelled, frantically.

The vault access room was dimly lit, with red lights over the rails. Shepard couldn't see her. She stepped onto an open vault, seeing a doorway across. Wrex and Liara followed. As they fully loaded onto the vault, the barrier activated. "That can't be good.", Liara said worried.

"Brooks! The vault sealed us in!", Shepard commed.

They looked around for a way out. "Is there an override?", Wrex asked. "None that I can see.", Liara replied. Shepard began personally comming her other teams, "Cortez? Brooks? Do you read me? Is anyone on this frequency?"

The clone stepped out of the doorway they previously came through, she held a smug look crossing her arms. "The short answer is no. They're not."

Shepard began firing at the barrier. She was trapped. "The longer answer involves your friends being trapped in iridium vaults and forgotten for...well, forever.", the clone smiled, gesturing to the other vaults around them. "Others know about this. About you. The Alliance will stop you.", Shepard warned.

The clone stepped forward, closer to the barrier. "What do you think, Staff Analyst Brooks? Will the Alliance stop us?"

Brooks stepped into view, dragging a half-dazed Satima on the ground next to her, grinning. "I wouldn't know. I don't actually work for them."

Shepard watched, staring down her clone. "Who the hell are you? And do you really think I won't track you down?"

"My name doesn't matter. I never keep the same one for more than a few days. And if the Illusive Man hasn't found me yet, you never will.", Brooks smirked.

"You're Cerberus?", Shepard asked, surprised.
Brooks paced, recalling her days in Cerberus, how she and Mr. Illusive didn't see eye to eye. "He's indoctrinated, whereas I prefer the whispers in my head to be my own."

Shepard shook her head dismissively. She knew the Illusive Man was indoctrinated, but why did these two come up with this misguided plan? "Why not come to me? We could've worked together."

"In a way, we did. I'm the one who put together all those dossiers on your "suicide mission. ", Brooks informed.


Brooks nodded in satisfaction. "There was the salarian doctor, the asari justicar, the drell. They were all mistakes. We were a pro-human group who started looking to aliens for help. So, I bided my time, and when I found another you who agreed... I woke her up."

"What was the point of it all? ", Shepard asked again. Satima began to quietly stir, working on her holo cuffs. They'll never learn. She can hack through them quickly.

"All we really wanted was your Spectre code. But then you survived the hit and insisted on bringing your asari into it, so I had to tie up loose ends. ", Brooks continued.

Shepard remembered how she "had" to use Spectre authority to get through to the other level in the wards. Then there was the casino owner, the one her clone bought the weapons from. "The arms dealer... ", she said aloud.

Brooks stepped a little closer to the barrier, "But then your sex bot just had to go and recover the data. So here we are: forced to... contain the situation."

The clone smirked, noticing that Satima was awake. She leaned down to the hybrid. "I know how skilled you are. I also know you and I share the same dna. Brooks has told me that she can fix your... problem. We can purge that turian bloodline right from your very genetic core. You can fully be human, and I can lead you, as my daughter. Not hers." The clone looked serious and sincere.

It was pathetic to watch. Satima looked down in defeat. "I am my mother's daughter." Shepard watched in personal horror. Satima then glared at the clone, "But I am also my father's!!" She headbutted the clone twice, not flinching from the pain. Her hands free, she went after Brooks who tried pushing crates in Satima's path.

The clone stood up, with an expression of pure rage. Shepard watched her clone begin the sequence at the genetic code terminal. "What are you doing? ", she said loudly.

"Setting things right. Remember this? ", the clone quickly displayed the day Shepard became a Spectre. She turned to Shepard, "Except somewhere along the way you forgot about your entire species. You've saved more alien lives than you have human."

Satima had cornered Brooks who glanced anxiously towards the clone. Shepard continued keeping the clone's attention long enough for Satima to get the codes to unlock the vault. "I don't care what species they are. Every life counts, but maybe a clone wouldn't understand that."

"You know the one thing they can't duplicate? Our hand prints. Life gives it its shape, not dna...which is a problem. ", the clone walked to the computer. She used it to update her own genetic hand prints, rewriting over Shepard's. "Now I'm the Commander."

Brooks was tossed over the threshold after Satima scanned the codes with her omni-tool. Brooks managed to climb to her feet, beat and bloody. "That bitch stole my codes! She's going to free
Shepard!

Satima readied herself as the clone advanced. They fought brutally in the closed quarters of the vault room. The clone displayed the same combat skills as the real Shepard, giving Satima a black eye and a bloody nose. Quickly, Satima gained the upper hand long enough to use the terminal, round house kicking the clone to the ground.

She ran to the access panel, putting in the codes. "Dammit!", she shouted.

"What is it?", Shepard asked worried.

"It's gonna be a second...or two.", Satima replied.

Shepard watched the clone get up slowly. Brooks keeping a distance. "Can you handle it?", Shepard asked.

Satima finished the codes, walking to the vault, trying to find an indication of the barrier weakening. "Yeah, I can. If you can use a biotic...". The clone grabbed the girl from behind, wrenching her arm between Satima's, twisting the right wrist painfully.

Clone Shepard brought out a long blade from Satima's arsenal, holding it menacingly above the girl's torso. "You could've helped me stop the Reapers. Instead, you choose her side and to be my enemy.", the clone spat. Shepard watched, helpless to stop her clone. Satima grunted, struggling under the threat of the blade, but the clone held firm.

"Now, I have two options.", the clone began as Satima struggled hard from her grasp. This clone was strong. Almost as strong as Reaper, herself.

"Deliver you to the Illusive Man, who will no doubt conduct painful and torturous experiments on you. Or!", she grinned. "Kill you. But don't worry, Shepard will join you soon.", she plunged the blade through Satima's armor. Shepard beat the barrier hard with her rifle, trying to weaken it. What was it she said? "Liara... warp that barrier!", Shepard shouted. Liara used a biotic warp, hitting the barrier's kinetic field. It started to dissipate.

Satima stood still, a look of pained surprise overwhelmed her when the clone removed the blade, red blood dripped from its metal surface.

Clone Shepard released her grip, while the barrier weakened and shut off. Shepard darted out, catching Satima in her arms. The Clone spoke with a fiendish grin, "If you'll excuse me, the Normandy needs its captain.", and walked through the doorway. "I guess this is where "legends" go to die.", Brooks laughed with a bloody smile. The door shut and locked.

Liara ran to the door. "It's sealed tight! I can call Glyph for help!"

Shepard laid Satima on the floor, applying pressure to the wound while blood pooled through her fingers. "Shepard...go after her.", Satima pleaded, wincing in pain. "No!", Shepard replied upset. "You can't die on me like Thane!", she thought.

Wrex looked over the two below him. Shepard held down Satima's wound tightly, "We're going to get you out of this. Just hold on. Where's the damn medigel?!", she yelled.

"Used it...on Brooks.", Satima gave a bloody grin.

"That bitch!", Shepard said in gritted teeth.
Glyph came by, 'I have found the remaining crew members in vaults-Y78, U45, and G12. Would you like me to retrieve them?'

"Yes... YES! Now, Glyph!", Liara said rushed. She watched Shepard and the hybrid, who is her daughter. Liara bent down to her, "Shepard...", she said softly.

Satima started to lose consciousness. "No... Satima!", Shepard shouted. Liara bowed her head, saddened to witness this. "Shepard...we have to stop the clone. Or the Normandy will be lost."

Wrex lowered himself, as Liara stood and stepped to the side. He gently picked up Satima. "I'll carry her. Let's get the rest of the team and go after that bitch." Shepard stood and nodded. Satima's life signs waning fast.

Outside the archives station, a sky car waited on the platform with Joker driving. The other teams were relieved to see Shepard alive, but Garrus's heart sank when he saw Wrex emerge with Satima motionless in his arms.
Shepard's face pale and solemn. He quickly ran up to them, as Ashley and the rest of the teams watched in worry.

"What happened?", he asked Shepard.

Shepard stopped and stared at him, "She helped us escape. We have more time to stop the other...me. She tried to kill Satima, and maybe has already succeeded in doing so."

"I'm willing to take her to the hospital. If anyone wants to tag along?", Wrex asked.

"I'll go.", Liara volunteered. "We'll protect her while you stop your clone."

Shepard nodded. "Garrus, you're with me and I'll need EDI. The rest, I'm sorry you can't all fit.", she tried a weak laugh with her joke.

Everyone watched uncomfortably, worried for Shepard's emotional wellbeing.

Liara drove the sky car in haste to the hospital, concerned Satima wouldn't make it. Wrex sat still as stone, his gaze focused on the traffic ahead. Liara swore if he could, Wrex might just hit every car in his way. Finally, within a small amount of time, Liara landed on the emergency platform to Lenai Clinic.

They could stabilize Satima and have her transported to a place like Huerta Memorial. Once outside, Liara waited for Wrex to emerge with the girl. He walked around empty handed.

"Where's Satima?", Liara asked.

He shrugged looking around Liara,"I thought you had her?"

Inside the sky car, Satima had slipped out silently. Blood droplets gave a short path to a sky car lot. "She's going for the Normandy.", Liara said fearful. "Come on! We have to hurry before she bleeds out!", They both rushed to the docks.

Meanwhile, during the ride to the docking stations, EDI informed the team of the clone's intentions. Suddenly, she stopped talking and stared ahead. Did she shut down?

Alarming everyone, Joker watched anxiously as EDI powered on. "I'm fine.", she said, as her bionic eyes readjusted into place. "Really?", Joker asked concerned.

Garrus leaned toward the door a little. In case EDI suddenly became hostile, controlled by the clone.
She then stared at him. Oh Spirits. Shepard reassured EDI, she will be reconnecting the AI right back into the Normandy's systems. The citadel's docking systems targeted the car, a clever defense the clone set into place as she powered the Normandy's engines.

Joker warned if the Normandy gained flight, going into FTL outside, they would probably never see the ship again. Shepard gunned the car faster to the landing pad. "Easy!", Joker complained. Ahead, the Normandy was still anchored to the docks with a barrier behind her.

They landed on the platforms, with Shepard rushing out of the sky car.

She led her team to make short work of the cat6 mercs, swarming the docks. Shepard had no time to deal with amateur wash-outs. The Normandy's systems prepared for launch. Quickly, they ran to the docking entrance, right into a bewildered Traynor. She had been standing outside the closed door.

"And I don't even...Wait, what?", she repeated upset. Traynor turned around to see Shepard, Garrus and EDI run up to her. "You were just on the Normandy. You... you fired me! Dishonorable discharge for conduct unbecoming! You kicked me off the ship with barely enough time to grab my toothbrush!", she finished, displaying her beloved toothbrush with disdain towards them.

Shepard listened, then stared right into Traynor's eyes, "That's a Cision Pro Mark 4. It uses mass effect fields to break up plaque and massage the gums."

Traynor cocked her head at Shepard quizzically, "Yes, I told you that."

"And I remember, because I'm the real Shepard.", she replied.

Traynor stared back at the door she was thrown out of, "And someone just threw me off the ship. If it wasn't you..."

EDI and Garrus busied themselves with figuring a way to open the door, he turned to Traynor. "It was a clone. Sort of a long story." The door opened, "I can explain more later."

Shepard walked to the door, expecting to be able to unlock it. But the doors holo lock turned from green to red. "It's sealed!", Shepard cried.

"Engines are online. They are preparing to take off.", EDI informed.

Shepard paced. She looked to Traynor, "Is there anyone still aboard who can help us?"

"No. I was only there because I helped with the Normandy retrofits back on Earth. Everyone else is on shore leave.", Traynor answered.

"Okay, you know this ship inside and out. Can you get me inside?", Shepard asked.

Traynor led them to an emergency hatch, "It's for evacuations." Shepard quickly scanned it, "Manual lock, and it's only meant to be opened from the other side. Any ideas?"

EDI examined the hatch, "Triggering it would require extremely precise mass effect field manipulation."

Traynor held her toothbrush up reluctantly, turning on its mass effect field bristles. Within a few moments of carefully devising the toothbrush to pop the hatch open, Shepard led her team through a ventilation duct inside the Normandy's underbelly. "If you'd told me this morning that a toothbrush was going to save the Normandy, I'd have been very skeptical.", she thought aloud.
The Normandy began take-off through the ward arms of the citadel. Clone Shepard started the galaxy map, preparing her new route. A merc lieutenant saluted behind her, "Ma'am! Just before takeoff, Normandy registered a perimeter access alert. One of the security hatches."

"Her. Where?", the clone demanded.

"Unknown. When we shut down the AI, we disabled a lot of security systems. Shepard could be anywhere on the ship.", he replied.

The clone menacingly stood before the lieutenant, asserting her command to his face, "Shepard is standing right in front of you. Are we clear?", she yelled.

Brooks smirked, following the clone into the elevator. "It's better this way. Wouldn't you rather take her down yourself?" Clone Shepard gave a last order to the merc,"Find her! Slow her down."

Cat6 mercs guarded the CIC and cockpit. Watching their backs from every dark corner. They didn't think to look under them, in the ventilation shafts. Shepard quietly led on underneath the walkway.

"Pretty sure we broke Traynor's toothbrush getting the hatch open. Remind me to reimburse her for that."

"Shepard?", EDI spoke.

"Later. Remind me later.", Shepard replied, whispering.

Further into the vent, the crawl was starting to get tight. "What do they size this place for, keepers?", Garrus asked sarcastically.

"Quiet. Can't risk them hearing us up top.", Shepard reminded.

"On many occasions, Satima used these vents to get around. Often ease dropping on conversations. I politely asked her to stop. She complied. For a time." EDI informed.

"Quiet!", Shepard repeated.

Garrus and EDI exchanged glances, "Sorry.", he said.

Up above them, the lieutenant gave orders to keep up their patrols. They needed to find the real Shepard.

With the other mercs complaining that the clone saw them as cannon fodder, the lieutenant had to force them into patrolling. It all went to hell when the "real" Shepard came through the CIC hatch. Another battle to deal with. Smaller waves of mercs trying to flank them. Cat6 heavies bombarded Shepard from the elevator, giving her enough exercise of her weapons. EDI distracted a few, decoying them right into Garrus's scope. "One of my favorite places to fight!", he shouted over the fray.

"The CIC of a warship?", Shepard asked.

"Right there above the gardens and below the electronics shops!", he replied.

Shepard laughed, "And antique shops, as I recall!"

"But only if they're classy!", Garrus shouted.

Two disruption drones were sent after EDI, but Garrus stopped them with his overload. It didn't take
long before they cleared the CIC of mercs. Shepard soon received a comm call from Liara. "Yeah, how's it going?", she asked.

"Shepard... Satima is not with us. She's heading your way. Wrex and I have already met up with the others. Shepard, she's bleeding out.", Liara informed.

"I can't abandon the Normandy and let the clone take it. Liara, just get here. Find her and stop her from getting killed.", Shepard ordered.

The comms ended, with Garrus watching Shepard closely. She pushed ahead for the cargo bay. In front of the elevator was her hamsters cage. A note had been stuck to the lid. "Please send this to an animal shelter for proper disposal as a warship is not an appropriate..."Oh, that is not okay!", Shepard yelled.

Once inside the lift, EDI began readying herself. Checking her pistol more than twice, eyeing the doors with a deadly gaze. "What's wrong, EDI?", Shepard asked.

"These people are showing disrespect to my home... my body. It is... unacceptable.", EDI said distressed.

"You want to talk about it?", Garrus asked.

"I intend to kill Shepard's clone, Agent Brooks, and anyone else in my way.", EDI replied.

"Deal.", Garrus agreed.

Shepard nodded, readying herself for the battle ahead. Her clone is tough, capable and extremely dangerous. Just like her. She won't go down easy, but neither will Shepard.

The elevator door slid open, with Shepard and team cautiously scoping the area. They passed into the armor and weapons lockers. Glancing to the workstations. Too quiet. Further ahead, the clone stepped out from behind storage crates. Fully armored in N7 attire, weapon in hand. "Well, that's creepy.", Shepard shuddered.

The clone opened fire, as the team took cover. "You want to stop shooting my ship?"

"It's not your ship", Shepard replied from the cover of the weapon mod station.

Across the room, the clone stayed behind crates. "It will be! I've taken your name, your Spectre rank, even your fingerprints!"

Shepard continued the conversation, moving to the exact area the clone hid in. "And then you left me to die...only I didn't. You were stopped, you think fake fingerprints are going to fool the Council? Or Hackett?"

She maneuvered around the crates, but the clone had caught on to her plan. Quietly moving to another spot. Shepard found only ammo boxes and empty space. "How's that big plan looking now?", she quipped.

The clone attacked from behind with her omni-blade, but the real Shepard spun quickly to meet it with hers. The blades eventually blew, sending a small shock wave through them both. Clone Shepard stepped back as Brooks entered the scene, firing on Shepard.

"Hatchet Squad to the shuttle bay!"
Shepard fled to the cover of the workstations, EDI opened fire on the clone and Brooks. Mercs poured in, keeping the two Shepard's from meeting in the battle. Frag grenades were lobbed into the field, as everyone took cover. Mercs received painful shrapnel injuries, shouting in pain while Brooks made sure to take cover far away from the fighting Shepard's. The clone attacked again, forcing Shepard to summon up her omni-blade in a counter attack. Another shock wave between them, sending them both back a second time.

"Lola? You there?", James asked over comms. "Lola here. You cut through the jamming?", Shepard spoke while firing on mercs. Liara came back through, "We did. It was heavily defended, but we got through and disabled their tech."

The clone shot a rocket directly towards Shepard. Garrus ran, grabbing her by the waist and throwing them both to the floor together. "That was close.", he said, breathing heavily. Shepard patted his arm reassuringly. Cortez commed them, "Commander, the Normandy's prepping for a jump to FTL."

Shepard jumped up quickly, running to another crate for cover. Joker's voice echoing, asking if she could get to the cockpit quickly. The clone's shields were regenerating too fast, preventing Shepard from ending the fight. Cortez informed loudly they were moving in, just as the Normandy started to waiver. Throwing them all off foot. Cortez flew a sky car in front of the Normandy.

"What the hell's going on up there? Get us out of the nebula and jump to FTL!", the clone demanded. "We can't. A sky car keeps blocking our path!", the merc pilot informed frantically. "Then shoot it!", she ordered. The merc pilot started targeting at the car, missing horribly and hitting ward buildings. "You need to stay within 30 degrees of the nose to block course plotting!", Joker shouted. "That makes us a perfect target!", Cortez yelled back.

"No, that makes us the bait! You want me to drive?", Joker shouted. "No!", Cortez replied angrily. They both fidgeted on the controls, continuing their argument while distracting the merc pilot. Clone Shepard spotted the sky car, watching in anger as her dependent mercs continue to destroy her plans. "Damn it! Launch the shuttle, and blow that thing out of the sky!"

Two mercs pilot a shuttle through the cargo bay doors, chasing the sky car down. Meanwhile, the battle goes on between the Shepard's. "Be careful! The door is unsecured!", EDI announces. "You should have died at that damn sushi place!", Brooks shouted, firing at them. The clone met Shepard near the crates, in front of an extra shuttle. Meleeing it out, delivering blows to each other. But the clone was fast, quickly fleeing the area, letting disruption drones block them. Shepard is winning, and she knows it. "I am Commander Shepard!", the clone shouted, furiously.
"No, you're not. We have nothing in common, you have not lived my life!", Shepard yelled back.

Clone Shepard fired on Garrus and EDI, distracting Shepard as she took cover behind the very workstations they were at earlier." And you don't know the pain I went through. Waking up, to be alone and abandoned. I was nothing but spare parts, my life meant nothing to you or the Illusive Man."

Shepard spotted her as she spoke, taking time to whittle the shielding down. "You could've come to me. I would've helped you, protected you." The clone fell backwards but regained her footing, hiding again. "Like you protected your daughter?", she mocked.

"You did that out of fear. Knowing she could've beat you... just like I'm going to.", Shepard warned.

Garrus couldn't help overhearing the conversation while battling mercs."You know the real Shepard would've blown my head off by now.", he mocked.

In a moment of desperation, Shepard took the clone down with a charge, right into gun fire. Her shields flickering from the bullets. They both fell, rolling down the bay door. The clone ended up straddling Shepard, delivering blows to her face. Shepard withstood it long enough to knock the clone backward.

Again, they both fell, sliding completely off the door, gripping the edge as they dangled above the citadel's wards. One slip and both could fall to their deaths below.

"Look at you. What makes you so damned special?", the clone spoke, struggling. "Why you and not me?" She looked on desperately.

EDI and Garrus ran to Shepard's aid, working together to help her up to safety. Brooks stood off to the side, watching as her plan in the clone utterly failed.

Clone Shepard waited to see if Brooks would make her way down to help her, but the previously employed Cerberus operative hesitated. Clearly not wanting to help, she left the clone to her fate.

"Thanks.", Shepard said as she stood with her friends, secure above the clone.

"And her?", EDI asked.

Shepard knelt, reaching out, "Here, take my hand." The clone looked at her, puzzled. "Even after all I did to you, to your friends. To...her. You would still help me?", she asked confused.

"Yes.", Shepard said hesitantly, thinking of Satima.

"And then?", the clone asked again.

"And then you live.", Shepard answered.

Clone Shepard glanced backwards to the wards below, thinking over the real Shepard's words. She turned her gaze back to the hand reaching for her, and she began to grasp it. At that moment, a single gunshot echoed in the shuttle bay. The clone had been shot in the head, a bloody hole between her eyes. She stared at the commander with a look of confusion, letting go of the edge she gripped so tightly before, as her eyes rolled in the back of her head. "...no..", Shepard whispered, watching the clone fall to the wards below. "Who fired...", she turned to see a familiar face.

Satima held the pistol firmly, panting and pale as a ghost. "And then you die.", the girl answered.
Satima took a step back, watching her mother's perplexed gaze. Blood seeped through her left hand, landing in heavy droplets on the grated floor. It started to pour from her gaping wound when she wavered, falling. Shepard reached out, trying to catch her daughter in time, as her legs gave way beneath them. Releasing her weapon and gazing at Shepard through hazy eyes. "Trust no one, Shepard. Even if they're wearing your face." Satima gasped sharply in pain, gripping her side.

EDI hovered over them. "Her vitals are fading fast. She may not make it, Commander."

Shepard refused to listen, shaking her head in defiance. "She will!", suddenly staring at Garrus.

He observed, fearful of the emotions that confounded him over Satima. His commander's pleading gaze, urging him to help. Resolved, Garrus carried her to the medbay, Shepard in tow. They laid her on the examination table, applying emergency medi-gel to the wound. "Will she live?", Shepard asked, terrified. Garrus couldn't answer that question. Satima had wasted precious time bleeding out to help them.

"I have placed a call to the ambulance for Satima, Shepard.", EDI informed over comms.

"Good.", Shepard replied.

Shepard wanted to stay in the medbay, while Satima awaited transport to Heurta Memorial. She may have to give blood, Satima did lose a lot. Stupid. Why does this girl keep trying to sacrifice herself every chance she gets? What is she proving? So many questions that were almost unanswered.

With her vitals now stable enough for transport. Shepard headed quickly down to the shuttle bay, still in full armor. Cortez approached her at the weapons stations.

"Well, Shepard. We were fortunate they weren't here long enough to do any real damage. Although I made need some help from James cleaning up the damage to the shuttle bay.", he gestured around them.

Joker darted out from the elevator, surveying the bay while shaking his head.

He met with them as they circled the area, with damage reports. "Plus, they overloaded the heat diffusion system firing at us." He and Shepard stopped in front of overturned storage crates, "Not sure if you noticed, but the Shuttle Guy here did some crazy stunt-flying to keep us in one piece."

Cortez wondered off, turning with a joking gesture, "It's nice to fly something a little more maneuverable than the Kodiak." He continued walking towards his station.

EDI eventually joined them, being the mind and embodiment of the Normandy herself. Shepard faced her, concerned from the AI's earlier comments. "How about you, EDI? Are you ok?", Shepard asked.

"I am once again in control of the Normandy. Thank you for asking.", EDI smiled. They didn't know she sent drones to pester and apprehend the merc pilot at the cockpit.

"Glad to hear it. What about the mercs? Any survivors?", Shepard wondered.

Joker scoffed, "Just one crappy-ass pilot and her. Alliance is taking her to a high-security facility. Maybe she can give them some dirt on Cerberus."

Brooks had been escorted in cuffs to face Shepard. "I'll be more than happy to cooperate with the authorities.", she lied.

"Maya, I know that voice.", Shepard said aloud.
Brooks smirked, "Do you really?"

Shepard approached her with a warning glare, "You're getting a chance to redeem yourself. Don't waste it."

Brooks started her own hacking sequence to escape the holo cuffs. "So, serious. Admit it. Some part of you liked having me around, looking up to the legend. Maybe mommy's attention wasn't enough for the freak of a child you created. At least I was willing to overlook that, and offer to purify her of that alien dna.", Brooks insulted.

"I didn't create her!", Shepard replied harshly, wanting to break that smirk right off Brooks face, but she didn't feel like stooping to her level. She walked away, while Brooks continued to run her mouth. "We had some laughs. And who knows. Maybe we'll have more someday. You know you'll miss me."

With that, Shepard angrily stepped in front of Brooks, "No, we won't. Because you're going to stay in your cell and do your time."

"Afraid I'll escape, come back for revenge? Is the great Commander Shepard pleading for her life?", Brooks mocked.

Shepard and Brooks glared toward each other. "I'm pleading for yours.", Shepard replied. Brooks glanced down, stopping her current hack. "So, thoughtful. Then I suppose I'm off to lockup."

Garrus approached, watching the verbal exchange between them. Brooks needed to have one last word. "You know she wouldn't have let me live. Your daughter... did the right thing."

Shepard stared at Brooks, "And now she's dying for it."

Brooks nodded in understanding, being pushed forward by Cortez to the Alliance officers. Garrus stood confused, "I'm sorry we didn't shoot her."

The Normandy was sent back to the docks, with heavy C-Sec detail patrolling the perimeter. Chockwas barely could board without being apprehended.

She met with Shepard in the medbay."I'll take care of her, and board transport to the hospital with Satima." Chockwas worked in haste stabilizing the hybrid.

"Thank you, Karin.", Shepard gazed at the doctor. She looked weary, worried.

Moments later, Cortez met with Shepard at the docking hatch, "The rest of the squad's waiting outside, Commander. We'll have the Normandy back in shape in no time."

The door opened, Traynor, Liara and Wrex ran up to meet them. Shepard really wanted to strip her armor off and just relax. Make her way to Chockwas and check on Satima, again. This had been one hell of a day. The other team members exited from shuttles to the landing platform below the Normandy. Shepard walked to them as EDI followed behind. "Are shore leaves always like this?", she asked.

"Alright, everyone's off duty, starting now. I'll catch up later.", Shepard ordered.

Most of the crew gathered, curious as to why Shepard didn't want to leave with them. Ashley led most of them off to a hotel. Liara stepped in front of Shepard, who was watching everyone depart the docks. All but Garrus. "Shepard...what happened?", Liara asked.
Shepard waved Liara back inside the Normandy. "Satima killed the clone. She's in the medbay while Chockwas is stabilizing her. I'm waiting on an ambulance from Huerta."

They took the elevator to the third deck, exiting it hastily to the medbay. Chockwas worked steadily between the vitals screen, attempting to stop Satima's bleeding. She looked up to Shepard, "If Satima loses anymore blood, she'll pass into a coma. Likely... she won't make it. I'm doing everything I can, Shepard."

Shepard stood over the girl, terrified to lose her. "Can I give her my blood? I'll do it right now.", Shepard spoke with a shaky voice.

"I don't know if that will work, considering she's still less than half turian. Shepard, I conducted some tests weeks ago, and found out her parent genetic markers. We may have to synthesize a fusion of your blood and... her paternal donor. Shepard... in case you don't know the entire truth about her genetic heritage, it's you and...", Chockwas stopped abruptly as Garrus walked in.

"And me. We both already know. I'll give as much as needed, to save her life.", he replied.

Liara helped with cleaning the wound, while Chockwas started a hasty process of blood transfusion. She began moving bandages, revealing the injury when something caught her eye. "Goddess. What is this?"

"What's wrong?", Shepard asked, concerned.

Liara pointed to inside the wound, "Look. It's... the tissues and the muscle, I can see it's... regenerating."

Satima started seizing, startling everyone. "Hold her down!", Chockwas yelled. Liara and Shepard held the hybrid down. Satima stopped, opening her eyes. She pushed Shepard back with a renewed strength, falling off the table, tightly gripping her wound. Shepard tried to grab her, but Satima pushed her away. "Don't!", she shouted.

Satima tore the top exoskeleton of her armor off, letting it fall to the floor with a thud. She ripped the under-suit open, revealing the short top that stopped above the injury. Her gaping wound no longer bled, but began healing. Each individual tear of tissue, muscle and nerves, started to reattach. Satima grunted from the agonizing pain the nanites in her bloodstream caused.

The process gained speed, as her flesh stitched itself together, eventually setting the wound closed. Her grave injury had been healed, showing a large blue bruise that grew, stretching across her ribs to the back. It looked like the skin of a husk.

"What's going on?", Chockwas asked nervously.

Satima stood, shaking. "...no... no... no... no... no... no...", she pleaded to herself. Glancing downward and falling to her knees, Satima held her head, as if something was causing her pain.

Chockwas used her omni-tool to scan her, checking her vitals and the condition of the injury. "It's totally healed."

Shepard slowly stepped closer, walking past the med terminal and scanners. "Satima, what's happening?"

Satima glared at Shepard, as if in shock to hear her voice. She then stood and turned around, sprinting inside the core room. Shepard made an advance to follow, but Garrus stopped her. "Too many unknowns."
Shepard stood in the mess, moments later. Waiting for Satima to emerge as normal, but the girl came through the door with a darker expression. The look of physical pain was gone, a new look of emotional torture took over. It troubled Shepard how she couldn't console Satima. Not one bit of physical contact.

The earlier decision to execute her clone was still fresh in Shepard's mind. Leaving her curious and aggravated. Satima approached her, glancing down. "I... apologize for my conduct. The healing process is still new and quite painful. This will not compromise me.", she spoke with an emotionless stare.

"I didn't think it would.", Shepard responded. "I'm just glad you're okay.", placing a hand on the girl's shoulder.

Satima gave a blank smile, looking past Shepard. She walked off, back into the core room, past medical and a worried Chockwas. A terrifying change has taken ahold of Satima, and Shepard didn't know what it was. She hoped to find it out soon, before the girl puts a bullet through "her" head.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. ;)


Reaper Tea Party

Chapter Summary

Shepard's friends are treated to a party. Laughter, stories and drunken banter raise spirits. But Satima remains on the sidelines, causing Shepard to worry over the girl's emotional well being. Samara offers insight, with the crew ready to take on the reapers the next day. until a sudden visitor crashes the hopeful Shepard's resolve.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Continuing…

Shepard met with Liara and Garrus outside the Normandy. Chockwas left to get a goodnights rest. "After that, I believe I need a drink. What I saw...that was something I've certainly never seen before.", Liara spoke.

"Krogan can regenerate.", Garrus added.

"Yes, but Satima is not a krogan. She's something...else.", Liara warned.

Shepard heard enough speculation. "Come on. Maybe we can take some actual time off. No explosions or anything. Just us.", Shepard assured.

Garrus stepped beside her with a smirk, "I'll believe it when I see it, but it's worth a shot."

At last, Shepard changed in her apartment, excusing herself away from Jokers "let's have a big party" conversation. She agreed quickly, but really needed to see Satima. He stood in front of her, smiling and carrying on about the music and food. All the while Wrex waited to speak with her.

"Please. We need to party down.", Joker begged.

"I think a nap is more preferable.", Shepard joked.

"Yeah, only if your old.", Joker commented.

"Excuse me?", Shepard folded her arms, looking cross his way.

"I didn't mean it as a parent insult. I mean...you're still pretty flexible and active for your age.", Joker stammered.

Wrex laughed behind him, "You might want to crawl to safety." Joker eyed him. Wrex continued, "Well, I gotta get going. Things to settle before I head back to Tuchanka. Always fires to put out when you're in charge, right?" He started leaving out the door, "Let me know if you wanna hang out, or if you start that party. And give me a heads up on the whole daughter thing, will you."

"See ya! ...jerk.", Joker muttered. Shepard glared at him, "Party, huh?"

"No pressure. No one's gonna make you throw a party.", Joker mused.
Shepard gave in with a sigh. "All right, good idea. Let's set it up."

Glyph appeared, informing them of private funds set into an account for celebratory supplies. Shepard shook her head, Liara must have been listening again.

Joker looked to his omni-tool as it pinged with mail. "Okay. EDI and Cortez and Traynor are in." Shepard shook her head dismissively. "Wait! I'm in charge here. So, I get to invite the rest, ok!", Shepard blared.
"Alright, alright. Oh...well, Cortez just invited James, so...", Joker informed.
"Fine!", Shepard shouted annoyed.

Glyph informed Shepard of the sun strips various activities, just as Joker was heading out. He also prepared her free pass to the combat simulator. "Glyph! Leave me alone! Go bother Liara.", she yelled.
"Of course, Commander.", Glyph replied.

Shepard barely stifled a laugh to herself, when she received a message from her study's terminal. She quickly walked to the desk, turning the computer on. There were several messages from crew members, alerts for party supply sells, and of course the invite list. She pressed for all. Within a few minutes, another message popped up. From the Normandy. She opened it.
"We need to speak!" It was from Satima.

Shepard immediately left back to the Normandy. Except for a skeleton crew and a small patrol of C-Sec, Satima was nowhere to be found. Another private message showed up on her omni-tool. "Apartment." This strange game of "find me", needed to end.

Back at the apartment, Shepard spotted Satima looking out to traffic through the windows. "Satima! What the hell is going on with you?", Shepard demanded. The girl kept looking out. Shepard stomped next to her, "I want an answer. Now!"
Satima glanced to her, unfolding her arms with a sigh. "Sorry. I had this anxious feeling and couldn't stay in one place too long."

Shepard calmed down, staying worried about the situation. She stared out the window with her daughter, watching sky cars pass through the wards above. "I used to command a ship... once. Her name was Haven.", Satima marveled. "I had someone to love, friends who protected me, fought for me. And I had adventures.", she smirked. Her face now downcast, "But all of that doesn't matter anymore. It's all gone... never happened. I'm all alone. I abandoned them."

"Who?", Shepard inquired.

"I can't say, not right now.", Satima answered.

"How did you abandon them?", Shepard asked, intrigued with fear.

Satima laughed sarcastically, then answered Shepard. "The Directive ordered me too." She turned to her mother, her face contorted to frightened pain, "It won't stop. They won't shut up!" Satima realized suddenly how she sounded and calmed herself.

Shepard stood back, taking in what Satima had just revealed. "How long have you been indoctrinated?"

Satima smirked curtly, "Too long, a fine line I have to endure. I will not let myself compromise the mission. If you think killing me now will be a better idea, then I accept your judgement.", Satima concluded. Her teal turian eyes searching, waiting for Shepard's response.
"Satima...", she answered. Averting her stare, she folded her arms tightly to her. "I've been experiencing things myself.", she walked away, sitting on the edge of the couch.

Shepard leaned out, "I just choose to ignore it, but how long I can ignore it, I don't really know. There are horrible nightmares and sleepless nights.", she paused, looking up. "No, I won't kill you. I want to help you. And maybe, you can help me?"

Satima looked surprised. "I'll... do what I can."

"Thank you, Satima.", Shepard smiled.

Satima stayed in the apartment, away from everyone after her regeneration. It had taken some time, but the memories were starting to come back. Since coming into the past timeline, The Directive's call was silenced and Satima's mind no longer harbored the whispers.

After obtaining extensive injuries, her reaper tech activated in the form of the self-healing nanites in her body. Or was there a signal... somewhere? It was a matter of time, she guessed, before the whispers returned. Reminding her of the delicate walk she treded between sanity and madness. An issue her mother, Reaper, had perfected.

And what if, then... the Sentarians chose to appear, and Callon still commanded? The whole truth will be uncovered, and that is what Satima fears the most.

Shepard busied herself in the apartment, glimpsing Satima at the large windows. A party is exactly what everyone needed. First thing is to spend time with all her friends... her family. There is the casino, the arcade and the bar... so much to do. Not to forget the combat simulator. Dressed in her finest N7 hoodie, Shepard ventured out to meet up with Jacob at the arcade.

She enjoys the various activities set by her time individually, reconnecting with the crew better. After joy-riding with Cortez, and attempting to steal the limelight from Blasto with Javik, Shepard returns to her apartment. Satima still wanders around, staring away at items that are usually seen as nonsense.

Later, Shepard entered the combat simulator at Armax Arsenal. She proved her skill in battle with high scores, even surpassing Aria. After receiving some nifty rewards from her winnings, a message was sent to her omni-tool.

It was an update from the simulator's vid-mail service an hour after she left. Someone had entered and competed after her, many times. And this person had achieved one of the highest scores, under Shepard's name. The anonymous player's name was entered as, Savant.

Shepard took a cab back to the apartment. She saved the best date for last, putting her dress on and a new shade of red lipstick. The date she and Garrus had been craving since they first started their relationship a couple of years ago.

Sure, in the beginning there was something of a spark between them. Shepard would venture down to the shuttle bay on the SR1, speaking with Wrex, or Ash... peaking towards Garrus as he tinkered and maintained the Mako.

There was a moment between them, when she helped him pull the main shaft from the Mako's inner hatch. Both struggled to get the metal rod out, only to stumble together, backward. She fell in his lap. Garrus never looked so nervous before.

His body felt hard in places, but strong and warm. Shepard blushed, quickly standing up to turn and help him to his feet.

That time forward, there was always a small part of her that wondered. Kaiden tried so hard to establish a relationship with her, but she couldn't click with him. Leaving him behind on Virmire left
a stinging pain in her chest. It was as if she had eliminated him from the picture. Like he had been in
the way.

By then, Illos came into view and soon the Reaper threat was ended. Or so they thought. Her rebirth
by Cerberus shocked the entire galaxy, but not as much as it did Garrus. Even herself. Shepard
finished her makeup and thoughts. Tonight, will be special, and tomorrow the party can take place. And if Garrus is lucky, they can
hold another tie-breaker in her apartment.

Satima followed Shepard at times. Curiously watching the interactions between Commander and
crew mate... friend. Friends. Companions. It seemed strange. What if Reaper... the other Shepard,
showed up suddenly. Sentarians everywhere, and Callon, commanding them to take over the citadel? What would this
current Shepard do? Fight or try diplomacy? Take his orders? She shook her head dismissively. Shepard
would tell him to go to hell. But what about Reaper? That would be something.

Shepard walked inside the casino, dressed differently. She looked great. Once inside, Satima spotted
Shepard at the bar talking to a turian male. On closer inspection, it was Garrus. So, they've planned a
date? Satima followed the crowd, blending in, until she made it to the bar.

A song came on that prompted them to dance differently. Shepard obviously looked uncomfortable,
but Garrus kept smiling at her, and she eventually learned the moves well. They were dancing
together, smiling and enjoying themselves. Satima had never seen them so relaxed, so unlike themselves before. If the reapers never existed, if
she were born to them in a normal reality... she shook the thoughts.

Getting soft, no longer focusing on the real threat is what made her. She continued watching, even as
James made an appearance. Curiously, Satima stood next to him, while her parents danced. He
leaned into her ear. "I helped teach him those moves.", James smiled. "Well, Liara did some of the
foot work, but how he holds her? That's my advice."

She gave him a slow, uncomfortable stare. "Ewe.", Satima replied.

James laughed, "Princess Lola, this was probably how you were created!" He continued to boast,
stepping closer to the dance floor, teasing Shepard with a charming look. And to Satima's further
horror, Shepard just flirted with him?

Of course, Garrus set that straight, immediately. Satima giggled. The dance ended with them
receiving an ovation of approval. The couple quietly exited the bar and building.

Satima wasn't about to follow that. No need for traumatizing images.

The next day at the apartment, Satima watched Shepard order more sushi from another restaurant
using Glyph. The place was starting to become frantic. "Remember, we need both levo and dextro
trays. Can't have anyone getting sick and ending up in the hospital.", Shepard placed her data pad on
the table. Glyph whirled by Satima, "Of course, Commander."

Satima crossed her arms, "Find a place you haven't destroyed?", she smirked.

"Anymore comments about that and you can clean the Normandy's air filters, instead of joining the
party.", Shepard warned with a glance.

Satima let out a small laugh before leaving up the stairs. She liked to sit under the tree, outside of the
second upstairs bedroom. It was real enough, carefully tended for years. Trees were not usually on
spaceships. Satima found it relaxing, sitting with her legs crossed, and closed eyes.
Except for Shepard's voice trailing in and out from downstairs, the apartment was pleasantly quiet. That is, until an hour later. People started to arrive.

Shepard greeted Cortez and EDI as they walked in, "Hey. Come on in, make yourselves at home", she smiled at them.

"Thanks for the invite.", Cortez shook his Commander's hand.

Liara showed up next, followed by Kasumi going into cloak. Others came in, smiling and talking loudly. The apartment filled up with the crew members quickly. She turned on the music, walking towards the bar to bring out the liquor. Shots were demanded, as well as beers and ryncol. She nodded a no to Wrex.

Shepard observed the living room, spotting Jack with Ashley and James. "Nice ink, but you got a lot of catching up to do.", Jack complemented at James's tattoos.

"Nah, I just got this when I lost my squad a few years ago.", he replied.

Shepard sat with them, listening to their conversations. Jack gestured to her, "So, Shepard. When are you going to get a couple of tattoos like me?"

"Never. No offense, but not like yours.", Shepard teased.

James laughed, "Yeah, I don't think a giant pair of skeleton hands will do nicely on the Commander's chest."

Jack and Shepard became quiet, while Ashley stared at him. Her legs folded, shaking the left one quickly in irritation. "You think about the commander's chest? Often!!"

Shepard set her drink down," Well… I should be going! Have a lot to do tonight. Great talking to you, James." She sat up quickly, giggling to herself while Jack enjoyed James defending his innocent banter.

Shepard started to wander, mingling again with other crew members. Joker, EDI, Miranda and Jacob spent time in front of the bar. Joker began discussing demographics of Cerberus.

Arguing how there is no future in a terrorist group. Jacob smirked, remarking on the lack of vacation time and minimum pay. With that, Miranda gave congratulations to him about becoming a father. He seemed excited enough. Jacob glanced off, then back at the group, "Be lying if I said I wasn't scared."

"You'll do great. You're a protector. That goes a long way.", Miranda replied.

Jacob smiled, seeing Shepard stand to the side of their little group. "Hey, Shepard. Good to see you again. Thanks for helping Brynn and I back on that Cerberus base." He saluted with his beer.

Shepard nodded, "My pleasure. Just glad I could be there for my friends."

He took a quick sip of his beer, eyeing Satima on the balcony as she overlooked the party below. Jacob cleared his throat. "I've heard a rumor that there's a new crew member. And she has some relation to you?"

"Oh.", Shepard spoke. "That would be true. I've been trying to keep the details under lock and key, but a certain blue skinned busy body has made it her mission to inform the entire crew."
Jacob and Miranda glanced to each other. Miranda stepped forward, "Your business is your own, Shepard. As long as you don't get hurt in the process, then… congratulations to you, as well."

Jacob looked stunned. "What's that mean?", he asked.

Joker popped open another beer. "Her name is Satima.", he took a swig of his beer. "Shepard's kid."

"Man!", Jacob responded. "That's one hell of a detail." Attempting to settle the atmosphere, he returned to Joker's previous debate on Cerberus.

Asking how he would turn Cerberus around. Joker replied with using propaganda and fundraising. Even kissing babes. Miranda thought he got confused and reminded him the expression was kissing babies. Joker laughed, he knew what he said.

Shepard appreciated the normal banter, leaving the group to make her way up to the balcony. Javik, Zaeed, along with Grunt and Wrex, started hanging out in front of the strange artwork. Javik was just sharing how Protheans used gatherings. Mostly for considering the future and respecting the dead. Zaeed replied with how boring it sounded.

Grunt wanted a krogan party, that would include breaking furniture and Wrex getting drunk and happily violent. "Not in my house.", Shepard muttered.

Zaeed laughed, "You want a real party, Grunt. There's a bar in the underbelly of Omega. All batarian strippers. Complete chaos and… other things." He grinned.

Shepard shook her head, "Damn, Zaeed. You need a hobby."

He chuckled, "I have one. Killing the reapers."

She leaned against the railing, listening to Javik challenge the two krogan men on who was the strongest. As Javik and Zaeed discussed the possibilities amongst themselves, the two krogan started to mince words. Wrex yelled how the "baby pyjack" wouldn't stand a chance. Grunt called him a fossil. Shepard stopped them before anything got broken. They began talking nonchalantly about Chora's den. She rolled her eyes. Men.

Back downstairs, Shepard found the last of the crew in the kitchen. Traynor was speaking about the enormous apartment and all its luxury accommodations. Tali sat on the counter top, enjoying a dextro beer. Traynor brought up the electric bill's monthly price, saying how it could have paid her entire college tuition.

Liara thought it could fund the war, whereas Garrus replied with it being a down payment for an Atlas mech. Tali wanted an air conditioner in her suit. No one said anything for a minute. Shepard leaned on the stove top, while Samara covered a small laugh at what Tali said. Garrus looked toward Shepard, "Keeping the hard liquor under lock and key?", he smirked.

"Otherwise, I'd have to drive you all home.", Shepard replied.

"Are we sure the Normandy is still here? Has anyone else tried to steal it?", Traynor questioned.

Kasumi appeared behind Shepard, speaking on how stealing the Normandy would be an interesting idea. Traynor took a second glance behind her Commander, and became seriously confused. "What? Who was that?", she asked, alarmed.

"Only the resident thief.", Shepard replied.

She asked Traynor if she had another toothbrush, everyone there laughed. Tali offered an idea to ask
Cerberus to build another one, the SR-3. Garrus laughed about it. "Maybe if we ask real nice, the Illusive Man will break open a trust fund, just for Shepard."

"Hey.", Shepard whined.

Samara asked Tali about her heritage, accidentally getting the quarian's middle name wrong, calling her Von Normandy. Tali replied that is was Vas, Not Von. Garrus started to reminiscence over the good times on the ship. They all replied, agreeing on the subject. Traynor felt honored to be a part of it.

Shepard raised a beer, "To the Normandy!"

"And to falling in love with her ship's captain!", Garrus replied, winking at Shepard.

An hour passed by, with everyone enjoying the relaxed atmosphere. Satima seemed to be hiding out, though no one bothered looking for her, or pressed either Shepard and Garrus on the matter. The party did start to finally pick up a beat.

People moved around, mingling with each other and drinking more. At the door's terminal, Grunt was busy turning citadel patrons away, quite hilariously. The sight of the dancing vorcha was the most disturbing. Then came the screaming fan girls. "Grunt... keep up the good work.", Shepard commented.

Zaeed, embarrassingly tried to flirt with Samara in the dining room. He attempted to use a comparison of their combatant lives, and how good looking they both were. Apparently, he needs a mirror, moreover Zaeed thinks that Samara should just go out with him, simply because... he's Zaeed.

Shepard quickly brought up the subject of the large art piece in front of the room. Zaeed tried to make a thoughtful conversation about it. Samara couldn't even force herself to like it. Despite the earlier flirtations, Samara warmed up to Zaeed's comments about the painting, whereas Shepard felt it looked like the background of a bad rock music video.

She left them to their... thoughts. Miranda and Jack relaxed at the mini bar in the den. "So... you're leading the Grissom Academy students.", Miranda asked.

"Yeah? That a problem?", Jack replied, slightly upset.

Though Miranda can be judgmental. Over the past 7 months, she has grown out of her cheerleader phase. "Just a surprise. Your psych profile suggested you were mainly invested in yourself.", Miranda added.

"You're telling me I'm only interested in myself? Oh, that's just fucking perfect. Did it occur to you that maybe I'm trying to grow as a damn person?", Jack argued.

"Oh, I could tell you were growing. I assumed it was... whatever that is you're wearing.", Miranda started to change the subject, randomly.

"Oh, these? Well, yeah, they were strapped down with a leather belt before. It's kind of a stupid move to show off your rack in the middle of a maximum-security prison ship.", Jack informed.

"I've never had the pleasure.", Miranda replied.

"You'd never survive. You might break a nail.", Jack teased.

"You have no idea what I'm capable of.", Miranda warned.
"You're a spoiled rich-girl cheerleader.", Jack quipped.


Shepard stepped into their hilarious threats, "Honestly, I think it might help if you just kissed and got it over with.", she snickered.

Both women replied with stunned expressions. "I mean this is all just sexual tension, right? Two powerful biotics, forceful personalities, confident in their sexuality...", Shepard went on. "You are shitting me". Jack complained.

Miranda covered her face in embarrassment, "Oh my God!"

Kasumi appeared, ready to record. Jack wanted to hurt her. Shepard made sure the two biotics were just ornery, and not ready to hash it out. "Relax, Shepard. We're just getting to know each other.", Miranda replied.

Jack groaned, irritated. "You know what that sounds like?"

Miranda's face flushed. "Oh no. That's not what I meant…"

Shepard covered her smile, reassured of their intended teasing, she left them alone. On the balcony, James and crew argued the value of biotics versus pure physical conditioning. He accidentally insulted those with biotic abilities, Liara was ready to educate him. James started to brag about his "fine-tuned appearance".

Ashley stood beside him, obviously taking in that appearance. At least she's gotten over his stupid comment.

Shepard became pitted between the two arguments. James claimed that physical strength trumped biotics, where Liara wanted to fling him off the balcony.

Shepard sided with biotics. Harnessing dark energy was something that required more than just physical strength. It meant honing in the mental capacity to control your surroundings and manipulate beyond the physical.

Meanwhile, downstairs at the bar, Joker was heard talking about pre-war excursions on the Normandy. Joker and Cortez traded life-bearing worlds, each with their own dangerous inhabitants and regions. Wrex argued about Tuchunka, and its own critters that would rip your guts out. Cortez raised his glass, replying with bring own the wildlife.

Shepard stepped behind the bar with Joker and Garrus, asking if the men were talking shop. It immediately went south to Joker's lack of firearm training. Garrus started it. Joker felt he didn't need it, considering he has an ass kicking robot next to him. Garrus doesn't agree, asking Joker what if he had to save EDI, instead.

Javik responded with how unacceptable it was, that pilots are warriors too. Wrex shouted that this was a "man emergency".

Garrus slammed his drink down. "Wrex, we need to drag his sorry robot kissing ass-no offense EDI-on the field! And give that boy a gun!" He teased with a determined gaze.

Shepard started laughing.

"What! Hell no! Don't touch me, Garrus. I'm serious. I could break something.", Joker whined.

Wrex got closer to the bar, while Garrus helped corner him. "Too late, fly boy.", he jested.
Joker stared at Shepard in distress, when the two men busted into laughter. Wrex slapped Joker's shoulder. "Oh, Man! The look on your tiny soft face."

"Yeah, yeah. Ha ha.", Joker glared at them, rubbing his sore shoulder.

Shepard was personally surprised at how Joker didn't want to train, reminding him of the collector attack. He replied, saying the real weapon is your brain, and besides, the collectors would have mobbed him if he stayed to fight. Upstairs, Shepard wandered around her new apartment, walking into a conversation between Traynor and Tali. EDI lounged with them on the couch.

The upcoming topic sounded a little personal. In which it actually was. Leading to the conclusion that before EDI was revealed as an artificial intelligence, Traynor believed her to be a very sensually voiced VI. Though EDI felt the flirtations charming and Traynor's personal thoughts on her voice appealing.

Traynor seemed embarrassed, and Tali was mortified. Almost choking on levo cheese, realizing she had been eating it. Tali ran out, freaking that she might be poisoned to block out the earlier conversation between EDI and Traynor. Shepard laughed in surprise, following poor Tali to check up on her. The quarian tech laid out on the floor, holding her belly and groaning. She looked up at Shepard. "You might want to stay away from this bathroom for a while."

"Oh, well... feel better?", Shepard offered, walking away fast.

Glyph passed by the downstairs guest, following Shepard, until they stopped in front of the fireplace. It was time to turn up the music and party. Everyone gathered in places to dance, mostly the open dining room.

Shepard spotted EDI trying to convince Jeff to dance. It wasn't going well at first, but EDI finally got him to try. Joker challenged Shepard to do the same.

After another round of mingling with her friends, Shepard decided to try dancing with the others in the dining room. Garrus was there, arguing about the way human's legs bend and their surprising ability to dance. That and the asari. Traynor took offense, revving up her dance moves. Tali agreed with Garrus but everyone kept dancing. Shepard shrugged her shoulders and started dancing with them.

Traynor couldn't believe it. Tali replied that since Shepard is saving the galaxy, they should forgive a few... eccentricities. Traynor thought it was at least enthusiastic.

"Hey, that's my girlfriend you're...ah, damn it, almost kept it straight. What is she doing with her arms?", Garrus begun laughing.

Cortez replied how it was good to see the Commander cut loose now and then. They all laughed heartily together, carefree of any worries. "Thank you all for your loyalty and support!", Shepard replied sarcastically.

Shepard made her way to Garrus, dancing beside him. "Shepard, is it just the alcohol, or do you have vids running in your head of us mostly naked, completely alone, and shamelessly rolling all over a couch?", he grinned, mandibles twitching in anticipation.

Shepard discretely slapped his behind and whispered in his ear,"...later..." His mind thought of so many naughty things to do "later".

Satima had wondered in, watching everyone dance and smiling at the happiness surrounding her. Jack spotted the hybrid. "Hey! Look who's actually socializing. Satima, want to dance with us?"
Most of the crew jested, and offered encouragement to see if the daughter of Shepard shared any-to quote Tali- of her mother's eccentricities. Satima's smile became a look of panic, as she vehemently shook her head. "No… no… I don't dance. Drink, fight, but not dance."

Wrex chuckled, "Now that's a way to enjoy a party. Fighting all your brothers on who's the most fertile with the females!"

Shepard covered her head in embarrassment, while Garrus laughed. Satima stared at Wrex, "First of all, ewe. Second, I didn't fight to win… those activities. It was to let out stress." She started to walk through the dancing. "Excuse me, but I have a drink to retrieve."

The party turned out great, with everyone enjoying each other's company. It also seemed like a relationship or two had started as well. Shepard had fun, watching her friends get the celebration they deserved. One thing was on her mind the entire night. Satima.

The hybrid watched from the side as everyone enjoyed themselves. Drinking, eating, dancing in the most horrible and embarrassing ways possible. Not her. Nope. Absolutely not. Keelah. Tali is grinding on Liara. She needs to leave.

Satima starts to rush out, until she is suddenly caught by James. "What's the hurry Princess?", he smirked.

She was pulled into a small group led by Jack. "Yeah. We need proper introductions girl."

Satima sat with the remaining group, sober enough to carry a conversation. Ashley brought more beer, while James ordered pizza on his omni-tool. She watched Jack and Miranda gossip about other crew members, as Traynor tries to teach Javik about poker. Liara takes a seat next to Satima. "Are you having fun?", she asks.

Satima laughs, "Yeah. This is great. Except for Wrex discussing about fertile females, and the awkward dancing."

Liara smirked.

"So, Queen of the Girl-scouts" daughter. How is that? Seriously!", Jack shouted, obviously a little more than drunk.

"You don't have to answer that.", Miranda informed. "But I am curious.", she then chuckled.

Okay. Some sort of joke going around? Satima accepted a beer. "I wasn't born naturally. If you're getting at that." Everyone got quiet. She continued, "The bad guys grew me in a pod... you know, the reapers. Everything is fuzzy on why. Since I came here in this time, it's been hard to remember."

Liara glanced away, clearing her throat as James nearly dropped a pizza slice. The rest seemed confused. Satima looked around, and with a grin laughed, replying. "That means I'm a test-tube warrior pilot girl scout! I kill bad guys and occasionally cause mischief."

"Damn Girl! She's definitely Shepard's!", Jack screeched with a beer in hand.

They all started to laugh out loud again.

Later in the party, she spent her time alone in the kitchen. Shepard caught up to her. "There you are!", she shouted. "I've been looking for you after the dance. Where did you go?"

Satima looked confused, "I've been here the whole time. Just... watching."

"Watching?", Shepard asked.
Satima glanced off, rubbing her neck nervously, "I didn't think you wanted me interfering with your party." Shepard looked downward with a heavy sigh. Satima continued with a small chuckle, "And some of your friends are pretty weird."

"The whole crew is having a vid picture made. I would like you to be a part of it.", Shepard requested.

Satima gulped, "Me? But, ... I'm not a part of your crew."

Shepard put a hand on the girl's shoulder, "This is your family, Satima. Be a part of it. For me.", she pleaded.

Satima nodded, more nervous and unsure of what to say. Shepard led her to the enormous couch in the living room, and started an announcement. "Hey, everyone! Come over here for a minute. Let's get a photo to remember this. Arrange yourselves on the sofa."

"An excellent idea!", EDI boasted. "Great idea! I want a copy.", Liara requested.

Some of the crew stood behind the sofa, others sat around on the couch. But they all knew to make room for two more particular people. Garrus, of course, and the new member. Satima.

Within moments, Glyph whirled in front of the fireplace. Shepard sat Satima between her and Garrus. Which made Satima blush from total embarrassment. "Okay. Everyone say "Normandy."

She leaned in close to Satima, "Smile, honey." At once, the crew repeated the word Normandy, and the picture was taken. A very memorable photo indeed.

It had been displayed that night on the vid screen, next to the bar. Satima stood staring at it. She didn't smile, but she didn't scowl either. More of a surprised look right at Shepard, instead. Shepard and Garrus had been glancing to each other, so she doubted the commander had any clue.

Most of the crew was off asleep or decided to take on some of the late-night amusements nearby, from the clubs and casinos dotting the silver strip. Satima sat in the dining room, preferring a quiet space to think. The Justicar Samara approached her. "Good evening, Satima.", she bowed respectfully.

Satima stirred from her seat, trying to give Samara a respectful bow as well. "Uh…. Good evening to you too.", she smiled weakly.

Samara sat next to her, as Satima resumed her seat. "I find the best time to enjoy your surroundings, is when it is quiet. I've been observing you. Tell me, what troubles you child?"

The hybrid became unsettled, "Nothing. I'm fine."

Samara gazed solemnly to her, "You have lost those close to you? I see it in your eyes, the way you stare at quarians and the way you stare at Shepard. How you act defiantly towards your sire."

Satima smirked, then stared at the Justicar confused. "My sire?"

Samara nodded with such gentle grace, that the whole movement seemed choreographed. "Yes. Garrus.", she answered.

Satima blushed, before averting her stare at the beautiful and strong asari. "They're not my parents. Not really." Her tone troubled.
"Do you not share the same genes?" Samara reached out. "The same eyes or the same hair?"

Satima leaned back in uncertainty. Samara continued, "When I had to deliver my daughters to the monastery, I left my previous life behind and became a justicar. I did this, not out of personal necessity, but out of love. To protect them from what they are, and hoped one day, we could be together as a family again.", she revealed.

Satima listened, no longer leaning away from Samara. The lament in the justicar's words stung for her. She could empathize, considering what she witnessed at that monastery.

The justicar's deep blue eyes were watery, irritated from an emotion she held in for so long. "Though I lost Rila, and my disturbed Morinth...I still have Falere. And I couldn't be prouder of her. Falere has shown that she doesn't need her mother to protect her." Samara's expression turned slightly saddened.

She moved her gaze to the hybrid, searching the young woman's noticeable tells and disturbed feelings. "Before me sits a grown woman, but inside, I see a terrified child. You must make peace with your past, Satima." She leaned out and brushed a stray ginger strand of hair behind the girl's ear. "Such a beautiful name. Shepard choose well."

Samara stood up, bowed again and left. Satima felt a sudden pang in her chest. She wanted Samara to come back, mentor her, guide her. There's no one here to do so, now. And even if Reaper showed up, she would be furious again at Satima. She stifled a short sob that escaped her mouth. Wiping tears off her cheeks, Satima got up to leave.

Meanwhile, Shepard stood at the doorway listening. It bothered her to hear Samara's words. "You're not alone in this, Satima. I promise.", Shepard thought.

Citadel-After Party

Shepard awoke in bed next to Garrus with warm sheets across her bare skin. "Oof, what a night... but look who's here.", she smiled.

"Yeah, I hung out a lot of places last night. Your upper body, your lower body... pretty much all the parts in-between.", he gave her a kiss.

"Turians certainly don't lack for a sense of direction.", Shepard replied.

"And you don't lack places to get lost.", he smirked.

Moments passed, with them dressed to greet the hangovers in the crew. James made eggs for breakfast, as everyone either took their time to wake up or hurried to find painkillers for headaches. Coffee was getting in short supply. Ashley exchanged a look between her and James.

Shepard found herself happy for the new couple. The morning lasted for a while. Noon came and so did their duty to return to the Normandy. No one noticed Satima taking a screen shot of the photo from last night. She zoomed in, making sure it was just her, Shepard and Garrus.

Outside on the sky car pad, the crew began to pile out. Ready to leave back to the Normandy. "Duty calls, huh? Even with a hangover?", Joker asked sarcastically.

Shepard turned to them from the sky car console, "There's still a war on."

Joker smirked, "Unless the Reapers are on shore leave, too."
"I'm guessing they're not. Round everyone up, pass out the aspirin, and have them report to the Normandy.", Shepard ordered.

"You got it.", Joker obeyed.

Later, Shepard stood leaning on the rails of the Normandy docks. She stared away at her ship... her home. Garrus walked up behind her, joining Shepard's view. "So, I guess it's back to the fight?", he asked.

"At least we threw one hell of a party. Probably the last one.", Shepard replied. "Get back out there to die, right?"

Garrus leaned in closer to her, "That doesn't sound like my girl. You'll find a way to win. And when this is over, I'll be waiting for you. We both will.", he hinted about Satima. Garrus gazed at the Normandy, "Best times of my life were spent on that ship. Been a damn good ride."

Shepard smiled, "The best."

Satima stood behind them and stepped to Shepard on her left. Shepard had been holding on to Garrus's arm while they took in the view. In the distance of the citadel's arms, was a small flash. "What the hell was that?", Satima asked.

"Good question.", Shepard replied. Most of the crew were already on board.

The flash expanded and exploded into a blinding green light. They shielded their eyes to it. "What the hell?", Satima yelled, then she saw to her horror, that a Sentarian cruiser was crossing through.

It had successfully navigated into citadel space. An enormous battle cruiser, nearly the size of the Destiny Ascension. Satima backed away from the railing, literally shaking in fear. Garrus turned around to see Satima's reaction, while Shepard watched, curiously and afraid. "What's wrong, Satima?", he asked her.

Behind Satima a tear opened. This wasn't good. She always carried a weapon on her, and readied it. A familiar shape stepped through with others. This shape took form and upon taking its helmet off, alarmed the terror-stricken occupants of the docks. She glared at Satima with her piercing green eyes. "Found you."

Satima dropped her blade, terrified. Her worst fear had happened. "I tho... thought you were hiding in the outer systems?", Satima stuttered.

"Archer told you as much?", she spoke, mockingly. "You knew we were here, but you never made contact. Why?", the woman demanded.

Satima gulped, "I didn't want to screw up the timeline."

The woman took a menacing step towards her, "Timeline?", she smirked. "Let's go over what happened." With a sarcastic flare, she continued, "We were so close to fixing this, Satima. Our home, our time. But you decided to deceive me. I thought, I believed... you were capable of fighting indoctrination, like I can. I was wrong."

She stepped closer, using a threatening tone. "You're nothing like me. You're something dangerous and unpredictable. And I can't have that kind of unpredictable running around free."

Shepard stepped up, unsure but determined to defend Satima. "What gives you the right to accuse her of anything?!!"
The woman walked further into the docks lighting, "Because I am Commander Shepard, her mother. And she belongs to me!"

Shepard looked horrified, just as much as Garrus. "This is... Reaper?", he asked Satima.

Satima nodded, returning her gaze to her mother, "I can control it. You just have to trust me."

Her mother scoffed, "Trust you? Like when you waited for me to not notice you using the platform. This was my mission, not yours. You don't belong here. These people don't know you, don't care about you. It's about the reapers and their war right now. Not the bigger picture.", she pointed insultingly at Shepard and Garrus.

Garrus darted forward, pissed, "The future is not certain. You can't be sure that it will repeat! What happened to you, won't happen this time. It can't." His terrified gaze couldn't leave the form of a reaper controlled Shepard. Or is she controlled?

The synthetically enhanced Shepard glared at Garrus, "It has happened! You're all going to die, or be subject to The Directive's whim, and I... you, it's slave.", she looked straight at Shepard.

"No!", Satima yelled. Garrus stared at her, "You would kill yourself?", he accused in dismay.

His commander gazed to him, "It's the only way! Without me, the reapers can't repeat this horrible future."

"Do you hear yourself? You sound... ", he started, backing down in realization.

Reaper laughed at them, "Indoctrinated?! Yes, she is. Since the batarian relay, Shepard has been subtly fed whispers and nightmares." She turned to the alternate, "Within time, their voices will sound very convincing.", Reaper stated in mock.

Satima glanced around. Everyone was arguing and threatening each other. "Enough! I'll go with you... do whatever is needed. But, they deserve a chance. We can give them that, can't we?", she pleaded to her mother.

The older Shepard looked down at Satima, who was standing directly in front of her. A sadness washed over her heart, but she remained adamant. "Satima... these people will either die or become harvested. You cannot help the damned. Let's go back to the cruiser and finish what we started... twenty-years from now.", she said gently.

Satima covered her mouth to drown out a whimper of regret. She turned to face them, "I'm so sorry. I wanted to help you... wanted to...", she looked downward.

With a few dried tears, Satima took her mother's hand. The older Shepard gave a final warning before leaving with her daughter, "Charlotte... do yourself a favor, and end it... for the both of you. Save yourself the pain."

They were gone inside the rift. Shepard wavered against the railing. Garrus wiped a cold sweat from his plated brow. "What the shit... Shepard?", he looked at her.

She began to stand again, a different look on her face. "I won't let anyone deter me from saving this galaxy. And if I die doing it, so be it. Are you with me Garrus?", she asked him with pleading eyes.
"All the way.", he smiled weakly.

They would keep this meeting to themselves. Unsure and scared of what was to happen to Satima. More distressed over not following her. The Sentarian ship fled through the relay, leaving confused and frightened naval ships behind.

Citadel Space-Preflight
Sentarian Battle Cruiser

Callon waited eagerly for the two reaper experiments to show up. He forgave Memtrix the slight error of helping her sister with the prisoners. Though they didn't realize this fact until it was too late.

Memtrix is loyal, loyal enough to look away, and his best soldier. Arkasia spent time in a cell, awaiting her fate. It took an awfully long time for it to happen, that is, until she heard the rumors about Satima being found.

Why would Shepard-Reaper, bring her daughter back here? To this place of danger and deception. She felt it no different than the stories of hive. In the council room, Reaper paced while Satima argued. "We can't just leave them behind. Mother, we can help them!"

"No. I don't want to hear any more about this! Satima, what about us?", Reaper glared.

"We can't be selfish.", Satima replied. Her mother threw a data pad across the room, "I have done nothing...NOTHING but give! This galaxy has taken enough from me!"

Satima gave an unsettled stare. "Archer tried to kill me twice. Made me almost kill them. I fought the voices, fought indoctrination. I can do more...", she was interrupted by Callon.

"That's what I want to hear.", Callon said upon entering the room. "I will forget the past issues of your last visit. Admittingly, I look forward to working with you, both of you, again.", he grinned.

"I have her back. It seems this timeline has not been derailed or disturbed. What can we do to stop The Intelligence?", Shepard asked.

Callon paced, as Memtrix brought up a map of the citadel. "There are three energy conduits. One of you must enter it and use your synthesis template we have created from your samples to eliminate the Intelligence.", he stated.

"Why your template?", Satima argued. She doesn't trust this scenario.

"Your nanites have the ability to encrypt and rewrite the Intelligence.", she looked at Satima. "This will kill either of you. And the one left behind could severely be affected by the pulse. In fact, both of you can die."

Satima shook her head. "This is what I was researching, back on the Normandy. The crucible supplies the power needed for this chamber."

Reaper looked to her, "We must accept our fate and perform this duty. To save them all."

Callon nodded in satisfaction. Satima stared at her mother, "What? You want us... to die?", she asked confused.

Reaper looked away, "You and I, do not belong here. We should have never existed... not like this.", her words were convincingly solemn.
Satima couldn't believe what she was hearing, and looked to Memtrix, "Where is Arkasia? Why isn't she a part of this?"

Memtrix looked downward, there was something going on. She replied, "My sister has undermined the command, she's incarcerated as we speak."

"What? Can I see her?", Satima asked urgently.

Memtrix looked back at Satima, "You may."

On the brig, Memtrix took Satima to see Arkasia. She looked tired and sick. "Why won't you eat?", Memtrix asked. Her sister remained silent. Memtrix walked to the energy cell, "I've brought someone to see you."

Satima was allowed in, stepping to the cell's opening. She looked at Memtrix and the Sentarian soldier took the hint, leaving them alone to speak. Arkasia glanced up as Satima began, "I wanted to thank you for trying to save me... from before. I know now that you weren't thinking only of yourself."

Arkasia looked down, nodding to her words. "I couldn't save him... your Jormun. And then you got stuck here... Kin Sha... I'm so sorry all of this happened.", she apologized

Satima crouched to Arkasia's sitting position. "Jormun made the choice most of us aren't brave enough to fathom."

It was hard to speak of him. She took a deep breath, "He wanted to protect me. Spirits, I was such a handful. I should've made time for him, been with him. And now he's gone. But it's not your fault. It was Archer's. He's the murderer. You tried to stop the madness that Callon started, and I think you've served enough time in his punishment."

Satima stood, using a hack to unlock the energy bars. Arkasia sat up, stunned. "But... Satima?"

"I requested you to help me against the reapers. These are probably my final hours of life, Arkasia. I want to spend them protecting the galaxy... like Jormun protected me.", Satima swore.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for taking the time to read this crazy chapter. :)
The final battle is waged, with Shepard spear heading the galaxies might against the reapers. With the citadel dangerously looming over Earth, the crucible is put in place. Satima and Reaper make a deadly decision, and the future of the galaxy is changed. But will this change, last?

Priority Earth
Cerberus Prologue

With the Illusive Man's headquarters located, the Alliance initiated their attack. Shepard led the assault on Cronos station in a last attempt to recover the Prothean VI.

She met with the truth, that the Illusive Man had betrayed them to the reapers, when a last obstacle showed himself. Kai Leng. Shepard fought the cybernetic assassin, killing him and avenging Thane. Satisfied in his demise, the commander left the doomed facility.

The Alliance decimates the remaining forces of Cerberus, preparing for the final confrontation against the Reapers on Earth.

During the flight back to the Sol system, the Normandy's crew members begin to question Satima's absence, to the point that Shepard starts to lash out. Arguing her command and their loyalty. Garrus does what he can to calm the tense atmosphere, assuring everyone that Shepard was just tired.

Meanwhile, Reaper leads a small team on a sentient star-ship to the Sol system. She already knows why the reapers are there, leaving Satima in the dark.

She doesn't plan to sacrifice themselves, but to use the power of the crucible to create a rift, and find a new home. Arkasia confirmed its use in that, and in time, Satima will understand and forgive her.

Normandy-Quantum Entanglement Communicator

Shepard entered the QEC, Anderson's frame coming into view. "Shepard. You read me?"

"Barely.", she replied.

"I assume you've heard about the Citadel?", he asked.

"Just now.", she answered nervously. Anderson gave her a serious stare. "Do we know what's going on? Why it's here?"
Shepard changed stances, "The Citadel is the Catalyst. Thanks to the Illusive Man, the reapers are now aware that we know."

Anderson shook his head confused, "And so they moved it here to protect it?"

"As far as I can tell.", she answered.

"What does this mean for the crucible?", he asked again.

Shepard started pacing, "I'll talk to Hackett about that, but... it looks like our planet is even more desperate now."

"Agreed.", he said. "I've got a team in London. The Reapers have been preparing something here. Now we know what for. We'll scout it out. Try to find out as much as we can."

"Roger that.", Shepard complied.

Anderson smirked, "Well... at least we'll be seeing you sooner rather than later."

She stepped close to his image, "Be careful, Sir."

He nodded, "You too, Shepard. Anderson out."

Shepard walked back into the war room. She double checked her war assets of all the different military, allying together to end this. If only Satima were here.

Once she finished, Shepard made her way into the CIC. Traynor waited, giving her a salute. Every crew member gave their thanks and wished the Commander luck. Acknowledging their honor to serve under her. On the third deck, she stopped at the main gun's door. It took a few minutes for her to walk inside. Tali and Garrus stood opposite, talking. "We were just saying goodbye.", Tali informed.

"And making friendly wagers.", Garrus spoke.

Tali laughed, "Optimistic wagers, in your case."

Garrus shook his head with a smile, "A turian operative competing with a quarian mechanic, and I'm the optimistic one?"

"Do you remember Ilos?", Tali asked.

"Yes. It was filled with geth, which tilted the odds in your favor.", Garrus complained.

"Excuses, excuses.", Tali chuckled.

Shepard stepped closer on the conversation, "You two have been with me longer than most. You believed in me when nobody else did. Thank you."

"Keelah se'lai, Shepard.", Tali saluted.

"Well, you did give me some incentive.", Garrus smirked. "At least we finally killed Lieutenant Bastard Kai Leng. I just hope we get to do the same to his general. It's kind of amazing how everything's come full circle. The Citadel's been the center of galactic civilization, a reaper trap, and my source of employment for a long time... and now it's our salvation for any chance at winning this war." He stopped, nodding to himself at the irony. Garrus glanced to her, "I think it's time we got you back home, Shepard. Earth will either be remembered as the place we beat the reapers... or it'll
be a smoking ruin for the next cycle to wonder about." he answered honestly, realizing how Shepard might be feeling right now.

Tali leaned off the console, walking to Shepard. "If she's out there, ... I'm sure Satima is thinking of you. And you too, Garrus. I am glad to have met her." She left the main gun deck.

Alone, Shepard and Garrus stood apart, awkwardly. He started to speak,"...if one of us survives...", he began. Shepard darted across the room to him, furiously putting her mouth to his. She let go to talk, "We will survive! And find her."

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Taking Earth back...

The fleets assemble through the relays. Joker glances at an Alliance cruiser as it hovers next to the Normandy. It was Admiral Hackett. The docking tube reached out, successfully attaching to the hatch of the Normandy. "Commander, you've got a priority message from Admiral Hackett, requesting to come aboard.", Joker informed.

"Permission Granted.", Shepard answered on comms.

Joker, as well as the crew of the CIC watched Hackett and his men board. They made headway through the deck. Shepard met him in front of the Normandy's display in her formal attire. She saluted, "Admiral."

Hackett likewise gave her a salute, "Are you ready to bring the might of the galaxy to bear on the reapers?"

"Yes, sir.", she said sternly.

Hackett shook her hand, "Then let's make sure the fleets are ready."

Traynor began the message sequence across the GUI interface of the galaxy map, "All fleets reporting in, sir.", she informed.

Hackett stood on the ramp, overlooking the galaxy map and deck. He began his speech, "Never before have so many come together-from all quarters of the galaxy. But never before have we faced an enemy such as this. The Reapers will show us no mercy. We must give them no quarter.", Hackett continued, "They will terrorize our populations. We must stand fast in the face of terror. They will advance until our last city falls, but we will not fall. We will prevail. Each of us will be defined by our actions in the coming battle. Stand fast. Stand strong. Stand together. Hackett out."

As they take a stroll around the deck, Hackett informed Shepard how the fleets were ready to strike the Reapers surrounding earth. He wants Shepard and other ground forces to take London. Shepard paused in their short walk, "London? Why aren't we hitting the citadel directly?", she asked.

"Anderson can brief you on that.", Hackett replied.

Back inside the QEC, Anderson's form once again appeared over the interface. Hackett asked him how he was holding up. Anderson was ready to end this.

He showed them a display of the citadel closing its arms since it appeared over London. Shepard knew they needed those arms open to get inside the crucible. Anderson informed them of the surrounding Hades cannons that shoot down any transports to it. Hammer ground forces would be decimated. "You'll lead a squadron of smaller shuttles. Infiltrate with a ground team to take out the
cannons using the heavy weapons," Anderson briefed. "Hammer can land, and we'll set up a Forward Operations Base."

"I still don't see how we're getting to the Citadel from London.", Shepard asked.

Anderson pointed to an image off to the side. It appeared next to Shepard and Hackett. "The Reapers use this beam to transport humans, alive and dead, to the Citadel. From the FOB, Hammer will launch an all-out assault on the Citadel beam. Everyone who makes it that far will take the beam to the Citadel, then locate and activate the Citadel arm controls."

"Once we see those arms, Shield Fleet will escort the Crucible to the Citadel.", Hackett acknowledged. "But timing will be crucial. We don't have enough fire power to keep the Crucible safe for long."

Shepard crossed her arms, this is what they were trained for. "Nothing's ever easy. No reason it should start now."

"It's desperate. I don't even want to guess at our odds. But...", Anderson was interrupted by Hackett.

"But this is the only plan we have. If we wait, the Reapers bleed us slowly. Conventionally... we can't defeat the Reapers without the Crucible.", he finished, turning to Shepard. "Get the Citadel arms open, Commander... whatever the cost. We'll do the rest." Hackett started to head out. "Good luck... to all of us."

"Yes, sir.", Shepard saluted.

Sentarian Starship en route to Sol system

Satima moved the panels, navigating the ship into the system. It looked the same, except for no hive. The transmission from the Normandy played out over their own com links. Her mother stood beside her. Arkasia readied the rifter devices needed to board the citadel. Her sister Memtrix gathered a team of stalkers.

"We'll have to be quick to avoid the reapers in this area. They will spot us and attack. Satima, use the cloaking on the thrusters, make us invisible.", Reaper ordered.

Satima did as she was told, turning her head towards her mother, "We can't just abandon them. I know you want to use the crucible for yourself... I overheard your plans with Arkasia."

Her mother leaned over her, "It's not just for me. It's for us! Satima... these people don't stand a chance."

"But they're your people! Regardless of timelines... are we not the same? We have the tech and the ability to save them. I cannot stand aside and watch this happen. Not without trying to change it.", Satima argued.

Reapr stood straight, "Are you really determined to die with them?"

Satima nodded her head, a look of pure determination and brought out the picture she took of Shepard and Garrus, with her in the middle. "Don't they deserve a chance? A chance you never got?"

Reaper stared at the picture. It hit her hard. Satima is right. This timeline deserves a chance, and these people deserve life. Regrettably, she agrees. "Go to earth. We will find Shepard, and finally end this
The Normandy leads the fleets to battle against the reapers over Earth, swiftly navigating out of the relay. Joker acknowledged the incoming fleets that were reporting. "Alliance fleets reporting, Turian fleets reporting, Asari fleets reporting.", he repeated.

The bulk of the allied naval fleets cornered the far side of the system, advancing towards the reapers and earth. Quarian fleets swiftly progressed to aide in the incoming battle. "Quarian fleets accounted for and ready.", a Quarian commander commed. The Geth fleet was the last to accompany them.

"All fleets reporting in, Commander. Ready to engage on your command.", Joker acknowledged. Shepard stared at her home world. Fire blazed in many places, as she stood vigilant behind Joker.

Reapers cut through the firefight of their enemies, mercilessly decimating the fleets. Fighter ships were sent after the reaper drones on Shepard's command. An Alliance cruiser attempted to advance on a reaper, failing in its own destruction.

"Breaking off. Preparing for descent.", Joker informed.

Many ships were destroyed as the Normandy made its way to London. Shepard started walking to the elevator, when Joker stood up from his pilot chair. "Commander.", he saluted to her, "Be careful down there."

She nodded to him, "We'll be fine. Stay focused.", saluting back.

"Aye. Aye.", he said.

Shepard and her team waited in the shuttle as Cortez navigated to London. Joker's image came on the terminal screen, "Advance teams away. Hammer's in position and waiting for you guys to clear a path. Normandy's rejoining Sword."

"Stay safe. I'll be back before you know it."

"I'll hold you to that. Normandy out.", Joker finished.

The screen went dark. Cortez busily worked the control console to the shuttle, "We're closing in on the LZ, Commander."

"How's it look?", Shepard asked, stepping into the small cockpit.

"Like hell. Take a look for yourself."

On the terminal screen, they viewed a dark and barren city. Sky cars laid abandoned and burnt, the roads were cracked from intense battle. Grey overcast left a gloomy outlook on the place, as they passed by overturned trucks on fire.

Buildings were damaged, fallen into each other from the massive detonations of the reapers weapons.
Shepard and EDI stood behind her, watching. "Sorry, Shepard. I know this isn't easy.", Garrus consoled.

"I barely even recognize it.", Shepard said solemnly.

They passed by a Hades cannon releasing a laser beam, aiming for them. "Shit. We got a lock. Hold on.", Cortez yelled. The kodiak's alarms blared around them. The beam hit a fellow shuttle, killing the marines inside. "Damn it.", Cortez shouted.

"Status.", Shepard demanded.

"That was the squad responsible for taking out that defense turret.", Cortez informed, panicked.

"Who's on it now?", Shepard asked.

"Nobody in the vicinity. All either deployed or shot down.", Cortez answered.

"Drop us off.", Shepard ordered.

Cortez turned to Shepard, giving her a quizzical look. "Ma'am?"

"We have to take that thing out before Hammer can land.", Shepard explained.

Shepard quickly turned to face her team, "Change of plans people. We're gonna take out that Hades Cannon." She grabbed onto the upper hull, watching for their response.

"A bold strategy. Do you have a plan?", EDI asked.

Cortez hastily informed them to look through the downed shuttle for the heavy weapons. "Perfect, you heard the man. Once we're clear, make your way to the crashed shuttle. We'll search the wreckage for heavy weapons."

They were dropped off, right into a heavy firefight. Assaulted by marauders and cannibals, Shepard battled her way through. Using her heavy rifle, she mowed down the first wave coming at them. Cortez came back on comms,"Damn. I can't stay here, ma'am."

"Get clear. Come get us once we've taken that turret down.", Shepard ordered.

"Roger that. Cortez out."

Garrus sniped three cannibals sneaking up on Shepard as she watched the shuttle leave to a safe distance. EDI made note of the Commander's current distraction, her feelings to watch over the crew. Shepard turned to them, "All right! Let's move!"

In the background, the hades cannon fired constantly, its blinding laser roaring into the sky. Out of cover from building debris, Shepard led her team forward. Ahead of them, more reaper forces occupied a cluttered parking lot. Up the stairs, two brutes waited.

"This is Captain Johnson. Hammer is getting torn apart. We need those guns offline, now!", a marine commed.

EDI sent her decoy out to fool the marauders holding the route out. They took cover behind black metal fencing. It seemed they fought their way to a small park.

Smoldering trees lined the scenery. The brutes came rumbling and roaring through the area. Knocking anything away from them, wrecking more havoc and chaos on the already dying landscape.

Shepard glanced over her shoulder to see the famous clock tower of London. It still stood.

A brute ran towards them. Shepard used her rifle to tear into the armored skin of the reaper monster.
EDI offered herself as bait, using her agile skills to evade it. Garrus fired, using armor piercing rounds against the brute’s vulnerable spots. Leaving gaping wounds for Shepard to take advantage of. The hades cannon opened fire into the sky again, roaring and vibrating the ground with its deadly accuracy.
"Two guns down, but we still can't land!", another marine commed.

Shepard made it to the building ahead. Debris and other wreckage provided a crude ramp to the top. "Damn it. You've got airborne hostiles inbound. Gonna try and keep them off you!", Cortez commed.
"Careful, Cortez!", Shepard yelled worried. Behind her, the screeches of ravagers and the shuttles roar stole her attention. She looked back to watch Cortez try to maneuver the enemy away from the crash site on the building. The ravager made a direct hit, "Damn it. I'm hit!", Cortez shouted.

"Steve!", Shepard screamed.

The shuttle barely made its way around, evading the ravager once more. "I'm all right.", Cortez replied.
"You sure?", Shepard glared, her heart pounding in fear.

"But I won't be picking you up. I gotta land this bird quick.", he informed.

On top of the damaged building, they fought through waves of abominations and husks. Banshees tried flanking them.

Shepard found the cannon in the crashed shuttle. She equipped the M-920 Cain climbing to the top of a broken wall, aimed and fired the grenade into its structure. With a glorious display of fire and debris, the cannon exploded.
"That's it. The gun is down. All Hammer teams, prepare for landing.", a marine commed.

The building became quiet after the explosion, with no reaper forces in site. They were stuck there. "Anybody. Come in! We need extraction.", Shepard yelled over open comms.
A banshee showed suddenly, "Heads up. We got company!", Garrus shouted.

Shepard had one grenade left from her Cain. Out of cover, she aimed at the banshee and fired. It roared at her when the grenade landed and hit with a fiery explosion. Reapers started attacking. "This is Commander Shepard. Any Alliance personal in the vicinity?"

Cannibals came through small holes and crevices, husks poured out. "We're going to be overrun soon.", EDI warned.

"Commander. Prepare for extraction.", Major Coats informed over comms.

The shuttle arrived during the firefight, to extract the Commander and team from the building. "Come on! We'll cover you!", he shouted.

They made a mad dash to the shuttle, ducking from enemy fire, and an occasional husk. Once safely inside, Shepard turned to see Anderson.

She gave him a handshake with a look of relief. It was very good to see him. He informed that since the heavy air defenses were dealt with, Hammer forces can land. What is left of the resistance is holding out at the FOB. Shepard asked him how it was before they all arrived. Anderson replied with it being touch and go every day.

He looked so worn and beat. With recon teams watching the reapers focus on the major cities, they
ended up losing a lot of good men planning this attack. Anderson held on knowing that Shepard would bring help. It's going to take everyone standing together to end this war against the reapers.

Shuttles were destroyed on the way to the FOB. Reaper forces tried to whittle down the remaining ground teams. But they held on, fighting through, reaching the base. Anderson turned to Shepard as she watched, disgusted. "There's one more thing.", he said.

"What is it?", Shepard asked.

"Your ace in the hole is here. And she brought company.", he replied.

Shepard glanced to Garrus. Satima is back? "About her… ", Shepard began.

Anderson looked out the shuttle window. "Shepard, there's a war with sentient machines aiming to wipe this galaxy out. I don't mind a little surprise, as long as it's on our side." Shepard nodded, relieved.

At the FOB, the shuttle hovered above the LZ, debris from overturned trash receptacles and previous occupants were blasted away as the Kodiak finally settled.

Shepard eagerly left the shuttle, along with Anderson and her team. They met with a marine who informed them of the command center being completed. "Admiral, we've set up a command center in the building over there."

Anderson acknowledged, "Looks like we still got groups coming in."

"Yes, sir, but not as many as we hoped.", the marine informed.

Anderson sighed looking to Shepard. "Come see me when you're ready."

"Will do.", Shepard replied.

EDI stood next to Garrus, "He's right. I expected to see more of Hammer here by now."

Shepard turned away, stepping to the side, "A lot of them won't be making it.", she glanced to her team, "You two go on ahead. I'll catch up."

Garrus and EDI left to explore the compound. Major Coats had finished briefing his own teams, when he caught Shepard in the process of leaving the LZ. "The fighting here's been some of the worst on the planet. It looks bad, but there's still hope.", he looked at Shepard who glanced off. "And, you're here. I'll do the troops good to see you. Bolster their resolve."

"I'm just a soldier like them.", she argued.

"You might see yourself like that, but they don't. Like it or not, Commander, you're a hero to these men and women. Don't discount the effect that can have on them.", Coats encouraged.

He and Shepard stood quietly for a moment. "I better go meet up with my battalion. I'll see you at the command center.", he informed.

Shepard jogged into the building, finding a ladder down to the command base. It was time to say her good-byes.

Meanwhile, Satima observed the battle field ahead on the highest building. Her mother stood quietly. It was unnerving to speak with Anderson again. Old memories, how they hurt and sting. He didn't quite understand what she was, or what the Sentarians were. Memtrix and Arkasia stayed behind on
the ship, keeping an eye on the crucible.

Satima wanted to help on the field first, and speak with Shepard. Her mother didn't want this interaction, so she opted out by staying away.

The citadel could be seen for thousands of miles across the face of the planet. This was the most frightening, yet exciting wonder to behold. The end of days.

"Shepard is talking to everyone. Those soldiers seem happy to see her. Look. There's James. He's really funny.", Satima recalled.

Her mother didn't look, but listened. "You really care for them?", she asked.

"Don't you still?", Satima answered.

Reaper, no longer the single Shepard, crossed her arms with a sigh, "Satima, Callon is convinced our cybernetics could change the will of The Directive-The Intelligence. The will of the Reapers. It's not possible. It is convinced itself that we are a threat. Organics and in-organics alike. Don't think only those with flesh are just destroyed. The synthetics are victims also."

Satima sat up from crouching over the edge of the building. "Then we change their will to ours. Rewrite... remember? We can try or die with them."

Reaper laughed, "You can't die that easily. Neither of us can."

Satima looked away, "If I could be free from this...", she gestured to her armor. "I don't want the implants, the nano tech in me. I just want to be normal."

Reaper glanced at Satima, she felt pained to hear her child hate herself. If she can change the will of the reapers, their Intelligence, free Satima of the indoctrination and bonds of the nano tech... Reaper will see to it. She'll sacrifice herself for her child, do anything to protect her. Anything.

"Go on. I'll catch up. Help Shepard fight the abominations below. Give her my regards.", Reaper spoke.

Satima gave her a hug, wasting no time to get down to the bottom of the base. Reaper cherished that moment. It would serve as a wonderful memory.

Moments later, Shepard found Garrus speaking with other turian soldiers at the second floor of the damaged building. "I want you to coordinate with the Alliance. Make sure we iron out these logistical problems.", Garrus ordered.

"Yes, sir. The krogan don't want to share supplies, though.", the soldier commented.

Garrus smirked, "That's just Wrex playing hard to get. Tell him I've got a crate of Denorian beer I'd be happy to barter with. That oughta get his attention."

Shepard ran into the Primarch. He wanted to be on Earth in person, returning the favor for what Shepard had done for him. She shook his taloned hand, grateful for the help. It would take all the races of the galaxy to defeat the reapers. If they can.

Garrus noticed Shepard by the Primarch and waited with a nod. She made the slow walk, afraid this would be the last time they could have to speak freely. Another awkward moment, brought on by the intense stress and hopelessness they both felt for each other.

"So, I guess this is...", Garrus started.
"Just like old times?", she jested. Standing together with that awkward laugh.

He smirked, "Might be the last chance we get to say that."

Shepard lost her grin, "Think we're going to lose?"

"No, I think we're about to kick the reapers back into whatever black hole they crawled out of. Then we're going to retire somewhere warm and tropical and live off the royalties from the vids.", Garrus smirked.

Satima rushed up the ramp, right into the doorway, before she spotted Garrus and Shepard talking. A few turians stood around, also conversing with each other. But their voices were plainly heard. She waited off to the side, unseen... listening.

Garrus leaned in closer to Shepard, taking her hand in his with a slight squeeze, "Shepard, I... this could be it, or not. But I wanted to ask you something."

She waited, staring at him, scared and excited to what his question was.

He cleared his throat, glancing to her hands in his. "Will you consider being my mate? Uh, that is in your culture... marry me?"

Shepard stood stunned, "...what?"

Garrus changed stances, his eyes widened like a frightened animal. He gulped, then repeated his question. "Marry me, Charlotte."

"Garrus...", she smiled weakly, "That's a promise I can't make... not now. I can't do that to you."

Garrus looked down, "We just have to beat the reapers first.", he replied. "Then we can see where this goes?"

Satima covered a gasp of internal turmoil. She can't let them die, the reapers must be stopped.

"Are you upset?", Shepard asked worried.

Garrus held her hand gently, "Not at all. You didn't exactly say no, so I think I'm doing pretty good right now."

They both laughed nervously.

Garrus glanced away to the outside, "James told me there's an old saying here on Earth: "May you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you're dead."

Not sure if turian heaven is the same as yours, but if this thing goes sideways and we both end up there... meet me at the bar. I'm buying."

Shepard shook her head, "We're a team, Garrus. There's no Shepard without Vakarian, so you better remember to duck."

"Sorry, turians don't know how. But I'll improvise. And Shepard... Forgive the insubordination, but your boyfriend has an order for you...", he leaned in to her, holding her arms to him, "Come back alive. It'd be an awfully empty galaxy without you."

Shepard and Garrus kissed with passion. He didn't want to let her go, but the other turians became a little uncomfortable. She released his embrace. "Goodbye, Garrus. And if I'm up there in that bar and you're not-I'll be looking down. You'll never be alone."

Her voice sounded shaky from controlling an urge to sob. Shepard rarely cried, and only when it mattered the most.
Garrus stood to the side as Shepard left him in the building. "Never.", he repeated, watching her leave.

Satima leaned out, looking at them. Shepard left and Garrus glanced around as the other turians minded their business. She stepped inside the room, wandering closer. A turian male looked up in surprise. He'd never seen an alien like her before. Garrus glanced up from his thoughts, shocked to see her. "Satima? How did you get here?", he asked, confused.

She gave him a smile, "I wanted to fight with you."

"Where did you go? The other Shepard-Reaper took you.", he said.

"She's here. Somewhere.", Satima chuckled, "I'm looking for Shepard.", she asked, knowing the truth.

"You just missed her. She's in the other building.", Garrus pointed.

Before Satima could continue, a turian soldier stepped forward, with a curious stare. "Excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt, but... what species are you?"

Satima cocked her head, curious to his question. She glanced to Garrus, then answered the soldiers question. "Half turian."

"Spirits. How is that possible?", he asked.

Satima grinned, "You don't want to know."

Shepard took her time for one last meeting with her friends, before she had to start the last mission. Anderson waited for her, overlooking the schematics of the reaper's transmission beam. Satima entered behind them. "Shepard!", she called out.

Shepard turned around in surprise. "Satima? I looked for you on my way up. Where is Reaper?"

"Gone. She's attending a personal mission and will catch up with us at the beam. Listen, Shepard... I wanted to talk with you. Before anything else happens." They walked to the side of the room, away from other ears. Satima wrung her hands, "Reaper and I have a plan. It's dangerous and you can't help with it. You're not like her... not yet, anyhow. I wanted you to know... how grateful I am to have accompanied you on missions and to party down with your friends. The Normandy was a nice place to call home, after I lost mine."

"Satima, you are always welcome on the Normandy. And after defeating the reapers... you have a place with us. Earth and Palaven are your homes. I hope you see that.", Shepard confessed.

Anderson stepped to them, "You're the turian hybrid?" Satima nodded. He glanced to Shepard with a stunned expression, then continued to speak with Satima, "Who are your parents? Are they here?"

Satima looked at Shepard, she proceeded to reply when Shepard cut in, "They are. And they're fighting to secure her future."

Anderson nodded between them with a knowing look. He walked back to the command center.

Satima leaned in close to Shepard, "I thought you forwarded the report about me to your Alliance? You didn't tell them about our relation?"

Shepard nodded away, "They're not ready yet. Not for the whole truth. When the reapers are gone,
then we'll see."

In moments, everyone circled the display as Anderson went over the sit-rep. "How's it looking., Shepard asked.

"Barely 50 percent of Hammer has reported in.", he replied.

"Can we count on more making it?, Shepard inquired.

"There's some stragglers still en route, but the bulk of Hammer that's still intact has arrived. We're as ready as we're likely to get.", Anderson informed.

Shepard leaned over the table, "Every minute wasted here, the reapers gather strength."

"Exactly my thoughts.", Anderson replied. He immediately commed the base, "Battalion leaders, report to HQ.

Anderson leads the brief.

The toughest part of the mission begins. They need to drive through the heart of reaper-controlled territory, breaking past their defenses, to reach the beam. Unfortunately, a reaper destroyer protects the passage to it, with the entire area crawling with reapers.

This prevented air support. Expecting heavy ground resistance, Hammer forces must cut a bloody swath through no-man's land to reach the beam. Setting up tanks would help them eliminate the destroyer, many will probably die getting there. But there can be no retreat, no stepping back. They will move forward at all costs.

Shepard learned her role quickly from Anderson. Protect the tanks in the heaviest reaper-controlled area. He needs her for the final push into the beam. And she needed to pick her team well. Her entire team presented themselves front and center. Satima stood to the side, listening.

Shepard paced, "This war has brought us pain and suffering and loss.", she walked around the command table, "But it's also brought us together-as soldiers, allies, friends. Family.", she glanced to Satima. "This bond that ties us together is something the reapers will never understand. It's more powerful than any weapon, stronger than any ship. It can't be taken or destroyed."

Some of her crew unsettled, looking at each other, either with a smile or knowing nod. Shepard continued, "The next few hours will decide the fate of everyone in the galaxy. Every mother. Every son. Every unborn child.", she walked in-between them, staring them down with determination and command. "They're trusting you... depending on you to win them their future."

Shepard stood in front of the open wall, overlooking the reapers in the background and the hell below. "A future free from threat of the reapers. But take heart. Look around you. You're not in this fight alone. We face our enemy together, and together we will defeat them.

The commander's words emboldened them.

"For peace.", Liara stepped forward. Shepard nodded.

"For Justice.", Garrus reminded.

James walked out of line, "For those we lost."

Tali raised her shotgun, "For the home world I hope to see again... someday."

Shepard felt a wave of emotion. Javik stepped forward, "Vengeance."

Everyone had something to say, Satima remained quiet. Javik looked to her and spoke, "Hybrid.
Now is your time."

Satima looked up to all their stares. The old memories of hive and the directive, Jormun's death and Archer, pushed her to a resolution. She slowly stepped forward in the middle of them all, staring at Shepard with a determined gaze.
"Retribution.", she answered.

Outside the FOB, Hammer began their assault into reaper-controlled territory. The slaughter had begun. Anderson led the multi-raced ground forces alongside makos, fighting their way through reaper infested territory.

Turian and human forces fought against the waves of husks. Grenades were lobbed from behind cover, ending their miserable existence. Shepard choose her team, bringing Garrus and Liara. Satima stayed with them. They ventured further into the barren area, climbing through damaged buildings and evading reapers.

Crossing no-man's land sounded like suicide. It was. But Shepard had confidence in her team. They waited behind a broken wall, finally ambushing a group of marauders and cannibals. Fighting through and clearing the area, Shepard jumped down below, following the mako ahead. Major Coats and another marine confirming their go-ahead over comms.

Satima carefully watched their backs as they approached the next zone. Suddenly the mako was attacked and destroyed. The team quickly assaulted by reaper forces. Cannibals opened fire, dodging the shots that Garrus gave back. The reapers were getting smart, learning from other mistakes. Liara saw to that mistake, by throwing a singularity in the middle of them. Suspended and helpless, Shepard threw a frag in the mix. Bloody bits exploded everywhere.

Satima caught a glimpse of the horrific landscape. Grey ash covered everything, with burning buildings in the distance. The Reapers turned Earth into hell. Marauders appeared. Garrus took out his mantis, waiting for the moment to use it. He shot out their shields, as Shepard fired on them with her rifle. More came through.

Satima took some loose grenades from the mako. She averted her eyes to the dead marines inside. A marauder got behind her, as she ducked from his rifle. Liara sent a warp in it, giving Satima time to back up to the group.
She threw the frag grenades towards the other marauders, damaging them severely. Shepard stepped closer, not taking her eyes off the battle field. "Cutting that close!", she scolded.

Satima nodded, noting to not be so careless. After the marauders were dealt with, another marine came on comms, complaining how they were to get through the buildings. She told them to cut the chatter. Shepard and team pummeled through, further into the wasteland.

Currently on the sentarian ship, Reaper has little time for Arkasia to finish the template re-write. "Satima is fighting down there. We have to hurry.", she demands.

"I'm going as fast as I can with this template. It has to be right or some serious shit could go wrong.", Arkasia informs.

Reaper smirks to herself. Spending too much time around Satima. Memtrix follows in, "My stalkers are reporting massive waves of reaper forces on the citadel. Reaper, you must fight through them in order to reach the purge chambers."

Memtrix showed the map of the citadel to Reaper, "The stalkers can carve a path for you, but it would leave the residents of the station to die. This is your mission, now. I need to know what...
what your orders are."

Reaper raised a brow, "My orders?" She paced to the tech console Arkasia had been working on. "Tell your stalkers to provide back up to C-Sec, the militia and others fighting in the citadel. I can cut through the reapers myself. It might take me longer, but I trust in Satima's abilities on Earth to survive. Shepard is well guarded."

Memtrix nodded, "Acknowledged."

Reaper prepared with weapons and a rifter device. She checked on Satima before boarding the citadel, and found them overrun.

Back in London...

They hid behind a building as a mako was being decimated by a harvester. Shepard opened fire, trying to get it off the marines. With the help of her team, she successfully killed it. But their victory was short as more reaper forces started to pour in. A banshee was leading them. The cannibals were easily eliminated but the banshee got closer. Satima played bait, "Liara! Do those warp things. I'll get her closer to the mako's cannon."

Liara threw warps at the banshee, whittling her biotic barrier. Shepard and Garrus took shots with their rifles. Satima came close to being clawed but managed to flip back away from the reaper asari. Bullet slugs caused damage to flesh, when Liara successfully took down the barrier. Satima finished the abomination with a blade through the eye.

Shepard became impressed. The girl was learning, becoming more in tuned with the team. She was still impetuous, but resourceful.

Just then, a marine yelled over comms about taking heavy fire from the second building. Shepard replied, alerting them to her intention on clearing the building. "We need to clear out the reaper strong-point!", she shouted.

The team made headway. The door opened into a parking garage. Foxtrot and Bravo were taking heavy damage. Reapers assaulted them from the other end, Liara threw singularities at them. They heard heavy breathing coming from behind the husk. "A mother fucking Brute!", Satima shouted. "Shoot it down!", Shepard ordered.

It sprinted forward with all the might and ferocity the reapers could give it. Inside this enclosed space, there was little area they could go for cover. A few sky cars littered the lot. "Not one... but two!", Garrus yelled.

The first brute attacked them. Shepard hit with her rifle as it tried to grab her. Garrus gave heavy fire, trying to aim for its head. Liara lobbed grenades, lifting a car towards it. The brute ran around, roaring and hitting its chest intimidatingly.

Satima took out her pistol, shooting its eyes. A car exploded next to them sending them flying in different directions.

It helped kill the first brute, but the second one was still coming. Liara crawled away to the side, next to an elevator. Shepard leaned against a wall, as Garrus tried to defend himself alone. Satima looked up, terrified the brute would kill him.

The elevator pinged and the door opened. Reaper stepped out, an auto rifle in her hands. She aimed the crude weapon and opened fire. It tore large clumps of flesh off the abomination, sending it backwards in a frenzy of pain.

She walked forward, unflinchingly, coming up on it. Now face to face with the monster, Reaper
jammed the large weapon's muzzle into an open wound and pulled the trigger.

With a final round emptied into the brute, Reaper dropped the useless weapon, covered in its blood. She looked around as everyone caught their breaths. "Did I miss anything?", she smirked.

Satima grinned, "About time."

Reaper checked Satima, glancing to Shepard and Garrus. "I can't stay. I only came to check on you, and it seems I was in time, too. Listen, Satima. Archer is here. He's trying to get onto the citadel. You know I can't let that happen."

"But we haven't even gotten halfway through to the beam yet. We need you.", Satima argued.

"Your armor will protect you. Satima... you don't need me anymore. You are quite capable of taking care of yourself. Just... next time, bring a backup weapon. Blades don't always work." Reaper winked at Satima, using her rifter out of the area. Shepard looked around. Her counterpart was convenient. "Let's move.", she ordered.

Behind the brute's entrance, a ladder led the way up into the building. Comms from marines reminding her they were still in trouble. Up the ramp on the second floor, they found a group of ravagers firing down on the exposed makos and Hammer teams.

Shepard threw her frags as Liara hit them with warps. Satima fired. Within minutes they were taken down. Charlie company made it through.

The team moved on into the building, passing by a bed with skeleton remains. Shepard opened the door, a husk nearly grabbed her. She quickly dispatched it. The team trekked down from a ramp of the building into a fire zone. Marauders waited for them. With the area cleared, Satima looked up to see the beam in the distance.

Hammer forces were forced to find other routes to the beam, as Shepard's team fought their way through husks and brutes.

Brutally killing everything that wasn't normal, lobbing grenades, throwing singularities and blades. The damaged buildings offered some cover, but plenty of reapers hid, ambushing them at check points.

Delta was becoming over run. Soon, there wouldn't be any forces left against the reapers. Shepard didn't want to admit to her fears. As she watched Garrus fight, Liara and Satima work together to bring down another group of cannibals... she couldn't face the truth. Of watching them die. Of becoming... her.

Delta had reached the area to set up the thanix missiles. Major Coats warned them to not fire on the destroyer yet. Shepard took cover, shooting husks. Then a flash blinded her. "Did anyone see that?", she asked her team. "See what?", Liara asked.

"The... never mind. Keep firing.", Shepard shouted. A small boy ran between the husks, coming at her. He stopped short of her scope. She hesitated for a moment, a husk nearly jumping her. Satima quickly dispatched the husk, putting a hand on Shepard's shoulder. "He is not real.", she reminded.

At this, they both took offensive positions, firing on the reapers together. With the next area cleared, they soldiered on. The marines failed firing the thanix missiles at the destroyer. Something was messing with their guidance system. They didn't know how long they could hold on. There was no word from Able and Golf, Delta and Bravo suffered heavy casualties.

Inside a cafe, Shepard and her team fought past marauders and cannibals. "It's looking grim. I never
knew just how much life was lost in the Reaper war.", Satima spoke.

"We can't lose hope. Keep moving.", Shepard shouted.

Liara and Garrus led the way, taking point as Shepard watched their back. Satima confirmed they were clear to move ahead. Past the cafe and into an alley way, three brutes stood guard. A few gas containers lined the wall they were on. Satima asked Garrus for some of his proximity mines. She had an idea to rig them over the canisters.

Shepard and Liara stood on opposite ends of the alley way, taking cover on the walls. Garrus used a metal dumpster as cover, leaning out to aim with his mantis. Satima finished the mines, and tossed them below. In seconds, the canisters blew. It rocked the wall down, throwing Satima to the ground.

One of the brutes caught much of the blast, dying in flames. The other two only took minor damage. "Fire!", Shepard roared. Garrus started taking down their armor plating. Liara knocked them back with warps, as Shepard used whole magazines of incendiary ammo. Dealing more burning damage.

The front brute fell forward, near death as a second explosion from a dormant container took him. With the last one getting closer, Garrus abandoned the dumpster. It ran straight for him. Shepard lobbed frags, trying to get it off Garrus. The brutes armor already down. Satima ran down the alley, shooting with her pistol, getting its attention.

She jumped on the dumpster, leaping off, exposing her omni-blade, jamming it into the monster's eye and twisting the blade as it fell backwards dead. Satima pulled her omni-blade out, sheathing the tech back into her omni-tools interface.

Garrus stepped to her, breathing heavily from all the running. "Thanks... kid."

Down the alley way and through the door of an adjacent building, Shepard and team witnessed ground forces being decimated by the destroyer. Air support was nowhere. Likely eliminated also, due to the overwhelming reaper forces. Ahead of them were the thanix cannons onboard the tanks.

They needed to secure the area, and fire the cannons when the go-ahead was given. Not an easy task considering the endless waves of reapers threatening them.

Cannibals began assaulting them from behind cover of damaged sky cars and building debris. Banshees tried flanking them. Husks poured in from the front, all the while the destroyer guarded the beam in the distance. Letting out its reaper roar.

"There's the artillery.", Garrus pointed out.

"But the company's been wiped out.", Liara replied.

Major Coats commed them, "Commander, do you read me?"

"Major? What's the situation?", Shepard asked, securing the perimeter.

"The beam's interfering with missile guidance. We can hit the destroyer, but we'll never make the precision strike we need to take it out.", Coats informed.

Satima cleared the nearby shop, carefully checking in-between the isles. Liara stood watch over the missile tanks. "Damn it. EDI, can you read me?", Shepard shouted over comms.

"Yes, Commander.", she replied. "Are there any suggestions?", Shepard asked.

"I may be able to use the Normandy's systems to enhance the missiles targeting capabilities. I'll need you to open a link to the Normandy from the missile systems.", EDI instructed.
"Excellent. I'm on it.", Shepard answered. She started working on the launcher controls. "That's it."

"I'll let you know when I've adapted the targeting systems.", EDI informed.

Major Coats boasted about the good news, but Shepard remained slightly skeptical. This war was getting to her. Anderson opened comms, alerting them to the ground forces making a final push. And the urgency in protecting the tanks against the reapers. "You heard them people! Get ready!", Shepard shouted.

Reaper forces started their second assault. Ammo was at a minimum between the team. Satima felt lucky to rely on other means of fighting. She gave backup to Liara over the tanks, watching Shepard pulverize husks and cannibals as fodder. Garrus gave the ravagers chase from his mantis, taking out the incoming reapers. The Hammer forces got overwhelmed again, leaving their trucks useless to help with the flanking side of the combat zone.

Waves of husks crawled and climbed over the sky cars and trucks in their area. Cannibals roared as they darted across towards them. Brutes leaped over their right flank. Endless waves of reapers fell upon them. "...Shepard...", Garrus breathed with exhaustion.

"...don't stop...keep firing!", she shouted to them.

Satima wasn't getting tired. Her armor saw to that, she picked up the slack from Garrus and Liara, wiping the husks out with her blades. Shooting down the cannibals, and blowing the cars further out to cause enough chaos among the reaper ranks.

Shepard thoughtfully thanked her for giving them backup. A harvester was on the way, its screeching roar from above forced them to find cover in separate areas. "Commander, I have reprogrammed targeting. Missiles are ready for launch.", EDI informed frantically.

"Back to the truck people!", Shepard yelled. They all carefully stood over the missile controls, listening out for the harvester. Shepard found a hydra missile launcher and kept it close to her. She punched the controls, sending the thanix missiles toward the reaper destroyer. They missed.

EDI informed Shepard that the reaper was still too close to the beam. It needed to get closer to them. Hammer ground forces couldn't hold back the onslaught of the reapers any longer. Anderson commed, telling them to hold on. Shepard pulled out her pistol, "Stay together... and hold on."

Her team stared on, already exhausted and will spent. Shepard hoped Satima could keep up her energy, in case they fall. They fought brutes, husks and cannibals. Marauders flanked them as a horde. Satima started to become the only capable fighter, faster and never tired.

She took on the more serious groups, showing a skill, no one knew she was capable of. Even Satima herself was surprised. Beyond the training of blades and hand to hand, she quickly dispatched an enemy without weapons. Delivering death blows and snapping spinal vertebra in most of them. The banshees would get close, Satima could handle their hits. Her armor healed her, the implants supplying regeneration.

Satima could get close and kill them. Only the brutes proved a real challenge, where she would have to work with the others to destroy them.

She wondered how Shepard made it, but it didn't take long to view her in action. Shepard soon regained renewed rage, skillfully dispatched cannibals, beating down husks and taking on brutes without fear. She gave out a war cry, receiving some of the blows from the reapers, never stopping.
Then the harvester came.

It landed over the tanks, screeching at them. Shepard wasted no time in aiming her hydra launcher, hitting the flying abomination with four rounds. With the last blow, it fell dead. Exploding into fiery ash. "Commander! The destroyer is in range. Missiles are ready for launch.", EDI blared over comms.

Shepard ran to the missile control panel, punching in the code again. The missiles fired, hitting the reaper as it targeted them with its beam. It exploded, swaying before the rest of the ground forces fired their missiles and cannons on it. The reaper was finally destroyed. Satima grinned at Shepard, then dashed closer to the dead reaper, standing on top of a damaged mako,"Who's the bitch now!"

Shepard shook her head at Satima's teenage reaction, receiving a comm from Anderson. He was finally approaching with back up.

On the citadel, Reaper fought her way through waves of husks and cannibals. Marauders roared at her, unsure of what she was. Dare she try and command them? Reaper approached one that didn't attack her, and she suddenly could focus her will on it. The marauder turned around and began firing on its own forces.

She let it distract them while she made her way to the upper wards. On the presidium, keepers piled around the conduit. They looked like they were waiting.

A most curious event. Suddenly, a doorway opened from beneath the bridge, water rushed in, flushing out through grates. The keepers swiftly made their way down into it. Reaper followed. This could be the path to the conduit chambers. She carefully walked past many of the green insect like aliens. Further down, until she spotted a massive door panel. One keeper approached it, opening the door as a blinding light poured through.

Reaper quickly stepped in, witnessing a horror she had not seen for a long time. Across the walkway, and down the enormous corridor, were dead bodies. Human bodies. There were a few asari and turians, an elchor and some volus. But this entire corpse heap was mostly human filled. Red blood stained and seeped into every corner of the walls and floor. Reaper masked her nose, the smell of decaying flesh was horrible.

Up the ramp, into a small alcove, surrounded by lit panels and tech. A familiar figure wavered against the walls. He fell. Reaper walked up to him. "Why did you betray us?", she asked him.

"Shepard?", he coughs dark blood. Those blue synthetic eyes stare right at her. "...no... No. You're not Shepard. You're something else. Like me." He grinned.

"I'm nothing like you.", she glared.

He laughed, "You are. Except you didn't willingly accept the reapers gifts." The Illusive Man stood, his cybernetic husk-like skin covered most of his face. It would be a matter of time. "Tell me... do you hear the call? The call to the glory of synthesis?"

Reaper pushed him back, disgusted. "I don't hear any call." She walked by, finding the console.

After pressing the coordinates to reach the conduit platform, The Illusive Man chuckled out loud. "Do you know why... you don't hear it, Shepard?", he coughed again, "It's because you are the call-a reaper. And Reapers don't obey... anyone."

He stood, grinning. There was something in his smile that sent a shiver down her spine.

"Reaper... Archer is heading your way.", Memtrix informed.
Immediately before leaving the room, Archer knocked her back. "Well... isn't this a surprise! And I see you already had company.", he glanced to the Illusive Man, who had found a pistol, aiming at them.

Archer stopped in his jest, now staring in shock. "So, here you are as well."

Reaper quickly got up, roaring as she ran forward, knocking him down to the ramp below. They fought, the massive electric magnetic sliders going up and down around them. Blood and bodies filling the area, where the keepers attempted to purge the station of the dead.

"You can't stop him from taking control!", Archer screamed. "This was all a distraction for him to subject the galaxy to his will."

Reaper landed a fist to his face, causing his eye to blow and him to stagger. "You're lying!", she grabbed his leg, dragging him to the end of the walkway overlooking the magnetic sliders. "This should keep you in place, until I come back and dismantle you myself."

She threw him down, his screams of defiance echoing in the chambers. Reaper felt a wave of enthrallment on her. "...a reaper is dead...", she muttered.

Earth

The trucks drove over the hill, into their previous battle zone. Anderson met her outside the vehicle, extremely happy that she was still alive. "Thank God you made it.", he exclaimed.

"It didn't look good...", Shepard replied.

Anderson and company stood before the dead reaper, behind it the beam. "It gets worse."

"Of course, it does.", Shepard grumbled.

Anderson informs her that Harbinger and several sovereign class reapers were on their way to them. Though it is an opportunity to get the crucible in place, they still need someone to open the arms. "I will open the arms.", Reaper suddenly appeared.

Marines and Anderson gazed in surprised fear. Shepard stood still, "We could've used your help!", she glared. "We were over run, nearly killed to bring down the reaper in front of the beam!"

"I was... preoccupied. I know Satima did her part... for all of you. That's what she was made for. Battle.", Reaper restrained herself, remembering Satima's presence. "Satima, I..", she began.

"It's alright. It's the truth... right? Reaper-born?", Satima smiled weakly.

Reaper gave her a knowing nod, quickly glancing up at the citadel. "I should go.", she said.

"What about him?", Satima asked. Hinting to Archer. Reaper stepped forward. "I have him occupied, but he could get free before I return. Be prepared, Satima. You wanted in this fight, you'll have to deal with him yourself. I can't be in two places at once.", she reminded.

Satima smirked, "But you are.", she pointed to Shepard.

Reaper gave a knowing smile, before an over taxed Shepard stepped forward. " This wasn't your idea? To help us?"

"No. But Satima can be very persuasive. Her argument was sound. I will open the arms, and meet you in the citadel. Good luck." She turned to the hybrid. "And, Satima... don't doubt yourself.
Archer is no match for a Shepard.", Reaper grinned, before rifting to the station.

Hackett's fleet led the crucible to the citadel over remaining fleet squadrons pushing to give Hammer team more time, Shepard sat inside the mako. Resting as they were transported to the conduit. Anderson stared at Satima, then motioned to Shepard. She stood up and walked to him. "Yes, Anderson."

"Tell me something, from one friend to another. What is she?", he asked.

Knowing that they may not survive past this night, Shepard obliged him. She took a seat next to him, giving a deep sigh. "She's from another timeline, after the reapers defeat us. She's... my kid."

Anderson's gaze grew wide. He stared at Satima, who was busy on her omni-tool, then back to Shepard. "If we make it through, I would like to hear that story.", he mused. "The galaxy can stand to have one more Shepard among us."

Shepard smiled. Coats came forward to speak of the plan at the beam, Anderson replied with how this was all a gamble, to get to the beam and find a way to stop the reapers with the crucible.

The commander stood, reminding everyone how it was a pleasure to serve with them and know them. The mako was suddenly hit, sending them all off balance. It rolled, stopping at the top of the hill to the beam. They piled out, checking their surroundings.

Outside the conduit, burning trucks and debris littered the landscape. They ran to the side of the truck to their horror, finding Harbinger guarding the beam. "Shit.", Anderson yelled.

"Move!", Shepard shouted to them all.

They ran forward down the path to the conduit. Harbinger attacked them with its laser. Turning anything into ash.

The closer they got, the more dangerous the laser fire. Shepard ran fast, nearly getting flattened by a mako that Harbinger shot. It flew over her, right into Garrus and Liara! Satima had been running on the other side, avoiding the laser beam.

The mako exploded upon impact to the ground, sending Garrus and Liara flying outward. Their armor singed.

Shepard jumped over the debris, reaching out to Liara. "I'm... okay. Go... get to Garrus!", she motioned, leaning on her knees, purple stained cuts on her face stinging. Satima sprinted to them, helping Liara to stand. She watched Shepard kneel to Garrus, putting his arm over her neck. Leading them all away from the chaos near the conduit.

Shepard contacted the Normandy, demanding evac for her team, too injured to continue. Satima stood over them, keeping watch, while they stayed in cover.

Citadel

It was confirmed, Reaper has a connection to them. A fear crept up, sure and maddening. They will not turn her into them! Inside the elevator, she proceeded to the lift. The Intelligence should be waiting for her. As the door opened, she stepped out onto a large platform, leading to a single conduit.

A beam of white energy, surging powerfully between the citadel and the crucible. Reaper stepped forward, stopped by a pulse. The Intelligence has sensed her. The view of warships fighting against the reapers filled her with awe and foreboding. This was the last effort she can make. Stars twinkled
brightly in the background as she casually walked to the small pulse.

Back on earth

The Normandy showed up, hovering low as the shuttle door lowered to the ground. Shepard helped Garrus up, leading them to it. His blue colored blood from open injuries stained parts of her armor. The thought sickened Shepard, reminding her of the time he almost died on Omega. On the shuttle ramp, she handed Garrus over to Liara. "Here, take him."

He grunted from the pain, "Shepard...", Garrus argued.

"You gotta get out of here.", she replied.

"And you gotta be kidding me.", he protested.

Satima looked around, worried of husks flanking them. She watched closely as the two exchanged their decisions. "Don't argue, Garrus." He leaned on Liara, holding back the pain of his injury, "But... We're in this to the end.", he stammered.

Shepard walked to him, her voice shaky with a glassy sheen to her eyes. "No matter what happens... you know I love you. I always will.", she caressed his face.

"Shepard I... love you too.", he answered back, almost in surprise to hear himself say those words out loud. His gaze became determined, but softened when she smiled warmly to him.

She backed away as he reached out to her on the ramp. The hatch closed with the Normandy beginning to lift off. Shepard turned around and glanced to Satima. "Help me come back to him.", she pleaded.

Satima stepped to her, "You know I will."

They ran together back down the beam path, straight to the conduit. It was so close... but Harbinger kept firing on them. A close hit almost threw Shepard backward, but she maintained her balance and kept running. As they got closer, Satima suddenly stopped. Shepard turned to her, "Satima...", she was hit by the laser.

A force of hot energy blasted her backwards, peeling her armor and burning her exposed skin.

"...God...they're all gone..."

-----------------------------------------------

Reaper watched the pulse actualize into a child... then seemed to become distorted again. Finally, The Intelligence took another form. An image of her.

"I've come to stop the reapers.", she spoke.

"This citadel is my home. Why have you invaded it... Reaper?", it grinned.

"I know who you are. The Catalyst-The Intelligence.", Reaper replied.

It paced around her. "I could control you, take your will and make it mine. But you would fight?"

"Every step of the way.", she answered.

It smirked, "The created will always rebel against its creator."
"Depends on how schizophrenic the creator is.", Reaper quipped.

"Ah. But, we are contradictory elements... your prodigy is as well. I cannot allow that.", it informed.

"You're not going to do shit to me, or Satima!", Reaper shouted. She realized its game and laughed while shaking her finger at the AI, "Sneaky. Well, now you know."

The platform lowered and raised again, with the Illusive Man appearing. He struggled to walk, already turning into a husk. "This is my time! You will not interfere!" Illusive collapsed, laying on the polished surface of the crucible.

The Intelligence observed, turning its gaze to Reaper.

Earth

In the middle of the path, people crawled away from the conduit. Husks descended on them. Shepard opened her eyes, wearily... to see a most curious thing. Satima still stood, her armor scarred and wisps of smoke came off the pieces, but she was alive. Shepard looked over herself to see extensive injuries.

Most of her armor had been blown off, revealing patches of burnt and bloody flesh. She could taste the mercury flavor of her own blood. Still... Satima remained. "Sa... tima...", Shepard tried getting up, barely able to stand let alone walk.

The girl never moved. Shepard didn't notice the heavy breathing and dilated pupils of the hybrid. She was being assaulted by Harbinger within her own mind.

Satima fell in a bed of dead grass. Trees were burning all around her. Her head hurt too much. A child's laughter caught her attention. "You smell like them. Speak like them... share their emotions. But inside... you are a reaper." The child appeared, speaking in Harbinger's voice. Satima had never known such a demanding source of power before.

"I.I am not a reaper.", she struggled to respond.

Harbinger forced his will into her mind, "You will serve. Kill the Shepard. Finish it.", he demanded.

Satima breathed hard, gasping."...no..

Harbinger sent her a volume of pain that made blood gush from her nose. Shepard watched, terrified. Satima didn't blink or move, and now she's bleeding from an unseen injury.

Satima couldn't move in her mind as she remained on all fours to Harbingers will. She looked up to see Jormun, a gaping and bloody wound still in his chest. He took his mask off, revealing a husk-like appearance. "Kill the Shepard. We order it.", he demanded.

Satima began sobbing uncontrollably. "...please... don't... this is cruel...please...", she begged.

"KILL HER! WE DEMAND IT!", Harbinger bellowed through the dead quarian's mouth.

Crucible

The Catalyst paced, arguing its existence. "I was created to bring balance, to be the catalyst for peace between organics and synthetics. I embody the collective intelligence of all Reapers. Tell me... would you undue that balance just to serve your own selfish agenda?", it asked.

"Yes. I would see you dispersed and destroyed... undone... no matter the consequences. This has to
end, but not because I want it too. Because it must. It's time to end all this slaughter and chaos. To end your experiment.", she argued.

"Even if you manage to erase me, conflict will always exist between synthetics and organics. I am the connection between them. The Reapers are my purpose, the harbingers of my solution that I was begged for, eons ago. You cannot sever that. There must always be balance.", it walked forward gesturing to the war above earth.

"When a reaper falls, its people... memories are gone. Erased from my collective. Consider that entire nation of the most advanced civilization, wiped out because of your fear. This war would not happen, if you only accepted your fate. We would give you a kinder ending, instead of this massacre."

"A massacre you seem to have no issue in starting. Don't presume to understand death, sorrow and pain. You're nothing more than holographic technology, incapable of emotions.", Reaper glared to the catalyst.

"Reapers harvest all life-organic and synthetic-preserving them before they are forever lost to this conflict. They are not interested in war."

"I find that hard to believe.", she replied.

"When fire burns, is it at war? Is it in conflict? Or is it simply doing what it was created to do?", the catalyst questioned. "We are no different."

Reaper contorted her face to disgust, "You can't compare an intelligent thought to something without a soul or any capability of sentient thinking! Fire doesn't give a damn about you or me. But you... you understand conflict. You've been privy to the wars for more than an age."

"Like a cleansing fire, we restore balance.", it retorted.

"Fuck your balance!", Reaper spat.

The Intelligence turned to the crucible, "This is my power source. In combination with the Citadel and the relays, it is capable of releasing tremendous amounts of energy throughout the galaxy. It is crude but effective and adaptive in its design.", it informed.

"Who designed this... originally?", Reaper asked.

It turned back to her, "You would not know them. They were lost in time... eons ago."

Reaper had a sudden idea to this answer."Sentarians.", she muttered.

"Yes. We did manage to harvest some of them, their knowledge. We first noticed the concept for this device several cycles ago. With each passing cycle, the design has no doubt evolved.", the catalyst walked Reaper to the front of the energy ramp.

"Why didn't you stop it?", she asked curiously.

It glances to the energy beam, "We believed the concept had been eradicated. Clearly, organics are more resourceful than we realized."

The Catalyst-Intelligence moves away, concerned. "The fact you're here, proves my solution won't work anymore. You are not organic, but not fully synthetic. Connected to us, but distant. You wish to utilize the template in your device to destroy us."

"Then you know why I came?", she asked.
It nodded, "The Crucible changed me, created new... possibilities. But I can't make them happen. If there is to be a new solution... a new re-write, you must act. Time is not forgiving, and your friends are losing theirs. Listen" The Catalyst links Reaper to the minds of the machines around her. She falls forward, her head in severe pain, "...too... too many voices!"

Quiet. She only hears two voices, arguing... both are familiar. Reaper hears Satima fight Harbinger in her mind, as he forces his will into her. She won't be able to stop him. "Speak... tell her to breath.", the Catalyst says.

Satima screamed, clawing at her own mind. Then it came, the voice of small reason. Reaper's voice. "I did not teach you to cower. They are afraid of what is to come... their end. Fight them, show them that there is strength in you."
Satima began crying silent tears. The blood stopped flowing and she woke up, falling to her knees.

At once, the link is severed and Reaper's mind is singular again. The Catalyst looks to her, "It is now in your power to destroy us, control us, or... join us."

Illusive Man conjures the strength to rise, a rage in his eyes. After listening to the AI give this Shepard imposter free will to choose their fate, he quickly made a decision. "No! I will make the choice. I am the one to control these machines and bring humanity to an apex of perfection."

Reaper began to protest this insane man's rants, when Archer appeared. He held an injured Shepard and threw her to the floor. "Did I miss much?"

On earth in front of the conduit, Satima winced in pain, gasping as she tried to locate Shepard.

Harbinger roared in defiance and anger in front of them. "Shepard... Shepard!", she yelled. The area in front of the beam was empty. Husks started to crawl around surrounding her. Satima turned to the beam. She had one choice. Quickly, she dodged husk attacks, slicing with her blade and kicking some back. They're trying to stop her!

The hybrid stood in front of the bright beam, staring straight at Harbinger. He roared loudly, a sound that almost deafened her. Satima glared at him, before running into the light.

The journey was fast, as she fell on a warm and squishy pile. Closer inspection and Satima gasped, gagging from the dead bodies that were under her. Her armor was covered in mixed blood, while keepers rummaged through them.
Picking out objects or taking pieces of bodies away. Satima stood, cautiously and proceeded ahead.

Meanwhile...

"Explain to me how this will affect the galaxy. How can my decision reach out so far?", Reaper asked.

"Your Crucible device appears to be largely intact. However, the effects of the blast will not be constrained to the Reapers. If you choose to re-write, you will die... lose everything you have. Join us. Give us the knowledge you possess. Your body is synthesis, your mind is ours. Join us.", it urged.

Shepard slowly crawled away, trying to reach the platform ahead. Archer loomed over her, until he noticed Shepard's slight glance behind him. Satima stood, blade ready.

Archer turned around to Reaper. "The family is all here!", he mocked.

Reaper stared in shock. "Satima? How did you get to this place?"
Archer shook his head, "Don't you understand? This is our beginning." He points to the Illusive Man. "He is the control."

Reaper eyed the Cerberus leader, when the Intelligence spoke. "Give us the knowledge you possess.", it demanded. "We will stop the harvest, and offer you the control of this galaxy."

"Then what? I am not like you!", Reaper argued.

The Intelligence gazed at her with pity, "Look at yourself. You are synthesis. Cannot an intelligent thought form a mind, can't that mind mold a soul? Your flesh covers the truth, Reaper."

Reaper paced, experiencing a crisis of who or what, she really is. "I was able to feel again... hope again. We... we were together. Everything seemed natural." She thought of her reconnection to Garrus from her alternate timeline, how adamant she was to safeguard Satima's life.

The Intelligence scanned her, revealing her physiological anatomy with a holo grid. "On the Normandy, there is an android containing an AI... EDI. Your EDI is the perfect example but not fully actualized into the unparalleled template. Like you."

Reaper stared at the grid. "Everything Archer said..."

"It is and is not truth. The nano technology, the cybernetic implants... the time spent rebuilding you. No matter the history, or the future predictions. You were meant to be the link. That is why you must integrate with the crucible, give us the chance to show you a better future. No more killing, no more harvests... just you and your Satima. This galaxy can be remade to our likeness.", it concluded.

"What about all the other people out there? The turians, asari, salarians... everyone! Are they expendable for this great new future you have planned?", Reaper asked alarmed.

"We can take their knowledge and make a new beginning. With you at the helm. Together, we will create perfect synthesis.", the Intelligence proclaimed.

Reaper shook her head dismissively, "I know I'm not completely human anymore. I understand what I am now. You made a mistake in creating me. Right from the beginning."

"And what mistake is that?", it asked intrigued.

"The ability to defeat and surpass you. The reapers belong to me, now. And I will usher them into a new age of perfect synthesis. Away from here and away from you." Reaper turned around, walking away to the lift. The Catalyst looked on stunned, "Where are you going?"

"To create my own solution. Oh, I will use the Crucible and your energy. But you can take those choices and shove'em up your ass." Reaper grinned.

The Illusive Man cursed, quickly sprinting to the conduit of control. Archer watched in amazement. "You think this will end that easily?", he shouted.

Reaper walked around him, passing her injured alter, and meeting with Satima. She never glanced to her daughter, but stared at Archer with a sinister green glare. "Satima, kill him.", she ordered.

Satima snapped a confused in her direction, only to shake her head and look down. Her eyes darted around the surface, she closed them quickly to narrow a crimson gaze at Archer. She wasn't in control anymore.

Archer advanced, trying to deliver a blow to her, but Satima caught the fist. "Too slow.", she
mocked, and brought her knee to his chest, turned quickly, kicking him back. Shepard leaned up on her hands, standing and stepping back. Watching in fear and confusion, as the hybrid continued her brutal onslaught against the droid.

Archer roared, running towards her with a blade in hand. She grabbed the blade as it sliced through flesh, red blood dripping over the metal. "You think this brings me pain?", she cocked her head. "How long has it been since you've felt it?", she asked with a devious smile, as he stared in fear.

Satima knocked him back, "You killed Jormun...", she plunged the blade in his hand. He cried out in surprised pain. "You killed my father...", she broke his collarbone, small nanites struggling to reconstruct it.

"Tortured me... chased me. You're unpredictable Archer, and evil.", Satima grabbed him by his throat, bringing him face to face with her. "And I can't have that kind of "unpredictable amount of evil" running around freely in the galaxy."

He shouted at her as she held his face back, "How dare you! You presume to judge me!? You killed your own brother on hive, and all those innocent people! Lured that foolish quarian boy to his demise, and left your father to deal with me."

She glanced down, "Yes... I did. And now I'm going to kill you for it." Satima picked him up with the strength like Reaper's, and threw him across the ground. Archer quickly regained his stance, and ran back at her, delivering blows to her face and body.

Satima stood her ground, taking in the blows. She looked at him with pity before kicking his right leg out, bits of cybernetic laced bone cracking. Archer fell back in pain, crawling backwards away from her. "Even if you win. Everyone will always see you as a monster, Satima.", he hinted to the galaxy, "You will always be different. And people fear what they don't understand."

Satima leaned over him, "I know.", she agreed.

The Illusive Man made it to the control console, placing his hands around the rods. Using the distraction of the hybrid and the droid battle, he resolved to finalize his control.

Reaper looks on her omni-tool, bringing the template online. A complex and intricate sequence, brought together by her and Satima's genetic mapping using cybernetic helix's, designed to merge body and consciousness through the crucible.

"Memtrix.. Arkasia, I'm here.", Reaper comms, pacing while her daughter battles Archer. Shepard stood to the side, observing. This is insane.

"Good. The massive reaper: Harbinger, is decimating the allying forces. My stalkers can only do so much. Callon is waiting for you to step inside and start the sequence. Is Satima there, also?", Memtrix asked.

"She's here, but it's just me that will finish this.", Reaper replied.

"Reaper... Shepard. You don't have to end it like this. Re-write is possible. You can still live.", Arkasia points out.

"Although I don't plan on dying, if that sacrifice must be made, it will take place. I won't take Satima's life from her. But I will purge her system of the nano tech. Arkasia... will that kill her?, Reaper feared.

"It shouldn't, though I'm not really sure. What would you like me to do?", she asks.
Reaper holsters her weapon. "Make sure she's okay, and if this hurts her or threatens her life, don't let Satima die."

Arkasia looks out the small command deck of the battle ship, watching the reapers and allied forces fight. The Citadel hovered over this planet, Earth.

Memtrix orders her stalkers to keep the reaper forces away from the crucible giving Reaper time to activate the purge sequence. She already mourned the death of this legend. Unknowing the real event starting to occur.

Satima watched Archer squirm away. She proceeded to use her deadly skills and kill him, but the piercing cries of the Illusive Man distracted her. Reaper looked in horror as he was being completely absorbed by the machine. His twisted laughter in victory echoed around them. "I am control… this will be my new Directive!"

He was gone, bits of ash covered the floor he stood over. Satima gave a worried glanced to Reaper, before a massive pulse radiated over them. It knocked everyone down. Reaper couldn't move. Voices overwhelmed her, causing immense agony. She rolled over the floor, holding her head in torture.

There were so many of them, commanding her to obey. She couldn't stop the force and control of the directive. It's too strong, stronger than before.

Satima felt sick, weakened by the pulse. Her regeneration wasn't working anymore. And a sudden pain surged through her. The reaper blast had caused damage to her armor, giving her patches of first degree burns.

Only one person was not affected. A unique oversight perhaps?

Turning to her horror, to see Shepard being held by Archer. He had a firm arm around her throat. "Now this is more like it. Right here... the final hour. I never knew what really happened, until now.", he laughed out loud, his stare wild.

"Let her go... please.", Satima pleaded.

Archer glanced at Shepard, and then looked to Satima. His gaze turned into something sick and sinister. "Beg me. On your knees.", Archer demanded.

Satima gulped, stepping closer to him. She gazed at Shepard, falling to the ground on her knees, tears forming in her eyes.

Reaper struggled with the control, helpless and unable to stop him. Archer grinned fiendishly, holding the commander tight. Her pained gasps echoing around them. "...beg...", he repeated.

Satima stared at Reaper, her pained gaze sending a wave of fear through the hybrid. What did that Illusive Man do? "...pl... please... don't hurt her. I... beg you.", she whimpered in shame.

Archer cocked his head, throwing the badly injured Shepard to the ground. She cried out. "That was more satisfying than I ever imagined."

He kicked Satima backward, knocking her down. Archer picked her up by the throat, lifting her high above him. Shepard watched in agony, helpless to do anything. Reaper attempted to stand, grunting to the force of the reapers. "Put... her down!", she demanded.

Archer strangled her for a minute, fascinated over her armor's ability to keep her alive. "The reaper's true power, in your daughter." He boasted.
Reaper turned her face away. She couldn't watch Satima's suffering. Archer let Satima fall, helping her back up. He stood behind her, bringing out an omni-blade. Satima heard the whispers again. She closed her eyes as Archer plunged the blade through her back, wounding her to his amusement.

She fell forward, screaming in pain. Reaper returned her gaze from her position on the ground. Archer stared at her, then walked closer. "Now... what to do with you."

Shepard leaned on her hands, spotting a pistol the Illusive Man dropped. She grabbed it, standing in position and fired a full clip into Archer. He stumbled back, amazed.

Archer sneered, beginning to sprint towards Shepard, when Reaper kicked his legs from under him. He fell, but regained his balance to turn. A rage inside him, Archer was ready to strike, when Reaper met his gaze with her cold glare. He heard a slice, feeling a force push him back a step. She held him close to her, "Your days of cruelty, are over."

Reaper pulled out her omni-blade, drenched in the droid's dark blood. She sheathed it, watching him fall with a smile.

Satima grunted, standing in shock. Shepard grabbed her leg, "The mission.", she begged. Satima looked down to truly take in Shepard's injuries. Spirits. She was bleeding everywhere, and there were scorch marks into her skin. Lacerations on her face and arms. "I won't abandon the mission.", Satima assured.

Reaper stepped them, noticing the dire situation Shepard was in. "She'll die of her injuries, if we don't get her back to the Normandy. They can save her."

Satima stared at Reaper in concern. "How?"

Her mother looked to Archer, who had a rifter attached to his omni-tool. She ripped it off, careful to not damage the device. Glancing around the crucible and the conduits ahead, she sighed at her daughter. "I'll take her back. Make sure she'll survive. Stay here and whatever the directive says, don't believe it."

Satima nods, "I'll wait for you to return and we can end this." Her resolute gaze struck something in Reaper.

Shepard groaned to being picked up and thrown over Reapers shoulder. The dead lift caused pain, but it assured them she's still alive. Using the rifter, Reaper disappeared to the third deck of the Normandy. A few crew members gasped at the sight. Ashley and Chockwas rushed out of the med-bay, with the doctor staring in shock. "Shepard?", she asked.

Reaper led them into the medical room, setting Shepard on the table. "She needs medical attention quickly."

Chockwas got to work immediately, while Ashley studied Reaper. "You are Shepard, aren't you?"

Looking away, Reaper nodded. "Once." She started to leave the bay, nearly running into Liara and Garrus. They were bandaged, in pain, but their strong will, kept them alert to the events unfolding in the galaxy. Garrus noticed Shepard's body on the table, he stared in alarm. Reaper spoke, "She's alive, barely. Satima protected her."

He didn't respond, leaving for Shepard. Liara gazed, "They call you Reaper, but you are still Shepard. Whatever had been done to you, I am sorry I wasn't there to stop it."

Reaper had painful emotions building up, she shook her head in understanding. "Thank you, Liara."
She left the deck, activating her rifter back to the crucible.

Satima waited at the green conduit, pushing the whispers to the back of her mind. Reaper stepped up behind her, placing a reassuring hand on the hybrid's shoulder. "It's time.", she stated.

Walking slowly, Reaper approached the conduit, still activated. Ready for her. The Illusive Man has tried to control them, and although the reapers haven't responded to him yet, she's hopeful this sacrifice will end the war, permanently.

Satima started to cry, "Mom?", she began. Reaper turned to her. They embraced, as Satima sobbed into her shoulders. "Please don't leave me.", she leaned out, looking up to her mother. "I'll go with you! It could help if both our bodies served as rewrite to synthesis."

Reaper let a loose tear fall, giving a smile. Her voice became shaky. "If I did that, then all of this will be for nothing."

Her daughter stared, confused. "But? You're here to save this galaxy, do what this Shepard cannot."


She let Satima go, "Stay back from this conduit.", she gave the rifter to her. "Activate this device and get your ass to the Normandy. Shepard is there. She'll want to know you're alive too."

Satima started to protest, but Reaper held her back. She faced the conduit once again, a fearless gaze and hardened demeanor. Approaching the energy well, she looked around her to the view of space. Reapers roared, sending drones towards them. Illusive has become the directive, as the Intelligence appears, taking on a grey haze.

"You cannot purge me! I am the source of all balance and reason in this galaxy!", he shouted at her. "I am the Directive!"

Reaper ignored him, taking a step forward to the conduit. "And this is the end." She fell forward into the beam.

Satima gasped, tears staining her face. She lost control of her legs, falling forward on all fours in sorrowful heartache.

Reaper began the re-write sequence. Energy started to build around her, static touched her skin and armor. Her cybernetics and nanites turned the skin husk like, but she didn't feel pain. Reaper closed her eyes, as her subconsciousness started to pull away into a bigger expanse of thought and time.

Reaper smiled while her body still remained, now a red husk form. "I'm controlling you. I will not abandon the many peoples that are suffering and dying for your solution.", her voice was fading into a cybernetic whisper. "I will lead the reapers into a new path."

The Catalyst roared once before it was consumed into the mind of Reaper. Her great effort of showing perfect synthesis. All her memories of who she was and what she had become, how she could reconnect with organic emotions. "I am innumerable, infinite...warden of this galaxy.", her voice became distorted with droid undertones.

She opened her eyes as a silver light emitted from them.

The pulse started through the crucible and outward across the expanse of the Sol system. Touching
every reaper, pinging to the relay. But something had gone wrong.

Another voice roared in defiance, stopping the mind of Reaper from taking over. The crucible rumbled, while Satima looked up at the beams. The control and synthesis beams turned red, sending a strong energy surge throughout the vessel. "It's him. He's going to stop her."

She stood up, stumbling as the place was coming apart. Reaper was losing! She heard a faint whisper behind her ear. "Destroy us."

Satima understood what was happening now. Reaper used her synthesis to stop the Illusive Man from directing his control over the reapers, but she can't stop him for long. Her will was against many.
The last known beam ahead pulsed in rhythm, as the hybrid ran up the ramp to it. A single encased conduit burned red and orange in front of her. With an idea in mind, she pulled a blade out.

The Intelligence flashed next to her, a holographic child pleaded against it. "Don't do it. Let them struggle and shape a new will. Together, they will become the apex of synthesis. All life will benefit."

Satima moved her feet from cracking crucible floors. "You mean to force a genetic imprint on all life, making everyone like him?!", she pointed to a dead Archer.

"He was a trial of error. You are the perfect template, hybrid. Your special dna, the circumstances of your existence. All for the will of the reapers, and the salvation of this galaxy."

She shook her head, holding back a sob. "No… I'm not a reaper-born."
The child stepped to her with a grin. "You are."

She panicked, while the reapers were falling apart under the power struggle of synthesis. Reaper had almost succumbed to the Illusive Man's control, when Satima stopped her fears, staring upward. "I'm tired of being the victim."

Taking a step forward to the conduit, she held out her blade. Satima glared at the Intelligence. "Go to hell." She turned to the energy case, busting the glass with her blade and jamming it into the conduit.

The source of power began to explode, sending the hybrid flying back into debris. A strong pulse resonated throughout the crucible, touching every reaper and into the nearby relay. Ashley and Joker watched from the Normandy while the entire ship exploded.

The citadel's wards bent and bowed from the heavy crashes of the crucible's hulls.

All reapers received the pulse. Palaven, Thessia, Tuchunka and Rannoch: all other planets assaulted and invaded by the reapers, witnessed the massive machines fight each other, before shutting down and falling, defunct. As all the races celebrated, relieved from the onslaught. One planet remained silent.

Satima dreamed of standing in a field of green grass. A warm breeze blew her ginger hair back. "...what made you want to stay?", Reaper asked.

Satima turned around to see her mother, her form of white energy almost blinding. She stepped forward, speaking quietly. "Mother? You're alive."

Reaper sighed, "Not in the way you perceive it. I am… an echo of the synthesis. I am dying."
"No.", Satima argued. "You can't! The reapers are gone, it's over! You can find an empty one to control, just like the directive."

"It's not that simple, Satima.", she looked down. "There are pieces of me, everywhere now. Countless imprints of my body that fought the reapers and him. I am… a myriad of myself."

Satima shook her head, "Isn't there a part of you, I can save?"

"Yes, there is. And she's on the Normandy.", Reaper explained with a weak smile.

Tears started to fill Satima's eyes, "...don't leave me alone...please. Mother! I love you."

"...tenderness...warmth... my satima.", her mother spoke, gently caressing Satima's cheek.

Reaper held out her hand, showing a small beam of light. It turned into a helix sequence that mutated from bright to dull. She touched Satima's chest with it, as the helix absorbed into the girls' armor and body. "You're free from the directive, from me. I love you, my daughter."

Satima opened her eyes in shock. She felt intense pain through her body. Fires and debris covered the area she lay on. Struggling, she tried to move, but a surge of agony shot up her leg. The reaper-born stared up, unable to stay awake, falling unconscious.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for stopping by. :)
Chapter Summary

The Shepard lives. Remaining military forces erect temporary bases over earth's ravaged landscape. Discoveries are made. And tensions rise.

Chapter Notes

Hopefully not as long from before. Enjoy.

In the days passing the sudden death of the reapers, surviving allied forces began to gather their dead. Bases were built to house refugees. Medical wings in damaged buildings with better structure had been opened, and food caches gathered from the destroyed remains of downed ships distributed.

The Normandy orbited in space around Earth. The entire crew busy with comms, emergency reports and transports.

Since Shepard's current condition was reported as stabilized, Ashley assumed temporary command. Hackett had given the order.

Though there were turian military crew awaiting transport to their ships, Garrus refused to leave with them. He kept careful watch over a sleeping Shepard.

She had been covered in bandages, and given all the care Chockwas could spare in the medbay. The citadel was still in complete disarray, with reports coming in every hour of the dead. Getting just one ward cleared and secured could take months. With a bigger problem emerging, of the citadel arms remaining closed.

Earth became a center of all refugee and medical operations.

Normandy Medbay
Five days after the war.

Shepard slowly woke to a dimmed room. She remembered all the fuss about her wounds and injuries. Chockwas always leaning over her, scanning her, administering fluids and pain meds. The bandages helped keep the cold air off her burns. Most of them were healing well, despite the severity. Surviving a reaper blast was very lucky. Retaining her limbs and most of her physical appearance... rare.

Shepard looked around the quiet space, and felt a heavy lump on her right arm.

She glanced down to Garrus, sound asleep. Laying over her, while maintaining an uncomfortable balance from his seat. Shepard smiled, quietly chuckling. He started to stir as she put her left hand over his fringe. "...mmm... what's so funny?", he asked groggily.
"...how long have you been here?", she questioned, concerned.

Garrus lifted his head, gazing to her, "As long as I needed to."

The lights turned on when Chockwas entered the medbay. She set down her coffee on the desk, glancing to them. "Oh, Shepard! You're awake!"

Earth

Major Coats overlooked the truck delivering supplies to the medical units. Each area of the base was utilized as a clinic for the many people that were caught between the fighting. There were a few scared children, and a lot of bodies covered in tarp.

"Sir. You have a transmission from the Normandy.", a marine informed.

Coats took it in private inside a building, "Major here."

"Major, this is Lieutenant-Commander Williams. By Admiral Hackett's orders, I am in command of the Normandy and future operations, pending Shepard's medical condition.", she sighed. "She's alive. And that's a God given miracle. Major, how are things topside?", she asked. Her tone exhausted.

Coats looked around, "Stable... for now. I'm afraid our dextro guests will have to wait a little longer for transport, and will need help soon. Food for them is scarce. At least they can still drink the water. Medical wise, we are in short supply, period. There are a lot of injured civilians, even more military."

"We're working hard to get ahold of things up here, too. The strange starship that has appeared yesterday has not moved or made contact. Be ready with your men in case things go awry.", she ended the comms.

Ashley leaned on the edge of Jokers chair. He turned to face her, "What are you orders... Ma'am?"

"Get a shuttle ready. Hackett has ordered me to take a team and look for Anderson where the conduit is, in London. None of the teams have reported in, and with Major Coats account of the forces being decimated... it's not looking good.", she replied.

Joker swerved himself back to the control console, sending the message to Cortez. Ashley was met by Liara midway to the elevator. She had tears in her eyes. "It's Shepard! She's awake!"

Shepard withstood the scans and clean bandage changes over most of her torso and arms. The small cuts on the right of her face were looking better, and her black eye was merely yellow. "So, what's the diagnosis, Doc. Am I going to make it?", she smirked.

Chockwas gave her another dose of painkillers, she felt a little loopy after it. "Broken ribs, lacerations, second and third-degree burns, torn ligaments, hairline fracture...", she was stopped by Shepard's hand.

"I get it. I'm feeble now.", she sighed.

Garrus walked to her, "You're not feeble. And don't try to force yourself to move around too much. Ashley is taking care of things.", he informed.

Shepard looked to Garrus a little stunned. "Ashley? I can't complain. She's a good soldier and will get what needs to be done right. I just wish someone would tell me what happened?"

Liara and Ashley stepped inside, followed by James and Cortez. "Shepard...", Liara ran to her,
wrapping her arms around the commander's neck.

"...a... a little too tight...", Shepard complained with a smile.

Liara let go, "I'm sorry, Shepard. I'm just so glad you're alright.", tears streamed down her face.

Ashley stepped forward, "Commander.", she smiled.

James saluted, "Nothing can kill our legendary Shepard!"

Shepard found a bag of bandage wraps and threw them at him, it bounced off his chest and everyone laughed. A moment of silence passed, and Shepard began to remember. "Where is Satima?", she asked, alarmed.

They all looked around the room, awkwardly glancing to each other. Ashley met her commander's gaze, "We don't know. I'm headed to the London conduit now. Anderson is missing too. I hope they're both still alive. Not like I can promise you anything."

Chockwas sat up from her chair, "Let's leave the Commander to rest. Ashley, you can inform Shepard of your findings once she's slept for a bit."

Ashley agreed, leading the rest out of the medbay. Shepard watched Chockwas busy herself with lab work. Garrus slowly approached, sitting next to her on the bed, holding her hand. She sighed, "What if Ashley finds Satima's body?", her voice shaky.

Garrus didn't respond.

Javik and James accompanied Ashley to earth. Cortez navigated the shuttle over burning buildings and rows of reaper bodies lining the neighborhoods. "This is horrific.", he commented.

"I'm sure we'll find plenty of terrible things to see.", Ashley replied.

James repeated a prayer in Spanish silently. On the conduit path over the bridge, the shuttle landed.

Javik lept out first, observing the area. James stepped next to him. The remaining Hammer forces were all singed, charred and blown apart over the landscape. Some of their bodies looked chewed on. James cringed at the thought of husks devouring them while they were too injured to move.

Ashley led the grim team, using her omni-tool to scan for any life signs. Halfway down the path, James caught Javik's unwavering gaze. "How can you be so calm? Look at all these poor bastards.", he fumed.

"I see them, human.", Javik replied.

James was getting angry, "And what? You just use your prothean abilities to not give a shit?"

Javik stopped in place, glaring at James, "You think I don't feel remorse towards the dead souls that cry out in this hell? I can feel every whimper, every fear and terror they felt before their lives were taken. In my time, this was the norm. And we burned our dead, honored their sacrifice and mourned the innocent. Don't presume to know me, human."

James scoffed, walking away from the alien. Ashley stared on, relieved nothing came of their argument. Further ahead, they spotted a litter of burnt out makos. The smell of burning flesh gagged them. "Nothing here.", James reported.

Javik felt a sense. He looked around and saw nothing.
"Let's keep combing the area. James, take the north side of the path, I'll continue up this hill. Javik, if you can use your abilities to find anything..."

"I will search thoroughly.", he acknowledged.

Ashley rummaged through debris and corpses. They were all piled together, she couldn't discern human from alien, even tell apart most of the reaper bodies.

More than once she gagged, and then vomited. Good thing she passed breakfast. James pried apart mako doors, looking inside. He brought out every body, of every soldier. He knew he was wasting time by doing this, but the thought of leaving them to rot inside the trucks disgusted him.

An hour passed of searching and they found nothing. The reaper blast was so intense, with so much force... bodies could've been flung anywhere. Even into the river.

The overcast sky provided little light to see by. Ashley wanted to check on Major Coats and the local bases. She commed her team back to the shuttle. Once Cortez opened the hatch, James tapped her shoulder. She turned to see Javik slowly walking to them from a small distance.

"Is he... carrying something?", she asked.

"Anderson?", James exclaimed excited.

But their excitement dulled to fear and caution. Javik met them, holding the unconscious form of Satima. Bloody and wounded. "Her life signs are weak. She had been laying under rubble for days.", he replied.

Immediately, they took Satima to the medical base. Ashley commed Coats. "Major. We have a priority emergency. I need security detail and a separate room."

"Have you found Anderson?", he asked, concerned.

"No. It's the classified traveler", Ashley replied.

Sentarian Cruiser

Arkasia paced. "It's been days. Why hasn't Satima contacted me?"

Memtrix observed the alien naval ships, watching them use the relay to come and go. There's been three times the amount of space traffic, and Callon was starting to become distrustful and irritated.

He wanted an explanation as to what happened with the reapers. "It was there time to take control of the citadel.", he would roar among the council Stravos. Memtrix witnessed him obsess over the crucible's destruction. He started a search for Satima on Earth.

"Maybe it's a good idea to not press it. If Satima is smart, she'll disappear. In time, Callon will remember his post and resume the mission getting us home.", Memtrix replied.

Arkasia stared out of the barracks port hole. "Callon is dangerous. He should be stripped and banished to the unknown recesses of space. It is you, sister... that should be Commander."

Memtrix quickly sat up from the bench and dropped her rifle she was cleaning, cautiously looking around the hallway and closing the room's door. "Are you miv nact? Ke so'r sha! Any of his loyal followers could've heard you!"

Arkasia glanced to her, "Weren't you a loyal follower once?"
Jevin, a lieutenant, walked in. "Commander Callon wants you on the command deck. Now.", he glared.

Memtrix glanced to her sister, then followed Jevin. Arkasia suddenly worried about her hasty words. He could have been listening the whole time. She walked behind her sister with a feeling of dread. Khin sha save them.

On the command deck, Callon stood with his personal guard of stalkers. He looked up from the mapping interface to scowl at Memtrix."Why didn't you accompany Reaper on the citadel?"

Memtrix stood at attention. "Sir, I was helping civilian forces on the wards."

Callon stepped in front of her, giving her a disappointed stare. He proceeded to pace around Memtrix,"Helping the weak species that thrives on the achievements of others, is the opposite of our mission, Commander Vale." Callon glanced to Arkasia, resuming an icy glare at Memtrix. "The citadel is our destiny!", he roared, fuming. "When the Reapers stole the station, and harvested our kind, we swore justice. When we attempted to use the tears against them and failed, we swore vengeance. Now, they are gone, and the citadel is devoid of The Intelligence. I want you to find Satima and eradicate the synthetic abomination. After she is dead, we will take what was stolen and use it to get home."

Memtrix objected, "Sir? Haven't we lost enough against the reapers? These people are still weak... barely able to summon any resistance."

Callon laughed, "Your sister's influence is clouding your judgement, Memtrix.", he signaled a stalker, who grabbed Arkasia on the deck.

Memtrix stared, afraid.

"Her life, for the life of Satima. And if you fail... you can expect a similar end.", Callon threatened.

----------------------------------------------

At the medical base, Ashley looked over treatment of Satima's wounds. It took some time to get that awful armor off. It landed with a heavy thud on the ground. How Javik managed to carry her that far... Ashley watched the monitor report the weak but stabling life signs.

"These wounds need cleaning, and she needs treatments to exposure. She's dehydrated and suffers from mild hypothermia.", the medical officer explains. "Several burns and lacerations on her arms and legs. Must have been hit hard by the reapers." He gathers bandages, sutures and steal trays. James keeps watch outside, preventing any curious eyes from starting anything.

Before the medical officer begins, Ashley remembers the most important part about Satima. Her hybrid physiology. Just as he starts to inject antibiotics, she grabs his wrist, stopping him. "She's not fully human, as you no doubt see. You'll need to use dextro laced medicine."

He looked at her confused, "But... we would have to petition the turian med camp for that."

"I'll handle it.", she replied.

Down the row of damaged buildings, Ashley walks by herself. Glancing around the devastation, until she stands in front of the turian base. They had provided search teams, helping to find other units trapped in debris and fallen buildings. An officer stood erect, his left eye covered in a patch.

"Ma'am."

She nodded, "I need to speak with your CO. I'm Lieutenant-Commander Williams, of the Alliance."
He quickly darted to the far corner, speaking to a turian woman in slate colored armor, and gold
toned clan markings. She then glances towards Ashley and makes her way to the Lt's direction. "I
am Commander Kerin. What can I do for you?", she asked.

"I need some medical supplies.", Ashley informed.

Commander Kerin looked at her curiously, "Medical supplies? Do you have any turian soldiers that
need help? We can bring them here..."

"No. Considering everything, and with all due respect... it's classified. I'm sorry, but I really need
your help in getting those supplies.", Ashley cut in.

Commander Kerin crossed her arms, "And with all due respect, Lieutenant-Commander, but I can't
just hand out supplies whenever the alliance asks for it. My men need it more than whatever
classified project you've got going on." She started to leave.

Tensions are still high, but Satima needs those supplies. Ashley didn't have time to debate or argue,
"Come with me.", she offered

Commander Kerin turned to her, "What?"

Ashley sighed, "Against my orders from Alliance command, come with me. Please."

Kerin almost declined, but her curiosity got the better of her. Inside the Alliance medical base,
Ashley and Kerin go past the officers, and right to the secret room inside the adjacent hospital. James
saluted out of respect and they went in.

Kerin found a young human woman on a cot, being sutured by a medical officer. "I am sorry about
your wounded friend, but I still don't understand why you need turian medical supplies."

Ashley motioned for Kerin to take a closer look. The turian Commander gasped, glancing at the
human features this girl had,

"She's not all human, and the only one. This is classified because she's a part of the reapers defeat.
And... close to Commander Shepard. Without turian designed medicine, she could die from her
injuries.", Ashley finished.

Kerin faced Ashley, "You can have them, but after this is done, I want answers. And if I find out
she's some kind of cruel experiment from the humans..."

"She's not. That I can assure you of.", Ashley replied.

Twenty-four hours later

Shepard waited anxiously on the shuttle bay. She leaned on anything in her path when she walked,
still recovering from the reaper blast. This time it was the console panel to the armor stand.
Chockwas begged her to use a cane, but she refused.
The hatch door opened as the kodiak flown in, settling over the docking couplets. In minutes,
Ashley, James and Javik stepped out.

Ashley approached Shepard, "Commander. We haven't found Anderson yet. Our ground teams are
still looking. The turians have offered help, as well as the small group of Salarians."

"I suppose no news is good news.", Shepard replied, looking downcast.
"Well, there is some news.", Ashley revealed.

Shepard stared at her, "What news?"

Ashley gulped, staring at her friend and commander, with a worried gaze. "We found Satima... and she's alive." Two marines from earth carried a stretcher with the hybrid girl on it. Shepard's heart jumped at the sight. Satima looked pale and had obvious facial wounds. It would heal, shouldn't it. Why hasn't it healed?

Chockwas overlooked the previous doctor's suture job. His ability to close the stab wound, and wrap the chest tightly from the damaged ribs were well executed. She applied scans and took samples. Shepard waited to the side, anxious. "Is she ok? Will she make it?"

"She'll be alright. Ashley's quick response saved her life. But, Shepard... I don't see any trace of the implants, the reaper tech-inside her anymore. I've compared it to previous scans and samples...", she looked up to Shepard, "Nothing."

Shepard watched the worried gaze of the good doctor, taking in the interesting and frightening facts. Chockwas continued with her examination. "This means she'll heal at a completely normal rate. It could take time.", she informed.

Shepard nodded, uncrossing her arms, "Then let's hope the citadel's hospitals are up and running again soon. We all need it.", she replied, limping out with the doctor.

Satima laid asleep on the bed in the medbay, her wounds bandaged. Sore and unaware of the difference of her surroundings. She dreamt of the last few hours before the reaper pulse.

Fighting and running, watching people get blown apart by reaper blasts... then his face. Jormun's awful reaper face. She wailed and cried out, there was no one to help her. A white-hot flush of adrenaline shot through her, causing tremendous pain. Until it stopped, her mind a blank. Memories were clouded, and the only ones she could recount, were the days she spent on hive.

Archer's sinister grin burned in her mind. The feeling of being watched spooked her. Satima woke up screaming. She looked around to see no one and sat up, wincing. Her shoulder was sore. Putting one foot over the edge of the bed, she turned herself, letting her feet dangle. Taking in a breath, she tried to step down, but ended up falling.

Her legs were too weak to support her to stand, and she fell hard on the floor. Hitting her face and busting her lip. A dotted smear of blood covered the spot where she had impact.

The medbay door opened, with Chockwas hurrying in. "Child!", she exclaimed.

Satima looked up to see this human woman hovering over her, trying to grab her. "Don't touch me!", she shouted, attempting to crawl away.

"Satima? It's alright. I won't hurt you.", Chockwas tried to soothe her.

The hybrid found a small amount of strength, and hit this woman on the leg, causing her to fall. She scrambled up, faltering towards a door and opened it, locking herself inside.

Shepard had been overlooking some reports Ashley brought inside her cabin, when a comm opened. "Shepard...", Chockwas was panting in pain,"...Satima has wakened and something is wrong."

Shepard immediately jogged to the medbay. Garrus and Liara accompanied her, helping her limp faster to the door. Once they entered, the commander stepped to the Doctor, helping her up to the

"I walked in a few minutes ago, and I saw Satima was awake. She had fell off the bed to the floor. I tried to help her, but... the fear in her eyes. She acted is if she didn't know me!" Chockwas glanced to the door leading to the core room.

Chockwas rubbed her leg. Liara scanned and saw to it. "I'll stay back here. Make sure Satima can't run past us.", Liara informed.

Shepard and Garrus both walked to the door, glancing at each other. He made a small knock and began speaking in a fatherly tone. "Satima... we know you're in there. It's okay, no one is going to hurt you. Tell us what's wrong."

Shepard made a surprise nod. She would tell him anything with that kind of assuring voice. There was a mumbling sound, followed by a small shuffle of feet. "Go away!", Satima yelled.

Garrus changed stance, "No. You're still recovering from injuries and need medical help. You have to come out.", he demanded gently.

"Or what?", she shouted, her voice shaky and afraid.

"Or we'll have to break in.", Shepard warned.

A minute passed, and the door opened. Satima had been hanging on to the rail. Garrus stepped in, but she raised her voice. "No. Not you. Don't come near me.", she yelled at him. "You... you can help me.", Satima demanded. She pointed towards Shepard.

Sitting back on the bed, Satima sighed as Chockwas stitched the cut in her lower lip. "I'm out of bandage glue, so you'll just have to deal with this. The stitch will dissolve in a few days. Meantime, I need to check your injuries. You've sustained a lot of them."

She winced as Chockwas lifted the old bandage off her back wound. Perfectly stitched, but still fresh. "It's healing nicely.", the doctor informed. After putting a fresh bandage on, Chockwas began scanning Satima, shining a light in her eyes, and checking her torso.

Then she needed to check the turian plated spine, that seemed to of taken some burns. "You were hit by the reaper's blast as well.", Chockwas informed.

Satima looked at her quizzically. "What's a reaper?"

"You know... Harbinger. On Earth. In London?", Shepard reminded.

Satima stared on, confused. "What's earth?"

Liara stepped forward, past Garrus. Her folded arms coming apart to rest on sore hips. Being flung a few feet from a reaper blast will do that. "Do you know who I am?", she asked.

The hybrid stared at Liara, then nodded with a puzzled glance. "I know you're asari.", she answered.

Shepard then stood directly in front of Satima, her eyes searching the young turian gaze. "What happened to Reaper?"

The girl sunk her shoulders in, trying to avert from their strange stares. She refused to answer, fearful of their insistence. Liara couldn't believe it! Something had gone wrong on the crucible. And that something, has scrambled the girl's mind. "By the goddess. You don't remember?", Liara asked,
upset.

Satima glared at her, "No, I don't! What is it you want from me?"

Chockwas started a scan on her head, "I'll need her to lay down, so I can conduct more tests, but I believe... she has short term memory loss. A result from all she's been through, physically and psychologically."

Shepard began trying to jog her memory. "Do you remember your name?"

The girl nodded with a mocking glare, "Yes!" Satima crossed her arms in irritation. "When do we get to the part where I'm running and you're chasing me through the station?"

"Just who do you think I am?", Shepard asked.

Satima rolled her eyes, "Oh no. You're not using indoctrination on me. Just turn off the simulation and get this over with!"

Garrus stepped back, confused and worried. Liara walked closer as Satima inched away from her. "You think she's that Reaper. The other Shepard, don't you?"

"I don't know who you are, but yes, she IS Reaper.", Satima answered.

Out of curiosity, Liara asked another, very important question. "How old are you?"

Satima dangled her feet, glancing at the room, then answered."15. Why?"

"Goddess.", Liara spoke, covering her face.

Confined to the medbay under guard, Satima spent her time tinkering on data pads and playing a race game James had lent her. Chockwas confirmed the injury. It could be temporary or permanent. Shepard wanted to be alone in her cabin. That meant Garrus wasn't invited to console her. Ashley didn't like how this looked.

Technically she was still in charge, and nobody gave her trouble over it. Shepard was still recovering, as well as the hybrid girl. Hackett allowed her access to the full report Shepard had given him, before their last visit to the citadel.

Alternate timelines, a reaperfied Shepard and this girl... this hybrid. A secret kept from everyone, even the Alliance, that she was... is-the commander's child. Impossible. Maybe?

It seemed confusing, but it was all true. All the medical reports from the quarantine facility on shalta ward, Chockwas and Mordin's finds. Then Javik's confession. It all led to this. The reapers were gone, everyone is safe... for now. But this anomaly, this child. "Princess Lola", as James calls her. Could prove to be the most dangerous paradox of all.

Inside the cabin, Shepard sat over her terminal, forcing sobs at bay. She overlooked everything she could find about amnesia and how to fix it.

With the extranet down, only emergency information was left. And it had a short and poor summary of what to do. "Keep the patient stable" and "Don't force any memories or people the patient is uncomfortable with".

Getting up, Shepard paced her room, staring at the fish tank that had only one fish in it. Then she blinked to see two. It looked exotic and had beautiful blue and red colors. She felt exhausted and
decided to lay down. As she sat on the bed, something fell to the floor.

Next to her nightstand, she found a note that had fallen to the side, it was written in bad human English. "Sepahrd. I dnt hae a lot f creds bt I hpe ths wll do. It rends me of u ad garus. Balue ad redd. Likee ur coloors...thi fsh. Sryy mi humane is bade. Direcive was mre interestad in traninnng mi to fiht, ntt to wrt."

Shepard fell on her knees. And it hurt so badly. The burn scars and the bruises... but none so bad as the feeling of regret.

Garrus stared at his control panel for the main gun. He didn't do anything but stare. It showed numbers and data... streaming over and over. EDI eventually re-calibrated it, not disturbing him. Still... he just stared. Satima came through. She helped defeat the reapers and stopped the harvests. Just as she promised to do.

She came through with her promise to keep Shepard safe and alive. Taking the blast too, and staying behind to fight. Regardless of timelines, she was still his. Regardless of age, she was still his. Whether by natural birth or reaper tech... she was his.

And now she's hurt, because of them. Maybe Chockwas is right and it's a result of all the trauma. Spirits... how many of those soldiers will go through the same thing? PTSD, anxiety... depression. Just the start of a serious problem.

How can the galaxy heal when it cowers at the nightmares and shadows at the back of their minds? He's not blaming them... he's not.

Liara watched her mom die from indoctrination. Jack was the subject of cruel biotic experimentation. Ashley has to live with the deaths of her squad mates, her friends and the sacrifice of Kaiden.

Garrus threw his data pad across the room. He spotted his mantis, dismantled and ready for cleanup on the work bench. He stared at it, feeling it to be useless against anything that wasn't solid. Garrus violently thrashed the weapon off the table. He roared at nothing, thinking of Shepard as she was lying there, injured on earth. Burned and bloody. Impaled the table with his claws, ripping the wood and metal, remembering Archer hurting Satima on Rannoch.

Remembering her surprised look when the picture was taken in the apartment. He snatched his visor off his plated brow, ready to throw it until he noticed an incoming message.

It was a message sent from Palaven, three days ago, from his father. Garrus slowed his anger, cradling the now precious device that held a single link to his family. He put the visor back on, pressing the button on the side to open the link.

"Hello Son.

I'm glad to have received something from you, letting me know you're alright. Solanna is doing well, walking and helping with technical advice.

She's worried about you, and your Commander Shepard. We both know how much you care for the human officer. And I want you to know, son... that I respect you and your decisions. I have no reservations on the matter, and I certainly have no say in who you choose to care for.

Now, about this... child you are speaking of. Son, I hope someday before my time comes, I can get the details on the matter. But for now, if this is a true occurrence. Then as a father, I can only tell you to love and understand this child.
No matter how he or she came. If this offspring is truly yours... then I hope to one day meet my
grandchild. I love you son. Your mother would be proud of the man you have become."

Garrus bit back a hard blow of emotion. He didn't want anyone to hear him cry, let alone sob loudly. He missed his family, he worried over his home world.

He wanted Shepard to be by his side, but she wasn't. Garrus covered his head, letting his visor fall gently to the floor. Small droplets of water fell from his covered face.

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Satima waited patiently as Chockwas started to nod off at her terminal. When the human falls asleep, she'll escape. She looks down, irritated that she was only in this... sweat pants and Reaper's underwear? Ugh.

It also irritated her that she didn't quite fill out the sports bra. The Chockwas stirred, trying not to nod off. Whatever Reaper is doing, this was definitely new.

And scary. All these humans running around, unaffected by the Directive's mind pulse or the fact Archer, her own personal torture officer, was nowhere to be found. Sometimes Reaper stood in and stopped him. Sometimes she didn't.

Chockwas laid her head down. Perfect.

Satima carefully hopped off the bed, tiptoeing quietly past the doctor. The door opened. She felt bad for hurting the female human, but she was scared!

It must've been late, because the ship's lights were on dim. Not a soul in sight.

Satima silently stepped forward, watching for any movements, listening to any sound. She got curious about the mess area, looking at the kitchen. It all seemed perfectly normal. Too normal. Probably a directive minion sneaking around the counter.

She made a quick dash, ready to take him, but felt a little disappointed to see no one there. Satima grabbed a sharp knife from a wooden holder and proceeded down the small corridor. Sleeping pods.

It had a few crew members in it.

Looked like they were forcing a couple hours shut-eye. Maybe to receive information? Like the soldiers did. She shuddered. Sentinels. There could be one through the door she spots in front of her. Or maybe there's a way to escape? They locked the core room door that had the hatch and ladder.

The door opened with a small swoosh. Satima cautiously stepped in. It closed behind her and she turned, almost gasping. That turian guy was asleep on a cot.

She looked down, seeing bits of damaged data pads and what looked like a sniper rifle in pieces beside him. She had an idea. Take him hostage. Reaper gave him glances... so she must be invested with him. Whatever that was.

Closer. Careful. A little closer. Her naked foot nearly crushed something metal. She took a sigh of relief when she stopped herself, picking up the device. Before she would attempt the escape and hostage account, Satima wanted to see what was blinking on the... visor?

It had a message. She couldn't keep her nose out of anyone's business. It seemed sad, but sort of... nice. This Garrus had a loving family waiting for him. Interesting, but not important.

Satima set it down on the workbench, turning to see the turian up and glaring right at her. "What are you doing?", he demanded. Garrus noticed his visor, quickly putting it back on. He could see her
heart rate was high. 
"It's alright. I'm not going to hurt you.", he assured.

Satima back away, her teal eyes wide in fear. He stepped forward slowly, "No one's going to hurt you. Let's go back to the medbay, and see if Chockwas can help you remember the last few days. Deal?" Garrus gently touched her arm, but it sent an alarm through her.

She instinctively tried to slice him to run away. He dodged back quickly, glad his armor was still on. Satima made a jab, but she seemed... slower than usual.

Like she was still learning her own defenses and strengths. Garrus tried to grab her wrist, wresting the knife from her hand, but Satima learned quickly. She hit his hand away, landing her small fist on his face.

He tried to retaliate the matter, realizing and focusing on the important fact. She believes she is trapped in hive again, a child frightened and alone. This moment of thinking led to a near disaster and unfortunate event. Satima managed to cut his brow, knocking the visor off, crushing it with her foot.

The cut and the attempts to hurt him didn't matter. But for some reason, the destruction of his visor and only communication with his father, drove him into a rage.

He looked at her stunned... glaring. Garrus moved forward at the now terrified Satima, reaching out and twisting her wrist until she yelped in pain, dropping the knife. She called him a bastard, and he suddenly smacked her across the face. Reopening the cut in her lower lip.

Shepard stood as the door opened, equally surprised at Satima's escape from the medbay, but more upset at what she was seeing. Garrus held the twisted arm of Satima, red blood smeared on the girl's lip and chin. She had tears in her eyes.

"What the hell is going on here!?", Shepard shouted.

Garrus let her go, astounded at his own actions. Satima ran forward, wrapping her arms around Shepard's waist. Hiding her face in the commander's shoulder.

Chockwas saw to Satima's lip again, glad to have found the bandage glue. Shepard and Garrus stayed in the main gun battery. She paced with her arms crossed. "How could you? Really! She doesn't remember a thing about the reapers or the war. She doesn't remember who we are. And you attack her? What... because you still think she's dangerous?"

Garrus stared at the floor as he sat on his cot. "I don't... know what came over me. One minute she was trying to stab me and then... I don't know." The amount of guilt stunned him. It's just a visor... it's just a visor.

Shepard stopped pacing, glaring at him. "You better know! You better have a damn good explanation for trying to hurt our daughter!"

Garrus sat up, fuming. There was something about the word daughter, that struck the last nerve."I don't fucking know! She damaged my visor, the only way of communicating with my father, Shepard! Spirits!", Garrus yelled. "I didn't mean to hurt her.", he turned around leaning on the hull with one arm.

"So, you decided to take out your frustrations on Satima?", she conclude, staring in upset.

Was she, right? Garrus couldn't look at her, only stare away at the hull wall.
Shepard left him, more vexed than before. She wished he wasn't on board anymore. It hurt so bad to feel this way, and it hurt worse that Satima wasn't any better. She stopped at the mess, glancing to the windows of the medbay. Satima sat up on the bed, watching something on the vid screen, as Chockwas resumed her scans.

EDI confirmed Satima's attempted escape, and that she tried to attack Garrus. But she was just afraid! Turning around, Shepard walked back inside the main battery, as Garrus was picking up the pieces of his visor. The door shut behind her. He looked up, standing. Shepard stepped to him, "Garrus... I'm sorry for accusing you. Satima was not herself, she was scared. And you've been under an incredible amount of stress. We all have."

Garrus tilted his head at her, his eyes were watery. She continued, "You didn't ask to be a father overnight, neither of us asked to parent something the reapers made." Shepard stared at him with glassy eyes, "I still love you, I'm just angry. Scared. Dammit, I almost died days ago, and I don't know how to deal with that!"

Garrus stepped to her closely as she waited for his response. "Don't talk anymore.", he gathered her in his arms, and they embraced. "You have every right to yell at me. I should've handled the situation better, but I didn't."

Shepard nestled her head against his armored chest. She felt his chest rise and fall with every pained breath he took. "How are we going to help her?", she closed her eyes briefly in tears. Opening them to his voice.

He held her tightly, looking away, equally saddened. "I don't know."

An hour passed by, with Garrus staying away from medbay for good reasons. He stood at the cockpit with EDI and Joker. She had something to show him.

"It's a data recovering system I created. I have managed to recover and save all the messages from you visor, Garrus.", she informed.

Garrus was beside himself, "This is... EDI, there's no way I can thank you enough for this.", he replied.

"The pleasure was all mine, Garrus. I hope Satima remembers herself, and that you are reunited with your family, soon.", EDI replied with a smile. A simple gesture that reminded him how human she acted, and how real of a friend this Cerberus AI, had truly become.

Garrus shook her hand, "How did you know what happened?"

Joker turned around in his chair. "The whole deck heard what happened. Plus, EDI had it on video. We're family, Garrus."

He laughed, but slowed it in personal shame of what happened in the main battery. Garrus glanced to them with a smirk. "And glad to be a part of it.", he added.

Deck 3

Shepard watched Satima pace in irritation inside the medbay. She joined in. "Are you okay?"

Satima tossed a ball, "I'm fine. He's new. Some kind of trust test or something?"

Shepard stopped walking, "There's no test, Satima. Garrus is not going to hurt you."
"Again... you mean. He just wanted to what... establish who was in charge?", she smirked.

This irritated Shepard, she grabbed Satima by the arms. The girl flinched, but didn't lose the commanders gaze. "How dare you! Garrus lost friends... family for this damn war. He's been there for everyone. And you come and... change everything!"

Garrus walks in to see the argument. Shepard continues, shaking the girl. "I'm not Reaper! This is not hive or the Directive! It's over with, Satima! We stopped them. Now remember who you are!"

Satima struggled against her with a frightened expression. "You're hurting me!"

A spatial rift opened into the medbay, with several tall armored aliens walking out. They surrounded them.

One of them, a pale green skinned female with crystal eyes, spoke. "Shepard, I am known as Commander Memtrix of the Sentarians. I'm sorry about this. But I demand Satima, immediately."

Shepard stepped in front of Satima, protectively. "Why the hell do want her? Get off my ship!"

Ashley, James and Liara ran to the elevator. Hitting the panel to take them to the third floor. As it opened, EDI informed the team of the occurrence. "Aliens have boarded the Normandy!", she alerted.

Memtrix stepped to them, "Commander Callon wants Satima. He doesn't want anything else. Give her to him, and you go free." Her gaze defeated.

Satima shook, afraid and confused. She stepped back right into Garrus. He held a firm gaze to this Memtrix. Shepard stood defiant. "Tell Callon, to go to hell. Whatever deals were made with Reaper, whatever idea he had before. It's over with. The reapers are gone and it's over."

Memtrix looked at them pained. "That's just it. Since Reaper is gone, and the machines defeated, who do you think he'll go after? Shepard... he has my sister. You understand family, don't you?"

Shepard exchanged a dangerous glare to Memtrix. "Don't you dare.", she warned.

"I promise it will be quick and painless in the end. Before Callon can conduct his experiments. Maybe her nano tech will save her, who knows. But I must take her.", Memtrix said apologetically.

Shepard started, feeling that something wasn't right. Chockwas proved hours ago, that Satima was free of all nano tech. The implants were gone. "Memtrix, Satima doesn't have...!"

A stalker grabbed Satima from behind Garrus, her screams of defiance echoed throughout the bay. Garrus tried reaching for her, but she disappeared in a rift. Memtrix stared at Shepard, "I'm sorry."

They were all gone. "...she doesn't have nano tech anymore.", Shepard muttered.

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Satima struggled against her captors. A tall and scary man stood in front of her, on what appears to be the cockpit of this massive ship she is on. "Satima. I am relieved you have survived the reapers onslaught. Please, tell me. How did your mother manage to stop them?", he asked with a dangerous glare.

"My mother? What are you talking about?", Satima asked, confused.

Callon stared at her. She seemed more timid and frightened than before. "Memtrix. What is this?", he
"This is Satima. Shepard and her mate tried guarding her from me. I retrieved her from their command ship, Normandy.", Memtrix informed.

Callon snapped his fingers and Satima was scanned. It was her. He began pacing, "Do you know who you are?"

Satima answered, "Yes. Is this another hive station? Where is Reaper?", she asked.

Callon stopped, looking completely astounded. "By the great ancestors!", he began laughing hysterically. Memtrix gulped, unsure of what his intentions were. "Stalkers! Stravos council!", he commed loudly through the ship. "We begin our invasion of the citadel... immediately."

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Shuttle bay

Garrus pleaded with Shepard, "Please, Shepard. You're not ready for this. Command the Normandy, but let me find her."

"I'm going with you. And I'm taking back full command. Besides... Ash is happy to relinquish it.", Shepard replied. She busied herself with a second set of N7 armor. It hurt to strap on the pieces over her under suit. Nothing is going to stop her from saving Satima, though.

He shook his head, "Only because she respects you. Does Hackett know?" Garrus handed her an arm guard, wishing he had the restraint over his feelings for Shepard. He should be stopping her, but he can't.

"Not yet. She's our child... and the most important person in this galaxy right now. She may have the answers to what happened on earth and the citadel. The crucible even. Garrus, we need to save her and stop Callon. Somehow." They walked to the already primed kodiak. Ashley waited with Liara at the shuttle. "Ma'am, you'll need more than a small team out there. I can offer my gun and assistance."

Shepard raised a brow, confused. "Assistance? You're sounding a bit off today, Ash. What's bothering you?"

Ashley stared away,"I'm worried about my friend, that's all.", she leaned in closer, "Please, at least let one of us lead. I don't care who. Just... don't die. Okay."

Shepard put a reassuring hand on Ash's shoulder, "I'll let you guys decide who leads. It might be fun to see who is the best.", she glances towards Garrus.

Liara let out a small laugh, "I'm so glad to have Shepard back."

On board the citadel, Zakera ward is slowly being put back together. The Presidium took the most number of workers and volunteers away, it being the galactic hub of every race. Other wards were getting the aid they needed flown in by shuttles of C-Sec from the upper wards. Callon didn't care for the inhabitants, using his stalkers to kill and maim anyone is his way. Memtrix kept Satima close, as Callon kept Arkasia closer.

They were both thrown into a cell of the C-Sec department, watched by Stalkers. Callon wanted to "evict" every living thing on the station, except for the keepers. A revelation that would shock the historical and moral foundations of the galaxy herself.

Arkasia watched Satima cower in the corner of the cell, rocking herself. There was something wrong. "Satima? Are you alright? Do you need medical help?", Arkasia asked, worried.
The girl just kept rocking. Her eyes closed. Memtrix approached, and let herself in. Arkasia stood in a rage, and spat at the feet of her sister. "Ja tru ka nac! I disown you!", Arkasia shouted.

Memtrix let out a sigh, sad and concerned. "I'm trying to save your life."

Arkasia shook her head in disgust. "By letting Callon do as he pleases? He's going to kill all these people! Did you not see the little faces of those children? Those faces will haunt you till the end, sister."

Memtrix looked away, "I know."

Arkasia stepped closer, eyeing Satima. "What did he do to her?", she asked concerned.

"Nothing. She doesn't remember anything. It's strange.", Memtrix pondered. "The Shepard did mention that the hybrid no longer possessed her nano tech, but I was too concerned about you to listen."

Arkasia sat next to Satima, who flinched from her touch. "Satima... I'm Arkasia. Remember? I'm a Sentarian. The good kind of my people. Do you remember what your mother did?"

Callon walked up to the cell, watching with an insulted curiosity. He continued his icy gaze, giving a stern order to Memtrix. "Commander, I need the wards cleared. Have all those disgustingly weak creatures moved to the conduit."

Memtrix quickly turned her distressed gaze to him. What madness is this? "But, sir. We don't know where it will take them.", she argued.

"And I don't care.", Callon replied. He tore his stare away from the women and left them in silence. Arkasia glared to Memtrix. Callon must be stopped, or he'll doom the Sentarians and these people.

Citadel
Third Arm emergency docking entrance

Shepard and team discreetly land on a docking pad outside the shalta ward. The Alliance will be furious about this rogue mission, but considering all that she's done for them and the galaxy, they can shove the complaints up their asses. Once inside, they tracked the Sentarian's stalkers signal from the presidium.

"Wonder what they have planned.", Liara muttered, carefully taking a side point on the way through the ward.

"Whatever it is, it involves Satima. We have to stop it.", Shepard informed.

Further on the level, a few humans gathered around a door. Quietly whispering. "Just open it, John.", a woman argued.

"I'm trying!", he replied, rigging the panel over the door as fast as he could.

Ashley crept up on them. "Hey.", she whispered loudly. They both turned with a start. "Don't hurt us.", he pleaded.

"Relax. It's alright.", Garrus stepped forward, lowering his rifle. "What's happening on the presidium?", he questioned.

"These strange beings appeared, taking people to the monument relay. They're trying to turn it on.
We escaped and came down here.

Shepard walked closer to them, "Listen... I know you're scared, but we need your help. If you want to save lives, then please, go to those that weren't taken. Tell them a team from the Alliance is here. We need help getting to the presidium before anything bad happens."

The two exchanged glances, "O... ok. We can do that.

"Report any findings on this frequency. Comm us, ok?", Garrus explained, typing the sequence to their Omni-tools. The two disappeared into another room. Shepard unholstered her rifle, letting Ashley take the lead. "Ok. Let's go."

Back in the c-sec building. Arkasia paced and paced. There must be a way to get free, and stop Callon. She looks at Satima. "I know you don't remember much. But I need your help to get out. There are a lot of people that are going to die, if we don't stop Callon."

"No. This is just another hive test. I'm staying here until Reaper gets me.

Arkasia became frustrated. "This is not hive! Satima... snap out of it!"

A guard came inside, "Arkasia Vael. Callon requests your presence." He nods toward Satima, as stalkers grab her, dragging her out. "Where are they taking her?", Arkasia demands. The guard ignores the question.

On the presidium, Callon watches the conduit come to life. It worked using Satima's dna imprint. She was brought to him, "You may not remember this, but here is where you came through. I wonder how all these citizens felt, seeing you for the first time."

Dozens of people, all different races were pushed together. Hundreds more waiting in the undamaged parts of the ward. Memtrix reluctantly pushes a human woman forward to the conduit. Arkasia is brought alongside Satima.

Callon holds a Shen-Tac to Arkasia. A primitive Sentarian spear. He then grins, threatening Arkasia from the sharp edge of the dangerous weapon. "My loyal soldier and most intelligent engineer. If you both hadn't been so persistent to find this place from the beginning. We would never be here. The information on Reaper and her bastard hybrid, the Intelligence's central network... all thanks to the ingenuity of two sisters. Memtrix, push the first one through. The rest will follow or be cut down."

Arkasia looks to her sister pleadingly. Memtrix reluctantly forces the woman in the tear. Satima stares in horror. This place, these people... this isn't hive. Where ever she is, it's not hive, but someone's home. And this Callon is taking it from them. "I remember!", she shouts. Arkasia gives her a glare of caution.

Meanwhile, Shepard and team make their way to the presidium, carefully killing any Stalkers in the way. Helping people trapped or injured to flee to the resistance that had been formed in those few hours. They took cover behind the cafe's walls, watching below what was happening. Satima had raised her hand, shouting something. "We need to get closer.

"Down there. The embassies. I'll provide cover fire, in case your spotted.

Shepard nodded to her and followed Garrus down to the embassy below.

Callon stepped closer to Satima, "Remember what?", he glared.
"I... uh. I remember coming through. Seeing all these frightened people. I was captured.", she said, hoping her assumption was correct.

Shepard had reached the embassy, carefully treading the ramps. They were getting closer.

"Then tell me, Satima. How did your mother stop the harvest?", he demanded.

Satima gulped, looking to Arkasia who didn't know what to do. Memtrix held her breath. "She... she, took control.", Satima answered.

Callon smiled, followed by a laugh. Everyone was afraid of this madman's intentions. Memtrix more than ever. "Took control? Well, that is a convincing answer." He chuckled, then brought out his pistol, shooting Arkasia in the shoulder. Silver blood splattered on her light armor. "No!", Memtrix yelled.

She ran to catch her sister. Shepard and team opened fire, just as Callon used the conduit to rift himself and Satima away. "Damn!", Shepard shouted. Stalkers shot back, trying to use the people as shields.

"Fight back for yourselves! Don't let them use you.", Liara yelled, using a singularity to capture two, she warped them backwards away from a huddled group of citizens. Liara stared to a few asari. "This is your home! These are your people, too. Fight for them!"

A few of the citizens attacked an unsuspecting stalker, beating him down and obtaining his weapon. The asari warped and lashed them. They took cover, offering fire support as Ashley from above took down two with the sniper rifle Garrus loaned her.

In minutes, the fight was over and the conduit still open. Arkasia took in pained breaths, "I'm sorry, sister. I was so angry...", she gasps in pain.

Memtrix worried over the wound, "I'm the one that's sorry. I should've stopped him. I could've...", she regretted.

Shepard stepped closer to them, leaning down. "Medigel can stop the bleeding, but I don't know a thing about Sentarians. Memtrix... I need your help."

After the application, Liara hovered over them. "I'll stay behind, and try to keep her alive."

Memtrix looked at them solemn, then her gaze turned to anger. "I'll help you. And kill the trez nik bastard myself."

Through the conduit, they found themselves on board the command vessel. "Callon is here. He's planning on destroying the citadel if he can't have it.", Memtrix informed.

Shepard took in a quick glance of the new vessel. She snapped her thoughts out of the uniqueness of it. "Then let's make sure he doesn't."

Satima was hit twice and knocked down to the grated floor. Callon had killed stalkers guarding the command deck, even a few council members that were against him. Stravos will be destroyed and a new council formed. Satima glanced around while Callon attempted to aim the beam cannon at the great station. "What are you doing?", she panicked.

"I'm rewriting the history of my people. This station was ours, everything you use, is ours! The reapers took it, but now we can lay claim to it all again.", he answered.
Memtrix found the ante-chamber of the council Stravos in ruins. Several members dead. "He's lost his mind.", she observed in fear. A council member in leather robes, struggled to stand from the other end of the room, "...mem..memtrix. You have to stop him.", she collapsed.

Shepard and Garrus followed Memtrix to the ailing woman. She was carefully sat in a chair."Memtrix. The council supported the claim Arkasia made. You have our support...", she coughed blood. "You are high-commander now. Stop Callon, and kill him. You have... you have our... sanction. Protect our home, reveal nothing." The councilor died.

"I'm sorry.", Shepard offered, still stunned by this new species of people.

Memtrix stood, and opened comms on board the ship. "Attention." She hesitated. What would her father think? "I am High-Commander Memtrix Vael. Commander Callon has violated our sacred laws of interference, our treatise with the people of this galaxy. Sac nik van tun. He must be held accountable. All those that stand with him, are pardoned. Join me and together we will protect our home and the future of all Sentarian kind."

Memtrix turned to Shepard, "They will blow the ship and flee to pods. This was Callon's command and anything he held is now defiled. It is our laws."

"How long do we have?", Garrus asks, now feeling panicky and wishing the woman would've stated this minutes ago.

"Less than thirty-minutes.", Memtrix replied.

They made it to the command deck as Callon desperately tries to stop the self-destruct sequence. Satima makes an attempt to stop him, but he knocks her into the hull wall. She falls unconscious. Memtrix aims her weapon at him. "You bastard!", she yells.

"Memtrix... the new "high-commander". What a pleasure.", he mockingly bows.

Stalkers in his loyalty group appear, attacking them. It becomes a close quarters combat. Garrus takes down two, while Memtrix mercilessly kills another. All the while Shepard makes her way to Callon. She tries to help Satima up, but Callon grabs her. His strength too much against her weakened body.

The mad commander, slams her into the hull wall, holding firm. "You may not be Reaper, but I will enjoy killing you.", he states with a grin.

Shepard struggles as his grip tightens, staring into black eyes. Something about that soulless gaze was familiar. She shakes the instinct, and pulls a bladed weapon, plunging it into his shoulder. Callon screams in pain as Shepard is helped by Memtrix away from him. "You've lost, Callon. Memtrix is in command now, your council approved it. This ship is set to explode and you're running out of time.", Shepard shouts.

"I may lose my ship, I may have lost this battle... but I won't lose the war on your weakened species. Memtrix, I will cut you and your family down! I will...", he's cut short by a blow to his head. Callon stares ahead with a stunned expression, feeling a wave of pain and dizziness. He turns around to see Satima standing firm, holding the speared weapon he was wielding, to her side.

"I know that look.", he gasps.

She gives him a warrior's glare, sure and calm. Then immediately wields the staff, turning her body with it, twisting and delivering a hard blow to his skull. The neck cracks and he falls backwards dead.

"You will do shit!", Satima glares.
The command ship rocks and rumbles. "It's going to blow. We need to get off!", Garrus yells.

The ship VI informs its impact to the citadel. "Dammit! Callon sabotaged the controls. It's on auto. The ship will crash into the station, causing massive damage.", Satima informed, over the bridge panel.

"Satima? You remember?", Shepard shouted, excitedly.

Memtrix locates a pod. "We need to go. Try and warn the citadel people to evacuate."

"Where would they go?", Satima reveals. "No... someone has to drive this ship far enough from the citadel." She overlooks the circular view window.

Memtrix nods. "I hope you make it out alive. Arkasia will want to see you again.", she smiles. The new High-Commander heads inside the corridor to the pod.

Shepard and Garrus walk to Satima, barely able to stand from the ships dwindling gravity. "You're not driving this thing to your death."

"I won't leave my little girl behind.", Garrus demanded.

Satima smiled, "Little girl?", she chuckled. The ship's thrusters were burning too much fuel, causing them to jolt from their positions. They have minutes left. "This is my mission, too. Let me do this. Please, go. I'll be right behind you, I promise."

Shepard stares at her, "Satima?"

"I'll be right behind you. Go.", she repeats, cryptically.

Shepard and Garrus respect her wishes and leave with Memtrix. Satima manually drives the ship away from the citadel. She has five minutes before it explodes. On the way out from the vicinity of the ship, in the escape pod, Garrus receives a comm."I'm sorry I broke your visor. I wish I could've made you a new one."

Shepard listens to the comm, hearing Satima's sobs,"...you're too important, to everyone... to this galaxy. It's got to be me this time." Satima stood on the command deck, backing away from the console. Her expression pained, as she accepted her fate. She almost tripped over something, then looked down to Callon's body.

A sudden memory of the crucible jolted her thoughts to the device. She stared hard at it determination. Closing her comms.

"No. It doesn't! Satima, you can escape, try to...", Shepard pleas.

The ship started to implode miles away from the citadel.

Shepard and Garrus held their breaths, when the ship finally broke apart, exploding into fiery debris. Memtrix gazed away. The pod rocked from the aftermath of the explosion. Barely able to navigate safely from the dangerous wave.

Moments later, the Normandy took the pod in, letting the occupants out. Arkasia met Memtrix on the shuttle bay, embracing her sister. The wound had been attended by Chockwas, who was surprised at herself for the ability to save the new alien's life.

Shepard left hurriedly, never looking back and leaving Garrus alone, wondering where she had gone. He leaned out of the pod, still shakened by his daughter's brave sacrifice. Garrus looked
around the shuttle bay, while Cortez and James watched in concern.

Up in her cabin, Shepard darted through the door.

She glanced around her room with an angry gaze. It fell on the glowing tank in the hull wall. She threw her helmet at the fish tank, shattering the glass with a force of rage. Water flooding out and leaking through the grated floor.

Hopeless, she stared and watched the fish flap their bodies as they suffocated. The blue and red one struggled, its mouth gasping for the water that sustained it. In this twisted moment, Garrus stood outside her door, desperately trying to hack in. Afraid of what she would do. She was still injured, pained and alone.

Shepard stared at the dead fish Satima had secretly put in. The black aquatic eyes were empty. She let out a blood curdling wail that sent Garrus using his talons to force the doors open. He ran in to see Shepard gripping a shard of glass tightly, warm red blood coloring the translucent material.

He grabbed the shard, cutting his own hand and enduring the pain of sliced flesh. She fought against him, thrashed her arms hitting his armored chest and crying out loudly. He held her close as they fell on their knees together on the wet floor. Sobbing over the loss of Satima.

Citadel lower wards

Ronin never trusted what he couldn't explain. And this whole conduit business was something far out of anything logical. He wasn't generally a science enthusiast, but he did appreciate the logic behind it. This war devastated enough lives using science in a maddening way.

He helped a small group of people to the large merchant center. It was being used as a medical and refugee site. This is his duty as Spectre, and his responsibility as protector. Ronin didn't like seeing the children with their blank little faces. Dirty and sometimes bloody from tiny cuts. Likely the result of broken glass and debris. Most of them were alone. Holding on to each other as the adults passed them by. It disturbed him. He made his way to the leader of the militia group. A human male named Derrick.

"Have you put anyone on guard next to the kids over there?", Ronin asked.

Derrick turned to him, data pad in hand as he busied himself placing people's information on it. "What children?"

Ronin's golden avian gaze widened, "Spirits! You didn't notice them being brought in? Kids! Alone. Go and put someone in charge of them!" Derrick did as he was told, retrieving two female humans and an asari. "Dammit. These people act like this is a dream.", Ronin muttered angrily to himself.

He felt it was luck that he wasn't on Earth or a turian dreadnought, fighting against the reapers. Not luck for him, but for these people. Being the only person of high rank around, able and awake enough to get shit done. C-Sec was thinned out, and most of them went missing. He shuddered to think what those abominations did to them, if they were caught.

Even more so, those strange green creatures, humanoid in appearance. Assaulting the citadel itself. Ronin sat down on a bench, glad all of that was over with. He prayed to the Spirits and anyone else listening that it is really over with.

A small human girl-child, walked up to him. She tugged at his arm. He looked to stare into her blank eyes. Dark and emotionless. Ronin scooped her up, taking her back to the children's camp. The asari
took her gently. He wanted to go home. How many turian children lay dead on the silver streets? How many mothers lie awake weeping as the men bury them?

Ronin shook his head. Everyone is affected by this. No matter what race or who you were... the reapers gave no pause to their brutal assault.

He stood next to the railing overlooking the wards below him. A lot of damage. Some of the bridges were destroyed, bodies lay in piles, and people scattered around... looking for their dead. Ronin looked up to a strange sound above him. In the middle of the ward's skyline, a tear... portal of some kind opened! Purple and green static spurted out, then suddenly a person fell out of it. A woman!

She screamed as a blast of fire blew out behind her, propelling her fast downward, past him. He reached out, trying to grab her as she shouted Spirits, he missed!

She didn't fall too far, thankfully landing on a bridge of debris, rolling off and falling a short distance to the floor below. Ronin realized he was holding his breath, and let it go harshly. He also looked to see she wasn't moving. Ronin turned his head, shouting orders behind him. "I need medical to follow me, now!"

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. ;)


The Council's Warning

Chapter Summary

Satima is rescued by a turian spectre. She awakens to a chaotic citadel. After meeting an old acquaintance from the day she first came, the hybrid lends a hand to help the citizens of the wards.

Shepard returns to duty, pushing herself to be the leader everyone relies on. When the citadel is suddenly opened to receive help, she makes a shocking discovery.

Chapter Notes

Long chapter. So sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Previously...

Satima fell onto the lower bridge of the merchant level. Cushioned by a pile of metal debris and soft garden basins damaged from the reapers onslaught. She could hear her heartbeat pounding loudly in her ears. The last moments before the destruction of the command cruiser, played in pieces inside her mind as a burning sensation overtook her senses.

Satima began to moan from her injuries. She tasted warm blood in her mouth when a hand suddenly touched her arm. Muffled voices shouted as she whimpered, falling unconscious. Ronin stared uneasily towards the young woman.

The medics scanned her body. She had noticeably suffered minor burns and lacerations. There were older wounds still healing, threatening to reopen. This oddity that struck the entire ward with fear, only piqued Ronin's interest.

He stood guard for a while, warning any onlookers to leave. His training would also provide good protection. They had moved her to a small shop, using its inside kiosk as a room.

Citizens moved about outside the private lodging as Ronin watched. He would glimpse at her, staring away at the unique features she held.

She lay on a cot, still wearing her light clothes. It seemed she was caught in the middle of undressing or maybe athletic exercise? He wasn't too sure, and speculating for hours was all his poor, over exhausted mind, could handle. Debating on sitting down, Ronin eventually fell asleep, only to be wakened by the screams of an intense nightmare.

She thrashed about her bed, knocking over the tray of bandages. Nearly falling off and onto the floor, wrapped in the blanket keeping her warm. Ronin quickly grabbed her arms trying to make eye contact.
"Hey! Hey... it's alright. You fell and landed hard on the bridge.", he kept repeating himself to her, until she calmed. Gazing at him with glossy teal eyes, and still drugged from painkillers, this girl could barely make out what was real and what could be another dream.

She finally closed her eyes, falling into a quieter sleep. Ronin laid her down gently, picking the tray up from the floor and sitting across from her. Spirits, what is she? Her features stunned him, how she survived the fall eluded him. With the citadel arms still closed, no form of command or council could be made or heard from. Just constant shuttles from the outside walls. Only a few pathways were cleared and most of them filled with decaying bodies.

Ronin stirred to a human woman entering the kiosk, staring at the patient on the cot with her steel blue eyes. "Derrick needs you at the merchants building.", she informed.

He didn't like leaving the patient alone, but he also had other duties to attend to. Ronin nodded, following the woman out.

Within hours, Satima opened her eyes. They stung and she could feel the stiff soreness of her body, resisting to sitting up. The wound on her shoulder caught most of the attention, as she winced and gasped quietly to its painful reminder. It took a few minutes, but she finally managed to sit up, taking in her surroundings. Where was she?

The noise of people sounded muffled from her room. At least she thought it was a room, until she viewed the empty shelves and a kiosk terminal. After leaning over her cot, blanket thrown to the side, Satima attempted to stand. Her legs were sore and weak, but she managed to walk forward.

There was a long piece of cloth positioned like a curtain that was tattered at the edges, soiled and thin. It provided a divide between whatever was going on out there, and her quiet confinement in the shop. Satima realized she wasn't fully clothed. A sports bra and sweat pants aren't exactly the best traveling attire. Her bandages needed changing and a shower was in full order.

But how to acquire these things?

She stepped out, her mouth nearly dropping to see she was back on the citadel. Somewhere on it, at least. There were people everywhere, hustling about... yelling or crying. Children shouted in the distance and more voices filled the surrounding levels of the ward. Smoke from dying fires led giant tunnels of black chemical clouds up into the wards.

Debris often shifted or fell from far off buildings. A loud scream was heard and everyone stopped. Then the silence was slowly filled with their voices again. This is worse than any of the refugee ports she landed on while navigating Haven. The ward looked overcrowded and was filled with the dying or dead.

The Citadel was in chaos. A few sky cars flew by, catching her attention. Up high, a building burned away. This massive station had been taken down from majestic galactic hub, to a horrible asylum of death and agony. Scorch marks ruined the surface of the glossy metal walls, and doors either stayed sealed with evident pounding from the other side, or were damaged from within. No neon signs worked, at least not here. An overturned market cart with trampled food spoiled away on the floor. Satima spotted a battarian's hand, sticking out from underneath it.

She ventured further until she found a familiar face outside of an abandoned club. Already being cleared out for more people to occupy. Broken chairs and damaged tables were cast aside, while a salarian and human busied themselves with a terminal.

"I need room for the critically injured. And fresh medical supplies. Not any of that first aid
nonsense.", she shouted in her subtle French tone.

Satima stepped to her, "Dr.?"

Michelle turned around with a surprised look, "Satima? The girl from the conduit."

Ronin looked around frantically. He knew as soon as he turned his back, something like this would happen. Damn! The kiosk was empty, no one had seen her leave. They probably didn't care to look anyway.

Further ahead, he looked inside a cafe, down two alleys and even threatened a few teenagers. The woman was nowhere in sight. Until he heard small laughter coming from the club.

"...it was foolish. But, if I hadn't tried the blind date in this club, I wouldn't be here to help everyone. I'm glad I am not stuck on the presidium. Too many complaints on the comforts of a hospital bed. Unlike these poor people.", Michelle added.

"I want to help, if I can. You think these wounds will slow me down?", Satima asked with a smirk.

"Well, I wouldn't try lifting too much or straining the shoulder. Overall you should heal up quite nicely...", Michelle had almost finished when Ronin interrupted rudely.

"There you are! I've been searching all over for you!", he yelled. Ronin glared across the crowd of people, giving Satima goosebumps from his golden stare.

Satima blinked, confused. "And you are?"

"The guy who saved your life. Who is this?", he pointed to Michelle, rudely.

"I am, Dr. Michelle. This is my temporary clinic. Who are you?", she glared.

He looked around, weary but calm. "I'm Ronin- a Spectre. I was stationed here a few weeks ago, before the reapers attacked the citadel. Listen, you fell from... whatever in the sky. A portal of some kind. And you fell pretty hard. I tried to catch you, but you were too far out from the railing. So, I gathered one of the medical teams here, and brought you on the ward. I see you are doing better.", he observed.

Satima swallowed hard, remembering her escape from Callon's cruiser. "Yes. Thank you. I'm Satima, by the way.", she held out her hand.

The turian named Ronin shook it quickly, "Right." He also noticed how she wore a different set of clothes this time. Her ginger hair braided to the side, over her shoulder. Now in civilian clothes, Satima said her thank you's to Michelle, opting to follow Ronin back to the merchant center. He was quite tall for a turian, with white colonial markings across his face.

"I take it the doctor has cleared you to work.", he said staring straight ahead.

Satima stepped beside him, walking in sync back to the kiosk. "What kind of work?", she asked.

Ronin stopped and gestured to the entire ward. "Putting this place back in order. Before your fall... there were barely any people around. You seemed to have stirred everyone's curiosity. Then this place started to get overcrowded. I need to find better rooms and areas of shelter for the wounded. Medicine, food... you know the drill."

Satima smirked, "Yes, sir.", she replied sarcastically. Ronin glanced at her attempt at a joke. "Sorry.", she apologized, looking down.
They both continued to the merchant center. Derrick had piles of data pads and not enough assistants to help. All the kids were crying, hungry and hurt. The three volunteers became overwhelmed. "Derrick. What's going on?", Ronin shouted upset.

"Sir. There's not enough volunteers for the kids, and I don't have enough room. Most of them come from nearby schools and daycare's. The adults caring for the kids either died helping them escape or were cut down. Some had been taken when those tall green people came through."

Satima immediately glanced up to the tall green people comment. She stared at the kid's camp, seeing the older ones try to calm the smaller children. Satima spotted a couple of teenagers stealing some food. As Ronin argued with Derrick, Satima discretely ambushed the three kids. "Hey!", she caught the tallest boy, gripping his hair with a mean pull. He dropped a funky little fruit that was red and round.

"I see you three have nothing to do.", she grinned. "Well, except take what's not yours."

"Let'em go!", the girl with brunette hair shouted.

"We're just hungry!", the other boy yelled.

This caught Ronin's attention.

Satima held firm, feeling some of the boy's hairs rip out from the roots. "And so are they.", she glared. The three kids looked tired and fearful. She let out a sigh, giving them a calmer gaze, "I'll let him go, when you decide to help out. You see those kids over there?", she pointed.

"Their scared and hungry. Your confiscation skills could prove handy. Being the eldest of your new group, why don't you take some of that food and feed them, and yourselves. Then while you're at it, round them up to see the doctor. Right at the club. I'll stop by and check on your progress."

The two kids glanced to each other, then back at their friend. The other boy chose to make a run for it, until Ronin caught him by the scruff of his shirt. "I believe the lady gave you an order. Now follow it.", he growled.

Satima let the boy go, with a nice little bald patch on the back of his head to remember her by. The three teenagers took the food to the smaller kids, helping out the one asari that stayed behind. Ronin crossed his arms, standing next to Satima. "You got a way with intimidation.", he smirked.

She smiled, hands on hips in amusement. "Runs in the family."

Normandy

Ashley met with James on the cargo deck. Cortez silently maintained the kodiak and other various projects he busied himself with. She caught James doing pull ups. Grunting with each lift of his heavy muscular body. "Have you heard from the commander yet?", he asked.

"No. It's been a few days, but I think duty will eventually pull her out from the cabin. Hackett is eager to hear from her and requests her on board his cruiser, asap. He wants an explanation for the citadel raid and for me not keeping the temporary command he ordered. I tried to explain things to him... it seems he's not in the mood either.", Ashley confirmed.

She didn't glance to notice him, which caused James to stop. This was serious enough. He let go of the bar and stood next to her, wiping off sweat with a small towel. "So, do you think that means they've found Admiral Anderson?", he asked worried.
Ashley glanced to Cortez, still busy with his repairs, "I honestly don't know. It could mean anything. You know, besides the Sentarians and the citadel." They leaned on provision crates, listening to the empty cargo hold.

On the CIC, Joker reviewed the navigation panel, keeping the Normandy in orbit around Earth. Avoiding the citadel altogether. EDI sat quietly, maintaining her watch over the controls. Joker worried about Shepard, and he felt sorry over what happened to Satima.

Traynor showed up behind him, "Joker. Admiral Hackett is requesting permission to board. Do you think I should get the commander?"

Joker swerved hard on his chair to face her, "What?", he glanced down, "Great."

Traynor held a data pad close to her, "This Satima business has hit her hard. I'm worried what she'll do if Admiral Anderson is...", she wondered aloud.

"Don't say it. Just... not yet. I'll uh... I'll go to the cabin myself. You try and stall Admiral Hackett with repair excuses or something."

He rose slowly, as EDI noticed. She quickly sat up and helped him to stand. "It's alright, EDI. I can do this."

"You've been sitting too long and could fall, Jeff.", EDI replied.

Joker patted her hand and proceeded with a slow limp to the elevator, anyways.

Garrus attempted to clean up the room, making everything tidy again. She would sleep, have a nightmare and then stare into space for hours. Two days of this and he was exhausted. Refusing drink or food, Shepard never attended any of her wounds or let Chockwas see her.

This wasn't good. It was refusing to exist behavior. How could he snap her out of this? Ashley commed him yesterday about Hackett's demands. Doesn't the man understand loss? Or does he think Shepard can just soldier through this one too? Ridiculous and unfair.

There was a knock on the door, as Garrus looked up from the computer chair. "Hey, Shepard... Garrus. It's me, Joker. Can I come in?"

Garrus readily welcomed the pilot, opening the door quickly. "You're a sight for sore eyes", he said with a weak smile.

Joker limped inside, careful where he stepped considering how dark it was. He glanced to see the fish tank's glass shattered and two dead fish still inside. It smelled fetid in the room. He could see a lump curled on the bed. "I uh, I wanted to speak to the Commander."

Garrus gestured him on, "Go ahead. I'm going to grab a bite, if you can stay here for a bit." He looked awful. His once intense avian gaze was softened and empty. Garrus needed a break, and get some time for himself to grieve as well.

"Yeah. Go ahead, big guy.", Joker replied.

After Garrus left, Joker turned the lights to dim for him to see around the room, but not to disturb her or make her angry. He limped to the couch, sitting with a sigh. Joker leaned out a bit. "Hey, Shepard. It's Jeff. How are you feeling?"

She made no sound and didn't move. Joker wrung his hands, looking about the room nervously. He caught a glimpse of a crumpled note on the nightstand, and a broken picture frame. It looked like a
picture from the party. "So... Hackett is requesting to see you. He's pretty peeved about the citadel excursion and Ashley's demotion by you. You know, without his orders."

"I don't care.", Shepard finally spoke.

Joker felt relieved she said something, "Well, Shepard... I think you should. He could strip away your rank, take the Normandy from you. If... he really meant it."

Shepard stirred, sitting up. She didn't bother changing clothes or cared to get out of her under-suit. "It's all over, and he acts like the reapers are still there. Let him have the Normandy. I'm not fit to command it."

"What about us? The Alliance is lost without you.", Joker argued.

"You don't need me and I don't need you. Now, get out.", Shepard warned.

Joker suddenly became angry. "You do need us! Anderson left me in charge of you, and I'm not going to give up because I lost friends, too! You can't leave us all behind because she's gone. How many others did you lose from this war? What about Anderson? And yet for some reason, you treat her death with special circumstance?"

Shepard stood up, glaring his way from all the angry questions. Tears rimmed her eyes as she stood in front of him, falling to her knees in sorrow. "She was my daughter!" Shepard closed her eyes in pain, tears streamed down her pale cheeks.

Joker sat back, unsure and scared of what to say. Shepard stopped crying long enough to stand, sadly walking back to sit on her bed.

"Damn.", he muttered.

Shepard wiped her eyes, running her hand through the matted red hair. Joker gazed back to his commander. "I know. He looked away, ashamed. "There's no way I can understand how you feel right now. But, we need you, Shepard."

"No, you don't. The whole crew can function without my command.", she stated. Shepard shook head, wiping her face and nose.

Joker rubbed his temples with an oncoming headache. "Come on, Charlotte. You're making this too hard for me. I can't keep pretending everything is okay, to cheer you up. I've lost family too."

Shepard stared at him, her expression embarrassed. "Joker, I... I'm sorry, Jeff. It's just, she may not have been from this time, but she was still Shepard's kid. My kid."

Joker nodded, understanding the pain they both have. "Does the Alliance know?", he asked.

"Not all of it. I told them she was a reaper experiment that backfired. And we could use her as an asset against them. I don't know what would've happened if I told Hackett the truth. I pretty much belong to the Alliance and the council. They could take her away, lock her up as some security risk, or experiment on her for the rest of her life.", Shepard sighed. "So, I lied about Satima's origins. Not very many people know the truth."

"Who does?", Joker asked again.

"Garrus, Chockwas, Javik... I think Ashley figured it out and so did James. Wrex said she looked too much like us to elude anyone.", Shepard chuckled lightly. "It didn't help that Liara has a big mouth."

Joker smirked,"Now the whole galaxy will know there's another Shepard, ready to give the angry
face at the next politician.", he said sarcastically. Joker realized the phrase of his words, wishing he had either used past tense, or kept his mouth shut, period.

Shepard turned her gaze away. "No one knows what happened on the crucible. It's coming back in pieces for me. But I do remember Satima begging on her knees for my life." Her face contorted in a disturbed fashion. "I will never forget that."

Joker stared with a dozen images of that hybrid girl, beaten and defeated, trying to beg Harbinger to spare Shepard. At least that's what he assumes. Until Shepard is able to recall the majority of the last few hours on that thing, it's anybody's guess.

"Commander. Hackett is requesting to board in a few hours. He's en route to the Normandy.", Traynor commed.

Shepard looked around her room. She was dirty, her bandages needed cleaning and changing. Most importantly, she had a ship to command and crew members who depended on her. "I guess duty calls.", she said sadly.

Joker stood up, lending a hand. "Come on, Commander. I'll walk you to the doc.", he smiled.

Patched up and in clean uniform, Shepard waited at the galaxy map for Hackett's cruiser to dock to the Normandy. The entire deck silently kept to work, watching nervously as the Admiral finally boarded. Shepard looked on, ready for an argument or shouting. They met face to face in front of the elevator, saluting to each other. "Admiral, sir.", she saluted.

"Commander.", he saluted back. He leaned in to give her a stare, "I need a word." Hackett motioned with a glare to the war room beyond the deck's door.

He stood still in front of the war assets display. He could tell Shepard was still injured, her small attempts to hold the limping back and her careful winces when she moved too quickly. She held a gaze that looked past him, respectfully, but also in an anxious manner.

"Shepard. I want to rectify what Alliance intelligence has informed me of. And then, when I'm done speaking... I want the full truth. Understood?", Hackett spoke.

"Sir.", she answered.

Hackett began pacing a little, but not too far to force the Commander to follow. "Three days ago, you woke up suffering extensive and severe injuries from a reaper blast in London. The classified traveler was found by Lieutenant-Commander Williams and her team near the reaper beam. Pending the traveler's own medical report, the Normandy was boarded and assaulted by the now known-Sentarians." He waited for a response, then continued when the commander showed no sign of faltering.

"The traveler was abducted, and you followed her whereabouts back to the citadel. Relieving Williams of her duty and threatening another war with the unknowns. You successfully stopped this "Commander Callon" with the help of a sentarian, escaping the alien cruisers explosion."

Hackett continued, "You completed this personal mission, without contacting me and receiving approval. Commander, I understand your actions to protect the citadel. You are after all, still a Spectre. But what I can't allow is your own personal destruction. Not when so many depend on you to survive. Not when the Alliance needs you the most, right here... alive. Now, tell me, Commander. On what grounds, do you justify going rogue for this one person, the traveler as you call her, to abandon your recovery and undermine my orders?"
Shepard gulped hard, glancing down to the floor. "Sir... through forces and elements of the reapers device. This traveler, she is... she is...", Shepard choked. She started to feel dizzy.

Ashley walked in unannounced, "Admiral, sir. If I may, for the commander's sake. The traveler's name is Satima. You know her genetic makeup as a hybrid. But the Commander withheld information."

Shepard shot a look to Ashley.

"On what grounds?", Hackett asked, disturbed.

"On the grounds that Satima is a relative. She's the commander's daughter.", Ashley informed.

Hackett looked at Shepard then glared back to Ashley, "I want an explanation, now!"

"Experimentation. Reapers, sir. They stole DNA and tried to use her as leverage against the commander. But, the commander convinced her to turn against the reapers instead. Since she is an important asset, Shepard thought it best to not let Satima get taken.", Ashley finished, attempting a nod to Shepard. She just lied to Hackett. And that could cost her.

Shepard didn't understand the reasons. Maybe Ashley is trying to help? She knows she'll have to reveal the whole truth, and soon.

Hackett crossed his arms in irritation with a stunned look. Ashley spoke up again, "For the record, sir. I didn't contest the commander prompting me back to Lieutenant-command. I respect her... too much." She gave Shepard a nod.

"Dismissed, Lieutenant-Commander Williams.", Hackett said in an angered tone.

Ashley left, hoping her intrusion and reveal would clear up the issue, and force Hackett to let up on the commander. He glared at Shepard, then a more softened gaze took over. Shepard gulped, but never waivered until she was at ease.

"Is this true?", he asked her.

"Sir... yes. It is.", Shepard answered.

Hackett shook his head, "Your lucky you're the hero in this scenario. Normally, I'd have you reprimanded for this behavior.", he smirked.

Shepard looked stunned at his friendly response.

"Get some rest, Commander. The Normandy is needed soon for a mission to the citadel. And I need my best soldier ready... for anything."

Citadel

A full day had passed, with successful relocation of various groups to safer areas. Medical facilities and clean water had been provided. Satima felt exhausted and sore, but content with the progress.

Back at the kiosk, she fell asleep on the cot, deeply dreaming and feeling more safe than she had ever been in years. Ronin walked in, watching her for a moment before returning to his work.

The next day, Satima checked on the children nearby, happy to see the teen miscreants were helping with them. Ronin approached her with a tray of food. "It's something the humans like to eat. After you finish, I could use your help again in clearing out the next ward. There's word of trapped occupants in apartments over there."
Satima took the tray, too nervous to tell him she can't eat it. "Sure. I'd be happy to help.", she smiled. Ronin quickly left. Satima mumbled to herself, "... and be too nervous to tell you about the food because I think you're cute..."

The next ward proved to be a challenge, leading to a long stretch of damaged walkways and building debris. Satima had a hard-enough time trying to carefully trek through it. A small team had been put together to reach the other end.

Hoping there would be an undamaged door leading to the other side. She leaned in too long on a piece of girder, nearly falling down a hole. Ronin caught her in time, grabbing her injured shoulder. Satima winced.

"Watch your step, Satima." Ronin realized the pain he had accidentally caused her, putting his hand on her waist instead. Not exactly a great idea either. They both emerged on the other end, helping the crew behind them. The apartments were mostly intact, but right away the problem was found.

The main entrance had a pile of reaper bodies and damaged debris stuck against it. It could take days to clear.

"Well, damn. Is that the only way in?", Satima asked.

"Let's find out.", Ronin replied.

One of his team used a scanner to find schematics to the lower wards. He pinpointed an emergency door that would be camouflaged into the walls. Ronin quickly utilized the omin-scanner, finding the exact door.

Above them, one of the windows had been shattered on the third floor. An asari looked down and shouted to them. "Hey! We have injured people in here. Help!"

Satima stepped back to see her and yelled, "We're already on it. Just hold tight. There's an emergency door on the main level, can you reach it?"

The asari disappeared for a minute, then came back to the window. "Yes. Thank the goddess. We'll bring the injured and children down first."

Ronin had finished opening the door. It was dark and silent inside the emergency tunnel. He led them in, finding the other entrance into the main lobby of the apartment building. "Help me open this.", he gestured to Satima.

Together they pulled the large door open, nearly stepping back in shock as two humans with dirty faces stood still. "We heard a noise.", one of them said.

"Come on.", Ronin gestured.

Satima went inside behind them, Ronin following. A salarian stood outside helping the ones that were on the main level through. Ronin's crew quickly followed in. He turned to a batarian merc. "Verin, go upstairs to the second floor and help evacuate the people there. Hannah, you have the first floor. Satima, follow me.", he ordered.

With the power barely functioning, the buildings elevators were not an option. Taking the stairs upward, they walked by splattered blood stains on the grey walls. Back up lights flickered around their feet, helping them see the path forward.
Once on the third floor, Ronin came across damaged rooms. Passing by overturned plant basins and busted ceiling lights. Satima peeked inside some of the empty rooms to see colored blood pooling from under caved in flooring. Ronin was glad to not see any little bodies.
"This is horrible."

"I imagine it's even worse on the other home worlds.", Ronin replied.

Satima continued through. "It is.", she answered.

The asari they were talking to came down the hallway with her two children. "There's an older man... he can't move his leg. It looks bad."

Ronin touched her shoulder, pointing down the hallway, "Go on ahead. Down the stairs and to the main lobby. Jevis is at the emergency entrance, and Hannah is waiting for anyone down there. Go.", he motioned.

Up ahead, they found the room to their right with the old man. A human male, gray haired and sickly sat in his chair. "Go on, leave me. I'm too injured to walk.", he coughed.

Ronin walked inside, cautiously eyeing the flooring above. It had huge cracks and threatened to fall on them all at any moment. "That's why we're here. To help you get out.", he said.

"No.", the old man waved his arm angrily. "Go away. I don't want to live. My daughter... she's Alliance. I know she's dead. I want to be with her."

Satima felt saddened by this. "You don't know if she's gone. How can you? What if she's still alive, and I have to tell her that I left you to die, because you gave up?"

The old man looked at her, "You're a peculiar one, aren't you? I don't care what you have to say."

A girl's cries were heard outside the room. Satima looked at Ronin, "Go. I got this.", he assured.

Satima ran out to find the source of the cries, as Ronin picked up the old man, hoisting him over his shoulder. "I'm telling you, I'll just be a burden."

Ronin felt the heft of dead weight in the old man's leg. "Trust... me.", he grunted as he walked forward. "I can feel it. But I won't leave you to die."

The cries came from the furthest room. Satima found a small human girl huddled under her table. She had been crying for hours. Tangled hair stuck around her face, and dirt from the ceiling covered her cheeks. "Heeey. It's ok, I won't hurt you.", Satima said gently. She held out her hand. "Come on. I'll take you out of here."

The girl shook her head, "Mommy."

The flooring began creaking above, Satima smelled smoke. The building was on fire. "We really need to get out of here. Take my hand.", she repeated in a panic.

The girl still nodded no. Satima could feel intense heat from above her. "Listen kid, after we escape. I'll find your mommy, so let's go!"

She still held back. Satima leaned in close to her face, "I won't hesitate to drag your ass out!"

The little girl grabbed Satima's hand and they ran down the hallway. The flooring above creaking, finally giving way. Ronin had barely made it out with the old man in time before he heard the upper floors caving in. Smoke and dust from the debris clouding his vision. He ran back to the emergency entrance, trying to stop the doors from sealing. The rest of his crew safely out, Ronin held the doors
screaming for strange woman.
"SATIMA!", he shouted into the dark building.

Suddenly a little girl ran out between him and the door frame. She was caught by Hannah. Ronin still didn't see Satima. He wasn't about to give up, until a wave of fire blasted by him, nearly catching him with its intense heat. Ronin ducked, barely.

Suddenly, Satima slid between his legs. She stood behind him, grabbing him by the waist and pulled him backwards just as the door closed in time before the flames pushed through.

They fell together. Satima sat up on her elbows, face covered in grey smoke. "We did it!", she smiled, catching her breath.

Ronin shook his head, breathing heavily. "Spirits... You should be a spectre.", he smirked.

He helped Satima up, both wandering out to the bridge where the apartment occupants were held. The little girl was sobbing quite loudly, staring at the top floor in flames. Satima immediately ran to her, "What's wrong? You're not hurt, are you?", she asked concerned.

The child's tears streamed her flushed cheeks, as desperate eyes stared in agony."My mommy. You let my mommy die!", she screamed.

Satima stood up, unbelieving of what she heard. Looking behind her to the top floor she just rescued the girl from. "My mommy was asleep on the floor, but you didn't see her!", she continued. Satima looked away, her thoughts clouded with a terrifying reality. She was so hasty to leave.

Ronin walked up to her, "Spirits. You couldn't had known. It was dark, and the smoke was getting worse. You made a call.", he tried consoling.

Satima felt sick. The girl sobbing and the fire roaring above. All she could hear is the screams of that child's mother burning away in her mind. Satima shook her head in disbelief and pushed past Ronin, running back through the pathway they dug out. Far away from the child and her own mistake.

"Satima!", Ronin called out before she disappeared.

Back at the kiosk, Satima sat in the corner... rocking back and forth to herself. She couldn't save the girl's mother, she couldn't save her own mother. Tears stung bitterly in her eyes. She won't cry.

Jormun's gone. She never mourned him. Is she evil? A horrible monster that Archer warned her to be... all along?

Ronin couldn't follow Satima back, not until everyone was safely away from the fire. Avina was barely working, but the VI managed to enact the sprinkler systems, keeping it from spreading across all wards. The small child that openly blamed Satima had been taken to the children's wing. A mall filled with empty shops, turned into shelters and clinics.

Later in the day, Ronin made the walk back to the merchant level, spotting Satima help rewire entrances and exits from the ward. It looked like a success, with her smile turning to a frown when she saw him. He caught up to her.

"Satima... what happened?", he asked concerned

She finished closing the panels over a wall, "Nothing.", she replied.

Ronin watched her work steadily. "You ran away. I'm sorry about the girl's mother. For what I said... about making a call.", he rubbed his neck nervously. "I can see you're not military, and don't really have experience in that sort of outcome. I shouldn't have said those things to you."
Satima chuckled, "I don't seem like the military type?" She sat up, turning to face him, "Listen, Ronin. You're a cool guy. But uh, my family is military... and I grew up with a lot of influence from it. I know the drill and I've seen a lot of shit that would make you run home crying. So, don't patronize me like I can't understand all of this chaos."

Ronin stood back, surprised. He glared at her shaking his head and walked off. "Excuse the hell outta me...", he mumbled rudely.

Satima scoffed at him.

It was nightfall, or if the citadel had a night time setting it would be. People were quieting down, resting or fast asleep.

At least on this ward. Ronin kept busy with plenty of comms from the outside. Finally, someone was able to break through and make contact. He got a message from the Alliance that the Normandy was being sent. Good. More soldiers mean more will get done.

The biggest problem is getting the arms open again. Could take weeks. Spirits.

Satima felt a little mean hearted for mouthing off to Ronin. He tried to comfort her. Ronin apologized, despite the misconception he had about her. She wandered over to his room. A place he dug out between two damaged shops. The short alley had three exits. Maybe he's a bit paranoid? Are spectre's like that? Well, Shepard is a spectre, but her missions prove the need for a little caution and contingency.

She stood in his makeshift doorway of cloth and a metal sheet from nearby debris. Crossing her arms with a smirk as Ronin laid out his weapons he'd been keeping concealed until now. "Favor the rifle?", she asked.

Ronin didn't turn his head but only covered up the guns. He stood facing her, "You like to sneak around on people?"

"Only if they're fascinating enough to watch.", she smiled. "I had a few on me, before I landed back here."

Ronin leaned in over her, "Planning to steal mine?"

"That would be rude.", she mocked with a sultry smile.

Ronin and Satima stood closely together, before Hannah returned from a short journey across the newly opened pathways. She cleared her throat, "Sir. There are keepers piling bodies in the shalta ward.", she informed.

Satima kept a careful stare at him as he answered, "We'll look into it tomorrow. Go and get some rest.", he replied.

Hannah stared at them warily, but left. Satima began to back up, "I'll be around if you need my help.", she grinned.

Ronin watched her leave, sitting back in his chair. He uncovered the weapons, thinking about her with a smile.

The next morning, Satima awoke from a dream. She remembered hearing Reaper's voice, telling her about a tower with arms. Outside her room, Satima quickly put her boots on and readied herself to help Ronin with the keepers. And whatever crazy thing they were up too.
Verin and Hannah gave her curt looks, but didn't say a word. You'd think she bedded Ronin after Hannah left. Satima smirked to herself.

She's not looking for a lover right now. Only finding out the truth on what happened in London, and hoping Shepard and Garrus survived Callon's cruiser.

The massive glass doors slid open as Ronin started across the bridge. He gave every one of his team a weapon. Turning to Satima with a pistol, "You know how to use this?", he asked with a smug look.

Satima rolled her eyes.

Shalta Ward

Keepers piled bodies. The stench was overwhelming. Trails of different colored blood led to most piles and others stopped short of walls. Not doorways. That really disturbed the team.

Everyone that ever lived on the citadel knew not to bother the keepers per Avina's orders. And they knew keepers had secret tunnels and walkways throughout the station. But the real question, is where are they taking these bodies and why?

A good clue for Satima, was the absence of most of the human corpses. She remembered her short studies about the collectors on the Normandy during space flight and days she didn't accompany Shepard on missions.

Could they have been following an order from the reapers to harvest the genetic makeup of humans, just like the collectors did?

"Ronin. There aren't many human bodies lying around. I think the keepers were taking them to a different area.", Satima implied.

"For what purpose?", he asked.

Hannah almost slipped on blood, "For their sick reasons. The keepers follow the reapers. We should kill every one of them!", she fumed.

"Then what? Are you going to start taking care of the maintenance systems and food, water... spirits Hannah! The citadel needs the keepers... their ancillary to this station.", Ronin argued.

Verin, a batarian merc, shook his head in disgust. They walked further into the area, eyeing the keepers that would pry apart pieces of clothing or items from the bodies. "It's like they're in auto. Could they be following a signal?", Satima wondered aloud.

The salarian that joined in the last minute from the merchant center, spoke up from behind. "The keepers evolved. They don't follow the reapers signal anymore. They're not a threat."

"Then what are they doing to the bodies?", Satima asked.

The salarian showed her a schematic of the citadel's many internal tunnels leading to large vats. "Dumping the corpses, processing them into the citadels bio-degradable systems. Humans can't mix with turians. And asari can't mix with salarians. It goes on. So, they take the bodies to different levels per their genetic makeup. The keepers are using the citadels genetic databases to do this."

Satima raised a brow, "You uh, are certainly well informed on this.", she observed. "What's your name?"
"It's Chorban. I used to keep a collection of data on them. It was illegal, but I had the famous Commander Shepard helping me.", he smiled.

Satima nearly tripped, stunned to hear this. "Well... I'm glad you're here, Chorban. We should find a way into the vats. Those people, all of them, deserve a proper burial. Not to be processed."

Ronin agreed, "Let's find a way to the presidium first. It's where the council tower is, and where we can use the main controls to open the arms."

Satima nearly stopped in her steps, hearing about the tower and citadel arms. Her dream. A keeper stood in front of her, blinking its dark eyes. It pointed to a door down a hallway. Most of the other keepers cleared the way. "What does it want?", Hannah asked, afraid.

Ronin stepped to it, careful not to touch the keeper. "I think it wants us to go that way.", he answered.

"Why? How can it know what we're looking for?", Satima asked.

Chorban spoke up, "Who knows. The keepers are very strange in their ways other than the normal or abnormal processes of maintenance they perform. Maybe in its current state of evolving, this keeper can understand what we are trying to do?", he insinuated.

Satima stopped in place, turning to the salarian with a skeptical tone. "Wow, Chorban. That's a bit far-fetched."

He made a nervous laugh before clearing his throat in silence. Ronin began walking down the hallway. "This way."

Moments later, they entered a functioning elevator. It took them to the presidium, finding themselves outside of the embassies. Not far was the conduit. Satima gulped.

Across the near crystal-clear water, people made shelters and medic sights. Flashes of their decadent attire, now somewhat tattered and dirty, caught the groups attention. "You think they'll have food to share?", Chorban asked. A few asari looked up in fear, afraid of what these intruders would do. They flared their biotics, staring down defensively. Ronin didn't contact them.

"You're not going to say anything?", Satima wondered.

"They're scared and dangerous. The best thing to do right now is to open the arms, get the military in here. No one knows where the council is, or if they are even alive.", Ronin replied.

The tower elevator hadn't been damaged, but Satima saw the conduit was still active from across the bridge. "Oh shit.", she said loudly.

"What is it?", Ronin asked alarmed.

"Nothing... nothing. Let's get up to that tower.", she replied.

The citadel's tower remained intact. Mostly due to previous remodeling with thicker metals and shatter proof glass. Council chamber's trees and gardens had been protected by a thin layer of kinetic shielding, with fountains still sputtering dirty water onto the floor.

It was quiet and dim. No alarm sounds, no smoke from fires and no living person around.

Not even one body laid in plain sight. Up the stairs and into the anteroom leading to the audience.
chamber, Ronin and team stopped. Keepers stood in a row, watching them.

"Yeah... this is not creepy.", Satima complained.

"Alright. Whatever is going on, the keepers led us here. So, they must want something. Keep your eyes peeled and don't touch anything. Satima, come with me.", Ronin ordered.

They both stood on the petitioner's stage, overlooking the garden below the glass floors. Ronin glanced to the keepers, turning to Satima. "Find the access panel. The dashboard should come up, allowing you to manipulate the citadel's main functions. Open the arms while I keep an eye out for our audience."

"Got it.", Satima replied.

She holstered her pistol and knelt, looking for a crack in the flooring leading to the panel. While she busied herself with it, Hannah and Verin became uneasy with all the keepers present. "Sir. More are coming in.", Hannah commed to Ronin.

"Keep cool. We're half-way there.", Ronin assured.

Chorban scanned a keeper from the distance, gasping at his findings. "There's something different about the electrical activity of their beta waves."

"Speak normal, Chorban!", Verin shouted in his deep voice.

"Uh, well. I'm not sure!", Chorban panicked.

"That's it. We need to thin the numbers!", Hannah yelled.

Ronin heard the idiocy from below them near the anterooms. "None of you better do anything stupid! I will personally kick your asses! Hannah, shut your mouth! Verin, get a hold of the situation, now!", he shouted over comms.

He turned to Satima who just hacked the dashboard to open and pull up. "Satima!", he yelled.

She hurriedly started to find the controls to the citadel's main systems. "Shouting will not make me go faster.", she warned.

Suddenly a loud comm echoed throughout the chambers, static filled but legible. "This is..Commander Shepard..f..the Normandy. I'm trying..contact anyone... me. We...th..arms open for..th...rst..the Alliance and Turian com...to dock. I can send...shuttle...a team to help..can… respond?"

Satima listened. Ronin glanced at her progress. "How long?", he asked.

"Almost... there!", she yelled excitedly.

The citadel made a deep noise that sounded like the belly of a beast. With the entire station rumbling and thrumming to the arms unlocking. Every race of people stood together, afraid and relieved to witness the arms beginning to open. Satima and Ronin made their way back down to the team, until she was hit by a wave of telepathic images. She winced, grabbing her head in pain.

"Are you alright?", Ronin asked concerned.

"I'm fine... ahh!", she stumbled to her knees when another wave hit her.

Images of a keeper being submissive to a reaper displayed in her mind. A voice spoke. "...not your
Tears formed in Satima's eyes as intense pain overwhelmed her. "Fine... ok... you're not our slaves...", she answered, holding her head.

Ronin listened to her, watching her writhe in pain as she spoke aloud. He kept his gun on the keepers. Hannah and Verin were terrified, ready to run back to the elevator. But keepers blocked their path. Another wave of images played out in Satima's mind.

The Leviathan from Desponia loomed over a multitude of keepers, sending a wave of calm to the aphids. "...want to leave... others will stay... not ready. Keye shor nac tir."

Satima nearly vomited when the keeper let her go. She laid dizzy on the floor as the keepers began piling out into their tunnels.
That was Sentarian language!

Ronin knelt to her, scanning her vitals. "Spirits, are you okay?"

"I think my brain is going to explode.", she answered with a weak smile.

Ronin grabbed her arm, quickly pulling Satima up and dragging her with him behind his team. They used the elevator back down, hastily making a way to the docks. Screams of onlookers echoed from across the presidium lake. The conduit was still active... and the keepers from the council chambers were using it!

"What are they doing?", Ronin stared in alarm.

Hannah started panicking, "They're trying to help the reapers through!" She began firing on them, killing a few that were making their way to the conduit. "Hannah! Stop!", Satima fell forward from Ronin's grip.

Two keepers broke off to look at Hannah who dropped her gun and began screaming. Clawing at her head, bleeding from the ears. Satima quickly crawled to her, trying to help the dying woman. She glared at a keeper. "Stop this! She's just afraid!"

Hannah gasped, shouting in pain before finally dying. The two keepers left. Chorban ran away, disappearing into one of the empty tunnels. Verin looked on in disbelief. "They're monsters.", he muttered.

Ronin watched the remaining keepers leave through the conduit as it shut down. He glanced to Satima and Hannah's dead body. "I told her to stop.", he said, stunned.

Satima sat on her legs, covering her mouth in shock. No one could've predicted this. Not even from the keepers.

Hours later

The docks were crowded by many eager people looking to leave the station for good. It would take plenty of armed guards to keep them back as the ships docked. Satima had checked out with Michelle, feeling better from her earlier headaches.
She still couldn't shake what happened to Hannah and what the keepers from the council chambers had done. Ronin stood beside her as they waited for the Normandy.

Midway through the crowd, an asari in white and black attire approached the docking entrance next to them. She glanced their way with a smirk. Satima raised a brow, ignoring the asari's indifference.
With careful glimpses, Satima saw the white jacket had dirty scuff marks and blood splatters.

"It's impolite to stare.", the asari warned.

"I'm not staring... wasn't staring.", Satima replied, still reeling from the headache.

The asari laughed to herself, turning to face Satima. She then took in the young woman's features. "My... you are an oddity. What species do you come from?"

"None of your business.", Satima replied with a glare.

"What an attitude.", she smirked. The asari tilted her head, "You do look like someone familiar. Interesting."

Ronin was tired of the word play, "Are you done? We're waiting on Commander Shepard. Unless your part of that... leave.", he warned.

The asari made a curt laugh. "I'll be fair, considering you don't know who I am. Your citadel small folk seem to forget anyways. I'm Aria, the commander of Omega. I know Shepard personally and don't... threaten me again.", she demanded.

Satima blinked, stunned, "No shit? Well, Aria. I'm Satima. And I know Shepard, personally as well. Don't threaten me either."

She and Ronin walked away from Aria, who smirked in surprise.

The Normandy docked with the crew eager to get out and stretch their legs. Some of them had friends or family living on the station, and were very worried about their fates. Shepard had opened the hatch, leading Garrus, Ashley and Liara onto the stations ward. It felt eerie. People were clamoring and shouting in the distance.

She remained in her military uniform, still sore and not wanting to wear that damn under suit for a while. "Ash, it's imperative we find the council. If they're still alive. We're going to need C-Sec back up and running again. Garrus, you're in charge of that."

"I'll get them back together.", he acknowledged.

Liara stepped forward, "And I'll go and see what needs to be done for the people of the citadel. Goddess knows there's a lot of them trapped and dying throughout the wards around us."

Shepard used her fingers to count down the list of missions to perform. "Alright. Council. C-Sec. And rescue operations. Ash, you and I will go to the tower.", she ordered.

Ashley quickly saluted, "Ma'am."

Ronin and Satima had just come up the ramp to the large docking arm. She stopped short, watching them converse with each other. Ronin leaned in to her, "How do you know Commander Shepard personally?", he asked curiously.

"Long story short... we're related.", Satima answered.

She quietly stepped behind Shepard as the commander finished giving orders. Liara glanced, gasping. Shepard looked at her quizzically, then turned around as a familiar voice spoke. "What took you so long?", Satima said with a wide smile.

Shepard, along with Garrus stared at her in shock. "Satima? You... you're alive!", Shepard
exclaimed.

"Barely.", she replied.

Shepard and Satima laughed together, embracing. Garrus stood beside them, "That's the Vakarian in you.", he smirked. "We're hard to kill." Garrus wanted to hold her, but he thought she might feel embarrassed considering they had an audience.

Ronin stood at attention, honoring Shepard. "Ma'am. I'm glad to see you."

Shepard glanced to him confused. "Oh?"

Satima slapped Ronin's shoulder, as his eyes widened in surprise to her friendly contact. "This guy has been keeping the lower wards together, for the most part. It hasn't been an easy four days.", she smiled at him.

"And who are you, exactly?", Shepard asked.

Ronin glanced to both Shepard and Garrus. Then to the rest of them. "I'm Ronin Naramis. Turian Spectre. I was on a debriefing here when the reapers hit, hijacking the entire station to the Sol system. Just about everyone knows the citadel is orbiting earth. This massive station can't orbit forever without a very big problem emerging. It could crash into Earth's atmosphere.", he surmised.

"See? All business. Although... he's right. We need to get the citadel back to the Serpent Nebula.", Satima agreed.

"Right. Satima... Ronin, how would you like to help out on important missions?", Shepard asked.

Ronin had accompanied Garrus to find missing C-Sec officers, putting the headquarters back into operating status. Satima followed Shepard and Ashley back to the tower. She told them of the keeper occurrence and the telepathic images.

This disturbed Shepard, who worried about Satima's experience. No one knows where those keepers went, or even where Chorban is.

C-Sec HQ

Garrus finished repairing the control dashboards overlooking the holographic traffic systems. Avina gave an alert for all c-sec officers and employees to report to HQ. Ronin had given a small militia of lightly armed citizens permission to start a search on the presidium for trapped people. He wondered how the lower wards were doing in his absence.

Within hours, over a dozen c-sec officers reported in. Immediately going to work with nearby teams scavenging the debris. More came through, though some were injured. Medics from the hospital erected clinics along the shops and walkways, as HQ became a hub of information and terrified citizens.

"We need more c-sec. It's seriously overcrowded with angry people.", Ronin worried. Trying to speak over the crowds and their loud complaints.

Garrus was the only former c-sec officer with real rank around. He may have to take temporary command of the place until Bailey or someone else high ranked showed up. "I fear you're right. Any chance the people you and Satima got together on the lower wards, could come up here? Take positions in the front lobby and help thin out the crowds to other facilities?"

"Sir. I'll make my way down there right now.", Ronin acknowledged.
Garrus eyed him. Military formality and a leader. And why was Satima smiling at him so much?

In the council chambers, Satima showed Shepard the main control dashboard she used to open the arms. "See. It wasn't until after I used this, the keepers here turned on us.", she informed.

"Brings back memories.", Shepard muttered.

"What?", Satima blurted.

"Nothing.", Shepard glanced away to the ante rooms.

Ashley made a laugh. "Nothing? Are you kidding? This is the very spot Commander Shepard was made into a Spectre. "Officially" the first human spectre and where she started her mission to bring the rogue spectre, Saren Arterius, to justice."

Shepard eyed Ashley. "Alright, Ash."

Satima looked around, then back to Shepard. "What was it like?"

Shepard sighed, standing at ease with her hands behind her back. Gripping her fingers together nervously as she recalled those moments. "I was determined to stop the reapers then, just as much I am... or was, now. Saren had been their prophet, unleashing chaos to find a conduit that would allow the reapers through. But, I put a team together of the best soldiers, scientists and techs in the galaxy. And we stopped him."

Satima marveled at the story. She could imagine Shepard a little younger, green to this whole save the universe thing. Sorry to never know the privilege of growing up as Shepard's daughter. "That sounds amazing.", she replied.

Shepard made a nervous grin, "Well. It was a long while ago.", she blushed.

Ashley finished with the dashboard's controls, copying the video of the keepers from the chambers on her omni-tool. She walked past Satima with a smirk, "It's also where she met Garrus."

Shepard scoffed, while Satima grinned."Oooh!"

"What is the behavior of the other keepers on the citadel?", Shepard inquired, hoping to change the subject for now.

Ashley brought out current vids of the station, "So far, no other keeper has acted in a hostile manner. They're either rebuilding, performing maintenance or... processing bodies.", she contorted her face in disgust.

"We need to find the council. I'm sure they're hiding out in a panic room somewhere. Satima, use the main citadel controls to find them. I'm going to have a look at the conduit again. Let me know when you've come up with something.", Shepard ordered.

"I'm on it.", Satima answered.

In the elevator, unbeknownst to Ashley, Shepard let out a grin before resuming her commander's gaze. She was grateful Satima had survived. And after things settle, she'll want the full story.

For days, the collective military of the galaxy that remained in the Sol system, contributed to the station's repairs and government structure. Medical and power were the first priorities after citadel security had been brought back online. Armed guards were needed to keep the hungry and tired from
raiding what was rationed.

The sick and dying had been relocated to hospitals, with clinics providing care to the injured. Weeks passed by like hours, and the body count grew. Families torn apart, friends slaughtered... and bodies in every corner, every crevice of space uncovered.

The keepers were carefully watched. Chorban finally emerged from the tunnels, dirty and sickly. He reported finding the vats that contained the corpses of many people. Chorban exhibited the behaviors of trauma patients.

Shepard was right about the council. Finding them in a designated panic room, safe and untouched by the chaos that went on in the wards from their pathetic actions of cowardice.

They resumed their positions with ease and comfort, sending much of the citadel's citizens in an uproar. It took the military to quell the dissension among the crowds. But in the midst of all the chaos and obligation, two souls maintained a secret and yet surprising relationship.

Four weeks had already passed. Ronin has his orders from turian command to go home. He didn't want to leave. Although the galaxy needed more people aiding it. There is one person... one woman, keeping him from duty. And another order from the council, trumping the command from Palavin.

Satima watched the ships fly out of the citadels arms, into space. She wanted to finally leave this station. With C-Sec back in order, the council found and the wards under control... for now.

There was no reason to hang around anymore. Well... she thought about Ronin. He's exceptionally capable. Strong, tall and... other things. She shook her head. Not now. No one else... she can't lose anyone else. Ronin caught her on the docks, walking up the platform past a keeper. She stopped short of it, carefully taking a long step around it. Cautiously.

"Satima.", he shouted across the walkway.

She turned to him. "Ronin. What's up?"

He stood in front of her, hesitating in his words before answering.. "Looks like I'm going home for a bit. I have orders."

"Ah... no one likes orders. Well... I suppose you should follow it. Or, you know, they can make you stay here and babysit the councilors.", she laughed.

Ronin joined in," You can babysit them. They could use some intimidating back talk to keep them in place."

Satima scrunched her nose, "Hey. I don't give back talk."

"You kinda do.", he smiled.

They stood silently together. The keeper passing by quietly. "So. You want to grab a bite before I have to leave?", he asked.

"Sure.", Satima blushed.

On the maintenance bay, they sat on a rigged platform, overlooking the Normandy below. Ronin didn't like heights, but he endured it with her. "I didn't know you could only eat dextro foods. In fact, I couldn't guess your... species difference.", Ronin began speaking.
Satima swallowed her dextro sandwich, drinking down her beverage. "Really? These features don't scream turian infusion, to you?", she chuckled.

"Yes and no. You have a way of pushing people from you.", Ronin replied.

Staring at the Normandy, Satima sighed. "I know. Comes with the territory, I guess."

"I didn't mean to...", Ronin started.

"It's alright. I'm not exactly safe to be around. Not really a people person.", she chuckled sarcastically.

Ronin took in her features again, and analyzed her words. "That's true. But, I've seen the many times you've been helping with the volunteers."

The docks hummed with life, as ships and people came through. A chill air from the open arms gave Satima a shudder. Ronin put his arm around her. She looked at him in surprise. He seemed to feel the same way. Satima pushed his arm off gently, turning around from the edge of the platform they were sitting on, to stand. Ronin followed suit.

"Look, Ronin. I really like you. But... I've had bad experiences with relationships in the past. They don't always work out.", she explained.

He cocked his head at her explanation, feeling it was a wall against him. "Meaning?", Ronin asked.

"Meaning, ... I lost someone close. He died protecting me, Ronin. I can't watch that happen again with anyone. I'm sorry.", she started to leave.

"Satima...", he spoke. She turned to him as he continued, "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. It won't happen again."

She gave him a glare, "Seriously? You're going to make me feel bad!" Satima stomped off as Ronin chuckled, following behind. They ended up inside the elevator, waiting to reach C-sec headquarters. The ride was long and intense. Satima felt an urge to stand closer. His touch fresh in her mind. Ronin stood still. He made a quick glance as she unsettled next to him.

Satima let out a nervous sigh, closing her eyes. "Are you going to kiss me or not?", she asked. Trying to block out the moment she shared with Jormun.

Ronin swung her around by the arm, bringing her close to him, as she gasped in surprise. He pinned her to the wall, while the many levels passed by behind her.

She never kissed a turian before, remembering how soft Jormun's lips were. Ronin's turian mouth was thin, put together by the mandibles that were lined with the dangerous and sharp teeth. Almost like her own. He leaned in, feeling her soft, warm body against his.

The elevator door opened, with a few C-sec officers waiting to board. Standing around, averting their stares. One of them made a dry cough. Ronin and Satima quickly let go, straightening themselves and exiting.

At the turian cruiser docks, Satima and Ronin stood in front of the shuttle. "When are you coming back?", she asked.

"I don't know.", he looked down.
She felt a little stung by that answer. He should know! Maybe this crush was ridiculous? "Just as well.", Satima lamented, walking away.

Ronin grabbed her arm, "Hey. I don't want to forget you. I'm not asking you to wait, but Satima, can you at least let me contact you?"

She smiled, "Yes." They gazed at each other, it was awkward but sweet. Ronin looked to the docked cruiser. "A long ride home.", he sighed. "It'll be good to see those mountains again."

Satima listened, hopeful of his own dream about home. "Good luck, Ronin.", she spoke.

He turned to see a warm smile from her, giving a slight nod before leaving to the ship.

On the Normandy, Shepard completes a vid-com with Hackett. He wants to meet with Satima. This could go sideways quickly, but the answer is only when the meeting begins. Ash's lie is going to backfire, when Satima reveals the truth to Hackett.

The commander turns to the sound of her hybrid child entering the war room. "Shepard. Check this out." She holds out a new visor. "It's for Garrus."

An incredible replica of Garrus's visor was put in Shepard's hands."He'll be very happy to have it.", she smiles.

"Yeah. I hope so. He seemed pretty pissed when I broke the original.", Satima worries.

Shepard lost her smile, remembering the scuffle in the main battery and what happened between Garrus and Satima. She gave the girl a sad look, "Satima, what Garrus did... when he got angry. I can't excuse it, but can you at least understand how he felt...

Satima began blurring a question. "So! What's with the names on the visor. Who were they?"

Shepard looked at her in brief shock, before beginning to answer. "Well, Garrus has a long history with it. And, a story that you don't know yet. He had a team of his own once. They followed him loyally, and he made good friendships.", Shepard informed.

"Where was this?", Satima asked.

Shepard glanced off in memory, "Omega. He cleaned out house... to say the least, for a little while. Things went wrong, and he lost his entire team. Garrus pushed too hard to win Omega from Aria, the mercs and other criminals. I wonder if he still blames himself?" She looked to Satima, "You see... he wrote the names of his team on his visor. It meant a lot to him, carrying their names. I have to admit, it took some time for me to figure that out. And this coming from me! I know a lot more about Garrus, than he does himself, sometimes.", she chuckled.

Satima stared down. "No wonder. I couldn't imagine the pain of losing such a relic into your past."

"What about Haven?", Shepard wondered.

Satima shrugged, "Haven was my home. A place to hide from all that I was, and still am. I mourn her, but I don't want to carry her with me forever. I like the thought of considering a future without all the weight."

They both stood together, overlooking the war table. Shepard leans against the railing. "We thought you were dead. How did you survive?"
"I spotted Callon's rifter. It was a small chance, but I took it. Rifted right on the citadel, falling down the wards. Ronin tried to catch me. He still saved my life with his quick thinking.", Satima explained.

"He seems to be an accomplished and very experienced young man.", she leaned in close to Satima, "I've seen the way he's looked at you."

Satima stared off in panic, "Please, don't start."

Two days later

Hackett docks again with the Normandy, waiting in the board chamber of the war room. Shepard and Garrus are both called, as well as Ashley. They know why he's here, and what he wants. To speak with Satima.

She paced nervously in the core room. Shepard made her dress in alliance uniform. It itched. All the wrong fibers to move and fight in. The collar didn't really fit her hybrid neck so well. Her hair was put in a tight bun, high in the back. Ashley's doing. What next? Colonial markings of a turian? Liara's blue powder? Spirits, is this Hackett going to drill her on the origins of humanity!?

Satima gulped, wiping a cold sweat from her hybrid brow. Maybe this is just precaution? Shepard didn't tell him everything, saying they weren't ready yet. Is he ready now?

"Satima. You are requested in the board room.", EDI informed over comms.

"O..Okay. I'm on my way.", she stuttered.

In the elevator to the CIC, Satima asked EDI a question. "Um, EDI. What do I say?"

"Be honest. Shepard will lead you in the right words to say.", EDI replied.

"And don't forget to say "Sir", every chance you get. And... maybe salute.", Joker chimed in.

"What? How do I salute?", Satima started to panic.

The elevator door slid open. Traynor watched her walk out. "You look good! A bit of Shepard in you.", she smiled.

Satima swallowed hard.

Shepard crossed her arms tightly against her chest. Hackett stood to the side, reading a recent report when Satima came through the doors.

They all stared at the hybrid through the glass walls. Garrus never slacked, standing at ease. He too was nervous at this meeting. Ashley nodded friendly to Satima, walking her in. "Look him in the eye when he asks you a question.", she whispered.

Shepard was impressed with Satima's formal look. In time, she could be an Alliance officer, if she so chooses.

"Admiral Hackett, this is Satima. The Traveler.", Shepard informed.

"The Traveler?", Satima thought with a quick glance of confusion. She instantly stared at this Hackett when he fixed his steel gaze on her.

"Of all my reports... both from Commander Shepard and Lieutenant-Commander Williams. I never
imagined you to look so... human.", he pondered aloud.

Satima stared. Was that a good thing?

"I need an answer from you. The truth, if you will. Where do you come from?"

The room fell silent as Hackett waited patiently. Shepard and Ashley exchanged worried glances. The hour of truth, and possibly doom, has come.

"A reaper controlled science station.", Satima finally answered.

Hackett looked to his data pad, then back at her. "Are you a genetic relation to Commander Shepard?"

Satima gulped, glancing to Shepard who nodded the go ahead. "Erm... yes. I... I am. S... sir!", she stuttered, saluting with the wrong hand.

Garrus noticed her attempts to be formal. Spirits. Ashley stifled a laugh. Hackett put the data pad on the table. "Read this.", he ordered.

Satima picked it up nervously, looking at the information. It took her longer, since her human was not so perfect. "Having any trouble?", he asked.

Satima made herself read faster, unable to understand some of the words. Hackett changed stances. "Satima, I'm losing my patience. An answer to my question would suffice."

She looked at him then back at the data pad, setting it down on the table. "I can't read it very well, alright."

Shepard's heart dropped a beat. She and Garrus exchanged glances. Hackett picked up the data pad again, "It says here, that you are a reaper experiment. Using Shepard's genetic dna, to gain leverage over her in the war. We know you are a hybrid. The first of your kind, really. Your assistance in the war and the defeat of the reapers is all here, as well. What I want is the truth. I know there's more to this. Before the beam raid in London, Anderson sent me information on this... Reaper? He said it was something no one could understand. Except you. I want answers, Satima. And I'm tired of waiting."

Shepard glanced to Hackett, averting her stare to the table. He knew. He knew that something wasn't correct in her account, and he knew that Anderson was trying to tell him about Satima before the raid. She can't protect Satima from this forever, but a little more time would've been nice.

Garrus stood forward, agitated with the way Hackett was drilling Satima. "Sir?"

Hackett raised a hand, "With all due respect, from her mouth only."

Garrus complied, reluctantly.

Satima crossed her arms, "Alright." She stared at him with a different gaze. Mature and determined.

"Your turian dna. Where does it come from?", he asked.

"Him.", she pointed to Garrus.

Hackett looked at Garrus in surprise, but didn't flinch in response. "Who is Reaper?"

"Her.", she then pointed to Shepard.
Hackett glanced at them both, then covered his chin in intense thought. After a moment, he stared back at Satima. "The meaning of it."

"I come from an alternate timeline. It's possible this is the origin zone. The reaper war was the breakaway... of the paradox. Shepard lost, and you all died... or worse. Reaper was the result, as was I.", she glanced to them both. With a weak laugh, she continued. "But, congratulations... it didn't happen this time. Not to any of you.", Satima finished, looking downcast.

Hackett glared to Shepard, who continued to stare off.. "Fabricating the details of your report was irresponsible. Lying outright about the truth... that's not like you, Commander. This is more dangerous than I thought."

"Sir...", Ashley spoke out.

"Williams... you knowingly lied for the Commander?", he glared.

Ashley shook her head in agreement, "I'd do it again, sir."

"Outright insubordination. From my best soldiers. All for this girl.", he glared at Satima. "Who may or may not be the most dangerous individual in the galaxy right now.", Hackett warned.

Garrus crossed his arms, the formal atmosphere broken. Hackett exchanged his glare to the turian officer. "Since you're the military consultant against Reaper forces. I wonder how the turian hierarchy will respond to this, Officer Vakarian."

Satima had enough. This wasn't fair, not to Shepard, not to Garrus... or herself. "Listen... Hackett. If I wanted to kill you or anyone else here, because you think I'm a reaper controlled enemy. I'd have done it... minutes ago. I may not have my nano tech anymore, but yes... I'm still very unpredictable. But what you don't know about me, is how loyal I am to my family. And they...", she pointed to Shepard and Garrus," ... are my family!"

Hackett was not amused, but he didn't lose his gaze on this girl. "Shepard. I will speak with you alone. The rest... dismissed."

Ashley led a fuming Satima out, with Garrus following. This didn't sound good.

Moments later...

"Commander...", Hackett sighed. He rubbed his temples in an obvious headache. "You know most of this will be classified. Likely for eternity."

"Yes, sir.", she replied.

"And you know, more than likely, that turian command will demand answers.", he said.

"Of course.", Shepard sighed, irritated.

Hackett laid the data pad down. "I'm not angry, but troubled... concerned. Anderson is still out there in London. Either alive or dead. Many more of our men and women... scattered throughout the planet. Tell me, is Satima a real threat to us all?"

Her gaze turned offended. "No, sir! She's not familiar with this past. You know I'll take full responsibility of her.", Shepard answered.

Hackett looked up with a weak smile. "We always do with our children. As parents... no job is the
hardest. Commander, I'll leave you to your duties. And tell Satima, she's got the same fire her mother displays."

Shepard let out a harsh breath when the Admiral left. Alone, she reflected on the revelations. Now the truth is out, and Satima can rest easy. There's no more hiding. No one to come after her, right?

Mess hall-Deck three

Satima threw her uniform jacket across the table. "Ridiculous. This isn't me. I don't fit in here.", she argued. Letting her ginger hair loose from the tight bun.

"It was mostly for show.", Garrus replied, equally annoyed.

"I can't wear human clothes like that.", she stretched, rubbing the small sore carapace over the back of her neck.

Ashley stood off to the side, anxiously. "Well, at least it's over with for now. I wonder what Hackett is saying to Shepard?"

Shepard appeared around the corner of the elevator. "He's not too pleased, but we'll survive it."

"You think he'll have me put in some kind of quarantine?", Satima feared.

"No. Your safe here, on the Normandy. I won't let anything happen to you.", Shepard answered.

Garrus put a hand on Satima's shoulder, "You're with family now."

Satima gave him a short smile, but wavered at Shepard. Hackett had allowed this infraction to continue without punishment. The most frightening part of this meeting, is how long will the alliance allow it to continue? And will Satima prove to be a valuable ally, or a reaper agent all along?

The following day, Shepard received a message to return to the citadel. The council wants a meeting with her and the traveler. Alliance, turian, asari and other representatives of command, were to hold counsel over the reapers defeat.

It was past time for a proper explanation. The galaxy demanded it, and the people feared it.

Satima stood in the anterooms of the council audience chambers. The pink blossom trees swayed from an engineered wind. She stared at a keeper. The painful images relived in her mind.

"Unpredictable backstabbers.", she thought.

Finally, the time had come to speak about what had happened. Shepard spoke to Hackett on the steps behind the fountain in their formal Alliance attire.

There were a lot of officials and bureaucrats dressed in their finest. Despite most of the citadel's citizens still dragging themselves in tattered clothing. But not in the tower. Not in the defiant white sword that cuts through all logic and common sense.

The meeting had begun.

There was a lot of talking, and some yelling. She could hear the different species all retelling their accounts of the war from different perspectives of the galaxy.

Some stories were downright gruesome, but true. The krogan still wanted a seat on the council, and surprisingly the salarians backed them. She heard Urdnot Wrex speak. Wrex! Satima was excited to meet him again since the party, remembering his son-Rex, and how he unapologetically admitted to
searching her while unconscious. Satima blushed, again.

Two hours passed by, as she paced around the fountain or strolled past the columns of the anteroom. Keepers returned, busy on terminals.

The moment came. She was called to the petitioner's stage. As Satima slowly walked up the steps, she caught a glimpse of a familiar face with golden eyes. Ronin? Did he ever leave? There wasn't time to acknowledge. On the top steps, overlooking the glass garden below, Shepard and Hackett stood on opposite sides.

She stepped forward on the platform, with them behind her. Hackett leaned in to speak to her. "Remember Satima, your real origin is classified in the Alliance. The council has no grounds to force you to submit any information on that. Just tell them about the last hours at the conduit to the citadel. If you have any information as to what happened or how the reapers were defeated. Don't hesitate to inform."

She nodded.

The asari councilor, Tevos, spoke first.

"Thank you for attending this meeting, Satima. We have a series of questions that require answers. Since we know of your effort and assistance against the reapers, we're confident you have firsthand knowledge of the events we will outline ahead."

Sparatus didn't like this new hybrid of his people and the humans. As Tevos spoke, he glared toward the young woman. Something inside made him irritated, and within that moment he spoke out of turn. Interrupting the asari councilor. "Like the fact, you are indeed not completely human at all. And your history with Commander Shepard."

Several of the officials in the audience murmured loudly.

The Salarian councilor glanced to Sparatus, holding out a dismissive hand. "But that can wait. Satima, do you know how the reapers were stopped?", Councilor Valern asked.

She looked around the crowd, glancing to the councilors and back to the gardens below. "Not entirely."

Shep had murmured louder, whispering discontent amongst themselves. "Then what do you know?", Tevos inquired.

Satima wrung her hands. She didn't like crowds. "There... is a race of ancient people. They are called the Sentarians. Long ago, to my knowledge, they were subjected to the reapers harvest. The first harvest. But, to the reapers surprise they escaped that fate. With advanced technology, this galaxy has yet to master, the Sentarians used... blackholes-singularities, to find a new home."

The crowd became silent as Satima spoke. She continued. "I was created by the reapers. Using the advanced technology stolen from the Sentarians. Through my genetic template, I could re-write them. To my will."

Tevos gasped as Sparatus dismissed the claim, "That's insane. You're just one person against thousands of those machines."

"That's all it takes. A single mistake... to overthrow the balance the reapers thought they once possessed. But it wasn't I that stopped them. There was another like me. She used her ability, more mastered than my own and subjected them to her will. At least that was the plan."

Satima spoke in
her deceit. Like Shepard planned with the alliance, it would be best to not offer all of the truth to this council. The galaxy in its current state, is simply not ready.

"So. This other, destroyed the reapers?", Valern panicked. "How?"

Satima shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. What I can tell you, is that the reaper threat is over."

Sparatus, unsatisfied with Satima's answers, spoke again. "How do we know you're not under the enthrallment of the reapers? How can we believe you?"

"You can't.", she replied. "Shepard trusts me. So, you'll just have to trust her judgement, instead."

Sparatus scoffed. Tevos and Valern exchange glances. Satima noticed this. "After all she's done for you... all she's sacrificed, you still don't have any confidence in her? When the reapers came, despite the warnings and the evidence. You let millions die, because of hubris. Your hubris." Satima started to laugh mockingly, "You guys blew it. You blew it so hard."

The crowd had mixed responses with some mockingly laughing and others gasping, appalled.

"That's enough, Satima.", Councilor Tevos demanded.

"No! It's not enough! I stayed in the lower wards, watching the fear in the eyes of those children, you were so quick to forget about. Turian, asari, human... I witnessed piles of bodies... dragged and processed by the keepers. The dead stinking and festering in the alleyways of this station you are so eager to abandon for your own selfish lives!", she shouted.

People whispered as Satima's voice gave a more mature, sub-vocal sound. Narrowing her gaze menacingly towards them. "Councilors, if I were still in the beguilement of the reapers, I would not hesitate... to end your miserable existence.", she grinned fiendishly.

Everyone gasped terrified. Shepard stepped forward to her, grabbing the girl by the arm. "What are you doing? Have you lost your mind, Satima?"

Truly, Satima didn't understand what had come over her. It was frightening and sent alarms throughout her mind. Hackett spoke in place, "Councilors, perhaps it would be wise to end the meeting here."

"No! I want that... thing, taken into custody.", Sparatus ordered.

Shepard became nervous, replying in anger. "You'll have to go through me.", she warned.

The crowd got louder and more hostile.

Suddenly on the bottom floor, three spatial rifts opened in the middle of the crowd. People were screaming and fleeing to the sides of the anterooms.

Keepers stood still, watching in emotionless reaction. Sentarians in their recognized armor, appeared through. Memtrix and Arkasia led the soldiers and two members of the new council, The Assembly of Stratos, into the audience chamber.

Satima turned to her relief to see them. Memtrix wore the armored attire of high command, with black paldrons over grey scaled armor and the yellow gauntlets of her house's colors. Arkasia didn't wear armor, being an engineer of her people's race.

Instead, she wore a deep purple raiment with a yellow lab coat worn tightly to her tall frame. Both sisters had muddy brown hair color and their distinct crystal blue eyes.
Memtrix stepped forward, "Beings of the citadel and galactic races. I am Memtrix Vael of the Sentarians. High Commander and shen na tar, to your galaxy. That means... ambassador."

A member of their new council also spoke. He was bald, revealing more of the pale green skin their race exhibited. Both councilors had a different attire altogether of green and grey robes. "Greetings. I am Vantar Aniu. The Assembly wishes to extend aid following the aftermath of the war."

Councilor Tevos shook, "How did you get here?"

Memtrix proceeded to walk up the steps, followed by Arkasia to the petitioner's stage. They all crowded together with Satima, Shepard and Hackett. "Simple. FTL. We used your relays from a systems tear, traveling here. We know of the grave circumstances of this station. Its massive size orbiting such a small planet." She turned to Shepard, "No offense."

Shepard shrugged.

Sparatus stepped forward, stunned. "Why are you here?"

Arkasia stood forward to answer. "We overheard your conclusions on open comms. And we know how much you fear what Satima is. She's under our protection. You know what that means if you try to take her into custody without our permission. Councilor, if you want our help. Leave her alone. She's Sentarian... officially.", Arkasia informed. Giving a nod and smile to Satima.

Tevos glanced to them, arguing, "She threatened our lives. We don't officially recognize your authority in citadel space, here."

Memtrix stared back at Tevos."With all due respect, councilor. But true citadel space is in the Serpent Nebula. Which I'm sure your citizens are eager to return to. As for what Satima said, it was under stress. She's been subjected to intense amounts of threats and physical experimentation for years. By the reapers, themselves. They are gone, and we are here to help. We pose no threat, and neither does Satima.", Memtrix argued.

Vantar approached the stage. "Councilors. Perhaps we can discuss this on a more personal scale, in your desired chambers. Hetan and myself, are ready to explain all that needs to be shared."

The audience present murmured loudly, arguing among themselves. With the three councilors in agreement, they dismissed the official meeting, for a private one. The anterooms cleared, and the gardens were back in order. Satima stood with Hackett and Shepard.

"You were damn lucky they arrived. Satima, that was stupid.", Shepard glared.

"Exactly. Threatening the councilors will not get you anywhere but confinement. The Alliance cannot break the relations with the council.", Hackett warned.

Satima looked down, "I understand. This is my fault. I just got so angry." She looked at Shepard pleadingly, "You do so much for them. It's not fair."

"Not everything will be fair, Satima. But thank you for defending me.", Shepard smiled.

Later...
Memtrix approached Satima next to the fountain. "You really like to start wars, don't you?", she smirked.

"I... I honestly don't know what came over me., Satima replied.

"Are you okay?", Memtrix asked, worried over this galaxies council and their paranoid claims.
Satima looked to her, "I'll live. At least the galaxy knows not to mess with me.", she chuckled.

The fountain water sparkled under the chambers illuminators. Satima sat on the edge. Memtrix glanced to the hybrid with a knowing expression. "I knew you could survive Callon's cruiser.", she grinned.

Satima looked down, her thoughts dragged her to that pivotal and dangerous moment. "I didn't.", she answered.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks. :)
Chapter Summary

Am upsetting discovery reminds Shepard of her mortality. A surprising meeting of families returns a happier mood. Only to be soured by indifference. The return of order prompts Satima to realize she may never be able to belong, in Shepard’s new future.

Ideas are made, and intentions... devised.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The council agreed on a joint effort to bring the citadel back into the serpent nebula with the help of the Sentarians. In the weeks of preparation, Alliance forces continued their own efforts to rebuild earth. Many rescue teams were sent to scout the ruins and debris of fallen cities. A final sweep of the London beam, had finally turned up a feared conclusion.

Shepard sat at the terminal in her cabin, finishing reports. Her coffee had become cold, but she wasn’t thirsty for it anyway. Just a habit to use the caffeine as a crutch to stay awake. More than happy that Satima is not in the clutches of the council, Shepard made a small request from Hackett. She would use it as a nice surprise or discretely delete it, if it turned sour.

Garrus had to leave, finally. He promised to be back soon, but turian command needed his own debriefing. Knowing that Satima wasn’t long for another grueling "meeting". In his absence, Satima took over the main gun battery, learning the calibrating techniques needed to optimize it.

Shepard had just started to close her terminal when a message from Alliance command popped up. She opened it.

"Commander,

It pains me to inform you of the retrieval of Admiral Anderson's body.", Her hands shook over the keyboard, as she read the message."Buried under piles of the corpses of our fellow brothers and sisters in arms. It seems the reaper's blast did more damage to the area than imagined. His body is severely burnt and there will be no open casket for his memorial. I'm asking you to perform an important duty. That which I know, Anderson would be honored to receive. If you will, commander, give his eulogy and lead us into his memory. I'm so sorry, Shepard.

Hackett."

Shepard closed the terminal screen, staring at her black reflection. The cabin became stuffy, as hot tears forced through her strained eyes. She glanced down to her hands, clinching them into angry fists. A bitter scowl glared toward the screen as she slammed the keyboard in a fit. Shepard did this again, and again. Crying out for the loss she felt. Tears streamed, and all she can do is sob to herself.

Tossing the keyboard off the desk, to lay her head on the cold surface, with open palms in defeat. She failed him. He was more than a mentor and leader to her, so much more. And that little bit of family he was to her, is gone.
"...anderson...it should've been me...", she whimpered in silence.

Satima came out of the main gun room, reading data from her latest calibrating. EDI sent her messages on several mistakes. She scoffed at them. Flying is so much easier, wondering if Joker would let her take the reins. In the mess, Ashley and Liara were speaking to each other.

"Hey guys. What's going on?", Satima asked, now noticing their solemn mood.

They both glanced at her, as Ashley began to talk. "Satima. They found Anderson's body. Shepard told us a few minutes ago." Ashley's eyes were red and strained.

She stopped short of the mess,"You mean, the guy that I met on earth? The... Admiral?", Satima feared.

Liara nodded with a sad sigh. "Yes. He was Shepard's mentor, and the reason she joined the Alliance military in the first place."

Satima stared off, "Oh no. Is there anything I can do?"

"Just give Shepard her space. This is hitting hard for her.", Ashley answered.

Satima nodded in understanding. Liara looked at her, "Just like it hit hard, when she thought you were gone, too." They watched the hybrid step away, slowly going back inside the main gun room. Liara left to her duties, already trying to find her own team. Now scattered by the reaper's galactic assault.

Days passed.

His casket is too be spaced. On the fifth fleet cruiser Hackett commanded, Shepard and some of her crew met with friends and fellow soldiers on the central command deck. They all stood around waiting, watching the twinkling stars of space in the background of black.

James stood next to Ashley and Cortez. "I can't believe he's gone. You know, he ordered me to guard Shepard during her incarceration."

Ashley changed her stance, holding a beverage in her hand. She smirked at his memory."He suggested I join the Normandy after I was rescued by Shepard from Edin Prime.", she reminisced.

Cortez nodded, "I wonder how the commander is taking it? She's going to speak in a few minutes."

All three of them looked down, "This could've been for Shepard, you know.", Ashley spoke, her gaze staring at the floor. They were dressed in their finest alliance uniforms. The thought gave her a cold chill.

Cortez shook his head. "I don't want to imagine that."

"Come on. Let's go check on Traynor and Joker.", James suggested.

Shepard wandered around the large deck, averting her eyes from everyone. A few sobs were heard with more murmuring and talking from the control center. Refreshments had been handed out and several officials started a sign-in terminal for people to use. Suddenly a voice yelled in the crowd.

"Shepard!"

She turned to see Khalee in the crowd, walking towards her. "Khalee?, Shepard replied.
Khalee stood in front of Shepard among the crowd of alliance soldiers and officials, dressed in her uniform. Blonde hair swept back. "I'm so glad you're alive. It's great to see you.", she said, shaking her hand.

"Me too. How have you been?", Shepard asked.

"I was with the students for a while. Jack has been taking excellent care of them. They've learned so much, showing skill in battle. If it wasn't for your suggestion to use them as support. I don't think a lot of our soldiers would've made it.", she informed.

"Good.", Shepard replied relieved.

Khalee glanced down, her eyes closed tightly, before reopening in watery tears. "I can't believe he's gone. Anderson always put the alliance first. Did he save a lot of lives? I know he did... tell me? Did he?"

Shepard held back raw emotion to answer her, "Yes, Khalee. Mine included."

Khalee smiled when Hackett commed for everyone to attend the memorial. The crowd gathered inside the large torpedo lounge. A vid of Anderson's image displayed as well as two wreaths over his grey casket. Shepard spotted the podium she would take.

Ashley stood by her side, with Hackett on the other. Everyone became silent for her to speak. She gazed at all the blue uniforms, and sad faces. Silent whimpers and sobs filled the room.

"I am... Commander Charlotte Shepard.", her voice shaky. She cleared her throat quietly, then continued."Friend and fellow soldier to Admiral David Anderson.", she glanced down at her info pad. Looking right back into the crowd. "He was a hero to many, a companion to some. He served with distinction, integrity and honor. His life in the Alliance was an example for all the men and women that served under him, of his bravery and leadership. David never backed down from a fight, protecting those that were thrown in the way of the enemy. He didn't fear the reapers, or their harvest. And he didn't give up."

Khalee smiled to her warmly from the crowd. Shepard bit back tears, biting her lower lip to stop the emotional pain. "He was my mentor. David believed in me, supported me... guided me. And I'll never forget that."

She nodded to Hackett. The two-part drill commanded by him proceeded. The following officers presented arms, saluting as the casket was shot into space through a torpedo pod. Every officer stood with their own salutes. Shepard held hers the longest, watching the casket float further and further away.

That same week, the citadel was successfully moved back in the nebula. With the arms open and docks still operational. The Sentarians proved to be great allies indeed.

Back on the Normandy over earth. Satima replayed the vid of the memorial. Not every alliance officer and soldier could attend. Most were out on other worlds, colonies... helping to fight the reapers. Shepard never looked so graven, so pale.

On the Normandy's personal memorial wall, Anderson's name was etched on a plaque. Along with many others.

Every crew member remained silent throughout their duties. Shepard most of all. Like Ashley asked, Satima stayed out of her way. Two more days of this silence and it seemed some light cheer was leaking its way back into the ship.
A rumor of an actual r&r went around, and soon the Normandy was navigated through the relay into citadel space. Satima joined some of the crew looking out the window to see it back in its proper place.

She had to admit a bit of relief at the sight. The Destiny Ascension slowly loomed over them, keeping a careful watch over the space around the station. It seemed normal activity was about to finally take place.

Once the Normandy docked, Satima decided to venture back down to the lower wards. She gasped to see most of it cleared. Nearby, Satima overheard a group of turians and batarians, talking about the council's new priorities on the citadel. Sentarians managed to convince them of the importance of all the citizens. She personally thinks her "conversation" also had a hand.

Wandering back down to the merchant center, she spotted the old kiosk that was her room. It wasn't there anymore, but someone familiar was. Standing there in dark grey armor, overlooking the empty space. "Ronin?", she shouted.

He turned around to her, a small surprised gaze.. "Satima. I didn't expect to see you here."

She caught up to him outside the empty alley, "Me too. I was just taking a look back here. The Normandy is docked again."

Ronin nodded, "I know I haven't contacted you. Been pretty busy with the current events. That, and watching you chew the asses off of the council.", he smirked.

She looked at him stunned, "You where there!"

He led her to walk up the street. "Yeah. I wanted to see you, but since you were the most important person at the time. I figured it would be best to wait."

They passed by open markets with strange and exotic foods, glancing past asari groups and turian officers, a landing pad for cabs and smaller shops. "This place has really turned around in these past two months.", she commented. Ronin acknowledged, rubbing his neck nervously. Satima noticed it. "What's wrong?", she asked.

He stopped walking, staring at her in concern. "Satima, you know I'm a spectre, right? If the council wanted to, they could order me to arrest you. If you decided to make threats like that again."

Satima scoffed, "You wouldn't do that.", she chuckled.

Ronin glanced away, "I'd have too. It's my job." His mandibles twitched, clearly upset at the thought.

Satima nodded, "Oh." She glared off. "Well, I'm glad that's been cleared up."

Ronin realized his mistake. "Satima, I would never hurt you. Besides, you'd probably have gotten away.", he jested. He waited for a response, watching her look away in thought. Satima turned to his gaze, and gave him a quick grin. She hit his arm, giggling. "You'd never be able to catch me. I'm too fast."

They continued walking. "You've never seen me in action.", he hinted.

Satima pushed him to the side, laughing as he pushed back. Leaning on each other, while onlookers stared in confusion.

On the Normandy, Satima paced in the main gun room. Her relationship with Ronin was getting
close.

She's been closer to him, than the glances and slight touches with Jormun. What if this goes further than that with Ronin? He's older than her and probably has more experience. But... she has no clue what to do. This can't go any further.

Shepard entered, looking a little better than the previous days. "Satima. How's the main gun today?"

Satima stopped pacing, remembering that she forgot to run the ratio patterns. "Uh... really well.", she lied.

Shepard took a look, "So well... that if I needed to use it, the gun would short out?", she laughed.

Satima wrung her hands. "I'm sorry, Shepard. I've been preoccupied with... things. I'll get right on it, right now." She started on the control panel, working the data.

Shepard tilted her head, curiously. "Satima. What's on your mind?"

"Nothing.", she replied. Still busy on the controls.

Shepard leaned on the panel next to her. "Is it about Ronin?", she smiled.

Satima shorted out the gun. "Damn it.", she swore.

Shepard laughed, noticing the growing crush her daughter had on the turian spectre. "EDI can help you fix that.", she informed, trying to help her.

"I don't need help. I can do this!", Satima argued over the panel. So many data structures flowed by quickly. How the hell does he do it?

The commander shook her head, beginning to leave. "Maybe calibrating isn't the most important thing on your mind, lately."

Satima mocked Shepard's words to herself, after she left.

The citadel began buzzing with happier citizens again. Jobs, shops, and most importantly... commerce, were back in working order. With the Volus busy in reestablishing finances and income among the many planets now functioning, a real sense of normalcy displayed over the galaxy.

A towering monument was erected on the presidium, displaying the many names of the deceased. Long granite structures were imported from earth, and used to etch the many names of all soldiers and officers killed in action. Every day, citizens of each race would pay their respects, offering flowers or incense. Prayers of all languages, and shoulders for strangers to cry on.

Three months had gone by, and each day brought more hope with the absence of the reapers.

Shepard waited impatiently at the docks. The transport ships were coming in, along with several turian command vessels. She received the message days before of Garrus’s return. He had company, his family. It was time to finally meet them.

His question burned in her mind from London, months before. She didn't exactly give him a solid answer, but that was before she survived the reapers. Satima saved her life. And she owed her a lot for that. Speaking of which? Where is she?

In the maintenance closet of the c-sec headquarters. Satima had pushed Ronin off, when he'd been
too hasty over her neck

"Ronin.", she breathed. "It's weird. You're tickling me!", she chuckled. "Stop..."

He groaned against her, "Can't help it. You taste... wonderful.", he continued.

Satima's comms opened. "Satima. Where are you? Garrus will be here any moment." Crap! It was Shepard. "I gotta go.", she said, pushing him back.

Ronin accepted it, smirking. "Should I wait for you here?"

Satima straightened her shirt. "Sure. Go ahead and clean up the mess while you're at it." Tossing him the mop. He caught it with skill, glancing to the spilled chemical floor cleaners they tipped over during their "make-out session".

On her way out the door, Satima received a message to meet at a restaurant, secretly hoping it's not sushi.

The dock elevator opened, with plenty of turians piling out and a few other species with them. She held her breath when a familiar stare caught her attention. Garrus ran out to meet her, scooping her up in his arms. "Did you miss me?", he asked.

Shepard gave him a kiss, "Every day.", she smiled.

His mandibles turned from an outward smile, to a solemn expression. "I'm sorry about Anderson. He was a good man, and one hell of an Alliance Soldier.", Garrus consoled.

"Humanities best.", she chuckled lightly.

"And I'm sorry I wasn't there while you were hurting." He seemed upset with himself when he said those words.

They embraced before he turned to the elevator again, gesturing her to look. "Charlotte. This is my father-Tiberius Vakarian."

An older turian with blue colonial markings, and wearing the same cobalt toned turian attire, stepped forward. Holding the familiar azure avian gaze like his son. "Commander. It is a pleasure to finally meet you."

Beside him, a turian woman stood, with noticeable likeness to Garrus. Wearing teal shaded clothing with black striped coattails showing more of a feminine quality. She nodded toward Shepard. Garrus walked to them, putting an arm around her. "And this is my sister, Solanna.", he said excitedly.

Shepard held back nervous tendencies, offering a handshake. "I'm very pleased to meet you both." Tiberius shook her hand respectfully. "Garrus has told us much about you. I am pleased also, that you survived the reapers."

The commander held back a blush, "He's only told me a little about you, Mr. Vakarian.", Shepard replied.

Solanna quietly chuckled. Tiberius resumed his conversation. "Please. Just... Tiberius. I assume everyone is hungry? I'm buying.", he said with a light smile. Tiberius offered his arm to Shepard, as Garrus and Sol followed behind them, occasionally shoving each other in a childish manner.

Tavern
An open restaurant with two terraces seemed like the best place to eat. With a table privately set in the corner, overlooking the presidium lake. Small laughter and light banter filled the casual restaurant, while Shepard waited impatiently for Satima to show.

Solanna began talking to Garrus about his time on the Normandy and how Shepard finally defeated the reapers. Tiberius seemed content, listening to his adult children speak. He did, however, notice Shepard's occasional glances to the restaurant's entrance.

"Is there something bothering you, Charlotte?", he asked with concern.

"Hmm? No. I'm just looking for someone.", she replied anxiously.

Interest piqued, Garrus looked at her. "Who?"

She widened her eyes in a careful hint.

Garrus gulped. Spirits. Now?!

"Dad, Sol... Charlotte and I need to speak for a moment.", Garrus led her from the table to another empty corner. He looked behind them, then leaned in close. "Tell me Satima is not coming?", he pleaded.

"I asked her too.", Shepard answered in confusion.

Garrus twitched his mandibles, "And normally, that wouldn't be a problem. But, I was hoping for a few days to prepare. Mostly for them. This will be a total shock. And you know that."

Shepard sighed, "Yes. I know.", she crossed her arms. "We can't keep her a secret forever. The Alliance and the council know about her. And Ronin, the spectre. Many people she helped on the lower wards." Shepard could go on.

They continued arguing behind a large green plant. Solanna and Tiberius exchanged glances.

Garrus leaned back, sulking against the wall. "It's not about us. It's my dad and Solanna. Months before, I sent him a letter about her. He knows she exists but doesn't know about her... physical appearance. More than likely, through my careful... and way too subtle letter. He thinks she's a turian. From another relationship. Years ago.", he informed.

Shepard gave him an angry stare. "Are you mentally handicapped?!", she nearly yelled, now punching his arm.

Solanna leaned from her chair to peak at the two "love-birds" whisper their arguments quite loudly. Tiberius watched curiously. "I wonder if everything is alright?", he pondered.

Solanna chuckled. "This is too funny."

Mid argument, Satima stood beside them equally confused. "Guys.", she whispered. "What's the problem?"

"Satima!", Shepard nearly shouted.

Satima looked at Garrus. "I'm glad you're back, cause I really... really.... hate calibrating that damn gun! It's not me. I suck at it... horribly.", she loathed.

Garrus raised an eye, "No one told you to calibrate it anyways. You didn't break anything, did you?"

She put her hands behind her back childishly, raising on her heels. "Shepard told me too, and no..."
nothing really important to the... ship... Hey! This place, is great.
Satima changed the subject.

Walking off to the exact corner where Garrus's father and sister sat.

She leaned over the glass railing to view the lake. "Wow. You can see everything from this view.
Including the scary conduit. Why the council has not gotten rid of it, beyond me. " Satima noticed
the two turians sitting at the table. "Hey there. Sorry for interrupting your... uh, lunch." She stepped
away, with an awkward glance.

Garrus shook his head, "I'm totally screwed."

Shepard walked forward grabbing Satima's arm, while maintaining a smile to them. "Ow. That
hurts.", she complained.

Shepard forced Satima to sit down in a chair next to her, as Garrus nervously sat between Solanna
and Shepard. Tiberius looked on them all, unamused. He glanced toward Satima, then back to
Shepard. "And is this the young lady you've been waiting on?”, he asked.

Shepard almost forgot his curious probing from earlier. "Yes.", she answered. "Satima... say hello to
Tiberius Vakarian. Garrus's father.", Shepard informed with a widened glance.

Satima had the look of a frightened animal."...hello...", she mumbled.

Solanna tilted her head in confusion. "Who is she? And why is she invited?"

Garrus swallowed an entire glass of turian brandy. As Shepard began to explain. "She's... well, this
is Satima. My... she's my..."

"I'm their kid!", Satima blurted in a panic. Tiberius and Solanna stared at her. Garrus just stared
ahead, with Shepard darted a glance between them.

The hybrid made a weak smile, trying to lighten the mood."...surprise..."

In the gardens of the soldier's monument, Solanna gave Garrus an earful. "Are you insane!? Seriously?
Dammit Garrus! What the hell is this?"

"The truth, alright.", he answered, frustrated.

Solanna paced in front of a tree. "I read the message you sent him. Dad didn't know, and I thought I
was going to see a full blooded turian child. My niece or nephew. Not... whatever the hell that thing
is!"

"Sol!", he glared.

Garrus watched his sister step away from him, fuming in disgust and confusion."What I don't
understand, is how the hell did she exist? She's way too old. It's not possible, Garrus.", she waved
dismissively. "Even Shepard isn't old enough to claim that.", Solanna argued.

He stared down, sighing in a forced agreement of her logical reasoning."I can't explain it easily.
Nothing from the reapers can be explained easily. It just... it just happened.", Garrus replied,
purposefully stepping on flowers.


Several onlookers passed by the arguing turians quickly as others watched in amusement. The
garden became quite full in the past few minutes.
"Look at me.", she pleaded. Garrus ignored her. "Look at me... brother.", she asked again.

Garrus glanced her way. She touched his arm gently. "I understand you want to bond with Shepard... right? I'm behind you on that. In fact, I'm happy for you. I truly am. But, her? Have you even had blood tests? Compared genetic dna?"

He glared at her, objecting the thoughtless words she casted towards him."Yes! Whether you like it or not, she's a part of my life, Sol. Just like Shepard.", he replied.

Solanna shook her head. "So stubborn."

Outside the green gardens on the steps to the monument, Satima watched Shepard approach Garrus and Solanna. The arguing didn't end, but at least it simmered down. Crap. She's made a mess of everything. Opening her big fat mouth... she felt so out casted.

Tiberius observed her from afar. She looked more human, with some turian features. This "Satima", twisted her four-fingered hands into knots with anger. The way she stared off in a gloomy haze, gave him memories of a certain child of his own. He approached her, "Satima, is it? How are you feeling?", he asked.

Satima looked up in surprise, standing to greet him. "I'm fine. Uh, Sir.", she replied, nervously.

He chuckled lightly to her. She couldn't meet him eye to eye. It was too uneasy, looking at an an older Garrus. Tiberius started speaking, after glimpsing the others argue in the gardens. "Are you really what they say you are?"

"Yes. I guess.", she sat back down in defeat.

He took a seat beside her. "I'm curious to how that happened. But I'm guessing it's a long story."

For a strange reason, her small mouth curved into a smug grin. "The longest.", she smirked.

Tiberius observed her small frame. She seemed shorter than most humans. "Are they your real parents?", he inquired.

Satima turned to look at him, glancing off. "In a sense... yes. Another form of themselves. They're both gone... dead. I'm orphaned really. Those two...", she looked behind her with a smile. "They don't mind the difference. Taking me in anyways." She resumed looking straight ahead, to the floor.

Tiberius nodded in understanding. "You're not orphaned, Satima. You just have to find the right family.", he gestured for her to look at Garrus, Solanna and Shepard. "And, child... I think you have.", he flexed his mandibles into a warm smile.

Between the arguing and yelling, Shepard took a glance to the steps, spotting Satima and Tiberius. "Look.", she said, getting Garrus and Solanna's attention.

Satima made a laugh at whatever Tiberius was saying, as he too shared a chuckle.

"It seems they're getting along.", Solanna observed

"Yes. Despite us.", Shepard acknowledged.

She and Garrus exchanged a look, happy to see this change of scenery.

Together in the gardens, they all gathered sitting on benches. Satima stood among them, explaining her creation and the horrible future that she grew up in.
Small details on how she ended up in this timeline and the first meeting with Shepard. Satima continued with the reaper war, the conduit and surviving the insane sentarian commander Callon. Meeting Ronin and helping the citadel's citizens on the wards. She omitted Archer, the keepers and Hannah.

"So. Your saying there really are multiple dimensions?", Solanna asked.

"Well, I'm kinda here... aren't I?", Satima answered.

Solanna gave Garrus a glare before returning to her questions. "What are you going to do, then? Continue living on the Normandy? Do you have any goals for a future here? At all?", she pressured.

Satima tried to answer, but her voice trailed off. She never thought about a future. The strange question put her in an awkward position. "I honestly don't know. Where would I begin? Here or... out there?", she gestured to space.

Understanding the tone of his newly revealed grandchild, Garrus's father decided that the young woman had enough of questions. "I think we should resume this tomorrow. Solanna, let's go back to the hotel. I'm a little tired from all of this excitement.", Tiberius said with a wink to Satima.

"We'll catch up at C-sec headquarters tomorrow?", Garrus asked.

Tiberius nodded, leaving with a still confused and disappointed Solanna. Shepard stepped to Satima. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm going to... walk around for a bit.", Satima replied.

They watched the hybrid slowly walk away from the gardens, disappearing among the crowd. Garrus cleared his throat. "I'm sorry about Solanna's attitude. She's... still sour at me. For... for not being there when our mother died." He turned to a sympathetic gaze. "You needed me on the Normandy. Stopping the reapers was the most important objective at the time.", Garrus smirked in irony. "Time.", he uttered in personal upset. "I thought I had it. I could help you, then go home and say my goodbyes."

Shepard gazed on him, heartbroken.

"There was no way of kidding myself. No matter how many creds I stole from the gangs on Omega. How many top salarian scientists there were to poke or prod the disease. She had no time. We could prolong it, but the outcome could not be changed," Garrus stared in shame.

She didn't want to say anything in the open. Not while crowds of people stood around them. Shepard reached out, grasping his larger taloned hand, squeezing tightly. It was all she could do at this moment. All that can be done to acknowledge the concealed pain, Garrus carried. A pain she caused, with her war against the reapers.

On the Normandy, hours later, Shepard read her terminal's messages for the day. One came from Hackett. She eagerly opened it, tapping hard on the new keypad.

"Commander Shepard,

Per your request. You are cleared for the full and complete approval of the Alliance recognizing "Satima", as your own. Shepard, turian command will want to butt in on this. Unfortunately, after seeing her... appearance. I'm afraid they'll deny her access to full ancestry rights. But despite that, she's got a home on Earth. And her specialty skills, along with her "mother's" name, will land her many military positions. Congratulations."
H.

Shepard turned it off with a wide smile of satisfaction. No matter what anyone thinks, turians, asari, the rest of the galaxy, or even Garrus's sister. Satima will be recognized as a Shepard.

Zakera ward.

Satima stopped by a gun shop. Eying various new weapons she wanted to have. Maybe Shepard could spare some creds for it? She hoped. Up ahead, a crowd gathered around the landing platform for the cabs. She pushed through to see Sparatus of all people, walking into the crowd.

He talked about having a councilor presence in the lower wards. Giving people proof that he and his fellow councilors, cared of the citizen's well-being. Satima rolled her eyes. A human woman with a white vid-droid, asked him questions. "Councilor. Is it true that the Sentarians helped maintain peace among the wards? Without the council's authority?", she asked.

He waved off the question. "The Sentarians and the council have worked together, night and day, to ensure the safety of all citadel citizens."

"I see. And what of the threat to you and the other councilors by the unknown in the audience chambers, a month ago? Can you explain her agenda?", the reporter asked.

Oh crap.

"Only the crazed banter of an unpredictable maniac. But I'm not a mind reader. Why don't you ask her yourself.", Sparatus pointed to Satima in the crowd.

The crowd stood back, as the reporter closed in on Satima. She pushed her omni-tool in the hybrid's face. "Is it true that you threatened the authority and lives of the councilors?"

"I uh... well...", Satima stammered.

"And is it true, through leaked military Intel, that you are close to Commander Shepard of the Alliance?", the reporter nearly shouted.

"Is your name not...", the reporter looked on a data pad then resumed her loud questions, "Satima? The traveler from the conduit?"

Satima glanced around, nervously. "...maybe..."

"Satima could see the devious smirk on Sparatus's face as he left the ward quietly. She became blinded as the camera droid floated too close, shinning the intense light in her eyes. Satima started to panic with so many people around her. Crowded and claustrophobic from their stares and whispers. Clamoring to get closer to her. The reporters' questions repeated and repeated. She felt someone touch her back.

Satima grabbed the droid, throwing it across the floor. It went through a shop window, shattering glass and bursting into sparks. The reporter stared, terrified. As the crowd finally stood further back, a human male leaned out to accuse her. "You're a lawless villain!", he yelled in fear. Many others shouted their agreements with him. It started to get loud as Satima was greatly outnumbered. She heard a voice in her mind. "...outcry of the weak..."
A different gaze looked into the reporter's eyes. Satima gave an answer to them. "I impose order on this chaos of week organics. You live, because I allow it. You will end, because we demand it.", she glared, holding the terrified stares of the citizens.

"She's a fucking reaper!", someone screamed.

Satima backed away, already feeling cold. She quickly ran, hiding between the alley ways of the shops on Zakera ward. Spirits! What has she done?

That same night at c-sec. Ronin had already finished putting the maintenance room back in order. He overviewed a few issues, but nothing serious. Yet.

Outside in the markets, he ran into a group of turians. Somewhat drunk, but not causing any trouble. Ronin nodded their way until one of them spoke.

"hey...you! Everyone knows you've been screwing that... disgusting hybrid.", he slurred.

Ronin stopped short of his walking, popping his carapace neck to the drunken insult. He knows to ignore it and keep his anger in check. As he attempted to leave the area, another one began shouting.
"Must be real nice. To feel all that soft pink flesh. Is she all human everywhere? Or are there turian sweet spots to find?", he laughed loudly.


That was it. Ronin turned around, quickly sucker punching the asshole first. He then kneed the next drunk, following the third with his head. They all rolled on the floor, before the second started to stand. Ronin was just warming up. "Stay down! I'm warning you.", he glared.

"Piss off!", the second roared. He ran forward, and charged into Ronin. Lifting the spectre in the air and dropping him hard on the ground.

Crowds of onlookers gathered, and someone called for c-sec. Ronin grabbed his leg, causing the drunk to fall, straddling him. He gave hit after hit, until blue blood splattered his own sore knuckles. The other two shouted for him to stop. Memories of Omega clouded his mind to the painful groans of the turian beneath him. A shock of reality made him nauseous. Ronin calmed himself, seeing the badly injured turian. He went too far, and he knows it.

C-Sec officers came forward, "What's going on here?", they demanded.

Ronin stood, breathing heavily. "These three attacked me. I defended myself."

One of the officers, a human, cautiously scanned Ronin's omni-tool. With his spectre status highlighted, the officer and his partner, another turian, stepped back.
"Poor idiots. Didn't know what they got into.", the turian officer noted.

"Someone get me medical in the markets. And make it quick.", the human officer commed.

They both stared at Ronin in disgust. "Damn spectres, always going too far. Think they can play cowboy in every quadrant of the galaxy.", the human officer spoke again.
"What's a "cowboy"?", the turian cop asked.

Ronin finally went home to his temporary apartment on the lower wards. A place discreet and small. He laid his armor out, beginning to strip his under-suit to check for injuries, when a knock was at his door. Ronin carefully picked up a pistol, aiming it at the entrance as he opened it.
Satima turned to see the muzzle at her face. Ronin quickly put it away. "Spirits, Satima! I thought you were with those thugs."

"What thugs? Are you okay?", she asked, overlooking his open under-suit. She never saw him out of it before.

Ronin closed the door, motioning her to come in. "Just some idiots looking for a fight.", he replied.

Satima followed him, sitting on the couch in front of the window. Ronin sat on the edge of his bed, holding his side. That second guy got him good. He'll be sore for a while. He glanced up to see Satima averting her eyes. Ronin smirked, before noticing how she looked so sad.

"Satima. What's wrong?", he asked.

"I did something... very stupid.", she answered.

Ronin got up to sit next to her, "Tell me."

Satima stared into his golden eyes. "I was baited on the Zakera wards by Sparatus. He... made me look bad... really bad."

Anxious, he pushed her to speak. "How?"

"There was a reporter, and a crowd gathered around him. Some publicity stunt, no doubt. He saw me and used that moment to bait me in. Ronin, there were so many of them. Demanding answers to questions I didn't want to answer. How was I supposed to fight back? They were civilians!", Satima argued.

"What did you do?", he asked again.

She looked at him, then glanced down. "I threatened them. Destroyed that annoying camera droid."

Ronin tilted his head. "Is that all?" He started to laugh, "Damn, Satima. You made it sound like you killed someone! I wouldn't worry about Sparatus. Word in the hierarchy, he doesn't have long of his seat. You made a valid point months ago, in the council's tower. Don't let stupid people ruin you."

Satima smiled, suddenly kissing him. Ronin replied in kind, wrapping his longer arms around her. They were alone, and close now. Closer than the maintenance closet and the alley he occupied months before. Satima leaned back, breathing heavily and staring into his beautiful golden eyes.

She reached out to touch his chest, feeling the hard plate and leathery warmth of his abdominals. Satima has never seen a turian's bare chest and carapace before. Ronin flinched a little from her fingers.

"Did I do something wrong?", she worried.

He chuckled, "No. Your fingers... they're cold." His golden gaze piercing right through her.

She kept exploring his chest, trailing the carapace that circled his neck. Satima realized how far it was going, and stopped. "Ronin? Have you ever been with anyone else?"

He swallowed. "If you're asking if I've ever been with a human before, then the answer is no."

"Have a problem with humans?", she asked curtly, almost forgetting her question.

He laughed before clearing his throat in excitement. "No, ma'am." Ronin raised a brow, confused.
She looked away out the window. "Have you been with anyone?"

Ronin took her hands and cupped them into his. "Satima. What are you getting at?", he demanded gently. She glanced down. Ronin made her look at him. "Yes.", he sighed.

She smiled. "Good." Satima wrapped her arms around him, planting her soft human lips to his thin turian mouth.

Enjoying the moment, Ronin pushed her back again. Something about her questions gnawed at his thoughts. "Satima.", he spoke.

She sighed in annoyance. "What now?"

Ronin sat up, pacing. It seemed rude, but he needed answers. Spirit's, he's gotten into this affair, too quickly. She's the commander's daughter, a hybrid... different. The insults the drunk bastards spoke of replayed in his mind. Satima is kind and skilled. Never mind her unique appearance.

She crossed her arms, then realized he wouldn't stop pacing or giving her occasional stares. Maybe he's got second thoughts about this, and now she does too. Satima stood, upset with herself. Ronin caught her, putting her face to face with him.

"Don't leave. I want to ask you something first. Please, sit.", he begged.

Satima complied, sitting on the couch once more in an uncomfortable manner.

"How old are you?", he asked.

Satima cocked her head. "What kind of question is this?"

Ronin caught her nervous gaze. "Relax. We've only known each other a short amount of time, and I don't even know your age or your favorite color. At least that's how humans complain about a relationship."

Satima calmed, nodding. "Oh, well, I'm 20. How old are you?"

Ronin crossed his arms."28." He watched her have little reaction, then asked another question. "What you said earlier, about my past relationships. I can understand if you're worried about mixed species... intercourse. But, why?

Satima glanced away, nervous and feeling stupid. "It's not you, Ronin. It's me. I'm...", she let out a deep breath. "This is my first."

Ronin tilted his head, confused. "First?"

"Sex, Ronin... sex.", she said loudly, irritated.

Ronin fell back on the bed, stunned. That would've been very awkward. "So, you're a... ?", he said nervously.

She nodded. "You want me to leave? End this here, before it goes horribly wrong?", she smirked, looking away.

Ronin tried to smile, but flared mandibles soured into a stern look. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable. Maybe we shouldn't take it this far, just yet."

She nodded her head in agreement. "Right.", getting up with a sigh. "It's always nice to kiss you though." Satima smiled.
He stepped closer to her, "And there's always more maintenance closets."

They laughed together. Satima hesitantly touched his left mandible, letting her cool human fingers caress his face. Ronin liked it, gazing into her turian eyes. She stopped," I should go. I'll see you later, Ronin."

He watched her leave, thinking about blocking a few thoughts with a drink or… two.

Presidium-Following day

Outside the embassies, the next morning. Shepard waited with turian officials. Garrus promised to be back from c-sec. She knew he wanted to spend time with his father, and she wasn't about to interfere with that.

One welcome site among them, was Primarch Victus. Probably the only ally that would not have a problem with Satima. Relieved the Primarch survived the reaper forces on earth, Shepard learned of the possible paranoid conclusions of the turian hierarchy about her adult daughter.

Rumors whispered in every corner of Satima's brief encounter with the turian councilor last night and of course, a damn reporter.

Shepard paced in front of Victus. Satima is still running late. 
"Shepard."

Turning to see the hybrid finally walk up the ramp, Shepard brought the young woman beside her. 
"This is twice. Where the hell are you going to be late so much?"

Satima blushed, glancing off. 
"Never mind.", Shepard dismissed.

Victus and four other turian officials approached them. "Are we ready for the meeting, Commander Shepard?", he asked.

Inside the turian embassy, Victus led the questions of Satima's birth and genetic heritage. Shepard stood beside Satima, refusing to sit comfortably. She prepared a long report, detailing what Satima really is. Pass the gasping and occasional disbelief response. The party was divided.

"She's more human. Let the Alliance handle it from here. We can't spare any finances for tests.", a female official complained.

Shepard held out a data pad, "There's already been tests. It's conclusive to her hybrid physiology.", she informed.

"Then what is this about? Surely you don't presume her to join turian military?", a male spat.

Another male spoke up, "I'm sure the Vakarian's would not want this "anomaly" in their genealogy, presently. Commander, if she were more turian, than we could try a joint custody over her heritage. But, this young woman is too human. And I'd rather not start another damn war on the galaxy speculating how many of these... hybrids, are walking around among us!"

Victus studied the quiet Satima. She never looked at them, but he could see the effect of the harsh words it had on her. "Perhaps we should take a small break.", he advised.

In the lobby, Satima stood to the side, wanting to leave. Garrus finally showed up, much to Shepard's relief. "How did it go?", he asked.
"Not too well. They don't want anything to do with her.", Shepard replied.

Garrus shook his head, "You'd think after the reapers, and all the cooperation between our people, things would change."

Shepard caressed his mandible. "It will. Over time. We have to make them change their minds. Show them how special Satima is. Her physical appearance shouldn't matter."

Satima overheard their conversation. She walked beside them as Garrus looked to her. "If I can convince the council, would you like to join the turian military?"

"Or maybe the Alliance?", Shepard chimed in.

Satima felt confused. "Why? Both sides won't like me there, anyways. How am I to choose? Am I a turian? Or human?"

"You're both, Satima. That's what makes you so special.", Shepard answered.

Satima looked about the lobby, this galaxy doesn't want her here. She can't blame them."The galaxy is not prepared for someone like me.", she replied upset. She declined out of the meeting, as it continued without her. After it was over, Victus spoke with Shepard and Garrus in the hallway.

"It's amazing how stubborn our people can be at times. We display masterful military skill and tactical intelligence. But not the compassion to accept a biological phenomenon.", Victus spoke.

"Guess that explains why there are not many turian's adopting orphaned human children.", Garrus replies solemnly.

"They can't deny her paternal heritage!", Shepard argued angrily.

Victus understood. "Give it some time. I wish I could make them comply, but I have rules to follow as well." He sighed. "Shepard, tell Satima this isn't her fault. I noticed how upset this meeting made her. She's young and still impressionable. I'm ashamed turian kind couldn't show her our better nature."

Victus took his leave, as Garrus and Shepard stood alone.

"I'm not going to stop fighting for her.", Garrus declared.

"We'll find a way. Everyone will see. She's just a normal girl.", Shepard agreed.

Satima sat over the ledge of the docks. Crying would mean defeat, and anger would mean no control. She kicked metal shavings from an earlier shuttle fix off to the wards below, hearing them impact on walkways. Footsteps were heard behind her.

"Hey! This is for employees only."

Satima sat up quickly to face a female turian. She had purple colonial markings, and silver eyes. "Spirits. You're that girl from the citadel tower." She stepped closer. "I was there, and watched everything."

Satima crossed her arms, irritated. "Of course, you were."

"I heard every word you said to the councilors.", the turian woman continued.

"Yeah? Do you think I'm a danger as well?", Satima asked.
She shook her head, "Spirits, no. It's about time someone told them off. I mean, that Commander Shepard could've, but she was always too polite.", she shrugged.

Satima smiled, "What's your name?"

"Helana. I'm maintenance up here. Got a bad leg injury that puts me out of work on the ships. I used to be military. Lucky I survived the reapers.", Helana replied.

Satima glanced around to see the work Helana was doing. Shuttles needed maintenance and repair. It would be good to get her hands dirty again. "Need some help?", she inquired.
"Sure.", Helana answered excitedly.

In the weeks, ahead. A new human councilor was named from the newly established London Alliance Command, and placed on the council seat. Shepard had orders to meet with her, welcoming the human councilor onto the citadel. Babysitting another bureaucrat.

To Shepard's surprise, the new councilor wasn't the snobbish official she thought her to be. Instead, Lillian Emerson proved to be a new villain in the guise of a former Alliance tactician.

She had served in the contact and reaper wars. Surviving the chaos, obtaining medals and honors. Lillian believed in human-council cooperation. Displaying her intention of getting it by any means. And she had a surprisingly disturbing and dangerous interest, in Satima.

Inside the new office for Lillian at the embassies, Shepard and Satima were led in to have an audience with her. Lillian had blonde hair in a formal bun.

Her attire was an indigo colored suit, worn without crease or smudge. Displaying the Alliance sigil on her upper left shoulder of the garment. The violent eyes observed both the commander and Satima, with intense criticism.
"Commander.", she smiled. "Thank you for stopping by. I understand your current time off is coming to an end, but I had to speak with you again.", she walked out from behind her desk.
Stepping in front of it to lean on the edge. "Well. I've finally gotten the pleasure of meeting you, Satima. Tell me. What is your last name?"

"I... I don't have a "last name", ma'am. It's just Satima.", she replied, cautiously.

Lillian chuckled, glancing to Shepard, "I thought you adopted her with the Alliance's official backing?", She stared deviously.

"I have, ma'am. She didn't know yet. Until now.", Shepard replied a little irritated.

Satima quickly looked to Shepard, stunned. Adopted?

Lillian stared back at Satima. "Oh dear. I must have ruined the surprise.", she grinned. Leaning off the desk to walk forward, Lillian paced around them. "Pleasantries aside, Shepard, we must tackle the immediate threat today."

"And what is that?", Shepard asked alarmed.

"The threats your daughter can't seem to control. Threats to the council, threats to Sparatus himself. And of course, blatant violence on the lower ward streets.", Lillian informed.

"Satima has never threatened Sparatus or any person here!", Shepard argued.

Lillian stopped in front of them as Satima looked down, ashamed. "I did.", she replied.
Shepard snapped her head in Satima's direction. "What?"

Satima wrung her hands. "There were questions, and people all over me. I couldn't stand it. So, I... I said some strange things."

Shepard shook her head in disbelief when Lillian brought a vid out from her desk. "Pay attention, Shepard.", she warned with a glare.

Satima's scuffle with the camera droid, and her anger towards the crowd played. Lillian turned the volume up for them to hear what Satima had threatened with. "I impose order on this chaos of organics. You live, because I allow it. You will end, because we demand it."

Satima looked to Shepard pleadingly, as Lillian turned it off.

"Satima.", Lillian spoke.

The girl slowly glanced to the councilor.
"I have it on good authority, you're very close with a spectre. Despite how close you are, he will not hesitate to take you in, if I order it.", she warned. Lillian continued. "Shepard. Keep a tight leash on your "adopted" child. Or I will put one on her for you."

Shepard made a start to argue, when Lillian raised her hand. "Commander. You have several medals coming your way, and I wouldn't want to be the one... that takes them. Go back to the Normandy, and continue protecting us from the enemy abroad."

Satima stormed out. Shepard began walking slowly, when Lillian gave one last warning. "Oh, and Commander. Don't forget. You are a spectre as well. And my orders supersede your Alliance, and your loyalty to family."
Shepard balled her fist, stomping out angrily.

Moments later...

They couldn't find her anywhere. None of the lower wards she liked to roam or even the presidium's conduit. No one on the Normandy had seen her. Shepard felt too apprehensive to summon Ronin.
Less than a day to depart, and she may have to leave Satima behind. Lillian's cruel and malicious words caused this.

Two more hours, and Garrus decided to consider the sentarian's presence. The ambassador high-commander-Memtrix, had been back to discuss future trade with the council. He met her in the anterooms of the tower. Memtrix had finished with a meeting, when Satima's turian father entered the lobby. "Garrus. I didn't expect to see you."

His demeanor seemed aggravated, as a worried gaze settled on her. "Sorry about the lack of formality, but have you seen Satima? She's gone missing for hours, and we can't find her.", Garrus explained.

Memtrix looked at him surprised, "No, I haven't. I've only just arrived. What happened?"


"But, Satima is an official Sentarian. The councilor can do nothing without our assembly of Stratos's approval. I should meet with her.", Memtrix glared off.

"In the meantime, if she comes to you...", Garrus implied.
"I'll let you know, immediately. I'm here to summon her to receive an honor among my people, an invitation, rather.", Memtrix informed.

"For what?", Garrus asked, curious.

"To journey back with us. We've found it, Garrus. The way back home.", she informed in excitement.

Garrus stared at her with inner turmoil. He feared losing Satima now. Not when he and Shepard had made so much progress to integrate her into this new future. Though, what if... Satima chooses them over her own new family?

In citadel space, Satima flew a shuttle near the relay. It hovered there, tempting her to use to it. Leaving everything behind. But wouldn't that be easy?

"...go back and kick that blonde bitch's ass... she deserves it..."

Satima looked around the shuttle. There wasn't anyone on board.

"...no one defends you... aren't you tired of that?"

Satima shook her head hard, feeling the pain of a headache coming on. "Shut up. ", she responded.

"...they live, because we allow it. Do you find it strange, that Shepard hasn't said anything about Reaper's demise? What actually happened? Mmm?"

"Shepard doesn't know. No one does. The crucible is still being stripped and monitored. There's nothing there.", Satima replies.

She sat quietly in the shuttle, letting out a demented laugh. "There's no one here.", she whispered to herself. Cautiously looking around her in fear.

The next morning, Shepard waited outside the Normandy, anxiously hoping Satima would show up. Thirty minutes left. No Satima. Joker prepared the Normandy's engines, with the loud thrumming of the ship vibrating the docks she stood on.

"Commander.", Joker commed.

"Just wait.", Shepard demanded.

Twenty-five minutes.

Garrus stood behind Joker, sighing in irritation. Duty called, even when family should come first. He can blame his strict turian military upbringing, but... Shepard had a galaxy to reassure."Shepard. She's not coming. Satima can survive the citadel without us. I know it's hard. Memtrix promised to find her and keep her safe from the council. We have a mission to run, and the Alliance has ordered you back on Earth. I don't want to see anything go wrong on this. Please, Shepard. Come inside.", Garrus pleaded.

Eighteen minutes.

Shepard debated going rogue, telling all the officials to screw themselves. It wouldn't do any good. Knowing her duties and mission, she reluctantly boarded her ship. Once inside, Shepard watched the docks become smaller, as Joker and EDI navigated them out of the station's orbit, and into the relay.

Satima watched the departure sadly from a lower dock. She didn't want to abandon them, but their
lives would be much better without her.

Two weeks later. Earth-London.
Alliance command.

Shepard received medals of honor, for acts of valor, going above and beyond the call of duty. Rumors of promotion to captain filled the halls between soldiers and officials of command. Many more medals were awarded, giving her a feeling of heft over her upper left chest and shoulder. Her honors were displayed on every vid, in almost every part of the galaxy.

Government officials from other races either sent their thanks or shook her hand in person themselves. She is the galaxies greatest hero and defender. And no other position can feel more alone.

Many asari delegates and a few more turians that stayed behind stole her attention for hours. Surprisingly, a small group of batarians started a new hierarchy. One that would not solely focus on the destruction of humankind, but to enforce a new ideal. Peace.

This would be met with opposition from other loose batarian factions in the galaxy, but Shepard offered her verbal support for their peace. Even asking forgiveness for failing the colony that was destroyed by the meteor, preventing Harbinger's earlier attempts to invade.

After the informal gathering and all the speeches, Shepard finally got time to herself. And one other.

The one private location for them to be together, in her cabin on board the Normandy. Her fish tank had been turned into a giant terrarium. Traynor's doing. Filled with exotic plants both from Earth and Thessia.

Dim lights threw their shadows to the floor, as their bodies warmed the wall they were up against. Naked forms colliding into perfect passion. Every thrust sent a thrilling wave throughout her body. Leaving her breathless and wanting more.

Once on the bed, she took control, straddling him with her soft and taunt legs. The minutes leading into satisfaction, led them falling against each other. Slumped together, a bundled heap of gratification.

Garrus stroked her hair, while she lay across his chest. "I know you're probably tired of hearing it, but... I'm proud of you. I'm honored to be a part of your life, Charlotte. You are... the love of my life."

Shepard smirked, "Wow. Was it that good?"

He smiled, "Well, nothing can compare to your... ahem, skills in bed."

"Flexible enough for you?", she grinned.

Garrus turned her over gently, carefully laying on her. "I'm not very good at romance. Never have been. And probably never will be. But I can at least do this one thing right.", he exhaled nervously. "Charlotte, back on earth... before the reapers... I asked you a question."

"I remember.", she replied with a lovely smile.

"Well.", he leaned off her, getting up to sit on the bed. "Spirits.", he said, covering his face in defeat.

Shepard sat up, covering them both with sheets. "Is everything okay?", she asked.
He shook his head. "Jacob took Bryn to the citadel gardens. A friend of mine in c-sec, years back, used Avina. He hacked it and almost got fired. I've seen vids and even asked Tali for advice. She made me watch Fleet and Flotilla. Why is there singing?" He shuddered. "She's doing great on Rannoch, by the way.", Garrus sighed heavily.

Shepard chuckled, getting up off the bed. She stood in front of Garrus with a smile. He looked up to her, curious as to what she was thinking. On one knee, Shepard took Garrus's hand and started to laugh nervously. "Garrus Vakarian. Here... in this cabin, of the Normandy. Will you, a very sexy naked turian, marry this equally hot and pretty damned skilled in the bed, naked human woman, to be your mate, your wife?"

They both laughed, unable to control themselves. Garrus grabbed her, putting Shepard's legs around his waist. He feverishly kissed her, touching their heads together. "You know the answer.", he replied.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank everyone for reading. Thanks for the kudos, and thank you for liking this chaotic story. Every chapter is written with fear and sweat and tears and laughter. I put a lot of hours into them, knowing it's not going to be perfect. I want to inspire feelings, and a continuation I felt was hastily cut by the original ending. Thank you so much stopping by. :)
Judicial Pariah

Chapter Summary

Satima leaves with the sentarians, hoping to find her purpose. Shepard tries to use the media as a means to reveal her hybrid daughter's innocent intentions. She makes a deal with Emerson. Javik delivers a cryptic warning. Ronin investigates a murder, leading to more unanswered questions. Garrus pleads with the turian hierarchy to accept Satima.

A happeir occasion gives hope.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Previously, the day of the Sentarian vessel's departure...

The Sentarian command ship was held in the upper docks. Closer to the council and embassy. Citizens marveled and dreaded this ship's incredible size. Built like a solid tank, the vessel had dark grey hues and tones that overshadowed the docking station. Sharp lines and geometric designs covered the outward layer of the ship. Satima had finally reached the docks where the command vessel was held. She decided to leave with them.

This station neither wants or needs her. Satima is aware of this as she passes by a crowd of dock workers and other citizens. Their indifferent stares pushing her to pick up the pace. She knows her relationship with Ronin is problematic.

At least to her. Would he be held accountable to her actions, if she had acted out more violently than before?

She'll never know now, because she's leaving. That thought started to eat at her inside, sending disturbing images of Jormun's demise at the hands of Archer. His death is her fault. Even with Ronin she couldn't help but think of the brave quarian boy who had loved her.

Ahead of her on the platform, Memtrix stood watching her crew finish clearing the coupling detachments. She spotted Satima standing near the edge. "Satima.", Memtrix called out.

The hybrid walked to her. "What's going on?", Satima asked curiously.

"We did it. We're going home.", Memtrix informed."Callon had been keeping the coordinates through the relay all this time. He didn't mean for us to ever leave. I wonder if the Directive had gotten to him."

"Good enough theory. That or he's just a bastard.", Satima replied with a smirk.

The VI announced current departures for incoming vessels to dock. A few keepers took watch of the ships before returning to their work.

Satima observed this significant behavior from them. The memory of the council chambers suddenly replayed quickly in her mind. "Look how they observe their surroundings.", she pointed out.

Memtrix turned her head to look at them. "Yes. I suppose they should, considering they need to keep..."
Satima closely watched Memtrix's response. "I encountered a keeper that could telepathically speak to me. This happened over several months ago, back in the council chambers. It said they were not our slaves anymore, and spoke something in sentarian language."

Memtrix didn't look back at Satima, "Really? Interesting.", she replied.

"Very. Care to explain what you think?", Satima inquired while crossing her arms.

"Perhaps when Callon boarded this station they overheard our language and simply repeated it. Not having one of their own.", she answered unconvincingly.

Satima stood akimbo with a frustrated look. "Seriously? I feel you're not telling me something here."

Memtrix began walking away to her ship. "Really, Satima. You need to stop being so paranoid."

They both stood in front of the sliding hatch doors. "I know what I heard, Memtrix. How much have we been through to not trust each other?", she argued.

With a heavy sigh, Memtrix understood that she could no longer keep this dangerous secret from the hybrid. "You'll need to come with me. Back home to see the truth." Satima began to argue the long journey before Memtrix replied to settle the girls fears. "I can bring you back as soon as you like."

Another announcement came from the docks VI. As the sound of ships flying by them in the open space vibrated the very walkway they were standing on, Satima let out a long sigh. "OK. I'll go with you.", she glanced around her. "This place isn't home for me anyway."

Surprised, Memtrix responded. "What about Shepard? You should know that Garrus spoke to me about you. He was concerned, Satima. Maybe almost afraid you would leave.", she added.

Satima looked away, "They want us together as a family."

"There's nothing wrong with that, Satima.", Memtrix remarked.

She looked to Memtrix, "No. But it's better if I leave for a while. Get my head on straight."

"Well, you're welcome on Lithera. Kep jin lom-My people's home.", Memtrix offered.

Satima smiled, "I really need to understand what you're saying."

"That could be arranged on the way there.", Memtrix replied.

Inside the command vessel, Satima watched the sentarian crew members tap away at panels and control boards. The ship began priming, ready to leave. Memtrix stood over them giving commands in their language.

She stared through the large circular view windows on her command deck. Reminiscing over the past and how Callon would stare away into the galaxy. Watching the fighters of the Directive or mumble about their people's home.

Satima likewise observed the view as the ship began to move away from the docks. Soon the galaxy she fought so hard to save will be far away. And wondered to herself if Shepard would care. At that moment, she remembered Ronin. This could break his heart.

Satima wasn't sure if he felt more for her than an intimate friendship. The least she could do is send him a message right away. The honorable thing would've been to tell him face to face. Satima was
out of honor... and time.

Meanwhile on the station, Ronin received a message from Satima while he finished a report at the spectre office. He opened it immediately only to furrow his plated brow in distress. She wanted to thank him for his friendship and more? Hoping when she returned from her journey that they could still be friends. Satima felt they were moving too fast. A single emotionless goodbye was the last word.

He closed his omni-tool, determined not to lose her. Ronin quickly ran to the elevator in the embassy. Hoping to catch the sentarian vessel before it left the citadel docks. Once he reached the docks nearly knocking civilians out of his way. It was too late.

Out in the distance was the great command vessel leaving on its journey. Ronin glanced down feeling heart broken. "Why do you always have to run away?", he thought to himself.

-------------------------------------------

Normandy-three days later

Shepard read the message from Memtrix. Satima has indeed decided to leave with sentarians in their trek home. Memtrix continues to inform of Satima's intent to return, eventually. There's hopelessness in her daughter that she doesn't understand how to fix.

She knows there are chunks of Satima's past still undiscovered, and Shepard has a lot of questions. For instance, what was Garrus like? What did her alternate villain-self do? Most importantly, what all had happened to Satima.

Until her daughter returns they'll remain unanswered and constantly nagging her in the back of her mind. Shepard shakes her head. In a couple of weeks, she'll be marrying Garrus. She had hoped Satima could be there. As a family.

Looking up from her terminal to a sleeping Garrus on the bed, Shepard smiled sadly.

Citadel

It's been two weeks since the Sentarian's departure from the citadel. Shepard paced and paced at the docks until she stopped short of a platform. Listening to the VI alarm of an incoming ship. Watching the couplings unlock and extend towards the cargo vessel.

Shepard sighed loudly, running a hand through her loose red hair. It's gotten quite long. Nearly past her shoulders. Been too busy with everything else to notice.

Satima hasn't returned since the last time the Normandy docked at the citadel. Not even a single message or vid-comm. She began to worry. Her daughter left everything behind because she panicked. Shepard was agitated at herself for not stepping in at the warning signs. Satima's behavior wasn't on purpose, but as a front.

A wall to keep everyone away from her. So, her out of time hybrid daughter ran. Dividing their family, or what they envisioned at least.

And this divide against her family was caused by Emerson. Shepard paced again. She is a spectre after all. With an idea in mind she quickly took a cab to the embassy.

Speaking to Emerson and trying to communicate on Satima's behalf could help alleviate negative public pressure off her hybrid child. But how will she stop the devious agenda of the turian councilor and the mysterious reason why Emerson has it out for her?
On the presidium, plenty of citizens began gossiping loudly. Whispering and silently gasping behind her as she pushed her slow pace to reach the embassy elevator. "That's Commander Shepard.", one would say. "I hear that strange alien girl is actually her daughter.", another would reply. Shepard ignored it, steadily making her way to the offices.

She will either be a friend of Emerson, or at least have neutral ground with her. If it can be achieved at all.

Once inside the blue tinted lobby, Shepard made her way to the front of the reception desk. Asari worked busily behind the glossy counter to offer information for the citizens and newcomers. Two lines formed on either side of her that quickly parted ways as people started to recognize who she was. The asari in a purple dress made a light gasp before asking timidly what Shepard wanted.

"Y... yes? What is it you require, Commander?"

"To see Councilor Emerson. Please.", Shepard replied with a smile.

That seemed to have made the awkward situation worse. The asari quickly pressed a button which led to two-armed security guards taking position behind her. "They will escort you to Councilor Emerson's office.", the asari receptionist insisted.

"Um. Thank you?", Shepard replied confused and a touch worried.

Up the stairs, three steps down the hallway and through a door, Shepard caught Emerson speaking with a batarian and a volus. Odd.

Emerson raised a brow, "Commander? I wasn't expecting a visit from you today."

The two men left hurriedly, with the batarian giving her a scowl. Emerson leaned against her desk, arms crossed. "Shepard. Please, come in."

Shepard walked forward after Emerson dismissed the security guards. "That necessary?", she asked.

"Precautionary. For your safety. You are the most important person in the galaxy after all, Shepard.", Emerson replied.

Shepard started to pace in her councilor's grey office. Large plant basins decorated the corners with bright green ferns. "I've been thinking.", she spoke.

"What has our heroic Commander Shepard troubled?", Emerson asked. Her interests peaked.

Shepard finally took a seat, crossing her legs closely. Ignoring Emerson's slightly contemptuous tone. "About our last conversation. You made threats, but you also made a point."

"Oh?", Emerson replied. "Although my points were correct, I will apologize for being curt. Out of curiosity though. Which of my many points... did you get?"

"The ones about Satima being out of control.", Shepard reluctantly answered.

"Yes, indeed she was.", Emerson replied. She could barely contain the amount of satisfaction in this conversation. "What is it exactly you want me to do?"

"I'll do whatever it takes to show the galaxy she's not a monster. With the Alliance's approval, of course. I can be her voice while she's away.", Shepard pleaded. "Help me to prepare a more accepting galaxy for my daughter, and others like her in the future."
Emerson leaned back, smiling deviously. "Shepard. Others like her? Are we planning on... enlarging the family?"

"You know what I mean.", Shepard replied with a glare.

"My apologies, Shepard. I agree. Together, we can make a better galaxy for us all.", Emerson stated.

Shepard nodded. Emerson walked around her desk to take a seat. She couldn't help but smile at this newly developed situation. "Well. Family aside. I do have a very important job for you as spectre.", she informed.

Nervous about this job. Shepard sat forward, eager to learn what the requirements were. "And what would I be doing?", she asked.

Emerson stopped smiling and resumed a sterner gaze. "Shepard. As you know, the council has employed various men and women of different species to protect the galaxy. You included.", she continued.

"Spectres serve their purpose well. Delivering justice and of course, information... where it's needed. But that time is changing. The reapers are no more. As far as we can tell from your personal account and Satima's. But now, older animosities between our species and another are slowly being repaired. Thanks to the reapers, in fact."

"What do you mean? Does this have to do with that batarian and the volus?", Shepard inquired.

Emerson nodded. "Very inquisitive."

Shepard leaned back, a bit confused. She stared away at the desk thinking hard on what Emerson was going on about. "The batarians have an aggressive nature, and a history of arrogant superiority. The volus are responsible for every financial backing in this galaxy. Clever in business with a talent for currency. Useless in the field."

Emerson sat up to stand. Walking around the larger end of her office to the balcony. Shepard followed. They both overlooked the lake and the rest of the presidium below them. Sky cars passed by overhead in a traffic flow. Citadel denizens bustled around shops, markets and gardens. Keepers kept to the sides, checking terminals and other maintenance jobs.

Emerson began to speak again. "I'm funding the beginning of a new hegemony. The batarians have suffered the most out of the war. Humanity can gain a higher seat on the citadel and a better military stance throughout the galaxy. If we help them rebuild."

Shepard's eyes widened in shock. "But, the batarians hate us more than any other species out there.", she argued. "Why would they vouch or help humanity in anything at all?", asking alarmed.

Emerson turned to Shepard, "Gratitude. Their factions are small and their needs many. It's almost been a full year and we can spare the help now. Don't look so distressed. This is a good position."

Shepard sighed, disappointed. "This is sounding more like a political agenda than just humanitarian operations."

"Your spending too much time on this station. It's for humanities... and Satima's future. Remember that.", Emerson stated.

Shepard turned herself around leaning on the rail as she stared into the office. With arms crossed, she
asked a final question. "So, what kind of job is this?"

"I will send a report via your spectre code." Emerson grinned.

Shepard nodded in agreement. "Alright, Emerson." She began to leave as the councilor looked on the rest of the presidium with a wicked grin.

Thessia

Months of grueling hard work and dedication led to a productive rebuilding of the capitol. Inside a newly reconstructed temple, Javik-the last prothean, sat in contemplative meditation. Since the end of the war, Javik had been searching. There was an emptiness in his life, and it needed filling.

He's traveled from colony to colony. In search of that answer. Speaking to humans, turians, asari, drell... the endless amounts of surviving races surround him with insecurity. Why? Shouldn't he feel relieved? Bask in the victory over the reapers. Even if it is over fifty-thousand years later.

The silence of the temple echoed his thoughts. He heard footsteps of asari coming in to sit and meditate. Someone far off into the corner started to sob silently. The Sentarians where gone. His chance was taken from him. But not from Shepard's hybrid.

She tried to conceal her departure with them. Where did they go? The sobbing had gotten louder. Javik opened his many yellow eyes in annoyance. He began to sit up and stand, looking around the temple. At the entrance stood Liara T'Soni. Nodding to him. He welcomed a distraction from the other asari's cries. It was too much to listen to.

"Liara T'Soni. It is good to see you again.", he gave a slight smile.

"Javik. I hope you're enjoying your stay on Thessia?", she asked.

He glanced around then back to her. The asari's sobs echoing behind him. "I was... for a time." He scowled.

Liara led him forward outside. "My people are still recovering from the reapers. Many have lost family and friends to them."

"I know this pain, Liara.", he replied.

"Of course, you do. I'm only asking for you to have a little empathy. We may seem like primitives to you still, but we're learning how to cope with mass loss.", she explained.

Javik and Liara stood on the large steel balcony. Overlooking the half-built city and many construction sites ahead of them in the landscape. "I believed Shepard could do it. Save my home. This galaxy. We all owe her our gratitude... and more.", Liara stated.

"Yes. But do not forget the hybrid child. Her interference has started something.", Javik remarked.

Liara looked to him confused. "What do you mean?"

"I have seen the reports of your informants. These... journalist. From the citadel. The galaxy is unprepared.", he answered.

"Javik. I don't understand your cryptic precautions. Exactly what are you talking about?", Liara demanded, folding her arms in agitation.

He shook his head, walking away to the stairs. Liara followed to listen. "Her mother. Shepard's
alternate. She is a reaper, and so is the hybrid."

"You mean what happened at the beam on Earth. Right?", Liara asked.

At the bottom of the stairs, Javik faced her. "On the Normandy, I touched the hybrid's mind. There is great fear and pain. There is also anger... deeply rooted. Her youth gives an advantage to mentor, but now that she is gone with the Sentarians. Who knows the outcome."

"Are you saying Satima is actually dangerous?", Liara asked.

"I'm saying to be prepared... for anything.", he answered.

Illium
Four days later.

Shepard received a surprise message from Liara telling her to meet on Illium. That is was urgent. Caught between missions, the Normandy was quickly navigated to the planet. Azure docking hub was beautiful. Everything that was rebuilt on Illium oozed asari opulence. Shepard, along with Ashley, hurriedly walked into the market and auction ward. Eagerly waiting for Liara to show.

"Do you think the asari government wants something?", Ash wondered.

Before Shepard could reply, Liara showed up with two other women in tow. Jack and Miranda. She now wondered if they started a galactic war between the ex-cerberus cheerleaders and the psychotic biotics. "Shepard!", Liara shouted happily.

Something was definitely up."Liara? I received your message. You said it was urgent?", Shepard asked.

Miranda smiled, while Liara continued. "Yes. An urgent reminder that you're still young and to take some time to relax."

"Alright, Liara. What's going on?, Shepard said with a sarcastic glare.

Liara gave a sly smile." I believe you humans call it a bachelorette party."

Shepard shook her head, using her hands to figuratively push the anxious party girls back. "Oh, no. I'm not twenty-something. I just want a quiet... small, ceremony. Nothing loud or crowded."

Miranda laughed, "Shepard. You're a hero. Do you really think the entire galaxy is not going to notice a private event between you and Garrus?"

"Let's have fun, Shepard!", Jack interrupted.

Ashley started to laugh as Jack began pushing a reluctant Shepard forward. "Yeah, and the last time we had fun. My clone tried to kill us all.", she argued.

"Shepard?", Joker commed. "So... do we just, hang here?", he asked confused. Joker looked at EDI. "You better go with them. In case a clone shows up or something."

EDI stood with a smile. Sauntering past him as she brushed her cool metallic hand over his shoulder and winked. "I'll just keep the Normandy locked down tight. You now... waiting. For you.", he said as she slipped into the airlock.

Liara reserved a VIP room for them at the Blue Floret. An entire night of fun, booze and very inappropriate gifts. Jacks especially.
Shepard and Miranda sat at the bar. The empty club reserved for them seemed strangely quiet. "Have you guys started thinking about children?", Miranda asked between sips of her drink.

Shepard nearly choked on her own beverage before answering loudly over the music. "Umm... we haven't gotten to that part yet."

Liara blurted, "You already have one. Right? Satima?"

Jack pushed through to the table from the dance floor. "Yeah, but she's all grown up. They need smaller kids. Like the krogan."

Miranda rolled her eyes,"Krogan babies are very high maintenance. Maybe a human child..."

"Or an asari. Shepard knows and has seen the destruction first hand on Thessia. There are a lot of orphaned asari children that need a good family. And I know Shepard and Garrus would be great parents." Liara stated matter of fact.

"No one has doubted that!", Jack yelled.

Tali pulled Shepard from the table, as she was about to take a drink. Spilling it everywhere and suddenly being led by Tali to dance."Quarian children are sweet and mild tempered. Savy with tech too. Little Chitka would make a great addition to the Shepard-Vakarian family. Oh! And to the Alliance as well."

Shepard nodded before being viciously pulled back to Miranda, "Human children are orphaned on earth as well. Shepard should stick to her own kind. No offense. Maybe in a couple of years, she could think of adopting a Quarian child."

"I think GARRUS would like a say in this!", Tali shouted, eyeing Miranda.

Poor Shepard was being squished between them. "Guys... guys... isn't this conversation a bit sudden?"

Traynor stood on the table, "She should adopt ME! I would like to be more than just... wait... where am I?"

EDI caught Traynor as she stumbled off the table. "My hero...", Traynor batted her eyes and giggled.

EDI put her down to a couch before pulling Tali and Miranda off of Shepard. "I believe the Commander will decide when the time is right.", she said aloud.

Shepard quickly ran out on the balcony. Finally, able to take a proper sip of her booze. A family. Little kids? It honestly scared her. She wondered if Garrus felt the same way. At this time, she couldn't contact him. Being away on Palaven and giving a report to his superiors. Garrus sent her a message after he left. Explaining the reason for his departure. A small private council was being held, and he was to attend it.

"Hey! Party girl. You okay?", Ashley asked walking behind Shepard.

"Yeah. Just catching my breath.", Shepard replied.

They watched a beautiful blue sunset go down over the tall buildings in the city. Ashley looked at Shepard then gazed out to the city-scape below. "Are you going to be okay? I mean, I know you must be worried about her. Leaving with the Sentarians. Whoever the hell they really are... uh and with this party, the upcoming event. My sister had to have a small ceremony. It was mostly because
her husband was shipping out within the next week. Before the... the reapers hit earth.", she looked away.

Shepard sighed, "I'm going to be okay. She'll let me know she's alright. Satima can handle a lot more than she lets on. And I'm not worried about this. I have the best friends in the galaxy to support me.", she smiled.

"Hey! Is anybody going to dance with me or not?!", Jack shouted from inside.

They both laughed. "Come on. Let's go celebrate.", Ashley invited.

Shepard downed her drink fast, "Amen to that.", she agreed.

One week later
Dark Star Club-Citadel

A female quarrian named Kesh, waited for whoever she was supposed to meet, ordering a drink while sitting to herself. Her subtle ash tinted suit camouflaged well in the dark corner. The music blared in the background until a batarian in merc armor sat next to her. "You Kesh?", he growled.

The quarrian gulped hard enough to choke herself. "Yeah.", she answered.

He gave her a data pad. She quickly took it. Dancers moved about the floor, unaware of this strange meeting. Kesh looked around then opened the screen. After a small moment of reading its contents she let out a quiet gasp. Ancestors. "This can't be real.", she murmured.

Councilor Emerson wants her to kill the turian councilor!? She glanced away, hoping it wasn't real before looking back on the screen. Instructions popped up.
"Hack the controls of the sky car. Have it crash into the presidium lake? Turians can't swim."

Why Sparatus? She's just a quarrian nobody. Why choose her to commit this awful deed? Kesh glanced up to the crowd. "H... how many ships can be secured for me to return to my home world with?", she asked nervously.

She doesn't know what disgusts her more. The fact she's now an assassin for hire or that she's using this terrible opportunity to give her people a better chance in space exploration.

The pad showed a virus shutdown before deleting its own contents and becoming corrupted. The batarian started to speak. "You're an anonymous hire. There are no links to you here on the citadel. The human councilor trusts in your abilities. Don't disappoint.", he said gruffly.

Kesh stared off. Ancestors. For the home world, she hopes will forgive her, someday.

Palaven
Hierarchy Capitol
Administrative Defense Advocacy Center (ADA)

He's walked these same steps before. When the reapers were knocking at their doors from the relay and Shepard stayed incarcerated for the deaths of thousands of batarians, she was not responsible for. His father vouched for him and spoke with the primarch, then alive. Before Victus. And he stood before them. Their own council. Explaining the importance of reaper strategy and survival.
Token task force. Token privileges.

But now he's here for a different reason. A reason he never thought to be answering for. Explaining
the existence of his hybrid daughter and how she came to be. Answers he doesn't possess. Soon, the meeting will begin.
Garrus just hopes he can keep the hierarchy off his kids back. Much like his own father has done for him.

The Normandy docked at the citadel for routine inspection.

Shepard left for the embassy. Once inside Emerson's office, she ran into an argument between the councilor and a quarian girl.
"I didn't agree to this!", she yelled furiously.

Emerson glared to the quarian. "You asked for employment to help your family. That kind of promise requires sacrifice, Kesh."

Staring at Emerson in disbelief, Kesh backed away. "I won't take lives for you!"

Emerson raised a brow as Shepard walked forward with an alarmed gaze. "What the hell does she mean by taking lives for you?", she demanded.

Kesh and Shepard exchanged concerned looks. "Ancestors.", Kesh shook her head and glared at Emerson with her lavender eyes. She ran out of the office.

Emerson sat heavily in her chair, covering her face before glancing to Shepard. "There are a group of dangerous vorcha threatening my hard work for the current batarian leader. I asked her to help my private reconnaissance team to take them out. It seems she's had enough of war. I don't blame her."

Emerson explained.

"Isn't that a little odd? Why not get a spectre on it instead of a young quarian?", Shepard questioned.

Emerson glanced down. "The galaxy fears what it cannot understand. And that fear can drive a person to do unspeakable things. Including sabotaging an effort at peace. Not every spectre supports what I am trying to accomplish, Shepard. Even with the council backing me... it's not easy to change people's minds, so steeped in a traditional way of thinking."

An asari assistant walked in. "Ma'am. The rest of the council is waiting for you."

"As you can see, Commander. I must attend another meeting, but please don't go. Wait for me in the lobby. There is extremely important information we must discuss."

Outside the office, Shepard wandered around the lobby. Listening to various species groups complain or chatter about their lives. Business deals, political gossip and financial threats surfaced as the main topic for the day.

An Elcor slowly rebutted an argument he had with two hanar. Enkindlers this (despite Javik having numerous times explained the truth), and "with barely contained irritation". She was about to display barely contained irritation with Emerson, until a woman's voice called out to her across the lobby.
"Commander Shepard.", she heard.

Shepard glanced behind her to see Khalisah and her camera droid wandering forward. Perfect. Time for round four.
"Well, if isn't my favorite reporter. How have you been Khalisah?", she asked.

Khalisah turned her droid off for the moment. "Doing well. Plenty of stories to cover. Now that the reapers are gone and people can get back to their lives."
"Good to hear.", Shepard replied. Hoping this would be the end of the conversation.

"Say, Shepard. Where is that young woman? The hybrid. I have a few questions to ask her.", Khalisah wondered.

Shepard crossed her arms, "She left over a month ago, I haven't heard from her since. What kind of questions were you going to ask?"

The reporter leaned on her back leg with a smirk. "Nothing more than the usual. Who is she? Her parentage? Whether the rumors are real?" She watched Shepard's response. "Why? Do you care to answer those questions in her absence?"

Khalisah is no fool. She's always had a problem with Shepard before. Whether it was allying with aliens or helping them. Khalisah had an issue. Except for the last time, they spoke in this very same spot. Right in front of the elevator and the information board.

Where Shepard had to console the obnoxious reporter, and for one moment they shared a mutual feeling. Stopping the reapers and getting vengeance against them. Reluctant at first, Shepard then knew this could be the beginning of clearing up all the previous misunderstandings. "Yeah. I would.", she replied.

Khalisah started beaming with a wide smile. "Excellent." She turned her camera droid on, and opened her omni-tool's voice recorder. "I'm here with Commander Shepard at the embassy. Commander: Who is the young hybrid that threatened the council and had an altercation with another reporter, here on the citadel?"

"Her name is Satima. She's a turian/human hybrid. And she didn't threaten the council. Only responded with emotions instead of manners.", Shepard informed.

"I see. Is it true that Satima is your relative?", Khalisah asked.

"She's my daughter. The information behind that occurrence is classified by the Alliance. Not even the council knows the details.", Shepard answered.

"Wow. Um. Do you think the council will make an appeal and take legal action against the Alliance, and you, for the details? Considering she's not entirely human. A more serious question: How would the turian hierarchy respond?"

Here it comes. "I believe the council is satisfied with the answers already supplied, and the turian hierarchy has already made it abundantly clear they don't want anything to do with Satima."

"I've done a little investigating on the citadel. It seems your daughter had a hand in rescue operations with another spectre.", Khalisah informed.

With a small grin, Shepard replied. "She's got Shepard in her. More importantly, Satima has courage. I've not known her to back away from helping others. Even if her own life is at stake."

Khalisah nodded in understanding turning off her droid. "Shepard, I can see how much you worry over her. You're usually quite evasive when it comes to the spotlight.", she chuckled. "I've heard stories from the lower wards of Satima's help. Her alien friends caused the council to act faster in helping those most in need on this station, as well."

"Please, if you could. Add that in there.", Shepard asked.

"Certainly. Thanks for the story. And Shepard... thanks for everything you've done to stop the reapers.", Khalisah smiled.
Later...
Emerson returned and waited for Shepard while sitting at her desk, when Sparatus barged in unannounced.

"Why councilor. How unexpected to see you.", Emerson frowned.

Sparatus stood in front of her staring in anger. "The rest of the council would like to know why you are privately funding a batarian election without our knowledge."

"If it were without your knowledge, councilor. You wouldn't be in here causing my delicate nerves to throb." Emerson sat up, "But since you are here. Please, let us discuss this.", she spoke sarcastically.

He paced in irritation. "You've decided to use Commander Shepard, without our consent, as a sponsor for the this new batarian hegemony. Causing other political affiliates to panic! Councilor Anderson never..."

Emerson stood face to face with him. "Councilor Anderson was a respected and honorable man. He knew what needed to be done for the good of this galaxy and all who live in it. Including you, Sparatus. He went behind your back to help Shepard against the collectors and reapers. They're both gone because he put her in charge of eliminating them. Shepard has great potential to bridge our two species together against the overwhelming odds that pose a threat."

Sparatus took a step back. "Shepard may be a hero and a spectre, but her daughter was created by monsters. Nothing good can ever come from the reapers.", he warned.

Emerson smirked, "I remember it was less than three years ago, when you discounted Shepard's claims on the reapers. You made a mistake that cost the lives of billions of people. By rights, you shouldn't be allowed in this position to make them again."

Sparatus flared his mandibles, "Are you threatening me, Emerson?"

Emerson turned her back to him to look out the balcony. "I believe you have meetings stacked high on your desk. Good day, councilor."

Sparatus turned around fuming to see Shepard standing at the doorway, glaring at him. He tried to quickly leave before she stopped him by stepping in his way. "My daughter is not a monster, Councilor.", she warned.

Shepard let him through.

Five hours later.

Sparatus finished his meeting with the primarch. He didn't agree with Victus on the new reconstruction of the outer turian colonies, but at least he has a good head to not interfere with Sparatus's own plans.

The council. They don't trust him, and everyone close enough knows this. But he can snap his talons and older families still loyal to his own could easily rid the citadel of his enemies. That salarian coward, Valern, wouldn't dare send his people's STG's after him either.

Tevos was too preoccupied with Thessia to even care. If Sparatus took control of the citadel, with various turian colonial backing and some of the volus financial fleets, he could employ more turian patrols in citadel space, replacing the asari completely. He looked up from his personal terminal. It was getting late.
Sparatus was escorted to his sky car. Sitting in leather comfort, he relaxed rethinking his current plans and that damn Emerson. No doubt she has some sinister plan with Shepard. Funding the batarians and hiding large transactions. He had a tracer on the volus that left her office yesterday. Barla Von. No coincidence he formally worked for the shadow broker. Who all but completely disappeared after the reapers were defeated. If you could call it a defeat.

Once the car began flight he closed his eyes. He could see it all clearly. Private funding, the batarian election of a new hegemony, and Commander Shepard with her hybrid daughter. Emerson is using them to gain political power on the citadel. Not if he has something to do about it. The two-minute ride started to slow.

He opened his eyes to see the auto control panel was being actively hacked. By who? Sparatus clawed his way to the front seat, trying anything to reach C-Sec. Suddenly the sky car rocked back and forth, nose diving straight into the lake, hitting the water like smashing into a cement wall. Sparatus hit his head hard.

Blue blood dripping from a small gash on his fore-plate. He slowly began falling unconscious as the car started sinking into the water. Screams and the faint sirens of C-Sec echoed in his ears. Water began filling the cabin.

A dark-haired woman stood watch from a distance amidst frantic citizens. While confirming the car was completely submerged she received a private comm from Emerson.

"Good. You took out a potential threat to the peace and good of this galaxy. My plans for the batarians can't be interfered by his paranoid personal issues with Shepard and the hybrid. Give us a few weeks, then meet me back in my office. You'll have a new boss to work for."

She turned around, hastily leaving the crowd gathering to watch the tragic situation.

Palaven
Heirarchy-Public Judicial Chambers
Located inside the ADA

Garrus waited until called. Knowing his people would want answers. Real ones. Turians aren't paranoid. Tactical and brutal at times, but never paranoid. Well, only if the occasion called for it. Tactically speaking. Except this occasion did. Victus saw a scared child in Satima. Despite her grown appearance. The rest of the high ranking turian officials only glimpsed a rejected experiment. An abomination created by monsters.

This didn't sit well with him. In fact, it infuriated him to no end. Garrus personally admitted he had his doubts about who and what Satima really is, and the truth delivered a total shock to him.

He couldn't accept it, not at first, but Shepard and Satima changed his mind. Watching them become closer as a little family. It helped him to realize that though this young woman was not from this time-his time. She still had his genetics. And something else in her very eyes that haunted him.

Inside the lobby to the Public Judicial Chambers, Garrus occasionally observed other turian men and women going about their business. A nod or two was sent his way or a glance quickly averted. He stared outside the massive glass windows that displayed Palaven's beautiful silver mountains. Even the sky had a metallic sheen to it. Garrus had been waiting for nearly two hours. Sitting on an uncomfortable cement bench. A turian assistant approached him.

"They're waiting for you, sir."

After he went inside the chamber, Garrus stood at attention. Ready for the hard questions.
"You have a civic duty to the hierarchy, Officer Vakarian. We need answers, some clarification if you will. On this... this offspring of yours from another timeline. You do realize how absurd this sounds.", Agripenex asked confused.

She is the acting high-ranking officer and councilor in this meeting. Her steel gaze and tan colonial markings peered at him in the dimmed room. The others sat before him as he stood still. He knew the meeting on the citadel was just a farce. With the primarch officially neutral, Garrus was on his own when it comes to an explanation. Formally.

Before he spoke, another turian official with an olive-toned avian gaze, interrupted. "Using Commander Shepard's report as reference. I think we can surmise the whole timeline to be nearly true.", he confirmed.

Agripenex stared at Garrus. "What we need to know. Is the truth on whether she is a danger to us and to the rest of the galaxy? The reapers created her. They were monsters. Don't think, regardless of her appearance... that she isn't one too."

Garrus shook his head defiantly, "She's not a monster. Satima would never harm anyone without cause."

The male turian official, Malen, spoke. "You are saying she is military trained?"

"I'm not sure I would call it military.", Garrus replied.

Agripenex held out a data pad, "No. Just a form of discipline and reeducation. Courtesy of the reapers.", she mocked.

Garrus began to argue when Malen interrupted. "She threatened Sparatus, and the rest of the council! Publicly assaulted the press and proceeded to threaten the entire populace of the citadel with her own harvest. Officer, if she were entirely turian. We would have to put her away until deemed sane enough to walk around the council's ante chambers!", he shouted angrily.

Agripenex stood up, glaring down Malen with her steel gaze. "Officer! One more outburst in this chamber and I will have you personally thrown out! Sit!

Malen flared his mandibles in controlled anger, before complying to her. After a small moment of silence, she turned to Garrus." We have reasons to be cautious. It's not a personal agenda against you or your family. But you have seen with your own eyes firsthand the destruction the reapers have caused. Now, another question for you. Answer honestly. From all your time spent with her. Can you tell us whether our precautions are rational?" Agripenex asked.

Garrus looked down. He knows how unpredictable and unstable Satima is, but to blame her wasn't right. She's been through hell since the beginning. Since before he met her. Shepard will hate him for this.

"To a degree, you have a reason to be cautious. Only because she has been a victim of the reapers from the start. Not out of choice. She needs guidance. A direction our people can show her. The humans on her mother's side have already accepted her. Why can't you?", he argued.

"You're saying you've already accepted her as your own?", Agripenex asked curiously.

Garrus gave one nod. "Yes.", he replied.

Agripenex exchanged looks with the rest of the council, then stood. "The hierarchy appreciates your loyalty and honesty. We will take every word you have said, examine your interpretation of this
young hybrid."

Everyone had been excused and started to leave, when Agripexx waved Garrus to the board. "I need to personally meet Satima. She must come here and show herself. If the hierarchy is to accept her as turian, she needs to prove that she has no allegiance to the reapers. Publicly."

"Of course, councilor.", Garrus understood.

"Out of respect for your family. Malen was upset about the councilors on the citadel for a reason. Sparatus has been murdered. Our sources have revealed Satima had left weeks ago, with the sentarians. She needs to return to give her account. That would help her case."

Garrus nodded. "Spirits. Does the hierarchy think she's behind it?", he asked.

"I can't give an answer. This is only what I've been told.", she replied.

Garrus stared. "I refuse to believe that. There's no proof!"

"Noted. You're dismissed. And, congratulations, Officer Vakarian. It's not every day you get to marry a galactic hero.", she mused.

He tried to give a thankful smile, but only ended up nodding before leaving to his father's home. Hopefully, his father can give him better council.

Citadel
Presidium-Councilor Sparatus's crash scene

Ronin studied the data carefully. Watching the vid's of both levels and the lower sectors. The sky car had definitely been sabotaged, but not the vehicle directly. Someone had hacked from afar and controlled it to crash into the lake. He needed to clear his head after losing Satima and bury himself in work.

Emerson gave him plenty to do. After his investigation of the crash is through, Ronin was to observe vorcha activity in the Terminus. Interesting. He finished scanning the area again. Looking for anything that seemed out of place from the everyday ordinary.

Sparatus had enemies, but this act was brazen and sloppy. Hurried to eliminate him. The vid of the crash played on his omni-tool. He watched it a thousand times before something caught his eye. In the far corner of the crowd stood a figure. Overshadowed by the nearby trees of the grassy lawn. Ronin zoomed in to reveal a female figure with dark hair. She seemed undisturbed by the event, unlike everyone else.

A message came in. "Naramis.", he said.

"Spectre, we have the trace data you requested. I'm sending you the copy now.", a C-Sec representative offered.

He pressed the data copy, reading the results. The traced hack led into the lower wards. Ronin quickly made his way to Zakera. He followed the trace into an alley. Ronin heard screeching and muffled conversation ahead. Behind tall crates and around a keeper, the red lit zone showed a group of vorcha.

"We stand here long. I no want to stay. Trap I say."

He leaned in closer.
"She told us wait here! Big payment to babysit a bunch of crates. Shut your whining!", another yelled.

Ronin listened until he heard the whine of a rifle priming behind his head. He turned slowly with hands up to a vorcha. "Caught a rat.", it laughed aloud.

They joined him, as Ronin was led to the group. "Look, guys. I'm just looking for a woman. Dark hair. Have you seen anyone down here like that?", he asked.

The middle vorcha with red and brown armor chuckled. "Look for female. No females here. Try Chora's." All of them snickered.

Ronin let out a sarcastic laugh. "Yeah, yeah. OK. I'll just head out through there.", he pointed to the door up the stairs behind them.

The vorcha leader behind him pressed the muzzle of the rifle hard against Ronin's head. "Don't think so. She ordered us to kill anyone that interfered. These crates you want. Not female. She said turian would come looking. And here you are."

Ronin knew that non-violence was out the question, and quickly turned to hit the gun out of the vorcha's grasp. Delivering a hard blow to his stomach and face. The others ran in to grab him. He picked up the rifle and fired on them. They fell swiftly. One of the dying vorcha coughed blood, staring with black eyes. Ronin knelt to him.

"Who is this woman that ordered you to ambush me? Speak!"

"...no dark hair...", he coughed. "...yellow... and... blue...", he stopped speaking and died on the cold metal floor.

Ronin looked around. What a mess. He called C-Sec and left in a hurry. Whatever is going on, must be big. Some kind of back door political coup, maybe? He kept to himself on the lower wards. His days on Omega taught him enough about false security.

Ronin stepped into a club, taking a lone seat in a booth. He watched the dancing and bar fights. A perfect setting to obscure him, while he reviewed the vid again. A woman with dark hair, overlooks the crash.

The vorcha claim a human woman with blonde hair ordered them to kill him. He stared ahead, knowing this is a good sign. He's finally getting too close. And being this close, means he'll catch the villain.

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Illium-Monastery garden
One week later

On the balcony, Garrus approached Shepard watching the sky cars fly past the building. A gorgeous purple sunset illuminated the city, while small twinkling stars high above dotted the sky. She stood there still as stone against the silver railing, her soft blue gown accentuating her goddess-like figure.

"What's on your mind Charlotte?", he asked, standing next to her.

She stared away while emerald eyes searched in the vastness of the city. "Our future.", she replied.

"It's looking great from here.", he said with a smile.

Charlotte giggled, "Of course you would say that." They both leaned together, his arm carefully
wrapped around her bare shoulders. She looked at him lovingly. "The galaxy is secure now. At least as far as we know. There's time for you and me. For everyone."

"Are you worried about having a family?", he asked inquisitively.

"Yes. I am. How would we even start? We both have our duties and military career still ahead of us. How can children fit in? I know not biologically. And not counting Satima. Where ever she is. But, I'm saying that... our lives are not exactly... normal.", Charlotte questioned.

Garrus nodded, "No, but that doesn't mean we don't deserve one. You know how it is for military families. All the moving around and different schools, homes. Friends. I know if we give it our best and don't give up. We can have a family. A great one. You would be one hell of a mother.", he smirked.

Charlotte grinned, leaning further into his arms, "Any kid would love to have you as a father."

They stood longer, watching the night sky overtake the city. "I wonder where she is. If she's hurt or if she's sad. Is she happy?", Shepard asked aloud, worried.

Garrus stared out to the city below them. He hadn't thought about Satima lately, and felt horrible for it. "I can't give the answers to that. We can only hope she'll be home soon. And that everything will be alright.", he replied.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for stopping by. :)
Chapter Summary

The new human councilor displays an agenda. One Shepard and her friends can't ignore. Tensions push an investigation. Leading to another close call.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One month later.

Shepard tosses and turns from a nightmare, where she stands in front of a mirror. The reflection of herself stares back, then blinks. An eerie feeling catches her attention, until her reflection becomes covered in red light. Cracking the pale flesh into veins of crimson agony. The familiar sound of a reaper startles her to wake.

Cold sweat formed on her forehead. She got up quickly to wash her face in the bathroom. After the wash, Shepard sat down on the couch. The small holo clock across the room read somewhere in the am. In two days, the Normandy will dock.

Emerson has her mission all planned out, made copies on data pads for her. She picked one up from the coffee table.

"The Batarian Hegemony. What a spiraled mess of personal agendas. Their hate towards the systems alliance has been the biggest problem in the galaxy for quite a long time. Even after the reapers nearly decimated their people. Various factions have risen up like a plague to constantly mock and deface humanity. Using an autocratic leadership hasn't helped the batarian society in their rants to be a part of the council on the citadel.

However, there is a smaller faction. Denouncing the past slavery that was so ingrained in the minds of the batarian populace. Wanting to cut themselves away from the older doctrines and methods of government that only harmed their image. They want to detach themselves from the raiders, the gangs and the other groups that only seek chaos to gain power."

Shepard was surprised of Emerson's information. She continued.

"Months ago, you met with this small faction. Offering your verbal support for peace. I want you to use the Normandy to reach Omega. Seedy place, I know. But this meeting with their leader must be more discrete. He will have a price on his head. And I need you as a spectre to keep both parties intact. To make sure he agrees to my terms, and deliver a competent smile. This peace is for us all. Securing a place for Satima when she returns. Good Luck."

Shepard put the data pad down. Peace in the galaxy. This entire mission sounded desperate.

Emerson deliberately avoided Sparatus's memorial. Claiming the arguments between them would only serve as fuel for the media and his loyalists to be used against her.

It was all too coincidental. Unfortunately, she couldn't find the quarian, and Emerson new how to charm or intimidate herself out of any situation. Including Ronin's thorough questioning about those
vorch.

Shepard hadn't been completely honest to Garrus about her plan with the human councilor either. Regretting the request for his help initially as a spectre, and not his mate.

The next two days went by quickly with the Normandy docking at the citadel. Inside Emerson's office, Shepard and crew waited to see her. Emerson decided for small talk. She began pouring cool water from a decanter into glasses. "From my recent reports, Officer Vakarian. You are having difficulty convincing the hierarchy to register Satima as your daughter.", she informed. "Such a shame a well renowned and highly respected people should turn to biased fear." Emerson feigned pity.

"It'll take some time, but I'm confident they'll change their minds soon.", he replied.

"No one else is working as hard as Garrus is, to help Satima have a secure future in our new family.", Shepard chimed in.

Emerson glanced their way before finishing the refreshments and handing them out. Ashley refused, carefully watching the councilor, who let out a devious grin before refraining into a solemn stare. "Interesting. Considering Officer Vakarian decided to side with the small council in agreement on Satima's unstable behavior."

Shepard gave Garrus a confused look. "What is she talking about? You didn't tell me you had a meeting over Satima. You said it was about your position and family."

Garrus didn't tell her everything, as he didn't want her to doubt his motives in supporting Satima. "If I didn't agree on some of the truth. They would never have wanted to meet her. Charlotte, I got her a chance to explain the situation."

Shepard put her drink down with a scowl. "Explain what?" She then turned to Emerson. "Your ridiculous claims months ago, have not really helped her image, Emerson."

Emerson gave a surprised look. "I merely gave a small warning to her behavior. She has a better shot now at explaining everything necessary when she returns.", she replied. "Although, I have to agree that Sparatus was very unfair to her. I hope the new turian councilor has a better understanding."

Garrus gave Emerson a puzzled look, before he turned his gaze back to Shepard. "I didn't do it to spite her, Charlie. Satima is off-balance. She needs help to control it."

"And I suppose her being subjected to more prejudice is the way to go.", Shepard argued.

Garrus set his glass down hard as small drops of water spilled over the rim. "No! Aggripex has Satima's best interests in mind."

Shepard crossed her arms, "And I don't?! I'm her mother!"

"And I'm her father! You're the one that has decided to join her...", he pointed to Emerson, "...with this little "help the batarian" mission."

Ashley understood Emerson's agenda now.

A dark-haired woman walked in to see the argument. She heard a little of the conversation outside the door. "I see the family reunion has started.", she chuckled in her British pitch.

Emerson gave a wide grin, as Garrus stepped closely to Shepard. "Commander and crew."
announced, "This is my liaison officer. Rasa."

Everyone stared in disbelief. Shepard gave a cautious look to Emerson. "What the hell is she doing here!!?"

Rasa broke through the tense atmosphere. "Aren't we here for a debrief?", she reminded.

"Of course., Emerson replied.

"Wait a second! This is Mia. She tried to kill me with my clone! You... you hired her?, Shepard shouted upset.

Rasa stepped closer to Emerson. "Ah, yes. My younger days of rebellion. Don't worry, Shepard. I'm not here with any clones., she mockingly laughed. "Our new councilor has seen my value and read my exceptionally good behavior while incarcerated. I have been given a second chance. To work with you."

"Load of horse shit, Commander.", Ashley warned.

"Agreed.", Garrus replied sternly.

Emerson stood between the two groups. "Please, everyone. Rasa, or as you knew her... Mia. Has changed. She realized the ridiculous agenda of Cerberus and their "humanity only" absurdity. I know that peace can only be achieved through every single race of this galaxy."

"So, you hired a deranged woman to spread your peace?, Shepard questioned sarcastically.

"No. I only freed her with extremely harsh terms. She works for you, Commander. Given her knowledge of alien factions and her former employment as liaison. I believe Rasa to be a positive asset for this mission. Please, Shepard. For Satima. I only want to help you.", Emerson deviously pleaded.

Shepard glanced to Garrus and Ashley, then gave a glare to Rasa."One wrong step and I'll put a bullet through your head. No more chances. Got it?"

"Absolutely, Commander.", Rasa saluted mockingly.

They all gathered around the large holo screen, depicting the batarian system. It looked terrible. "As you know. The reapers helped in the destruction of the Bahak system. Nearly decimating the entire batarian race. Many of their people that survived are the colonials and space faring workers."

"What about the gangs?, Ashley asked.

"In a moment. Now, Shepard. You remember the batarian you met months before at your military ceremony?, Emerson stated. Shepard nodded, while Emerson continued. "Good. His name is Gesin Sar'manak. He is putting together a small hegemony. Not based on slavery or rooted in an autocratic government. They are looking for a form of democracy. Freedom from the old hegemony. No more animosity towards humans, and no more raids on our colonies. They need to rebuild a new home, and we're going to give it to them. With their newly established hegemony completely grateful to the efforts of the great Commander Shepard, of course."

They all looked at her shocked. "You must be entirely insane. The batarians especially hate my guts after what happened with the meteor and the alpha relay. This will not work.", Shepard argued.

"Batarians are not known for forgiveness.", Garrus stated.
Emerson stared to Rasa who walked in front of the group. "Gesin needs our help. We aren't doing anything out of the box here, other than making sure peace talks go through securely. We have terms, and he has desperation."

"You mean he can be taken advantage of.", Shepard insinuated.

"Yes. He's vulnerable to any one that offers help. That's why we must make sure it is our help that is offered. Shepard, this is very important to the galactic community. To humanity. Don't you have your people's best interest at heart?", she smirked before resuming a more serious stare. "To finally broker a peace between humanity and the batarians. Almost as great as the krogan and turians working together.", Rasa stared at Garrus.

He only narrowed his gaze.

"I believe Commander Shepard has every race of people's welfare at heart.", Emerson stated. "We need your help Commander. Your crew, the Normandy itself... represents a united effort at securing peace for this galaxy." Shepard seemed unconvinced at Emerson's supposed concern for the wellbeing of others. The councilor glared at them. "I could take this up with alliance, get a formal request sent directly from Hackett.", she warned.

Ashley let out a sarcastic laugh. Shepard stepped forward. "We need to ready ourselves for departure. I'll send you the report immediately after meeting with Gesin." Emerson nodded in agreement, watching Shepard lead them out.

The Normandy prepped to depart as Shepard and crew, along with Rasa, boarded. She felt the stares of the crew. No doubt they don't trust her. She can't blame them after trying to take the Normandy and kill their commander. Rasa smirked to herself. Almost worked too. Damn alien hybrid.

"To my cabin.", Shepard said sternly, walking by hurriedly to the elevator.

Rasa followed, knowing Shepard is going to demand an explanation to everything. Garrus gave her a warning glare.

Inside the cabin, Shepard stood still, tapping her foot in irritation as Rasa slowly walked in. A nice garden was in view opposite her. "What is really going on?", Shepard demanded.

Rasa stood facing the plants. "You know the mission. It's not hard to get." She touched a green leaf.

"It's not just the highly and politically dangerous mission. It's about you.", Shepard stated.

Rasa scoffed, surprised. "Me? I'm surprised you seem so concerned."

Shepard crossed her arms, "You suddenly appear at the embassy after I find out you're willingly working for the human councilor. Who only offers vague explanations as to why you're here in the first place. You cannot be trusted."

"Absolutely", Rasa smirked. "Maybe if this mission is a success, we could all go out for sushi. My treat.", she grinned.

Shepard shook her head in disappointment. "Why have you started working for her with a bogus job title?"

"It's not bogus. I have legal jurisdiction in all of council space, and I can represent Emerson anywhere she sends me. If I'm assaulted, threatened or even given the stink eye. I can legally retaliate without the galaxy worrying I'm acting out as a Cerberus assassin.", Rasa answered with satisfaction.
Shepard was disturbed. "I don't know who the fool is. You or Emerson."

"With Cerberus gone, I don't have many allies.", she stepped closer to Shepard. Her gaze open and calm. "Because the council has my back, no one will try to accuse me of anything. Not even you",

she narrowed her gaze.

"There's no way the council is supporting you", Shepard argued. "I'm alerting the alliance of this little mission and you."

Rasa looked away walking to the chair to sit. "One thing at a time, Shepard. If I can broker peace for the batarians alongside the great Commander Shepard. Then everyone will trust me, again."

"You're talking about the citadel?", Shepard supposed.

Rasa nodded. "That and others." She glanced around before standing again. "I have a lot of research to do. If I have your permission to leave, I would like to get to it."

Shepard folded her arms in distaste."You have my permission to go to hell, Rasa. Until then, stay on the third deck only, until I summon you"

Rasa gave another mock salute before leaving with a fiendish smile.

Omega
Afterlife

The Normandy navigated past the familiar station's harvesting columns of Omega. Shepard took Garrus and James. Rasa lead them into Afterlife from the docks. A private meeting with Aria who knew where Gesin and his crew were hiding.

Outside the club, they passed a few onlookers. The standard fuel stench filled the low oxygenated air around them. On the large wall, next to the entrance of Afterlife were two holo images. One was of Aria holding the head of an adjutant and the other was Shepard standing on the corpse of a Cerberus soldier.

"Propaganda anyone?", Rasa chuckled.

"Brings back memories. Not found ones though.", Garrus complained.

Shepard shook off the weird feelings associated with the images as they walked inside the club.

The dancers distracted the patrons, while plenty of booze circulated between the bars. Shepard watched Rasa cautiously approach the same upstairs room that overlooked the floor. She gave a turian guard some creds and he let them pass. Aria waited, chatting with some of her group.

"Well, if it isn't the grand liaison Cerberus bitch." Aria mocked.

Rasa gave a laugh, "You know how to charm a girl. Tell me, how did that work with Nyreen? I heard you two were quite the couple." Aria glared. Rasa quickly covered her mouth apologetically. "Oops. I forgot. She died protecting the innocent people of Omega. The Talons must miss her sorely."

"Unless you're here to die painfully by my hands. I suggest you leave... now!", Aria threatened.

Shepard walked out from behind Rasa, who stood smugly. "I hope it's good to see you again Aria. After what happened with Petrovsky and the citadel.", Shepard replied unsure.
Aria let out a laugh ignoring Rasa. "Like the artwork?". She waved off two of her guards. "You'll have no trouble from me. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be in charge of my home again. Besides, you showed me a much more diplomatic approach to my methods." She stared at Rasa.

Aria led them to sit with Shepard obliging. James preferred to stand, as well as Garrus. It's been over a year and some months. He won't take chances. Rasa sat opposite, which prompted Aria to give a look of disgust. "Well, Shepard. What's been keeping you from giving my station a visit?"

Rasa interrupted, "Work. Now, Aria. We need the location of Gesin. I've already sent the transaction eight hours ago, your men should be able to confirm the amount is correct. Our end is settled. I'm waiting for yours.", she retorted.

Aria let out an irritated laugh as Shepard gave Rasa a cautious glare. The queen of Omega, stood up, "Only here for a few courteous minutes, and already you're making demands. My, my.", she leaned over her. "I wonder how long you would last on my station if Shepard wasn't here to babysit you."

Rasa slowly sat up meeting Aria's menacing gaze. "I wonder how long you would last alone with the remaining adjutants on your station. Oh, yes. I know that you've haven't completely destroyed them. Seems your men lost a few. Would be interesting to see how many of your loyal citizens know this."

Aria gave a wide stare of surprise at this information.

"Don't threaten me, queen of Omega. I'm not as incapable as you think.", Rasa threatened.

Aria glared before turning her angered gaze to Shepard. "Gesin is in the gozu district. Warehouse 45. Everything else, is your responsibility." She answered turning away to overlook her club.

They left promptly with Shepard standing beside Rasa in the elevator down. "Threatening Aria is not exactly a smart move."

Rasa didn't avert her stare from the elevator door. "My information is correct. You may want to look into it after we're done. Considering how dangerous the adjutants are.", she replied.

The doors opened into the district. "Dios." James mumbled.

Gozu looked cleaner than before. No burning bodies or bloody walls. No signs of adjutants and creepy whispers in the dark. People were still weary of who came through, but it seemed there were less seedy deals in the making.

With more efforts at a peaceful community emerging. There were tech pawns open again. The alleyways that led to the market had been cleared of all debris. Aria really did put in a good effort to clean her station up. The people of Omega deserved it.

Gesin paced in front of his crew. He would nervously check his rifle, glimpsing his hard stare. All twenty of his group kept a close eye on the various checkpoints he ordered. They had mates and children, but couldn't risk dragging them into this suicidal mission of peace. The door to the warehouse opened as his personal guard took up arms. A female's voice echoed. "Khar'shan varse kortan.", it echoed.

Gesin narrowed a wary gaze, crinkling his tan nose before waving the guard to stand down. "Let them through.", he ordered.

Rasa led Shepard and team into the large warehouse floor. Shepard walked alongside her. "What did you say?"

"It's batarian. I said peace for khar'shan.", Rassa replied.
They met with Gesin. A tall and quite young batarian male in green armor, who began speaking with Rasa. "It is good to see you again.", he shook her hand. "Commander.", he nodded towards Shepard. "It's a real honor to meet you again, as well."

"Batarians that don't hate us. Now I know I'm in a twilight zone." James replied sarcastically.

Rasa ignored him. "Have you had any trouble?", she asked.

Gesin smiled, "It's been quiet. Aria kept her end of the bargain. Must have been a large deposit of creds to convince her. Your human council has my thanks."

Rasa led him away to speak privately. Somewhat disturbed, Shepard didn't bother to interfere with Rasa's council job. Yet. "Emerson has the batarian race in her welfare. She understands the importance of your people to the galaxy. You were explorers and scientists before raiders and slavers.", Rasa replied. "You need a home, and we need your answer, Gesin. The council can only stall for so long."

Gesin glanced to his men, "It would be near impossible for the batarians to back an expansion into your systems. Not to mention dangerous. My men stand against the past we wish to move forward from. But I cannot promise total safety to human colonies."

Rasa nodded, "You are right." She looked down, defeated. Suddenly staring into Gesin's eyes with childish charm. "But with your information on the two remaining factions, we can purge the leaders..."

"I don't want to kill any more of my people. Even if they are the lower scum of my race. We can convince them to stand down and join our liberation into a better structured hegemony. One that serves the people. Not themselves.", Gesin argued.

Rasa tilted her head. Realizing Gesin is truly trying to save his people. It's not political gain or a power grab. He's genuine. Despite the fact he's a complete tool. "You really do believe we can convince the other leaders?", she asked.

"Yes. Once we show them the alliance backing, there will be no doubt in our ability to get them to surrender.", he replied.

She smirked to herself, "Well. Then that's what we're going to do.", Rasa lied.

An hour passed, as Gesin spoke with Shepard. Rasa used a room down from the warehouse to make her private comm to Emerson. Confirming his ideals and compliance to the council.

After sending her message, she heard a noise from behind the outside door. Someone is listening. Rasa ran to the door to see a blur of tan armor disappear into the ward. She followed him.

Coincidentally, Garrus was approaching her position with a question from Shepard. When he spotted her hastily leaving into the same alley.

A dark alley turned into a deeper hole carved right into an older part of the district. He walked past the bass of music thrumming off metal and vibrating the floor, as a smell of rank pipes, cooked chemicals and sex permeated around him. Garrus blocked out muffled sounds from small doorways and continued after her.

What she was doing here could not have been good. Nothing wholesome that is. Couldn't have anything to do with council business. They prefer the more cleaner approach.

He made his way inside the club. Pushing past dancing bodies. Garrus glared, warning off any
onlookers and occasional upstarts from coming after him. A low growl towards a turian group got the point across clearly. Blue suns. He spotted her dark hair go into a hallway. Garrus continued to push through meeting a set of doors. But which one did she take?

Two of them had obvious sounds of sex. He couldn't imagine she was here for that, and really didn't want to in the first place. The last one had two voices arguing. Her voice was getting louder. Garrus stood by the door to listen. He needed to understand what was going on.

"I knew you were shady the moment I met you on the citadel. You seriously think you can sneak past me, Hurtan?" Sounds like Rasa.

"Gesin has lost his mind. Putting in his lot with your human councilor. The hegemony has survived without your precious and diluted peace for centuries. He would seek to usurp our very ideals just to appease the humans. We don't need your help finding a new planet of our own."

Rasa shifted from her standing position. "You will tell me everything you have heard. Then you will tell me where the other faction leaders are hiding. ", she demanded.

"I'd rather die!", he spat.

There was a struggle. Garrus heard enough. He carefully opened the door to see Rasa hold the batarian with a pistol aimed to his head. "Listen to me, you little shit! I have a job to do, and you are not getting in the way of it!"

"Let him go.", Garrus threatened in low sub vocals.

Rasa glanced to him in surprise. Hurtan plunged a short blade in her gut, causing her to release the gun and step back. "Die you Cerberus bitch!", he yelled.

Garrus made a start when Rasa pulled out the blade and jammed it in Hurtan's throat, laughing at his demise. "Disgusting creature.", she said.

"Come on!", Garrus grabbed her. Leading Rasa out of the club and through the alley. Her blood dripping everywhere. Trying hard to put pressure on the wound, Rasa sucked in her breath to the pain.

"Well, Emerson will be ecstatic to know how much you've nearly screwed your peace talks!", Garrus argued.

Inside an empty doorway, Garrus took a glance at the wound. "I don't think it's deep. You need to get to the clinic. It's not far." She pushed his hand away from the wound. "What are you doing? I'm trying to save your life here!", he argued.

Rasa stared at him, reluctant to accept his help. These damn fools. "I can take care of myself. Besides, why aren't you leaving my Cerberus ass behind? Taking care of loose ends.", she hinted. "I mean, how poetic that I get stabbed in the same manner the clone did your hybrid daughter? Hmm?"

She tried hard to push his buttons. Spirits only knows why she would. Garrus can already conclude that she's insane.

He pushes the image of Satima's frail body from that day behind, and glares at Rasa. "Because Shepard says Emerson is the only way to help Satima in this galaxy. I won't sabotage that. Regardless of your meddling.", he answered.

Rasa smirked.
Shepard and Gesin appeared with a few other batarian guards. "What happened?", she questioned. Rasa groaned holding the wound. "

She decided to pull a Cerberus, that's what.", Garrus answered.

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Later...

The clinic is quiet. Rasa lays silently on the cot, hand over her new bandages. She almost got killed. Sloppy. She sat up carefully, holding the sore wound in. Gesin entered the medical room. "I heard about Hurtan. Unfortunately, I had suspected for some time he would betray me."

Rasa shook her head in irritation."I should've been more careful. Gesin, if we are to continue to work together in the future. You need to inform me of situations like this.", she argued.

"No one's arguing about you defending yourself. My boys had meaner methods planned if he survived. Sorry about the wound though." Gesin smirked.

Rasa chuckled, when Garrus and Shepard entered. Gesin gave them the room with a nod. After he left, the two stood in front of her. "Oh... no.", she teased with a pout. "Giving me those scolding looks. It's too bad your hybrid reaper brat isn't here to take my place. To be honest, the girl could use some parenting."

Shepard stepped forward, her hateful glare sending an alarm to Rassa. "I'm not going to say a damn thing. Why bother? I'm only here to tell you that Emerson has been comming for the past hour. I finally had to tell her what happened." Her temper was becoming evident.

Rasa glared at Shepard, "Wonderful."

"Don't worry. Your Cerberus status hasn't gotten far from the club you murdered Hurtan in.", Shepard mocked angrily.

"He attacked me! Tell her, Garrus.", Rasa shouted.

Shepard moved closer to Rasa. An intimidating manner that set the tone clear, while holding a fixed deadly glare. "After this mission is over. You're not using the Normandy to ferry your official liaison ass to any other part of this galaxy. Are we clear? The men and women under my command depend on a responsible adult to lead them. I'm not letting Emerson's back room politics and your hired gun attitude put those lives in danger."

Shocked, Rasa watched a fuming Shepard leave the clinic room.

She grinned to herself, muttering. "My dear, Commander. You'll soon regret that."

Gesin choose to stay on Omega until Emerson had given him a more secure transport to an alliance colony. More instructions would be provided when Rasa reached the citadel. The entire journey back was slow as Rasa kept to herself.

Once the Normandy docked, she left the vessel quickly and quietly.

Illium
Market Center

Liara waited for Javik to finish observing the current amount of people shopping. He wanted to think. She agreed to get away long enough for her meeting with Miranda. It was urgent according to her. Walking into a short alley next to an omni-tool station, Liara waited for Miranda to show.
She watched hundreds of sky cars pass by overhead. Tall metal buildings reached to the sky, disappearing into the planet's orange sunset. "You really love this place, don't you?" A familiar voice echoed behind her.

Liara turned to see Miranda stepping towards her. "It was where I started my first informant job. This place gave me the broker. Call it nostalgia.\", she smirked.

"I understand. There are places that feel the same for me. Especially my earlier days with Cerberus.\", Miranda glanced around, then back to Liara. "Speaking of them. I found out some disturbing news."

Liara unsettled from her relaxed lean against the alley wall and stood to attention. "What is it?"

"I don't know just how active you are with the current events. But... Rasa is no longer in a cell. She's free, and working for the newest human councilor. Emerson.\", Miranda informed.

"Goddess. I've been busy with other whispers in the galaxy. Javik has been pushing me to listen to the empty parts of space and wait. I'm not going to lie when I say that I've been acting on paranoid counsel. He can sound pretty convincing about what hides in the dark.\", Liara admitted.

Miranda put a hand to her hip, "That's why you have friends like me. I'm not very familiar with the prothean, but if has creepy vibes on something, and reaper related. Don't ignore it. I'd rather have someone like you with a wider range of information warning me to duck and cover my ass first."

They both laughed. Liara tilted her head. "How is your sister doing?"

"Great. She's got a boyfriend now.\", Miranda replied with a sour expression. "He's young and arrogant, but doesn't try and push my buttons." She flashed a smile of satisfaction. "Well, after I warped him back from kissing her."

"Uh-oh.\", Liara smirked.

"Don't worry. She can take care of herself.\", Miranda walked forward. "When I find out anything else, I'll let you know."

Liara nodded as Miranda made her way out of the alley, slipping into the crowd. She stood still for a moment thinking on Javik's cryptic warnings. Goddess knows where Satima is, and whether or not the girl is a true danger to them all.

Embassy
Human Councilor's office

Shepard made her way inside to see Emerson. She wanted answers about Rasa. Once through the doors, Emerson turned quickly to the soldier's angry footsteps. "Commander. What a pleasant surprise."

"Save it, councilor. We both know I'm not here for pleasantries. I want answers to what this liaison officer position is, you've got that psychopath in charge of.\", Shepard demanded.

Emerson grinned. "Believe it or not, Commander. The position is official. Rasa had been trained by Cerberus to handle any situation thrown at her. And I believe you, yourself, have given me a personal report of her successful first mission abroad since leaving incarceration."

Shepard shook her head in anger. "Cut the bullshit. I know you're hiding something."

Emerson smiled. Leading Shepard to the balcony. Reluctantly, she followed. Emerson set a datapad
down on the edge, turning face to face with her visitor, "Commander. I'm not a parent. Although, I do understand the importance of family. You're under a lot of stress."

"What is that supposed to mean?", Shepard demanded.

"It means that I know what happened on Omega. I know that Hurtan was a traitor. Gesin informed me. Impressed with Rasa's skills and cleaning house initiative. She's taken this job to broker peace in the galaxy and eliminate old feuds, seriously.", Emerson waved her arm over the presidium. "Look at this station. Both Cerberus and the reapers have tried to destroy it. You, Commander, have stopped that chaos from taking over. I know your history with Rasa, and if she tries anything against you. I will have her back behind bars. Simple."

"Commander. Hackett wants to see you on vid-comm in the Normandy.", Joker commed.

Emerson gave a nod. Shepard proceeded to walk away before turning around to Emerson."Rasa is unpredictable. Don't think you can control her so easily. It didn't work out for the last villain that she helped. And it certainly won't work out for you." Shepard almost reached the door.

"But, Commander. Wasn't that last villain... you?", Emerson grinned.

Normandy QEC

"The Alliance is concerned about Councilor Emerson's motives, Commander. She has stronger pull on the citadel than we thought. With earth slowly rebuilding our own fractured governments back together, we can't afford the time to look deeper into this development." Hackett's shoulders slumped a little. He was tired and worn from the number of meetings that filled his month, securing the Sol systems borders. Bringing their men and women home from the other worlds. All of it showed clearly in his dull gaze, as he informed Shepard of the current issue.

"What's worse is that Emerson has Rasa wrapped around her fingers tightly.", Shepard replied.

Hackett nodded in understanding. "Commander. The Alliance is not formally engaging in the batarian hegemony and its problems. If we tried, it could mean an open act of war. On every side. You remember we had no choice but to incarcerate you. To protect you from them and to keep the galaxy from tearing itself apart on your behalf."

"Sir.", she said.

"As for Rasa. Keep an eye on her movements. Don't turn off communication with her. Emerson is no fool.", he warned. Shepard nodded, while the admiral continued. "I'll see if alliance intelligence can do some digging into Emerson for you.", he informed with a nod. Hackett couldn't spare anyone to investigate the citadel. This is all on Shepard now.

Shepard agreed, "Good idea."

The admiral gave her an assured stare, "Hackett out."

Shepard turned around, walking out of the QEC and through the war room. She stopped short of the board room to look out the port hole and think. A silent place to ponder Emerson's motives.

She's all about humanity, but wants to secure a position of power within the council. Which sends red flags all over her. A bigger question. Why would she suddenly bring Rasa into this?

If Ronin as a spectre could give her information on the councilor and what pushed her decision, then maybe Shepard could get to the bottom of what the woman really wanted. Back to the lower wards.
Shepard had already asked to meet Ronin at a diner. Maybe he knew the reasons why Satima left? She sat back in the booth, staring at a cup of something dark that definitely wasn't coffee.

"Commander Shepard." Ronin stood in front of the table. His golden avian gaze surprising her. No wonder Satima became attached.

"Ronin. Sit."

He sat down quickly. "I read your message. You think Emerson is not who she says she is?"

Shepard attempted a sip of her drink, her face soured from it. She wiped her mouth with a napkin, nodding to his question. "Yes."

"Good. Then we're on the same page. I've been on to your human councilor for months. She released a dangerous ex-cerberus agent weeks ago, her former alias was Mia. You would know her as the one who tried to kill you." Ronin stated, as Shepard shook her head. She nodded, "Oh, yes. We've met."

He sat back, no longer leaning on the table for a closer conversation. "Spirits. Well, in conclusion to that. Emerson has been dealing with batarian pirates. Not the ones who want peace like Gesin. But dangerous people. I'm talking murder, slavery and more unsavory things."

"I should've known. At first it seemed she wanted to help...", Shepard glared off angrily.

"There's more."

"The new turian councilor has gone missing. The hierarchy has already requested an investigation, in which Emerson has delayed long enough. I'm going to track his last coordinates."

"Anything I can do?"

Ronin chuckled. "I think you have enough on your hands, ma'am. As soon as I get something, I'll let you know."

"Good.", she replied. Shepard pushed her coffee to the side and stared at him. "There was something else I wanted to ask you, Ronin. I need an honest answer. It's about Satima." He sat up at attention while she continued. "I know you both spent a lot of time together. It wasn't really a secret, but... since she's left. I can't help to wonder why. If you have any explanation or know anything...", she left off.

Ronin shook his head upset. "She didn't tell me anything."

Shepard tilted her head with a sad expression. "I'm sorry, Ronin."

"It's fine. I just hope she's safe. Where ever she is.", he replied in concern. Ronin shook a wry laugh, trying to not let out any emotion about the matter.

The commander noticed this, but didn't want to pressure him. "Thank you, Spectre Naramis.", she tried to smile at him.

Shepard got up to leave, while he continued to stare at the tables surface.

With their conversation done, Ronin decided to stay longer. The least he could do as a courtesy to Satima, is keep batarian loyalist off her mother's back. Or try. Rumors were spreading quickly about Emerson's personal alliance with the batarians. What is her motive? What does she get out of this? That whole humanity crap had to be a front. Even Shepard knew that.
"Sir? Do you want to order anything?", a human waitress asked.

She had ginger colored hair like Satima. "Uh, no thanks. I was just leaving." He left a tip and walked out into the ward.

In the weeks, there after, Shepard spent time understanding Emerson's motives. Ronin had unfortunately left for a short while to investigate vorcha intrusion on the batarian matter, but nothing serious came of that either. The galaxy was eerily too quiet for her. Or maybe she isn't used to peace yet.

Shepard kept busy with Alliance missions. Evacuations from unsafe planets, colonies that were in desperate need of medical help and food. Dissension among militias that were formed to fight a guerilla war against reaper forces that no longer occupied the galaxy. She received a message to meet with a volus in the embassy lobby of the citadel. Could it be been Emerson?

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Menae
Barrent Base

Garrus finished the schematics for a squad's outpost comms. He had offered to do it during his hours off to pass the time. Being away from Shepard felt wrong. She is his mate after all, but when duty calls, he has to answer.

He listened to orders over comms for other teams to begin a sweep of the craters. It's been over a year and reaper components are still popping up all over this moon. Usually, they're immediately incinerated. Some are kept in kinetic containment pods. Sealed for later research. Can't be too careful in case one of them decides to show up again.

"Vakarian, sir. Specter Naramis is here to see you."

Garrus looked up from his work to give a compliant nod to the young soldier. Ronin is here?

"Officer Vakarian. I've been meaning to speak to you.", Ronin said walking into the garrison building.

"Ronin. What brings you here?", Garrus asked suspiciously.

"Unofficial and official spectre business.", he waited for the other soldier to leave. Facing Garrus, "I'm here to track the last whereabouts of the new turian councilor.", he answered.

Garrus set down his data pad and turned off the terminal. "That's pretty serious. He didn't stop by here. It was in transit to council space that he went missing. So why exactly are you here?"

Ronin stood, "I've spoken to Commander Shepard. We have our suspicions about councilor Emerson. I'm asking you to accompany me to the relay. I could use your help. Someone I can trust."

Garrus smirked in amusement. "Someone you can trust? Alright. Since we're sharing this kind of trust, I have a question for you."

"Ok.", Ronin replied, caught off guard.

"Did you sleep with my daughter?", Garrus asked sternly. His avian gaze glaring to the young man. Could've been the reason why she left? Ronin seemed too attached to her, and it could have caused some problems. Or something else happened? Either way, the boy will answer a father's question.
Garrus was surprised in thought, and felt damn proud of it too.

Ronin stood awkwardly as another soldier ventured in on the conversation. He glanced between the two men, and the awkward silence in the room. "Oh... uh... Sir.", he said while leaving.

To Garrus's surprise, Ronin averted his gaze sadly. "No. She ended our brief relationship before leaving with the sentarians.", he answered.

Garrus felt a little bad for the guy, but more relieved Satima wasn't taken advantage of. "Good!", he slapped Ronin's shoulder while walking by. "Then I can trust you."

Meanwhile back on the Citadel Embassy

Shepard waited inside the lobby as a volus approached her. Something is going on at the embassy, and behind every closed door, Emerson has been planning. She stared ahead with a short smile, already wandering what the old volus was up to these days. Liara has kept him safe from the reapers so far. Can he stay safe from anything, or anyone else?

"Barla Von. It's been a while. How are you?", she asked.

His response was followed with occasional asthmatic breaths. "I am doing well." He takes a breath. "I see you have become quite the hero, Shepard.", he replied.

She looked around with personal satisfaction. "Yeah. It hasn't been easy."

Barla also looked with her, before resuming his talk. "Indeed.", he breathes. "There is a matter I would like to discuss with you. If you aren't too busy."

"Not at all.", Shepard informed.

Barla led her to a quieter part of the lobby. Away from listening ears and loud chatter of the floor. He takes another breath. "I've heard that Khalisa Al'Bin Jilanni had interviewed you."

Shepard resumed a smile. "Nothing I couldn't handle."

"That's good to hear.", he replied. Barla looked around, "Shepard, the shadow broker is back", he whispered.

She glanced behind him and to her side before responding. "Really?" Like she doesn't know who the broker is.

He looked away, leaning out to his toes to see someone. "I figured that would be your response. Safe to say, I think he wants to speak to you."

"Where is this conversation going, Barla?", Shepard asked curiously.

"I was recently contacted by him. After more than a year of silence. I'm not going to lie when I say that I am very concerned about it.", Barla replied upset.

Shepard put her hand on his suited shoulder. "That's not like you to be afraid. You used to work for him before. I always believed you to be his most trusted operative."

Barla shook his head. "I didn't want to trouble you." He stopped short, taking in a breath.
She chuckled lightly. "It's alright."

"I must be going now. The Shadow Broker wanted me to deliver a message to you. He wants you to meet him in an apartment here, on the presidium. At three o'clock.", Barla took a breath and started to walk off. "Good day, Shepard and be careful. The shadow broker never meets with anyone."

She'd seen him off, feeling a bit excited and curious. What is Liara up to?

At three, Shepard stood in front of the silver metallic door to the large apartment. The seal turned green alerting her to come in. The living room was mostly empty and dark. A few chairs were set in corners. She kept an alert stare, but didn't feel a need to fear anything in this abandoned home. With a smirk, she started to speak out loudly. "Hello? I'm supposed to meet with the shadow broker. You may have seen him... or her.", she smiled. "Possibly blue with an obsession for protheans."

"Ha ha.", Liara said from the corner. Sitting comfortably near the window's edge. It was tinted to obscure anyone from outside the ability to see in. "Very funny, Shepard." Her bright blue eyes narrowed in sarcasm.

Shepard's smile widened. "And, how are you?" She asked, hands behind her back in jest. Teetering on tipped toes, excited to see her friend since her ceremony.

"I'm doing quite well.", Liara informed with a smirk. "How have you been since your wedding?"

"Busy. Too busy.", Shepard replied, now relaxed and shaking her head. "The galaxy has me on errands for now."

Liara sat up, crossing her legs. "I'm sorry to hear that. Perhaps you and Garrus will get a chance for time off soon.", she offered a seat for Shepard.

The commander declined, now pacing to the window. "So.", Shepard began while looking about the room. "Why am I here? We could've just met at the cafe."

to

Liara looked back on a data pad with messages popping up. "It needed to be in private. I have some information to tell you.", she then turned her gaze back to Shepard in a serious manner. "Emerson is not the woman you think she is."

Shepard walked closer, hands in her pants pockets. "Don't worry, Liara. That we can agree on. I spoke to Ronin before he left the station. The Alliance is also concerned.", she stated.

"Her motives in helping the barians?", Liara asked, curious.

"You got it. For humanity.", Shepard gave a warning tone.

Liara and Shepard exchanged glances, "Goddess.", Liara sighed. She stood to pace, "Her reasons may seem honorable. It's her way of exercising those ideals that will have more than the alliance concerned. I've discovered she has deployed violence and devious measures to secure Gesin stays in power. You are not a part of that, because of who you are."

"Spectre Shepard, Commander of the Normandy and N7 of the Alliance.", Miranda said stepping out.


Miranda stood beside Liara,"Can't have Emerson or Rasa know that I'm here."
"Why?", Shepard asked, folding her arms.

Miranda stepped forward. "I used to work close enough with her in Cerberus. She knows me."

Shepard glanced around the room, she ran a hand through her hair. "This can't be good, then.", letting out a sigh of annoyance. "What do you have on them?", Shepard asked.

"Emerson used to be Cerberus. Miranda confirmed it days ago.\", Liara informed.

"Shit.", Shepard blurted. "The Illusive Man is gone, and still agents remain.", she complained.

Miranda spoke, "I told you that Cerberus cells worked independently, only reporting in when necessary. We were a cell, years ago.", she informed. Miranda stepped into their circle. "It's clear Emerson is deceptive. Putting herself between a dangerous political game with the batarians and freeing Rasa as her liaison."

Shepard nodded. "Knew it. Had a feeling anyways with all that humanity talk. She knows I'm on to her. I can't go after her without proof. The Alliance doesn't want to intrude on it either."

"So, you let non-alliance people get the information for you.", Liara grinned. Already tapping away at her Omni-tool. "I have agents of my own."

"This will be risky for you, Shepard. You must keep up a ruse while watching your back.", Miranda added. "Illusive Man or no, any agent of Cerberus is dangerous. Especially one with ideals."

Shepard stared at Miranda, "Are you dangerous then?", she smirked in sarcasm.

"You know me.", Miranda replied. "But I will never work for Cerberus again. The Illusive Man was using me as a puppet for his will. And I still hate him for it.", she looked away in disgusted thought.

"Hey.", Shepard patted her arm. "You're nothing like him. You never were. That place used us all, but we turned it around on them. You're my friend, Miranda. Don't forget that. I trust you."

Liara's omni-tool went off, breaking up the friendly conversation. "Looks like my next appointment is arriving. Shepard. I'll get in touch with you again."

Shepard and Miranda left the apartment to the lower lobby. They both stood beside the wall of the office, away from the small crowds of citizens. Miranda leaned on her leg, an obvious fidget of her suit's collar. "Shepard, I have something to say about Satima."

The commander carefully her arms over her chest, unaware of what the ex-operative could be speaking about. It made her nervous. "All right. Shoot."

"Listen, I know what it's like to be different from everyone else. You feel alone, scarred. I thought joining Cerberus was a way to keep father away from me. To protect me, while I learned how to be a dangerous bitch. To quote Jack.", she smirked, then continued. "But, physically I'm human. I'm accepted because I look human. Satima is not entirely human. Neither is she entirely turian. This kind of difference causes division. When she returns, guide her. Mentor her away from those that would force their ideals.", hinting at dangerous military organizations like Cerberus.

"Of course, I will, Miranda. I won't let anyone take her away from me.", Shepard remarked.

Miranda gave her a sad stare. "You let the Sentarians take her."

Shepard sighed. "I know."
The commander left the apartment building, while Miranda felt awful for bringing it up. She wished she had time to get to know Satima, and maybe do a quick psych eval. The poor girl has been the subject of reaper indoctrination since her birth. And whatever she does, however she acts out, is because of them.

Back on the docked Normandy. Shepard gulped hard liquor from a small shot glass. She had taken a seat in front of her terminal. A call came through from Garrus. He looked tired, but his gaze lit up when he saw her. "Charlotte. I've missed you."

"I've missed you too."

Garrus noticed her downcast expression. "What's wrong?"

Shepard set her drink down, feeling the wave of booze take hold of her senses. "Emerson is dirty. Ex-Cerberus."

Garrus glanced down, "Spirits. How much danger are you in because of it?"

Shepard touched the side of the monitor as if touching his face. "I'll be fine."

"Don't get cocky, Charlotte."

"I won't", Shepard replied. "Besides, I got friends with agents too." She chuckled.

Garrus followed suite, only to stare at her sadden smile. A shot glass sat to the side of her desk, just within view. Spirits, she's really conflicted on this. He hoped she won't get drunk, but Shepard can hold her liquor. Somewhat.

-------------------------------------------------------

Weeks later

Shepard kept partial contact with Emerson. Carefully compiling the evidence she needed to stop the former Cerberus supporter from gaining anymore power. If she tried to outright speak against the human councilor, it could cause a massive public panic.

Liara used her shadow broker connections to help ferry out the truth. Emerson not only was Cerberus, but she held personal council with The Illusive Man himself. No wonder she freed Rasa.

Using false records, Emerson pushed her way to becoming the new human councilor. Almost an embarrassment that the Alliance didn't catch on. Shepard could only guess that with Earth still in repairs, multiple colonies still needing aide, and supporting other council races with military. No wonder she slithered her way in.

The Alliance committee and other high-ranking delegates couldn't keep up with what was happening under their noses. A Cerberus snake.

The Normandy had just finished a mission near the Artemis Tau cluster in the Athens system, securing a new fuel depot from pirate gangs. After docking to see Emerson at her urgent request. Shepard left her ship in the command of Ashley.

"Commander. Are you sure this is a good idea? To walk right into a possible trap? She knows you're on to her."

"Yes, Ash."

Shepard finished securing her armor in the locker. "Yes, Ash."

"If anything happens, I want you to command the Normandy. Find Ronin. Tell Garrus. And if Satima
returns... stop her from retaliating. I'm trusting you, Ash."

Ashley hates this. Shepard debriefed her on the situation, making her promise to take care of the
Normandy and everyone on it, no matter what. But how is she to handle the hybrid, IF she returns?
She sighed, following her best friend's orders. "Yes ma'am. I will."

"You can say Shepard, you know.", she laughs. "This isn't an alliance mission. It's a spectre one."

Ashley chuckles, then sighed. "Watch yourself, Shepard. I mean it.", she then glared.
Shepard gave her a nod, saluting in surprise, "Yes, ma'am.", before heading to the CIC deck.

Moments later...

Emerson greeted Shepard inside her office. Four batarians stood to the side, looking very
menacing."Shepard. Thank you for stopping by on such short notice. This is Fantar and his men.
They are here to discuss Gesin's personal guard.", she informed.

"Personal guard?", Shepard repeated, already on alert.

Emerson didn't flinch. "Why, yes. He's important. Please have a seat.", she gestured.

"No thanks.", Shepard dismissed, eyeing that Fantar and his low growl. This could be it.

Emerson shrugged. "Well.", she poured two glasses of water. Giving one to Shepard. "I've heard of
your latest mission. Stopping merc pirates from raiding a fuel depot. Wonderful work you've been
doing. Cleaning up the more seedier parts of the galaxy."

Shepard reached out for the glass, and held it tight, "Yeah. Grand.", she mocked.

The councilor paused at the commander's tone, giving a curt smile. "Unfortunately, it has been
getting in the way of my employees."

Shepard stared, "Really?" She took a sip of her drink, setting it down on the desk.

Emerson grinned at the drink, "Yes.", she stared at the commander. "I thought at the beginning we
could broker an alliance. You and I. Rebuild humanities image after the whole Cerberus problem.
The reapers paved the way, however, I'm not convinced you see it as such, anymore. Or is it because
you know... that your daughter is coming back."

Shepard looked up in surprise. Suddenly feeling woozy. "What the hell are you talking about! How
would you know that?"

"It's just speculation, really... but after I stage Gesin's unfortunate demise. A real leader under my
advisement will take the reins of responsibility from him. Rasa will by my hand, and when Satima
returns to learn that the horrible batarian pirates killed her mother. What do you think she'll do?",
Emerson stated, proud of her prediction and Shepard's defeated demeanor. "Most likely from
experience", she continued, "your brat will put on a wonderful display of that dangerous behavior
people fear. Prompting my own spectres to apprehend her. She'll be dispatched humanely, and that
will be the end of all my problems with you Shepard's.

Emerson smiled fiendishly.

Shepard felt all the strength begin to leave her legs, leaning over the desk. "Garrus... the Normandy...
won't let you get away with this."

Emerson leaned in closer. "Where do you think, Rasa is going as we speak?"
Shepard opened her comms hastily, "Joker! Cerberus..." The batarian behind her used a jammer.

At the docks, Joker received the comms to her voice cutting out. He looked at EDI. "You think?", he started. EDI quickly went over possible outcomes in seconds. She looked to Joker, "I'm sealing the Normandy.", she said. "Shepard's orders."

Ashley stood behind them, as Rasa and a group of batarian pirates muscled their way to the docks. "Shepard was right. We need to find Ronin, and fast."

"What about the Commander?", Joker argued.

Ashley put her hand on his shoulder with a saddened stare. He understood. This was Shepard's plan with Ash in case things went sour at the meeting with Emerson.

Meanwhile in the embassy office. Shepard glared at Emerson before falling unconscious. "You Cerberus bitch..." She fell over the desk, hitting her head. Finally collapsing to the floor.

Emerson leaned over, satisfied. She lifted a villainous gaze to the batarian. "Take her through the alley entrance. Do what you want. I just want a confirmed kill. Understood?", she warned.

Fantar grinned as his men dragged an unconscious Shepard out. All the cameras had been hacked and a few guards paid. All except a hidden volus. Barla. He couldn't believe the betrayal Emerson carried out.

The shadow broker had expressed a concern for the commander before. Barla quietly made his way to the lobby, exiting to the elevator. Without a second thought, he immediately messaged the broker. Shepard, had been taken.

Apien Crest Relay

Garrus and Ronin arrived near the relay. The system was quiet with only a few freighter ships passing by. Inside their small cargo vessel, Ronin showed the ships trajectory path on a holo grid.

"The councilor had reached here using the relay, but he never appeared through the Serpent Nebula's relay. Or any other.", Ronin informed.

"The relays only send ships to other connected systems. Possible sabotaging of the vessel?", Garrus wondered, overlooking the display.

Ronin considered the schematics of the ship. "Even if whoever did this managed to destroy the ship. There would be evidence of it on either side."

Garrus stared at the navigational console, watching the freighter's ship signatures cross the system back and forth through the relay. He had an idea. "What if the vessel wasn't destroyed, but did go through. Only, our new councilor wasn't aboard?"

"What are you saying?", Ronin asked.

Garrus brought up a cross reference of the systems flight trajectory from weeks before and right now. "Two ships passed by the councilors vessel. One opposite each side. There's a split-second gap. Hacking. His ship was boarded and most likely, he was kidnapped."

"So. Where is the real ship?", Ronin pointed out.

"Likely, inconspicuously docked at the citadel.", Garrus answered.
Ronin whistled low, "Spirits. Emerson is good."

"Cerberus good.", Garrus cautioned.

Titan Nebula
Capek
Hahne-Kedar Facility-Defunct

Hot. Shepard could feel the room she was being held in had no air system. Except for maybe a little oxygen. Enough to stay alive. Sweat streaked down her cheeks from her forehead. Matted red hair clung around her face. Shepard started to stir, struggling to get a hold of her arms.

They were chained behind her with her wrists cruelly tied together. Now sitting upright in a metal chair, Shepard gazed around the dark room.

There was no light and only the sounds of muffled speech outside the closed door. Emerson had betrayed her. No surprise there. Had her taken by batarian pirates to be dispatched. When she escapes, Emerson is going to regret it. The door opened, letting in a slight amount of bright light. She could feel a body standing over her.

"If you let me go now. I promise the Alliance won't bomb the ever-living hell out of this place. Girl scouts honor.", she smirked.

Shepard received a hit to the mouth, tasting blood with her tongue. A deep male voice spoke to her. "That felt good. Well, Commander.", he said mockingly. "Now that I have your attention. I would like you to listen to what I have to say."

The batarian stood over her, covered in worn and crudely built armor. He walked around her, pacing until he stopped to turn the lights brighter. It was Fantar from Emerson's office. Staring at her with a scowl. His six black eyes narrowing on her. A long deep scar across his throat stuck out. "Emerson wanted me to kill you right away. I'm not a good man, but I have honor. And killing you quickly while unconscious and unable to give me a fight, is not the honorable way out."

"Am I supposed to feel relieved?", she shot back.

"No. You're still going to die. But not right away. I have exciting plans for you. After you've been freed, my men will take you to the arena. There you will die in a more entertaining way. Befitting a warrior and mass murderer.", he mused.

Shepard glared at him. "Why are you helping Emerson? She'll betray you, too."

"I don't trust your ex-Cerberus councilor. But knowing how much damage she'll cause your alliance is much more satisfying. Now, Shepard. Relax. I need to administer a little tranquilizer. A precaution to protect my men. Believe me, you should feel good at such a compliment.", he grinned.

She struggled against him as he jammed the sharp needle into her neck. Everything was dark again.

Meanwhile...

The Normandy docked at Omega. There, Liara and Miranda waited to board. Once inside, Ashley and Shepard's closest crew members already on the ship, met in the war room.

"She knew something would happen. Shepard wanted me to stay behind, warn Garrus. And if Satima did return. Stop her from going after Emerson.", Ashley spoke. This was such a stupid gamble, but Shepard ordered it.
Liara paced,"Barla informed me of four batarians taking her off the station. Emerson was indeed behind it." She brought out a vid from a hidden camera inside the councilors office. "She may be ex-Cerberus, but she's not broker material." Liara smirked.

"What are we going to do?", Traynor asked worried. "She's a councilor! We can't just outright go in, guns blazing."

James grinned, "I can!" He flexed his muscles. "That's our commander they've got!"

Liara raised her hand to quiet them down. "Here's what we know. Lillian Emerson is ex-Cerberus. She's behind this new batarian hegemony. For reasons, not our business, Shepard openly backed her. For a short time."

Miranda stood to the side, quietly thinking. "It's for the hybrid. Her reaper born child.", she spoke. "She wanted the galaxy to accept her, not fear her. We need to help prepare that, after we deal with Emerson and her batarian mercs."

Liara eyed her before resuming. "Regardless. My informants have told me of other occurrences soon after Emerson became councilor. Sparatus's death. Which was no accident. Her recent employment of Rasa. No doubt she's been planning this for some time."

"Never can trust a Cerberus.", Ashley glared. Miranda glanced to the lieutenant-commander. "No offense.", Ashley said. "You know, experience in all." Her awkward laughter only annoyed the mood.

Miranda ignored her, "We're going to find Shepard.", she assured.

"But how?", Traynor asked again.

Miranda smiled, giving a nod to James. "Go in guns blazing."

Citadel
Embassy

Rasa sat smugly while Emerson paced in panic. Poor councilor didn't plan for mistakes. So enamored with her own success. Thus far.

"Absolutely unacceptable! How did she know? Never mind. We need to leave for a time. Make sure she's dead. Then, we can return.", Lillian Emerson stated.

"Return? I'm not planning on coming back. You screwed this up. Not me.", Rasa argued.

It's like the clone all over again. So sure, so foolish. Emerson glared to Rasa. "Listen to me you lackey bitch. I'm better trained than you are to cover my traces and leave no loose ends. And right about now, you're acting more and more like a loose end.", she threatened.

Rasa stood slowly, "You wouldn't dare!" She held open her omni-tool. "I will ruin your entire life with one press of this icon. I have the expert hacking skills. Do you honestly think I'm not clever enough to anticipate your next idiot move? I... freed the clone and waged a secret war against Shepard and her "save all the aliens" ideology. I managed to take the Normandy right from her."

Emerson laughed mockingly. "You also managed to fail spectacularly, Rasa. You didn't anticipate Shepard's very own reaper child to execute the clone and beat you like the weak insignificant excuse for a human, that you are."
Before Rasa could jump Emerson, the doors slid open. Shepard's crew stood before them. Rasa recognized one in particular.

"Miranda?"

Emerson stood back away from Rasa. "Oh, thank God you're all here! She just admitted to having Shepard taken by batarian pirates. To be killed! I fear you might be too late. But maybe not too late in putting this monster back in a cell." She smiled deviously to Rasa.

Rasa couldn't believe Emerson's sad attempts. "You really are a Cerberus reject. No wonder the Illusive Man had you thrown out." She walked closer to the back of the room. "The only reason the alliance took you in, is the critical information you had regarding him and Cerberus. I can only imagine from there how you manipulated your way into the ranks."

"Enough! Where is Shepard!", Liara yelled, flaring her biotics.

Emerson stared in disbelief. "I don't know what you're talking about? Ask her!", she pointed to Rasa.

Between the two bickering back and forth, Garrus and Ronin walked in. Liara contacted them both en-route to the citadel. He approached Emerson, knowing full well this woman had the answer. Garrus stood face to face with the human. His height dominating hers with a stern avian glare. "Where is she?", he demanded in a low tone.

Emerson gulped once but never wavered. "You have no authority here. Leave."

Ronin stepped forward. "Council Spectre authority overrides your own when it comes to an investigation. Especially against you. Where is Commander Shepard and Daxis Quintyrus, Emerson? You have nowhere left to hide."

Emerson's face contorted to that of a caught animal. She blinked twice, glancing quickly between Rasa, Ronin and Garrus. Miranda quietly snuck behind Rasa, who was trying to hack into a secret tunnel system the keepers used. "You're not going anywhere.", she said while delivering a hard blow to Rasa's face.

As the other ex-Cerberus agent fell. Garrus had enough of Emerson's refusal to talk. He flared his mandibles in anger, shouting. "WHERE IS MY WIFE?!"

Back on Capek Hahne-Kedar facility

Shepard woke up to loud jeering. Crowds of batarian pirates and mercenaries gathered around a small arena made with the scraps of mechs from the facility. She recognized this place. That data virus from the Corsica crash sent straight from the Jarrahe Station's internal VI. Seemed ages ago now.

She stood up feeling groggier, though becoming aware of her surroundings. They put her and another inside a cage. Shepard turned to the body on the floor. "Hey. Are you ok? I'm Commander Shepard. Listen, I'll get us out.", she tried to assure.

The body uncurled to be a male turian. He slowly stood up, injured from a gash to his leg. "Shepard? From the alliance? Spirits, am I glad to hear that."

Shepard stood back to see him more clearly through the crude amount of lighting. He had a tattered council robe, grey with purple stripes. Grey colonial markings and strained brown eyes. "Who are you?", she asked. Obviously, he looked important. Well, before he was taken by the mercenaries.
The turian struggled to stand, gaining leverage holding on the open wiring of the cage. "I'm.. I'm Daxis Quintyrus. The new turian councilor.", he answered.

"Emerson.", Shepard said angrily.

"What does this have to do with her?", he asked.

Shepard watched the batarians clear out a few dead bodies from the arena. " Doesn't matter right now. We need to escape. And soon. Daxis, can you walk?"

"At this point I'm not sure what I can do. Fighting mechs for hours kinda puts a strain on you.", he tried to laugh but winced from other injuries unseen.

"Mechs?", she repeated surprised. Shepard watched him nod in agreement. "Do they give you weapons?", she asked.

"Pistols, rifles... whatever they throw in there. If they like how you fight. I saw a quarian girl try to hack a nearby wall junction. It powers this area of the arena and outside. She almost got it before Fantar sent a heavy mech to gun her down.", he glanced away.

"The quarian girl from Emerson's office?", Shepard muttered to herself. Could be?

Daxis stared at her, trying to understand what was going on. "Commander, please. Tell me what this is all about. I've been telling myself it's bad luck. But if there's more to it..."

"There is. Emerson is ex-Cerberus. I'll tell you the details later. She's behind this, and trying to sabotage the batarian leader, Gesin. Putting Fantar in charge and causing government upheaval with the alliance. We need to escape and stop her."

"Spirits. Alright, I'm up. I need to get to the citadel. We both do, in fact. Living proof of her motives.", Daxis agreed.

Loud cheering echoed around them. Fantar came into view in the circular stadium. He took the upper row fiendishly grinning towards Shepard and Daxis, and began to speak. "Brothers. We want justice." The crowd roared. "We want revenge." The crowd roared again. "We want entertainment!" Raucous laughter and loud roaring drowned out any sound in the room.

"I promised a fair fight. Given the unfair advantage this world burner had over our people!", Fantar shouted.

Shepard shook her head. She tried so hard to stop the meteor from crashing into the alpha relay. Daxis put a hand on her shoulder. At least someone in this room didn't blame her.

"The great Shepard will have a fair fight.", he glared to her. "Open the gate."

Shepard was released with no weapon. Daxis tried to follow but the gate closed. Batarin mercs shouted at her. Shepard ignored them. She had one goal in mind. Blow the power junction. Four small mechs were sent out, repeating their commands to stop resisting. Without fire arms, Shepard needed something else to fight with. They had pistols.

She dodged the incoming fire, finding cover behind scorched crates. Nothing. They were getting closer. "Over there!", Daxis shouted to her. Sure enough, Shepard spotted a rebar in front of the crude wall. She ran forward, throwing herself into a roll over to the wall and grabbed the metal rod quickly. The first mech nearly grazed her arm with a bullet.
Shepard used her new melee weapon to bash in the mech's head, sending sparks outward. She then picked up the pistol. Shooting with her right hand, and defending with the left. Reminding her of Satima's similar skills in battle.

After dispatching the three remaining mechs, Shepard stood in the middle of the ring, staring at Fantar. "Alright, Fantar. I'm giving you one more chance. Let me and the turian councilor go, and I'll write this up as a big misunderstanding."

Everyone roared. "You humans and your egos. There's no one here to save you.", he laughed.

More mechs poured in, followed by a heavy mech. Dammit. Shepard took cover behind crates, leaning out to shoot down the smaller ones. Daxis couldn't stand his helplessness. Trapped like an animal in the cage. Fantar roared with satisfaction as Shepard ran to another corner out of the heavy fire fight against her. "Looks like humanities best isn't so agile anymore.", he mused.

She leaned out again to finally spot the junction. A few shots and the whole place would go dark. The mechs will still be firing, but the mercs would definitely be in the way. Two small mechs were closing in as the heavy mech started to shoot down her cover. One chance or they really are dead.

Shepard quickly ran out, shooting the power junction four times. It exploded with sparks catching the flammable containers around it on fire. Dumb luck. Emergency lights and alarms turned on, blaring in the background of the chaos.

Daxis's cage opened. He limped in time before the heavy mech could spot him. Mercs began fleeing off the raised stadium seats from the mechs misguided fire. Fantar gathered his closest men and fled outside the arena into the courtyard. A shuttle awaited him.

Daxis ran into Shepard, when she pulled him away from a burning pile of containers. "You all right?, she asked panting from running.

"I'm fine. Fantar escaped. We need to get out of here as well.", he replied.

She nodded in agreement, using the remaining thermal clip to mow down any merc in her way. An explosion knocked a walkway down over the entrance. "Shit!", Shepard yelled.

"Shepard! Mechs!", Daxis shouted.

The mechs still came after them. She shot down one of the smaller ones. Leaving the heavy left as a threat. Daxis found a rifle from the dead body of a batarian merc and dispatched the other small mech. He turned to Shepard, "Here.", he shouted while throwing the rifle to her. "Cover me. I'm going to the control room across the arena to stop the mechs from bringing this facility down on us."

"Be careful.", she yelled.

Shepard opened fire on the heavy mech, giving Daxis time to run to the other side. After he disappeared behind the stadium, the heavy mech began to close in on Shepard. She dodged more fire from his mini gun. The walkway produced cover as well as a means to climb away to safety and higher ground. Shepard took the advantage.

Daxis limped quickly, feeling his thigh wound reopen, bleeding out and down his leg. He can't stop to assess the bleeding. Finally, he reached the controls through debris and flames.

Shepard crawled onto the downed walkway, trying to get an advantage over the mech. He knew time was running short. Hacking into the main terminal, Daxis found incriminating evidence pointing to Emerson. Private extranet mail sent to Fantar. The batarian wasn't a fool and kept it in case she tried to betray him. Copying the data, Daxis found
the deactivation code for all the mechs.

Shepard almost made it to the top of the walkway when a miniature rocket hit the wall ahead, knocking her back. She fell and rolled right off onto the ground below, looking up to the heavy mech as it pointed its muzzle to her. Suddenly the mech began to sputter its commands, walking backwards and powering down in front of her.

Daxis did it. Standing up, sore from the blow to her head, she could hear fighting coming from the control room. Shepard ran past the burnt seats and arena, right into the room. Daxis had been keeping a batarian merc off him. Shepard opened fire, putting three holes in the mercs back. Too bad it wasn't Fantar.

"Thanks.", Daxis gratefully nodded, before falling over unconscious.Blue blood trailed around him.

Shepard put his arm over her shoulder dragging him out from the room. Past the arena and to another door now open from the mech deactivation.

Outside, the kodiak shuttle landed with Liara, Garrus, Ronin and Miranda jumping out. They watched the facility burn on one side in shock, as batarians fled or wandered out dying from uncontrolled mechs.

From the side of the building, Shepard dragged out Daxis, smiling to see them. Garrus could see the wounds from debris that gave her bloody scratches and a small gash across her forehead from an explosion. She set him down, panting from the hard walk. "Where the hell have you been?" Shepard collapsed.

She opened her eyes to see Garrus hovering over her in the shuttle. His worried gaze troubled her. "Hey. I'll be fine.", she assured with a bloody hand to his face.

He took it and squeezed slightly. "Charlie, I told you not to get cocky."

Shepard laughed, "This coming from a guy who got a rocket to the face."

Garrus smiled. "I'm glad you're alive. I don't know what I would do if anything had happened..."

She sat up, pulling his forehead to touch hers. "Nothing happened I couldn't handle."

He wanted to believe that. Garrus continued to sit next to her as Cortez flew the shuttle back to the Normandy. Emerson is going to pay.

------------------------------------------------

In the weeks ahead, Emerson faced trial for treason and murder. The alliance renounced her status and together with combined evidence from Daxis, Ronin and Gesin-proved her devious plans. Rasa had escaped the incapable hands of the citadel and once again the galaxy had a secret fear to harbor.

With her and Fantar running around loose, no one knew what to believe when the council reported peace and safety.

The original council whole again, Daxis Quintyrus closely worked with the alliance in promoting a worthy candidate for the human councilor position. Nearly two months later, they found their councilor. Shepard waited in Emerson's old office. The cold white metal and lonely plants were removed. Citadel blue was put back, with the desk covered in family pictures and one picture that stuck out. She picked it up, smiling.

"That's my favorite." A woman's voice echoed.
Shepard turned around to welcome Khalee. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't be messing around with your things."

"It's quite alright. Your welcome to reminiscence with his photo anytime, Shepard.", she replied.

Shepard put the picture down. "Are you sure you want this job? Anderson wasn't too fond of it. Although, I can't deny he did an excellent job at it."

Khalee chuckled. "He preferred to be out there with you and the rest of the alliance. Fighting the reapers and securing peace. I'm sure about this job, though. After what Emerson did, we need to reassure the citadel and the rest of the galaxy that no more Cerberus agents will infiltrate our lives again."

"Would be really nice.", Shepard remarked.

Khalee took a seat at her desk with Shepard sitting opposite. "Everything else aside. Gesin will get a home world for his people. The alliance has taken everything Emerson's compiled together and given it to the council. The asari want to help, also given that some of their own people have batarian mates. We can turn this around to good, Shepard."

Shepard agreed, but glanced away in uncertainty. "Khalee. I know many of the batarian people are still angry with me. I couldn't stop the reapers from destroying their system. Their home."

"You've served your time. Unfairly. Gesin believes you, most of his followers believes you. After winning the war against the reapers, the galaxy has already forgiven you. If they didn't. There wouldn't be a statue being built in your honor, of your service and sacrifices here on the citadel.", Khalee smiled.

"Say what now?", Shepard blurted surprised.

"Don't worry, Shepard. It's not any taller than the krogan statue on the presidium. We didn't want to start any wars.", she winked.

"I'm...I'm honored, I guess. A little disturbed to see myself like that.", Shepard answered astonished.

Khalee laughed before resuming a solemn stare. "Shepard. We need to talk about Satima, as well. Emerson had terrible plans for her. The council knows it, and so does the alliance. We're in the middle of informing the turian hierarchy. Daxis, unlike how Sparatus felt, is very curious to meet her. Do you know where the sentarians might have went?"

"Honestly, I don't. I wish she told me, but Satima had been pushed away by Emerson. ", she replied sadly.

"Not to worry. When she does return. The galaxy will know a better story about her, then what Emerson was planning.", Khalee informed.

"Thank you, Khalee.", Shepard added.

"My pleasure. Now, go and get some rest. It's not every day a person can say they survived a batarian pirate kidnapping.", Khalee stated with a chuckle.

After their meeting, Shepard boarded her ship. Inside her cabin, she sat on her bed and attempted to stifle the upset she felt. Everywhere she turns there are enemies.

People want to hurt her, destroy who she is. Worse, they want to destroy Satima. Villains lurk
around the galaxy and all she can do is put them down. One by one. Shepard feels so tired. Tired of
running, tired of killing.

Garrus walks in to see her in this state. "Charlie.", he says while approaching her. He stayed on the
Normandy, pacing in worry over these events. Even after the reapers are gone, it never fails for those
with sinister ideals to steal an opportunity to do harm.

She wipes a few stray tears and her nose. "It's nothing.", she lies.

"Can't be nothing if it's got you crying, Charlie.", he stated, sitting beside her.

Shepard leans into his arms, "I'm just tired. Guess the great commander Shepard isn't up to the
challenges after the reapers anymore."

"What challenges are you talking about?" Garrus knew what she meant, but he wanted to hear her
take on it all.

"I just want a safe place to raise a family. To settle down, and... move forward. Keep a spot open for
when Satima returns.", she replied.

Garrus held her tightly. "We will." He lifted her chin up to gaze into her softened teary green eyes.
"I'm getting leave soon. We're going away someplace tropical, just like I promised before. And
you're going to rest."

She smiled at him. "Can't wait.", giving a sweet kiss to his mandible. "If we're going tropical, then
we're going to a beach? That means I'll need something to wear."

Garrus could feel his heart skip a beat into excitement. "Or", he started with a smirk. "You could
wear nothing at all." He growled low to her, teasing her side, hearing her giggle. They fell back
together on the bed, already caught in a moment of intimacy.

Chapter End Notes

:)
Renuion

Chapter Summary

The hybrid returns. But not all is well. Shepard encourages her daughter to open up about the past year, while teasing the notion of a family. The council demands answers from the hybrid. None are given. Satima is hiding a secret, and one that could be fatal to them all.

Chapter Notes

Welcome! Language and illness triggers. Thanks for stopping by! ;)

A year passed as the galaxy continued to heal. Systems Alliance made an expansion closer to the Terminus systems, despite the council's warnings. Humanity started to spread themselves too thin, again. Would more outposts prove beneficial in the long run?

Gesin Sar'manak had become leader of the new Hegemony. Batarians everywhere began recolonizing their home with the help of the Alliance and the council. Councilor Khalee organized a joint colony in the Armstrong nebula. Many humans doubted how long it could continue, considering how much animosity lasted between the two races. Even other council races shed their own voices of concern for this project.

Keepers throughout the citadel continued to display more cognitive behavior. With a few here and there going missing. The council denied any issues with the situation, using Khalee as speaker for the entire station.

Currently, Commander Shepard finally received her promotion and became Captain of the Normandy. Lieutenant-Commander Williams was promoted herself in the position of Commander, maintaining her alliance career, working alongside her fellow spectres.

Garrus had been given advancement in the turian military to Commander of Administrative and Logistical Strategy, heading a reaper division for future turian privates to tour and study.

James completed his N7 training. Proudly working on the Normandy and often colonies on the terminus. Liara formed a public intelligence and statistic data division. Putting the Alliance and Thessia's own asari government in charge, co-oping the two races. Still resuming her role, privately, as the shadow broker.

Captain Shepard had recently headed back to the citadel for important news. All of this progress helped forge a way for her and Garrus to settle down more, and maybe have a family. But it was once again overshadowed by an anxious thought. Where is Satima? And is she still alive?

Styx Theta Cluster
Erebus System
In orbit of Nepmos
The freighter, Endeavor, slowly navigated through the system. Carrying mostly provisions and a few construction crates. Captain Marley paced the circular corridor checking on the diagnostics of her ship's engines. Everything looked perfect. So why is she feeling anxious suddenly?

As she continued through the engine core, a sudden jolt of turbulence caused the ship to rumble, bolting the entire vessel forward. Forcing Marley to stumble. The lights flickered with some of the monitors on the diagnostic panel displaying static.

"Captain. We got some kind of spatial anomaly happening here.", her pilot commed.

She ran to the cockpit. "What's wrong?" Once there, she spotted her crew gathering around the two windows into space. "Captain, look.", the pilot pointed.

Outside the view window, they witnessed a large magnetic tear rip a dark hole the size of a dreadnought in space. "What the bloody hell?", she spoke.

The Endeavor's electrical systems started to flicker again, and navigations were going out. The gravitational pull of the singularity was causing massive emp waves. "Get us out of here. Don't stop recording those readings, though.", Marley ordered.

"Captain. Should we contact the Alliance?", her lieutenant asked.

Marley watched the tear threaten them, hurling electrical veins from the black whole. "Do it.", she said.

Endeavor groaned from the hard turn her pilot forced. As they managed to leave the area, something began coming out of the tear. "Give me vid point on this!", Marley shouted, terrified.

The display played the tear spewing out a grey dreadnought, a warship of great size. It had obvious signs of heavy battle and the hull was damaged on more than several places. Onboard fires blazed in sections throughout the vessel.

"My God.", the pilot, Pax, spoke. "It's going to crash into Nepmos."

"Lenna, has the Alliance responded yet?", Marley asked.

"Ma'am, not yet.", she replied. Lenna watched the event, anxious to leave. "We need to continue to evacuate!"

Marley looked to her crew then back at the ship."Nepmos is unstable. If there are any survivors, they won't make it in time for the Alliance to get here. Keep the Endeavor at a distance. When this ship crashes, we'll send a shuttle to the surface."

Her crew glanced around, nervous and fearful of this order. They weren't soldiers. Marley continued watching the ship crash into the atmosphere of the radioactive planet. Something seemed off about the way it descended. Almost as if someone was trying to navigate it. "Keep your nose up... ", she muttered to herself.

More hull pieces peeled off in layers, flying backwards like shrapnel. In moments, this massive ship was navigated straight into a mountain, hitting the rocky surface at maximum speed. Giant rocks turned into boulders of destruction, exploding off the mountain side.

The ship skidded forward, groaning loudly into the sky as fires scorched the thin ground.

The bridge of the ship slammed right into a magma flow from a rocky hill, spilling hot overflow down the side of the mountain. Any closer and whoever was flying that ship would have been...
roasted. Pax held his breath, watching in astonishment, as Marley stood behind, equally in awe of the massively destructive collision. "I've never seen a crash like this before.", she commented.

Lenna observed the planet. "Captain, are you sure it would be a good idea to follow this? We should wait for the alliance."

"Until the alliance gets here, we must make sure no one is dying in that ship. We'll only be there for a short time and no longer.", Marley informed.

They waited half an hour for the majority of the fires to die down, before flying to the surface. Lenna shook while putting on her enviro-suit. She's never been this terrified since the reapers attacked her colony. Marley placed her hand on the nervous lieutenant's shoulder and nodded. Inside the small shuttle Lenna flew, Marley turned on surface scanners recording any anomalies nearby.

"Keep your breather on. The air is filled with sulfur.", Marley informed.

"Yes, Ma'am.", Lenna complied.

Into the overcast sky of the planet, Endeavor's shuttle carefully flew over the crash site. Through their view window, they could see the devastation of the ship's circumstance. "I have multiple hull and deck fires. It's mostly in the aft of the ship.", Lenna informed.

"Take us down there. I think I can see a hatch.", Marley ordered.

As the shuttle landed, a cracking sound echoed underneath it on the surface. The hatch opened. "Step carefully. Nepmos has a thin surface." Captain Marley informed.

"How do you know so much about this planet?", Lenna asked.

The hatch of the defunct vessel looked warped, but luckily the shuttle had a torch. "I used to be a marine of the alliance. My platoon was stationed here. We were 90. In the end, we had gone down to three."

"Because of the planet?", Lenna asked, standing beside Marley.

"That and the fact a hostile nest of rachni lived here. If it wasn't for Commander Shepard and the Normandy, I wouldn't be here today.", she explained.

Lenna gave a silent wow before taking the torch and beginning on the hatch. It took less than an hour, but they managed to cut out a sizable enough entrance. Once inside, Marley and Lenna used their only means for weapons as a guard against whatever had been trapped in the ship.

"It's so dark and hot.", Lenna complained, as she wiped sweat from her brow. Pushing honey blonde strands behind her ears.

"That's because of the fires further down. We'll make a short sweep of the bridge, then check for life signs on the second deck. Hopefully by then the Alliance will have showed up.", Marley explained.

The hull interior was black, with condensation leaking down the walls. Blistering steam spurted out from side vents. Must have been from the decks below. Using their small flashlights, they slowly stepped into the shadowy bridge. Sparks from damaged panels lit a few areas.

Up ahead, Marley looked for a command center. She spotted right away the set up with four pilot chairs on each side in a row. This would be where ensigns, lieutenants and other crew would manage the ship's basic and tactical functions. "Here.", she pointed.
Two large bodies laid on the deck wearing damaged black armor. Closer inspection showed strange grey lesions, oozing silver liquid in the open patches of flesh on the lifeless corpses. "Keep looking.", Marley continued, disturbed. A disgusting smell started to permeate throughout the rest of the ship, giving off a decayed rotting scent. "Oh, my God.", Lenna commented while covering her nose.

"Ignore it and keep looking. Someone steered this ship to land. They must still be alive.", Marley commented.

Pax commed,"Captain, an Alliance vessel is here. Also, there seems to be a reading of several life forms coming your way. I... I think it's a scanner malfunction."

Marley realized they made it to the bridge of the ship inside the navigational bay, and looked around the cockpit. "Lenna. Link up your scanner. It could be survivors.", she ordered.

Lenna set her light down, putting her torch on a panel. Quickly linking her scanner to the Endeavor's navigational output. "This isn't possible?", she questioned aloud.

"What? What isn't possible?", Marley argued. She turned around to spot a shadow that moved quickly from the front of the cockpit. Holding her light steady to the walls, Marley read some sort of graffiti written in red liquid.

"..I cain heare tem in tha wals.." She repeated. Whoever wrote this couldn't write the common tongue correctly.

Lenna looked up, her eyes wide in fear. "Those life forms are already in the room with us." She turned to pick up her torch. As she grabbed her light, Lenna pointed it to a shadow and screamed as something loomed over her.

"Lenna!", Marley shouted.

Silence. "Lenna... where are you? Lenna!", Marley had the feeling this had gone horribly wrong. Cautiously, she stepped to were Lenna had been. The pitch-black bridge prevented Marley from seeing much. A chittering sound echoed from the hull ceiling and the walls, followed by clacking noises in the vents.

Loud rumbling from the ship's lower decks caused her to stumble. She suddenly felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand. As she turned, she was face to chest with a creature.

Pax frantically tried comming them. The Alliance had started to send out search teams for the wreck. Warning the Endeavor to stay clear. Pax didn't alert them to the Captain being on the surface. Finally, after minutes of desperation, he got his Captain's comms open. "Captain.", he repeated.

"Pax?", she answered.

He let out a sigh of relief. "Captain. Are you alright? Where is Lenna?"

"Feeling ill. We're coming back now.", Marley replied.

"Did you find any survivors?", Pax asked.

"Survivors?", Marley answered.

"Yes. You wanted to check for survivors of the crash.", he replied.

"I... I don't remember. I'm not feeling very well, myself. The atmosphere has too much radiation. Prepare the shuttle bay.", Marley informed.
Citadel
Zen Gardens Apartments
Presidium

Charlie waited for the extranet mail to reach her inbox. She sat anxiously at her desk, crossed legs, and shaking. They waited for their situation to settle, for the galaxy to quiet once more, to have time for a family. Being a high-ranking officer gave her more control of the days off, which made the crew of the Normandy ecstatic.

The mail pinged.

She hastily opened it, reading the contents to herself, her eyes darting from one sentence to another until it was finished. Charlie closed the terminal and uncrossed her legs, pushing herself back from the desk to stand, and ran.

Through the door, down the hallway and into their bedroom, where Garrus sat on the bed. Reading his own mail from a data pad.

He looked up to her. "Charlie?"

She gave a wide grin. "The adoption went through."

They embraced, nearly forgetting that in three days they were both due back in duty.

That night, amidst the happy dinner they celebrated over, Shepard received a message from Alliance Command. "No, not yet.", she groaned. Garrus looked up to her omni-tool's ping, when his went off as well.

"Urgent from the council"

They exchanged a worried look to each other. What would happen that forced the council to call them both?

Days later, the Normandy was sent to investigate the mysterious crash on Nepmos. Another alliance ship nearby, made the first contact with a single survivor.

During space flight Shepard received news, courtesy of Khalisah, about the crash on Nepmos circulating throughout the galaxy. She knew the specifics for her being in the cluster. Publicly, it was to show a healthy presence of military to any anomalous situation.

Officially, it had been confirmed the crashed vessel was indeed Sentarian. Further inspection proved it was the same ship High-Commander Memtrix directed. Satima left in this vessel.

Shepard held back her fears of the outcome. The Endeavor originally reported the incident, with a short vid of the tear and the ships entrance. Except, no one had heard from them since. Temporary structures were erected to house the alliance presence during the investigation. The alliance had not searched the ship, yet.

Normandy entered the system, beginning it's decent into the atmosphere of the planet.

On the cargo deck, Cortez had just finished prepping the kodiak for flight. James started to gear up when Garrus approached Shepard. She stood at the weapon rack. "Charlotte. Heard anything from top side?", he asked.
"Only that the ship remains defunct with one survivor.", she answered, tightening a strap over her leg.

He handed her a pistol, as she holstered it behind her back. "The hierarchy is getting anxious about the wreck being sentarian. If something can bring them down like that, we don't want it here."

"Agreed. The galaxy isn't prepared for anything like the reapers. Or even a small-scale war.", she replied.

Garrus followed her to the kodiak as James stepped inside. "Ready to see the Sentarian war ship up close. I never got a chance to meet them personally.", James remarked.

Cortez chuckled, "Nothing surprising about them. They're tall, green and don't want to probe you."

"That's not the image I would like to travel with.", Garrus replied, disturbed.

Shepard smiled as she put on her helmet. "Finish gearing up. Toxic atmosphere, so helmets on."

Cortez flew the kodiak to the alliance outpost. The nearby vessel orbited around the planet, sending a steady supply of marines and engineers. A bigger warship not meant for stealth, the Inglorious received the comms from alliance command to secure the wreck and keep remnant batarian pirates out.

Down on the surface, the crew piled out of the shuttle into the camp. Shepard observed many alliance soldiers going over orders or changing shifts. Some nodded at Shepard, knowing who she was. While others stared, or averted their gazes.

"They don't look so happy.", James spoke.

"I wouldn't either if something like that was next door to me.", Shepard pointed ahead to the now crumbling ship. It's massive dark hulls slumping into the mountainside.

"Why is it only the alliance that's responded? Where's the turians or asari?", James wondered.

"We're not in council space, remember.", Garrus answered.

Dark clouds covered the sky as they continued to inspect their surroundings. Murmurs from groups of marines echoed through the long path between the hab tents and small compounds. Rumbling sounds came from the ship in the distance. Shepard gazed ahead to see Commander Williams walk out of a small hab, quickly smiling upon seeing them. "Captain. You made it."

"Ash! It's been months. How is the spectre work treating you?", Shepard inquired, shaking her hand.

"The only way damage control can.", Ashley replied.

"It's not all that bad.", Shepard smirked, feeling relieved to see her friend. Ash looked great. Clearly enjoying her work in the spectre field. She still wore alliance blues, proud to show her human presence.

They both turned to the ship on the outskirts of the camp when another rumble came from its crash site. "One hell of a crash.", Ash commented. She shook her head before turning to Shepard. "I've got to check a few things. Rear-Admiral Marsden is in the end hab tent. Along with someone else.", she informed.

"Thanks.", Shepard said, before turning to Ash again, confused. "Someone else?"
"The survivor.", Ash answered. "You'll see, Captain." She furrowed her brow troubled before heading off to another tent. What was that about?

Alliance soldiers took guard at perimeter choke points, as marines carried heavy crates of medical supplies for the hazardous atmosphere. Helmets were suggested due to the toxic air, though not required. Among the loud chatter of orders, Shepard heard a familiar voice. Her team quickly followed it to the end tent adjacent to a medical compound. "Don't touch me!"

Shepard and team walked in to see a woman sitting on an examination table, her back turned to them. A medical officer attempted to administer meds to her. "Ma'am, I'm trying to help you with pain.", he stated. "You're covered in minor burns and lacerations."

She shrugged off his hand and smirked. "I don't need to be drugged.", she started. "Now get out of my face, before I jam that needle someplace tender.", she warned in a more mature tone.

On closer inspection, Shepard realized that mature tone was Satima. She wore no armor, with her under-suit in tatters and dirty. Shepard jogged up to her, Garrus in tow. Both parents tried to embrace Satima, but she flinched back. "Whoa."

"Satima... it's us.", Shepard spoke, elated to see her daughter alive.

She stared at them in confusion, quickly turning her head away. "That was quick.", Satima complained.

"You're not happy to see us?", Shepard feared.

Satima sighed. Stepping up to the third family reunion, James caught a dramatic difference in the young girl's appearance. Her hair was buzzed off. She had a faded scar over her right cheek, and she looked... older. Not by much but less of a kid and more filled out. Like Shepard.

Satima exhibited a more distant attitude. The most important feature was innocence. Whatever small shred she held onto before, looked completely gone from her gaze.

Even Shepard could tell from the turian like eyes, her daughters crystal alert stare became an empty glance. Garrus stared away at this grown woman who is his daughter. She had old bloody cuts on her hands and neck. Small cuts on her left cheek.

Grime and dirt covered her pale face in patches. Possibly from the crash she survived? Satima had been through hell, obviously, and her frightened expression towards the outdoors convinced him that something really bad happened.

"Okay. I get it. It's been some time.", Shepard accepted.

Garrus watched Satima's edgy stance. "So, kid. How was the journey?" He tried to lighten the mood with small talk. Garrus hates small talk, but it was all he could think of at the moment.

She looked at him strange, licking her lower lip nervously. "Not so good, I guess." Satima stared in the distance.

"Can you tell us what happened?", Garrus asked.

Satima then shuddered as if a chilled wind swept over her. "You feel cold?", she questioned.

"Some de meido shit going on here.", James muttered.
Rear-Admiral Marsden entered with alliance marines at his side. "Captain Shepard. It's an honor." He held out his hand to shake hers. Shepard returned the compliment. "Admiral."

Marsden looked similar to Hackett, wizened from decades of warfare. He stood tall and still before them. Nearly matching Garrus and James's height. "You got here quickly." Marsden wondered.

"I don't make it a habit of waiting when it comes to dangerous and peculiar circumstances.", Shepard stated.

He caught Satima's gaze before returning to the conversation. "Well, Captain. We've scanned the outer hulls of the dreadnought. There are no life signs. This young woman here was found wandering in the valley below. She kept muttering something in a language unknown and put three of my men in medical. I had her scanned to find out she's the classified traveler, and according to alliance command, your daughter.

Shepard couldn't help but to grin, before answering. "Yes, Admiral. She is."

"I thought the alliance had her holed up in some quarantine lab on a distant planet?", he argued.

Shepard's grin soured with a glare. "Why would you think that?"

Satima hopped off the table and started walking towards them. She picked up a jacket from a chair. "That's because I'm dangerous.", she replied sarcastically.

The admiral and Shepard stared away awkwardly at her. Satima finished putting her jacket on and began walking outside. One of the marines tried to caution her. "Ma'am the air is toxic, you should wear a re-breather."

Satima stopped to glance his way, turning to Shepard and team with a sarcastic expression. "I survived worse.", she replied, returning her gaze to the marine. "And stop calling me ma'am!", Satima glared. The marine stepped back, letting her through.

Garrus followed her, as she strolled past the marines and guards. She sat on a crate, overlooking the valley of ash and cracked ground below. Heavy grey clouds covered the sky choking the sunset to darkness. Satima heard footsteps behind her. "Here.", Garrus handed her a re-breather. "There's no logic in being stubborn." She scoffed, pushing it away. Garrus shoved the mask in her hand. "Put it on.", he ordered.

Satima glared at him, putting on the re-breather. "Happy, now?", she mocked.

Garrus crossed his arms, satisfied. "Yup."

Meanwhile, the Admiral continued his report informing Shepard of rachni movement below. "No hostile activity has come of them, but I want to remove my men all the same for a time, before resuming a thorough search into the ship.", Mardsen stated.

Shepard agreed. "They haven't been hostile since the reapers defeat, but I wouldn't want to test that with lives."

"I'll continue planetary scans in orbit. Alliance command will send you a data report. Captain, you should probably take her to earth. That's just my advice.", he offered.

"Admiral.", she replied. What an asshole. Looks like she finally met the first biasedly influenced human against Satima. Not counting the Cerberus bitches.
After stepping outside. She found them near the encampments edge. Garrus speaking to her.
"Where's Memtrix and your friend Arkasia?", he asked. "What happened to the sentarians?" Satima
stared ahead and pointed to the sky. "Back there."
"What do you mean? Space?", he asked again.
She only stared.

Shepard hiked to them. "Admiral Marsden is leaving and taking his men with him. Rachni activity
below us. We should leave the surface back to the Normandy. Satima, are you ready to go?"

The hybrid nodded, looking back to the ship. "Do you think the fires will completely destroy it?"
Satima asked with a worried tone.

"Possibly. That's another reason to wait before searching the ship.", Shepard informed. She stared at
her daughter. What the hell happened?

Satima stood up to follow them out of the camps edge. She hoped Shepard is right.

The shuttle ride was filled with silence, as both Shepard and Garrus watched Satima keep to herself.
She didn't want to discuss anything. James stared away from the awkward setting. Once docked in
the Normandy, they left the kodiak to ungear. Satima gazed away quietly.

Shepard had just finished taking her chest piece off when she noticed this. "Satima. Are you okay?"

Satima had begun biting her nails nervously staring at a table of guns. "Hmm? Yeah, I'm fine.
Why?", she asked startled.

"Nothing.", Shepard replied, worried.

On deck three in the medical bay, Satima stood in front of Chockwas as the doctor scanned her head
and neck. "Well, my dear. It seems you've experienced some head trauma. Though nothing serious, I
need to give you a thorough examination just to be sure."

"No.", Satima protested. "I'm fine, there's nothing wrong."

"Why?", Shepard asked. "You're covered in abrasions and more than a few lacerations that the
doctor can suture together."

Satima gave them a warning glare, "No."

Concerned, Shepard slowly stepped forward to Satima. "Did someone do this to you?", she gestured
to the cuts and bruises on the girl's arms, neck and face.

Satima's expression went from panicked to terrified. "You don't understand.", she complained.

Shepard watched her daughter's frightened flinches from her own touch. "Tell me! Who did this to
you?", she demanded.

Satima started to hyperventilate, falling to her knees in distress. She covered her ears, yelling for the
pain to stop. Shepard knelt down trying to help her calm. "What's wrong with her!", she yelled to
Chockwas.

The good doctor hurriedly administered a sedative to calm the hybrid while scanning her. "She's
exhausted, feverish and hysterical. Shepard, she's post-traumatic."

Shepard continued to hold Satima staring at Chockwas in disbelief. Post-traumatic? Why? Satima
shivered in her arms, whimpering as the sedative took hold.

Moments later, the doctor finally scanned the girl's body. Which revealed troubling truths. Shepard stood by nervously. "What did you find?", she asked.

"Several surgical sites. Scarring from tissue removal.", Chockwas answered.

Shepard couldn't believe it. "What? What do you mean tissue removal?"

Chockwas brought a holo display of Satima's body above them. Showing the old recovered injuries. "Previous battle wounds. I should know, I've bandaged and sewn up plenty of soldiers in my career. Her hair has grown back, but there is a surgical scar on her right scalp. Just above the ear. Shepard, there's a neural implant in her brain. Strange looking. I've never seen this type of technology before."

"Could it be Sentarian?", Shepard asked, alarmed.

"I won't know without removing it and comparison to others, and that could prove fatal."

Shepard stared away at Satima. What did they do to her? Chockwas left the lights on dim as Satima laid on the bed sleeping. Hooked to intravenous bags of fluids and other medicines for her dextro needs.

Warp gate
Spatial Rift Tear near Nepmos
One week ago

The ship roared and groaned under heavy fire. Satima tried everything possible to stop them from boarding, but she was only one person. She'll lock them below and hope the fires will kill them. Sanitation and quarantine.

"Kel tor meh jin"

Ship VI alerted her to several hull breaches. Satima hopes she can make it in time to reach Shepard. Before it spreads. Once through the tear, the ship began losing velocity and navigational functions. Panicked, Satima tried manual flight. In the distance from the large viewing windows, another ship hovered nearby. She didn't have time to comm or alert them.

"Ne la'tir ke tin"

In the midst of all the noise from deck fires, hull breaches and alarms, Satima can still make out the warnings from the VI. "Yes, I know I'm about to crash you stupid digital bitch!", she shouted.

Through the atmosphere, she could see the ground getting closer and closer. Satima tightened her straps and swerved her pilot's chair around as the vessel crashed into a mountain.

The glass of the windows broke into thousands of tiny pieces, flying shrapnel into the bridge. Some of it bounced off surfaces, cutting like little insect bites into her exposed skin.

The force of the crash knocked her unconscious.

It could have been minutes or hours, even. Satima opened her eyes to feel heat. "The fires!", she said aloud, struggling to undo her chair straps. With a quick slice of her blade, Satima freed herself. Falling on her knees and crawling through glass and shrapnel. The chittering noises were heard again.

She turned to watch a lava overflow from the broken windows, barely touching the sharp nose of the
ship. Too close for comfort to think about. Once on her feet, Satima knew the infected were outside the bridge doors trying to find a way in. Disturbed, tired and out of options, Satima decided to display her fears for anyone who finds her dead body to see. She took a bloody finger and wrote on the bridge hull.

"I cain heare tem in tha wals" Horrible human, she knows. But if Shepard ever found this, she would know it was Satima who wrote the warning. They banged on the doors. Their screeches of terror and pain echoing to her. Satima had heard enough. Angry, she ran to the door, past the bodies of her friends who helped her steal the rift capable warship, and hacked the panel to open. Satima readied herself with her blades.

In a rush, they nearly overwhelmed her with their incredible speed and disregard for pain. She sliced, stabbed and impaled them off her. Screaming in defiance against their relentless onslaught. They were not many, but Satima had become virtually exhausted from the battle. She panted hard, sweat covering her brow with the last one down.

Then the noise came again. A single infectant crawled from the dead and attacked her. She sliced its flesh as black ooze spurted all over her armor. The creature died at her feet. Satima began to panic, and stared at her blunder in fear. "Sanitation and Quarantine!", she repeated.

Quickly, Satima began pulling and tearing her armor off. Trying to rid herself of the contagion. Once stripped to her under-suit, she spotted the emergency exit hatch above her and opened it.

On top of the ship's upper hull, Satima closed the hatch with a heavy thud. She observed the volcanic ashen landscape. Satima thought she landed in hell. Crawling down to the surface, she started her long trek into the unknown. Thinking of how her body would look... petrified in volcanic ash.

-----------------------------------------------------------------

Shepard left Satima to rest under the care of Chockwas as she paced in her cabin. She should plan to go back to the planet herself and find answers to what was going on, but the rachni activity and the ship's fires prevented that.

Meanwhile, Garrus finished overlooking his old spot in the main battery. EDI had already set a program during his absence that did the work for him. He still checked it four times before finally giving it a rest. Eventually, Garrus quietly walked into the medbay, having heard of Satima's panic attack and listening to Charlie's concerns.

"How is she?", he asked walking through the door.

Chockwas closed her terminal. "Better. Her vital signs at least."

He stood beside Satima, watching her sleep soundly, pulling the brown blanket over her shoulders to keep her warm. Spirits, it must have been a long while before she could rest like this. Satima seemed to have treated the Normandy as a refuge for her. He was glad she did. It is for him, too. "I wasn't in here for her eval. What did you and Char... Shepard, find out?"

Chockwas gave him a glance, and stood up from her chair, walking to the examination table the hybrid girl slept on. "She's been through heavy combat. Her body is overly stressed from exhaustion and malnutrition. There are surgical scars, injuries. Traces of an acid substance. Then again, wandering around in a toxic atmosphere doesn't help, either."

"Spirits.", he commented. She started to stir. Her eyes opening slowly. "Hey, kid.", he flexed his mandibles into a grin. "You're on the Normandy, in case you forgot."
"What the hell happened?", she asked sitting up carefully, holding her head in pain.

"I had to sedate you. You were suffering from post-traumatic injuries.", Chockwas informed, performing another scan for good measure.

"Damn.", Satima replied. "I didn't... hurt anyone, did I?"

"Other than scarring the hell outta Shepard, no, you didn't.", Garrus helped her to sit up straight.

The doctor finished, closing her scanner. "You seem to be recovering well. A little more rest and maybe a good meal could help. I'll go tell Shepard you're awake and give you two some privacy.", Chockwas smiled warmly at them.

After she left, Garrus crossed his arms leaning on the table. "You look... different." Satima raised a brow. Garrus smirked. "I'm talking about your hair. You cut it off?"

She felt her head curiously. Her eyes widened quickly before settling down to a stare, sighing loudly. "Necessary."

"It's... interesting.", he added. Satima glanced away, her cheeks blushed a light red. Garrus couldn't get out the fact Satima was still very pretty to him. His round faced adorable daughter, but if he said that, she might punch him.

"Satima.", Shepard said coming into the medbay."I'm glad you're feeling better."

She looked back up to Shepard, "Thanks.", Satima replied.

The lights came back on from dim to bright again. Satima adjusted her vision while Garrus and Shepard stared at her head.

"What?", she spoke aloud. "Why are you staring at me?"

Shepard started speaking to her."Chockwas found a surgery mark on the right side, behind your ear. Do you remember why?"

Satima quickly felt behind her ear, rubbing the scar. "Vaguely", Satima replied, averting her gaze oddly.

"Would explain the hair.", Garrus spoke. "No offense, but you're kinda sporting an old Jack look."

Shepard continued while giving Garrus the eye, "Satima, you have surgical scars inside your body, tissue removal... a neural implant of unknown technology in your brain. Do you understand how dangerous this sounds?"

Satima sat up completely, irritated at the questions. "It's none of your damn business." She began ripping the iv's out of her arm, while red droplets of blood dotted the table and floor. Satima stood up and pushed past them, heading out of the door. Shepard couldn't believe what was going on. "Satima?! What are you doing?"

She didn't turn her head, but replied. "Heading back to the warship."

Garrus and Shepard followed her out. "Without armor or weapons? You're still injured, Satima!", she grabbed the girls arm.

Satima pulled away viciously, "Ca ida di striba!"
The deck went silent as Normandy crew members stood around, unsure of the display they were watching. Garrus stared in confusion. "So now you're one of them? Speaking their language and acting shady about what is really going on.", he questioned.

Satima glared at him, "Yes, I speak their language, eat their food and live on their ships! It's because they accept who I am. Not just being a hybrid, but of what I am."

Shepard stepped closer, her gaze worried. "And just what do you think you are?"

Satima put her arms to her sides with an unhappy expression. "An abomination."

Serpant Nebula
Citadel

The Normandy shot out of the relay, swiftly passing by other ships and freighters. Satima stood behind Joker as he navigated the warship towards the citadel, pacing when Shepard approached. They passed underneath the Destiny Ascension and between turian warships. An alliance dreadnought stood watch over the open arms of the great station.

"It's been over a year, Satima. Do you remember what the citadel looks like?", Shepard asked, trying to reconnect.

Satima remained silent, quickly leaving the cockpit in a rude manner. Shepard watched with a worried expression.

Joker and EDI navigated the Normandy through the docking hubs, finally hovering into the presidium upper docks. "So, Captain. What do you think is Satima's problem? I mean, she survived a crash and started speaking like the sentarians. You think maybe she's got a stick up her butt, too?", Joker commented facetiously.

"Cut the crap. She's been through enough.", Shepard warned.

Joker and EDI exchanged glances, obeying Shepard's order.

Satima waited at the hatch with Shepard and Garrus, following them out onto the citadel. She knows her attitude was insulting to Shepard, especially in front of the crew. "Last time I was here, I watched the Normandy leave.", she recalled, trying to answer her mother's question from earlier.

"That was a choice you didn't have to go through, Satima.", Shepard spoke, keeping her gaze straightforward.

Inside the open elevator, Satima continued. "Yes, it was! You don't understand, because you're not her!", she argued.

Garrus could tell there was frustration in his daughter's attitude.

Once on the presidium, they took Satima to their new home. Using the cab as transport and a quick way to keep prying eyes off them. Shepard knows sneaking Satima on the citadel isn't a grand idea, but she needs to speak with her daughter alone.

Away from the paranoid citizens and all too curious journalists. Their home was located further in the presidium. Close to the entrance stairs and elevator to the Silversun strip.

The old apartment that Anderson had given her sustained heavy damage. After the presidium received the bulk of repairs, the upper and lower wards were next in line to be rebuilt. Instead of
keeping it as an apartment, Shepard decided to use the space for better means. Serving as a dorm for
the many kids who suffered losing family as well as being next door to a newly rebuilt arcade.

Shepard landed the cab on a small parking hub, quickly getting out. Ushering Satima along with
Garrus walking behind. They strolled inside the lobby to the stairs, following the steps to a short
hallway. Satima slowly walked through the front door when it pinged green for entry. Her eyes
widened to the expanse of the spacious apartment. A generous gift to them?

"Make yourself at home, Satima.", Shepard offered. Trying to cool the earlier arguments.

The large living room was surrounded by tall windows overlooking the presidium. She could watch
traffic flow from the couch and stare away into the false sky above.

The walls were colored in light blues, overhead dimmers gave enough light to bounce off furniture
and art displays. Some of the displays looked familiar. Prothean stones and asari text sat visibly
across the entry way. Another housed a perfect replica of the Normandy.

Satima stepped further into the room, spotting a set of pictures on a table behind the couch. She
picked one up. It was the image of her, sitting between them that night of the party.

Another picture caught her eye of them in beautiful attire. Shepard wore a sky-blue dress, pillowy
and soft looking. Her radiant red hair crowned in gold dots. Their friends all dressed wonderfully,
holding glasses of pale yellow liquid and genuine smiles.

What did she miss? Their whole lives?

Satima sat it down gently, depressed and lonely.

"Satima. Follow me.", Shepard asked.

She followed Shepard down a hallway to a sizable room, with a big bed and private bathroom. "This
is your room. For when you returned. We didn't know if you would have a place of your own, so
Garrus and I decided to leave a space just for you. I know how much you enjoy privacy, so this
room was built in the back of the apartment. Quiet and away from the front of the home.", Shepard
informed.

Satima couldn't understand the reasons behind it, but neither could she express the turbulent amount
of emotions welling up inside. She had her own bed, washroom and privacy. What was it they
wanted in return?
"There's fresh clothes in the dresser next to the wall by your bed. I had them especially made for
you.", Shepard added.

When Shepard left, Satima looked inside the drawers to see a nice assortment of garments for her.
Everything displayed in dark colors, just how she likes it. She decided to take a shower, programing
the panel to make it extra hot.

Naked, Satima stepped inside and fully immersed herself in the hot water, gasping at the intense heat
burning her skin. Dirt, blood and grime washed away down the drain, leaving a dark streak behind
on the white tile.

Images of the infectant attacking her played while looking at it. She closed her eyes tightly to banish
them. Visible scars over her legs and back showed more clearly now. The soap stung her small
wounds, causing her to wince.

She shouldn't be here, but what else was she to do? Satima needs help to save them, and Shepard
was the only help she could think to get. Memories of the ship's crash filled her mind as she slowly sat down on the tile floor, bringing her knees to her face, and wept.

The Dinner

Shepard set the table, satisfied with its organized appearance. This will be the very first time they sit together as a family. Tomorrow will be full of work and duty, but tonight is for Satima. She walked into the open kitchen where the dining table was placed.

Natural wood with pewter metal designed the space. She could smell food. Shepard turned around to see her daughter, clean and dressed. Looking more terrified of the table than she did on Nepmos. "I see your wearing the clothes I got for you.", she smiled.

Satima looked down to her shirt and pants. Proud of wearing something decent for a change, since the horrifying event. "Thanks. It feels soft. I like the vest that goes with it.", she replied.

"It sometimes gets chilly on the citadel. I figured a thermal vest would be nice to have.", Shepard continued. "Does it fit well with your small carapace in the back?"

Satima adjusted the collar, giving a nod. "Not tight, but comfortably snug."

Garrus walked in, unarmored and wearing normal attire. Satima stared in shock. He caught this and laughed at her. "I know it's strange, but I do take the armor off. Well, just this once.", he mused. Garrus still wore his visor, regardless.

She chuckled lightly at him. They all sat down to the table, sitting in silence when Garrus got up quickly. "Let me get it.", he gestured to the food.

Once the plates were given, Shepard and Garrus started to eat while Satima gazed at the situation. Shepard glanced up to Satima. "Are you hungry?", she asked, concerned.

Satima viewed her meal. "What is it?" Grey looking meat and purple sauce covered her plate.

Garrus exchanged glances to Charlotte. "It's dextro. Safe for you to eat. Pretty tasty if you try it.", he tried to smile.

Satima gulped, feeling uncomfortable. She picked up a utensil and started to dig in, then little by little put a morsel or two in her mouth. They attempted to not stare, afraid it would prevent Satima from eating. "How was it you were able to eat anything the sentarians had? Considering you can only eat dextro.", Shepard wondered.

"I think they can eat both kinds of protein. Levo and dextro. I've never gotten sick from it.", she answered.

"Oh.", Shepard spoke. "Well, how do you like this place?", she asked.

Satima glanced up, "It's... nice."

Shepard gave a short smile, quickly looking to Garrus and tapped his leg with her foot, nodding to Satima. He cleared his throat, "So, Satima. Are you feeling any better since the crash?"

She looked at him, "I'm still sore. A little tired, but glad to be away from that planet." Satima started to enjoy her meal. The sauce really was good.

"Tomorrow, Alliance command and possibly the council, will want to question you. If you're not up
to it yet, I can make them wait.", Shepard stated.

"That's alright.", Satima replied. Slowly cutting the grey meat, she started to ask questions. "When I came in the front door, there were images on the table. I looked at one, of the both of you in nice looking clothes. Haven't seen anything like that before. What exactly has happened while I was gone?" Satima stopped eating, staring at them with her question echoing in the room.

It was time to reveal some things. Shepard smiled at her, "Last year we got married, finally.", she looked to Garrus lovingly. "That's why we were dressed so nice. It's a ceremony and then a party."

Satima tilted her head slightly, "You're... mated?! Like... joined?"

"That's what it means, yeah.", Garrus answered.

"Oh!", Satima replied, nervously. She started to play with her food, picking away at the leftovers. "Oh.", she sighed.

"What's wrong?", Shepard asked.

"Nothing. I'm glad you're together... married. You deserve it more than anything.", Satima seemed sad.

Suddenly, the door VI announced a visitor. Shepard slammed her glass on the table upset at the intrusion on this important moment, and got up to answer. Satima observed, anxious to what the reason was behind it.

Shepard opened the door to see Khalee."Councilor?", she announced surprised.

"I hope I'm not disturbing anything, but we need talk right now.", she informed.

Shepard stepped outside the door with Khalee. "What's going on?"

"I had a report earlier today that Satima has returned. And she is here, with you.", Khalee stated. She seemed more than antsy, looking around nervously. Are they being spied on? Charlotte nodded, leaning against the wall of her apartments exterior. "It's correct. She's back and inside. What's the problem?"

"Apart from Alliance Command breathing down my neck and the rest of the council concerning her "rants" a year ago, I've tried to stop their paranoid fears, but they insist she come immediately to a private meeting.", Khalee replied.

Shepard's face contorted in outrage. "That's out of the question. She's tired and suffering from the crash. Satima needs to rest, not be grilled by bureaucratic nonsense."

Khalee agreed with a sigh. "Shepard, I wouldn't have come here if I could postpone this. My hands are tied. I'll stall a little longer for you to get ready, but she has to come to the embassy. After that, I promise I will do everything in my power to keep them away from her."

Shepard shook her head in disappointment. "At least let her finish eating. She's been through a lot."

"Of course, Captain.", Khalee acknowledged.

Shepard went inside to see Satima standing with her arms crossed and a sour expression. "So... what happened to Emerson?", she asked.

Embassy
Satima stood on the petitioner's stage. This time it was empty, except for Shepard and Garrus. The new human councilor, Khalee Anderson, stood behind her. This woman too, had blonde hair and wore alliance blues, but her expression was that of genuine friendship and not devious undertakings.

"I wish we could've met in a more pleasant circumstance, Satima. I'm sorry to hear your ordeal of crash landing on Nepmos. If you need anything, please come to my office. I will be happy to help.", Khalee smiled. The young hybrid stood still, unanswered, yet her eyes told Khalee she was listening.

Satima stared in the direction of the holo images of the other councilors. Khalee stepped forward.
"My fellow councilors. Satima has agreed to meet with you this evening."

Tevos, the asari councilor, observed the girl with slight disgust. Daxis, however, studied the hybrid's appearance in fascination. "Satima. It is good to finally meet you. I'm the new turian councilor, Daxis Quintyrus.", he informed.

Satima ignored him, glancing around the stage. So much has changed since she last stood here. To hear of Sparatus's death and Emerson's treason shocked her in the ride to the embassy. Valern started to speak. "Has she lost the ability to speak? Why isn't she talking?", he demanded nervously.

Khalee spoke, "Councilors, Satima has been through a great deal, while suffering injuries from a crashed warship on Nepmos. Please understand her hesitation in replying."

"Our reports indicate there were no survivors, save her. Why isn't she being held in quarantine?", Valern argued.

"Satima has passed two medical exams and a third eval on the Normandy. Other than combat exhaustion and more than a few sustained injuries, she's safe.", Shepard retorted.

"Where are the Sentarians? I find it ominous she's the only one around from their warship!", Valern accused.

Satima glanced at them, almost delivering a devious grin before Tevos spoke. "Beginning tomorrow, I want a full investigation into the crash. Starting with her.", the asari glared.

"Why?", Satima blurted.

"We want to know if you'll be threatening anymore of our citizens. Since Emerson's disgraceful treason, we were not sure where you stand directly.", Tevos stated.

Satima scoffed. She gripped the front stage rails, leaning forward to give the councilors a hard stare. "I worked for the sentarians, nothing more.", she replied. Then glancing to Shepard. "I also stand with the alliance. Good enough?", she added sarcastically, facing them.

Tevos shook her head in annoyance. Daxis began to speak this time. "We appreciate your cooperation. When you are recovered, I would like to meet with you privately, tomorrow."

Satima crossed her arms, wary of this new turian councilor. "The council will adjourn at this time.", he added.

The holo images flickered and disappeared.

"Well, that went well.", Khalee frowned.

"Hypocritical jerks.", Shepard commented. She faced Khalee equally disappointed.
Garrus approached Satima. "Don't worry about them. You showed up. Now, you can go home and rest."

"Home?", Satima repeated, confused. They stared at her. Satima rubbed the buzz of ginger hair on her head nervously, "Right. Home.", she stated.

Later that evening, Satima sat on her bed remembering the words she said a year before to the crowd of people and the reporter. What a foolish thing she did.

A dull pain started to throb above her ear. The implant was reminding her of its existence again. This would make it five headaches a day, instead of two. Arkasia warned her. Satima suddenly looked up at the door. Shepard knocked and entered. "May I come in?"

Satima nodded.

Shepard took a seat next to Satima. "I just wanted to let you know that Khalee is a good person. She's nothing like Emerson. The council, apart from her and Daxis, are simply trying to dig up a reason to kick you off the station."

"Are you sure they're trustworthy? The new human and turian councilor's?", Satima asked, skeptical.

"Well, I fought alongside Daxis when I was kidnapped by batarians. Khalee was married to Anderson a long time ago, and used to teach at Grissom Academy. She works for the Alliance."

Satima leaned up, her attention caught. "You were kidnapped?"

Shepard nodded her head. "Oh, yeah. They couldn't hold me for long, though."

Satima glanced away."Kah ve. You certainly had an adventure while I was gone."

Shepard began to speak when Garrus came in. "Sorry for disturbing. I just wanted to see how Satima was doing.", he spoke. "We were talking about the treason Emerson committed a year ago.", she stated. He stood in front of them, arms crossed. "Another Cerberus bitch. I'm glad she's gone.", he remarked.

Satima looked up to him, "Cerberus? Damn!"

Shepard gave him a grin at the comment. "Yeah. But that's over with. She's put away in a deep cell so far down into the earth's surface, there's no chance for escape. Although two of her henchmen did. Miranda is on to Rasa, and Fantar is being hunted by Gesin.", Shepard added.

"Who?", Satima asked, confused.

"Sorry.", Shepard laughed. "I forgot to tell you all of that."

Satima smiled. Garrus pointed, happily. "There it is. I've been waiting to see that all day."

She blushed a little. "It's just a smile. Nothing significant."

Shepard touched Satima's arm. "It is to us." She glanced to Garrus, then back to Satima. "Can you tell us what happened? You don't have to say everything. Just... tell us what caused the crash."

Satima leaned back, her eyes widened in an unseen terror. "I'm not ready to talk about it. I just want to sleep, alright.", she replied apprehensively.

They both nodded in agreement, "No one's pushing you to talk. Maybe we can catch up in the
morning, before you meet with Councilor Quintyrus?", Shepard replied.

That night, Satima tossed and turned in bed. Reliving the nightmare, she went through before coming back to Shepard's galaxy. The unseen terror plagued them all. Sickness and death spread like wildfire in the system.

All of them massacred by gruesome monsters. How could they be so stupid and bring the fragments back from her time? She shot up from her bed, covered in cold sweat. Her head throbbed. The neural implant reminding her of the delicate walk she treaded between sanity and madness. The voices unheard can be quieted. If she only complied to torturous means.

Satima got out of bed, leaving her room to wander the living room. The windows were tinted to imitate night and a silent hush filled the large space. She walked to the couch and laid in it. Falling asleep to the sky cars outside, flying back and forth.

Nuclear Family

Satima stirred to muffled conversation from the kitchen. Groggily, she sat up wiping her eyes and curiously observed her surroundings. So, this wasn't a dream? Sky cars flew by as usual in the open space of traffic. The occasional whine of their engines muffled from the double panned glass. Satima slowly walked ahead, listening to them talk.

"I've got to contact Alliance Command today. They'll want their turn at speaking with her.", Shepard spoke.

Garrus sat at the table with a cup of hot liquid, "The hierarchy has been waiting patiently as well. It's a matter of time before Daxis interrupts a dinner to speak with me."

Satima watched their normal behavior. It didn't feel fair to be so safe here. Comfortable, clean and fed. Shepard looked up from her meal prep to her. "How are you feeling?", she asked.

Satima ran her hand over the ginger stubble of hair. A nervous pattern becoming self-evident of late. "Better, I suppose."

"Didn't like your bed, or was the couch a sort of old habit?", Garrus commented.

"Just wanted to be in an open space. Where I could see outside." she shrugged, taking a seat beside him. "What are we doing today after I speak with the turian councilor? Visiting more politicians and locking me in a cell for good measure?", she spoke sarcastically.

Shepard glanced at the comment upset, while Garrus awkwardly sat. He started to speak, "In order for the rest of the galaxy to understand your motives and heritage. You will need to speak with politicians and people looking to lock you away. Satima, you have to prove your innocence regarding Emerson, and you have to show yourself publicly to others."

Satima stared around. "Joker was right. You have no sense of humor." She grinned, but noticed their serious stares."Kha ve! You guys really need to chill out." Satima grabbed a curious looking piece of food that easily crumbled in her hand. "I'll speak to Daxis and the entire damn universe if I have too!"

Shepard sat across from her, taking the muffin containing levo ingredients out of Satima's hand, "Satima. You're still refusing to tell us anything that happened to you. We can't help you against the universe, if you won't comply."

"Comply to what? I didn't come back as a courtesy, or because of guilt!", she shouted.

Satima slammed her hands on the table in irritation, getting up to pace. "Look at us! Playing some kind of twisted fantasy of family. It's sick."

Garrus stood up, clearly annoyed. "You're avoiding the question."

She stared at him, "I am not.", she declared with a shaky voice.

"Then answer Charlotte's question!", he demanded.

Satima stood still, as Garrus began stepping closer. "You were the only person aboard, Satima. Where are they? What happened?"

Shepard gazed at her with an urged expression. "What are you hiding?"

Satima straightened herself giving them a cold stare. "I am a sentarian, lieutenant of the directive division, promoted from chief technician and master pilot. My reasons for the crash are classified. I speak for them representing their will and commands. I don't have to answer to you." She turned around and walked back into the living room.

Garrus turned to Shepard. "Why couldn't she have remembered to say that last night to the council?", he smirked.

Embassy
Turian Councilor's Office

Satima stood in the lobby. Glimpsing occasional stares from the current crowd. She returned a scowl, slowly strolling past the fearful gazes. The dull pain returned, prompting her to stop at the steps. One time. Just one time let it have a say.

"So, this is the embassy? Weak and pathetic things that struggle against our will."

"Quiet.", she said in a hushed tone.

Up the stairs and down the long hall, Satima stopped short of the councilor's door. Behind her would be Emerson's old office, now occupied by Khalee. In that moment, the door opened, causing Satima to flinch back with a gasp. Daxis stood at his desk, readying a glass of water. He heard her surprised tone.

"Welcome. Please, come in and sit.", he offered.

Satima straightened her shirt and vest, clearing her throat quietly before entering the office. She followed his gesture and sat in a grey chair. Unsettled, she stared ahead waiting for him to sit opposite her, behind his desk. Daxis sat down, studying her wary gaze. "I would like to begin by introducing myself..."

"I know who you are. You and Shepard were both kidnapped by Fantar and fought your way out together from the mech factory.", she replied rudely.

Daxis glanced to the side, folding his hands over the desk surface. "Well, yes. That is true."

Satima smirked, satisfied.

Until Daxis continued. "But, your missing something else.", he stated. "I'm a councilor and your
"only" sponsor for turian heritage rites. So, Satima... I believe it would be in your best interest to practice a little more respect and decorum for the future.

She scowled as he continued.

"I know you've been through a lot. I've read your files from Shepard and previous statements from the council. Sparatus acted like a bastard. An exceptionally well trained, tactical bastard. He, like the rest of the galaxy, feared what your existence meant. To him it was an insult to turian kind. But to me..." Daxis rose up from his seat and stepped around the desk to Satima. He sat on the edge, gazing directly to her. "I see a beautiful example of this galaxies future."

Satima blushed, averting her eyes from him. Was he... flirting? "Look, councilor. I only came here to clear things up... with the council and with, uh... you."

Daxis realized his tone and how it must've sounded to her. "Spirits. That's not what I'm implying."

He stood up and opened his terminal, turning the monitor around for her to see. A brunette human woman, sat under a shady green tree, smiling back at her. It was taken on the citadel. "This is Julia.", he beamed.

"You are in a relationship... with a human?", Satima inquired.

"Yes.", he nodded. "We met on Menae. She was a part of an alliance transport team. Delivering supplies and medical help. You see, Satima. I'm not against your hybrid genetic make-up, because I want to share that experience with Julia. I want to have a family with her. Not just to adopt, but to have real biological children. And you're proof there's a way."

Satima sat up quickly, bewildered. "I'm not from a traditional birth! I was made by the reapers. For a darker purpose than most of you think!", she started to argue loudly, becoming erratic.

Daxis shook his head. "But, the reports indicate..."

"Nothing. I come from an alternate future. The reapers win, and they kill Shepard, only to remake her into a monster. And from her... they make me.", Satima shook all over in the reveal. "Don't you people get it?! I'm not normal. This is not normal!", she shouted, pointing to herself.


"Corrupted DNA from his bodily fluids mixing with hers. A twisted and cruel way to conceive an abomination. Their mating caused my existence. The Shepard from my time-my mother, did not carry me naturally. I was not born... I was designed."

"Now, councilor. Tell me if you still want a hybrid child with Julia?", she finished.

Daxis couldn't believe this. "Genetically mutated to fit the reapers needs.", he said aloud.

Satima stared down. "Yes, there is a way to make a hybrid. But it only seems the answer to that kind of biological anomaly was taken when the reapers were destroyed." She glanced to his sad gaze.

Daxis sat in her chair, covering his face in despair. "I told Julia it was possible. She believed me, had hope... but..."

Satima stepped to him, hesitantly placing her hand on his shoulder. "You don't want the answer to something the reapers made. I'm not without my flaws.", she added. "Tell Julia I'm sorry." She started to leave when Daxis stopped her. "Thank you... for being honest with me. You could've led me in a lie, manipulate your way to Palaven's council."
"I'm not like that. There's been too many lies lately.", she replied, sadly.

Later that afternoon, Satima wandered the lower wards thinking about what she told Daxis. It sounded cruel, but it's true.

She eventually found Shepard and Garrus in the markets taking a stroll together. Satima followed them, watching the couple act perfectly normal. After they took a seat on a bench, Satima attempted to make amends for her curt response from the kitchen earlier in the day.

"Well, if isn't the lieutenant master pilot with an attitude.", Shepard remarked sarcastically.

Satima stood in front of them with arms crossed and a look of embarrassment. "Ok, I deserve that."

"Or chief sentarian of the galaxy.", Garrus quipped.

Satima narrowed her eyes at him, "Alright. I get it."

Shepard smirked, "How about, the division of technical jerks?"

"Nice.", Garrus replied. Shepard chuckled, "Got that one from Joker."

Satima glanced off in shame. They didn't understand the military titles, because she's not explained what it meant. Neither has she told them what happened and why. Shepard regarded her daughters slumped shoulders as she stared upset to the ground. "Satima. What did you want?", she asked.

"I came to apologize. Not to be ridiculed.", Satima replied, still staring off.

Garrus got up, "Take a seat.", he suggested.

Satima briefly glanced at him, sitting next to Shepard. "Those military ranks are real, by the way. They may not count here with you guys, but it counts with the sentarians. And me.", she informed.

Suddenly aware of the way they teased her, Shepard nodded in understanding. "We're sorry. We just got a little... carried away."

Satima accepted the apology with a shrug.

"How did you get those ranks?", Garrus inquired.

She looked at him, "Hard work, determination... all the basic military requirements.", Satima answered. "Memtrix promised me a place with them. I chose to leave, feeling it would be better if I wasn't around to cause you anymore trouble."

Shepard placed a hand on Satima's shoulder. "You were never a burden. Emerson caused the trouble, not you. We worked hard to make a home here, for all of us."

Satima looked at Shepard confused. "Why?"

Garrus and Shepard exchanged a look, gazing at her. "Because we... we care about you, Satima. We...", Shepard stirred uncomfortably in her seat next to the hybrid. "We love you."

Satima's eyes widened, awkwardly scooting away from Shepard and blushing towards Garrus. " Spirits.", she mumbled, suddenly getting up panicked. "But... you barely know me! I'm not even from your time! I'm just... just an accident. Why would you say that? It's... it's...", she nearly stumbled over another bench, before sitting down hard.
"It's what?", Shepard asked.

"It's unfair. Why can't you just hate me, like everyone else?", she yelled, her expression pained.

Citizens started to circle around them, listening to the shouting of the strange family. Garrus noticed this, "Why don't we take this someplace less crowded.", he suggested.

"Oh, crap.", Satima said covering her face.

Shepard stood up, "Okay, people. Shows over. Get back to your lives.", she warned annoyed.

Everyone hurriedly walked off, with a few asari scoffing in annoyance. She turned back to Satima.
"Let's get a drink."

A small bar provided the quiet backdrop for the family to continue their discussions. Faint music filled the space while Shepard poured fresh liquor into Satima's glass. "Calm your nerves.", she gestured to the drink.

Satima took a healthy gulp. "It's not everyday parents take their kid drinking, I guess?"

"Not when their kid is already an adult. And an immature one at that.", Shepard stated.

Satima glared at Shepard. Garrus sat opposite of the circular booth, glad for the private seating. "We should talk about your past, Satima. Charlotte and I barely know anything about you, prior to your crashing in on our reaper party.", he smirked.

She finished the drink, looking at Shepard to pour again. "Why are you asking now?"

"It's time you had your chance to explain everything to us. You can tell the truth without judgement or accusations thrown your way.", Shepard stated. "Plus, I would like to get to know my daughter more.", she smiled.

Satima let out a sigh, holding the glass with two hands. Garrus observed them. "Like how you have four fingers instead of three or five.", he added.

Shepard agreed. "Can you tell us more about your childhood? What was it like? Were you always with the other me?"

Satima nodded, "Always, up until she helped me escape hive.", she answered.

"How old were you?", Garrus asked. curiously.

She watched their concerned stares. "Sixteen. I was quite a handful.", Satima chuckled.

Shepard and Garrus laughed, resuming their questions. "Typical teenager?", she wondered.

Satima nodded. "I guess. Didn't really know many kids out in space. Spent most of my later teen years hiding and learning to fly."

Shepard tilted her head in inquiry,"Who taught you?" Satima looked away. "A batarian. He acted like my friend, but betrayed me. It didn't end well for him.", she replied staring into the liquor. "If you want to know a few personal things... I was never birthed to begin with. Had this sort of conversation with Daxis.", she answered.

"When you say birthed...", Shepard asked.
"The other you didn't pop me out.", Satima replied with a smirk. She noticed the bothered stares they gave. Clearing her throat, she exhaled at the unusual explanation. "Ok, here it is. I was extracted from the other Shepard's body, and put into a growth pod. At five, I was... birthed."

Shepard took a hard gulp of Satima's drink. She continued with a sly smile to Shepard. "I wasn't born with a carapace, or turian eyes. It took lots of painful injections to mutate and adapt. Some kind of neural training and Reaper's methods taught me to fight. And I fought them often. Being a small kid on a reaper controlled station was no picnic. I'm lucky to have survived at all.", she commented.

Shepard looked away. "Do you think Reaper ever loved you... as a mother?", she asked.

Satima gazed at her, before returning her stare at the glass. "One time, I think. Her motives were always torn between the directive's will and her own. In the end, I believe she tried to help me." She shook her head, a small memory of the crucible helix faded quickly into her mind.

Garrus stirred uncomfortably, waiting to ask his questions. Satima glanced to him, nodding for the go-ahead. He started, "You said I was in your future. What was I like? Was I around for you as a kid?", Garrus asked, curious.

Satima gave him a smile. "You were cocky and strict." She contorted her face to indifference," But, no... you were not around while I grew up. You didn't even know I existed until we met accidentally on hive."

Garrus sat up straight, completely at his curiosity's will. "How did it happen? Why was I on hive?"

Satima noticed his excited demeanor while sipping her drink. "Well...", she laughed, "You were trying to kill Reaper. Apparently, you've been doing the same thing for twenty years."

"That doesn't sound healthy.", Shepard quipped.

"We ended up escaping, after a short battle between your alternate and Reaper. It was close, but we made it off that hell station.", Satima explained.

Garrus gave Shepard a suggestive look. "Told you, Charlotte. All around turian bad boy. Up till the very end."

Shepard smirked at him, scooting closer to his body, getting face to face. "You certainly are.", she bit her lower lip.

Satima watched in disgust. "You... ALSO LIKED TO DRINK!", she said loudly.

"I did?", Garrus replied, resuming a fatherly stance.

Realizing his tone, Satima quickly spoke. "But, you were also cool, and nice to me. You prevented Aiden from...", she stopped speaking.

"From?", he repeated.

Satima let go of the glass and held her arms together. "It's not an appropriate subject for right now.", she dismissed.

Shepard leaned closer to her. "What's wrong? You can talk to us about whatever happened. What you went through... we want to know."

The girl had a downcast expression. "No, you don't. It's not something I want to discuss. Ever." She
Sateima stared hard at them.

Satima sighed loudly, "We were stuck on Omega. Directive soldiers were everywhere and we just survived an attack by an adjutant." Shepard's eyes widened. Rasa warned her about Aria's inability to eliminate them completely. Satima continued, "Garrus and I needed the help. He ran into the Talons and they offered. It almost came at a cost. To me." Looking away, Satima shook her leg under the table in an anxious mood.

Garrus noticed, "They tried to kill you?", he added.

"Or sell you out to the directive?", Shepard commented.

Satima laughed mockingly. "That would've been a better story.", she glared at a distant memory. "I don't want to discuss it anymore. It's in the past, leave it there."

"Satima...", Shepard began. Garrus looked at her in concern.

Satima traced the lines of scratches on the table with her eyes. She glanced at them both. "The other Garrus, saved my life." Satima looked down, "Before I came here, he died trying to stop Archer."

Shepard stared away, upset at hearing this. Garrus cleared his throat, trying to break the serious atmosphere. "Did I at least get to kick his ass?"

Satima chuckled, "Yeah."

"Excuse me.", Shepard pushed Garrus out of the way from the booth, quickly walking to the restroom. Satima and Garrus exchanged glances. "I shouldn't have said anything.", she worried, covering her face.

Garrus got up, touching her shoulder, "Don't get upset. She just needs time to process this, we all do." He walked after Shepard, leaving an uncomfortable Satima behind.

Shepard leaned against the wall of the dimmed restroom, her eyes watered. Satima was tortured, abused, in a future that she herself came close to repeating. If Satima had never came, the reapers would've won. And all this horror story would repeat. Garrus walked in. "Charlotte.", he spoke.

She ran into his arms, remembering the story of his alternate death. He held her close and tight. "It never happened. It never will. We changed all of that.", Garrus reminded her.

Shepard buried her head into his chest, eventually gazing to him. "But it happened to her. Our daughter. I don't care how she was made. She's ours, and the galaxy tried to destroy her. Just like its doing now."

Satima waited nervously. Glancing from time to time to the restroom and to other quiet patrons. She slowly sipped her booze, wishing she had kept quiet. Garrus returned with Shepard in tow. Her eyes red and strained. Satima tried not to stare.

"I'm sorry if what I said upset you. You did ask about my past.", she spoke.

Shepard breathed in and sighed. "That I did. I'm glad to know this, so I can be there in case it gets to be too much. I know those kind of days, Satima. I didn't have a great childhood either."

"Oh. Well, what happened?", the hybrid inquired.

Shepard had resumed her seat, closer to Satima this time. "I was an orphan on earth. Joined a gang called the reds. That was before I went into the alliance. Long story short, I used to hate aliens, got
drunk and stole a lot of merchandise.

Satima's eyes widened in excitement. "Did you beat people up?", she asked childishly.

Shepard started to laugh as Garrus watched in satisfaction. "Yup. But, you know, most of them were bad."

Domestic

Satima sat on the couch, legs crossed with a book in her hand. It was written in some kind of ink. A gift from Kasumi, the invisible nuisance at the party a year ago. The thief loved to read these things and sent quite a few to Shepard over the past few months. Satima stared into it, words were displayed across thin pages that could tear easily. She didn't understand them but looked all the same. Holding the book sideways or upside down, Satima attempted to speak the words aloud.

Shepard passed by her, taking a step back to see what her daughter was doing. "What are you reading?"

Satima held the book closely to her face. "I don't know.", she spoke flippantly with a shrug.

Garrus came through with data pads. Shepard stopped him. "What's going on?"

"Work. Crap for work and more work.", he replied. "I'm getting a report ready for Satima. The hierarchy has started knocking at the door.", Garrus hinted.

She nodded, then watched Satima again. "Can you understand the words on that page?"

"No. Well, I can try.", she answered.

Shepard took a seat beside her. "Let's start with this sentence.", she pointed with her finger.

Satima glanced to Garrus who shrugged his shoulders. "I can't read human, kid. Come to me when you're interested in turian.", he winked before heading into another room.

Shepard tapped on the page. "Come on. Try.", she encouraged.

"All right.", Satima complied. She started to read, "T..tha womann...sho-wed..intertest in", she looked to Shepard, "I can't"

"Just continue to try.", Shepard urged.

Satima gulped, glancing to where Garrus might be, hoping he could get Shepard's attention. She then continued when it looked like it wasn't going to happen."...laerniinng..." Satima slammed the book shut. "No thank you."

Shepard looked up at Satima surprised and disappointed. "You were doing well!"

Satima waved the book in the air. "Well?! A vorcha has better vocabulary."

Garrus's laugh echoed from the other room. Shepard sat up and glared to the empty hallway. "Satima, it takes practice. Human children learn for years how to read and spell. Once you get the hang of the alphabet, it comes easily."

"You know what I have the hang of?", Satima replied. "This.", she began to speak in sentarian, utterly confusing Shepard. "Las tom la tan no, Et na, esh ni..."
Shepard shook her head, unable to understand considering her translator had no data on sentarian language. Mid-sentence of whatever Satima was saying, she gave up. "Okay... all right. You win. Today only.", she glared.

"Without my translator, I will only speak sentarian. My choice.", Satima remarked.

"Could you not speak at all without it? Before learning Sentarian?", Shepard asked.

Satima shook her head no. "Apparently, reaper experiments are not required to speak. Only obey.", she answered.

Private Council Chambers
Citadel

Days later, a summons was sent to Satima by the hierarchy. Garrus read it, learning who in their small council was to attend. They sent Agripenex, Malen and two others to meet with her in the council chambers. Shepard made sure her daughter was ready to explain everything necessary to satisfy them. Daxis promised to help her case, assuring that they could not deny her paternal heritage anymore. One good thing coming out of this at least.

Satima paced in the lobby. A turian assistant came forward and invited them through. Once inside the chambers, Khalee led Satima to the front of the room. Standing before the four turian officials and their indifferent stares. She stood straight unflinchingly. Trying to remind herself of who she is. If that even mattered at all.

"It is time for the hybrid to explain herself.", Malen spoke.

Agripenex glared toward him, returning a softened gaze to Satima. "We've been waiting for some time to meet you in person. To get a clearer picture of your motives, your allegiances."

Satima stared in confusion. "My allegiances?", she asked.

"I don't want to associate you with the criminal activities of Emerson. Frankly, there's no evidence. You left the citadel, and the galaxy for a year, returning in a crashed sentarian vessel.", Agripenex stated. "Of course, there are some indiscrepancies in the story you presented to the council."

"Then why am I here? Obviously, there is more to this, than to just "explain" myself.", Satima questioned.

"You represent change. A frightening conclusion to the reapers presence and destruction. There are no reaper ships left to study. We can't predict if there are hidden dangers scattered on every home world, in any station. The galaxy has you left to fear, to blame. And the fact your genetics tie you directly to two evidently famous war heroes... doesn't make anyone sleep any easier at night.", Agripenex explained.

Satima stood still, holding a silence to herself. Malen shook his head in annoyance. "It won't even speak to us. I'm tired of pandering to the alliance's embassy. We can take her into our custody and conduct our own evaluations. Safely incarcerated inside a metal box."

"Malen! How dare you insinuate an illegal abduction in front of the small council.", Agripenex shouted angrily.

Garrus stood forward, flaring his mandibles in anger. "You touch her, Malen, and I'll gladly put you in that metal box myself. Head first!"
Khalee stepped between the council and Garrus, worried. "Please, councilors. This is exactly the kind of argument that starts wars!" Everyone quieted down. Agripnexus glared to Malen, then to the turian guards. "Remove him. My commands."

Malen's jaw dropped, "You can't be serious?! I'm a part of this council!" A guard grabbed his arm, forcibly pulling him away from the long table. His seat overturned as he struggled. Malen glared to them all, "You'll regret letting that thing on Palaven! You'll regret not locking her up!" Malen faced Satima, who exhibited a satisfied grin to him. "She's a monster!", he roared before being thrown out.

Khalee and Agripnexus exchanged nods. The female turian continued. "Satima. Please forgive his insubordinate attitude. Malen was close friends to Sparatus."

Satima resumed a solemn stare. "I understand."

Agripnexus sat down with the other two councilors. Tevos had arrived in time to see the display before taking Malen's seat. She nodded for them to resume. Agripnexus continued, "Apologies, child. You have not had the chance to speak your peace or tell your story."

Khalee nodded to Satima with a faded smile. She started. "I know you're all scared. To be honest, I am too.", Satima revealed. "The reasons behind my creation were sinister, that's true, but the reapers did not succeed in using me for their purpose. I came back here to this time, to stop them. To save the Shepard and everyone here. I befriended the Sentarians, who did help in the fight, and I discovered a loyal family along the way. I have no intention of hurting anyone, I just...", she looked down, "just want to live my life in peace and do as much good as possible.", Satima explained.

Agripnexus smiled, "That sounds like a good plan, Satima."

Khalee sighed in relief, then stood next to Satima. "I'd like to start this day with confirming Satima's citizenship to Earth. Daxis?"

He stepped forward also. "It is time to allow this unique young woman, her own heritage rites to Palaven. She's proven her allegiances to the good of the people. That's something we can stand behind."

Satima glanced to them both, relieved and more than happy about this. She can call earth and palaven her homes. And she has a right to them both! Elated, Satima spoke with a confident smile. "Councilors, I can assure you that I, like my mother, will do everything to protect this galaxy and its people. Even lay down my life for them."

"We are pleased to know you have good intentions, despite the past. Thank you, Satima."

Agripnexus stated.

After the council dismissed the meeting, Agripnexus met with Satima in private. "I can see a lot in you, young hybrid."

Surprised, Satima replied. "Like what?"

"I can see you've been in battle more times than you'd like. You have seen things, terrible things. War does that. I'm grateful for your honesty. You do your parents proud with that character."

Satima looked away with a slight blush, "I can't compare myself to them.", she stared at Garrus who was thoroughly shaking Kahlee's hand in gratitude. "I was thinking... maybe I don't want to fight anymore. No more ships, no more battles... just, a nice cozy job. Something local? Helping people."

Agripnexus nodded with a turian smile. "Maybe there might be such a job for you in the future. In the meantime, use those skills to secure the galaxy a little longer with the Shepard."
Satima nodded in agreement, watching her leave.

The Park
Two weeks later

Time was wasting away. Satima selfishly withheld any more information, trying to enjoy this short period of peace she found. She's paved a new way for herself in this galaxy. But it didn't feel right. The Sentarians were left behind, and if they suddenly come looking for her. If any of them survive, if her friends lived? She knows there will be hell to pay, and her life... forfeit.

Back in the monument park, where the granite walls with names stood. Citadel flora, birds and people all crowded the place. Satima sat to the side of a wall, rushed here by them in a hurry to meet someone. They acted strangely happy about it. It piqued her curiosity, but it didn't mean anything. Did it?

Satima needs to talk to Shepard. Alone. Garrus keeps butting in, always asking her if she's ok or if she wants to talk. He means well, but Garrus is not Shepard, and Shepard... is no Reaper.

Laughter in the distance caught Satima's attention to children playing. Human children and some asari. She spotted a happy couple of a human male and an asari female. Both embraced and smiling as their children played. This kind of peace is nice for a change.

"Satima.", Shepard called out.

She got up quickly, following Shepard's voice to a shady spot under a tree. Garrus stood next to a few benches as a woman with short flaxen hair spoke to him.

"Satima. I wanted to tell you, but we've been so worried about you lately, it slipped our minds.", Shepard spoke. There was a strange amount of excitement in her voice.

"What's wrong?", Satima wondered, watching Shepard's nervous looks.

She led Satima to the woman who finished speaking to Garrus. "Jenny. This is Satima. She's our biological child.", Shepard informed.

Satima gave her a confused look. What is going on? Who is this woman?

"Oh! My, she is... unique. Nice to meet you. I'm Jenny Garcia. Social services and counseling.", she replied.

Garrus stood next to Shepard, obviously excited. Satima watched anxiously. Jenny then signaled for someone to come to her. A girl, no older than ten with dark brown hair and hazel eyes, showed up. She smiled to Shepard and Garrus. Jenny put her hands on the child's shoulders with a grin.

"She's been talking about coming to your home all morning. All the details have been finished and the adoption complete. Congratulations, to you both." She leaned down to face the girl, "Now, Natalie, be a good girl. We're going to miss you." Jenny hugged her.

Natalie returned the hug, eagerly running to Shepard who caught her. "Oof! You've certainly grown in the last three months. Are you ready to go home?"

"Yes!", she replied, happily

Jenny then left as the small family continued their cheerful meeting. It all seemed surreal as Satima watched in utter shock. Natalie turned to Garrus as he knelt to receive her hug. She then turned to
Satima with a wide grin that faded to a frown. This surprised them. "Natalie, what's wrong?", Shepard asked.

Upon closer inspection, Satima crossed her arms with a sarcastic glare, "Well, shit."

Natalie stuck her tongue out, when Shepard stood up, confused. "Do you two know each other?", she asked.

"Yeah. Pulled her stubborn ass out of a burning building.", Satima revealed with an unpleasant expression.

"You left my mother behind. You killed her!", Natalie shouted, her eyes teary from the memory.

"Being burned alive, killed her!", Satima yelled. "And you would've been dead along with her if I wasn't there!" She continued to glare, already agitated by this unwelcome surprise.

"Hey!", Shepard shouted to her. "She's only ten, Satima."

Satima rolled her eyes at Natalie, who ran up and pushed her. "Mommy killer!", she stated.

"Hey! You little bi...", she started.

"Enough!", Garrus yelled.

Natalie stood back behind Shepard. Garrus noticed this and leaned down to her. "I'm sorry, but you shouldn't have kicked your big sister."

Satima's mouth dropped. "What the actual fuck! Is this what you were "preparing for me?" My new room and what? Some little space for the new addition? How ridiculous.", she dismissed.

Shepard couldn't understand what had Satima so upset. "Watch your mouth around Natalie!"

"You know what? I should go.", Satima said while leaving quickly.

Zakera ward
Later...

Satima downed another drink of turian brandy. She wanted to be numb and drunk. Shepard has her own head too far up the idea of a family's ass. There's darkness coming, and they're all too busy playing house!

"You that girl that told the council off?", a drunk beside her asked in his deep tone.

Satima turned to see a krogan, old and heavy set, sitting next to her. She grinned. "Yeah."

"Next round is on me.", he replied.

An hour passed with Satima listening to his war stories. Most of it she spaced out from, but she got the point of never trusting your closest friends. He then proceeded to fall off his chair. Satima bursted in laughter and started to leave after using his creds to pay for her drinks.

She stumbled down the street, past a few alleys. Filling sick to her stomach from all the booze. Satima can't go to their place, not in this state. So, she decided to park her butt in an alley, sitting down against a wall and nodding off. Minutes passed of her staring away into neon lights from buildings. Footsteps approached her, and then a voice spoke.
"Of all the places in the galaxy, I never thought to find you here."

She passed out.

Satima woke with a start. It had to be morning. A heinous headache attacked her, leaving all her senses useless. Nausea overwhelmed her and before she knew it, she was running into a bathroom to vomit. After a few minutes of painful retching, Satima then stood up, finding a sink to wash her face and rinse her mouth. She realized this place was familiar.

The door opened and she stepped out to see a bed and couch facing each other. The small apartment still had light problems and the loud noise of the adjacent shops outside. She turned quickly to the sound of a glass being set on the table behind her.

"It's got medicine for your head and stomach. Dextro safe. Go ahead and have a seat."

Ronin?

Satima slowly took a seat, putting her hand carefully around the glass. She had a small sip. "How did you find me?", she asked.

He smirked while making himself something. "Dumb luck, I guess. I followed you down the street after coming back from the embassy. You were drunk. I can tell. Didn't want to leave you alone and incapacitated in the alley."

She gave him an indifferent look. "Doesn't matter."

"It mattered to me. So, I brought you here.", he turned around with a dish of something and sat across from her. "I heard you were back, but I didn't know where. Are you staying with Shepard?"

Satima took another sip, "Was. They got a kid now. She uh... she's the one I saved from the burning apartment building. Remember?"

Ronin ate a few bites, nodding his head and swallowing. "Spirits, yeah. Real handful after you left. Didn't trust anyone. I put her in protective care. Why?"

"Shepard adopted her. Yesterday. She remembers me all too well.", Satima replied, irritated.

Ronin nearly spit out his food. "Spirits! That must've been one hell of a day."

She laughed a little. "You can say that." Satima stared at her glass. It's been a full year, and some weeks now, since she left him behind. He looked great, and here she was, with a bad hangover and a grumpy attitude. "I'm sorry for leaving... the way I did. I hope you're not mad at me." She hoped, yes. But, Ronin had every right to be upset. It was rude, and insensitive.

He stopped eating and glanced to her. "It's all right. I understand.", Ronin commented. "Interesting choice of hairstyle, by the way.", he smirked.

Satima blushed, embarrassed. Ronin had gotten used to her longer locks, and now she resembles a strange looking boy. "It was for medical reasons. Hair grows back.", she informed.

He stared at her, tilting his turian head in concern. "You alright?", he asked.

Satima shook her head dismissively, "So. What have you been up to?", she asked.

Ronin looked at her, finishing his plate in a hurry. "Listen, Satima. I'm running late. I can take you back to Shepard's or anywhere else you like."
Satima's eyes widened, "Oh... no. Don't worry. I can see myself out. Thanks, Ronin. For keeping me safe.", she smiled, getting up. "Oh, and the hangover meds.", she stated.

She walked out of the door, hurriedly jogging down the hallway to the elevator. Ronin seemed a little preoccupied and totally inconvenienced. Satima felt awkward, meeting him so suddenly again, thinking to return a kindness by inviting him to dinner at Shepard's. That is, if she's still allowed over there.

The elevator doors opened to a turian woman with green clan markings. She stepped out, excusing herself past Satima in a hurry. Satima nodded, letting her through as she walked inside the elevator. Before the doors closed, she spotted the female stopping at Ronin's door. The female waited for a minute when the door opened quickly with them embracing.

They exchanged a kiss.

She could feel her heart sink into her stomach as the elevator door closed. A strong pain of regret caused her eyes to water. No. Satima will not cry over him. She made a choice and he's clearly made one of his own. Why would a man want to go back to a woman that broke his heart?

Back at the apartment...

Shepard paced. She waited for Satima to arrive last night, but the girl didn't. They needed to set the two girls down and have them discuss the problem. Maybe they can work out their issues and it will be all over with? The door opened, with Satima dragging herself in. Shepard glared to her. "Where the hell have you been? We were worried sick."

"Satima...", Shepard spoke, watching her daughter act emotionless. "Are you okay?", she asked.

Satima stopped, "Yeah. Just tired." She continued to her room. The door shut fast. On her bed, she thought about the last few weeks, and yesterday. They're not her family, not really. She can't fill in that part of their lives, but that little girl can. A girl who had suffered being an orphan, no thanks to the reapers.

She stared around her dimmed room. Letting go of Ronin and any ideas she had harbored for the past year, would be better. Dragging someone into the mess that is her life, is unfair. He's a spectre, a protector of this galaxy. Much like Shepard. Satima exhaled with a shaky voice. So many hurtful emotions bombarded her right now. She laid back, and curled up on her bed.

Later that day, Shepard and Garrus talked to Natalie about what happened to her biological mother. Satima locked herself in her room.

After a good amount of explanation came out, they realized what went on in that building. Satima helped Ronin rescue as many civilians as possible. It was an accident that the mother was left behind. Shepard held Natalie close to her, while the girl listened. "You must understand that Satima did not leave your mother on purpose. She did everything she could to help."

The poor girl wiped stray tears from the memory, holding onto Shepard's hand. "I just wish my mom could be here."

Shepard gave her a hug. "Oh, sweetheart. I do to. I'm so sorry for what happened."

Garrus left the explanation to Charlotte. It seemed so natural to her. He wanted to adopt this child with Charlotte, but... somehow, his nurturing paternal feelings were rusty. Worse than rusty, he didn't
know what to do! While they discussed the events of the past, he walked off to Satima's room, leaving Shepard to console Natalie. After a few minutes of trying to reach her, he hacked the door open, anyway.

Satima sat on the floor, barefoot and against her wall. She stared at him from across the room. "I see privacy is not respected around here. Like I was told.", she glared.

"It isn't when you're being an insubordinate.", he retorted. Garrus looked around the room, settling his disappointed gaze to her.

Her eyes widened in surprise. "Insubordinate? I didn't realize we were back on the Normandy! Please, go ahead and barge in my life anytime you like."

Garrus stepped forward. "Satima, what is going on with you?"

She glanced off. "Nothing you can fix. I thought you weren't going to treat me like your kid."

He gave a sarcastic smirk, "You kinda are."

She shrugged. "I kinda don't care."

Silence fell for a moment. Garrus got closer, nearly stepping on her exposed toes. He looked down to them. Such small pale human toes. "I understand what you're going through. I used to be C-sec, and there are things I've seen. Horrible and troubling. You ever heard of duct rats, here on the citadel?"

She nodded no to him.

"Well, there are orphaned and poor kids running around the lower wards. Tiny things that can crawl in the smaller spaces of the keeper tunnels and the like. Sometimes they grow up fast and can't maneuver like they used to when they were smaller. They'd get caught in the vats, fans and... even spaced.", he informed.

Satima looked at him sorrowfully. He continued while taking a seat on the bed. "I've pulled little bodies out of vents, Satima. I've drowned my nightmares with so much liquor, it almost got me fired. Several times. At one point my father and I worked on the same ward.", he chuckled. "You can imagine the fun conversations we've had back then."

Garrus looked at Satima as she stared off. Her expression seemed hopeless. "Satima, you have to understand how protective I get when it comes to something or someone I care about. You're a grown woman, I get it. I wasn't exactly happy to hear who you really are, before all of this. But now, circumstances have changed. Shepard loves you, Satima. I want you to know that, before you decide to run again."

Warm tears strayed down her cheeks. She didn't cry out or cover her face, but only stared at him. Her dark teal eyes watery with an expression of pain. "Do you?", she asked.

He stared at her more intensely, her question almost accusing instead inquiring. Satima asked him again "Do you love me? Like the daughter, I am to you"

Garrus cleared his throat. "I... ", he started. Stopping himself because he wasn't sure of the real answer.

Satima looked away, unable to gaze at him anymore. She knew the answer. He's not her father, and Shepard is not her mother. They never will be. This is a new future, a future free from all of the reapers, the directive and hive. A future, that should be free of her.
"You don't want me here.", she began to sob. "I don't deserve this. I never have. Reaper should've killed me a long time ago. Then none of it would've happened."

Garrus stared at her pain, and knelt to her. "Satima."

She wiped away tears. Satima can't hide the truth any longer. It's going to spread, and she knows everyone will die, if they don't understand how to stop it. "I brought them with me. Didn't know, not until I landed on Nephmos. I had hoped the fires would consume them and destroy the infection. Someone got to the ship and released it. Now... now the alliance is there. And they're all dead."

Garrus took her by the shoulders and brought her face to face with him. "What are you talking about? Brought what?", he asked in a panic.

Satima stared in fear. "In the dark part of space, the Directive woke something terrible. Clusters of red and black... It's from my time, and I can't stop it."

Garrus released her shoulders, staring at her with a fierce gaze. "How could you have been so irresponsible? Dozens of alliance lives are in peril because you were afraid to tell the truth?!"

She started to speak when Garrus shot up to quickly leave the room. He nearly ran to the living room to see Charlotte and Natalie watching the vid screen. "I need to talk with you, Charlie. It's extremely important.", he spoke, antsy.

Shepard noticed the panicked glance. "Alright.", she replied. Sitting up and turning to Natalie with a smile. She followed Garrus to their bedroom. "What's wrong?", Charlie asked.

Garrus paced in front of their bed. "Satima just told me the truth about the crash."

Charlie closed the door shut, facing him. "Really? What's going on?"

"Satima revealed that the sentarians did something foolish. It involves the Directive. That ship has something tremendously dangerous. The Alliance there, could be in severe trouble.", he informed.

"I... I can't believe she would do this.", Charlie replied, shaking her head in disappointment. "She kept asking me if the fires would destroy the ship. We need to go back there and find out what it is she's been hiding."

They rushed back to Satima's room, while Natalie watched curiously. She sat on her bed, as Shepard and Garrus paced. "We need to contact the alliance. Garrus, you're in charge of the reaper division on Palaven. You should get in touch, ask for help in case this infection gets out of hand.", Shepard stated.

"I'm thinking of heading there tomorrow, and taking Satima with me.", he added.

"What?", Satima spoke, surprised.

They both ignored her for the time.

"Natalie is going to be upset. I promised to enroll her in school, here on the citadel.", Shepard ran a hand through her hair with a sigh. "I'm going to see if Khalee has room for her in the academy. At least she'll be safe and not alone with the other kids."

"Do you want me to break the news to her?", Garrus asked.

Shepard nodded her head, they both embraced.
"Let's get some sleep tonight.", he said. "Tomorrow will be a hectic day."

Satima watched them leave her room with slumped shoulders, burying her face in her hands. They didn't even acknowledge her or say goodnight. She tightened her arms around herself. "I don't even deserve it.", she whispered.
**Endeavor**

**Chapter Summary**

Satima visits Palaven for the first time. Learning more about Garrus's family and history. A sudden illness interferes with the tour. Shepard discovers what Satima has been hiding. A dangerous mission is pursued, and the hybrid's life is threatened as an infection spreads.

**Chapter Notes**

Thank you for stopping by. :)

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Docking Station
Freighter transport V-786

Satima stood to the side like a scolded child, upset over breaking this new family apart because she wanted to live in a lie. Natalie walked in circles from one end of the platform to the other, watching the ships come in and go. She waited for Shepard to finish her goodbyes to Garrus.

"Be careful on your trip home. Tell your father and sister hello for me.", she smiled in his arms.

Garrus smirked, "I will, Charlie." Leaning in to kiss her.

Natalie made an odd face at it, but kept giving a happy smile to them. She walked closer, grabbing Garrus's hand. "I'll miss you.", she said.

He leaned down, brushing a stray piece of brown hair behind her ear. "I'll miss you, too."

Satima watched, arms crossed tightly to her chest. A sick feeling at the pit of her stomach. She wasn't sure whether she hated this scenario displayed before her, or whether it was guilt eating away at her for ruining their lives.

Shepard turned to her with a stern gaze. "I'm not angry with you, Satima, but I can't help the amount of disappointment you've shown. You're responsible for people's lives, now. Did you not understand this back with the sentarians?"

"Of course, I did! I still do!", she answered, suddenly defensive.

Shepard stepped closer, "Then why did you lie? Why wait so long when the danger is so near?"

Satima uncrossed her arms, clenching her fists till her knuckles shown white. She stared with watery eyes."Because I wanted this to never end. Like I had never left to begin with. The amount of regret I felt when you brought me back to your home... it drove me to do stupid things."

"Satima.", Shepard spoke. "You didn't have to hide the truth to protect us.", she started to chuckle sarcastically. "We've fought the reapers, remember?"
Satima wrapped her arms around herself, looking away. She closed her eyes briefly before speaking. "I wasn't protecting either of you. I was protecting myself." Satima's voice became shaky, "I'm selfish. Jealous of what you have with her.", she pointed to Natalie.

Garrus still held Natalie's hand, who had taken a step closer to him with a curious gaze towards Satima. She didn't understand what was going on in front of her, but started to feel sad for the scary woman that saved her life the year before.

Shepard sighed, "You could've just told me this over a month ago."

Satima kept looking away.

The VI announcement echoed around them. "It's time for you to board. We'll keep in touch through vid-comm, after I've taken Natalie to the academy.", Shepard informed.

It was a sad moment to watch the transport leave the docks. Shepard couldn't understand Satima's hesitance towards them. She only hoped things will change for the better soon.

Citadel
Council Tower

Ronin finding Satima on the backstreets of the lower wards took him by surprise. At first, he thought it was just a hallucination, but after following her from the bar and finding her against the alley wall, he realized the encounter was very real. What had made her get so intoxicated and reckless?

He found out the next morning as she sipped his hang over concoction. Without demanding questions for reasons why she left him, Ronin waited for Satima to give him answers. He wanted to interrupt her, tell her how much he cared for her and how she broke his heart by running off without a proper goodbye.

The second issue was her looks; paler than usual, and her head covered in ginger stubble. Was this her choice? A rebellious move against her family? No. It was something medical, and an answer she refused to tell. He nodded his head back and forth, confused, while waiting for the council to see him.

If he had more time to speak with her... and if he didn't push her out the door so quickly... Jaine wouldn't have understood, she's not fond of the hybrid. And he couldn't afford to drive another wedge between them again. There was too much he would lose.

He sighed aloud, listening to himself call her a hybrid. Like she doesn't have a name. The council called him in. He stood on the petitioner's stage, waiting for their next urgent mission.

Tevos spoke, "Have you been debriefed on the Nepmos incident?"

"Ma,am.", he replied.

Tevos nodded, "The Alliance has the planet under heavy surveillance and nothing has left its surface, save the survivor. That... hybrid.", she informed with disgust. "There is a problem, however, and we need you and another spectre to find it."

"Another spectre?", he asked. "What is this problem?"

Khalee spoke,"Spectre Naramis, we're asking you to follow the last trail of the Endeavor with the help of spectre Williams."

He changed stances, quickly glancing to a keeper then back to the human councilor."Spectre
Williams? I know of her. She used to serve on the Normandy."

"Good. The Endeavor left Nepmos after contacting the Alliance about the sentarian vessel crash. We suspect they also were on the crashed ship, briefly, but never told the Alliance whether or not they gained access.", Khalee explained. "With a joint investigation between two different council races, as spectres, it would help the galaxy rest a lot easier."

Ronin raised a plated brow. Something more threatening had to of happened for the council to openly display a search between different races. What's next? A batarian handout? He cleared his throat, "Ma'am, I'm confident spectre Williams and I can find this ship and the truth behind their disappearance."

Khalee nodded with a smile, while Tevos concluded the meeting. Ronin left to immediately find Williams in the embassy, reading an article on her omni-tool. She looked up to him quickly, "Spectre Naramis?", she asked.

"That would be me.", he replied with a smirk. "Have you been briefed?"

She closed her omni-tool, stepping closer to him with a nod. "Affirmative. I'm curious myself where the Endeavor has gotten too.", she answered. Ashley looked him up and down, with an unsure gaze. "I've worked with a turian before, and I greatly respect Garrus, but I gotta ask. You don't have a... problem working with me, do you? Because I'm human?"

Ronin's eyes widened, nearly in disbelief in that question. Why would he hate humans? He thought for a moment and decided to answer as honestly as he could. "As long as you don't call me dinosaur face, we're good.", he smiled.

Ashley almost choked on her words. "Oh... I would never...", she started.

"It's alright. Come on, we got an invisible ship to find. System searching takes time and is extremely boring.", he stated, leading them out.

Landing platform
Palaven capitol

Satima felt like she entered a tropical climate. At least that's what the extranet calls it. The Sentarian planet is similar but more moisture and balmy. Forward she must go, following Garrus into his home planet's major city. Satima stayed behind him, unfamiliar with the territory and the people.

Agripenex was nice, and Ronin was really nice. She blushed a little from that thought, suddenly remembering his own liaison with another woman. A turian woman. Figures. Leaving him behind without an explanation or a proper goodbye gets you in the ex-department. Satima sighed in irritation.

The streets in the daytime were heavily crowded. She could still see buildings in the outskirts of the city with damage, fallen into each other and unlivable. Every city, colony and home world will be rebuilding for a long time after the reapers.

Garrus worried bringing her here this quickly would be a bad idea. It just might. So far, no one has "voiced" their opinion on the matter. So far.

Furthermore, Satima is only less than half turian. Her small carapace could be a problem, medically. But he couldn't worry her over the complexities of it. She stared around wide eyed or averted her gaze when others looked.
Twenty-one, and still such a kid to him. He and Shepard discussed taking her into therapy. Although he hates it and doesn't care for it.

He can talk to a bullet and it will take care of all his problems. Of course, his problems were usually criminal scum, assholes with a temper or reapers. And lately the galaxy has been fresh out of all those problems. Down the cement sidewalk, Satima spotted a couple of turian kids standing in formation, ready and at attention as an instructor gave them orders to perform city-wide sweeps. Despite their younger ages, they still towered over her.

"I want all alley ways and docking ports scanned. Failure will result in a week's long discipline and no trip to the citadel's C-Sec HQ. Am I clear?!", he shouted.

"Sir!", they all yelled.

The versions of Garrus, Solanna and Ronin piled out before Satima. Some of them stopped in front of her and gasped. She tried to move out of their way. The instructor noticed this. "Have you not seen a turian before? I said, pile out!", he ordered.

Satima stared at him, confused. "I'm not..."

"Ma'am. Have a good day.", he said leaving out behind the kids.

Garrus stepped beside her. "Not everyone thinks you're a dangerous reaper experiment, Satima." They walked together down the street. She smirked, "Those guys were kinda adorable... and scary tall." Why is she so short? "Do all turian children go through military training?"

Garrus nodded, "Yes. At the age of fifteen turian children are automatically drafted into the military. There they train until eighteen, and take on jobs in war ships and dreadnoughts.", he answered.

"Wow. And you've...", she stepped in front of him, curious and childlike. "You've done that too? Served on a warship, before the Normandy?"

He stopped to answer. "Yes. I joined C-Sec, following in my father's footsteps in my early twenties."

"So.", they resumed walking. "If I was a kid still, I would've been put into turian military?" In front of a passing sky car lane, they waited for the right of way to pass. On the other side, he led her to a local restaurant. "Not exactly. You're still half human. Shepard would've wanted you prepared in the alliance. And I agree."

"I was talking about... if I was turian, not human.", she said downcast.

Garrus held the panel to the door of the restaurant too long. It almost shorted out. "Uh, well. Then, if you were born a turian and raised in a turian family... yes. You would."

Satima walked in. At a table, they sat in silence for a moment. "Satima", Garrus spoke. "Are you ashamed of what you are?"

"I've never liked what I am. I don't care which, but I would rather be either human or turian. Not both.", she answered.

"Being both is what makes you special. You're one of a kind, literally. No one can claim that in the galaxy.", he explained.

Her pale cheeks flushed pink at him. "Thanks, Garrus."
He chuckled, "Maybe, if you're feeling comfortable about it. You could call me dad?" He acted awkward. "It's just a suggestion. It's perfectly fine to call me Garrus."

Satima faced the table, completely embarrassed. "Do you... want me to say that word?", she asked, unsure.

Garrus glanced around the table and other patrons. He covered his face," Just forget I said that."

Satima nodded. "Forgotten."

They continued their awkward meal in silence.

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Sigurd's Cradle
Skepsis System

The Endeavor was traced to the colony on Watson. A recovering city belonging to the Alliance. Ronin and Ashley carefully landed their shuttle at the docking port, stepping out to see colonist giving them wary stares. "Wonder what has them spooked?", Ashley thought aloud.

Ronin locked the shuttle, "Don't know."

They made their way to the docking hub, scanning the terminal for data on the Endeavor. It had docked a week ago, with the crew of three departing and disappearing into the city. Inside a local city station, Ronin downloaded the upper city's vid footage, while Ashley began inquiring where the crew had lodged at from the receptionist.

"Look, I'm just trying to find the crew of the Endeavor, so I can ask them to make a delivery. They do make deliveries, right?", Ashley asked.

"Well, yeah. But I don't know where they went.", the woman stated.

"Do they usually come here?", Ashley inquired.

The woman shook her head, "Once or twice. Ferrying out supplies, bringing in supplies. The captain used to be alliance. She retired after the war a year ago, injury or some such.", she glanced around nervously. "It's just something I picked up at the bar, alright."

Ashley nodded, leaning back from the counter, "Ok, ok. Thanks for the information." She walked back to Ronin who noticed quite a few stares from the human colonists. This might be why the council wanted Williams to back him up. "Local bar. The captain went there a few times.", Ashley informed.

He nodded, "Look at this." Ronin showed some footage from three days before. The captain walked up and down the market street, coughing and shouting angrily to people. She went inside a bar for an hour, before leaving with a bottle of liquor and a gun in her hand.

Ashley and Ronin glanced to each other, "Should we check for recent homicides?", she stated.

"Ooh, yeah.", he replied.

Something sinister was going on around this large colony. Ashley and Ronin proceeded to the security station, passing by a few people coughing.

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Satima thought long and hard on what could have been the most uncomfortable experience of her life. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not counting Natalie, came to mind. Except this day. Standing close to a corner, in the home of the Vakarians. For once she wishes she was back at the citadel.

Their home was situated inside the fortress city, in the capitol of Palaven. Buildings rose high with thick strong walls made of durable metal and smaller windows. Outside they seemed like illuminated slits at night.

Every turian citizen had a hardened stare. She would never fit in a society of military doctrine. She's too much like a human, full of emotion and extremely foolish. That gave her a smirk. Satima looked through the window to the streets below. Watching them all go about their daily lives. The mountainside in the distance caught the sun's dying rays, turning the rock into pure silver. She marveled at it.

"The only thing on this planet that isn't silver are the turians. It's all too clear they're made of steel.", Tiberius Vakarian stated, walking into the living room. "When the Alliance visited my home world, after the first contact war, Jon Grissom marveled at those same mountains."

"First Contact War?", Satima asked.

He stared at her with curiosity. "Yes. A grave mistake that almost cost our position on the citadel and the galaxy.", he remarked. Tiberius sat down, suggesting a position in a chair for Satima. She obliged, taking a seat, glancing around the room nervously.

He glimpsed at her cropped hair and uncomfortable demeanor. "You've been gone quite a while, Satima. I heard you took a position within the sentarian's military. Is it to your liking?"

Satima gave him a wary look. "Yes, it is. I've learned a lot abroad with them."

Tiberius nodded. "Are you happy to be back?"

"I... uh... I'm not sure.", she replied conflicted.

"I'm sorry to hear that.", he added.

Satima raised her eyes to him, feeling awful for her response. "I am happy that I've come here. To finally see Garrus's home." She stood up to gesture outside the window. "The view is amazing and everyone has been accommodating. Intensely strict and disciplined."

Tiberius nodded favorably to her. "That's good to hear, but you don't have to force a smile on my behalf. You're a guest in my home, I want to make sure you're comfortable."

Satima put her arms to her sides, looking discouraged. Garrus and Solanna walked in. "Thanks for letting us stay the week here, dad."

Solanna rolled her eyes. "Stop acting like you're an inconvenience."

Satima put her hands behind her back nervously. Solanna glanced to her and attempted a conversation. "It's... nice to see you again.", she commented.

"Yeah.", Satima replied.

Everyone sat. Satima swears if someone dropped a needle, it would sound like a gunshot. Solanna
stared at her, before Satima noticed. At that point Garrus’s sister resumed her stare with the glasses of water. Tiberius took this in, quietly laughing to himself. His own strongly opinionated children, greatly accomplished and widely known. Scared of a small girl.

"Would you like to hear about Garrus and Solanna's mother?", Tiberius asked.

Solanna nearly dropped her glass, while Garrus sat up to attention.

"Sure.", Satima answered.

"Has he spoken much about her?", Tiberius wondered.

Satima and Garrus exchanged looks. "No.", she replied, shrugging apologetically to him.

"Lealia was a remarkable woman, full of compassion and a strength to her that others flocked to. She would've adored the idea of your existence. I like to think Solanna carries her strength and intelligence. Garrus... carries her compassion for others.", Tiberius explains.

"She sounds incredible.", Satima remarked.

Garrus looked down in a far-off memory. Satima observed him, but continued to ask questions. "If it's not rude... what happened to her?"

Solanna placed her hand on Garrus's shoulder. "She was sick for a time. Before the reapers came to harvest the galaxy, she died while he was away helping Shepard. It was just dad and I for a little while."

"Kha ve. I'm so sorry.", Satima offered.

"We appreciate that.", Solanna commented. She glanced between her father and Garrus, and sat up. "I'm going to bed. Got a long day of technical crap. See you guys tomorrow.", she said to Satima.

Satima stared at Garrus who didn't return a glance. Tiberius stood, "I'll see you tomorrow as well, Satima. Goodnight."

A moment of silence forced its way into the home. Quiet outside, and still in this room. Satima watched Garrus for a minute, before standing up to leave.

He suddenly started to speak, "From the moment I met you... no... no. That wouldn't be true. Let's start again.", he sighed aloud. She stood still, unsure of what he was about to say. "From the moment, I knew you were mine. I couldn't stand looking at you.", his voice thick with contempt. "Not because of what you are or how you were created. But, because of how you look at me."

"What...", she started. This was like the Garrus she met over a year ago. Paranoid and distrustful of her. It didn't sound good.

"Let me finish.", Garrus hung his head low, staring away to the floor. "Your eyes, Satima. They're special. Not because you're turian and human, not because of the genetic mutation you recalled suffering from the reapers. No. It's because they're hers." He swallowed hard. "I don't understand how the reapers knew. Maybe it's just a coincidence or a sick cosmic joke. Satima, I want you to know that you have your... grandmother's eyes. My mother. There's a part of her in you. Don't forget that.", he finished.

She stared at him. Unable to look anywhere else but him. "Why are you telling me this?", she demanded.
He looked up, "It's important, that's why."

Satima turned around running out of the door in a hurry, leaving Garrus confused and surprised. He stood to follow, only to run into his father blocking him. "Let her go, son. She's heard enough tonight."

Garrus glanced at him, resuming a stare to the hall outside the door. "I don't understand why she ran off?", he stepped back, agitated again. " Spirits, dad. I don't understand her at all!"

Tiberius sighed, "Then make it your mission to do so." He stared at his son.

She took the elevator to the top floor, using emergency stairs to reach the rooftop. It took a hack to break the door open, but she stumbled forward, holding her arms together to herself.

Warm tears streaked her face as she stood at the ledge of the tall building. Overlooking the city. Satima covered her mouth to muffle her sobs. It's cruel. Leading her on to believe in a future with them.

"...how pathetic...", the voice spoke.

She paced, ignoring it, feeling a warm breeze send an odd chill down her spine. She'll have the sentarian geneticist fix it. She doesn't care if her eyes are human, or sentarian black. If she could strip away her genetic link to them, she will.

While reflecting, Satima suddenly had a dry throat, coughing loudly. She held back the urge to retch, wondering if the heavy dextro meals were making her ill. It would be better to go back and get some sleep, even if she wants to leave this planet for good.

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The Normandy navigated back into the system of Nehmos. Standing on the bridge, Shepard eventually stopped behind Joker. "Is the Inglorious in view?", she asked.

Joker whisked a few holo panels, effortlessly raising controls and turning the Normandy to Nepmos. "There it is.", he pointed. The alliance dreadnought sat undisturbed. No shuttles or traffic came between it and the planet. "It's quiet.", Joker stated.

"Raise the comms again. Maybe there was interference.", Shepard ordered.

As Joker followed commands, EDI continued to monitor the ship. "Captain, I have scanned the Inglorious. There is nothing to indicate a com-link issue. It's simply empty."

"What?," Shepard asked, concerned.

"There are no life forms aboard.," EDI informed.

Joker turned his gaze to Shepard, "Well that can't be good.", he remarked.

Shepard walked away from him, pacing, staring at the ship in orbit of Nepmos. Satima hoped the fires of the sentarian war ship would kill whatever was hiding in it. "We're going topside. I want this ship ready to evacuate when I order it. If I can't escape the planet, contact alliance command. Whatever Satima brought with her on that ship, we don't want it spreading throughout the systems."

"Ma'am.", Joker replied.

Shepard tried communicating with the Inglorious, but nothing went through. Static and dead space filled the comms. She readied the kodiak, taking James and EDI. Joker never likes it, but she's short on experienced crew. The kodiak rumbled through the atmosphere. Cortez flew directly over the alliance camp. "Ma'am. There's no one down there. It's vacant."
Geared in heavy armor, Shepard stood over him. "Where could they have gone?"

James loaded his rifle. "Maybe that ship? I knew something was strange about that thing."

"We'll settle down in the camp first, take a look. If we find anything leading into the ship, then we'll just have to go inside.", Shepard stated.

"Captain, it would be best to contact Satima. Considering this is a vessel familiar to her.", EDI commented.

"She's too far, EDI. We're on our own for now.", Shepard replied.

Cortez settled the shuttle on the landing pad. Shepard led her team out into the camp. Dusty silence echoed around them. EDI started scanning the compounds and hab tents. "This camp has been empty for weeks, Captain."

"Any sign of rachni activity?", Shepard asked. Her rifle aimed at her surroundings.

"None.", EDI replied.

They slowly proceeded into the center of the camp. Some of the doors of the compounds were malfunctioning. Lights flickered inside them. Ahead in the temporary electrical station, Shepard walked into the vacant space. Ashen dirt rustled beneath her boots, causing the room to look dusty. She could see grey dust that had settled over time on the generator. It had slash marks from something with sharp claws. "Look at this.", she gestured.

"Dios. You think the rachni did this?", James asked.

"Not going to know unless one of them shows up.", Shepard stated.

"Usually queens command them. It could be possible a nest has hatched recently without a queen nearby, like the hot labs on Noveria.", EDI informed.

Shepard used her rifle to lift pieces of electrical junk off a smaller generator. Someone was trying to fix it. "Yeah, but the queen on Noveria was a slave. She couldn't help her young. We had no choice but to kill them. This, however, is different. It seems calculated, but unstable."

James stepped to her. "Captain, Commander Ashley was here weeks ago. You think..."

She briefly touched his arm. "Don't worry, Vega. Ash is out on spectre business."

"Captain. Movement.", EDI reported.

They followed it to the medical tent. Shepard carefully opened the flap, walking inside slowly. She pointed her rifle to something hiding in the corner. It had a lab coat on. "Stand up, slowly.", she ordered.

The person stood with hands raised up. "Don't shoot! Please."

Shepard lowered her rifle, eyeing the woman. "Who are you?"

She stepped out carefully, her once white lab coat covered in dirt. "I was a part of the medical team here. Before it all went to hell.", she replied.

"How long have you been here?", Shepard asked.
"Two weeks. I came with a shuttle to the Inglorious. They opened the big ship, out in the distance. Found bodies of those tall aliens. Something wasn't right about them.", she answered.

James looked around, giving the all clear. EDI took quick scans of the woman. "She's perfectly healthy, although dehydrated."

Shepard nodded in acknowledgement. "What's your name?", she asked.

"Morgan... Morgan Reeves. I'm in bio-tech.", Morgan responded.

"Morgan. Can you tell us what happened here?", Shepard inquired.

Morgan walked around the tent, realizing the night sky was almost full. "No! We have to find shelter! Stay hidden, stay in the light!", she started to panic.

Shepard grabbed the arm of an erratic Morgan. "Calm down! You're not alone here."

Morgan wrested her arm from Shepard. "You don't understand! They took all of them. I saw some of the soldiers return, but they were sick. Coughing up dark blood and behaving violently."

"Hijo de puta!", James exclaimed. He found a marine's body, nearly gutted. "Rachni!", he exclaimed.

EDI stepped outside to see if any rachni started to emerge at night. "Captain."

Shepard walked outside. Morgan and James followed. "What is it, EDI?"

"Over the hill. More movement.", EDI readied her pistol.

Suddenly a group of rachni approached them, headed by three sentarians. Their pale green skin turned an ashen grey, like the world's surface. The texture looked paper thin and dried, with grey lesions covering most of their exposed body. A putrid colored growth was exposed in patches over their necks and hands. The rachni shared a similar distinction.

Shepard looked closer to see milky white eyes staring back at her. A handful of alliance marines stepped beside the group, blue parasitic veins covering them. Some of them were coughing violently. Morgan shook in terror. Shepard faced her. "Are they dangerous?!" Morgan only stared in fear.

Shepard shook the woman, "Morgan! Are they dangerous?"

A low rumble below them vibrated the ground. Suddenly the surface broke before them, with dozens of infected rachni piling out. Morgan moved her gaze eerily to Shepard. "Run.", she whispered

Quickly, they ran to the shuttle. "Cortez!", Shepard yelled over comms, panting from the heavy footfalls of her boots to the ground.

"Captain.", he responded.

"Ready the shuttle. We're bugging out!", she ordered.

"Yes, ma'am!", he replied.

At the landing platform, James had no choice but to shoot at them. "Captain, their hostile."

She opened the hatch as Morgan and EDI hopped inside. Shepard turned to see the sick and crazed marines run towards them behind the rachni. "Defend yourself.", she shouted.
She and James mercifully put down a few, leaving the rest to flee back from the gunfire. They both ran inside the shuttle as Cortez hastily lifted off the platform. He looked down to the camp. "Captain, what happened?"

Shepard stared at Morgan who shook all over from fear. "Something bad.", she replied.

Back on Palaven

Satima took the tours with Garrus about her paternal sides home world. Not very many turians were happy she was there, but she tried to ignore them. Unfortunately, during her stay, she had started to get sick. Running small fevers and feeling nauseous.

One morning, before the shuttle ride back to the anticipated Normandy. They were taking an elevator to the top of the judicial building in a meeting with Agripinex. It was an offer of a position, one that Satima had stated she'd rather have, opposed to fighting.

Inside the elevator, Garrus noticed Satima started to sweat. "Are you ok?", he asked.
"I'm fine. Just... hot.", she replied, stretching her vest collar with a finger.
"You've also been coughing lately.", he noticed.

She dismissed him. "I'm not used to this place, is all."

At the top floor, they stepped out to see Agripinex. She gave a turian smile, welcoming the hybrid to her office. They sat on more comfortable chairs than the concrete benches Garrus remembered. Agripinex began. "Satima, I have an offer of a position here on Palaven."
"Here?", Satima answered. "Is that wise? Considering how most of this world may not want me wondering around their streets."

Agripinex shook her head, "You would be working closely with me. This would give you the chance to secure a better reputation with our people.", she offered. "I think spending your time learning our culture and history will help you understand our position in the galaxy. I could also use an intimidating assistant to get people like Malen in line." She chuckled.

Satima stood up, walking to the window of the office, staring out to the mountains. "This is an incredible offer.", she turned to them. Her gaze to Garrus. "Would your father and sister let me stay?"

He nodded. "Of course, they would."

Satima started to walk forward, when she became lightheaded, nearly losing her footing while standing in place. "Whoa.", she touched her head.

Agripinex continued, noticing the hybrids ill appearance. "Satima... you don't look well. Is there something wrong?"
"I'm just... just a little hot." Satima fell backwards, shaking. Garrus knelt over her. "Satima!"
"I'll call a medical team. She is half turian, after all.", Agripinex summoned.

The hybrid woke up at a hospital filled with turians. She sat up feeling weak. Solanna stood to the side, now aware of the girl's wakening. "They were worried. I... I was concerned as well.", she
Out the open door, a few turians passed by, curiously looking in for quick glances at her. Their wide stares told her of their thoughts. "The hybrid here! In their medical facility, where vulnerable patients are!" Satima understood their fears. She gazed forward, nearly daydreaming when Solanna started speaking.

"Do you remember anything that happened in madam councilor's office?", she wondered.

Satima glanced to her, then sighed. "I don't know what happened. One minute I was just a little hot, and the next I'm on the floor."

Solanna began thinking. "The doctor surmises it might be the radioactive atmosphere on our planet. You're not a full turian. You weren't born on this planet or raised in a poor magnetic environment.", she commented.

"What does that mean?", Satima asked.

"It's thu...Nothing.", she dismissed. "You'll just need to be more careful when you visit here from now on. There are special envirosuits and preventative injections you can take.", she added.

Garrus and Tiberius appeared through the doorway. "How are you feeling?", he asked.

"She'll live.", Solanna informed walking out.

Tiberius eyed her, continuing to Satima. "She sat with you for an hour, while Garrus here contacted the Normandy. It won't be long before you'll be leaving back to the citadel."

"Oh.", Satima spoke.

"I did enjoy your stay here.", he remarked.

Satima smiled, "Thank you for the stories. It's something I can retell to my friends on Lithera.", she added. A bitter memory stinging her words. If she has any left, that is.

"Lithera?", Tiberius asked.

"Sentarian home world.", she answered.

Garrus watched them, contented Satima had time to know her turian side of the family. That's all she wanted was a family, and she nearly doomed the galaxy to this unknown infection to have one.

On the shuttle ride, Satima started to feel nauseous again. She stood grasping a handle for balance as the ride made her sicker. Cortez looked behind him, "Don't worry about the bumpiness. It'll be smooth sailing back to the Normandy in a moment."

She nodded, thankful for the attempted assuredness. Once through the planet's atmosphere, the shuttle settled down. It's not like Satima to ever get sick in a shuttle, or in a ship. She lived on one for years, something was very wrong.

Garrus sat on the bench, ready to get back on the warship, and back to Shepard. He had a lot to tell her about Satima's time on Palaven. He looked at his hybrid daughter, who seemed paler than usual. They heard Solanna's words before walking inside the room.

"It's thulium, in our carapaces. That's what protects us from the radiation of our planet, Satima. The doctor back in the city could only make a best guess that yours being so small, couldn't handle the
planet’s surface for longer than a few days,", he stated. "Or, good chance, because you were never born there, yours did not develop correctly."

She nodded.

"Are you still feeling sick?, he asked.

"A little. I'm sure it will pass in a while.", she replied.

The kodiak shuttle made its way to the Normandy, carefully maneuvered inside the cargo deck. Cortez had just finished attaching the couplings from his panel controls, when Shepard opened the hatch. She spotted the two, giving Satima a glowering look. "We need to talk.", she demanded.

Garrus glanced to them both, when Satima began to step forward and started coughing violently. Shepard walked in to help her, turning to Garrus. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know?, he replied, panicked. "She started to get sick on Palaven, but the doctor thought it was just a radiation issue."

Satima couldn't catch her breath, suddenly spitting up a handful of dark red blood. She looked at it in horror. "No., she muttered. Shepard stared as Satima faced her, pained. "I'm infected."

Medical bay
Normandy

Chockwas scanned her thoroughly. "There was never anything on her previous eval's before. This is a new development."

Morgan stood in the corner, shaking and glaring to Satima in anger. "We should space her. She's only going to infect the rest of us!"

Shepard stared at Morgan. "Quiet. Stay over there, and do not interfere." She turned to Satima, who had a pleading look.

"You should listen to her.", Satima warned.

Shepard shook her head. "No one's spacing you. Chockwas, find anything yet?"

Garrus came in, "I alerted the hospital she visited on Palaven. Agripenex is having it scrubbed and the patients there screened.", he glanced to Satima. "It's not your fault. You didn't know you were sick."

Satima averted her gaze. "Yes, I did.", she replied.

Shepard uncrossed her arms, surprised. "What?"

Garrus walked forward, confused. "For how long?", he asked.

Satima stared at their upset glares, and looked down in disappointment of herself. "Since I landed on Nepmos. I fought the infected and one of them... one of them bled on me. On Lithera, we would've scrubbed and sanitized. Quarantined until cleared. I've come close before, but never got sick. Until now."

"Until now?! How long have you been fighting these things?, Shepard asked, alarmed.

"For six months on Lithera. The Sentarians have advanced technology. Ways to prevent infection or
"Slow it down.", Satima answered.

"Spirits, Satima! I took you to my home world, to my family!". Garrus argued. "I took you to public places!", he complained.

Satima got off the examination table and stepped to him. "I know, and I'm sorry.", she said pleadingly. "I thought I was immune. I've never been sick before. Never. I thought the reapers made me immune."

"What do you mean, immune?", Shepard asked, concerned.

Chockwas ran the blood tests and looked up at the word immune. She pondered this same question, watching Satima's results on the screen. Satima continued, "I agreed to help Arkasia extract a piece of the hive laboratories from my timeline. Yes, it's still there. I blew that ship up, destroying everything and everyone on it, but... pieces remained."

Morgan quietly stepped to the side behind a table grabbing a scalpel. She waited in the corner.

Satima paced, "I warned her. Tried to stop her, but she insisted that hive had sensitive information on her people. Reaper creations that needed to be eradicated. She happened on an intact lab, brought it back. We didn't know the entire piece had a survivor in it. It was too late then."

"What happened?", Shepard inquired.

Satima crossed her arms vulnerable. "The infection had already begun to spread.", she answered. "But... that survivor had used it to screw us all."

Garrus spotted Morgan stepping behind Satima with the scalpel. "Satima!", he shouted.

She turned to defend herself, blocking the attack with her hand foolishly. The small razor pierced through, causing Satima to yell in pain, holding the scalpel tightly. Morgan backed away. "You're responsible for them. It's your fault!", she shouted, terrified.

Shepard approached Satima as she pulled the scalpel from her hand. It fell to the floor with a sharp ping, blood splattering around it. "Chockwas.", Shepard summoned.

Satima wrested her hand from Shepard and glared toward Morgan. The bio-tech stumbled backward in fear. "Stay away from me!", she warned. She walked forward, while Shepard attempted to stop her. "Satima, don't."

"Poor human.", she cocked her head, a voice not recognized speaking now. Morgan found another scalpel and pointed it towards Satima, "Stay away! You're sick, infected. You should be quarantined!"

Satima laughed dementedly. "Why does everyone want to put me in a box?! It's really starting to piss me off." She stared dangerously towards Morgan. "You think there's a cure?", she leaned in close to Morgan. "There's no cure for something like me." Her dark eyes piercing the woman's mind. Suddenly her teal eyes turned a shade of crimson, surrounded by the black scelra familiar of turians.

"Shepard, help me.", Morgan pleaded.

"That's enough, Satima!", Shepard yelled, fearful for Morgan's life.

Satima faced them briefly, showing her strange gaze and an unamused expression. She turned to Morgan, leaning closer with her bloody hand on the wall behind the terrified human, "This galaxy is
ripe with heroes... what it needs, is a better villain.
Morgan cried out as Satima grabbed the scalpel and with advanced reflexes, quickly attempted to jam it into the woman's eye, but suddenly stopped.
Satima stared and held her breath, glimpsing the woman's petrified expression. Her eyes resumed their natural teal stare from before. A terrified and surprised expression on the hybrid's face. "I'm... I'm sorry.
She leaned back, letting Morgan go and let the blade slide from her hand to the floor, disgusted with herself. Garrus stepped forward, confused and afraid of what Satima is. Was he right to begin with? Spirits, they have Natalie now.
Shepard walked to Satima, despite Garrus nodding no. She touched the girls arm, as Satima flinched from her and suddenly wrapped her arms around Shepard. She started to sob loudly, "What's wrong with me?!", she cried with eyes shut tightly. Wet tears overflowed as Satima's muffled sobs echoed from Shepard's shoulder.
Shepard consoled her, holding her sick daughter. "You didn't mean it. It's okay. You didn't mean it.
Garrus looked on perplexed. He turned to Chockwas who had a pistol ready.
Moments later...
Satima sat in the core room, sealed away in darkness. She wanted it, begged for it. The implant has stopped working, but how? She got out and almost killed someone. Satima rubbed her head in pain. The scar above her ear throbbing. She looked up as the door opened. It was Garrus.
He didn't look happy. She stared at him, knowing how disappointed he must be. "Are you here to kill me?", she asked.
Garrus uncrossed his arms, staring at her in pity. "The neural implant behind your ear. What is it for?", he inquired, not answering her.
Satima buried her head between her knees. "To stop... her."
"Who?", he demanded.
"You wouldn't understand.
Garrus stopped at the wall, leaning against it. "Try me.
Satima sighed. "I'm indoctrinated. You know how that goes. Any person that is or has been under the reapers thrall can never escape the after-effects of it." She sat up to stand, "At the beam on earth, I had nano-tech inside me. That's why we could wear those special suits of armor.
"My whole life on that reaper station was spent being tormented to be just like Reaper. I developed... I have an alternative personality. She's been trying to take over. It wasn't me that defeated Archer on the crucible to save Shepard. It was her. She's stronger, better than I am, and it's all because of the reapers.
"So, your hair... that implant...", he asked.
"To receive the surgery. They needed me awake during the process. She was taking over, and Memtrix had to incarcerate me. I... hurt some people.
"If I don't get
back to Lithera, she'll take over completely, and you'll have no choice but to kill me."

"Satima...", Garrus stated.

"No. Promise me... promise me you'll do it, kill me. Shepard can't! She won't! But, I know you'll do it. To save me.", Satima smiled weakly.

Garrus became upset, averting a stare from her. She's lost her mind about this. Leaning off the wall to face the door, he spoke again. "Chockwas has your results. Shepard and I will let you know what it says." He walked through the door. It sealed behind him.

Satima stood there. If no one will stop her, then she'll do it herself.

In the medbay, Shepard and Garrus waited for Chockwas's announcement to them. Satima stood cuffed with two of the crew on either side, armed. She understood the reasons. Memtrix had to do the same. "What does it say about the infection?", Shepard asked.

Chockwas looked at them, then to Satima. "You've seen how this works. You know the symptoms. Explain it to them, hybrid.", she remarked with a cold stare.

Satima gulped. "That test is going to say the foreign bacteria will mutate, and start respiratory problems. It's attached to the nervous system, releasing toxins throughout the blood stream. The infected sentarians developed growths on their bodies. This is some way the virus controls you. You become paranoid, violent even."

"What about the rest of the infection?", Shepard inquired.

Satima glanced to each of them. "It's a parasitic spore that fills your lungs. Your insides start to liquefy, and you turn into something like a... a husk. But somehow, a bit more terrifying than what we've seen on earth."

"Spirits.", Garrus commented. He looked at Shepard, "That sounds too familiar."

Chockwas stepped to Satima. "How long do you have?"

The hybrid couldn't look at them and answer. She exhaled, letting anxiety go to speak. "Fifteen days, maybe a little more. I'll die of the infection, and turn into them.", Satima replied. Her stare became determined. "But I'll kill myself first."

Shepard gazed at her. "What do we need to do, to save you?" She's not going to allow this to happen, not to Satima. Or anyone else.

"The warship. There's data inside that will help me find a spatial rift, from there we can use a warp tunnel. Shepard, I need to go back to Lithera.", Satima answered. "There's a way to slow down the infection."

The captain nodded in agreement. "Then we'll do that, but first, you must tell me what we're facing.", Shepard demanded. "I saw infected rachni, but they were from Nepmos."

Satima looked down in thought, "Clusters of red and black.", she answered.

"Red and black what?", Shepard asked.

"Eggs.", Satima replied. "Groups of them, scattered about."
So, that explains it. Shepard shook her head. The Directive woke something terrifying, alright. Rachni from their own time.

Without a moment to spare, the Normandy once again reached Nepmos. Joker didn't like this idea, but Shepard's daughter was dying. Even though she tried to kill that bio-tech in a crazy fit of reaper rage.

On the cargo deck, Shepard started gearing up. Satima sat off to the side, taking a handful of pills to fight the fevers. Garrus watched, his face expressionless. Did he care, or was he mentally preparing himself to accomplish Satima's wishes? He came to her that day before, telling her of what Satima asked. Shepard could clearly see how it upset him.

"Ma'am.", Cortez alerted. "Do we have any contingency plans in case this goes bad?" He still had nightmares of the harvester that almost killed him in London. He'd wake up in cold sweats and nauseous. Maybe he should talk to someone about it, but... it seemed so difficult to express. Cortez continued to stare at the captain, waiting for her solution. She always had a way out, that's the N7 training.

Shepard noticed the nervous twitch of his eye. "We blow the sentarian ship to hell, scorch the surface.", she informed, loading a thermal clip into her rifle.

"But, what about her?", he pointed to Satima, who kept her own gaze downward. "Is she... capable of staying in control?" He cleared his throat in regret of his words. "I mean, will she be okay?"

Shepard glanced to Satima. "We find a way to save her and stop the infection. Then I find a way to purge the indoctrination."

Cortez's eyes widened, "Ma'am.", he responded, unsure.

James stepped up to his captain. "So, princess lola went loco on someone, huh?"

Shepard finished with her boots. "Yeah.", she revealed.

He whistled, glancing to Satima, then displayed a grin. "Nah. She didn't mean it. Maybe she just needs to get the anger out. Like you did with me."

She smiled in memory of their 'sparring' session. He needed to get out his frustrations of his failures to his CO and his team. And how angry he was, that alliance didn't update the intel, when Shepard cleared and destroyed the collector base on her own. Looking up to him, she shook her head, uncertain. "If it's that easy, maybe you should offer to be the punching bag.", Shepard jested.

Satima listened, but didn't respond. She couldn't shake Garrus's scary gaze toward her. Would he really end her miserable existence to protect everyone?

The dangerous plan unfolded. Satima needed warp gate coordinates to a spatial rift, in order for the Normandy to reach Lithera. And to obtain that, they must infiltrate the vessel and fight their way to the lower labs, avoiding infection.

On the shuttle ride to the surface, Satima's hand started to shake uncontrollably as she handled her helmet. Shepard offered her armor, with slight adjustments in the back to protect her. An old set of N7. It looked good on Satima, eerily. Now if only her daughter wasn't turning into Saren.

Satima glanced to them, beginning her warning, "Remember to keep your helmets on. Do not expose your body in the ship. If you have an open injury, alert the rest of the squad. Cover it quickly.", she started to have trouble breathing, but continued. "Don't let the infected get too close. The spores can
be seen, and their blood can infect you. After we get the data, we leave quickly. Use the sanitation hab in the camp to scrub our suits.", she informed.

Shepard stepped next to her with a raised brow. Satima noticed. "Sorry. Just... habit."

"Perfectly fine. You know more about the infection than I do.", Shepard commented.

Cortez landed the kodiak on top of the war ship. "It's going to feel a little wobbly, nothing I can't balance. You know how to do that, Satima?", he smiled.

She chuckled, "Better than you."

Once outside the shuttle, she led them to the emergency hatch she used to escape. "Through here. We'll keep it open. It's a bitch to lift.", she informed.

Garrus and James leaned down and lifted the hatch. "Dios. How did you lift this thing by yourself?", James quipped.

Satima smirked, "Desperation." She looked down the dark whole, glancing back to them. Satima put her legs in first, hopping down. Shepard took a good look around her. Volcanic eruptions in the far distance emitted black clouds into the sky, covering the sun. She watched everyone go in, following last.

Inside the dimly lit bridge, Satima led them to the open door. The bridge hatch was wide open. "Looks like your alliance finished opening the door. That's how they got in."

"And how the infected got out.", Shepard stated.

"Yeah.", Satima checked the walls for anything crawling. She doesn't want to be here, but duty and guilt have pushed her forward. So much guilt. The bridge door tried to shut, but opened again. A malfunction on deck controls. Satima broke the panel to keep it open. "This way.", she gestured with her pistol.

Shepard stepped next to her on their way through. "The infected rachni... are they also on Lithera?"

"Rachni?", Satima asked.

"You don't know what rachni are?", Shepard replied, stunned. "You said something about eggs. It had to be them."

Satima stopped, "They were brought with the rest of the fractured salvage, along with the survivor from hive. I've never heard of rachni before. Although they do look a lot like those reaper abominations on earth."

"Yeah.", Shepard spoke. "Those were reaper controlled. This infection could be a plague or a bio-weapon. Sounds similar to what happened on Omega. Only the plague was targeting every species, except human." She pondered aloud. "That was years ago, though."

"Reapers.", Satima shook her head. "Their favorite past-time, experimentation."

Further down the corridor, a decaying smell filled the hall. James scrunched his face at it. Large fuzzy spores floated around them, sticking to the surface of the hull walls. They avoided the heavily dense areas of the spore contaminated rooms. At the end of the first hallway, marine bodies were laid around, horribly mangled. "Explains the smell.", Satima remarked.
"Poor bastards.", Garrus commented. "Looks like they were taken by surprise. Rachni are good at that." He eyed the hull ceiling above.

"We only saw a handful of sick marines, they were acting deranged. Why aren't they dead, too?", Shepard asked.

"The spread of the infection varies. One group could've been exposed first, contaminating the rest while they looked for a cure.", she pointed to the mangled bodies. "Looks like the carriers didn't take these.", Satima explained.

"Carriers?", Shepard asked.

"You said these bug creatures are rachni? Some of them take the bodies and… repurpose them. If they don't turn, then they are used as genetic plague." Satima pointed to a wall in the corner. A disgusting growth of parasitic means clung to the metal. "Spread that everywhere, and any population within miles will be infected in days."

They resumed past shut doors to other parts of the ship, all the way to an elevator. "Here.", Satima pointed.

"It's not working.", Garrus observed.

Satima put her pistol up, "I know. We're climbing down." She opened the double doors to reveal a pitch-black shaft. "Use your lights to see. Just don't make any extra noise. Draws them out."

Slowly, Satima led them down the shaft, gripping the notches purposefully forged into the metal for emergencies. Condensation from intense heat below made the notches slippery, causing Shepard to lose her grip once or twice. Satima looked up. "Careful, Shepard. We can't have you falling down there."

"I'm getting a lot of deja vu here. Anyone else?", Garrus remarked.

Shepard chuckled, "Let's see. Omega?"

Garrus laughed, "Sometimes. I'm thinking more of the ardat yakshi monastery." He nearly lost his grip too, shaking his head in response. "But, maybe talking about it isn't such a good idea right now."

Satima smirked, "I remember." She stopped her smile, knowing there were more sinister things back on Lithera, things that whisper to you and guide you to horrible acts. "Guys. You will hear things. Screeches, scratching sounds... sometimes talking. The infected are just the first."

James looked down to her, "The first of what?! What else is there?"

"Sorry, James. I needed a tank, and couldn't have you staying back on the Normandy because of unknowns.", she replied.

Shepard glanced to Satima below her. "Unknowns?"

"Take what you know of indoctrination and twist it without a will, but a hunger. The infection consumes mind and body.", Satima informed. "You're a plague-husk, remember? No thought or emotion."

"Dios.", James worried. "We seriously need to stop getting involved in spooky crap like this."

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"James, I needed a tank, and couldn't have you staying back on the Normandy because of unknowns."
"And that's what will happen to those marines and the three sentarians we spotted in the camp, days before? To you?", Shepard wondered, concerned, ignoring James's comment.

Satima stepped down another notch, careful to not lose her concentration while talking. "I can't be too sure. They might die of the symptoms before becoming what I described. It's all theory for me here, Arkasia had the answers, but she was left behind on the moon base.", Satima answered.

"How did she have the answers?", Garrus asked.

"It's a long story.", Satima sighed, frustrated. "Let's just focus on the data and escaping, then we can discuss this in more detail. Safely on the Normandy."

Shepard looked down to check on Satima, remembering their half-discussed conversation. "So, who was the survivor you discovered on that ship fragment?" Nearly stepping on James's hand.

Satima turned her gaze upward, "She's an asari. I forgot her name.

"An asari?", Garrus asked. "On hive? I thought it was mostly a human-reaper controlled operation?" It sounded as much to him, anyways.

"That's what I said.", Satima replied, annoyed. "An asari. There were different levels on the station, with different species running it. But the reapers did have a special fascination in humans."

Half-way down to the labs, a sudden rumble filled the ship. Everyone held on tightly. Screeches echoed."Rachni?", Satima asked.

"You tell me.", Shepard stated. "You say they're carriers of this infection?", she inquired.

Satima admitted with a nod,"Those eggs on hive were injected with a bio-weapon. Arkasia discovered it, and the survivor from the intact lab was a former scientist for them. She's behind their release."

"And you don't remember her name?", Garrus commented. "Can you really be that oblivious to the danger around you, Satima?", he accused.

She looked up at him, stunned by his words. It's hard to remember small details when bad memories are clouding your mind. She stopped and made an effort to remember for him. "Shila...no.", Satima muttered, trying to keep her grip tight on the metal ladder. "Shiala!", she yelled.

Chitterring sounds surrounded them. Satima looked down with her flashlight. She saw dozens of rachni crawling up the shaft towards them. "Shit! Go back up!", she yelled.

The rest of the squad viewed the menace advancing to them. Above James was a door. "I'll get it open.", he shouted.

Shepard reached his level, helping to pull the door apart. They grunted against the pressure. "Something behind it.", James remarked.

Garrus held out his taloned hand to Satima, who was further down. "Grab my hand!", he yelled. He glanced to the creatures steadily making their way to her.

She quickly climbed the wall, avoiding jutting debris. One of the rachni jumped, but missed her. Garrus leaned down as far as his weight would let him. Satima looked up and realized she needed to jump to an adjacent piece of girder to reach him. "Hold on.", she replied.
Meanwhile, Shepard and James finally opened the door as a body fell. "Watch out!", Shepard yelled below her.

Garrus caught the warning in time to duck from the body, but Satima had just started to jump. She looked up as the body hit her full force, knocking her down the long dark shaft, past the rachni carriers. All of them screeched following her down.
"Satima!", Garrus roared.

Shepard climbed onto the deck, helping Garrus and James in. "Where's Satima?", she questioned.

Garrus glanced to her, then pointed to the shaft. "Down there.", he responded hoarsely from screaming her name.

"We've got to save her. Come on!", Shepard ordered.

Fourth floor
Engineering

Satima woke to heavy breathing. A carrier stood over her, it's bug-like eyes staring. She quickly sat back up, crawling backwards from it. The carrier leaned in to her face, studying her. Her heart beat faster, and suddenly she started coughing violently again. More dark blood came from her mouth as the carrier watched in curiosity. It ignored her, moving on.

Satima stood up to see dozens, maybe more of them. Clustered together and dragging the dead bodies of the marines from above. She started involuntarily coughing, unable to catch her breath. Against the hull wall, she closed her eyes and waited for the episode to end. Her lungs hurt, they burned and felt heavy. Spirits, she's brought this agonizing end to others here.

Opening her eyes, she spotted small emergency lights that gave her a path back to the shaft. They brought her here, unharmed. Why? To witness her slow death, or turning into one of those grey husk things? She slowly walked forward, careful of them.

One would glance to her, and another would smell the air. None of them did much but stand around, or crouch in corners. Waiting. If these creatures didn't care about her presence now, then it should be easy to recover the data, find Shepard and leave.

The problem would be if Shepard started looking for her. Satima knew she had to go faster, making her way to an emergency ladder. Up she climbed, hoping Shepard didn't get far. Before the infected surround them.

Deck two
Barracks and Quarters.

Shepard led them through the darkness, careful of any noise or movement.

"You think she's still alive?", James asked.

"She's got to be.", Shepard hoped. That was a long fall, right into enemy territory. Her body could be mangled, broken. She could be dying. Noises came ahead. They stopped, weapons aimed. A group of carriers shot out of the darkness, running towards them. "Fire!", Shepard shouted.

Thermal bullets burned apart their hard flesh, spattering dark blood over the walls and floor. Dying screeches filled the hall, causing more to appear around them. Shepard led them forward, fighting their way through the horde, avoiding blood and bites.
"Relentless little bastards!", Garrus commented. He put one down overhead from a vent. James pummeled two of them into the wall, flinching back from blood spurts. "Gonna be hard to avoid getting dirty in tight corners!", he complained.

"Fight smart! Kick them back, then fire.", Shepard ordered.

Her team followed suit, Garrus managed to stomp one down, emptying a clip into its body. James barreled through, avoiding a claw of one the infected rachni. Ahead, a single door at the end of the hall remained open.

Once they made it to the end room, James closed the door while Garrus barricaded it with heavy debris. "That's not going to hold them for long. Shepard, we need to get to deck four."

She panted from the running, putting her rifle up to explore. "I know. We'll find a way down. James, keep an eye on the door. Garrus, come with me. There's another room in here."

Stepping through the second door, they observed a room full of beds and sentarian design lockers. VI panels lined each one, giving a personal touch for the soldiers who bunked here. "There's got to be a hatch somewhere in here. A way out.", Shepard commented.

"I can't reach Satima.", Garrus worried using his comms. "It's nothing but static."

Shepard turned to him, "She's alive. I know it. We'll find her and get that data."

He nodded, returning to look around the room. Garrus walked to a locker that was already opened. The VI spoke softly in sentarian, lighting up the inside. Objects and other broken pieces filled the space. He closed it silently.

Whoever this belonged to is probably dead now. Shepard moved a tiered bunk, squinting at the sharp noise it made. "Well, that wasn't quiet.", she laughed, nervously. Underneath was a hatch. "Found it.", she stated.

James called out. "Captain! They're breaking though!"

Infected rachni soldiers were using their claws to slice through the metal debris.

"Leave it. The hatch is here.", she informed.

Garrus opened it to more darkness. "Wake me up when this nightmare is over.", he complained.

Shepard went in first, with Garrus and a panicked James behind. He slid the hatch over them, using his omni-tool to seal it shut. At least the carriers couldn't follow them through. Unless there were some waiting below.

Meanwhile, Satima slowly ascended the ladder, cautiously stopping if a carrier got too noisy. She let out a sigh of relief when it ignored her again. Once on deck four, she held out her pistol, aiming ahead of her. Her light growing dim from landing on it in the fall. "Come on.", she hit it to make it bright again.

The labs lined the corridor with their doors either shut tight or wide open. A few scratching sounds came from the shut ones. Luckily, the data was inside an open room. Although a carrier could be hiding in one. Satima stuck her pistol in first, easing inside the room against the wall. Slowly and quietly.

A display on the far wall shown many sentarian schematics and biological data. Their mission to the
moon base and ultimate foolish endeavor to her timeline. Endeavor. Where was that ship? That was the freighter that hovered in orbit as she crash landed the vessel. They opened the door.

Satima leaned over the panel display. The infection has spread now. Where ever those idiots had gone too, she was sure they already infected others, and if a rachni carrier was on board. Chaos.

Satima heard scuffling behind her, quickly turning to the sound to see nothing. Back at the display, she found the data and hastily downloaded its contents. Using a spatial rift for the Normandy could be risky. Sentarian ships are built to handle that kind of journey. They'll find out soon enough, if they can escape this place.

Deck Four
Virology Lab

Shepard opened the hatch to land down into the room. She observed her surroundings, signaling for Garrus and James to follow. The only door leading out was shut. "Damn. We need to get that door open.", she pointed.

Garrus walked to it. "Sealed tight. I can torch it open, but it could take a while."

"Could two torches help?", James added.

"It might.", Garrus replied, with a grin.

Shepard stood to the side, rifle over her shoulder. "Get to it. I'll check the hatch and the vent over there."

The vent was quiet while Shepard paced under it. What else was there to do other than watch them work on the door? She observed the dark walls, and dimly lit spaces. This place might've been a bustling warship. With a proud and experienced crew, now reduced to graves. Trash laid in the corner underneath a large metal desk. Its simple design reminded her of the Normandy.

An eerie feeling crept up, before she heard screeching sounds coming from outside the sealed door. They stopped to listen. "You hear something?", James asked.

"Sounds like footsteps.", Garrus commented.

Shepard stepped to them, holding her rifle. The noise got closer, imitating careful footfalls. Another screech came down the hallway outside the door and the footsteps hurriedly ran back from its origin.

They heard a grunt followed by a squishing sound, then a thud. The footsteps returned, but sounded slowed. Whomever it was, had to of been hurt. "Hold on.", Shepard murmered.

She opened her comms."...satima...", she whispered.

The footsteps stopped.

"Are you outside a sealed door on deck four?", Shepard asked.

From the other side of the door they heard a voice, faint and barely audible. "Shepard?" They heard a thud against the door.

"Get this door open!", Shepard ordered.

James and Garrus double timed it, creating a long stretch of melted metal between the door panels. Together they opened it for Satima to fall in. Shepard leaned out to help her. "Satima... Satima...",
she repeated, touching her forehead, "She's burning hot.", Shepard complained.

Garrus knelt, picking Satima up. "Let's get out of here."

"What about the data? Without it she'll die.", Shepard stated.

Garrus looked over Satima, he stared at Shepard. "She can't stay on this ship and fight.", he argued. "She's too weak."

James pointed with his rifle, down the hallway to rachni carriers approaching. "Whatever we're doing, it better be fast."

"We'll have to mow them down to get to another hatch. Take it all the way to the bridge.", Shepard cautioned.

James and Shepard fired on the carriers, as Garrus held Satima. They fought their way through to a hatch, taking the ladder carefully past two decks to the bridge. Satima became conscious enough to climb with them. Her weakened demeanor proving difficult to control, as rachni assaulted them from below.

On the second floor, Garrus laid a half-conscious Satima against the hull wall. Lending a gun to the rachni forcing their way through the narrow hatch. "We need to seal this part of the ship. Give us a chance to escape!", he shouted.

"Agreed! James, you see anything that could block them out for a while?", Shepard yelled.

James used his carnage round on a group of rachni pouring through a vent. He spotted overhanging girders that could be knocked down over the hatch, blocking the third deck doors. "Yeah!", he replied. James threw a grenade at the metal girders, shouting a warning to the crew.

Shepard leaned next to Satima, covering the hybrid's body with hers. The grenade exploded, knocking the girders out of place and sending them crashing down over the doors and hatch. Far off screeching echoed through, sending a clear message that the rachni were backing off.

"Good.", Garrus panted, running away from the explosion. "Keep the bastards off our backs. Nice job, Vega."

James sighed, setting his rifle over his shoulder satisfied. "What can I say? I'm a problem solver.", he smirked.

Garrus laughed, "Satima was right. You are a tank! Could've used you on Omega!"

As the men laughed, Shepard checked on Satima. Her labored breathing beginning to get louder. "Guys... she can hardly breath.", Shepard stated, worried. "It's getting worse."

They double timed it to the bridge, Garrus again carrying her, when Shepard and James met with several infected sentarians. "Damn!", she shouted.

One of them spoke, "She calls us to control... she calls us to take... you will give what is hers..."

"What is hers?", she scoffed. "You're sick, infected!", Shepard argued.

The middle male sentarian smiled, his teeth covered in grey blood. "You will give what is hers."

Above them, a voice shouted. "GET DOWN!"
Shepard pushed her crew to a corner, when a loose grenade was tossed into the bridge. It exploded, blowing away the infected into bloody chunks. Two loud thuds landed on the deck with them. Amidst the bloody smoke, Shepard could make out the figures.

"Ashley?", she spoke relieved. Then squinted her eyes to make out another figure. "Ronin?"

He let out a smirk, "Captain. We found the Endeavor. It led us back here.", he replied. Ronin nodded to James, quickly frowning to see Satima in Garrus's arms. "What happened?", he asked alarmed.

Shepard walked forward. "She's infected."

Ashley stared in concern. "Oh, no.", she spoke, glancing to Ronin.

Back in the medbay on the Normandy, Satima laid asleep from her fever. Ronin paced in the mess, listening to Shepard and Garrus, as Ashley stood to attention. "This dangerous contagion comes from Satima's timeline. Reapers of course. We were trying to get the data to open a spatial rift. To reach the sentarian home world. They have a way to help her.", Shepard informed.

"Spirits.", Ronin replied.

"What happened to the Endeavor?", Garrus asked.

Ronin looked ahead to a sleeping Satima, when Ashley spoke. "They docked in a colony inside Alliance space. People started to get sick, dying. We found a group of them… deformed, they looked like husks, but scarier." she cringed. "Within two weeks, most of the colony was dead. Now...", she looked at them. "It's a ghost town. There was nothing we could do to help, but follow the Endeavor's coordinates back to its origin. Nepmos."

"And the crew of the Endeavor?", Shepard inquired.

Ronin continued the briefing, "Captain Marley killed her crew. Committing suicide after the first set of colonists died. She didn't know they were infected, claiming shadows resembling creatures, took her and another crew member. Marley complained of whispers, but it wasn't coherent between the violent coughing and sudden outburst of anger.", Ronin answered.

"That's because she controls it. The infection.", Satima stood behind them, pale and sickly. Her eyes had dark circles.

"Satima, you need to rest.", Shepard stated.

"Not yet. I have the data. We can find Lithera.", she informed.

Garrus couldn't believe she was awake. Her fever was over the one hundreds, and she could barely breathe. "How? We didn't get the data.", he complained.

"While you were trapped behind a door.", she smirked. Satima lost her balance, nearly falling.

Garrus helped her to the medbay. Ronin started to follow, when Shepard stopped him. "It's a risk. Are you sure you're willing to take it?" Her gaze searching at him.

He looked ahead, then back to her. "Yes."

Ashley stepped forward, "We've been exposed for weeks now. It wouldn't matter anyways."

Shepard nodded, gravely. "I'm sorry you both were dragged into this, unknowingly of the infection. Satima should've told me from the start."
Ronin had nothing to say, agreeing with Shepard, but he felt something again for Satima. Or, maybe it never really faded? He couldn't understand it, now. Only hope the spirits guide them to a cure, or the whole galaxy will suffer.

Sentarian Command Ship
En route through temporal portal
One year ago

Memtrix overlooked her command deck. Since Callon's demise, everything has become clearer. Her people needed rescuing, but not his way. Callon wanted chaos to save their kind. The humans had a similar villain. Illusive Man? Yes, that is him. That's all it takes. Is for one person to put a ripple in the galaxy, and they all fall. Like trellin stones... all in the same direction of chaos and defeat. All for one man... or woman's, darker purpose.

She paced around her crew, nodding to the new smiles of victory in finding the temporal portal. It's all happening quickly, but hope has a way of blinding the realities of the universe. What will they find when they go home? They received several transmissions from the home planet. Memtrix has a knot in her gut suddenly. That old feeling of hesitation and dread. She shook it off to give commands. Maybe everything will be alright. Will it?

Arkasia and Satima stood together, anxious to see the home system. To see the home world. Bustling with their people. Safe and free of the reapers.

"Reaching designation two. Temporal portal is stable.", a crewman stated.

"Acknowledged.", Memtrix answered. "I want full comms open. All stations."

Satima and Arkasia stood by watching the deck with anticipation.

"So, now that you're a sentarian. How do you feel about joining our military?", Arkasia asked.

Satima turned to her, "What would be my pay?"

They both laughed.

Five more minutes. The temporal portal shown billions of small stars, all swirling into blackness as they passed further into the tunnel. The entire council of the Assembly crowded behind them. Sure, in their High-Commander's ability to bring them home.

Two minutes.

"Ma'am. There's some static coming in from one of the comms. It's sketchy, but I think I can clean it up.", an ensign alerts.

"Do it.", Memtrix ordered.

Arkasia watches the Assembly begin to mumble among themselves. She leans in to Memtrix."I got a funny feeling."

Memtrix glances to her sister then back to the cockpit window. "Armor up.", she orders. Everyone is starting to get nervous. Satima steps closer to the radar panel. "There's something there.", she says aloud.

50 Seconds.
"Ma'am. I have it cleared. You're going to want to hear this.", the ensign discovers.

Memtrix opens it to the command deck.

"...hundreds are infected...repeat..do not...land...base...quarantine...infection..."

Memtrix's eyes widened when they finally reached the end of the portal. A Reaper filled the system, right in front of their pathway from the warp gate. Lights blinded the deck as the ships sirens blared around them.

"Brace for impact!", Memtrix yelled.
The year before Satima's return.

The hybrid learns what it means to be a sentarian. She gratefully integrates with her new friends, hoping to use this time to become the hero her mother is. But a threat from the dark galaxy pushes the ancient race to battle a plague. Strange creatures with terrifying abilities, stop all progress of a cure.

Thank you for coming back. That being said, I know that author goggles is a hard habit to catch, and the story can read in a hurried manner. So, I hope you readers can forgive me, and enjoy the story. Have a wonderful day.

Sentarian Warship
Lithera-One year ago

The reaper vessel was confirmed dormant. After Reaper's ascendance into full synthesis, she sent a galaxy wide signal to all relays. All the reapers in the galaxy had been destroyed by her. All accept for one. This one. It no longer functioned or roared its harvest cry to the sentarians. Instead, it remained in the vacuum of space. A silent fear to keep the children of the first species awake at night.

No one knows how it escaped its brethren's fate, but here it was. Dominating the once peaceful system of the sentarians.

Memtrix's warship contained minor damage, all due to superior piloting from her top navigator. Master Pilot Gern Te'Jool. Satima stood behind him, fascinated by his skill. "That was some awesome flying. How did you do that?", she asked. She leaned over his chair, her turian teal gaze wide in excitement.

Te'Jool glanced to her with a charming smile. "It's all instinct. That and years of practice.", he answered.

Memtrix approved of his practice. "Master pilot, take us home.", she ordered.

"Ma'am.", he replied.

The warship flew over the green planet. Satima observed how even the oceans were tinted green. Teal and cerulean colors melded with jade palettes. "Is it a garden world?", Satima asked.

Arkasia stepped beside her, "Mostly jungle. We have all kinds of plants and dangerous flowers. You'll love it."

Satima smiled. This adventure that would prove her worth, heal her past and pave a way back to
Shepard. She'll return a hero to her mother and finally show the galaxy who she really is.

Lithera-2186
Assembly Chambers
Archon Council Seat

The warship deployed several shuttles to the homeworld. Satima rode with Memtrix and Arkasia. Most of their rifters had been depleted of resources to help fuel the journey to their home. A long stretch of docking platforms covered the top of a mountain among large growths of jungle. It led straight into an impressive sight. A giant silver city with towering buildings, littered in blue rift gates that showed their advanced technology.

Satima marveled as the shuttle passed by the docking platform and headed straight towards the biggest building she had ever seen. It had to have been several warships long, displaying holo screens of symbols and sentarian language.

Thousands of open windows covered the building, with colored banners flying high into the wind. She could peer inside as the shuttle got closer to see hundreds of sentarians carrying on about their business. "What is this massive grey building?", Satima asked, stunned.

Memtrix chuckled, "Archon's seat. It is the place where our assemblies and councils gather. Military factions, scouts and even stalkers come here to accept their duties."

"Stalkers?", Satima spoke. "Those scary guys?"

"I am a high-commander. With a ship and crew. The stalkers are a lone division. Sworn to watch the darkest parts of the galaxy, to listen. They fight when a threat approaches. Sometimes giving their lives to stop it, and sometimes surviving to warn us. Infiltrating, assassination, that sort of thing."

"Assassination? That makes those past encounters even more thrilling.", she quipped.

Memtrix turned her gaze, "They weren't sent to hurt you. At least, not by me. Remember, Callon needed you alive.", she overlooked the hybrid, already planning a place for the girl to thrive and mature. "I think for you, a pilot's seat would suit."

Satima started to argue, "Pilot? Of your ships!" She shook her head, "I can't fly those things! They're advanced technology."

"You have battle skills, but you're untrained. Satima, I've seen your navigational abilities. I think Te'Jool can teach you a lot." Memtrix assured the young hybrid.

Before Satima could detest, the shuttle finally landed on top of the building. Sentarian guards stood erect as they passed underneath a tattered overhanging that was deep saffron colored. There were faded grey symbols patterned vertically. Memtrix leaned in, speaking to Satima, "Those colors look familiar, do they not?"

"Yeah, like your armor.", Satima noticed.

Memtrix grinned, "That is because they are. My father is a part of the Seat of archon. Our banner flies today, because his daughters are home."

Satima glanced to Arkasia who gave her a wide smile.

Inside the top level of the building they were led into the Seat of Archon. The Assembly of Stratos gathered into a crowd with other assemblies and councils, suggesting an important announcement
might be occurring at this moment. Satima was filled with excitement to observe such an ancient gathering of a long-forgotten people.

Everyone quieted down. Several men and women stepped out of a dark door above them. Taking their places in a stadium designed chamber, staring down the entire crowd below.

These archons wore grey robes with different hued armor pieces, obviously displaying their houses colors. The tallest and proudest sentarian man at the head of the group, wore saffron yellow. Satima could tell he and Memtrix shared the same confident stare. His jade toned skin seemed dulled by the darker space he stood on. As the representative of the other archons, he proceeded to announce their directive.

"For thousands of years", he began, "We have fought the machines. The intelligence our masters created to guard our thoughts and homes.", he gazed about the crowd. "Our ancestors watched from afar, hoping that one day a species would rise against the created and destroy them. It took time... time in waiting and in patience for the created machines to finally make a mistake." The head archon's voice echoed across the great hall. He narrowed his crystal gaze around them.

"This mistake proved their undoing, and defeated them at their own will. We are free. Free to recolonize, to explore further than our own systems. To stop using time as a means to hide, but instead, use the time we have now to live."

The crowd cheered, clapped and agreed loudly. The Sentarians are free. Satima stood amongst giants, standing closely to her friends, afraid she would be spotted. Memtrix suddenly stood forward. The head archon acknowledged her and spoke, "My daughters have returned home with the news of our total freedom. Successful in securing the origin home. It is time we go back and reconnect with our ancestors, who were taken and forced into servitude on the great station."

Their ancestors? Great station? Satima looked to Arkasia who was too busy watching her father. He continued, "The Seat of Archon is adjourned."

Everyone started to gather in smaller crowds, discussing the meeting with each other. Satima quietly pushed away back to the outside, where the shuttle was. Memtrix caught up with her. "Satima, my father would like to speak with you. It will be in private."

Reluctantly, Satima turned around and followed Memtrix back inside. They were led to a private chamber with the view of the entire city. Strange plants that had purple flowers lined one side of the room. Head Archon stood with his hands behind his back, observing the view. Arkasia, Memtrix and Satima waited behind him.

"I have heard a great deal about you, Satima. Your family, your creation and your hand in the reapers defeat.", he spoke.

Satima was ushered forward by Arkasia who nodded for her to respond. "Not all bad I hope.", she chuckled nervously.

He turned around. His clear eyes piercing through her with a stern gaze. She almost started to shake from it, before he softened his stare. "No. You have fought the Directive, destroyed their science station and stopped more creation replicants, like yourself. I understand it came at a cost, stopping the reapers. Reaper, was one of the most feared and powerful enemies our people had fought, before the Archer was sent, after her withdrawal from them."

Memtrix spoke, "She sacrificed herself to stop the machines. Reaper is dead."
Satima glanced her way quickly. Arkasia noticed this, "Reaper willingly gave her physical form to destroy them. She did it for Satima.", she smiled to the hybrid, turning her gaze back to the head archon. "And of course, for the galaxy."

Satima was shocked. Old memories of the crucible flooded her mind, she felt dizzy. Now she finally remembers! Spirits, Reaper is gone. She's all alone now. But... but what about Archer! Is he dead too? She quickly shook her thoughts when this archon spoke.

Head Archon nodded, "We have more pressing matters presently."

"Matters?", Memtrix repeated.

He looked at them gravely, "No doubt you heard the transmission on your way here. Before nearly crashing into the dormant reaper."

"Something about an infection. Hundreds of dead, right?", Arkasia mentioned.

"Yes. One of our moon bases here have experienced a disturbing set of events. Our defense lab had encountered an anomaly tear. It brought a piece of hive into our system.", he explained.

"What.", Memtrix remarked, alarmed. "You brought something from hive here?!"

Satima stood to attention, darting her eyes between the Archon and Memtrix. He continued, "They studied the fragment, not knowing what sinister organism lay in wait. The infection began there and has spread throughout the entire surface, affecting other colonies and outposts."

"What about our center of recovery for toxigenics and virology?", Arkasia asked.

"Since your arrival, the seat has argued who to put as head of each division as we fight this virus. As head of the seat, I must act accordingly and without restraint.", he glanced down, worried, taking his gaze back to his children.

"Which is why I appointed Memtrix to head the infiltration teams back on the moon and Arkasia to take over the defense labs. It is a sacrifice, expected from all head families, and one I don't make lightly. Be careful my daughters, this infection is intelligent, clever. Like all of the abominations the reapers create."

They stared on, ready to take this mission. Satima sulked between them, confused if he also meant her as an abomination as well.

She was created by the reapers after all. Wouldn't be farfetched either. The Archon noticed her demeanor, stepping towards her. "You have firsthand knowledge of hive. You, Satima, understand the Directive's will better than any of us could. Will you accept this mission, guiding them to stop the infection?"

Surprised, she responded. "Of course."

"As a sentarian, you are officially recruited into our military. Memtrix, what position do you suggest?", he asked.

"Second Pilot. Under the supervision and training of my master pilot, Te'Jool.", she answered.

The head archon looked at them in satisfaction. "Excellent.", he nodded.

Satima stared at them. "That's kinda sudden..." She was cut off.

"May Kha ve watch over you.", Archon added.
Both young women nodded, leading a confused and nervous Satima out.

Back inside the warship, Satima paced. Unsure of what was expected of her. Arkasia entered the mess with something in her hands. A device? "Satima. I know you're not familiar with our language. I've set up a translator and training implant that will sit snugly behind your ear. You will turn off your old translator implant and let this guide your speech. Don't worry, Sentarians are known for extreme patience."

Satima took it hesitantly, "Are you sure? I'm not confident what I know without my translator."

"Just try it.", Arkasia assured.

Satima turned off her original implant, putting the small sticky new device behind her ear. She started to speak, realizing she didn't have good human speech like Shepard. Her words sounded twisted, pronounced with an impediment. Arkasia frowned. "Damn Directive. Don't worry, Satima. You'll have our language for your own.", she smiled.

At the same moment Arkasia spoke, the new implant translated the entire sentence in Sentarian. Satima repeated a piece of it. "Trelsnic Distec.", she grinned.

"Oh, we should start with naughty words just for fun.", Arkasia beamed.

Satima laughed.

Sentarian Military Base-Zone Delan
Training Facility
Lithera-One week later

There were dozens of groups of young sentarian men and women, going to and from advanced training classes. The long hallway stretched before Satima while she attempted to walk past the giants. All of the sentarians either had brown or black hair.

Various tones and highlights left to the imagination. Some of them didn't pay her any attention, but a few gave her indifferent looks with their mix of green hued or coal colored eyes.

And why should they acknowledge her? She's a strange girl from another galaxy, attending piloting class. She's never been to a place of academic education before. That's what Arkasia calls it.

Memtrix wants her to familiarize herself with basic ship functions before sitting in the second pilot's seat on her ship. Precautionary and a bit embarrassing. Satima wished she never left the citadel, now.

The building itself seemed to swallow her whole with its deep moss colored walls. Tall, slender windows allowed the bright sun to naturally illuminate the hall. She stopped in front of the door to the advanced piloting simulation center. Taking a deep breath, Satima walked through the sliding door frame.

Inside, she viewed many personal simulation units surround by other recruits. Their uniforms were a darkened brown, almost soot colored. Gold insignia on the left arms of a circular symbol that had an angled rod through it. The units were cubicle designed, with a two-person seat layout. Holo panels, grids and other simulations of space flight showed through data screens that enveloped the entire open pod.

Three units down, Arkasia glimpsed Satima, waving energetically with a smile. Spirits. Don't call attention to her! "Satima! Down here!"
Her head hung low, shoulders slumped with red cheeks, Satima slowly walked towards her. Arkasia had Gern Te'Jool alongside her. His charming smile gave Satima a bit of confidence, winking towards her. She blushed redder. He pointed to the simulator. "Good to see you again, Satima. High-Commander has ordered me to help you in the simulation. I'll be teaching you the right way of piloting a warship."

Satima nodded, too nervous to speak.

Gern stepped next to the unit, seating himself in the teacher's chair, as Arkasia leaned in close to Satima. A giant grin on her face. She nudged the hybrid's arm."Mm-hm.", she insinuated.

Satima glanced to her, irritated. "...stop it..."

Gern waited patiently, as Satima stepped inside the large unit. Taking her learners seat. The holo display of sentarian navigational functions came on with an option for flight trajectory practice.

"We'll start with learning what all the buttons do first.", Gern assured.

Satima used her slender finger to push a stray hair behind her human ear, and laughed. "That would be important.", she chuckled loudly.

The other recruits heard the awkward laughter, leaning out of their units to view with confused looks. Arkasia stared at Satima, still smiling.

**Vintae**

**Moon Base**

In the weeks following Satima's successful induction into sentarian military, Memtrix had her brought onboard to finally sit in the second pilot's seat. As master pilot, Gern would still train Satima during their open space flight. It is here, Memtrix knows her hybrid friend will excel. If it wasn't for Satima, Callon would have destroyed the citadel and all hope of ever coming home.

They would never know about the infection or be able to help their people. She owes the Shepard's child a great deal. And Memtrix plans on paying it all back, by guiding the young warrior abroad.

The great bridge had many sentarian ensigns busy with controls. Lieutenants carried their orders with pride, ready to quell this troublesome plague and continue the ideal of space exploration. Arkasia worked on deck four, virology labs. If they are to understand what kind of hive bio-weapon this is, then they'll need a fully functioning lab to do so.

Gern observed Satima next to him. Their seats were stationed at the front of the bridge, viewing the expanse of space and the moon through the large circular windows. She carefully kept an eye on the radar, whisking holo panels by after reading the diagnostic data of the engines.

Satima was certainly becoming a skilled pilot of their ships. If she decided to stay longer, she could gain a higher ranking in the sentarian military. He leaned out to her, watching the data from her end with his sea-foam colored eyes. Flashing that charming smile, proud of her catching an anomaly on the radar.

She carefully swerved the left thruster away from the meteor debris. Small pebbles that could block the cooling vents to the emissions chamber. "You've learned faster than most recruits can in years. Have you piloted a ship before?", he asked, curiously.

Satima smiled, satisfied in pleasing him with her skill. "I did. A long time ago.", she replied.

"You had a ship? So, that means you were the captain?", Gern wondered.
Satima continued monitoring the holo panel, "You could say that."

Gern returned to his screen. They were beginning to approach the moon, ready to land an assault on the base. "What was your ship's name?"

Satima spotted the moon, feeling anxious about the hive infection. She swallowed, resuming her conversation with a smile on the memory. "Haven.", she said, gazing straight out to the stars.

He glanced to her, watching the twinkle in her eye of the memory. Must have been a great ship for Satima to react that way.

Memtrix stepped behind them. She stared towards the base. It's onyx angular building like a threatening dagger tip to them. "I want this ship in orbit. Ready the shuttles and rifters. The assault begins soon.", she ordered.

Gern nodded, "Ma'am."

Satima turned to Memtrix with a bothered expression. The High-Commander waited for her to speak, noticing how formal the hybrid looked in sentarian uniform. The obsidian black uniform brought out the girl's vibrant ginger hair, tightly woven into a low bun. From the side, she could see the family resemblance to the Shepard, taking account of her hybrid turian gaze.

"High-Commander, will you be needing me on the base when you start your assault?, she asked, concerned about the potential threat of hive.

Memtrix stood still with her hands behind her back, gazing into approval of the young woman's respectful speech. Very good sentarian accent, well versed tones. Arkasia's little translator did well. Satima should be proud.

"If I have personal need of your expertise on them, I will summon you via rifter. Until then, continue monitoring the void and learning all you can from the master pilot.", she patted Satima's shoulder. "You have come a long way from the dark galaxy. Be safe on the vessel and be proud of yourself, Satima of the Shepard.", she smiled.

Satima averted her gaze in embarrassment. "High-Commander."

Memtrix wandered back to the main bridge, away from the helm. Her feelings towards Satima and Reaper were different than years before. The rage she felt against the then-murderous Reaper, had been calmed since the return. She had no reason to believe all that Callon spoke of, poisoning her against Arkasia when she defended the hybrid. No one under The Directive can stop indoctrination. You either do as they say, or perish under their will.

Once she stepped on the shuttle bay, Memtrix observed her teams of sentarian soldiers.

They had already prepared and geared up for the assault, eager to retake the moon base. Rifters in place, weapons holstered. Memtrix stood among them, a furious and well-seasoned warrior, ready to lead her people into a Directive-free future.

"Our reports tell of this infection as brutal and intelligent. It can turn you against your fellow brothers and sisters. Do not let the infected come into contact with you. Unless provoked, do not engage. Lethal force is a last result, not a first response. Understood!"

"Ma'am!", they all yelled in unison."Hein-Comtant!"

She smiled. This day will be victory and the plague destroyed.
It has been three weeks since Memtrix’s successful assault. Now completely in charge of the rebuilt labs, Arkasia went over the viral aspects of the infection multiple times this day, and they were no closer to a cure than the start.

Hive had many weapons at its arsenal but none so dangerous as this plague. The sentarian scientists that examined the lab fragment from the tear, stayed in quarantined cells which were scrubbed daily to prevent any spread to her team or herself. Under the bright lights of the lab, Arkasia began to get a headache.

Her father depended on a cure being found. Exhausting and burdensome. Suddenly, Memtrix's system border patrols seemed more exciting. Arkasia sighed. She missed Satima and talking about the origin galaxy. Trading stories on secret loves and dangerous adventures. Arkasia tried to pry more about "Ronin", but Satima wouldn't say anymore. It hurt her friend to speak of it.

Amidst her thoughts, the alarm blared. Two guards entered the room. "Engineer Vael. There's been an anomaly outside the planet Vagor.", one of them informed.

"Does my sister know? Have you contacted the Seat?", she asked, quickly leaving her station.

"Ma'am, this comes from the Seat. Two tears have opened and ship debris are coming through.", he answered.

She stopped short of the door, "Ship debris?" Arkasia wondered, "Send a message to my sister-the high-commander, to meet me in the board chamber."

He nodded, leading his fellow guard to the rifter platform straight to the Seat.

An hour passed steadily, as the warship found its orbit around the moon, sending Memtrix and Satima to the base. Once inside, they made their way to the board chambers. An off-white circular room surrounded by double panel windows.

Araksia paced under the large rectangle lighting. She laid out several reports from her own people on the metal table before her. Ship debris. And that debris had familiar data coming from it. She looked up to see them walk through. Satima smiled, "Busy lately?"

Arkasia walked around the table, making her way to where they were settled at the door. Hugging them both equally. "Too busy, and father expects a lot." She turned to Satima, "I've read the report about your promotion. Chief Technician? That's a big step."

Satima smirked,"Gern is still master pilot. I'll be viewing the navigational functions of the ship while leading a team for data extraction. It sounds meticulous, but I never thought securing two new mining sites on an asteroid would be so satisfying."

"Glad you came along?", Arkasia teased.

"You know it.", Satima agreed. She couldn't believe her luck, becoming an important member of these people, and helping them destroy the remnants of hive. Reaper would be proud of her.

Memtrix gave a slight "ahem". Arkasia quickly turned to her, "Oh, and leading our people under father's advisement has to be highly exhausting. We are proud of you sister."

Satima nodded in agreement.

"Uh-huh.", Memtrix spoke, with a raised brow.
Arkasia looked away, turning to face the table. "I have my reports here. I believe these debris patterns are straight from hive."

Satima stared in alarm. "Are you absolutely sure?"

They circled the table, overlooking the reports together.

Memtrix picked up a data pad, comparing them to the reports on her omni-tool. "Indeed. These patterns are similar." She informed, warily.

Arkasia brought out a holo display in bright green hues. Ship debris, patterns of arrival and several tears showed across the surface of the table. The entire room dimmed, with the viridescent color glowing off the two windowless walls and their faces.

Satima leaned over it, worried. "I thought the fragment you destroyed was the only one? How can they be suddenly appearing in sentarian space?"

"We don't know why, yet? But we need to bring them in and find out what is bringing the fragments here. Who or what is opening these singularities?", Arkasia insisted.

Memtrix glared to her sister in warning, "The last one contained a hazardous plague. We're still trying to figure it out, make a cure. You think it would be a good idea to bring in another!"

Arkasia glanced away in frustration. "I'm trying to save more lives by being one step ahead of whatever is happening. Memtrix, we don't know if this an assault from the dark galaxy."

Satima looked at her, "Are you saying that The Directive is still active? Even after I destroyed the station and killed Archer, and stopped the reapers in the origin zone!?"

A guard came in the dimmed room, handing Arkasia a private data pad. She nodded at him, as he began leaving. Memtrix stared. "What is it, sister?"

Arkasia faced them, "There's a life sign on one of the fragments."

"Khin sha.", Satima muttered, anxiously.

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Moon Base Labs
They brought in the hive fragments to Arkasia's secure quarantine center. All ten of them. More had come through during the flight path to observe the event. Each tear closed quickly behind the last fragment. Satima shuddered while facing them at the bottom of the base.

Fifteen scientists screamed down the hallway from the cells, where they were standing. Memtrix closed the doors and sealed them. She had no time to listen to insanity. "What have the examinations revealed about the plague, sister?", she inquired.

Arkasia finished with her scans on the debris data, signaling for her apprentices to help with access to the interior of the first fragment. "Frightening conclusive data of the symptoms." She gestured a side room filled with monitors and terminals. They displayed the cells occupants with their medical information. "Cells 76 and 23 are getting worse. They're unable to breathe at times.", she pointed out to a vid of days before. "Violent coughing produces blood. I have examined that their lung tissues are being destroyed. A slow death of asphyxiation."

Bringing up a display of the same spores that were growing and infesting parts of the defunct vessels. "It's a visually viral plague. If you don't die from these things filling your lungs, you become a terrifying husk."
"That's horrible.", Satima commented.

"The others...", she sat in a chair, bringing up several vids on the large screen. "Those spores are fusing in their nervous systems. Attacking and damaging their cerebral cortex. Their ability for intelligence, personality, reasoning... all erased. Instead you get a violent and very contagious individual.", Arkasia explained.

Memtrix watched with uncertainty. "And if they had reached Lithera?" Her gaze never moved from the screen.

Arkasia glanced to her. "Our people would face a plague designed to eradicate a civilization. We would die.", she answered with fear.

Satima observed the infected uneasily. Even after stopping The Directive, they still find a way to kill innocent people. If only Shepard were here.

"Satima.", Memtrix spoke.

She stood to attention, "Ma'am."

Memtrix sighed, gazing down to the lower monitors, turning to face the hybrid. "We face a possible extinction from my own people's ignorance. I want everything you know about The Directive, hive... even Reaper-in four days' time. I need a plan, a clue... something that points to a cure. Help me stop this from spreading across the system."

"I will do my best.", Satima replied.

"I need more than your best. I need the hybrid that defied Callon and stopped the reapers from killing Shepard.", Memtrix pleaded sternly.

Satima glanced off, unsure but determined. She stared ahead in confidence, "You'll have all I know in two days."

On the warship, Satima sat in her room, recounting all that she had been through and witnessed under The Directive. It had been hours after the moon base meeting. Arkasia, unfortunately couldn't follow, with all her duties lately piling up around that blasted cure.

Gern stood at the doorway quietly, observing her type away on her terminal. He smoothed his dark hair back, as the thick strands gave a wave effect on the side of his face. A handsome well-built subject of sentarian male, and very available. "So, this is what the high-commander has my second pilot doing? Writing?", he jested.

Satima glanced up with a start to his voice. She shook her head, smiling before resuming work. "I'm sending a long report of The Directive. This is really important.", she explained.

Gern stepped in her room, standing behind her with arms crossed. "I understand.", he began, sitting on her bed. "You have one fascinating story, Satima. Surviving hive and Reaper. Facing those machines on the battle field.", Gern continued. "And yet, your content with being a second pilot and chief tech under the command of an alien race not your own?"

Satima stopped typing, facing her holo board. "What are you getting at, Gern?"

He leaned out, "You're running away from something, or rather... someone? Maybe there is more than "one" someone? Like a family? Or a lover?", he insinuated.
Satima faced him, irritated. "That is none of your business!", she glared.

Gern chuckled, "Indeed, it isn't. But all the same, I wanted to know something."

She sighed, frustrated. "What?"

"Is that particular someone still waiting for you?", he asked.

"Wha... why would you ask that?, she replied, awkward.

Gern smirked, looking away with a smile. "I wanted to know if you moved on. Maybe we could try something different together? That is, if you're wanting to?"

Oh. My. Spirits. Satima stared in shock. Did he just... ask if she wanted to... "Uhh... wow. Look at the time! I really have to finish this report. Deadline and all.", Satima stood up, grabbing him by the arm and ushering Gern out the door. "Thanks for visiting.", she shouted in embarrassment.

Gern turned around to face her with a grin. "So, that's a maybe?, his brow raised with a hint.

Satima pressed the panel to close the door on him. She then hit her head on the metal surface. Stupid... stupid! A knock echoed off the other side of the door.

What does he want, now? Satima then opened it to Gern grabbing her by the waist, pressing his soft jade lips against hers. It lasted a few seconds, with him pulling away. "Even if you decide you don't want to, we'll always have this.", he smiled.

Satima blushed bright red, quickly pushing him out of the doorway. He fell against the hull wall, still smiling. She closed the door standing in shock. Suddenly a thought occurred.

What if Ronin was kissing someone else back on the citadel? Or shacking up with a hot asari on one of his "spectre" missions? She didn't know how to feel and wished Gern hadn't done that. It was invasive and unwanted.

Sure, he's pretty good looking, and not to mention charming. But, he's her superior! Just like Memtrix. You don't see Satima giving Memtrix a big sloppy wet kiss?!

Satima stepped back, taking a seat on the bed. Well, Gern wasn't sloppy. No, she blocked the thoughts. There is no time for taking on lovers. The Directive is threatening them all, and she's the only person that can stop them.

Satima sighs, thinking. Sex complicates things. She doesn't know exactly how sentarian biology works. Her imagination running wild while she bit her lip. Satima sat up, shaking her head from the thoughts. Sitting back at the terminal, she started writing again.

It would be irresponsible, not to mention fraternization. Every time she gets close with someone, it ends badly. One way or the other, it's impossible right now to even think of it. The terminal displayed a late time. She'll finish the rest of her report tomorrow after her duties. Then tell Gern to never kiss her again.

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The Survivor

The fragment of hive was a lab. Scorch marks and indentations from an explosion covered the outer layer. Absolutely unique how these bits of structure can withstand a journey through a rift. "Careful with the structures interior. I don't want the life form to be destroyed.", Arkasia
commanded.

Her assistants followed instructions, accessing the lab using a nano cutter. The large piece of metal slab fell to the floor with a thud. Preserved oxygen from inside hissed outwardly. Arkasia turned the scrubbers on and pulled the old air into vents, leading off into containers for study.

She put on her enviro-suit and led the team in. The entrance showed a dark space, with shadows in the corners from the outside light. "Scan the area.", she ordered.

The scans revealed a small cell further into the sizable lab. She could hear a muffled voice. "In hear.", Arkasia pointed.

An assistant, Jenar, helped open the cell door. "Scans read a life form.", she cautioned.

Verdant hued fingers grasped the door frame, reaching out to them. "...help...", the feminine voice strained.

Satima stared at the green asari. She's never seen this woman before on hive. That green skin is definitely unforgettable. Memtrix approached her in the medical wing. "So, this is the survivor?" She stared at the asari warily. Anything from hive can be a danger to them.

"Apparently.", Satima replied, cautiously.

Arkasia entered, holding her own tablets while catching their conversation. "She used to be a scientist for the Directive. They imprisoned her when she tried to stop them from experimenting on her people.", she informed, stepping in the observation room.

Following her, the hybrid of the old directive held thoughts of her time on hive, and her disturbing actions. "You mean my victim.", Satima added with a pained look.

Arkasia glanced to her, "That was almost a year past. You were under The Directive's control. Even Reaper understood that."

Satima crossed her arms, with a wry look to her face and a smirk to follow. "Yeah. Right after she beat the shit out of me.", she stated.

Memtrix glimpsed their way, taking her gaze back to the asari. "With that aside, we need to keep her confined for the safety of the base. Resume your examinations and alert me if anything goes awry."

Her orders were stern, but full of concern.

"Of course, Sister.", Arkasia complies, flippantly. Her quirky smile giving away the attitude.

"Arkay.", Memtrix warns. The high-commander rubs her temples.

"Mem?", Arkasia turned to her sister with a light pitched innocent voice.

Satima chuckled between them.

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Warship

Satima finished her duties as second pilot. She had scanned for more data when Gern turned his head to her direction. "Satima. About last night...", he began.

"Whatever it was, I don't want it to happen again.", she replied curtly.
Gern glanced away, sighing heavily. "I wasn't thinking, Satima. What can I say? You have an exotic beauty about you. Mysterious, impetuous and don't forget-one of a kind.", he added.

"Stop.", Satima warned, continuing her scans.

"What I wanted to say, is that I shouldn't have pressed you into a kiss.", Gern admitted.

"More like a force.", Satima added.

Gern nodded, "It won't happen again. I wouldn't want anything to get in the way of our friendship."

Satima stopped her scans, swerving the chair to stare at him. "If we're going to be "friends", then you need to know that I still think of someone back... back from the place I came from. Kha ve, I hope he still thinks of me.", she glanced down. He leaned out, but stopped when she looked back to him. "You're charming, Gern. And that's dangerous for a girl to fall for."

Gern watched her stand up to leave the bridge. He regretted being too hasty and going after her with a fool's heart. Maybe she might change her mind? For now, he'll be content with their camaraderie.

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Labs-Vintae

Arkasia finished examining the asari woman, noting her similar green appearance. It was a little amusing to think of, but the asari didn't seem to agree. She mumbled about hive and experiments. Always flinching away or "speaking" to someone other than herself.

What terrible things did The Directive do to her? Arkasia would rather not know. For now, all she can do is help this poor woman back to health and maybe help her back to sanity.

On the warship, Memtrix waited in her cabin as Satima stepped in. The square room had high ceilings, due to the sentarians height. Various weapons decorated the right wall she passed. Sentarian spears, kechoc knives and a big rifle. That must be the High-Commander's favorite.

"Have you completed your report, Lieutenant?", Memtrix asked from her desk. The table had been placed in the middle of the room.

"Yes, High-Commander.", Satima replied. Bringing her the data pad reports. "This is everything I can remember. May seem a bit... disorganized."

Memtrix took the pads, "I'll figure it out. Please, sit.", she gestured.

Satima seated herself across from Memtrix. Looking around the room to the large brown bed and back to the weapons wall. Memtrix is a soldier through and through. Duty first, and always. "Satima, I have been wondering when you're going to plan a trip back to the citadel? To see Shepard again.", Memtrix began.

The hybrid unsettled in her seat. "I haven't."

Memtrix glanced to her from the data pad, "Is there a reason why? I can give you leave. We're handling the fragments well, and Arkasia reports the survivor is not a threat."

Satima thought about the survivor. "I just don't think it would be a good idea to leave amidst my duties.", she stated.

"You mean you don't trust the reports about hive?", Memtrix remarked.
Satima nodded, "I'm worried about this "survivor". She's too... strange. It's not just her skin pigment. Asari are mostly all shades of blue, but... it's how she acts. A concern, that's all."

"Your concern is noted. Thank you for helping us, Satima. You've proven to be an outstanding sentarian. I'm happy to call you friend.", Memtrix smiled.

Satima stood up, "If I have your permission to leave."

"You may.", High-Commander spoke.

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Weeks later

Arkasia busied herself with the infected. The two scientists from the last cells, died during the night. She tried her best to help them, but the plague was stronger than her medical knowledge. Damn the Directive. At least the others were still alive. If you can call insanity a living.

That and hideous lesions on their bodies. Their skin became pale, thin and easily disregarded pain, attacking with wild abandon to any victim in front of them. The deranged patient's minds were lucid enough to send three of her guards into medical.

The asari survivor had suddenly made progress in her behavior. She had stopped mumbling, resuming a politer character. It was pleasant to finally see a happy miracle from the Directive's touch. Shiala, as she is called, spoke of her days as a scientist before the Directive enslaved her.

Arkasia allowed Shiala to walk in the lower levels of the base, even without guard. Her knowledge against the virus could provide a cure.

Satima came to the base for a report on the survivor. Memtrix sent her there, to allay the hybrid's fears on the situation. The elevator to level eight opened, as many of the bases staff walked about. She stepped out to meet Arkasia near the observation room.

"How is the survivor?", Satima inquired.

Arkasia began leading her to the rehab wing. "She's doing remarkably well. I think being away from hive has really helped."

"How?", Satima asked.

Outside the door in the rehab wing, Arkasia pressed the panel to Shiala's room. "Her behavior has become reasonable. Shiala is making rational decisions, telling us of the many experiments on hive."

Shiala sat on the couch, reading comfortably from a translated pad that Arkasia fixed. She looked up with a smile, then frowned in terror towards Satima. "No..NO!", she yelled, frightened.

Satima stood in place, while Arkasia stared in concern. "What's wrong?"

Shiala pointed, trying to get away from them. Nearly jumping backwards over the couch, "She survived? You brought IT to me?! Lock her away, she's Reaper's scion!"

Arkasia glanced to Satima, "Oh dear."

Satima tried to step forward, but stopped when Shiala attempted to run towards the door. She lifted her hand in calm gesture. "I'm not what you think, anymore. Everything has changed. Reaper is gone. Forever. The Directive and hive are gone."
Shiala glared at her, "That's because you destroyed hive! There were innocent people enslaved, trapped on that station."

Ashamed of her past, Satima lowered her gaze to the floor. "I know." She walked forward, then knelt down in front of a fidgety Shiala on the couch. "And I am so sorry for it. Will you believe me when I tell you Archer forced the Directive's will on me. I couldn't escape it, only comply. I felt the only way to stop them was to destroy the station."

Shiala calmed down, lowering herself back in a sitting position on the couch, "Their will is our freedom. That's what we were told from the beginning." A curious look came about her, as she watched Satima stand up again. "So, Reaper... hive... all of it, is gone?"

"Yes. It's all over now.", Satima answered, rising to stand.

"I would like to be alone, please. This has been quite a day.", Shiala pleaded, gazing to a different direction.

Arkasia began leading Satima out, "Of course. We understand."

Once they entered the hallway, Satima turned to her in concern. "Are you sure she's rational enough to have access to this facility?"

"You're being paranoid.", Arkasia dismissed. "Shiala was trapped in that cell for a while. She's physically healthy.", she added, assured.

"Just not mentally.", Satima quipped.

The asari watched them with her door slightly open. She stared towards Satima with emotionless eyes. All the opposition is gone. There is no reaper threat anymore. But the hybrid remained. Curious. Shiala closed the door with a treacherous smile. Her plans will come together perfectly, without resistance.

Later that night

Satima tried to sleep. Arkasia sat up, still trying to run the data for a cure. She had come close, but it only led to a preventative serum.

A sudden chill filled the quarters. It had started to become cold in the room, too cold. Being a base settled on a moon, it should have heating vents. So why the drop, in temperature? "Arkay.", Satima spoke, staring at the darkened ceiling with an arm behind her head.

"Hmm?", Arkasia responded.

"Is it getting colder in here to you?", she asked.

Arkasia looked up, noticing her breath was showing in the dimmed room. "This is strange."

Sitting up, Satima quickly put her uniform pants on. "Something's wrong. We should find out what it is."

In agreement, Arkasia set her pad down. "It's probably an issue with the base's heating coils.", she guessed.

Outside the room, they entered a darkened hallway. "Does the base shut down during the skeleton shift?", Satima asked, alarmed.
"Absolutely not.\textquotedbl", Arkasia replied, spooked.

They started carefully going towards the elevator. Pass the mess and lounge lobbies. No one was around. Food trays were left on the tables. Other rooms were left open. "It's like everyone "quietly" left in a hurry.\textquotedbl", Satima noticed.

"Certainly, not without my approval.\textquotedbl", Arkasia remarked.

The elevator opened, with Arkasia pressing the fifth floor to the heat generators. Could be a malfunction, resulting in staff being evacuated.

During the ride, down, Arkasia tried contacting them. No answer came through the comms, though. Satima had a bad feeling. "Omega with the other Garrus" bad feeling. If she sees an adjutant... "This is ridiculous.\textquotedbl", Arkasia argued. "I'm in command here! None of my staff would dare abandon the base without my permission to leave.\textquotedbl", she fumed.

"I don't think it's something that trivial, Arkay.\textquotedbl", Satima cautioned.

Arkasia faced her, "It can't be what you think. Shiala was a victim!"

Satima stared in dismay, "So was I.\textquotedbl" She glanced to the door."Shiala was remarkably upset about me. This could be a retaliation."

Arkasia shook her head in disagreement. "No. She's a fellow scientist, a victim of hive. Shiala is probably hiding from whatever is going on.\textquotedbl" She held her arms close to her, the cold biting away at her skin. "How could she easily have gotten rid of my entire staff on this base, this quickly and without a single noise?"

The elevator stopped at the fifth level, with Satima irritated at Arkasia's naivety.

Once they stepped onto the level, a sinister feeling filled them with a silent terror. No one was around, with the level in total darkness. Satima didn't have any weapons or light. "We should turn back. Do you have access to weapons on this base?\textquotedbl", she asked.

"My guards.\textquotedbl", Arkasia replied, realizing Satima may have been right, all along.

Fourth level
Armory

Satima used pieces of sentarian guard armor. She wasn't a seven-foot giant, but the female arm guards and leg coverings will have to do. Pistol in place and a blunt weapon to her side, they set foot together back to the elevator, wondering if the real threat wasn't on the eighth floor.

The thought finally occurred to Arkasia, remembering Shiala's outrage over Satima. Arkasia gazed off, worried about her fellow scientists and the rest of the base.

Reaching the eighth level, Satima led Arkasia out carefully. The dark hall became lit with her pistols light. Floating debris clung to the walls, finding its way to the vents overhead. Clogging them. "That might be why the heating vents have stopped. The spores have gotten inside the ducts.\textquotedbl", Arkasia noticed.

"But what about the staff and everything being turned off?\textquotedbl", Satima wondered. "And how the hell did those spores breach the containment room?"

"I don't know.\textquotedbl", Arkasia replied. "If Shiala is behind this... something terrible could have happened
to them." She felt guilty if others suffered because of her foolish intentions.

Wandering to the quarantine labs, Arkasia stepped into her observation room, viewing all the monitors. The screens had been slashed. "What is this?", she exclaimed, upset.

Satima pointed her pistol to a chittering sound from the first cells hall."Arkay..."

"All of the monitors have been destroyed. I can't bring up vid cameras on anything.", she continued to complain. She stared at the status terminal. Looking towards the cells screen. "Oh, no.", she whispered in fright.

"What?", Satima whispered loudly to her.

Arkasia turned to her, eyes wide in fear. "All of the cells have been opened. Fragments status is unlocked. All ten of them."

They both scrambled out of the room, before a low moaning echoed down the quarantine cells, the chittering noise had gotten louder from the overhead vents, with Satima pulling Arkasia to her. "Listen!"

From the first hall, something had come closer. Their hearts beat faster to see a terrible figure emerge from the darkness. It walked slowly, as Satima shined her light to reveal a horrifying husk thrall, with a monstrous face staring at them. The sound stopped. "...we need to leave the base and contact Memtrix!", Satima whispered.

Arkasia nodded her head. "The rifter platform on level three.", she informed.

They began to carefully turn around, when Satima faced an infected scientist. His once full brown hair had fallen into patches, revealing a pale scalp. Silver blood oozed from lesions on his exposed skin. He smiled with blackened teeth, and lunged on them.

Arkasia was knocked aside by Satima, who emptied her thermal clip into his chest. The infectant fell to the floor dead. Panting, she turned to Arkasia. 'Run!"

Fleeing into the elevator, the doors closed with pounding and moaning on the other side. The two women panting and shaking in fright. What new terrors was hive working on?

The elevator couldn't have gone fast enough. When the door opened, they bolted to the rifter platform in the transport room. "I'll set an auto-shut down from here, so they can't follow. Memtrix can use her own rifters to infiltrate this base.", Arkasia shouted beside Satima.

Reaching the platform, Satima waited for Arkasia to finish her shut down sequence, when she heard another chittering sound. It became louder."Arkay...", she hurried.

"Done! Let's go!", Arkasia yelled, panicked.

The rifter whined, coming online with its green and purple singularity static pricking their skin. Arkasia stepped on, rifted straight to Memtrix's warship. Satima started to approach it, looking back quickly to see a large insect like creature screech at her, crawling on the base walls with full intent to harm.

She turned around, jumping through the rifter to disappear. The creature hitting the platform, denied from its kill.

Warship
Memtrix took an account of what Arkasia explained, as Satima paced. Fuming. She warned them. Hive is dangerous. And while they were fighting in the origin galaxy, the sentarians brought the infection over to study. Unleashing it on themselves. Now, Arkasia's folly has unleashed something else. That asari was nowhere to be found. She has to be behind it.

"We need to find out what happened. They can't all be dead.", Arkasia complained.

"It's gotten out of hand. We need to take care of this with lethal force. It's the only way.", Memtrix ordered.

"But... you don't know if everyone is infected! There could be people trapped on the levels.", Arkasia argued.

Satima slammed her hands on the board table. "They're all dead by now, Arkasia! I told you... The Directive is dangerous. You should've blasted those fragments into the sun."

"And the survivor? Should I have just put a bullet through her head? The Satima way?!", Arkasia yelled, mockingly.

Memtrix stood between them, glaring. "Enough!", she shouted. "Sister, we will get to the bottom of this.", her gaze narrowing to Satima, "Lieutenant! You have duties as second pilot to perform. Dismissed."

Satima scoffed, leaving the war room. She traveled to the bridge quickly, sitting in her pilot's chair harshly. Gern glanced at her. What had Satima so upset?

24 hours later

She paced in front of the large rifter platform on the ship's shuttle bay. Arkasia had to lead Memtrix in their raid on the base. Satima hopes they're alright, sorry for her attitude previously. Gern reassured her that Memtrix is a capable leader and soldier. Everyone will be safe, but hive cuts through capable leaders easily, and turns them into something else.

The platform came alive with green and purple light. Bodies shot through to the floor. Injured soldiers groaned at their wounds. Grave lacerations through the thick black armor. What happened?

Memtrix showed with Arkasia in tow. Their terrified expressions were enough. "Kha ve.", Satima muttered, running to them. She took Arkasia, who seemed more exhausted than injured. Memtrix helped her men. "We were outnumbered. There are too many of those things. I must contact the seat.", she spoke, panicked.

"They're all infected. Both our people and those... creatures.", Arkasia covered her face. "I witnessed them cut through the soldiers. Rending them limb from limb." She looked to Satima, "If we did not leave..."

Memtrix stood over them. Her armor had slash marks, with the under-suit becoming visible. "We survived. Barely." She looked down.

Gern's voice came on comms."High-Commander! The shuttles on the base are taking off!"

Together, the trio ran to the lift, reaching the bridge. "What is their destination?", Memtrix demanded.
Gern brought up the flight trajectory of the shuttles, his gaze widened in fear. "Lithera.", he said gravely.
Battle for Lithera

Chapter Summary

Lithera is desperate, and the hybrid reveals a hidden evil. At the mercy of the effects of indoctrination, Satima’s friend-Arkasia, forces a painful surgery to help her. But will it be enough?

A last effort to secure the cure, leaves Satima's friends in a dire situation. And the hybrid makes a perilous escape, to the chagrin of her commander.

Chapter Notes

I hope no one is confused at the time line. So sorry.... :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Continuing,

Lithera

The Infected creatures landed in the jungles, miles away from the capitol city, Ne'Lin. Shiala had disappeared. Sentarian troops were deployed, but did not understand the dangerous warfare against the insectoid creatures. Sustaining heavy and sometimes fatal, injuries.

Once infected, soldiers were immediately removed from the squads and put into quarantine. Without the moon base for further research, Arkasia had to resume a new development of study into a cure. The closest she had come was serum, again. Better than the first batch created on the moon base, this serum had the ability to prevent infection longer in the healthy, and stall the infection on those already afflicted.

With the jungles turned into a war-zone, and the first patients loose on the base-Archon had no choice but take his most skilled military officials, putting them at the battlefield. As the creatures began burrowing into the planet, a last effort to stop them was put into place by destroying their nests. If that didn't work, then the Seat agreed to a purge. At the cost of their own home.

Warship

High-Commander received the transmission in her cabin. Her father needed master pilots to man the rift cannons. Using them to transport large quantities of troopers into the bowels of their planet, to the creature infested tunnels. Gern Te'Jool was requested. Her best pilot and Satima's friend.

Satima sat next to him at the helm. Running diagnostics while they sat in orbit of Lithera. The past weeks had been boring, staying on the ship and not engaging in battle. They weren't given the green light to assault the base, and no orders to help with the jungle front lines.

What exactly is the Archon waiting for? High-Commander Memtrix appeared on deck, making her
way to them. Her expression looked grave. She stood behind Gern."Master Pilot.", she spoke.

Gern stopped his data panels, turning to face her. "High-Commander?"

"The Seat has requested you at the battle front. Manning the rift cannons to secure a victory against the creatures.", High-Commander ordered.

He stood from his seat, an expression of shock, saluting. "Ma'am."

Memtrix looked over to Satima, who stared. Is Gern a fighter? Would he survive manning the cannons? Those creatures have been known to overwhelm the outposts easily. The High-Commander began to speak again, this time to her. "Second Pilot. You have been moved from your current post to that of Master Pilot, during Te'Jool's absence for the field. I have every confidence in you.", she finished, saddened.

Satima wasn't happy about it either. Her small group of friends is being torn apart by The Directive's toys. She stood to attention as well, "Ma'am. I accept.", facing Gern. "Be careful. Watch your green ass out there.", she shook his hand vigorously.

Gern flashed his charming smile with a confident smirk. "Miss me already?"

Satima squeezed his larger hand, "I mean it." She said in concern.

Memtrix put her hands on both their shoulders, "We have our duties.", giving them both an optimistic and sure gaze. "We will all be together on this ship again.", she stated. "Count on it."

They both nodded. Gern started to leave, passing Memtrix and the other crew. Some of them stared, giving gazes of approval. Satima watched him disappear in the corridor. She turned to the chair he once occupied.

Sitting down easily, prompting the holo display to show her the full ships diagnostics and tactical functions. She's done it. Chief Tech and Master pilot. Not to mention head of the directive division. Shepard would be proud. A feeling of accomplishment washed over her. Satima had a good vibe that victory is close. She knows it.

---------------------------------------------------------------

It had been a long day. The position of Master Pilot demands more, and with her duties expanding to three divisions, two of the subs having a separate crew of its own. Satima was exhausted, both physically and mentally. It had been weeks, hearing comms of cities being overwhelmed by the creatures and infected spreading across the territories.

She had received a private comm from Gern on Lithera, in her room. Satima sat on her bed.

His outpost survived a creature infection onslaught. There were a few casualties and one infected. He was lucky. The creatures managed to piggy back through the rift, trying to destroy the cannon. No doubt led by the powerful and clever asari. Her abilities puzzled Satima.

The Directive had to of experimented on her, given her enhanced biotics or something! Reaper would've known, but she's gone now. Shepard isn't here and no one understands the reapers better like them both. Satima only understood their insanity. Funny that. Takes one to know one, she guesses.

"...of course, it does..."

A voice echoed around her, or was it from her? She shot up startled. "Who's there?"
Satima shook her head furiously, "No...no...no...no. Go away!", she yelled.

The other voice laughed,"...you struggle so hard against what you are... pathetic..."

Turning to a deep soughing sound in the direction of her mirror on the wall, Satima viewed herself. Then the face contorted to someone else. Red eyes pierced back at her with a devious grin, as a darkness filled the room around her. "You can't run away this time. Where ever you go, I'll be right here.", she pointed to her head in the reflection.

"I'll never let you harm anyone!", Satima warned.

The other laughed. "Threatening yourself?" She leaned out of the mirror to Satima's horror, grabbing her head with cold pale hands. Struggling, Satima tried to break free as the room turned into a suffocating nightmare.

"You cannot escape the madness. The darkness is already breached in you... "she tilted her head in sarcastic empathy, "and it will destroy all you love, all you hold dear. No galaxy is safe from a monster."

Satima screamed. Suddenly the room went back to normal, with the other disappearing. The mirror looked whole, giving Satima her familiar expression. She had cold sweat beading down her forehead, while staring into a pale reflection.

Balling her right fist, she yelled in anger, smashing the mirror to pieces. The shards fell around her boots on the floor. Satima sobbed to herself, falling to her knees and crawling to hide under the desk. There is no Shepard to comfort her. And no one to care whether she's losing her mind.

Days slowly passed by. The ship was becoming quiet.

High-Commander noticed a subtle difference in Satima's demeanor lately. She had been irritable, focusing on her duties as Master pilot, ever respectful in attitude to her. But to the rest of the crew, she had grown distant.

Topside, the rift cannons were proving effective, but slow. The creatures had borrowed so deep, it had become impossible to follow. How that asari-Shiala, commands them so well is still a theoretical nightmare.

Maybe Satima needs to stretch her legs? Head Archon has requested a skirmish be complete near an outpost gone dark. No other troops were near enough to investigate. He needed Memtrix to prevent more infected creatures from landing on Lithera, but they were getting limited. Chances of stopping this infestation, slimmer.

Memtrix stepped behind Satima. "Master Pilot. Head Archon has commanded us to investigate an outpost in the Ha-Jin zone. Since we will be in orbit, the auto VI can carry your duties for you."

Satima stopped her panels, facing Memtrix with a confused stare. "You're replacing me? Why? I didn't do anything wrong!", she complained.

Memtrix shook her head, "No. I want you to accompany me to the outpost." Her mind and expression perplexed" Satima, you haven't been off this ship in weeks since the warfare started. I'm asking you to help me fight and secure any survivors."

Looking away, Satima thought it over quickly. She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. "I
apologize, High-Commander. This is an honor to join you." Satima glanced up to her. "It would be good to feel ground under my feet again."

"As I suspected. You are relieved to join. Go to the armory and gear up. ", she smiled.

In the shuttle ride, Satima marveled at her sentarian armor. Memtrix had the suit custom built to protect her hybrid form. The nano-tech still unnerved Satima, bad memories and all. But the ease, comfort and over all protection of the suit was unsurpassed.

Her small carapace on her back never felt constrained. No discomfort. It had been some time since she battled anything, other than the training room. And that had gotten boring fast.

High-Commander overlooked the sky from the open hatch. Grey clouds were beginning to take over. "We have storms ahead. Helmets will help keep the rain out of your eyes. The outpost is not far. Be wary, many of those infected things run rampant in the area."

Satima nodded, putting her helmet on. A green light glowed from her thermal visor on the face plate. It will be dark soon.

The shuttle hovered at the landing port of the outpost. Several jungle vines tried to ensnare the tall sentry towers that should be occupied by sentarian snipers. They were empty. Memtrix, Satima and another crew member-Feran, jumped out.

Their pilot taking off, in case the creatures attempt to overtake the only transportation out of there. In the cover of night, the squad carefully infiltrated the base. Small rain droplets began to splash on the ground. Falling in line, Memtrix led them to the center of the outpost.

Overgrowth from the jungle covered a few doors and roofs. Purple exotic flowers dotted one of the damaged landing pads nearby. But, what damaged it?

Habs, terrain rovers and other temporary erected buildings looked unused for some time. Distant thunder rolled behind them. Lights flickered in the open habs. "I don't see anyone. Not a living soul.", Feran informed.

Satima stepped to a hab. She looked inside, pointing her pistol forward for protection. Her heartbeat getting excited from the unknown fear. It had been too long since a battle, and her poor reflexes to sudden sounds showed it. "Nothing. ", she said, viewing a furry little animal leave the hab out the other entrance.

Memtrix led them further to the barracks for the troops that often came and went from the rift cannon. The compact mess hall had trays of old food littered about the tables. This place was abandoned weeks ago, maybe longer.

The humid atmosphere caused condensation on the walls from the change of temperature outside. They made their way through to the other side, finding the command center, within a few feet of the rift cannon and its platform. Feran overlooked the last comms that went through.

She studied the data, listening closely. Feran then widened her amber eyes, staring at the High-Commander. "This outpost was attacked. Hundreds of the infected creatures came through the rift cannon."

Satima listened, alarmed. "Then where are the bodies?"

A chittering sound came from outside. Memtrix cautiously walked out, her large rifle aimed ahead of her. "Put your helmets back on.", she whispered. "Can't risk infection."
They both complied. Once outside the command center, the sound got louder. Satima tried using her thermal visor. "The rain is obscuring my vision. Hold on while I adjust it."

The moment she finally fixed her thermal vision, Memtrix and Feran gasped as the thunder produced a strike of lightening. Over a dozen infected sentarians stood ahead in the darkness towards the rift cannon, and many creatures were quickly crawling their way.

"Well, now we know what happened here! Run!", Memtrix shouted.

Satima fired on the ones that got too close, as Feran ran forward. Terrified. Memtrix tried to catch up with her."Feran! Don't get lost...", Memtrix warned.

Feran disappeared into the dark of the outposts center. Satima caught up to Memtrix."Where did she go?"

More sounds of the creatures echoed from behind. "We can't follow her. She's abandoned us.", Memtrix remarked. "The shuttle is returning. We need to escape."

"Agreed.", Satima added.

They both stood back to back, weapons aimed around them. "On the count of one...", Memtrix started.

"...two...", Satima spoke, her hands shaking.

"Three!

They both ran to the landing pad. Creatures pursued. Satima fired on them again, taking a few down. She nearly stumbled. Memtrix opened the ramp to the pad, while the shuttle landed. She turned, aiming her rifle towards the infected. "Run, Satima! I have them!"

Satima stared at her, "High-Commander!?"

"Go!", she yelled.

Satima ran across the ramp, reaching the shuttle. Once the hatch opened, she gasped to see the pilot was dead. A creature had impaled him with its large claw. She fired, falling in a panic, crawling backwards and close to hyperventilating from fear.

Memtrix's grunts could be heard, fighting the infected behind her. The creature jumped on Satima, trying to rip her apart. She can't die here! Shepard would never know! Ronin would never know how she felt about him!

She roared in defiance at it, bringing out her pistol and fired into its insect eye. Green blood splattered all over her, covering the armor in infection.

Satima didn't care, only survival mattered. It fell back, screeching in pain when Satima brought out a long blade from her side. Violently jamming it into the brain.

Memtrix managed to block the infected, running across the ramp and turning to the controls to retract it. Buying them a small amount of time. She faced a rage ridden Satima, placing a hand on the young warrior's shoulder. "Satima?", she started.

The hybrid stopped, swiftly knocking Memtrix to the ground and straddling her. She put the bloody blade to the High-Commander's throat. Memtrix gulped under the intense strength she displayed.
"Master Pilot...", she began.

Satima ripped her helmet off, revealing a wild excitement in her eyes. She spat at Memtrix. "No master pilot! You are weak... helpless.", she leaned closer, face to face with an intimidating glare. "Incompetent." The hybrid remarked in a grin.

"Satima... what has happened to you?!", Memtrix argued, noticing the ever-encroaching danger from the infected around them.

The blade was held tighter to the neck, "I don't deal with weak. I put her away, where she belongs."

Memtrix realized in fear, that Satima had succumbed to the will of hive. Strange. There is no Reaper or Archer to control her. How is this happening? "Whoever you are, I want Satima back, now! You will release my friend.", she demanded.

She laughed, before her expression turned violent. "You will not make demands of me! I am the one in control!"

"No, you're not. You are nothing but a slave. The Directive has you in its will, and nothing you think or say is your own. Satima, fight it! Think of Arkasia, Gern... think of your parents! Shepard would be distressed to learn this of you.", Memtrix tried to implore.

More thunder deafened the sky, as heavy rain washed off the infected blood of Satima's armor.

Her hand began to shake, a stare becoming panicked. She lowered her gaze, taking the blade away from Memtrix and throwing it down. The high-commander waited as the hybrid quickly got off her, standing, giving a blank stare to the infected.

Something had gone terribly wrong with her friend. She picked up her rifle, hitting the back of Satima's head hard, knocking her out completely. Dragging her unconscious body inside the shuttle and navigating it away to the warship.

She's going to need Arkasia on this one. If they can stop this dangerous event at all.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------

Back on the warship, Satima was contained in quarantine. Given the serum by a medical team that suffered the wrath of this.... Savant. A name the other shouted at them. She surfaced again, causing Memtrix more despair in what to do with her. Having learned about the incident at the Ha-Jin outpost, Head Archon cautioned Memtrix to act accordingly with the hybrid.

He wants incarceration, but Arkasia pleaded with Memtrix to allow her a chance to save Satima.

Savant paced in the cell, staring at the guards with violent thoughts towards them. The Sentarians will all pay. Drown in their blood and the keepers with them. The "Arkasia" returned. Looking more upset and terrified at the same time.

"Satima?", she spoke.

Savant scoffed, "No."

Arkasia stepped forward, wary but determined. "If you're in there, I might have a way to help you against this."

Savant smirked, "Such foolish attempts... go ahead and try your best shot, slave.", she glared.

Looking away, Arkasia resumed her desperate exchange. "Satima, I'm here to help you. Believe that, trust it. There is a way, I know it." She turned around, walking out as Savant stared perplexed about
The next day, Arkasia had busied herself in a way to help control the alter-Savant. She devised an implant that could send a subtle theta wave through Satima's brain. Allowing her to focus on her true personality and shutting the other out, for a time.

An unfortunate side effect would not only be constant daily headaches, but the fact she needs to be awake during the procedure.

Arkasia needs assurance that Savant is quieted, and Satima emerges. This procedure could kill the hybrid. But what if Satima felt that death might be the only true freedom? No. It can't be that way.

Savant was apprehended and given a heavy dose of sedative. Memtrix stood by to watch her master pilot enter the preoperative chamber. Arkasia didn't like it, but she needed to shave the right side of her friend's hair, right above the ear.

When it was over, she had Satima strapped to the implantation chair. Used mostly to give Sentarians their nano-tech edge in battle. The surgical room was scrubbed clean, giving a perfect reflection off its metallic white floors. In the viewing room, Memtrix observed her sister start the implantation monitor. "Are you sure this will help her?", she asked over the room comms.

Kha ve, it was just like with Callon and his extraction pods. She felt disturbed. But this must be done, right? Will the Shepard forgive their actions, their attempts to save Satima?

Setting up the controls for the droid arm she prepared, Arkasia responded. "I hope it does. For all our sakes... and hers."

She injected the waking drug, and watched as Savant opened her eyes. Suddenly aware of the chair, her arms and legs strapped tightly with metal clamps holding her head in place. She grunted, gritting her teeth in rage, giving an angry glare to Arkasia. "You will suffer. I promise that!", she shouted.

Arkasia gulped, retaining her unperturbed gaze. "This will hurt... a lot. But after it is done, you will either be yourself again, or put down humanly." The engineer couldn't do it, she can't kill her friend. Would Memtrix put down Satima? Arkasia gave a short glance to her sister before resuming the procedure.

Savant tried to resist the droid arm as it closed in on the right side of her shaved head. Shouting and cursing at them. It locked in place with a click, scanning her brain and putting in the display to Arkasia's monitor.

With careful guidance, she started the incision above the right ear. A bright yellow laser burned away the flesh, opening the minuscule spot where white skull showed. Savant screamed in agony while tears streamed her face. Warm blood surfaced from the intended wound down her neck, coloring her white patient garment. The droid had successfully found the scanned spot, beginning implantation of the small nano-chip.

With perfect placement, the chip was activated, already sending data through theta waves. The room darkened around Arkasia, while Savant's eyes turned red. She stared into them, feeling an amount of fear that she had never known before.

Arkasia shook her head, tears brimming her eyes at the abuse she once again put her friend through. She enhanced the strength of the implant, forcing Savant to fade. Satima started losing consciousness from the high amount of stress to her body.

Once placed, Arkasia began closing the three-inch incision, hopeful in its success. Never forgetting
how she tortured her friend for being a victim of The Directive.

Hours passed.

Satima laid asleep in the recovery room under heavy guard. She opened her eyes slowly, suddenly wincing in pain. Reaching up and feeling for the fresh surgical scar that Arkasia inflicted on her. She sat up, standing and roamed the room, until she found a mirror on the wall. Spirits.

She gave a shuddering gasp, while she touched the partially shaven head, staring at the scar. Hot tears brimmed her eyes. They did this, to stop her? Violated her body and mind, all to save her? She looked below on the surface of a table.

Memtrix walked in, viewing the master pilot in wakening. Her frail appearance leaning heavily over a counter. "How are you feeling?", she wondered.

Satima was startled, and stared with a fearful gaze.

Memtrix approached. "Are you still Savant?"

She shook her head no. "I don't hear her anymore.", Satima responded.

"That is good news, my friend!", Memtrix smiled, stepping closer.

Satima flinched from her, averting her eyes away from the High-Commander. Arkasia appeared through the door, viewing the scene. She looked distraught upon the hybrid, moving forward to her. "Oh, Satima. We had no choice.", she began to cry. "I'm so sorry I had to this to you. I couldn't let my father kill you. You're my friend."

Memtrix looked away. "We should leave her to rest.", she gestured. As they started to leave, Memtrix looked back to Satima. "Please, forgive us. I owe it to you, to give you peace."

Satima closed her eyes, she didn't want to look at them. She stared back into the mirror, her disfigurement taunted her.

Time passed, and she was led back to her quarters on the war-ship. A guard outside to prevent her from leaving, while her high-commander and so-called friend pleaded with the Head Archon that the extreme measures worked. And all the sentarians and their little sentarian children were safe from the reaper abomination.

She stepped into her private washroom, once again staring at the monster in the mirror. Looking down, she found a sharpened razor. They must have foolishly forgotten to search her room for weapons. Or is this blind trust?

Satima glared at herself, taking the razor in one hand and a chunk of her remaining hair into the other. She quickly began cutting the ginger strands, letting them fall loosely to the floor. Images of Jormun running his suited hand through them, of Ronin pushing a stray piece back behind her soft human ear, tormented her.

This is all to have peace, but after this day, there will be no solace for her. Only anger and fear.

Memtrix implored with her father to have Gern return to the warship, Satima refusing to continue her pilot duties. Savant never came back, but the rest of the sentarians on the ship didn't trust her anymore. She pleaded with Memtrix to send her to Lithera.

To battle the infected, maybe die with some honor on the field. An understanding soldier to the core,
the High-Commander acquiesced. Allowing the hybrid to take out her frustrations on the unsuspecting creatures in the tunnels.

In the days that followed the requests, Satima was allowed her armor, weapons and few provisions, as she was dumped at a dilapidated outpost on the edge of the infected jungle. A handful of sentarian soldiers awaited the shuttles arrival. She stepped out, catching their stares and disapproval.

Their captain approached. A male with a long scar over his left eye, and a coal black stare that reminded her too much of Callon. He crossed his arms in dissatisfaction. "The reaper hybrid has been delivered to our outpost to save us, men. Be accommodating.", he ordered, mockingly.

Three of the soldiers scoffed, walking away. She stood there, confused at what to do. Satima took her small bag and wandered inside a hab. Putting it down on the floor, she found a cot to the far part of the shelter. That must be her bed. Satima sat on it, contemplating what she went through. How she got here. This is terrible, all of it maddening.

All thanks to the directive. Reaper was wrong. She'll never be free.

She woke to a loud boom. Satima stumbled out of her cot, hearing the soldiers outside screaming. With weapon in hand, she ran out of the hab's door, to see a group of infected creatures spreading throughout the outpost. A soldier had got in the way of them. He was torn apart. Silver blood splattered the ground, as his agonizing screams pierced her ears.

Satima couldn't move. They were getting closer, as the other men shouted her way. The captain ran in front of her, firing a heavy rifle. Iridium rounds pushed the creatures back. He turned to her, yelling. "Move your ass to cover and defend this post!"

She snapped out of it, aiming her pistol. Satima fired on a few, dashing across the yard to a small barricade. Grunting against the crude metal and debris, she noticed another soldier had been taking cover also. He aimed his rifle, fired, then hid to recover. "Sitting out here for a month, and we get your useless hide.", he complained.

More screeches echoed loudly, as they fired on the horde together. She exchanged her old clip for a new one. These weapons were older than the ones on the warship. "Forgive me for freaking the hell out!", she argued.

The captain held the rift platform clear, using placed mines to burn the creatures back. He signaled for his men to rally at the platform. Satima and the soldier followed suit, picking off stragglers as they burrowed away from them. She didn't know how desperate it was on the surface. Memtrix may not know.

On the bottom of the platform, they surrounded the open rift, ready for more. Two new creatures came through, bigger and faster. Satima dodged an attack straight for her, almost getting sliced by one of its massive claws. Three soldiers opened fire, bringing the second one down. It cried out in death, with acid blood pooling on the ground.

She baited the last one off, letting it get close enough. Her new friend from the barricade stood behind it, emptying a clip. He ran out too quickly, having to step back as the warrior sized creature advanced. Satima fired on it, but the insectoid had its eyes on him. She ran after them, with the captain too preoccupied shutting down the rift. His other men and women stood guard around the platform.

As her friend fell over debris, he crawled fast, finding a smaller rifle to fire with. The creature had been stunned back, but it didn't stop. Satima picked up speed, running directly in front of it, aiming
her pistol. She shot out an eye, ejecting a clip to insert a new one. Firing on its spiny legs.

It fell back, crippled. She leaned down and helped the soldier up. Turning around to be knocked down by the infected bug. It spit acid over her leg, and managed to slice through her armor. Satima yelled in pain, while the soldier opened fire and finished the creature off.

With the rift closed, the captain left it guarded to help them. He kicked the dead creature away, pulling Satima up to her feet. His taller height forcing her to be on her toes. She winced in pain, while he dragged her to the infirmary. On the cot, she stared in surprise. "I don't get it. I thought you guys didn't want me here?", she questioned.

The soldier had been hurt, but not as badly as Satima. He and the captain exchanged looks, before he spoke. "No. We don't want you here.", he started. "We need you here."

She looked away, as the medic took off her leg armor and began assessing the injury.

Months passed, with the war becoming a stale mate. Shiala held the power, but the sentarians were reluctant to back down. They fought so hard to win back their freedom from the created, turn back the tide against The Directive. These people will die on their home world, free. Never enslaved at the whim of an intelligence gone mad, again.

Satima's hair started to grow back. The bare scalp showing ginger stubble. The troops she fought with had seen a valuable ally in her.

She earned their respect, and in return they followed her to every tunnel of hell the creatures created. It didn't matter. The rift cannons were not fast enough, too many of them replicated in hordes. Overtaking outpost, after outpost. This stalemate will prove the sentarians demise. Hers as well. A nagging voice kept telling her to flee, leave them to their doom.

She won't. Satima refuses to abandon them.

The remaining team from her outpost had been sent to resupply personally from the capital. A debriefing was to follow, with their captain being killed in action. Satima felt it her fault, somehow.

She decided to wander the docking port while the shuttles were being stocked. Satima needed some time to think. This world is going to die, and all her people with it. Shiala had won.

Sitting at the docks, she witnesses the warship Memtrix commanded, land. Heavy battle scars cover the once intimidating exterior. Memtrix and Arkasia worked together to continue to find a cure. They had one more idea. Raid the moon base, and recover the lost data on the cure she had been so close in finding.

In the great hall of the assembly, Satima caught up to them speaking with Head Archon. His gaze grave and face full of worry. "Securing the data is all that matters. The base is lost.", he spoke in a heavy tone.

Memtrix slammed her fist into her hand, "Father, I am certain I can retake the base. I know it!"

Arkasia looked worried, catching Satima's gaze from the side. She offered a weakened smile to the hybrid. Their father spoke again. "I forbid it."

His eldest shook her head in anger, she paced while arguing. "If we don't defeat this Shiala and her creatures, then what can we do, father?! Run?", Memtrix argued.
Archon turned around, his expression solemn. "If we must evacuate the entire planet, retreat back into the unknown. Then it is to be done. We will survive."

Memtrix glanced to him, "You know the people will not run. Not anymore. Father, they are tired.", she pleaded. "So many are dead, and many more have abandoned this planet."

Archon faced her, saddened. "I know."

Satima looked down. This is it. The sentarians face extinction. Memtrix had exhausted all possibilities of victory. Arkasia is an intelligent scientist, but she's still one person. She walked around the opening of the hall, ignoring commands of another troop facing deployment. They need unconventional warfare, and someone who knows how to wield it.

An idea popped in her head, causing her to swiftly run out of the hall. She passed Gern as he just entered from the damaged warship. It's been months since he's last seen her. "Satima?", he called.

She kept running. Once on the docks, an alarmed blared. Sentarian troops and stalkers sprinted past her to the halls. Had there been a breach? She can't go back now.

The warship loomed in the distance. If she could use it to go back to the origin galaxy, find Shepard... request help?

The city is now under siege. Somehow the infected creatures had broken through the barrier shielding. Satima ran into two of her friends from the front lines. They stared at her, "What's going on?", He'tir asked.

"The halls have been breached. The city is under attack.", she answered, panicky. This wasn't a good time for those things to start the extinction today! Satima stared at them, "But I need you both to help me.", she replied.

"With what? Stopping the creatures?", Jensia questioned.

She shook her head, "Taking the warship that's docked and going for help. In the origin galaxy."

"You're miv nac! We can't go against our orders! Satima, you've had our backs many times, but the city needs us. The Assemblies are in danger.", He'tir argued.

Gern had caught up to see Satima raise her hand. A sudden chill danced down his spine. It's never cold on Lithera. The two soldiers in front of her wavered, staring in blank expressions. She spoke, not knowing he was behind her. "You will help me.", she commanded.

They both picked up their weapons, following her to the docks. What has she done?! Gern continued to follow. The sounds of explosions and gunfire below echoing around them. At the docks, Satima and the two had begun to open the hatch. She's stealing the ship!

"Satima! Stop this!", he yelled from the ramp.

She turned to him in surprise."Gern?" In the background of the docks, the infected creatures started attacking the nearby dock workers. "Gern, run! Get out of here! I'm going for help and I won't let you stop me.", she warned.

The hatch opened, with her enthralled friends going inside. She didn't notice the creatures crawling into the vents of the docked vessel. He approached closer to the ramp. "Satima. You're not well. Come back. I'll take you to Arkasia. She can fix you again.", he implored.
Satima narrowed her gaze, upset with him. "I'm not going back to have my brain scrambled for your safety."

"I don't care about my safety. Only yours.", he pleaded. "That's what friends do.", he assured with a weakened charming smile.

She hesitated to go in the ship, sighing loudly. "Just let me fix this. Please.", Satima gazed down. "I want to help."

Gern got closer, nearly touching her arm. "Then let's secure the city first. Arkasia will find the cure."

Satima looked at him, nodding her head. She turned to the open hatch, unknowing of the creature behind Gern. He stared at her, grunting in pain, squeezing her arm tightly. "Gern? What's wrong?", she asked, alarmed.

He let go of her arm, smiling. She gazed to his torso to see a claw impaling through. Silver blood covered his chest, splattering on the ramp. Gern pushed her away from him, as he screamed, leaning forward to break free from the creatures hold. "...Gern...", Satima called out.

He turned around grabbing the creature, pulling it down to fall off the ramp to the hundred foot drop below. Satima shouted to him, reaching out but failed to grab his hand. She watched Gern fall far, seeing his body meet the bottom of the cargo floor. Broken and mangled. The creatures swarmed him.

Satima stared, terrified at what she witnessed. Loose tears tipped her eyelids to drop on the ramps surface. Mouth agape in shock, Satima covered her face to moan in sorrow.

She rocked back and forth, hearing the creatures crawling up the walls to the ramp where she sat. Leaning forward to her knees, one thought dominated all others. Quickly she got up, running inside the ship. Closing the hatch without a second glance.

Once in the master pilot's seat, she began the warm up. Hurrying the engines to start. The couplings detached, and Satima flew the massive damaged warship into the sky.

A warp gate hovered open, as other ships came in defense of the planet's major city. The Seat of Archon. Reports flooded the comms of the hybrid's escape through the gate.

Memtrix managed to get Arkasia to the base. Shiala over powered them, with her sister trapped in the labs. Leaving her no choice but to retreat in shame. Once she rifted back to Lithera to report, her father informed her of the bad news.

Satima betrayed them in the end, abandoned them to die. Gern was slaughtered by the creatures as he attempted to stop her.

She listened but did not respond. Leaving the hall to balconies outside. Her world burns from the last effort to stop the infected. Her friend has forsaken her, and Arkasia hides at the mercy of a crazed hive scientist.

Memtrix grips the rails tightly, glaring in rage. If Satima ever returns, she'll answer for her crimes or be executed.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you for stopping by.
Chapter Summary

Time is running out for the infected. Satima navigates the Normandy to Lithera. Shepard uses her unconventional knowledge to help the sentarians. But is she too late?

Chapter Notes

This is a work of pure fan-obsessiveness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

2189
The Directive controlled galaxy

Head Archon overlooked the war table's display of his people's military outreach into the corrupted space. The galaxy that once served as their home... thousands of years ago. Commander Callon stood next to him. A warrior's stare searching the battle scene for flaws, calculating the details. He turned his gaze to Archon.

"Head Archon. We cannot delay any further. The answer to stopping the created-The Directive, are in that system. We must infiltrate.", he urged.

Head Archon faced the commander, "If you go beyond the warp gate, I cannot ensure backup through rifts. You know this."

"A risk I gladly take to secure our home.", he slammed a fist in his right hand with confidence. "My command carrier will dominate their space and bring terror to hive."

Head Archon nodded his head. Callon is a master warrior. Capable and sure, but none so foolish. After the death of his beloved mate on the moon base by Reaper, Archon kept his daughters too close. He thought it a harmless display of a parent protecting his children... others called it coddling.

"You have my support, Callon. Find the answers we seek and destroy The Directive."

Head Archon returned his crystal gaze to the view below. His people and his city, surviving away from the chaotic harvests, thriving. The seat and assemblies had watched through rifts, the destruction the reapers caused in the home galaxy.

Massacring whole civilizations, striping resources to stay functional. Massive god-like machines, that needed thralls to attend them. Much like the ancient leviathans did to his people, long ago.

On the command carrier, Callon observed the flight into the warp gate, proud and confident. He turned to his second in command, Alen Hertan,"There is more to our mission then you've been briefed on. We're not going to just infiltrate and kill Directive soldiers."

He faced him, "Then what is the mission, Sir?" His black eyes stared with a glossy intensity.
Callon continued, "When the Directive sent their Reaper here to find us, destroy our purpose by killing so many of our people-The Seat of Archon made a decision. We must eliminate Reaper. Her existence alone is a threat, with the many enhancements and dangerous synthesis she represents. Our stolen technology"

"I want to be in the leading raid on the station. I want to face this Reaper!", Alen exclaimed.

Callon grinned, "I'll see that you will. I need you to be indiscriminate in wiping out the stations inhabitants. All of them are corrupted, irreversible. You will bring me the body of Reaper."

He stood to attention, "Sir, I'll bring you her head."

Callon turned back to the view of space, "There is one more important detail to this mission."

"Sir?", he answered.

"Our stalkers have scouted information from the station. Reaper has a synthesis child. She's the key to stopping the Directive. I want you to bring her to me, alive.", he ordered.

Alen stared, puzzled. "A... child? How can a child stop the Directive?"

Callon smiled, "You'll see soon."

Alen nodded and saluted, then resumed his duties on the bridge. Callon had planned this since the attack on their moon base. The Archon's mate was killed, and his own pride ripped open for all to mock. He will have revenge on the entire dark galaxy, and put Reapers head as an ornament on his ship. Her child... will pay the price in blood.

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Present-2187
Normandy
En Route to Citadel Space

In the medbay, Satima received more pain relievers, causing her to become drowsy. She laid on the examination table, feeling chilled and heavy. Shepard hovered over her with a worried expression. She bit her nail, her arm bundled over the other, supporting her chin. Satima needs to tell the truth on what happened back on this Lithera?

Whatever her envolment was, had gotten out of control.

Chockwas assured Shepard that Satima is stable. Ushering the captain to resume her own duties and get some rest. Reluctantly, Shepard agreed, leaving her daughter to the good doctor.

An hour passed with Satima now sitting on the examination table, watching Morgan shake from feverish chills on the cot. She had already been infected too. The bio-tech was of no use in helping Chockwas create a serum to boost immunity to the infection. If Arkasia was here it would be easier. Satima couldn't risk forcing her to come along. The Sentarian's needed her. She's all they've got against the virus.

Chockwas tried giving Morgan another dose of medicine for the fevers, when the woman attacked her. Shouting and cursing. Satima quickly hopped off, grabbing the woman's wrists as Chockwas jammed the needle into Morgan's neck. Her eyes rolled back, calmed and finally asleep.

"Thank you.", Chockwas spoke. She leaned on the cot with a sigh, then chuckled. "I'm not as young as I used to be." Satima kept her gaze downward, when the doctor spoke again. "How are you
feeling?", she asked.

Satima laid Morgan's arms down gently, covering her in a blanket. "Everything hurts, but I'm holding out.", she replied with a weak smile.

Chockwas nodded, "Are you having any more trouble with your implant?"

"I think the infection is causing it to malfunction. Then again, I'm not too sure. Arkasia built it for me. She knows more about it then I do.", Satima answered.

Chockwas understood, leaving Satima to rest again. She didn't want to alarm anyone of her illness's progression. Silently slipping away to vomit more blood, wheezing from the lack of air her lungs weren't getting, as she sat next to the toilet. Stopping herself from screaming when she found a lesion over her collar bone.

Satima always locked the women's restroom, making sure no one came in.

The medbay door opened with Ronin stepping through. "Satima. Shepard is requesting you in the CIC.", he alerted. Spirits, her skin is so pale. The once energetic bounce to her step was slowed and weakened.

Satima shook her head in silent agreement, averting a stare at his vibrant gold eyes. They weren't for her anymore, she knows it. But it still hurt. Just a little.

The walk to the elevator was quiet. He didn't speak, but followed her in. Satima glimpsed at him for a few seconds. Quickly tracing the strong build of his body inside the grey turian armor. Her heart fluttered a little, painting a pink blush over her pastel cheeks.

Ronin glanced to Satima, noticing the difference in her skin tone. He didn't say anything or move. There won't be a long kiss in this elevator ride, she made that clear between them when she left.

They stepped out as the lift's doors opened, walking side by side to Shepard.

On the bridge, Shepard paced behind Joker. EDI watched from the corner of her eye. "Captain, Admiral Hackett is on vid-com now.", she informed.

She turned around, hastily passing by Satima and Ronin, gesturing them to follow. Satima stepped closer behind, "What's happening?"

Through the door to the war room, they stood still for a minute to be scanned. "I'm cautioning the alliance to what's going on."

The scan ended, as they continued to the vid-com room. "And about Nepmos?", Satima asked.

Garrus waited for them in front of the QEC. He nodded, as Hackett's image came on behind him. The admiral stood still with arms crossed. Shepard stepped in plain view, "Sir. I have urgent mission information. It involves the sentarian vessel crash on Nepmos."

"We've been trying to contact the Inglorious for days. What's going on, Captain?", he demanded.

"They're... dead, Hackett." She relayed gravely.

He uncrossed his arms with an alarmed expression. "What?"

Satima stepped forward, next to Shepard. "It's an infection... a virus that kills quickly and efficiently. Admiral, it's from my time. A bio-weapon of hive."
Hackett stared at them, "Good God. Are there reapers involved?"

"No, sir. This is stand alone.", Satima answered.

Shepard watched, listening to the mature responses Satima was making. Hackett rubbed his chin, staring off in intense thought. He turned his gaze to them. "Do you have a plan, Shepard?"

"I don't, but Satima does.", Shepard informed. "We revisited the warship, and retrieved star system data. Hackett... it leads through a spatial rift, using a warp gate." She stared ahead with a serious expression.

Hackett raised a brow. "Warp gate?"

Satima started to speak again, "Sentarian travel gate. It's how they eluded the reapers for so long, and how they hid in time." She gestured with her hands, "I'm not sure if the Normandy can handle something like that. But, I do know, if we don't try... the infection will spread, unchecked."

"You have firsthand knowledge of this?, he asked.

"Yes... unfortunately.", Satima answered, feeling despondent about her condition.

Shepard spoke, "Hackett, she's infected like the others were, and a Morgan Reeves from the camp on Nepmos as well. We can't dock or land this ship anywhere without being a liability. That's why we're using council space to send the comms, while the signal is reachable. Through the warp gate, I don't know if we can contact the alliance."

"Shepard, you do what you must to protect this galaxy. The alliance is right behind you every step of the way.", Hackett assured, turning his gaze to Satima. "I expect you to make a full recovery, returning back with Shepard and the cure. Understood?", he ordered in concern.

Satima glanced to Shepard, standing a little more at attention. "Sir.", she replied, unsure.

He nodded, the image began to flicker and faded away.

Shepard turned to Satima, "That was surprisingly different from you. Your responses are less..."

"Childish?", Satima answered awkwardly.

"No.", Shepard replied, shaking her head in disagreement.

Garrus spoke, "Impetuous."

"Thanks, I guess.", Satima shrugged.

As they left, halfway through the war room the comms opened with Traynor on the other end. "Captain. I'm receiving an outgoing message to your private channel. It's coded. EDI opened it.

They stopped in the board room. Shepard played the transmission. "Shepard, this is Liara. I've managed to find out about Nepmos, and your plans to find the sentarians? Don't ask. It would just complicate things." She smiled as everyone snickered over the "broker" insinuation. The message continues,"Javik insists on coming aboard, accompanying you despite the health risks. He's using a private shuttle to fly to the Normandy now. Good luck, my friend. We'll be waiting here, "batting down the hatches" until you return."

Joker opened comms."Uh, Captain? You're not gonna believe who's trying to dock with us."
Shepard shook her head, "Oh, I do.", she sighed in irritation.

Normandy

Javik boarded the warship, holding a personal excitement back from the crew. He carefully walked to the elevator to meet Shepard in the mess. The hybrid sat, slowly drinking water while lifting her gaze to meet his. Javik could already see the infection taking its toll on her.

Shepard stood over her progeny with a wary look."Javik, tell me why you're risking your life to come with us?", she eyed.

"Simple.", he blinked his many yellow eyes. "I follow the trail of the ancients. There is nothing left in this galaxy for me here. I would've joined the hybrid, had she not snuck away like an insolent child.", he narrowed his gaze at Satima.

"Excuse me?", Satima asked, annoyed.

Shepard waved a hand to Satima,"Javik, I didn't allow you on board to cause unnecessary drama. You want to find the sentarians, then you need to act like a crew member again."

Javik chuckled lightly, "I don't seek quarrel with either of you." He looked to Satima, "I will return to my previous quarters, meet me there in an hour."

Satima answered with a confused nod. "Sure...

That evening in citadel space, Shepard sat in her cabin, awaiting a private call from the academy. Nerves led her to stare away at the old hobby ships above her terminal. Some of them were dusty. Need to clean that. Eventually moving her gaze to the fish tank, now terrarium. Plants need watering. Do that.

Shepard's nails began tapping on the desk surface, impatiently. What was taking so long? "Ding." She sat up straight, sighing nervously when the call pinged. Quickly, Shepard opened the menu and accepted the vid-com. Natalie's face beamed on screen. Her hazel eyes watery with excitement.

"Hi!", she squealed happily.

"Hey there, sweetie. How are you holding up?", Shepard wondered with a smile.

Natalie held up a data pad with drawn pictures. "Okay. I'm practicing shading in art class." She used her small finger to whisk several pictures past the screen until she settled on one. It was a pretty good sketch of the Normandy, with several men and women in military uniform standing around it. "This is your ship. I tell everyone in class that my mom flies the Normandy."

Shepard gulped, retaining a smile. Mom? Natalie calls her mom? "That's very good, Natalie.", she complemented.

Natalie grinned, "I know." She looked away, her bright smile turning into a frown. "I miss you. Can't you come back so we can go home?", she asked, holding a pink stuffed hanar toy, tightly to her chest.

Shepard looked at her sadly, "I'm sorry, Natalie. But we can't yet." She unsettled in her chair, letting out a small disappointing sigh. "Listen, we're going to be away for a short while. A friend of mine will come and visit you weekly. You won't be alone."

Natalie faced the screen sadly, "Okay.", she responded softly.
"She's a lot of fun, too! You guys will go to the arcade when you visit the citadel and maybe visit the park.", Shepard tried consoling.

"...ok...", Natalie sounded sadder.

Garrus had just come in the door, after hurriedly finishing his calibrations in the main battery. He viewed Natalie's face on the terminal screen, stepping beside Shepard. "I got here as fast as I could.", he whispered in her ear.

Shepard pushed her chair back to allow Garrus space to see Natalie better. She smiled at him. "Hey!"

Garrus knelt on one knee, being taller than Shepard and able to reach the desk's edge, chest high. Resting his left arm on the surface of the desk, Garrus smiled at Natalie, "Are you doing okay in the academy?"

"Yeah.", she replied, looking around her terminal. "Some of the kids are nice. The ones that can make stuff fly sometimes pick on me. But, I stay to myself and draw."

"Why are they picking on you?", Shepard asked, concerned.

"I don't know.", she answered with a shrug, gazing down.

"Why don't you show Garrus your picture of the Normandy, Natalie.", Shepard asked, changing the subject.

Natalie happily showed him the picture, talking about her classes and how much she missed home. Meanwhile, Satima quietly stood in the doorway of the cabin. Their loud talking muffled her presence to them. She sighed silently, looking away from the happy scene.

If they both get sick, die from Shiala's control-Natalie would never forgive her. Hell, she'd never forgive herself... if she came back alive, that is. Satima suddenly felt something strange about Natalie. Shaking the feeling, Satima left the family to their call.

Before long, an hour passed quickly. Satima found herself visiting Javik again. He washed his hands at a smaller basin, and kept his back to her as she entered the old room. Why is it always so musty?

"Hybrid. I must speak with you.", he insisted.

"About what?", she wondered.

Javik turned around, walking closer to her. "What is this infection that plagues the system the sentarians inhabit? Why did you bring it back with you?"

"I didn't mean to bring it back. I made a risky and foolish decision, thinking Shepard could help me. I'm not sure whether or not I was right.", she answered, leaning on the hull wall. Satima sighed, "It was hive fragments. They discovered a bio-weapon and a survivor. She unleashed the rachni on Lithera. The sentarians unleashed the infection on themselves."

"And now you are infected? As well as that human female? She is doing worse, yet you are surviving? Curious.", Javik pondered.

Satima agreed, "I battled the infected rachni, not knowing what they really were then. The sentarians don't know their origin either. I've been stabbed, lacerated and spit on by their acid during the last months of excursions on Lithera itself."

Shepard and Garrus had at that moment, come through the elevator door, in search of Satima. A curious request from Natalie that sent them after her. Happening in on her conversation of the past
battles with the infected, the couple decided to wait and listen.

"Before it all went south, I was training with the master pilot of Memtrix’s dreadnought. He taught me a little about their warships and the warp gates.", she looked down in memory. "He's dead now."

Javik didn't waver, unsurprised at this information. Satima gazed up, continuing. "Arkasia had the labs under control, until the asari survivor revealed her true intentions. She can... control them, somehow. The infected rachni follow her.", Satima informed, troubled. "I think it has something to do with those spores."

Javik contemplated the hybrid's words, while Shepard and Garrus stepped forward. "So, that's what all those surgical scars and tissue removal was for? Rachni attacks? Did you not have any back up from the sentarians?", Shepard asked, concerned.

Startled, Satima continued. "I was a part of a squad, topside. Most of them didn't make it." She gazed off in memory to recall the past. "They were either infected or brutally killed by the rachni."

Satima stared at Shepard, "You've stood against them, before the reapers and their experiments. You know how deadly an encounter is.", Satima remarked. "We were stationed to the surface for months, fighting them back, finding a cure. It was almost possible."

"How did you get back here on your own?", Garrus inquired.

Satima leaned off the wall, walking forward. She turned around, "Two of the crew tried to help me escape the system. The infected are getting numerous, with too few of the serum left. Arkasia discovered a way to help the body fight it. But, Shiala is becoming too powerful."

Satima looked down, crossing her arms. "My alter started again, louder and without restraint. She... attacked Memtrix."

Shepard placed her hand gently on Satima's shoulders. "You'll defeat it, and we'll help you through this."

"I hope so.", Satima spoke, feeling despaired.

Garrus stepped beside them, "We should take the data to EDI in the war room. See what she can do to help the Normandy travel through a rift." He glimpsed toward Satima, personally worried. Shepard nodded. The women left together, with Garrus staying behind for a moment. Reflecting between his role as a father and a soldier.

Javik spoke, "A foolish emotion. It blinds you."

Garrus looked back to Javik with a perplexed gaze. "What blinds me?", he asked.

Javik resumed his hand washing at the basin. "You did not raise her. There was no bonding between you. Banish the thoughts now, while you still can. Before they destroy you, Garrus."

He stepped forward, "Are you done with your cryptic bull?", he warned.

Javik smirked, "I am. For now."

Garrus shook his head, thinking Javik not worth a deck to the face.

============================================================
War Room
Normandy
EDI carefully scanned the data from the sentarian warship. The holo grid displayed different fluctuations in space flow around the vessel. "This is fascinating. The sentarian engines use a form of dark energy. A similar design of their rifters."

"I had some time to observe their drive cores. It's definitely not like the Normandy. I used their ship in hopes we could go back safely and help them. I was wrong.", Satima commented.

"So, if we use the data, could the Normandy make it through the singularity?", Shepard asked.

EDI brought up several scenarios with the Normandy crashing into the warp gate, or being pulled apart by gravitational anomalies. "I would have to create a second kinetic barrier over our drive core. Adjustments to hull pressure and navigation."

"That means Joker will be flying solo? Can he fly through a spatial rift?", Ashley wondered.


Some of the current crew protested, while Satima did a double take to Ronin's suggestion.

James shook his head, "No offense, Ronin, but Jokers been flying for a long time. And no one flies the Normandy but him.", he remarked.

"I think he's glued to his seat.", Garrus quipped.

Shepard stood still, listening... watching Satima. She crossed her arms, "Satima, can you do it? Fly us safely through to the warp gate?"

Satima looked up, stunned. "I... I could. Wouldn't Joker protest? Maybe I can teach him about rift tear navigation."

Ashley stepped forward, aggravated by Shepard's insistence. "Isn't she sick?", she pointed out. "Wouldn't that be a problem if she passes out or has a sudden urge to crash the Normandy into the gate?", Ashley argued.

Satima turned to Ashley upset, "I may be dying but I won't sabotage this mission! It's mine to begin with!", she yelled.

"And how do we know this wasn't your whole plan?!", Ashley accused. "You brought the infection with you! Alliance soldiers died because of your negligence! We're all in danger, because of you!"

Satima fumed, "You don't think that doesn't haunt me?! I will carry their lives, their blood-on my hands till the day I die!", she started shouting.

"SHUT IT!", Traynor screamed.

Everyone looked at her, stunned. She awkwardly gulped, resuming her point. "Captain... Commander...", she looked around."No one wants to cause worry. But, half of the Normandy is already sick. We've been trying hard to cover it up. Shepard, we want to help, but all this arguing will solve nothing." Traynor stared at the hybrid pleadingly, "Satima, please fly the ship and get us to a cure." Her gaze traveled to Ashley, "Commander Ashley, no one is without their mistakes." Traynor's eyes looked watery, and then she started to cough.

Satima put her hand on the Comm Specialist's back. She glanced to her, giving an appreciative nod.
Ashley backed down with a lowered gaze. She cleared her throat, already feeling a small fever affecting her.

Satima watched Traynor fight the beginning symptoms of the infection. "I'm sorry, you're right.", she looked at Ashley. "I didn't plan to hurt anyone. I know I'm screwed up, and I'm sorry you're all sick. This is my fault, but I would like a chance to fix it"

Ashley stared at her with a sigh, "Don't apologize."

Shepard resumed a stern gaze to them. "Alright. We know we have to prepare for a rough ride. Everyone who is experiencing symptoms needs to get an eval in the medbay. Those who can return to duty need to do so. Satima, we face the hardest part of this mission."

"What is that?", she asked.

Shepard narrowed her gaze, "Telling Joker he can't fly."

Someone whistled in jest.

Vintae Moon Base-Present
Biological Weapons Lab

Arkasia kept busy on the serum, trapped in a barely ventilated grey room. Those damn spores kept plugging up the ducts, preventing fresh synthesized air from circulating.

And now she is just steps away from a complete cure, if Shiala-the hive queen, doesn't break through the doors first. Several stalkers tried to end that abomination, but to no avail. Either infected or mutilated by the savagely violent bug creatures from hive.

She looked up as one of the stalker soldiers almost fell asleep at the door. He took off his helmet moments before to alleviate the pressure of a headache. Arkasia felt helpless, sorry for their pain. They stood between her and death for weeks now. Or has it been over a month?

She'll see to it that her father will award them the highest honor, and some sorely needed rest. Kha ve, Satima warned them not to continue in their meddling of the labs. But hive had some of their people experimented on! Their secret could be revealed!

Secret or no, the infected pounded on the base doors. A handful of soldiers to keep them at bay stood between success and doom. Memtrix's last messages told her what had happened on Lithera. The rachni were burrowing deep into the planet, out of reach from the fires.

Which was the only way to destroy them. A last word gave Arkasia a fearful thought. Satima had used the abandoned warship to flee their system, with a small group of soldiers aiding her. Gern Te'Jool was found dead, his mangled corpse under the ramp of the docking platform. Did they commit mutiny? Left them to their fate?

She shook her head, resuming the serums chemical extraction. Reading the data on the monitors and organizing her table of the proper chemicals. Satima would never betray them, she respects the sentarians. She's her friend, isn't she?

Joker sat at the controls, quietly whisking away at the holo panels. Everything looked perfect. Across all boards, the Normandy was purring like a kitten. He put his arms carefully behind his head, relaxed. Shepard stood next to him. "Hey, Shepard. Hanging around to see the best damn pilot ever?", he smirked in satisfaction.
She knelt next to him, her face solemn. "Joker... we need to talk."

Satima and Ronin stood at the elevator, while another crew member passed by. Quietly speaking to each other when they heard Joker shout. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN I CAN'T FLY THE NORMANDY!"
Uh-oh.

Shepard tried to calm her pilot while he paced back and forth, angrily... and slowly. "Now, Joker. You know I wouldn't relieve you of your post unless it was urgent. Satima needs to fly the Normandy through a warp gate to reach the Sentarians. After that, you'll be back at the helm with EDI. I promise."

Joker stared at her, "Promise!? Shepard, I've flown this ship through hell and back. Twice! I can fly her safely through a wormhole!"

"And with the same training Satima received, you could. I have no doubts. But, we need to make it there fast. You'll still sit in the cockpit, just not in the pilot's chair.", she explained.

Joker shook his head in indignation. Satima and Ronin carefully stepped behind them, watching the display. Joker then took off his hat, "I can't believe you don't trust me. With all due respect, ma'am, but I don't think Satima is fit to drive this ship through anything. No matter how much you trust her."

"It's not just about trust.", Shepard argued.

He averted his gaze in anger. "Right. It's only about her being your daughter.", he mumbled in complaint.

Shepard looked surprised, clearly upset at his accusation. "You think I'm playing favorites? She may be my daughter, but I wouldn't put her in a position if I wasn't confident she could do it."

"Captain...", he protested.

Shepard and Joker stared at each other, at odds with their feelings. He was like a brother to her, surely, but he can't be serious. "Monroe, you have an order.", she said sternly. "Now follow it."

Joker angrily stood to attention, stuffing his cap into his pocket, then walking off. He glared to Satima. Shepard let out a frustrated sigh. "Damn.", she said.

Satima approached her, "He feels that strongly about the Normandy?"

Shepard gave a sarcastic laugh. "She's everything to him." EDI continued at her station, knowing full well Shepard meant her.

Satima nodded, "After we get through the gate, he can resume command of navigation. I'm sure the flight back will be easier with a sentarian ship to guide us."

Shepard understood, gripping the back of the pilot chair annoyed, "I can't believe Joker would say that."

Satima nodded, personally upset at causing a rift between two good friends. "He didn't mean it, I'm sure.", she tried to smile.

Shepard kept staring away. Satima meandered off to the bridge, leaving the Captain alone. The whole crew heard about the change of pilot issue. Some of them didn't bother to say anything, while a few gave Satima indifferent looks.
She may be the Captain's daughter, but she's still an outsider. Bringing her reaper plagues and hostile alien friends to cause trouble for them all. Satima knew they felt that way, finding a seriously sour note in the core room where she stayed.

It took two days to find a plausible spatial rift. All the way to the far rim. Shepard remembered Tali speaking of dark energy in Haestrom's system, Dholen, causing the sun to collapse. No surprise to find a tear around those parts of space. A total of five days had passed, with Satima's countdown to death or a husk-like existence at the back of her parent's minds. Always a constant conversation among them, which annoyed Satima more.

Three crew members became too sick to stay at their posts, causing a slight panic among the crew itself. They supported and respected Shepard, but her daughter was the cause of this problem. And it seemed she was doing nothing to fix it, other than spending time with the spectre, Ronin.

Truthfully, she was telling him of her time on Lithera. Slowly working her way to who the turian woman was. Changing the subject, to eventually busy himself with the engine room, often speaking to the Normandy crew. Ronin attempted to explain Satima's skill and usefulness on the ship, but when it was brought up, they scoffed and dismissed him.

While in the mess, Satima had attempted to eat a little. At least to keep her strength up to fly the legendary warship. Two human crew members stood behind her, as she prepared her meal. The men had angry gazes and equally toxic words.
"Can't believe the Captain is letting her fly the Normandy. Even threw Joker off the bridge.", one complained.

Satima rolled her eyes. Shepard didn't throw Joker off the bridge! She ignored their misconstrued gossip, continuing with her preparation.

"She's not normal. Neither human or turian. And the reapers made her! Why should Shepard even care to have her on board?", the second argued.

Satima turned around to counter, when she spotted Garrus standing behind the men with a displeased expression. "Hey.", he began. They quickly turned themselves to him. "..si..si..Sir!", the crewmen stuttered, saluting.

Garrus folded his arms in dissatisfaction. "I may not be human or apart of the alliance, but I can tell you that causing dissension among the crew is a very bad choice.", he narrowed his avian gaze.
"Valdez, did we not have drinks in the lounge days before going to Earth, where my people helped you stop the reapers from slaughtering yours?"

"Sir, yes sir! Thank you, sir!", Valdez saluted.

Garrus turned his gaze, "And, Davis. You came to me about sending a message to your sister in C-Sec, after Udina's coup. Did I not make sure she received it? Didn't you find out that she survived the attack?", he continued.

"Sir! She's now stationed on the presidium with better pay.", Davis saluted.

"Then why are you treating my daughter as a pariah? Like she's incapable of bringing this ship through a dangerous and near impassable sentarian designed warp gate?! Satima is more seasoned than the both of you. She deserves your respect.", Garrus cautioned.

Davis and Valdez faced each other, concerned for their position in the alliance, due to verbally attacking their captain's daughter. Not to mention she's Garrus's too! Together they voiced their
apologies. "Ma'am", Valdez started. "Will you accept our formal apology?"

"We were out of line, ma'am.", Davis agreed.

Satima stared. Her teal turian eyes wide, as her facial expression looked like an embarrassed young girl. "Uh... sure?", she shrugged.

Davis spoke again, "We're just tired and scared. Valdez started his fever yesterday. We don't want to die."

Satima sighed, looking at them in pity. "I'll do everything I can to prevent that, promise."

They accepted her promise, returning to duty. Garrus gazed at her. "Are you okay?"

She smirked, "Words don't hurt as much as weapons do. I'll be fine." She assured.

Day Ten
Normandy
Far Rim, Ma-at system

The Normandy hovered in space, while EDI scanned for the spatial rift. She found a possible singularity with a small gravitational pull. Satima observed in anticipation. All of the Normandy will be watching her, fearful of her ability to navigate to Lithera. She was afraid too.

Afraid to fail and put Shepard to shame. Two more crew members ended up in the medbay. One of them was an engineering officer. Ronin offered to stay on the engineering deck, helping with workflow.

Joker stood by in the co-pilot seat, waiting for Satima to sit and fly them through this dangerous rift. He still glared toward her and Shepard, despite EDI explaining to him why Satima must fly the Normandy. Joker would have none of it, surprising EDI of his distance towards herself. She felt a new emotion for the first time. Hurt.

Garrus waited in the main battery, resuming his role with calibrating the gun and other power systems. EDI being preoccupied with the entire ship's structure. He had confidence in Satima, hoping she felt the same way about herself.

Satima slowly took the pilot's seat. It felt warm and cushy. She adjusted herself with satisfaction, glimpsing over to Joker who never wavered or glanced her way. If they all make it out alive, she'll find some way to make it up to him.

The holo-panels displayed before her. Satima carefully whisked controls to view the drive core's current output. EDI had already downloaded the data, staying in the core room for maximum efficiency. A flash of light quickly blinded the front of the ship. "What's that?", Shepard asked, standing behind Satima.

"Warp tear. In a minute, a gate will be visible. Sentarians started to open these all over the galaxy after the reapers defeat. They had plans to recolonize.", Satima informed.

"Really? Interesting.", Shepard replied.

Satima cautiously flew the ship towards the tear, eying the Normandy's diagnostics and statistical data. Everything looked smooth. EDI updated her. "I have the second kinetic barrier activated over the engine and drive core. Hull pressure will be slightly released. You may all experience a dizzy sensation. It will be brief."
"Got it, EDI. Thanks for the heads up.", Shepard responded.

Satima brought the vessel closer to the tear, when a visible slash into space opened. "There's the gate. We're going through.", she alerted.

The gate is a large singularity, brightly colored in yellows and oranges. Tendrils of electrical currents in blue lashed out towards open space. To Joker it looked unstable, dangerous.

He knew to complain now would destroy whatever concentration Satima had of the flight trajectory. Everyone on board could feel a pull of the gravitational current, the Normandy giving a low groan under the pressure.

Shepard stood behind her, as Joker readied the thrusters to propel the ship forward at a faster pace. Satima looked at him, "Careful. We need to enter diagonally. Too much speed and we'll hit the tear head on."

He sighed, "Yes, ma'am."

Satima rolled her eyes. Maybe a "small" gift. "Alright, entering the gate... now.", she informed.

The Normandy groaned under pressure again, rumbling and shaking, as it entered the gate. Once through, the front view of a thousand stars whirling by held them in awe. No blue emissions could be seen around the Normandy, like through a Relay.

FTL had to of been broken by these speeds. Would that even be possible?

Satima kept a firm hold over the controls, carefully navigating through the tunnel. Joker readjusted the thrusters, darting his eyes back and forth between readings and drive core data. "This is crazy! We should've never attempted this.", he complained, suddenly.

"We can make it. I know it! Just keep the speed constant. Don't adjust until I say.", Satima ordered.

Normandy's hull groaned louder, with the entire ship beginning to shake violently. A hard rumble forced several crew to jolt forward. Shepard held on to the back of the chair. "Satima...", she cautioned.

"We're going to make it.", the girl replied.

EDI came on comms."I'm keeping the pressure from releasing into the engine room. If we cannot reach the other gate in five minutes, the lower decks will need to evacuate to the CIC. Drive core pressure will surely kill anyone in the engine room and cause radiation damage to the other decks."

"You hear that, Satima?! My friends could die, because of this stupid mission.", Joker argued. "We need to turn back."

Satima glared at him in frustration. "We turn back now, then everyone on Lithera and this ship will die! You think the virus back in the galaxy will stop at Nepmos? It's already arrived on other colonies. The sentarian's have a serum and it can work. We can't give up because of fear!"

Joker stared at Shepard, who nodded, then back to Satima. "Fine! We push forward and hope we don't die reaching that gate!"

Satima resumed her controls, silently hoping they can reach it. The ship rumbled harder. EDI came back on comms."Hull pressure can't equalize. The second barrier is collapsing. Shepard, I'm doing all I can to keep everyone alive!"
"Just hold on, EDI!", Shepard shouted over comms through the ships noisy flight. She held on to the chair tight, feeling a tugging sensation behind her. Crew members on deck gasped in fear, trying their best to hold on to the hull.

Everyone waited, holding their breath when the Normandy reached the end of the gate. Satima realized the tear was closing, pushing the Normandy hard to make it through. Joker glanced to her, knowing her intentions. He forced the thrusters to max power, damaging the second kinetic barrier in the engine room.

Ronin led the remaining crew members to flee into the elevator, while alarms blared behind him. Leaving just in time for EDI to release engine pressure. The Normandy hit the end of the tear in full force, emerging in sentarian space. The gate violently closing behind the vessel causing a large emp wave to hit the ship.

Crew members were thrown backward into the hull or down onto the floors. The ship's alarms went quiet, lights turning off and the Normandy in shut down.

The warship floated in space sideways, with the thrusters putting out their blue emissions. Minutes passed, as the crew moaned or grumbled to stand. Viewing their surroundings in surprise of their survival.

Shepard woke on the floor, having hit her head against the wall. She quickly stood up, seeing Joker laid over his holo board. "EDI... is everyone okay?", she commed. Helping Joker to sit up. He had a bloody lip, but seemed alright.

"Captain. The engine is intact, but overtaxed. We could be suspended for a time. Repairs are needed.", she informed.

Shepard looked over to Satima, also laid over her board controls. "Are you okay, EDI?", she asked, checking on her daughter.

"Yes, Captain.", EDI replied.

Shepard hovered over Satima, who woke startled. She stared at Shepard wide eyed. "Is... is everyone okay?! Did we make it?", she asked, alarmed.

Shepard let out a laugh, "Yes. I think everyone made it fine. We're through." She answered, wiping a little blood from Satima's nose.

Satima turned her head to space, wincing as she stood up. "Okay, Joker.", she started. "The chair is all yours."

Joker limped out of his chair and back into the pilot's seat quickly, swerving himself around to face Satima. "That was stupid and dangerous. But... you did a good job. I guess I could let you drive every once in a while. You know, so I can get some shut-eye."

Shepard knew that was his way of apologizing. Satima smirked. "It's a deal. Just for shut-eye.", she winked.

Within an hour, the ship was back on. Most of the crew that wasn't sick, helped with repairs on the lower decks. EDI personally checked all levels, running diagnostics to ensure her body was not compromised in any way. She wanted to thank Satima for confidently navigating the Normandy through an unknown device of travel.

The hybrid's last location was towards the women's restroom. EDI didn't think much of entering the
space to find her. She heard a gasping sound, followed by violent coughing. EDI looked to find Satima bent over a toilet. She heard the droid's footsteps, quickly looking up while wiping her mouth. There was blood smeared across the back of her hand. "What are you doing here?", Satima demanded.

"I came to thank you for getting us through the singularity safely.", EDI replied. Observing the situation.

"How did you get in? Hacking?", Satima accused.

"No. It was not locked.", she answered.

Satima shook her head, realizing she forgot to lock the door. She stood, leaning off the toilet, and walked to the sink to wash her hands. "I'm glad I was able to fly the Normandy through it, as well. Joker really helped. I'm also glad he's not mad at me anymore.", she chuckled lightly.

Splashing cool water on her face, Satima turned to EDI. The droid woman stared away. "My scans indicate your condition with the virus has gotten worse. How do you feel?"

Satima smirked. "I'm fine. Just got a little sick."

EDI cocked her head. "You should see Chockwas. At least tell Shepard how it is progressing."

Satima started to walk out, "I'll tell her when it matters. Come on. People will start looking for us."

On the deck, Shepard waited for any transmissions from the sentarians. She didn't know what part of their space they had traveled to. EDI resumed her seat next to Joker, scanning the area for any comms or ship emissions.

Ronin looked for Satima, finding her back in the medbay. She had taken another dose of fever reducers. This time the max amount. Morgan shook violently from watched Satima worry over the bio-tech. Ronin stepped up to her as she turned to him briefly.

"This is my fault. She didn't deserve this.", Satima shook her head, upset.

Ronin observed her ill appearance, "Neither do you.", he remarked.

They both walked into the core room, the door closing behind them. "Well, we're here now. It won't be long before we're on Lithera. I'm sure Memtrix is gonna be pissed about what I did."

"Maybe she'll ease up when she sees Shepard?", Ronin commented.

Satima laughed, "Maybe."

Standing in silence, Ronin checked the lit panels of the core room. "I didn't want to bring this up, considering the situation and your... condition. But, when you asked me if I was upset, back on the citadel-about you leaving. I wasn't exactly telling the truth."

Satima gazed at him, before lowering her eyes. "I figured that. You were in such a hurry to see me leave, so I didn't press it."

Ronin leaned on the rail in front of the panel. "I pushed you out, once I knew you were okay.", he faced the hull wall. "Spirits, seeing you again made me confused."

"Confused about what?", she asked.
Ronin glanced to her, "About where we stood. You made it clear you didn't want to stay with me. Even more clear how you felt. I tried to make sense of it, but I couldn't."

Satima averted her gaze, "I was scared, Ronin. Trying to understand myself. You don't know the whole story.", she dismissed.

"Try me. Satima, I've seen how you care for others around you. Everyone makes mistakes, even in battle. You were just trying to help your friends.", he remarked.

The memory of Gern outside the warship's hatch, surrounded by the infected rachni forced her to shudder. She watched him die after he tried to stop her. Satima made a decision, and she must live with it.

"No. I ran away from my responsibilities.", she admitted. "I felt ashamed and tried to make things right, once I got back. I only made them worse.", Satima lowered her gaze. "All of this is my fault.", she said, pained.

Ronin leaned off the rail, stepping closer to her. "Did you unleash the virus?", he asked.

Satima stared at him, puzzled. "No."

"Did you free the rachni?", he asked, again.

"No, I ...", she tried answering.

Ronin cocked his head, "Then this isn't your fault. You didn't run away from your responsibilities. You retreated for help. No one is perfect, Satima. I don't expect you to be. And I believe neither does Garrus or Shepard. Stop putting yourself down, and get back to rescuing this damn galaxy.", he ordered with a smile.

Satima gazed off in a grin, blushing. "You always this pushy?", she asked.

Ronin chuckled, "You always this stubborn?"

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CIC

Shepard paced up and down the bridge. Most of her crew were okay, except for the critically ill. Satima managed to fly them through the gate in one piece. At least Joker has stopped complaining about it, for now.

"Captain, a transmission is being sent to us.", EDI alerted.

Shepard nodded for EDI to open it.

"Unknown vessel. You have entered through a warp gate. Please do not be alarmed.

Shepard opened the comms,"We know. We're looking for High-Commander Memtrix Vael. This is the Normandy, with Captain Shepard speaking."

Silence.

"Normandy. Welcome to our part of the galaxy. We'll lead you to our home world."

A massive sentarian ship came into view around a small purple planet. Joker whistled. "Satima flew one of those?", he asked.
Shepard raised a brow, giving him a look. "Yup."

Joker watched in awe, "I was a jerk.", he admitted.

"Yeah, you were.", Shepard replied, patting him on the shoulder a little hard.

"Ow, ow. Watch the delicate bones!", he pleaded.

The Normandy navigated behind the sentarian vessel. Lithera came into view, as Satima stood in the cockpit, anxious. Part of the planets green atmosphere was covered in ashen gray. Fires could be seen in patches from the surface. "Lithera burns.", Satima spoke in despair.

"Once we're down there, we'll find out what's going on.", Shepard assured.

As the Normandy was flown through the jungle atmosphere, a hazy fog covered most of the tree canopies. Ahead, the silver spires and towering buildings of the sentarians, lost their gleam in the overcast sky. Not from weather, but from scorched terrain.

Massive kinetic shielding in blue and white, kept the assaulting rachni from breaching the city. Again.

They docked at the Seat of Archon. "Half of the planet is evacuated. So many sick... so many dead.", Satima informed, pointing to the large frigate ships in the distance. They listened to a comm array from the Normandy's channel, with Sentarian language echoing on the deck.

"We'll do all we can to help.", Shepard assured her.

Once docked, Satima and Ronin stepped out first. Shepard and team followed. Javik tagged along, against Shepard's orders. The team stared at the tall spires of the city below, glimpsing the colored banners across the docking platform flapping in the harsh wind.

A cold hush surrounded them. Satima led them to the council hall, where many sentarians stood fascinated by this alien arrival.

"Humans! Here!", one spoke.

"Look, Telani. A prothean! We must speak with him.", another blurted.

Javik stared in personal admiration. The ancients stood before him, all captivated by his presence as he is with theirs. The tall, slender jade-skinned sentarians that long ago explored a young galaxy, wanted to speak with him?! Javik smiled to himself. Telani, a raven-haired female in violet colored raiment, approached him.

"How is it a prothean has ventured to Lithera? You must be thousands upon thousands of years old?", she asked, blinking her deep brown eyes to him.

Javik bowed respectfully, "I am over fifty-thousand years old. I was brought here, by the hybrid who has lived among your people."

Telani changed her stance from an open curiosity to that of suspicion. "You mean the reaper-born? Yes, I have heard of her. The Seat of Archon wished to use her knowledge against this horrific plague. There was no help, only... jec vin te, incompetence."

"Incompetence?", Javik wondered.

Telani shrugged, watching Satima and the others in the hall, "All was not clear. She became a
compromised danger and then her friends—the Archon's very daughters, stopped her incarceration. Now she is back. There will be much to answer for."

Satima stopped in front of a clearing of sentarian soldiers, proudly wearing their black armor, adorned in layers of different protection. Likely in defense against the rachni.

High-Commander Memtrix spoke in her language to them, glancing over data of their current position in the fight to stop the infected. She looked up to Satima. Her crystal eyes narrowed in anger. "Shas no gani la ten viv.", she glared dangerously.

Shepard figured Memtrix was quite angry with her daughter. You don't leave your post, abandon your duties—on a wild hunch. She watched carefully, hoping Satima could smooth things over. Satima stepped forward apologetically, "Men tom. Vein tesh mi tai."

Memtrix nodded to a soldier who led half of her own team out. The hall had gotten less crowded suddenly. Memtrix paced, gesturing in anger. "Shen tar! Kesh no lo-pitar! En vroud!"

That sounded angry, with an accented flare. Shepard stood firm behind her child as both women's voices had gotten deeper in the sentarian tone. Satima sounded older, more in command of her responses. While Memtrix's cultural pitch filled the hall with an ancient authority.

Satima glared, "Ya, ne vi."

She turned to Shepard and the rest of the team, who stared confused. Satima shook her head. "Gen tar... I didn't want to drag this out. Memtrix, you need help. I know Arkasia is stuck on that moon base, surrounded by the infected. Shepard is well versed in warfare. As well as her crew!"

"You will address me as High-Commander! Do not think your time away from Lithera has erased your duties here!", Memtrix warned.

Satima stood at attention, reluctantly. She stared ahead, while Memtrix walked around her. "You sought a mother's help like a lost child. I thought the implant was helping you?"

"It is. Was... that doesn't matter now! High-Commander...", she stared. "People are sick in the origin galaxy. We have to work with Shepard to free Arkasia and stop Shiala."

Memtrix sighed in disappointment, looking at Shepard. "Thank you, Shepard, for attempting to help. But, this is something we must fix ourselves.", she glared at Satima. "No outsiders."

Satima watched Memtrix walk off, balling her hands into fists. "Outsiders?", she raised her voice. "You fought alongside Shepard against Callon when he lost his mind and tried to destroy the citadel!"

Memtrix looked away, "That was a different circumstance, Satima. This is our own war now. We must not risk the ancient tur ne ga-to be revealed!"

"You think the truth matters anymore?!", Satima asked in irritation. "Your people are dying out there, all because of foolish endeavor!", she turned to Shepard. "You want to know the truth?"

Memtrix stopped, facing Satima with a warning stare. "By Khin Sha, Satima..."

Satima glanced to her, then back to Shepard. "The keepers on the citadel... they ARE the sentarians. When the reapers made their first harvests, the sentarians tried to flee. Some of them were captured."

She turned to Javik, "Just like the collectors used to be prothean, the keepers used to be sentarian.
"That's the reason why they came after me and Reaper." Her gaze darting back to Shepard, "Why they wanted hive and the Directive destroyed. Vengeance. Those hive fragments had sensitive information regarding that truth. The first De-evolutionized civilization."

Memtrix looked at Satima in disbelief. "You are a traitor! You have no right!"

"Call me what you want. I'm tired of the secrets.", Satima responded against her better judgement. "I came back to help you, to help Arkasia. I brought the infection with me, and people are dying. Memtrix, you can throw me off this planet when this is over.", she offered. "But, please... let Shepard help us stop Shiala and the infected rachni. Before they spread."

Satima stared with a pleading expression, hoping Memtrix will change her mind.

Memtrix gazed away, her arms now akimbo. "You always have compelling arguments. No one really listens until it's too late..."

Satima sighed, "I apologize for my insubordinate attitude. I didn't mean to undermine your command."

Shepard observed Satima's different behavior. She couldn't deny there was something about the sentarians that made her daughter grow. She glanced to Garrus, who equally watched surprised and pleased with his daughter.

"We need to assault the moon base. It's overrun, but we can use remaining rifters to quickly grab my sister and her cure.", Memtrix informed.

Satima looked up in shock, "There's a cure now?"

"Yes.", Memtrix replied. "And the hive queen will do anything to destroy it."

"Hive Queen?", Shepard repeated, confused.

"That's what she's calling herself. Shiala has certain abilities that alter the battle field.", Memtrix informed.

"Like what?", Ashley asked, curious.

"She's an asari, and can control you like the reapers did. The creatures follow command in her thrall, as well as anyone infected who lives long enough.", Memtrix answered.

"Then we'll need a plan to block her from the labs Arkasia's in. Maybe a careful distraction?", Satima spoke.

"How can we provide this distraction?", Memtrix countered.

Shepard nodded, stepping forward. "We can. You know more about your own technology, giving you the advantage to grab and run. We'll use the Normandy for a quick skirmish, causing her to focus on us."

Memtrix glanced off deep in thought, before returning her gaze to the Normandy team. "It's a good enough plan to execute, I just hope it will work. We're running out of ideas, ourselves."

"That's why we're here at Satima's behest. Along with other reasons.", Shepard eyed Satima.

"Then we'll meet on your ship and discuss the whole plan.", Memtrix announced.
Satima turned to Shepard, "Be cautious. Shiala is powerful."

Shepard gave her a confident glance. "We will."

Outside on the docking platform, Satima caught Ronin gazing about the city view. Grey skies overhead prevented the sun from showing the metropolis's true beauty. "I heard Memtrix let you off the hook, so to speak.", he began.

Satima stepped next to him, looking below to the soldier covered streets. "She's still pretty upset with me. I gave her every reason to be, though."

Ronin glanced to her. "You have a habit of undermining authority?"

She smirked, "Not like a Shepard who upholds authority, or a Vakarian who enforces it." Satima gazed off, "I'm nothing like them. I wish I could be. To make them proud."

He turned to her, "You shouldn't be like them at all."

"What? Why?", she asked, upset.

"It's more important to be yourself. There's nothing wrong with that.", he gestured to the Normandy and the Archon's building. "So, you brought a dangerous plague to the entire galaxy from here? At least you took responsibility for it. You also apologized publicly for your actions and resumed your duties to these people."

She didn't think of it that way. "No one trusts me, Ronin. They see only the actions of Reaper."

Ronin sighed, wishing he had pockets to put his taloned-hands in. He led her back to the building, "Trust is hard to prove. It's starts with a promise, then physically acting on it. If you let one person down, you're suddenly a villain.", he smirked. "Trust me, I know this from experience."

Satima glanced to him, but continued to listen.

"You're a good person, Satima. Just... scared.", he finished.

She stopped him with a hand to his arm, quickly pulling it back nervously. Satima lowered her eyes as he gazed towards her. "And do you?", she asked.

"Do I what?", he wondered, watching her timid expression.

"Trust me?", she spoke, already afraid of his answer.

Ronin averted his gaze. "Not with my heart, Satima.", he answered, feeling a tinge of guilt in his chest.

Satima looked away, "I understand." She quickly walked back inside the building, leaving Ronin alone on the docks.

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Normandy
War Room

Memtrix observed the holo display. A different technology, but efficient in its design. She met a few of Shepard's crew. Most of them were coughing, running fevers. Kha ve. She stood beside a turian male who was revealed to be the infamous Ronin.

The one Satima ran from. Arkasia would be grilling her for questions. Shepard, along with her
current strike team, walked into the room. "Alright, people. Let's get a real sense of what's going on.", she spoke.

Satima looked at Memtrix, who began while the crew settled around the holo display of the moon base. "No doubt, Satima has relayed to you the lab incident. An infection had broken out from a hive fragment. Bio-contamination was issued and our people transported to sanitation hubs. My father... Head Archon-ordered several teams to contain the situation, scrubbing the labs and seeing our people medically treated. It only got worse when we arrived."

She unsettled, changing stances to reach out and press an icon for a new display. "Here in the labs, Arkasia opened a large fragment containing a cell. We thought there were no survivors. Turns out we were wrong. An asari woman had survived in that cell. Who knows for how long. She revealed herself to be Shiala, a scientist that worked for hive. My sister tried to help her."

Satima continued. "She found several containment crates with red and black eggs from hive. Opened them. Shiala released the rachni. They became infected and she somehow controlled them to attack. Those who have been infected either die, or become a thrall husk."

Ashley started to question. "How did you get a hold of hive station fragments?"

Memtrix looked at Satima, then answered. "Hive was destroyed. Its station torn asunder from the inside, debris crashing into the atmosphere of a nearby planet."

"And did your people destroy this station?", Javik asked.

Satima sighed, loudly. "I did."

Everyone looked around. Shepard nodded, understanding the situation. "Okay. Shiala is from my time. Earlier, before the Directive. She was sacrificed from Saren to the Thorian creature on Feros, in an attempt to gain information on the conduit. I'm not sure what happened in your time to change her, Satima. But I'm completely sure she had no hazardous side effects from the Thorian other than being green."

Satima stared at her, "That's her! She's green alright."

Memtrix folded her arms with a cross look, "An ugly shade, if you ask me."

Some of them snickered, noting that sentarians have a paler shade of green skin tone. Satima wiped cold sweat from her forehead. Ronin noticed this. "Are you okay?", he asked.

"Yeah.", she replied.

Shepard continued, unknowing of the issue behind her. "The Thorian couldn't command others without releasing spores into the air. It was a plant-like creature. Shiala can't do that, can she? She must be able to control others differently. You said it was like reapers? Can an asari be that powerful?"

"Don't know, Captain. Wish we had Liara here.", James commented.

"T'Soni has in depth knowledge of her own people's abilities.", Javik informed.

Memtrix spoke, "We can bring her here, if needed. I can send one of my smaller vessels through a warp gate. Do you think she'll be willing? Risking infection?"

Shepard nodded, "If I ask her... maybe.", she turned to the crew. "We need help to stop Shiala. If
we're going to get Liara, then it'll have to be me. She won't trust other sentarians or anyone else with this request. Ash... Garrus. You're both in charge. I need you to help prepare the ship for the skirmish."

She turned to Memtrix, "How long will it take to get there and back?"

"Four days. One to arrive, another to reach your asari. Then another to journey back before arriving at the moon base.", she answered.

"Ok.", Shepard looked to Satima. "Are you going to be alright?"

"I'll keep an eye out on the sick crew. I'm sure there is some serum left to help them hold on longer.", Satima replied.

On the CIC, Satima watched Shepard leave in the small vessel through a rift. It was gone in a blink. Another four days to wait, while Satima's chance at surviving the infection became slim. No amount of medicine was helping anymore.

It seemed futile to even try. Morgan was unresponsive. Her face turning a slight shade of pale blue. No matter what the doctor did, she couldn't breathe. Chockwas gave the human woman two days before she turned or died.

Hopelessness crept darkly on the ship. Ashley started to have the same problems as Satima, but in the earlier stages. It didn't stop her from commanding and looking after the crew. But the second day, she couldn't stop shaking. Satima suggested rest. Ashley commed Garrus to take over, and he agreed with no hesitation. While she rested in the medbay, Chockwas held back a fever herself, making notes of the infection.

She observed the crew, taking in their symptoms alongside Satima's account. One peculiar issue stood. Most the crew were human, not counting Garrus, Ronin and Javik. Dextro amino species, also not counting Javik's possible amino connections. She wasn't familiarized with prothean physiology, yet. According to her data, they weren't getting sick.

Further studying revealed this. Chockwas brought up Satima's scans. The hybrid is more than half human, with a 76.2 to 23.8 percentage in ratio of her DNA. That twenty-three percent wasn't enough to stop the infection, but it certainly helped keep it from progressing too quickly. She could have been infected long before leaving the sentarian's system.

With this new find, she needs to contact Shepard. Unfortunately, she had left the day before to retrieve Liara. Another levo species susceptible to the virus. Ashley rested peacefully on the cot, when James entered the medbay. He held a book in his large hand and a smile to her. "Hey, bella. Looking a little better with rest, I see."

Ashley smirked, "What's that in your hand, James?"

He held it up, "Oh, this? It's nothing. Just some reading material." James carefully took her hand, opening it to set the book in place.

Ashley looked at it to see the name on the cover. "Asari poetry?", she grinned. "How thoughtful of you, James.", Ashley leaned out, hesitated, worried of spreading the infection to him.

"It's alright, bella.", he smiled again, taking her hand and kissing it. "I gotta get back to it. Hope the reading helps you relax."

She watched him leave and opened the book. Feeling eager to get the cure, and rekindle their
relationship, since they went their separate ways in duty months before. Chockwas didn't want to disturb Ashley over the viral data. She resolved to alert Garrus instead. Who is currently in command.

He walked on the deck of the CIC, checking the sick human crew. Two of them he had to relieve. They couldn't stand anymore, fatigued from the fevers. Memrix promised to return within so many hours with serum. There was enough to help the current crew continue their duties.

Garrus had just stepped beside the Normandy's holo display when Chockwas came out of the elevator. She also looked ill. Not a good thing, either.

"Garrus. I need to speak with you, it's urgent.", she insisted.

He obliged, following her to the corner of the bridge. She handed him a data pad. "I discovered something about the virus. It only infects those with levo amino DNA."

Garrus stared at her in surprise, "Really?"

She nodded, "Yes. Dextro species, like yourself are safe. As long as the virus doesn't mutate, that is."

"What about Satima?", he asked in uncertainty.

"She's more human, although her turian side has kept her alive this long. I think, and I say this with extreme caution, but I think she can last a little longer without the serum. This, however...", she informed cautiously," is entirely up to you. Ashley is unable to make the full decision, currently. You are in command. I'm sorry to say, but you must put the lives of this ship above your daughter's.", Chockwas implored.

Garrus stared in frustration, taking a step back to her insistence. "That's not fair, doctor. You can't ask me that."

"I know, my dear. I know.", she apologized. "I'll see if I can make a synthetic version that can help her hold on a little longer. I hope her turian side can fight the infection in the meantime."

Satima stood behind them, with Garrus looking up to her. The data pad held tightly in his hand. Chockwas turned around, cautioned to the girl's response.

"The crew should come first.", Satima agreed. "Chockwas is right. I'll be okay.", she smiled weakly.

Garrus nodded, as Chockwas began to leave. "Your mother will be proud of you.", she said to Satima.

Satima returned a smile, watching the doctor leave. She then gave Garrus a concerned look, following Chockwas.

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Lithera
Seat of Archon
Archives Chamber

Javik left the Normandy to study the sentarian language with fascination. This was worth the dangerous journey. In the presence of the ancients and their history, he learned all he could of their retreat from the reapers. When the first harvest began, how their masters-the leviathans, advised them to flee the galaxy.
Standing in the round expanse, Javik paid no attention to the stone columns or colorful banners of an age long past. History was more important than aesthetic viewing.

Data panels faced him imitating parchment shelves his own people once had before their great fall. He viewed tall, expertly built tech with horizontal slots, eight to each row. When his presence approached them, the slots would light up in blue. Activating one turned the color white. He eagerly read the last millennium, coming upon a familiar story that he-himself, had been awoken into.

Many accounts of sentarian soldiers, doctors and leaders led to the conclusion that the origin galaxy was lost. It was only thousands of years later, that the new leadership-The Seat of Archon, renewed their resolve when the moon base was first assaulted.

It speaks of Reaper. The hybrid's mother and Shepard's alternate. She slaughtered hundreds in the name of the Directive. Prompting the sentrians to seek vengeance. Javik wondered. Was this truly a blind attempt to harm the ancients? Or was this a carefully laid assault by Reaper? To start a series of events that would lead her home?

In the meantime, the High-Commander procured a crate of remaining serum for the Normandy. Generous, considering he would have his own people come first. If and when, the Normandy and its crew were successful in stopping the infected. Then he would let the cure... not the serum, be administered to the remaining humans. What few will survive.

Day two
Citadel

The scout ship appeared in citadel space, hastily using a relay to the station. Shepard used their comms to find Liara. She knew if she sent out a desperate message, that the "shadow broker" would come looking. Sure enough, Liara showed up on a procured frigate, outside the citadel itself.

With so much exposure to the infection, Shepard didn't want to take any chances on the station. Herself finding out about a set of small fevers, hours ago, she ignored them for now, hoping they'll get back to Lithera soon.

Liara docked alongside the scout ship, surprised at how fast Shepard handled the infection. Or so she assumed. Then again, why use a sentarian vessel? Unless the Normandy was destroyed using a spatial rift! Liara stepped it up to the bridge, where she spotted Shepard waiting.

"Oh, thank the goddess! Shepard, you're okay?", she nearly shouted.

Shepard laughed, "Relax, Liara! I'm fine."

The broker walked fast to her, dressed in asari attire. "And the Normandy?!", Liara asked, alarmed. Shepard raised a hand in calm. "In one piece. Satima got us through safely."

Liara let out a sigh of relief, "Goddess." She started to walk around. "I got your message. What's going on currently?"

"We made it to Lithera-the sentarians home world. It's bad, Liara. There's an infection, a bio-weapon. They've been battling rachni that are controlled by an asari."

Liara gave her a confused look, "Controlled by an asari? Rachni? Did I hear you correctly?"

Shepard crossed her arms, "You did. This asari is someone we've met on Feros. Shiala. Remember the Thorian? Only this Shiala is from Satima's time. The sentarians brought her through, along with
the rachni and the infection. It's a mess, I'll admit."

Liara stopped pacing, glancing to other sentarians, then back to Shepard. "Why are you here, then?"

"This alternate Shiala is powerful. We don't know much about how powerful an asari can get, Liara. We need to cut her control over the rachni and save Arkasia. She's got the cure.", Shepard informed.

"And you need me to help with defeating her, because I am an asari?", Liara stated.

Shepard stared at her. "What are friends for?"

Liara sighed loudly in irritation. She put her hand to her now throbbing forehead. "Alright, Shepard... I'll go back with you."

Liara thought to herself. Why not ask a more powerful asari, like Samara? A justicar of her skill could easily stop this Shiala. But Shepard came to her, instead. Was there a more personal reason to not contact Samara?

Normandy

Satima stopped eating, couldn't sleep. All the while Garrus and Ashley worked with Memtrix on the plan of distraction. Ronin gave his input, opting to lead a skirmish along the outside of the base to force the infected rachni's attention on them. Ashley and Garrus would help Shepard "knock on the door". Memtrix's stalkers will infiltrate the labs, finding Arkasia and the cure.

It sounded like a good plan. Except, Satima couldn't join. She started to get irritable, shouting to crew members to get out of her way. Working unceasingly on various tasks on the ship. The worse part were the nightmares. Chockwas could hear the hybrid's cries and groans from fighting an invisible force in her room.

More than once she's called Garrus to aid the poor girl, but it never resolved anything.

Memtrix had returned from the surface, eagerly awaiting Shepard's arrival with the rest of the crew. She started to wander around for Satima, who had not come to the bridge to look for her mother's approach. Strange. On the engineering deck, she found Satima ripping hull panels in the bottom room.

Satima grunted in exhaustion, using tools and sometimes her bare hands to pull wires out of a hole in the wall. Mumbling to herself. Memtrix approached. "Satima? What are you doing to Shepard's ship?"

She smirked loudly, acting manic. "I'm trying to fix shit, okay!"

"Fix what?", Memtrix asked, worried.

Satima ripped wires, as sparks stung her fingers. "Shit!", she cursed. "There's these little bugs that keep eating the ship. I have to stop them.", she replied. "EDI depends on me to stop them!
"

Ronin had just walked in, when he heard Satima's rant. Memtrix looked at him in caution. "She has been infected?, she tried to whisper. Noticing the manic behavior and pale appearance.

He nodded, glancing to Satima. "Hey, maybe we should take this to EDI? See what she has to say about those bugs." Ronin tried to distract her by leaning closer. "You know, Shepard will be here soon."
Satima took a tool and faced them, surprised. "You think I'm crazy, don't you? Don't you see those little bastards crawling all over?"

Memtrix took a step forward. "My friend. You are not well. It would pain Arkasia to see you like this. Please, come with me to the medbay. We can help you."

Satima scoffed, "Oh, now I'm your friend?" She shook her head, "No thanks. I'll stay here and keep EDI free of bugs." She resumed her destruction of Normandy property.

Ronin objected, "Satima..."

She turned to him. "Leave me alone!" Satima stopped herself, holding the tool and suddenly realizing the hole in the wall. "Who did this?", she asked, upset.

"You did.", Ronin answered.

Satima stared, noticing the bugs were gone and that she had started to lose her mind. "It's too late.", she spoke, distressed.

"Not if Arkasia can stop it. We have the cure, don't worry.", Memtrix assured.

With their help, Satima made it to the medbay. They stopped short to see Chockwas cover a dead Morgan. "Spirits.", Ronin spoke. Satima stared, shocked.

Joker's voice came on through comms."The Captain is back with Liara. She's heading your way, Doctor."

"Thank you, Joker.", Chockwas replied.

Within minutes, Shepard had come through with Liara from the elevator after docking. They were walking fast to Satima and the rest. "We made it. I hope in time.", she stated.

"Not for her, unfortunately.", Memtrix gestured to the human in medbay. "Her infection had spread too quickly. It has been seen in others as well, on Lithera. My sister had informed me that the rapid speed of the virus can cause the body to shut down, with the spores destroying organic tissue, instead of mutating it."

They all lowered their gazes, saddened and disturbed. Chockwas stood over the body. "Ms Reeves died minutes ago.", she informed solemnly. "I did all I could to make her passing easier."

Satima backed away, slowly. Standing behind everyone. This is not happening? It can't!

Liara looked away. "Goddess."

Shepard contorted her face in determination. "We need to figure out how to stop Shiala and cure this infection. Memtrix, I'm ready when you are.", she stated.

"Indeed.", Memtrix replied. "My people are ready for one last try."

Satima wavered, her fever spiking high. She could hear someone whisper in the room. Then the cold sweat stopped, hearing her heart beating faster and harder, feeling pressure inside her chest. All she could hear is her labored breathing, while everyone stood talking.

Then it hit. Satima couldn't breathe! She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out. Not even a gasp. Their voices becoming muffled, as she closed her eyes to the loss of oxygen, falling to the floor unconscious. They heard the thud of a body hitting the floor.
"Satima!", Shepard shouted.

Ronin turned to Satima, kneeling to her. He grabbed her hand, "Satima… can you hear me?" She gave no response.

Chockwas scanned her, "I need to help her now!"

Ronin immediately picked Satima up, taking her to the opposite examination table. Chockwas examined the hybrid. "The tissues in her lungs are not getting enough oxygen. The spores are multiplying too fast. She'll die of asphyxiations., she stuttered, already flustered as to how to save Shepard's child.

Satima's lips were turning blue.

"Then stop it!", Shepard demanded.

Chockwas stopped scanning, staring at Shepard. "I can't!", she grabbed Shepard's arms, pleading the only logical way, she could. "Unless there's a cure... or something to stop this. There's nothing I can do." This pained the good doctor. Helpless against the virus that killed so brutally.

And insisting Garrus give the serum to the crew, instead of administering it to Satima. "I... I can't save her, Charlotte. I'm so sorry."

Shepard shook her head. "You've saved me, before! Why can't you think of something?!", she argued, her eyes already watery and agitated by her own fever. She stared at the doctor, "I know you're sick. We all are. But this is my daughter, Karen. I can't lose her, not now. Please, you're the only one on this ship with medical training." Her voice shaky, "I wouldn't know what to do."

Chockwas sighed, realizing the foolish panicking she displayed. "Oh, Charlotte. Forgive me.", she looked back at Satima. "I'm going to prepare a surgery and force air into her lungs. You go, and stop this from spreading."

Memtrix watched in panic, looking to Shepard. "There's no time! We must strike the labs now, get my sister and the cure. It's Satima's only chance!"

"You have very little time.", Chockwas warned. "I can give her oxygen, but if her lungs fill completely up, there's nothing left I can do."

Shepard didn't want to leave, afraid her daughter would die alone. Garrus rushed inside, standing next to her. He glared to Chockwas. "You said she would be fine without the serum!", he nearly shouted.

Shepard glanced up to Ronin, who didn't lose his gaze on Satima. "Stay behind and be here for her. In case we don't return."

He looked up to Shepard, knowingly understanding the situation. "That cure is Satima's only chance. I can't stay here and give up, knowing there's something I can do.", he stated. "I can't sit here and watch her fade, doing nothing."

She looked back on Satima, who could barely breathe. Shepard leaned over her daughter, fearful of this plague. Liara stood over them. "Half of your crew is dying, and the rest nearly too sick to help. We need every able-bodied person on this mission. Getting the cure first is priority. Shepard, she'll die too, if we don't hurry now."

Shepard glanced to Liara. She spoke the truth. "Ronin, get your gear ready.", she ordered without
staring. "We're assaulting the base now."

Chapter End Notes

:)
Assault on the Moon Base

Chapter Summary

Shepard pushes her sick crew to help rescue Arkasia and retrieve the cure. Satima uses a new ability that has frightening consequences. A victory is near, but Garrus faces a challenge. Can he become the father, Satima yearns for? Or is he following a fools heart, and attempting a hopeless mistake?

Chapter Notes

Self harm trigger. Thanks for reading. :)

Vintae Moon Base

The labs were built in the middle of the base. An onyx structure that angled high into the moon’s open starry sky. Sentarian descriptions were etched in white over the front of the entrance. The side of the building had long connected highways that led into the moon's surface to underground tunnels.

Signal array wires were wrapped tightly around tall thin spires that had been forced into a concrete platform. Massive solid windows gave a view into the building.

Lights were still functioning and several floors looked empty. Systems alerts had been echoing through the base for months. The VI sounded corroded, with a stuttering sentence replaying over and over their comms.

Ronin and James hopped off the shuttle to the entrance of the base. Rachni covered the area in droves. An extensive amount of sickly fungal growth covered the door and edges of the structure. The atmosphere had spore-like material floating about. "What the hell is this?", James demanded.

Ronin scanned it quickly, wanting to know his surroundings. "Something dangerous. Let's keep our helmets on once we reach the interior of the base. Push forward. We only need to get their attention and stay alive."

"Staying alive is my specialty.", James jested.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the base. Ashley, Garrus and Shepard stood in front of the docking doors. Several rachni guarded the area. "Of course, they wouldn't make it easy.", Ashley complained, coughing.

Shepard touched her shoulder, "You okay, Ash?"

"I'm fine.", she replied. "Ready to get that cure."

They proceeded with caution, taking cover behind a terrain rover. Ashley looked over to Shepard, "I'm sorry about Satima. I hope we can get the cure in time to save her."
"Thanks, Ash. Me too.", Shepard answered, worried.

Up ahead, the rachni started to react to noise from far off. That must be James and Ronin assaulting the front. They began to skitter off, leaving the docks open. "Come on!", Shepard whispered loudly.

Garrus began hastily working on the dock doors, while the two women watched his back. Within a minute, the doors let them inside. Shepard took point, looking out for anything sinister. Rachni sinister. "The labs should be ahead.", she informed.

Memtrix and her stalkers appeared at the labs hall. Arkasia's was at the very end. She passed by many dead sentarian bodies. That Shiala will pay. "You two, keep watch. The rest follow me.", she ordered.

At the last door, Memtrix stood by as her own tech started to work on the panel. She commed Arkasia. "Sister. Are you still alive?"

Static filled the comms, that became cleared. "Mem! Kin sha. I'm glad to hear your voice. We're down to three of us. The rachni are finding weaknesses in the lab."

"Just hold on, Sister. We're coming through. The Shepard is here, helping us.", Memtrix informs.

"Shepard! Then that means Satima...", Arkasia began.

"Yes. She's here. Arkasia, her condition has gotten worse. She needs the cure, or she'll die.", Memtrix remarks.

"She's infected? Then hurry up!", Arkasia demands.

Memtrix smirks to herself. The tech finished the panel hack, opening the doors to Arkasia. Suddenly, rachni came through a vent overhead, blocking the path between them.

The two stalkers with Arkasia fought hard, but their over exhausted bodies were no match for the relentless rachni. Arkasia grabs the cure, running around the fray to Memtrix. A rachni stabs her leg, piercing flesh and pulling her back.

Memtrix follows her screams, running on top the rachni and letting loose an arsenal of bullet spray into the bug. It releases Arkasia, screeching at Memtrix before dying in a bloody pulp. She turns to her sister, helping her up, putting Arkasia's arm around her shoulders. "Are you alright?!", she worried.

Arkasia winces, "We need to escape!" The wound causing discomfort. "Without this cure, we're all doomed."

"High-Commander!", a soldier shouts.

More rachni came through the long hallway. Crawling down the corridor in waves. "Open fire! Carve a path to the other side. We must reach the rift platform on level three!"

Helping Arkasia to run, Memtrix and her team fire on the creature's advance. Another of her men went down, with a female getting dragged into a vent. Her team were being slaughtered in front of her, and all she could do was protect her sister. Protect the cure.

By the time, they reached the elevator, only four of her team remained.
They piled in the lift, waiting to emerge in another wave of battle on the third level. The doors slid open. Rachni infection covered the floor and most of their armor. Along with the silver sentarian blood. "Oh, sister.", Arkaisa remarked, upset.

"We're almost to the platform. Let's go.", Memtrix insisted.

Back at the entrance, a heavy onslaught of the rachni pushed Ronin and James further away from the base. "They're getting smart. Leading us out to the valley below.", Ronin pointed out.

Indeed, the valley below housed a massive hive of rachni. James wasn't about to be bug food. "Hell no! I'm not falling down that!" He roared, unleashing his carnage ability on them, forcing the rachni to fall back. Ronin was impressed. "When I get back to the citadel, I'm requesting a really big gun for situations just like this!", he shouted, shooting down stragglers.

James laughed, "You could just throw yourself into it, and beat them down!"

Ronin looked at him, "Because that's a great idea?" He stared ahead to more rachni reaching the surface. A terrain rover sat unused a few feet away.

Minutes later...

James yelled in excitement at the back of the rover, using his rifle as a mini turret against the rachni. Ronin drove right over the bugs. Green goo and black ooze covered the wheels and underbelly of the vehicle. "One way to kill these things quickly!", Ronin said aloud.

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Main Hall
Labs Base

Carefully, Shepard led her team to the hall. This is where Shiala was sighted, along with her thrall rachni horde. Pods of red and black eggs lined the sides of the room. Overturned tables and chairs littered the place. That same decaying smell permeated through their helmets filters. It was disgusting, and nearly too distracting to focus.

Further inside the dark room, a chittering sound echoed. "Captain...", Ashley whispered.

"I know, Rachni are near. Keep an eye out. We're waiting for Memtrix's alert, then taking a look at this hive queen.", Shepard responded.

Garrus stepped cautiously around a table, covered in eggs. "Right out of one of James's horror movies.", he thought aloud.

Ashley quietly smirked, until another noise echoed. Shepard stopped, alerting them to follow. Suddenly the comms came on. It was Memtrix! "Shepard, I have the cure and my sister. There were casualties."

"I'm sorry to hear that, High-Commander.", Shepard consoled.

"They fought bravely. Their memory will live on in the archives. We are approaching the platform. You should finish your distraction quickly.", Memtrix informed.

"Acknowledged.", Shepard replied. She turned to Garrus and Ashley, "Looks like the hive queen is nowhere to be seen. We should back out and collect a little data along the way."

"Sounds like a good idea.", Garrus remarked.
"Why not stay?", an eerie female voice echoed.

Behind them, Shiala stepped out surrounded by infected rachni and a few husk-like sentarians. Their crazed looks gazing at them. She wore a tattered lab suit, covered in grime and black ooze. Her skin, a sickly green color with the stare of coal eyes.

"You look like Reaper, but you couldn't be.", she observed. "I sense nothing from the nanite tech in your system. Clone?", she cocked her head.

Shepard looked beside her, and behind them to see rachni covered all exists. She rested her rifle on her shoulder. "Original.", she revealed.

"Oh. Well, in that case. It will be fun to see you torn to pieces by my children.", Shiala showed a sinister grin.

Shepard's heart skipped, but she regained a balance. A battle-ready stance and resolve in her gaze that alerted her team to fight with confidence. They will survive and escape. "Fire!", she shouted.

Garrus and Ashley opened fire on the rachni. The creatures swarmed the room, crushing some of the egg sacks that covered the tables and floor. Shiala laughed. "It's futile. My children are many, and you are too few."

"We'll see about that!", Shepard roared.

She led them to stand on top of tables, never backing down. The minutes passed with their thermal clips getting low. She didn't want to give in. Come on, Memtrix!

"Shepard. We have left the base, and your other crew has been picked up as well. You need to escape, now!", Memtrix's voice blared over comms.

"Busy being ambushed!", Ashley yelled.

"Shen nac... I'll find your location! Stay alive, we're coming!", Memtrix shouted, worried.

Droves of the rachni horde piled in through all exits, being gunned down in groups. Their bodies providing a small barricade against the waves. Eight minutes passed. "Shepard! I'm running out of ammo!", Ashley worried aloud.

Shiala mocked and laughed at them. Shepard turned to Garrus, he gave her a hopeless stare. Coming all this way, surviving the reapers... only to be cut down by the Directive. She faced the hive queen. Shepard could make a run for it, endure the pain of the rachni attacks and jam her omni-blade into Shiala's chest.

Something Satima would attempt, to save them all. Something a Shepard would do.

Resolved to save Garrus and Ashley, Shepard jumps down off the table, running towards Shiala. Omni-blade primed for the kill. "Shepard!", Garrus yells.

Suddenly mid path to the hive queen, among rachni... a rift opens. The room comes to a halt. Satima stands in the middle of them all, staring downward with her face overshadowed. Standing unsteadily, breathing hard. Shiala stares. "What is this?", she complains.

The girl moves forward, spitting blood to the side, carrying a crimson grin. When a rachni tries to lunge towards her, she lifts her hand and a bright red flash sends it backwards. Shiala's sure gaze turns into an expression of fascination. "So, you're back.", she states. "I've been waiting for you to
Satima lifts her head, glaring at Shiala with a wild gaze "Well... here I am!", she challenges.

Shiala walks forward, a dark biotic pulse coming from her. "You will give me what I want!"

Shepard steps back, falling into place with her team as they observe this new development. Satima staggers, but attempts to walk to the hive queen. "What is it that you want?"

"You're power.", Shiala grinned. "I will feed on it, and become stronger. Return to my galaxy and satiate my hunger.", she glares to them. "Then, establish my own Directive!"

Satima stops, giving a smirk. She points to her implant, tapping away to the scar. "You want what's in here?" She leans forward with a wicked grin. "Come and get it."

"Satima, no!", Shepard warns.

Memtrix suddenly appears with more stalkers, firing on the rachni, keeping Shiala back. She stares at Satima in shock, noticing the rifter on her arm. Grabbing the Normandy team, Memtrix and Shepard disappeared, with Satima following behind. Shiala screams in defiance.

She will feed, and no one will stand in her way!

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Normandy
Medbay

Satima appears in the mess, falling forward, unable to hold back the urge to cough up blood. Arkasia begged her not to go, but she woke up to hear Memtrix's warning for Shepard in the Medbay. She stopped Chockwas from helping her, preventing the surgery, and ran to a stalker.

Quickly grabbing her rifter, Satima traveled to their location, finding Shepard in the main hall of the base. She has no clue what came over her or how she did it, but whatever that power was-Shiala wants.

Arkasia stood over Satima as she labored to breathe. Her cure in hand, the sentarian engineer and bio-geneticist injected the hybrid. Shepard and Garrus stood by, fearful if the cure would work. "It could take some time. With the DNA of almost every species from your galaxy onboard, I can synthesize a cure for everyone.", she informed.

Chockwas sprinted out of the medbay, and stood to the side, confused but feeling afraid. What is Satima? She was dying, then suddenly she managed to hold back the virus's deadly affects long enough to save Shepard?

Ronin ran out of the elevator to the third deck, finding Satima after he heard about her foolish confrontation with Shiala. He helped her to her feet, leading back to the medbay.

Garrus followed behind, while Shepard stayed in the mess. Watching through the clear windows how her daughter is faring. She paced. What was that power Satima wielded? And where did it come from? Something strange is happening, and Shepard feared the outcome of it.

Hours passed, with the new cure being given to everyone on board. All those that were sick, or near dying, showed signs of recovery within hours. Captain Shepard received the reports from Chockwas, relieved that her crew is saved.
Memtrix stood beside her on the bridge, after leaving the medbay. It seemed the outbreak had finally been reined in.

Now they only need to deal with the rachni and Shiala. Memtrix finished with a comm to her second, when she turned to speak with Shepard. "I thank you for your help. It seems my methods of warfare are not... crazy enough.", she chuckled.

Shepard smirked. "I learned crazy, fighting the reapers."

Memtrix smiled. "Of course." She observed the deck, replaying the conversation her sister had about Satima months before. "Shepard. There's something you need to know about your daughter."

The Captain turned to her. "What is it?"

"She has spoken of her implant, and the reasons behind it, correct?", Memtrix asked. Shepard nodded. The high-commander continued. "Her alter was not the only problem that emerged while she stayed here. Personality changes did not put a blade to my throat."

Shepard stared in disbelief, worried about Satima's actions.

"The Directive made their creation with the intention to harvest the galaxy. She's only following out with the orders that have been given her. Satima was designed to be better than Reaper. She has abilities that have come to light recently. Dangerous abilities. I wanted you to know this, before they get out of hand.", Memtrix explained.

"How would they get out of hand?", Shepard wondered.

"We may need those abilities to stop Shiala. Shepard, your daughter is the only other that can have thralls.", Memtrix informed.

Shepard looked away. "Don't say that. Satima is not a reaper."

Memtrix sighed, "Shepard, accepting what she is will help her control it. Give her a reason to stay away from a dark path." She started to leave, noting Shepard's adamant expression of defiance to her daughter's abilities. As Memtrix stepped through the cockpit door, the captain turned to her with arms crossed, and an upset glare. "Who did she control?"

Memtrix sighed, "Two of my men to help her escape through a rift." She left the captain to disturbing thoughts.

Satima claimed those other sentarians helped her on their own. She claimed a lot of events, that clearly didn't happen the way she explained it. Shepard looked out the cockpit window. Has Satima been lying this whole time?

Normandy

Satima wakes in the medbay, a strong headache pounding in her skull. Sitting up, she turns to see a couple of crew members talking and smiling to each other. Did they get the cure?

"You're awake!", Arkasia stands over the terminal.

Satima smiled. "Guess I am."

Ronin had just entered the room with Garrus, when Arkasia sprinted across, wrapping her arms around Satima."Arkay... your squeezing me!", Satima complained.
Arkasia lets go with a frown. "Good! I hope it hurts!"

Satima rubs her neck, "Arkasia...", she starts.

The sentarian genius throws her arms in the air, livid. "I thought you abandoned us! Memtrix was convinced you fled. I tried to believe that you wouldn't do that. You know how hard it is to create a cure with scary creatures at your door?!"

Satima stared at her embarrassed, as Ronin and Garrus stood to the side. Equally awkward. "I..", she tried.

"I know, I know! "You lived on HIVE". Your advantage over everything.", she complained. "I watched soldiers die for me! So, I could survive and make the cure. It's... I feel so guilty.", Arkasia grieved

Satima hopped off the table. She put her hand on Arkasia's arm. "I understand how that feels. I'm sorry I didn't tell you what I was doing. I stayed on the battlefield for months. It was brutal. We needed help. That's why I went after Shepard."

Arkasia glanced to Satima from her taller height. "Of course, you did. Because that's what soldiers do." She walked past Satima, leaning against the table, lowering her gaze in distress. "I am not a soldier. I'm a scientist. I help people with my knowledge, not with a gun."

"And that knowledge has saved us more times than I can remember.", Satima argued. "You and your sister both carry the sentarians to survival. Without either of you, they would perish against this galaxy.", she stated.

Arkasia smirked, looking at Garrus and Ronin. "You see why she's my friend?" She turned to Satima, "After all that had happened with Callon... your implant, you still trust me?"

Satima folded her arms with an annoyed stare, "Are you kidding me? I wouldn't be here right now, if it wasn't for you."

Arkasia once again hugged Satima, staring ahead in surprise. "Let's go look around! I've never been in the Normandy before! Our people are regarding Shepard as a legend.", she remarked, excitedly.

She dragged Satima out. "That's nice, I guess.", she added. Yelping as the sentarian scientist hastily pulled her across the mess.

Garrus shook his head with a smile. It's nice to see some normalcy for a change. Especially among friends.

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Deck Three

Memtrix wandered to view the memorial wall Captain Shepard erected. Many names decorated the surface. Brave men and women, lost to the will of the reapers. Liara and Memtrix met at that moment. "High-Commander Memtrix? I'm Liara T'Soni.", she introduced.

Memtrix nodded in respect. "Greetings."

"If you are not busy, may we speak in private?", Liara wondered.

Agreeing, Liara led Memtrix down the corridor, with Javik appearing through the elevator. He followed them to the observation room. Inside, book shelves lined the walls. Ashley had been busy in the mess, not currently spending her off hours reading. "So, you are a Sentarian? An ancient pre-civilization?", Liara asked.
Memtrix lowered her gaze with a smile, at the asari's question. "Yes."

Javik began speaking. "They are the keepers, or rather the keepers are them."

Liara stared between them. "Goddess!"

"My people would like to return to the citadel and attempt to connect with our ancestors. Before they leave the station.", Memtrix implied.

"Leave?", Liara said wide eyed. "Is that true?"

The high-commander relaxed her gaze, "We speculate. The only way to find out is to speak to them.", she answered.

Javik interrupted the questions with his worried thoughts. "We must talk of what to do with the hybrid. You say her abilities will stop the asari. What is it you speak of?"

"I speak of her control. There is something hidden in her mind, something she hasn't discovered until now. The implant suppressed it, but it seems it could only keep the issue at bay for a time.", Memtrix replied.

Liara stared, confused. "You say control, like a type of indoctrination. Asari cannot keep that kind of hold over others for long. It's taxing on the mind and body." She informed. "Shiala is only able to, in which I'm guessing, because of whatever the reapers did to her. Double that with the time she spent inside the thorian's thrall."

Memtrix nodded, "Correct. The data from hive spoke as much. The thorian is no more, but the indoctrination remains. My people worry over this. If we can stop Shiala, and completely eradicate those rachni-Satima will need to leave for a while."

"Why is that?", Liara asks.

Memtrix looks at her solemnly, "Because she is a reaper. She did save us... but it is not enough."

"Your people are afraid?", Liara stated.

"Rightly so.", Javik spoke.

Liara shot him a look, returning her gaze to Memtrix."You must tell Shepard this. She'll be happy to have Satima back, I'm sure."

"I believe the Shepard will understand better if this information came from someone she trusts.", Memtrix implied.

Liara nodded.

Memtrix stared into the open view of space, "I hope someday soon, Satima can be free of the Directive and in control of her mind. Returning here to a warmer welcome.", she remarked.

Medbay

Liara caught Shepard heading to see Chockwas for an update on the virus. Before she could go through the door, the broker tapped her arm. "Shepard. I need to speak with you.", she implored.

Puzzled, Shepard stepped away from the door. "All right, Liara. What is it?"

Near the hull wall, they stood to the side quietly discussing what Liara had in mind. "I've spoken to
Memtrix. The High-Commander. She's told me some distressing news about Satima. After Shiala is stopped, they plan to banish her from Lithera."

Shepard stared, shocked. "What?" She glanced down, her eyes darting back and forth to the thoughts inside her mind. "For what reason?", Shepard demanded, looking up again.

"The same reasons from our own galaxy. Only here she's acted on them. Shepard, Memtrix warned me that Satima is in trouble for what she did. You have to take her home, or there might be permanent consequences for her actions.", Liara cautioned.

Gazing away to the mess, Shepard sighed. "The sentarians mean everything to her. Just look at how they've shaped her to be a responsible adult."

Liara touched Shepard's arm, consoling. "She's sick. Not like from the virus, but... from indoctrination."

Shepard understood, personally worried how Satima will react to this news.

Assume Control

The only way to stop Shiala now, is to fight her at her own game. Indoctrination. What a horrible idea. Arkasia had turned off the implant, stopping the restraint that kept Satima's alter at bay. Liara understood what she needed to do... she was just not sure if it would work.

With Shepard, she used her ability to scan the woman's mind, revealing the protheans demise and the cryptic message the beacon left behind.

With Satima, she was to encounter the alter and order it to obey the girl. Teaching Satima how to use an ability of mental counter control, that only asari commanded, would be difficult.

They used the cargo bay for its wide space. If Satima is to use a form of control over Shiala, then she needs to practice on a willing subject. Although, there weren't many who volunteered. In fact, none at all. Javik unwavered against the idea and stepped forward. His people having some stronger will of their own, Javik finds it fascinating that Satima will attempt to read his mind.

Shepard and Garrus stood to the side, with Ashley and Cortez. James had a bad vibe about the whole thing. He opted out of the little experiment. Ronin watched beside the armor table, afraid but curious to what Satima could do.

Liara stood opposite a nervous Satima. Javik walked to the middle of the room where they occupied the center. "We are wasting time, hybrid. Begin your control.", he demanded.

Liara shook her head, "I haven't even read her mind yet. She needs the alter to comply to this-if you'll excuse me- ridiculous notion."

Satima shrugged, "Hey, I'm just as freaked out as you are. Reaper could do this stuff, but I never thought hive would create something so dangerous in me."

Liara placed a gentle hand on the girl's shoulder. "You're going to be alright. Learning to control this could help you in the long run." She looked around the room to everyone, then back to the hybrid. "Okay, Satima. I'm going to reach into your mind. Just relax and don't think about anything for the moment. Imagine a serene mountain or quiet river."

"Oook.", Satima replied, feeling strange.
Liara stood closer, closing her eyes while gesturing Satima to do the same. "Relax, Satima. And embrace eternity."

Her eyes opened to reveal a black stare. Liara probed Satima's mind, while the hybrid remained still. She witnessed horrible experimentations, labs on hive and other atrocities. Javik paced, anxious to what would happen. Shepard nervously wrung her hands, as Garrus stared, worried.

Liara found several more memories of the cruel life Satima had on HIVE. Reaper's training and Archers torture. She watched Jormun die from a grave stab wound, listening to Satima scream. The hybrid swallowed, remembering the details, balling her fists tightly.

"Don't let your emotions cloud you.", Liara cautioned.

Satima took a deep breath. Silent tears fell down her cheeks, as her shaky voice whimpered. Ronin didn't like hearing her make those sounds. Shepard wanted to wrap her arms around Satima and hold her tightly. Telling her it would be okay, and to let the past go.

Garrus felt helpless. How would he be able to comfort her? A hug or a pat on the back? He glanced to Shepard who stared with a motherly gaze.

Liara made it to a red field. Scarlet colored flowers grew between dark grass. The colorless sky had yellow clouds. Where was she? It grew cold.

"...you managed to get here...", a female spoke. Her voice echoed then faded before it finished.

It sounded like Satima, but more menacing.

"I did.", Liara replied, looking around the empty field. "I wanted to speak to you."

Amidst the group, Liara repeated her words out loud. They could only guess to what the other was saying in Satima's mind.

"...about what?"

Liara walked around, "About leaving Satima alone. She needs to stop a powerful asari with the same abilities."

The voice laughed, "She thinks she's powerful? Why not interfere? I could take care of this quickly. Painfully."

Liara stopped, "No. You will do as you are told, fade away and never emerge. Satima is in control. Not you." Liara turned to see Satima stand in front of her. Her eyes red as blood. "You would stop me?"

She had enough. Poor Satima was attacked daily by this reaper thought that tried so desperately to be actualized. Liara walked forward outside the mind, placing her hand on Satima by the neck. Bringing the girl closer to her, touching foreheads. Everyone wondered what method this was that Liara is attempting. Something the asari never revealed before?

It took a lot of mental strength to begin a mind purge on Satima. To stop the other from ever taking over again. Liara wasn't sure if it would work, having only researched this technique in her younger years. A more powerful matriarch could attempt this unflinchingly. She hopes this Savant doesn't catch on to her hesitance.

"I will free her.", she struggled to speak. The intensity of the mental battle causing her to grunt under
its assault. Satima tried to pull away. "You're hurting me!", she shouted with gritted teeth.

Shepard and Garrus made a start, when Javik stopped them. "No.", he raised a hand in caution. "It is the reaper intelligence fooling you."

Fearful, they stood by with Ronin, wondering what was happening to Satima's mind. Liara's eyes remained black. It was so close to being done, but something changed. Satima opened her eyes.

Javik stared at a reaper red gaze. Suddenly Liara staggered, trying to pull back. "Satima?", she spoke, pained. "What... what are you doing?"

Satima grinned devilishly, wrapping her hands on Liara's head, preventing Shepard's friend from escaping her grasp. The pain made her shout in agony, as Satima attempted the same mind purge. Javik grabbed the hybrid's arm, only to yell in torment at her double assault on their minds.

"...what was it you were saying about fading away?", she smirked, her hybrid sharp teeth glistening like a predator.

"STOP SATIMA!", Shepard screamed.

"I will do what is necessary and end your foolish attempts to kill me!", she shouted.

Satima and Savant battled for control, "You cannot control me!", Satima yelled. Her mind had become an intense battle of will, all the while Liara and Javik remained at the mercy of the reaper ability.

Shepard couldn't think of any way to stop this. If she touched Satima, she too would be under the same agony. An answer presented itself on the weapons table. Shepard held the muzzle of a pistol to Satima's head. Shaking in anger and sadness.

"Captain, don't!", Ronin pleaded.

Savant realized the delicate situation, stepping back. Now was not the time to control, only observe. Satima thought she had won, letting go of Liara and Javik. They stumbled back, staring at her. "Goddess.", Liara breathed, leaning over her knees and pushing a nauseous urge back.

Satima glanced around, feeling for her alter in her mind. Silence. She smiled at them, "We did it.", she spoke.

Shepard carefully stepped back, holding the gun to her side in personal shame. She contemplated killing Satima to save them.

Javik helped Liara up, glaring towards the hybrid. Ashley stepped forward. "Did what? You almost killed them!"

Satima shook her head. "No... she's gone. It's just me now." She turned to Javik and Liara."I swear, she's gone."

Unsatisfied, Javik grabbed the girl's arm, searching for the others presence. "It is true.", he spoke, stunned. "The alter is gone. Liara was successful." He informed, giving Satima a distrustful glare.

She gently touched the asari's arm. "Thank you, Liara. You have freed me from the Directive." Satima hugged the asari, who flinched but accepted it. "You had me scared there.", she questioned.

"It was close.", Satima agreed. "But now it's over, and we can go after Shiala.", she stared at
Shepard with determination.

Ronin let out a sigh of relief. Her red eyes stayed in his mind, though.

Strike teams were created on the sentarians side. The Normandy continued to orbit around Lithera. The news broke of the effort to stop Shiala, using Satima’s control ability to overpower the asari’s mind. Liara offered to train her in meditative biotics.

Shepard wanted to start biotic offensive techniques immediately. Having seen Satima use a similar move to stop a rachni. With Shepard's past biotics training, they could help her hone those new reaper-like abilities. Unfortunately, duty came first. She asked Liara to train Satima instead. It would be better, Shepard hadn't been fond of using biotics herself, always preferring a hands on approach with combat.

Back in the cargo bay, Satima sat with Liara, meditating. It was difficult. She is to steady her mind and slowly reach out to her surroundings.

Liara took a deep breath silently. Satima opened an eye."Liara..."

"Absolute quiet.", Liara stated.

Satima closed her eye. Reaper NEVER did this. She just looked at you and you did what she wanted. Reapers themselves had this down to a quick and effective ability. Asari must always approach things in an artful way... this is ridiculous.
"Can you feel the ships vibrant essence?", Liara asked with a spiritual air.

"Umm... no?", Satima replied. Vibrant essence? What the kim sha is she talking about?
"Listen harder.", Liara ordered.

Satima snapped out of her thoughts. Closed her eyes tightly, listening to James work out and Cortez hum while cleaning the shuttle's panels. The door behind her opened and someone stepped out. Heavy footfalls. Male.
"Don't pay attention to the current noise, Satima. Embrace eternity beyond the norm.", Liara expressed.

Satima tried harder. Eternity this, and asari essence that. Why does this have to be so hard? Noises filled her mind. James grunting, Cortez humming... footsteps coming her way. "I can't do it!", she shouted, fed up. Satima got up quickly, stomping past Garrus, turning around to an annoyed Liara. "I'm not an asari, I can't just reach out into the void and do shit!"

"Because asari learn at a younger age! And are more patient!", Liara stood now, irritated. "The whole point of meditating is finding your calm. Whether you’re fighting or connecting to others around you, you need to find a calm. Without it your mind is chaos."

Satima balled her fists, "I've had nothing but chaos! Sometimes remembering what I went through helps me move forward." Her left-hand shook, a red biotic flare shot out with every angry word she spoke. "If I could just put a bullet between Shiala's eyes, I would! Not... reaper biotic-asari essence... crap!"

A burst of red biotics shot out towards the weapons table, causing a few mods to fall. Satima jumped back in surprise, glimpsing a small crimson husk-like skin cover her knuckles. She quickly covered it with her other hand.

Liara shook her head. "I understand you're scared of this. Biotics is something you don't take lightly."
Especially the ability to influence others." She sighed, pointing to the mods. "You're letting your anger control you. Be at peace, and you will control it."

Satima stared away.

Liara walked past them, tired and vexed. "Should've dragged Samara with me, if I had known this...", she argued to herself.

Garrus stood to the side. Satima looked at him, then bent down, beginning to pick up her biotic mess. "I don't like this. I'm turning into Reaper, with a bonus of biotics. It's not fair." She flung the mods on the table, downcast.

Garrus stepped to her, holding a hand back from comforting Satima. She doesn't see him as a father, although he's starting to see her as daughter. But, it just seemed better if they were good friends.

Besides, Charlie is better at this parenting thing. Even Natalie wouldn't call him dad. "Satima, you have to learn how to control your biotic abilities. Memtrix and Arkasia are depending on you. Stopping Shiala will help them focus on the infected rachni. Plus, you'll be able to hurl objects around the deck.", he smirked in jest. "Maybe move one of James's weights over there.", he pointed.

Satima raised her brow, curious. "Why are you suddenly picking on James?"

Garrus changed his expression to shock, "I'm not picking on him! Just leaving a message, friend to friend.", he stated.

"And that would be?", she asked.

"Put a damn shirt on."

Satima laughed, looking over to James's push up routines. His muscles flexed with every pull of his hard-built body. She heard the rumors of how he flirted with Shepard, calling her "Lola", before he and Ashley started a sudden romance. Satima blushed. He calls her "princess lola".

Garrus stared at her, unsurprised at a young girl's fascination with a good-looking guy. He then stared at James, narrowing his gaze, suddenly feeling defensive and... fatherly. Cortez walked to their side, smiling. He noticed this. "You ever heard of the term "grinning like an idiot?"

Cortez crossed his arms with a smirk, "Can't help laughing to myself how James attracts everyone to his manly physique."

Satima caught on to the joke, snickering out loud and pointing to Garrus. "He thinks you're watching James workout!", she continued to mock.

Garrus glared at her, before Cortez spoke. "Don't think you haven't been caught either, Miss Satima." He eyed her.

Satima suddenly stopped, gulping. "I... I have not!", she stuttered with a blush.

Cortez continued his laugh, resuming duties at the shuttle.

Shepard walked in from the elevator to check on Satima after Liara's briefing. "What's going on?"

"Nothing.", both Garrus and Satima commented.

Another day of preparation went by. Memtrix readied several teams to assault the base. Using her power of control, Satima will cut off the rachni from Shiala and attempt to cripple the asari. A
dangerous and risky battle, but it needed to be done. Lithera burns, and her people are dying.

Assault on Vintae
HIVE fragment Labs

Geared again in her mother's older N7 armor, Satima sat in the shuttle while waiting for Cortez to land them at the other entrance to the labs. Their destination is a rifting platform. Arkasia will power the device, allowing them access past the rachni and straight to Shiala herself.

"EDI is helping me use the Normandy's signal array to contact the VI on the platform. How fascinating.", Arkasia comments.

"Just remember to keep it working so we can get off this moon after we kill the "queen".", Satima worried.

Arkasia sighed, "Relax and focus your reaper control thing on her. Memtrix will keep the rest of the rachni busy."

Reaper control thing? This is going to be disastrous. She leaned out of her seat, covering her face. Shepard stepped away from Cortez, "Are you feeling okay?"

"Yeah, just nerves.", Satima replied.

"Hey, we got your back. Just focus on Shiala.", Shepard remarks.

"Why does everybody keep saying that?", Satima asked, upset.

"Captain. We're approaching the backdoor of the base. Rachni are guarding the entrance. This time in larger groups.", Cortez confirmed.

Shepard looked to Garrus and Ronin. "We need to access through to the platform. Once we get off this shuttle, we make a break for it."

"Right behind you.", Garrus commented.

Ronin nodded. Satima stood up, prepared to fight and run with them. She only hopes Shiala won't be too prepared.

The shuttle landed over the surface, with Shepard opening the hatch. She hopped out, "Let's go!", Shepard shouted.

They followed her, running behind or alongside. Shooting down any rachni that got too close, dodging attacks from the ground and sidelines. A few rachni tried to ambush from behind, forcing Satima to jump over one in front, turning to unleash a bullet spray into them.

She caught up to Shepard and the team at the platform. They stepped on while Arkasia powered the riffer tech to transport them closer to Shiala's location. In one blink, Satima viewed a different scenery. A massive hull fragment from hive. She could already tell at least three intact labs were up and running inside it. Terrifying.

"What is this dark place?", Ronin wondered aloud.

The squad stepped off, as Shepard led them forward. Satima hesitated. Arkasia touched her shoulder, awaking her back to reality. "HIVE. Well, a small piece of it.", she replied.
Satima closed her eyes, and walked off the platform. Garrus watched in concern while she took a deep breath.

"Shiala is here. Somewhere. Let's move forward.", Shepard ordered.

Satima walked to her, "It would be best if I led the group. No one here knows this place better than me."

Shepard nodded, "Lead the way."

The labs were dark and barely lit with a slight blue illumination. All the sinister nostalgia that emitted off the walls gave Satima a cold shudder. Ronin used his rifle's light to check the few alcoves. Garrus couldn't believe this place. "Satima, you grew up here?"

"Not specifically in the labs, but the rest of the station, yeah. For sixteen years, this place was my home. And my hell.", she answered bitterly.

He didn't say anything back, but thought enough to distract him from the mission. What the hell was his future self-doing? Besides trying to kill Reaper and failing miserably. Maybe he couldn't kill the one thing he loved so much and lost, that it drove him to failing? But how could he have missed Satima? Not seen or heard her, and at least rescue her from them!

"Garrus. Over here.", Shepard spoke.

He nearly walked into an alcove because of his thinking.

Satima led them inside a lab with dusty monitors and damaged displays. The room had medical equipment against the walls, lighting over a few tables. But right in the middle was a single examination chair. That chair had arm and leg cuffs. Satima stood in front of it, staring hard towards the cuffs. Old and new memories flooded her mind. How dare Arkasia subject her to torture! She shook her head. They had no choice.

Shepard noticed this. "What's wrong?"

Satima gave a quick glance to her, realizing Garrus had been staring at the chair too. Arkasia walked forward, while Ronin stood to the side. Listening.

Arkasia started to speak, "This is one of the rooms Satima was held in during...", she looked up data on her omni-tool, glancing at Satima for an assurance to her answer. "During the second mutation phase of turian dna, right?"

Satima folded her arms to her chest, giving a nod. "I was seven years old when they did this. It wasn't a day I remember much from. Only that Reaper stood where I am and observed them experimenting. After it was over, she took me back to my room.", she sighed "Gave me plain material and colored sticks to draw with. She watched me for a while, before leaving for weeks. I never saw her again until it was time to train. To fight."

The room stayed silent. Arkasia closed her omni-tool, "We should check the next rooms for clues to Shiala's whereabouts."

Inside the second lab, Arkasia walked up to a set of bio-pods. Empty, filled with dust particles and other debris. They observed the different layouts of each station. "This must be the growth chamber. So many horrific experiments that were carried out.", she informed.

Ronin shook his head. "How many people suffered at the hands of the reapers? And this..."
"Directive?"

"Too many. The dark future is just that. Dark. A dire outcome that almost repeated.", Arkasia looked at Satima, who stood over a particular pod.

It had been shattered by force. She gulped, reaching out to touch it. Her name still read clearly on the data pad that belonged to a certain scientist. One who designed her. Garrus stared, uncertain. He stepped carefully to her, "Is this...?"

"Yes.", she replied quickly.

He gazed at the data pad, picking it up to read its contents. Shepard stood beside Satima, "This is where you were grown?"

Satima nodded her head furiously, closing her eyes. She started to silently weep, kneeling to sit against the pod station on the floor. Shepard knelt next to her, as Satima buried her head between her knees. Arkasia looked on upset.

Garrus remained to the side, reading the terrifying notes of Archer. He sickeningly described how Shepard's body was repurposed into Reaper. The genetic anomaly of her pregnancy and how he managed to save it by promising the Directive a living reaper. Not Shepard, but Satima. There was something else, but the data was too corrupted.

Ronin leaned down in front of Satima, "This is what you didn't want me to know about you?, he asked.

She looked up, quickly wiping her eyes. "I was afraid you would look at me as an abomination. A twisted existence not even nature would touch." Satima resumed burying her head between her knees, her voice almost muffled. "Jormun understood this. He knew much more, seen much more. Before his life was taken away."

Shepard watched Ronin try to reach out to her, but his hesitation prevented closer contact. She put her hands equally on them both. "We need to continue looking for Shiala.", turning her gaze to Satima, who now looked up to her.

"I can't possibly imagine what you've been through, but we must stop her. And after she's been dealt with..." Shepard took her hand off Ronin's shoulder and wiped a stray tear from Satima's cheek. "Your father and I will find you help to heal from the past. Promise." She smiled.

Satima looked her up and down in surprise and fear. Find her help? What kind of help?

"The last lab has rachni readings. We should check it out.", Arkasia informed.

Satima sat up, following them out. Garrus stood by, his gaze narrowing on the chair.

Once they entered the last lab, Satima immediately remembered what it was for. "This is the bio-weapons chamber! Reaper would come here often when she encountered a rebel colony or two.", she informed.

The team stared at her. Satima glanced to them, "She used everything at her command to the Directive's will. Frightening as it sounds, Reaper was very effective in her wars. No one was left alive."

They all stared at Shepard. The war-trained soldier in her, knew what that meant. "Hey, that was a different me!" She complained.

"Over here.", Arkasia announced.
At a chemicals station, they found a previous hack into the hive's data systems. Someone was trying to find a permanent solution to Arkasia’s cure. "This is scary. She's going to make a deadlier virus. Eradicating my cure. Satima, if she manages to perfect this?"

Satima faced Arkasia."I'll kill her first."

"Then we're wasting time. Let's trace the hack to her.", Shepard ordered.

Arkasia went to work, quickly finding Shiala's location."Kha ve.", she spoke in shock.

"What?, Satima asked.

Arkasia turned to her in terror. "She's on the derelict reaper."

Garrus looked to Shepard, as Ronin stepped forward, concerned. "A reaper? Here?", he asked disturbed.

Before they could react, the platform turned on. Running to the entrance of the hive labs they used, the team witnessed dozens of rachni pouring out. "Shoot them down!", Shepard yelled.

Using the entrance for cover, they opened fire. Rachni bodies were piling up around it. "They're trying to overflow the rifter's singularity path. If that happens, we're stuck here without shuttle transport.", Arkasia shouted.

Satima figured that Shiala was attempting to trap them. If she ran through and stopped the overflow, then the rifter might be saved. Where ever she would end up is anyone's guess. Shepard kept a small horde from overwhelming the left side, while Garrus sniped the larger warriors from the back.

Ronin looked at Satima briefly, catching that curious look in her eye. "Satima. You stopped firing?", he yelled.

She gazed to Arkasia,"Help them reach the reaper. I'll stop the rachni overflow."

Arkasia used her sentarian pistol to shoot a few small rachni, "What?", she said aloud.

Satima faced the platform and the many rachni."You heard me!", she yelled before running forward. She passed rachni attempting to impale her with their large claws. Acid spewed around her. Satima kept running, hearing Shepard scream her name so close to the platform. A rachni slashed her back, exposing a small amount of flesh. Satima didn't flinch, but jumped forward, right into the rifter.

She was gone.

Arkasia shook her head, "Here we go again."

The rachni stopped and were dispatched in minutes. Shepard ran to the platform, holstering her rifle. "What did she do?"

Arkasia jogged behind her, "She wanted to stop the overflow so you could reach Shiala. We can still get to the reaper from here."

Shepard shook her head, hitting the platforms monitor nearby in anger. "Dammit!"

Garrus stepped forward. "I hate to say this, but she took care of herself against the rachni before. She can do it again. We need to end this Shiala issue now, or face the consequences of her getting to our galaxy."
Shepard turned to Garrus with a mean glare, then softened to understanding. Ronin stood to the side. Arkasia noticed his silence. "Ronin? Right? What do you think?", she asked.

He stared at them, personally irritated with the disorganized way this mission went. "We need to kill Shiala and find Satima. That's all we can do for now."

"Spoken like a spectre.", Garrus mocked. "I thought you cared about her?"

Ronin glared to him. "You're the one who should be more concerned. She's your daughter."

Garrus laughed insultingly, "I'm glad you remember. She's my daughter, and the last time we discussed that, I reminded you to keep your hands off her!"

"Guys...", Arkasia spoke.

"Satima doesn't belong to you.", Ronin argued.

Garrus and Ronin got closer, each giving off a menacing glare. Garrus continued, "You know what an interloper is, Ronin? Someone who becomes involved in a situation where they're not wanted. And son, you're not wanted here." He quipped dangerously.

Ronin flew at him in a rage. Garrus caught his fist but received a knee to the gut. Arkasia stood back watching the two men fight in a savage manner. What was happening?

Shepard had enough. She took the butt her of rifle and hit Ronin hard on the head, leaving him to reel on the floor in pain. Then turning to Garrus, she stepped quickly, a fury in her gaze. "Charlie, I was...", Garrus began.

Shepard balled her right fist and delivered a hard blow to his jaw. He never felt so beneath her before. Realizing as he held his mandible in pain, what a worthless idiot he behaved.

She glared at him, "Grow the hell up! So, she's infatuated with a spectre? Big damn deal! You don't like him. I don't care!"

Shepard turned to Ronin who was now standing, rubbing the back of his head. "You care enough for Satima? Then step the hell up! She runs from us because she's afraid we'll reject her. Satima turns to you, Ronin! You! So, work with us to help her. Got it?"

Ronin looked away in shame. "Yes, ma'am.", he said.

Arkasia glanced around them until she met Shepard's steely gaze. Whoa.

"And you!", Shepard shouted.

Arkasia stood to attention. Just like how Memtrix taught her.

"Find Satima and take us to the reaper ship!", Shepard ordered.

"Ma'am!", Arkasia yelled back.

Shepard used the monitor to find the coordinates that could help locate Satima. Garrus and Ronin stood side by side. "Word of advice.", Garrus started, still holding his mandibled jaw. "Never cross a mother."

Ronin smirked, "I'll tattoo it on my ass.", he quipped.
Garrus began to laugh, holding his jaw tighter in pain. "Hahaha...ahh. You bastard.",&quot; he replied.

Ronin smirked.

The Reaper vessel
Shiala's rachni halls

Satima woke in a dark place. No lights, nothing. She couldn't see a thing, but a familiar sound sent chills down her spine. The chittering and scratching along walls. Satima slowly stood up, wincing in pain remembering the wound on her back. Damn rachni.

Ahead of her, a small bit of light penetrated the darkness through a door. With every cautious step, she made her way closer to this curiosity. A wave of heaviness began to cloud her mind, while a sudden cold shudder almost made her stumble.

Satima reached the lit doorway, entering to see a giant hall filled with rachni. The red hull walls and metal spires to the ceiling revealed the place she was trapped in. A reaper.

"Spirits.", she muttered.

The rachni turned to her, but didn't attack. They cleared a dangerous path right to Shiala herself. She sat on a crudely fashioned throne made of reaper parts with hordes of infected surrounding her. The husk thralls were terrifying, more frightening than the reaper husks in the war.

"Welcome, my dear. We've been waiting for your return."

Satima's resolve diminished as she witnessed a new terror before her. Shiala looked every bit as menacing than their last encounters. Covered in the rachni's exoskeleton for armor. Her coal eyes never wavered from Satima's stance and narrowed with a fiendish grin towards the young hybrid.

"As you can see, my children hunger for other worlds. They await their queen to start this vessel's journey through the sentarian's warp gate. I hunger as well.", she smiled.

Satima walked slowly to her. "What is it you want, Shiala?"

Satima stopped short of the ramp to Shiala."Power isn't everything, Shiala. It can corrupt, destroy." Shiala once again sat, "It can also create!", she glared. "Plus, it can bring me joy!", she laughed in a sing-song voice.

Satima looked at Shiala disturbed. "You're deranged." "I'm a goddess! More powerful than the ardat yakshi ever dreamed! I can take your mind without any effort.", Shiala countered. She pointed to a platform rifer, most likely brought from the moon base. It sat surrounded by rachni. "I predict your friends will be here in three... two..." she grinned, "one..."

Satima watched terrified, as Shepardi and the rest of the team appeared. Armed, and suddenly realizing the current danger they're in. Arkasia glanced to Satima. She turned to Shiala."You're just
going to slaughter us here!"

Shiala leaned from her throne, "That's the point."

The rachni became hostile, lunging on them as Satima yelled in fear. Shiala laughed loudly, "All the best entertainment comes with power." She stood up, her dark biotics flaring. "Now finish them!"

Satima faced them again. Something deep inside started to take over. A violent, uncontrollable thought surged throughout her mind. Satima held her arms outstretched towards the rachni, hands shaking as red biotics flared from them. The attacking rachni were pulled back from the group. Pressure in her skull from the unexperienced biotic display caused her nose and ears to bleed. Shiala observed in fascination.

"Wonderful! This is the power I need to remold the galaxy.", she quickly sat up, using her own abilities to push the rachni harder against the group.

The cries of the stressed creatures echoed painfully in the room. The powerful biotic powers were literally tearing their minds asunder. Satima could understand their pain suddenly, unable to turn off their red notes. "We're killing them!", Satima yelled.

Shiala laughed, "They are fodder. We are the apex!"

Satima knew this was enough. She let go of the rachni, who suddenly had no more interest in their queen or Shepard and her team. The creatures retreated into the many dark alcoves of the reaper ship.

Their queen-Shiala, watched in anger. "Useless creatures! I will slaughter your entire species once I reach the origin galaxy." She turned to Satima, who had been weakened from the ordeal. Shepard, Garrus and Ronin slowly walked off the platform, aiming their weapons at the fleeing rachni.

Arkasia witnessed this strange occurrence. Although the rachni were unfamiliar to her people, this was still an unsettling situation.

Infuriated at her loss of an army, Shiala quickly attacked Satima. Holding the hybrid's head between her sickly green hands. Her coal eyes narrowing in anger. "I will have my power! Your mind belongs to me!", she shouted.

Satima yelled in agony, as Shiala began attacking her nervous system, trying to absorb the powerful untapped biotics.

Shepard shot Shiala's leg but she didn't budge. A blue field of biotic energy surrounded the team, preventing them from interfering. Shiala grinned devilishly as Satima started to succumb. Her eyes closing to unconsciousness.

"Shiala, don't!", Shepard pleaded.

The reaper asari believed she had finished off the hybrid, letting go of her and watching Satima's body fall to the floor. Flaring her swirl of dark and red biotics, Shiala stared at them with sinister intent. "The power... it's incredible! My rachni will overtake the galaxy and the entire universe!"

They turned to see the rachni forced into submission and returning to Shiala in servitude. She laughed, secure in her victory. Garrus and Shepard pounded in the barrier. Shiala leaned down from her position to them below. "I'm afraid her little brain hemorrhaged and she died. Such a shame. The Directive had an entire list of plans for her." She started to chuckle.

"Pull down this barrier and I'll show you my plans, bitch!", Ronin shouted in rage.
Shiala glared with a sour frown, "You'll be next to die, because of your mouth." She looked around the room, "Now... what to do? Oh, I know! Commit genocide against the sentarians!" She began stepping down from her crude throne, chuckling past the lifeless Satima. At the bottom, she glared toward the group. "I'll start by sending my children to tear your sister apart." She stared at Arkasia.

"No!", the scientist yelled. "Please, stop doing this!"

Shiala stood still, her laughing cut short as two pale hands held tightly to her head from behind. Satima leaned in to her ear, "Miss me?", she whispered.

"Wha..."

Satima began pouring out all her reaper biotic power into Shiala. "You want power? Well, you can take all I have to give!" The red biotics flared between them, while Shiala screamed in agony. She fell to her knees, purple blood oozing from her nose and ears. "Too... much!", she begged.

Shiala's last cries echoed in the hall, as her eyes turned white. Satima let her go. The "hive queen's" body falling with a dead thud down the stairs. Shepard and Garrus stared on in trepidation. What is Satima?

Ronin watched her gaze forward, lifting one hand outward and commanding the army of rachni to retreat. They began leaving, as she turned to the throne. Satima found a switch that released the team below. Cautiously they walked up the ramp. Satima stared at the dead queen's body.

Shepard touched her arm, "Satima?"

She flinched, facing her. "I'm fine. Just... a really bad headache.", she assured, wiping her nose. Shepard nodded.

"What about the infected rachni here? And the ones on Lithera?", Garrus asked.

Arkasia stepped forward, "Without Shiala to control them, they'll be vulnerable and scattered. It should be fairly easy to finish them off."

Satima looked around the room, walking carefully down the ramp past them. She turned her head to the left, then to the right. "I can hear them.", she spoke.

Shepard glanced to her squad, then watched Satima. "Hear who?" The team quickly arming themselves.

Satima stopped short of a stairwell on the left of the hall, leading downwards. "Their silence.", she replied. "Easy, indeed. The rachni are nothing more than mindless husks. Shiala destroyed them."

"So, all of the rachni on Lithera?", Arkasia began.

"Empty.", Satima answered.

Shepard gave a last look around, walking to Satima's position. "We need to return. Help the sentarians on Lithera."

Garrus and Ronin led Arkasia back to the platform, waiting on them. Satima started to follow when she turned to the same stairwell. The rachni on this vessel and on Lithera will be put down. She felt pity for them. Shepard noticed Satima's silence, staring at her. "What's wrong?"

Her daughter faced her with a puzzled and pained expression. "If Shiala had the power to do this?
Then, what does that make me? I've never experienced this... ability before." She glanced down, "I wonder if Reaper knew."

Shepard sighed, "I wish I had the answers for you, Satima. You deserve them, but all I can do is give you the help you need to control it."

Satima looked up to Shepard, "At least you haven't given up on me." She then stared to Ronin and the others, who were eager to leave the ominous vessel. "Spirits, I shouldn't have left a year ago."

"Dwelling on regret won't help," Shepard replied, putting her arm around Satima's shoulders. "Come on. It's time to end your mission and get back to the Normandy."

Satima gave a little grin, "Yeah."

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Seat of Archon
One week later

Shiala's control was broken. The Sentarian military efficiently wiped out the remaining rachni tunnels and nests on their planet. Shepard offered codex information on the species from the Alliance's data. Lamenting how the creatures were sentient, exhibiting intelligence and were once a space faring species before the Reapers found them.

Arkasia noted that in the future, any contact with non-infected rachni will be taken with full caution.

The reaper vessel was destroyed, along with the rachni onboard, though.

Head Archon ordered the remaining hive fragments to be dismantled and spaced into rifts. With no gate to guide a location, the pieces could end up anywhere in dark space. Where they rightfully belong. Forgotten and faded.

Satima felt at odds with herself during the matter. Should she save a piece of her growth pod? Would it be important? Arkasia promised to record any data regarding her as a precaution. This made the hybrid feel more secure.

Then the day came. Fires no longer burned. Barriers were taken down, and Shepard waited in the chambers of Head Archon with her daughter and others. As Memtrix and Arkasia's father prepared his gratitude, and judgement.

Satima wrung her hands, looking out the great windows into Lithera below. She didn't have time to spend among them. Strolling their streets, socializing with the people. Arkasia, Memtrix and Gern were her closest friends here. And even then, she betrayed them.

Took advantage and ran back to Shepard, hoping her mother could fix the mistakes. Reaper would be ashamed, or would she be unsurprised?

Painful flashbacks crept up in the back of her mind. She controlled those two soldiers. Forced them to help her steal the ship and flee. Gern pleaded with her, tried to make Satima see reason. It ended with him torn apart by rachni.

She averted her stare from the city. Arkasia entered with her sister, dressed in cleaner attire than a week before. No more grime or blood decorated the armor. Memtrix stood next to Satima, as Shepard observed the chamber.

The brick colored walls glowed from the distant sunset. Charlie viewed the room, until Satima happened to turn and see her. Her expression went to alarm, "What are you doing here?", she asked.
Shepard raised her right brow, confused. "Arkasia told me of your meeting. I wanted to attend." Her real reasons kept from Satima. Knowing that Archon is most likely banishing her daughter.

Head Archon finally entered, dressed in the saffron robes of his house. He walked forward, nearly taller than Memtrix with a solemn look. Satima gulped, while Arkasia unsettled next to Shepard. She hopes her father will remember the good Satima did do, and not dwell on the "incident".

He stared at Satima with clear crystal eyes, a gaze stern and unmoved forming. Head Archon observed the Shepard in his presence, as well as the similarities to Reaper.

"Since your arrival, hybrid", he began, "I had hoped your knowledge and skill would be useful against the Directive. We foolishly attempted to conceal the secret by compromising our position." Archon glanced to Arkasia,"Unleashing a dangerous foe and coming close to eradicating our entire race from a plague." He then began to pace in front of them.

"Your intentions were never clear to me. When you displayed unstable behavior, I overlooked it. Thinking you were only exhibiting a mindset given by Reaper.", Head Archon stopped pacing, turning to glare at Satima. "But when you held a blade to my daughter's throat, I had no choice but to retaliate. If Arkasia hadn't spoke for you, made that implant to control you...", he stopped himself from anger.

Shepard feared what he would've said next. Her daughter's right to live after betraying the sentarians are being discussed, not a banishment.

He cleared his thoughts, resuming a more logical mindset. "Satima, you have saved my people. Killed the Shiala and rescued Arkasia with the cure. For that, I and the sentarian assemblies are forever grateful." He then gazed to her, "But you are not well. Not capable of control over your reaper mindset, and this causes panic among my people."

Satima stood still. Fearing what he was going to say next. All this information is true, and Shepard understood why Liara told her to take Satima home. She committed a shameful and disloyal act.

Memtrix stood out between her father and Satima, she placed a hand on the hybrid's shoulder. "Do not consider this as an exile. You will always be sentarian-our Master Pilot. But, you need help, time to heal. Satima, you are young and need to be with your own species for a while. Take guidance from them, let them do what is best. You are still my friend and I forgive you.", she finished.

Satima stared at Memtrix, her dark teal eyes watery. That stare turned cold. She looked past Memtrix as Head Archon spoke again, "Satima you are not allowed to return without the seat's approval. If you are found within the boundaries of our system, you will be incarcerated and tried for insubordinate actions, and assault on a superior officer."

He then stepped forward, towering over Memtrix and Satima. "I see a young woman struggling in darkness. Reach for those who care for you, and draw on their strength to survive."

The room filled with silence. Arkasia couldn't believe it. They're kicking Satima out?! It's not fair! She didn't mean to attack Memtrix. "Father...", she began.

Head Archon gave her a displeased look, while she lowered her gaze, defeated. Memtrix led them out.

In the hall, many sentarian's stood, murmuring amongst themselves.

The unpredictable hybrid is leaving, and they all gave a sigh of relief over it. Shepard replayed Head Archon's warnings. Satima may never have permission to return. She feels grateful her own galaxy is
Standing next to her daughter on the docking platform, Shepard watches shuttles fly overhead. "You don't have to say anything right now." She looked down, then to Satima. Her eyes searching the hybrid for any hint of reaction. "That Archon guy has already said enough about your actions. I hope you understand what running does. Your problems don't disappear. They follow you."

Satima didn't respond, her eyes darting around the docks, trying to stare at something as Shepard gently scolded her.

Shepard gazed off into the city. "I'm proud of your accomplishments, Satima. You've protected an entire race of people no one knew existed until recently. The fact they are the keepers... and the warp gates?" She shook her head in personal awe, "It had to of been an amazing adventure for you."

Shepard turned her gaze back to Satima. "The good memories outweigh the bad. Don't hold on to the bad." It sounded more like she was reassuring herself, than her daughter.

Satima continued to remain silent. This was all Shepard could do for the moment.

Normandy

Satima preferred to be alone for a while.

The sentarians of Lithera, the entire crew of the Normandy, and the rest of the galaxy all see her as a demented freak. Ready to pounce on them and deliver terror. No matter how many times she helps them, saves them from villains like the Directive, or the reapers. They all focus only on negative truths. She's unfit to exist. Can't control her stupid mouth, can't control her stupid mind.

Satima locks herself in the core room. Sitting on her knees, staring ahead into the compartment above. Numb to the recent events. What good is the implant? What good was Liara's mind purge, if the other can suddenly come back and break free at any time? She's somewhere in there. Waiting.

Satima heard footsteps at the door, but they turned away. Good. Go away, don't even try. Would be useless to do so, anyway. Shepard wants to find her help. But Satima knows there is only one kind of help for her.

She reaches for a secret blade inside her boot, tucked away for emergencies. Contemplating over the six-inch metal threat in her view. Satima knows vulnerable areas that would promise a quick death. Does she deserve one?

Images of Ronin flashed in her mind. Jormun's lavender gaze followed her thoughts. And Gern's smile...

It'll be the heart. A useless organ that only brought her pain and loneliness. She'll jam it there and be done with it. No way of coming back from that.

Satima placed the blade over her chest, firmly pointing the tip. Her heart beat harder, and loud in her ears. The concept is easy, but the action will be difficult.

She didn't hear the door open behind her, and she didn't care. Only the kill mattered. Hers. Breathing heavily, she started to push the blade slowly, feeling the pain of the sharp tip begin to pierce through the thin armor. Someone suddenly grabbed the weapon and wrested it from her hand.

Satima winced as this person gripped her right wrist tightly, angrily. Bitter emotions weakened her to fight back, while her eyes closed shut to sob in despair.
Whomever this soul is that fought to stop her, knelt and wrapped their arms around her. She didn't want to open her eyes to see who it was, but that person held on until Satima gave up. She sobbed in this person's arms, exhausted and emotionally drained.

He picked her up, laying her gently in the compartment with a disappointed look. Leaving Satima to a sound sleep, and taking the blade as he left.

An hour passed on the Normandy. It was getting late and most of the crew had either taken their breaks or took to the mess. Shepard had busied herself collaborating with a sentarian tech crew over the warships engines.

A journey back could ultimately destroy the drive core. With the help of two frigate ships, Memtrix directed a team to stay on the Normandy until they reached the end of the gate back to the origin galaxy. Arkasia left a message to speak to Satima before their flight back home. Shepard postponed the journey for her daughter's sanity.

The crew members were all cured, with Ashley grateful to finally be well. She started spending time with James again. Cortez often teased them, happy to see the couple closer together.

Javik debated on whether he should stay on Lithera. Nothing would bring him more satisfaction, but there was a terrible dread at the back of his mind. The hybrid has proven to be the danger he warned about all along. He should go back, counsel Shepard against letting her progeny lose in the galaxy. Liara would object.

Javik smirked to himself. Liara T'soni. Something about her was clouding his mind as well.

Ronin was invited to engineering to receive gratitude from the crew below. The engine officers offering him drinks and a card game for his trouble, while the plague ran rampant. Joker and EDI overlooked the navigational guidance data the sentarians sent through. He didn't know if Satima was winging it or is secretly a navigations genius.

On the cargo bay, inside the kodiak. Garrus sat on the bench, leaning out with his head lowered. Damn the Archon. Damn the sentarians. They're all incapable idiots!

No wonder the reapers turned them into maintenance slaves on the citadel. He shook his head, disregarding his feelings as anger. Damn right he is! She tried to commit suicide! Garrus covered his head. Should he tell Charlie? Satima doesn't even know that it was him in the core room. Maybe she thinks it's Ronin?

That would do no good. She'll ask him and he'll reply in confusion, then concern. Then come the lectures about life and it's all worth living for. Garrus knows how she feels. Well, to a point.

It all goes back years ago, when Shepard was killed by the collectors. He wanted to follow her into death. Too damn shy to explain those odd feelings he had about her on the SR1. She stopped him from acting like a stubborn hothead, and managed to help him become a better soldier. "We do it right, not fast." she used to say.

During that time, he sat inside his apartment in the lower wards, drinking. Garrus had contemplated eating a bullet. Two whole bottles of turian whiskey later, and that thought almost became a reality. But something pulled him away. Some mysterious force.

He's not a religious man, and the spirits have been silent lately. But, he could feel Shepard would return. Somehow. And she did!

Two years later, working for a treacherous organization banking on the fear of non-humans and their
own shadows. Cerberus. He didn't care. Once her N7 insignia shown through his scope, Garrus knew his life had turned around for the better. At least for a little while.

Then came Satima. Amid a war against the reapers, this girl from an alternate future, full of childish antics and stubborn character came crashing into his life. He'll admit, it took time. But she grew on him. The truth hurt, and he wanted to run away, too. Charlie bridged them together, made them into a family.

Now, Garrus doesn't know what to do. If Satima were a child... Natalie's age? He could easily assume the father role and take care of everything. The Directive, Sentarians and even Reaper, whatever the hell she is.

But, trying to be a father to an adult? Trying not to dwell on the little more than a decade gap between them? And Spirits, does she need a parent. Father, mother... as long as someone can guide her. His comms came on.

"Garrus, I tried to find you in the main battery. Satima is asleep.", she sighs over comms."We need to talk. Come up to the cabin.", Charlie asked.

"I'll be right there.", he replied.

He agreed that they needed to talk. To discuss what happened to Satima and how to help her. Unfortunately, the Head Archon is correct. She's going down a dark path, drowning in her past. Garrus knows there is one action he needs to fulfill. It's time to be a father, now.
The Return

Chapter Summary

The Normandy embarks on a return trip back to the origin galaxy. Their home. All is not well within the Shepard-Vakarian family. Satima has been banished, and faces a new uncertainty with her place in the galaxy. Ronin pushes her away, after he reveals that he has indeed, moved on. Hackett orders the hybrid to earth for a study.

Shepard's hope of a peaceful break, are torn away by duty. And Satima is left to watch Natalie, on her own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shepard waited patiently in her cabin for Garrus. Now that the infection is cured, and the rachni thralls were stopped, there is time to breathe again. Time to assess what Satima has done. Her hybrid daughter slept in the core room. EDI promised to keep watch while they discussed the events in private.

She couldn't sit and wait, but preferred to stand, pacing back and forth. Running her pale hand through the thick strands of vibrant red hair, giving a soft sigh to the silent room. So many thoughts raced in her mind. Shepard shoved her hands inside the pockets of her uniform's pants. Staring away to the metal floor when the door opened.

Garrus slowly stepped through, standing in front of her. He had a determined, yet pained gaze in his avian eyes. Something is troubling him. Shepard has a good idea what it is. "How are you feeling?”, she asked affectionately.

He changed his stance to lean comfortably on one leg, glancing off with a wry chuckle." I was about to ask you the same thing, Charlie.”

They both exchanged a dry laugh, unsure of how to start the conversation. She continued, "I'm sure you can guess what I want to talk about." Her eyes searching him, waiting for a knowing response. Their years before as mentor and protégé turned lovers had switched positions, and lately, it is Shepard looking for advice and direction.

Garrus gazed to her, "We "need" to talk about it. We're her parents, after all." That left a bitter taste, again. Why? He thinks nothing of Satima now, then as a daughter. Garrus tells himself over and over that she's a victim, not a villain. Regardless of the outcome, she's still his responsibility.

One that he tried to leave resting on Charlie's shoulders, unfairly. But that was over a year ago. "I understand what Satima did can't be excused, but I disagree with that Head Archon.", he spoke.

"How?", Shepard wondered. She watched him carefully move past her, further into the cabin to where the bed and couch occupied the area.

He took a seat at the other desk, folding his hands over his lap while leaning out from the chair. "She needs them. Memtrix and Arkasia, I mean. Have you seen how she acts around those two?", he
argued. "You can see it in their interactions. Their comradery has helped Satima form a bond to their people. She feels responsible for them."

Shepard agreed with a nod, "I've seen it. I was impressed with her growth at the Seat, but Garrus... the Archon had to keep her away from his people, because he doesn't trust what "could" happen. Satima is still fighting the effects of indoctrination and her abusive past." She took a seat on the couch, staring at him with sincere eyes. "She doesn't need more missions, she needs rest."

Garrus looked down, understanding what Charlie meant. But what Satima tried to do in the core room nearly an hour ago, left a sharp pain in his head. The stress ache that meant talk about it, or suffer for the next couple of hours. He stared hard at the floor, counting the metal tiles inside the square grates. Should he say anything at all?

Garrus can hear his father's words echo in his mind. Charlie is her mother, and deserves to know. "Charlotte...", he gazed up to her.

She resumed her soft stare, waiting for him to finish his sentence. Garrus sat up in his chair, sighing so roughly from the anguish of this secret, that it turned into a lowered growl at himself. He placed his left arm over the desk, picking up a data pad and carelessly tossing it across the surface. Charlie leaned out closer to him, pushing the coffee table away from dividing them. "What's wrong?", she asked.

Garrus met her with his avian gaze, and an unhappy expression. "Satima tried to kill herself earlier in the core room. I stopped her. She doesn't know... I guess she was so upset that she didn't care to look."

Charlie stared at him intensely, "How far did it go?", she wondered, afraid.

"I just stepped in when she attempted it.", Garrus informed, looking away now. "I wasn't sure if I should tell you, only because...", he began, "because I..." Garrus stopped short, when Charlie picked up where he left off.

"Because you were afraid she would reject you for telling me.", she finished. Charlie stood up, stepping to him and placing his head between her warm hands. Caressing his mandible with her fingers, she gazed into his eyes lovingly, then leaned back with a calm expression. "Satima has a deep hate for all things reaper, she doesn't want anyone knowing about her life and the hardships she's been through. But she'll never hate you, Garrus. I know it."

He glanced down her chest, settling his gaze on her alliance uniform belt. "Are you upset that I waited to tell you?", he wondered. Now getting up slowly to tower over her, closely holding her waist and bringing Charlie face to face with him. Her hands had trailed down from his face, now to his carapace collar.

She smiled, touching his forehead to hers. "You did what you thought was right, debating between being a friend or father. I think you know who you are to her, and who you are to me.", she answered. They embraced, as he carefully kissed her velvety pink lips. Hoping that when Satima wakes up, they can finally sit down and talk. He'll be sure to establish his role in her life, and help her to feel safe again.

Satima wakes to the faint sounds of the core room. The echoing pings of the console panels on the walls and small amount of light from overhead, awakened her currently dull senses. She checked her omni-tool, reading the time and realizing she had been out for quite a while. A real deadline of the return to the origin galaxy ticked away in her mind, sending an alarm of haste to her. Satima didn't
want to miss the chance of saying goodbye to Arkasia and Memtrix. She may never see them again.  
  
Quickly, she sprinted to the lady's restroom of the ship. Freshening herself to look halfway decent and hoping they haven't left yet. Outside, in front of the elevator, she remembered her moment of weakness. Or was it pain? So many emotions drowned her to commit something permanent. But someone stopped her. Satima can't remember who it was, and as the elevator opened for the CIC, she didn't have time to care.  
  
Once she made it to the top deck, Traynor spotted her and gave a nod. It seemed genuine. Through the screening frame leading to the war room, Satima waited with hands on hips, frustrated with this contraption of a nuisance. After the ensign waved her on, she stepped through the door to see the High-Commander and Arkasia conversing with Shepard.  
  
Engineer Adams and EDI stood by, also speaking at times. Too crowded. Always too many people... they looked at her with surprise and possibly upset? Satima walked into the board room, hands behind her back and standing straight to attention towards Memtrix. "High-Commander.", she acknowledged.  
  
Memtrix stared with a warm smile, "Master Pilot. I heard you were feeling exhausted, and needed rest. I was not about to interfere.", she nodded.  
  
Arkasia smiled curtly towards her sister, while finishing putting her brown hair in a tight knot. She felt that Memtrix was being snide about that rest part. After being banished and tossed aside from her own people, diplomatic speaking-Satima should be outraged. But her hybrid friend returned the nod, and continued to give Memtrix respect. Arkasia started to speak, "We're finishing the collaboration of the Normandy's flight home. Some of our technology can be used to give your ship less of a rough ride.", she informed.  
  
"Would this require me to navigate the Normandy again, Captain?", Satima turned her gaze to Shepard. Formal and calm.  
  
Shepard stared away in personal surprise as seconds passed before giving her answer. "No. With these new navigational data readings and the sentarian core upgrade, we'll make it through without your help." She finished, now realizing how her words sounded-"Without your help?"  
  
Satima stood still, lowering her gaze. "I see.", she spoke in a defeated tone. Returning her stare upward to them, and maintaining a calm expression, Satima continued to ask if her presence was needed elsewhere. "Is there anything else I can do for the journey back?"

Arkasia started, "How about we check out the drive core on your engineering deck.", she looked to Adams. "Could you show us the new upgrades, again? I hate to be a bother."  
  
"No, ma'am. That won't be a problem.", he obliged, leading them out.  
  
Memtrix exhaled with folded arms, glimpsing to Shepard. "Has Satima given you any trouble since returning for good?" Now confident to speak to the Captain after the hybrid had left the board room.  
  
Shepard snapped her gaze angrily to Memtrix,"No, Satima has not.", she replied sharply, and began to leave as well, when the High-Commander resumed speaking. "Captain Shepard, I do not relinquish Satima of her duties lightly. She's been an asset to my command since day one. I only ask of her behavior, worried of a repeat of what happened to me."  
  
Shepard stopped, slightly turning her head for Memtrix to hear her, "My daughter tried to take her own life yesterday. Because the people she cares for have abandoned her."
Memtrix glared, "She is the instrument of her own failures! None of us, not even you, can stop what she is. Satima must face this path on her own and either come out sane, or an indoctrinated slave."

Shepard shook her head defiantly, hastily walking away from the sentarian. Memtrix watched in frustration. "The hybrid is my friend, also. I could have taken her life when she threatened mine! But I let her live!" Her words died at the door as they closed behind Shepard. She heard her, but didn't stop to acknowledge it.

If both parents continue to be stubborn on what Satima is, then it "will" be her life the next time her alter takes over. Memtrix shook her head at the thought, secretly mourning a possible outcome, and how to tell Arkasia of the poor girl's demise.

On engineering, Adams displayed the console's holo panel of the drive cores and its upgrades. Satima was impressed and relieved that the Normandy can be safely navigated through a warp gate. Joker will be happy to do this himself. But at that moment, she felt miserable.

Ronin was nowhere in sight, and Shepard doesn't need her help, never did and never will. Why would she? The help of a crazed maniac is the last thing an accomplished and decorated officer would ever want. Adams cleared his throat loudly, waiting for Satima to respond to his question. Too deep in thought, she accidently tuned them both out. "Yes, Engineer Adams?", she finally spoke. Blinking her eyes in confusion and embarrassment.

"I asked if you think the drive core is properly upgraded to specifications of sentarian design?", he pressed.

Arkasia looked to Satima, who also cleared her throat, overlooking the data pad. "Yes, it is.", Satima assured quickly. He stared at her blinking, before taking the data pad back and resuming his duties. "Alright. I guess that will have to do.", Adams complained. How is this girl supposed to be "master pilot" of anything when she thoughtlessly throws out an answer while daydreaming? Adams stands confused at his console.

The two women continue to wander around the deck, with Arkasia starting a conversation. She walks side by side with Satima, keeping a lowered gaze. "I thought you would be angry with me, since my father kicked you off Lithera."

Satima smirked, "Waiting for the insane reaper to pounce?" She glanced to Arkasia before lowering her gaze likewise. She stopped with an upset expression. Satima noticed it, sighing. "I'm sorry, Arkay. It was a bad start to a joke. I... I didn't mean it."

Her friend's expression turned to hurt, a noticeable struggle of feelings displaying in a troubled manner. "You attacked my sister, Satima.", Arkasia begun, now glaring towards her. This sudden change in attitude in private caught Satima off-guard. "Threatened to kill her.", Arkasia recalled.

Satima looked away, "I know." She stepped back, feeling ashamed. "There's nothing I can do to take that moment back. What I did was reprehensible." The memory of holding her blade to Memtrix's throat, surrounded by infected rachni in the dark and stormy jungle of the outpost soured her mood.

She deserves incarceration, not freedom. "Arkasia, if you want your father to put me away, I'll accept it. I can't run from my mistakes anymore.", she pleaded. Now staring to her friend, afraid of Arkasia's unknown answer.

Instead of disapproval, she gave her a knowing look, watching Satima's response and inner agony. "I don't want you to be put away. You've done so much good. That outweighs the bad, I think." She put her hands on the hybrid's shoulders, turning her upset frown into a warm-hearted smile. "Friends
forgive each other. Memtrix has forgiven you, and so do I." Arkasia gave Satima a quick hug, resuming her walk on the deck. "Give it a year. Father will change his mind, you'll see."

Satima chuckled, following behind. "You have a big heart, Arkay."

"Flattery? From you?", she responded in shock. "Well, now I wonder what you'll stoop to next?", Arkasia replied, facetiously.

Down the corridor overlooking the cargo bay below, they didn't notice four yellow eyes staring their way. Javik stood in the darkened doorway of his room, watching the hybrid. You do not let a viper loose in the nest, and hope it won't devour the others.

The hour of departure had approached, with Satima saying her goodbyes to Arkasia and High-Commander Memtrix. They stood at the docking hatch, still attached to Memtrix's newly acquired warship. Shepard stepped to the last meeting, listening to the women speak.

Arkasia had watery eyes, giving Satima a hug. "I hope to get leave soon, to visit your citadel again. This time under better circumstances.", she laughed. Wiping her eyes, Arkasia resumed," Head Archon is curious about the keeper's awakenings.", she explained. "I'm sure to get a little mission or two that can cover my journey back there."

Satima returned a smile, her cheeks turning a soft blush as she shook her head in amusement."Arkay, you find any way possible to get what you want. I'll be looking forward to your visit."

Memtrix observed happily, never letting more than a small grin overtake her expression. She stepped to Satima, who stood at attention again, only to relax her stance and lower her gaze. "High-Commander, for what I did on Lithera... and how you helped me regain control of it..., she began, almost stammering her words nervously.

The High-Commander raised her hand to silence Satima gently, resuming a comically stern look. They both struggled to stifle a laugh, with Memtrix speaking. "I hope in time your mind will heal.", she glanced downward. "Satima, I'm so sorry you must be exiled for a time from Lithera. It is a punishment you don't deserve, but father has spoken. For everyone's safety and yourself, you must not return for a while. Learn to control what you are, and accept it, my friend." She placed a well-meaning hand on the hybrid's shoulder. "Head Archon will forgive you."

Satima stared, glancing off to shake her head lightly in agreement. "Thank you."

Arkasia gave one last surprising hug to Satima, before leaving with her sister back to the warship. They continued through the air-lock and disappeared down the tube. Satima felt those turbulent emotions return, holding still while tightening her fists.

She wanted to cry out, tell them not to go, not to leave her behind. There's no way she'll survive back in the origin galaxy. Shepard can't stop the alter... she can't help her!

Shepard touched Satima's arm, catching her attention. "Satima? Are you okay?", she asked sincerely.

The hybrid glanced to her, returning her gaze to a closed docking hatch. "I'll be fine.", she replied sadly. Satima then turned around and left the cockpit. Shepard watched her leave, hoping Garrus's intended talk will help.

Joker leaned out of his chair, helpless to observe the awkward and sad goodbyes. "So, Satima's been banished from keeper land?", he faced his controls again. "Rough. Listen, Captain... if she needs to fly sometimes, you know, to clear her head. I won't mind.", Joker offers.
Shepard almost snapped back at his earlier comment before his offer. She crossed her arms satisfied with his kindness, and gave him a comical stare. He turned to see it and laughed, "So that's a thank you? I'll take it, Captain."

Meanwhile, Satima returned to the core room. Intending to sit in quiet and reflect. She walked in, suddenly surprised to see Garrus messing around with the panels. He looked alarmed at first, but stopped touching the wiring and faced her. His expression became milder, and displayed the turian look of fondness. Satima stood in the doorway, completely awkward at his presence and totally worried at what it means.

Garrus fumbles to cover the wires, before facing her. He steps forward, "EDI wanted me to check on the panels. With the new upgrades to the drive core, she has a lot to cover before we leave.", he informed.

Satima looked past him to the panel, then back to his gaze. "I see.", she replied. Stepping around him, and to her usual place at the compartment she often camped in. She picked up a few data pads that Ronin left before venturing back to engineering. She keeps missing him at every turn. Or is he avoiding her? Satima needs to speak to him.

Garrus resumes his small talk, hating himself every minute of it. "I heard the High-Commander and Arkasia have left.", he started.

"They have.", she spoke saddened.

He sighed. This was going nowhere, quick. Garrus stared at her, "Satima, I was here when you tried to... harm yourself. I'm the one that stopped you.", he revealed.

Satima dropped her data pads, slowly facing him with a pained stare. "It was a moment of weakness. It won't happen again.", she informed automatically.

Garrus stared, unbelieving of her robotic response. "Satima... it's not your fault to feel that way.", he urged. Stepping closer to her, he continued. "You've been through a lot. You wanted to find a way out. I understand how that feels."

She gazed at him. "You've wanted to die before?" Satima shook her head in disbelief. "Why? You've always had Shepard to live for. And your family."

Garrus glanced away, and began pacing in front of her, taloned hands to his smaller turian hips. "That hopeless feeling, like you're slowly being smothered. Every emotion attacking you at once, filling your mind with emptiness.", he recalled. Sighing, he continued. "Then you get a sharp pain in your chest that hurts so bad you can't move. Finally, the thought of ending your life to get relief from all this torment fills your mind."

Satima's eyes watered, as single drops of warm tears rimmed her lower lids, slowly trailing down the red cheeks. She quickly turned to her little niche in the hull wall. Gripping the edge of the metal surface hard. "I let them down.", she started to sob. Gritting her teeth to stop it. "Gern tried to stop me, but I didn't listen.", she glared angrily at the wall.

"I've spent every waking moment in fear since the day I was born. Hating myself and others for the cruel life I was forced to live." Satima faced Garrus with a despaired expression. "Everyone keeps telling me to accept what I am, to control myself." She stepped forward, her heart racing from the feelings of dread. "How can I?", she asked, upset. "When the days I am "normal", and can control it, they still see a monster?"
Garrus gazed away. What answer can he give her? She needed to talk with someone who experienced a similar life. He grew up in a loving family on Palaven. Shepard was an orphan on Earth, but had been taken in by Anderson and enrolled into the Alliance.

How is he to nurture a wound in his child, without the experience or knowledge to do so? Garrus faced Satima as she wiped the tears, folding her arms tightly over her chest. She stared off to the wall, "What made you feel that way? That emptiness?", Satima asked.

Garrus exhaled in personal upset, "The day I lost Shepard to the collectors. No one knew how I felt about her. She didn't know… spirits, I didn't fully understand it either.", Garrus recalled. "I held onto a resolve to honor her by doing something good in this galaxy. So, I went to Omega. Satima, I failed people who trusted me too."

She glanced to him in surprise, "The names on your visor."

Garrus nodded.

Satima smirked sarcastically, already feeling hopeless. "But you have support! Shepard didn't give up on you, or you wouldn't be here." She lowered her gaze, "I have no one."

He stepped to her, watching her gaze widen nervously. Garrus reached out and brought her close to him. Words escaped his mind to speak, but he hoped this often-overlooked gesture of love and kindness would express his feelings properly. Bad people have hurt his daughter, used her for their own evil purposes. He wasn't there to stop it, but he's here now to bandage it. Just like he did with Shepard during the reaper war.

Satima stared as her head was gently pressed against his carapaced chest. Hugging a turian isn't exactly easy, but his strong arms held her close. Like he did before when she nearly took her own life. This can be enough for now. A private embrace between parent and child. And the attention Satima craved so much from her father, Garrus Vakarian.

The Normandy returned to the galaxy. Sentarian frigates led them safely through the warp gate, resuming their flight back to Lithera. With the whole crew relieved to be home, Shepard makes her vid-comm to Hackett about their successful journey and a cure to the growing threat of the infection.

Alliance officials prepared a quarantine zone on the affected planets, while waiting for the Normandy to return. Hackett had summoned Shepard to the embassy, along with a cured Satima, to relay the mission details to him and other alliance officials.

Days passed, when the stealth ship finally docked at the citadel. Liara and Javik left first, with Ashley leaving to the spectre offices. Satima didn't want to leave the core room, afraid the whole galaxy would lock her away.

On the presidium docks, Shepard and Garrus waited patiently for an apprehensive Satima to leave the ship. She hesitated at the hatch, while Joker stole glimpses in pity. He knows she's scared, but doesn't feel sure how to give friendly advice on the issue. Ronin came up the deck walkway, as Joker sighed quietly in relief. The on again-off again boyfriend should help. He hopes.

Ronin stared at the hatch with Satima. She didn't move for a little while, now. He cleared his throat and tried to coax her into moving forward. "A lot has changed.", he started. "You brought a cure back from the most elusive species in the galaxy and made good on your promises."

Satima lowered her gaze with a sigh," Which wouldn't have been needed if I didn't act like an
immature coward to begin with."

"Everyone makes mistakes. You redeemed yourself from yours. That's enough.", he tried assuring.

Satima glanced to him, "Why haven't you been to the core room to see me? I tried comming you, but EDI said you would not answer."

Ronin cleared his throat. "I needed time to think, Satima."

She crossed her arms, feeling distant. "Contemplating reporting on the insane hybrid to the council? Maybe they should lock me away."

Ronin gave a low growl in frustration. How can she move forward when every moment is spent moping about the past? Shepard said Satima values his advice, even runs to him when she's afraid to speak about any of this to her parents. If only they were still together.

Those feelings hurt, but he's moved on. And so, has she. "Your pity party needs to end, Satima. You've saved the galaxy by being "responsible". You've been exiled and publicly humiliated. Now, move forward.", he ordered, before leaving through the hatch in an irritated hurry.

Satima stood by, stunned at his attitude towards her. He's never bit back at her before. She felt assaulted by his words. He doesn't understand what she's been through, seeing a few hive research and experimental rooms wasn't enough.

Does Ronin understand how much it hurts to lose good friends because of foolishness? She quickly walks out, glaring towards him reaching the docking platform to the cabs. Shepard and Garrus were relived at first to see her leave the ship, but quickly noticed the anger in her appearance.

Ronin had just opened a cab door, when Satima stepped behind him. He faced her, as she began to curse him out. "Go to hell!"

She took a step closer, staring him down with that demanding avian gaze her father held. "You don't know what it's like to have another voice tormenting you, day and night. Teasing normalcy at the edge of insanity.", Satima argued. Her voice stern but shaky. "So, take your perfect spectre training and display your self-righteous principles to that turian tramp you favor nowadays. Because I don't need you or anyone else!"

Garrus and Shepard walked a little closer, hearing the argument and watching the display. Ronin glanced up, giving off a dismissive smirk. He then glared to Satima. "You don't know me.", he warned. "I earned my self-righteous spectre principles, by taking out the menace that threaten this galaxy."

Ronin stepped forward, pushing a now surprised Satima back to the dock, with his displeased manner. She could tell through his smooth movements, and warning tone, he wasn't going to accept her words and back down. "And that turian tramp, is my ex-wife!", he pointed out. "Her brother was my good friend in the blue suns. A man much better than I, and more forgiving than I will be with you."

Satima had no words to counter with. She broke Ronin's heart, and even after he followed her and tried to reconnect as friends, Satima did all she could to push him away. He backed down, looking away from her. She could tell he was about to say something hurtful. "Satima… He stared at her, his gaze hurting. "I can't be with you. A spectre can't be compromised by the enemy."

She stepped back in shock. Why couldn't she have kept her stupid mouth shut? Ronin continued to sit inside the cab, he glanced to her, "I wish you well." The door shut over him, and he left promptly.
Shepard slowly walked to Satima, and with a knowing nod patted her daughter's back. Satima shrugged it off harshly, leaving the docks on her own. If this "help" can't stop her from losing the people she cares for, then the only way will be to leave.

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**Citadel Wards**

An hour after the Normandy returned, a sentarian envoy ship docked. Several medical specialists departed the vessel requesting to speak with the council on terms of a universal cure and future inoculations against any reaper biological contaminants.

The Alliance met with them, sending Doctor Michelle to assist the specialists in the high-level bio-warfare labs on the station.

Shepard had been quite relieved to learn of this while searching for Satima, however, Hackett requested them immediately for a mission follow up. If Satima returns to a reaper behavior now, this could ruin her chances on Earth.

Outside of a seedy bar on the lower districts, Shepard wandered in to the dimmed space. Wasn't a very large place to drink and practice criminal deals, but she figured Satima chose it because of its obscure atmosphere.

Nothing flashy or modern stood out, except for the half lit holo sign to the one restroom. Interesting and disturbing. At the bar, her daughter sat slumped over a drink she had only stared at, instead of gulping. Shepard took a seat on the stool next to her. "You like hanging out in run-down places, don't you?", she started.

Satima took a sip of her liquor, setting the glass down. "Reminds me of home.", she replied. Placing the palm of her hand on her face, with an elbow on the counter surface, and continued to slouch, wallowing in self-pity.

Shepard sighed aloud, signaling for the bartender to give her a glass of beer. She tasted the raw and unrefined bitterness of the booze, making a face of dissatisfaction. "You, know… I can't start lecturing you on your behavior and relationships, considering you're a grown woman, now.

Shepard handled the glass of beer, gently shaking the liquid and forcing it to swirl in motion. "I want to, but I can't. You have to tell me you want it, first."

Satima turned to Shepard, "Want what?", she asked, her expression puzzled.

Her mother set the beer down, glancing to her. "Parenting. Tell me you want it, that you need guidance, and I'll do all that I can to be a mother to you. I know the age difference is strange, and believe me waking up to realize you have a twenty-one-year old daughter is not an easy way to start the day." She tried to jest. Shepard's smile faded when Satima only stared in awkwardness.

"Well…", she continued, glimpsing the counter in embarrassment, "Unless you preferer we just encounter as friends."

"Friends?", Satima wondered.

Shepard shook her head, turning back to the bars liquor shelf. "I understand since you've arrived that the transition hasn't been easy. Outright trying to be your mother wasn't fair. I should've stepped back and offered advice, but nothing more."

She seemed saddened now, regretful. "Being an orphan on Earth wasn't easy. I did a lot of things to survive. Bad things at times. When I was sixteen, I met Anderson. He was visiting a museum while on R&R and had been occupied with a painting. I marked him, figured he was easy to steal from, and tried a hack on his omni-tool for creds."
Satima listened, watching Shepard's expressions of smiles and widened eyes to the recollection of her past. She continued. "He found me outside of a mall, chased me down an alley and dragged my sorry ass to the security building. They locked me up, and that was it. But, he didn't leave. The guard told him that I had no contacts, no family. I was an orphan. Forgotten." Shepard took a sip of beer again, cringing at the taste.

"Anderson stayed the night, paid my bail and took me to the nearest recruitment office for the Alliance. He pointed to a large picture of a dreadnought and said, "Our future is not in petty survival, but true exploration. There's a whole galaxy waiting for you out there, kid. Don't ruin your chances for a few creds." I stared at him", Shepard recalled, "Then I ran. He didn't see me for another year."

Satima looked away quickly, "It was your destiny to be the legendary Commander Shepard." Her demeanor sulking further into self-loathing. Shepard stared at her, "So you made mistakes. You beat yourself up over them more than anyone could. Fine, do it. Then look in the mirror and tell yourself, you won't make them again." She tried pointing out.

Shepard continued, "I get it, now. You have the freedom and the time to finally grow up. To finally be a part of this galaxy, instead of hiding in it." She took Satima by the shoulders, making the girl face her. "It's time to let the past go, and move on to a better future. You have fought hard to secure it, don't ruin your chances because of the disappointment from others. I am here. Garrus is here. Let us be your family."

Her daughter froze, almost unable to speak, with her rigid frame relaxed and expression calmed into a submissive defeat. Satima lowered her gaze to the floor below their feet from the stools. "I'm so afraid to lose you.", she began. "You don't want me as a daughter, I'm too damaged. It would be best if I left this station and disappeared. Best for you, Garrus and… and Natalie." Satima swallowed hard. That awful sting in her chest returned. It often caused her discomfort whenever she felt abandoned.

Shepard tilted her head, feeling heartbroken at Satima's lack of confidence and inner torment. She let go of the girl's shoulders, getting off the stool to stand and placed her gaze on Satima. "I know you want to leave. I can't stop you.", she started. "But, I can offer help. Not from us, but maybe professional?", Shepard tried offering.

Satima looked up, staring at Shepard, while she explained. "Hackett wants to see you. He's going to go over what happened on Lithera, and there are sentarian scientists here too. It's going to be painful, but I know it would help you if you faced those mistakes one more time." She stepped in front of a sitting Satima, "And instead of running from them, or accepting defeat, you'll learn from it. Move forward and never look back in disgust at yourself, again."

Reluctant to attend the meeting, Satima accepted that Shepard is only trying her last chance to help her. As terrified as she is to see the disappointed faces of those sentarian scientists, she slowly got off the stool, standing in front of Shepard.

Looking past the captain, lowering her gaze, Satima nodded to go.

Hackett waited patiently, knowing the situation with the traveler was half-cocked at best. A crude term, but considering how the girl brought a potentially devastating plague to the galaxy that nearly wiped out the ancient race of sentarians, he'll coin the phrase as he likes.

The door in the office opened, while Khalee busied herself on her terminal. Shepard walked in with the hybrid in tow.
"Shepard, we have two alliance high-ranking officers waiting patiently and a sentarian scientist. What took you so long?", he asked, a little irritated.

Shepard stood to attention, offering respect and an apologetic look to the Admiral. "Sir, locating my daughter, the traveler."

Hackett nodded," Alright, Captain. Don't go all formal just yet, we need that energy for the meeting. Follow me." He led.

Inside the board room adjacent of the spectre's office, Hackett led them to meet with two officers and the scientist. She stared at Satima with a bit of disdain, then resumed her olive gaze to her data pads. Satima sulked in the corner, feeling more than terrible about her behavior on Lithera and the betrayal against Memtrix.

Hackett began," El'Nam here, is a virologist sent from Lithera by the Head Archon. Or so I'm told.", he glanced around the room, confused at the titles, but continued. "She reports that the colonies affected by the infection have been successfully quarantined and as we speak the cure is being applied to every survivor."

El'nam spoke, "The Archon sends his regards to the Shepard and her people. We will deliver more of the antiserum soon." She stared at Satima in the corner. "Head Archon also wishes to extend his concerns over the former master pilot, and at the behest of Chief Engineer Vael."

Satima looked up in surprise, but made no verbal inquiry. The meeting continued with Hackett reviewing the details of the ordeal with the traveler's mental state. He held up a data pad, then glanced to Satima. "You are called Master Pilot, correct?"

She stood to attention, gazing past him respectfully. "Sir.", she answered.

He nodded, "I have read the reports of your outburst and direct insubordination towards your superior.", Hackett glared briefly in disappointment before continuing. "Engineer Vael had no choice but to construct a device that controlled your emotional state."

Shepard sighed, and stood forward. "Hackett, sir. It's from indoctrination.", she informed.

The two alliance officials gasped silently.

Hackett looked alarmed, then seemed confused. He spoke, "We have over two-hundred and fifty men and women in uniform that have been under the influence of indoctrination. They had to pass a psychological evaluation before re-entering into service."

Shepard and Satima exchanged glances, when one of the officials stepped forward. "But none of them have the unknown tech capabilities as her. And only a dozen from the other N7 groups could possibly match her in combat. Admiral, she could be a liability." This female official stared them down, unwavering in her concern. Satima gazed at her alliance blue uniform and lowered her eyes from the brown eyed stare.

"Which is why, although I have a classified report from T'Soni of this…", he looked at the data pad, "Mind purge? I must order that Satima Shepard be put under psychological evaluation on Earth at Alliance command, in two weeks." Hackett glimpsed Shepard's worried expression.

Satima understood their fear, and although Liara helped quiet the other down, the implant could malfunction and disaster would strike. "I accept.", she blurted. Everyone stared at her. Satima continued, "I accept this evaluation. I know I'm not well… in here.", she pointed to her head.

Hackett resumed, "Then it is agreed. Shepard, a word."
The two officials left with the sentarian scientist, who glared one more time to Satima. Hackett led them further into the room. He watched the hybrid sulk while Shepard waited. "Satima.", he spoke. She looked up timidly, unsure of what the admiral was going to say.

"Were you in alliance military-your actions, beginning from the moment you helped stop the reapers, to when you threatened the council. And now running to this galaxy from your responsibilities. would require reprimand.", he explained. "But you're not." Hackett paced in front of them, hands behind his back. "The Sentarians have exiled you, and now the only home you have is here." He stopped pacing and stared at her. "Therefore, you must understand why I'm saying this to you, now."

She glanced down.

"This behavior must stop. Permanently. Shepard doesn't deserve this from anybody, including her own child.", he accused. "I don't know what you've been through, and God knows living in the presence of monsters will change a man. But, you are not like them. Don't allow their training to turn you into them. Understood?"

Satima refused to meet his gaze, but nodded. "Yes, sir.", she answered.

Hackett looked to Shepard, "I'll contact you on the details about the eval. Until then, go and rest. You both deserve that." He then turned his gaze to Satima.

Shepard saluted, leading her daughter back out.

In the embassy lobby, they walked to the elevator, passing by curious onlookers and other whispers. Inside the lift, Shepard turned to Satima, who continued to stare away in shame. "I hope you understand what everyone is doing for you.", she explained.

Satima nodded her head, "I do."

Shepard pressed for the presidium ward. "I want to believe that, but until then, you have to follow your orders." The elevator descended, when Satima started to speak. "Whatever it takes to make everything right, I'll do it."

Back at the apartment, Shepard and Satima stepped through the door to see Garrus and Natalie talking with Jack. Charlie gave a wide grin seeing her friend again, while Satima stayed in the background. "Jack! You brought Natalie home? I was going to get her at the docks today.", Shepard explained.

Jack chuckled, nodding towards Natalie. "The little sprite couldn't wait to get home after hearing about your return. So, I got early leave and we hung out here for a few days."

Natalie smiled at them, "We went to the arcade a lot and made a huge ice cream sundae!"

Shepard raised her brow to Jack, who defended her sweet tooth. "Hey! I like ice cream, got a problem with that?!", she jested in a serious tone.

With a laugh, Shepard gestured in amusement. "Nope, you can have all the ice cream you want, so long as Natalie didn't get sick.", she eyed.

"I threw up one time.", Natalie informed.

Jack snapped her head to the girl, "Traitor."
Garrus chuckled at them, standing next to his adopted daughter. "I'm a little upset.", he complained.

"Why?", Shepard asked.

He crossed his arms defiantly," Turians can't have ice cream."

Satima watched them laugh at the comment, feeling left out on what this "ice cream" business is. She knows it must be food. Quietly, she tried to leave the living room to her domicile.

Jack noticed. "Hey, girl scout! Where're you going?"

Satima froze for a second, then turned to Jack. "I'm just going to my room. I won't bother anyone."

Jack contorted her face to confusion. Natalie stared at Satima, slowly walking forward, and standing in front of her. An uncertain gaze searching the hybrid woman for a response. She then placed her arms around Satima's waist, almost chest high to the young woman.

"I'm glad you're feeling better.", Natalie tried to give a comforting squeeze, just like her mother used to do before the fires. Her hazel eyes watered suddenly at the memory, and upon looking up to Satima, Natalie finally understood what she had done for her.

Satima didn't reciprocate, but felt like her legs were lead. Natalie stared hoping for Satima to say something, as the room suddenly grew quiet. Swallowing hard, Satima looked away, and gently pried Natalie's arms from her. She turned, walking back to her room, locking the door.

Shepard tried to process what she witnessed. Natalie treated Satima like a sister, but her hybrid daughter couldn't handle it now. Instead of the usual unpredictable behavior, Satima treated the situation with care and left in private.

No doubt in Shepard's mind, Satima needs help. There's a lot of pain wrapped up in her child, and it's eating her alive.

Jack crossed her arms, tapping her foot impatiently while Garrus and Shepard exchanged worried glances. Natalie stood there, upset that Satima didn't like her hug. She's trying to be a good sister to her!

Satima gets all the attention, and gets to go everywhere with Ms. Shepard…. mom. Natalie silently gasped to herself, holding a small hand over her mouth like she had said those words out loud. Garrus stepped behind her, "Natalie, are you okay?"

Natalie felt angry suddenly, quickly facing him. "Just leave me alone!", she shouted with tears in her eyes.

Garrus stood back surprised, but didn't stop her from running to her room on the other side of the apartment. He turned around to see Shepard watch in concern. Jack continued to tap her foot, then stopped. "What's going on?", she demanded.

Shepard glanced in her direction unhappily, taking a seat on the couch facing the large windows ahead. "Satima has been suffering from long term indoctrination and abuse for a long time. It's affecting her life every day." She stared at Jack," She betrayed the Sentarians and her superior."

Shepard looked away, personally ashamed that her own child, albeit from the future, had done so much damage in the galaxy. Interesting thought came about, as Garrus and Jack stood around closer to her.
Wouldn't it be balance, that although she has played the hero-the guardian, the shield to this galaxy for a long time. That if it were not her, but her own child that ends up the villain at the end?

Garrus sat next to her, repeating her name over and over, until she snapped out of it. "Charlie... Charlie... Charlie!"

"What?!", she nearly shouted.

Jack unfolded her arms, "You were daydreaming, Shepard." She placed a hand on her hip, leaning into it with an expression of pity. "You guys got a handful to deal with."

"Yeah.", Garrus spoke.

Jack shook her head, "Well, I'll be here for a couple of days. If you guys need any help with the kids," she laughed in jest," Let me know and I'll put them in time-out barriers."

Shepard laughed. Garrus stood up, extending his hand to Jack. She took it, as he spoke. "Thanks Jack."

After she left the apartment, they both sat together, letting out deep sighs. Charlie held Garrus's taloned hand, as she wondered what to do next. "We have two weeks to prepare her for Earth. The last time she set foot there, reapers were crawling all over the place.", she recalled.

"It's been almost two years, Charlie.", he turned his head to her. An avian gaze searching her sad outlook. "I haven't been on Earth since that day either, but the vids of the new reconstruction look good." He tried to assure her in this matter. Palaven still had buildings that were too dangerous to fix, and hazardous from the reaper blasts. It would take decades for his people to rebuild, and more to find all the bodies that weren't turn into ash.

Charlie looked at him, "I just don't want her to see a barren wasteland again. Remember, I haven't been back there in a while, too." She gazed out to the windows, watching the sky cars pass by. "For them both this station has been the only home they know. Palaven and Earth are big steps, and I don't blame either Satima or Natalie for not wanting to try."

Garrus leaned over to her, taking her face into his hand and caressing the soft human cheek. Charlie's emerald eyes pierced his gaze. "We'll do this as a family."

She smiled, lightly chuckling. "I know. Just us, together."

Garrus shook his head," Not just us, but your whole family."

Charlie stared at him puzzled. "My whole family?"

"Yes.", he said. "The Normandy." Garrus widened his mandibles into a turian smile. Charlie touched his plated forehead to hers affectionately.

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Following Day

Satima woke from a nightmare. Cold sweat pouring down her face, as her turian gaze looked for the monsters in the dark of the room. Empty and silent. Slowly, she pulled the covers off her, sitting on the edge of the bed. Satima ran slender fingers through a no longer shaven ginger hair.

A heavy sigh escaped her lips, followed by a cold shudder. The thoughts of Lithera and Gern, the rachni hive-queen and how she betrayed her closest friends nauseated her.
In the bathroom, she stared at her reflection. Dark circles dulled her gaze. Didn't help her complexion by being paler than the snow on the planet Borlask lived on. Looking more closely, Satima could see that she seemed sickly. Even after the cure, and silencing the other for now, her body had gone from fit and agile, to thin and weak.

Did they notice on the ship? Had she worked herself so hard on Lithera to rid the planet of the rachni, that she forgot to rest and replenish? When she returned, infected, was she so pale? Clearly the plague had created enough trauma to her system. Maybe that's what caused her to weaken against the alter? If Liara hadn't done that purge, and the implant from Arkasia?

There was a knock on her door. Satima leaned out and listened, as another knock echoed. She walked out, glimpsing the holo clock on her dresser. It's morning. A voice spoke from the other side of her door.
"Whenever you're hungry, there's dextro food in the fridge. If you need any help… just let me know."

It was Shepard.

Satima didn't answer, choosing to crawl back into bed and skip the family morning social altogether.

At the table, Natalie sat opposite of Garrus, sorry for her how she acted the previous day. She averted her gaze, focusing on her cereal. Shepard, her new mom, watched them both eat silently. She smiled at them, taking a seat next to Natalie with her coffee.

After a few bites, she looked up to him. He continued to read an article in his visor, waiting for a message from Daxis. She started to speak, letting out barely a soft tone before quickly shutting her mouth. Garrus closed his extranet tab, now seeing her clearly.

He wasn't sore at what she said yesterday, only worried. Settling into a parent role wasn't easy, and he still struggles to be open with Natalie. Unfortunately, he feels his parenting style has turned to more of a cop versus informant role with Satima. As he always pleads with her to make the right decisions and connects with her only during combat.

Natalie sat crossed legged in her chair. She kept glancing to him. "I'm sorry!", she shouted, embarrassed.

They both stared at her in surprise.

"What was that?", Charlie asked.

Natalie played with her food, keeping a lowered gaze. "I said I'm sorry. About yesterday. I thought Satima would be happy to be here… like me. But, she's not."

Garrus exchanged a glance to Charlie, returning a soft avian gaze to Natalie. "Satima.", he began," Is going through a difficult time, right now. She's lost friends, and it's going to be a while before she feels better." He kept a stare to watch her response. "Do you understand?"

Natalie looked at him. He could tell the little cogwheels of child-like understanding where turning in her mind. With a calmer gaze, she nodded. "Yes, dad. I do."

Another surprise. Garrus leaned back, somewhat stunned but answered. "Good."

Charlie observed with a smile. After all they've been through, it seemed like a few barriers were taken down between them. Now if only Satima's barriers could be brought down. But that will take time, and trust.
Just as she was finishing her thoughts, a ping echoed off her omni-tool. Charlie opened the message. There is a meeting with the councilors today, and her presence is requested. She glanced to Garrus. He and Natalie were busy discussing her time at the academy while they were away in the sentarian system. Charlie cleared her throat, they both looked up. "I'm meeting with the council today.", she informed. "I don't know what it is about, but I can just guess."

"Do you need me to come with you?", Garrus asked.

Charlie shook her head," No. Besides, it would probably be best if you stayed here with Natalie. Keep an eye on Satima." She cautioned.

Garrus nodded his head, then looked back to the hall. "Speaking of which, she hasn't come out of there in a while. I'm worried."

"I am too, but we should give her space. She'll come out in time.", Charlie assured.

Shepard prepared herself for the meeting. Dressing in alliance uniform for formality and a show of rank. She'll need to remind them that this time, her words will be weighed, carefully. Satima is her daughter, and no one will lock her away.

Hackett gave a sound order in urging Satima to receive help. She needs therapy to cope with her past and the traumatic mistakes she's made from poor judgement.

Taking the cab to the presidium and using an elevator to reach the lobby, Shepard bumped into an unexpected person from her past. His dark hair and suspicious glare were a dead giveaway. A man that once ran with her in a gang on earth, long ago.

He managed to narrow his gaze on her, immediately stomping forward with a small group of men and women at his heels. What now? "SHEPARD!", he shouted. Finally standing in front of her, blocking her way to the stairs that led to Khalee's office. "We want answers!", he demanded.

She crossed her arms in irritation at their glares and angry agreements. "I don't answer to you. Get out of my way.", she steadily warned.

"Damn straight you do!", he paced. "Do you remember me?"

"Hard to forget an asshole like you.", she countered. "Finch. You used to be in the Reds with me, a long time ago." Her recollection leaving a bitter taste in her mouth. "Five years ago on the citadel, you wanted me to free one of your men. I alerted the c-sec guard to your little scheme. Then you disappeared." She smirked out loud in amazement, "Figures the reapers couldn't get rid of scum like you in the galaxy."

Finch balled his fists, then released them with a nasty glare. "Oh, I survived. Fled to Omega, where that stupid asari let a bunch of idiots create reaper monsters. "Humanity first"- I watched my friends die from those things." He complained. "I remember the collectors kidnapping human colonies. You worked with Cerberus and stood up for humanity, going rogue and taking down those bastards, doing the Reds proud."

Shepard unfolded her arms, confused. "Then why are you here, harassing me?"

Finch and the others glimpsed to each other, their gazes changed to worry. He stared at her, "Because of your alien-loving ways, this galaxy is once again in danger."

"From what?", Shepard implored, annoyed.

Finch stepped closer, "That thing you openly call your daughter. She's an abomination to all of
mankind! We're not meant to breed with those aliens!” He then pointed to a turian c-sec guard in
disgust.

Shepard shook her head, "Finch, you're nothing but a sad little man. Leading others down your path
of personal destruction. Take your bigot mouth and get out of my sight, before I toss your sorry ass
from this station." she glared in warning.

Unknown to them a crowd gathered, listening to the loud debate. Suddenly, a large applause roared
around them. The crowd of different species took to Shepard's defense of her hybrid progeny. That
despite the implications of the terrifying reaper child, she did save the station from the rogue sentarian
and had a hand in stopping the reapers.

Shepard looked on in approval, smiling towards Finch a bit deviously. "You see, Finch? No matter
what color your skin is, or how many eyes you have, or if you come from a civilization of one sex.
Your actions speak more loudly than your physical appearance. And if you think calling my
daughter a monster will erase the good she has done here, you're wrong."

Finch stared away, catching a nasty glare or two from the crowd. He blinked his eyes, frustrated and
defeated. "Paint the picture how you want, Shepard. It doesn't change the facts." He left with his

She turned around to see Khalee and Daxis standing in the crowd. "I'm starting to think you
should've been made councilor, Shepard. That was quite a display you put out there.", Khalee
commented.

"Indeed. I'm glad you're on our side. Diplomatically speaking.", Daxis added with a smirk.

Shepard chuckled, then quieted down, reflecting in thought. She glanced to them. "I was just
thinking."

"About what?", Khalee asked.

"The only other "hybrid" of children out there are the ones from asari. Genetically." She had spotted
a small asari child running to a human man. He scooped her up in delight, as a beautiful asari woman
took his arm. They looked perfectly happy. "But, those children are still asari. Accepted and actually
praised for their different genetic makeup from another species." Shepard's face contorted to
disturbance. "But, my child. The child of the Shepard, the only living hybrid between two species
that cannot-as we know it today-procreate due from difference in biology, is publicly feared and
hated."

Khalee stepped forward from the dying crowd, "I'm so sorry, Shepard. Satima doesn't deserve to be
seen as such." She glanced down, then back to Shepard. "This is part of the meeting."

Shepard sighed, "Wonderful. What is the next part?"

"An assassination attempt on Gesin.", Daxis informed.

She narrowed her gaze in thought. Fantar.

Shepard returned home, frustrated at this new mission so early after getting back. She knows how
important Gesin is to the batarians. Keeping him alive will continue the peaceful relations his people
have now taken up. If Fantar is successful in killing him, he'll start a war that no one is ready to face.
Least of all humanity.

Inside the large living space, she spotted Garrus speaking to Daxis over the vid screen.
"I understand you just returned from the sentarian home system, but the small council is worried over
the plague. Your reports indicate it was a bio-weapon from the reapers-this "Directive". A future
countermeasure to wiping out a whole species.", Daxis spoke. He tilted his head, holding the data
pad to his gaze, then staring at Garrus. "Has a similar strain like the "sickness" on Omega."

"Yes, but the one on Omega targeted every species, but two. The humans and the vorcha. And
Mordin Solus had already confirmed then that the reapers were behind its experimental properties.
The new infection from the Directive was levo centered. Doctor Chockwas from the alliance
Normandy confirmed that. Though it is speculation that it has mutation advancements, which is why
the sentarians were also affected.", Garrus informed.

Shepard kept quiet, noticing Natalie coming down the left hall from her room. She looked up in
surprise at her mother, who then put a finger to her mouth in a shush. Natalie obeyed and waited.

Daxis set his pad down, "As head of the reaper division on Palaven, your presence is required during
a debriefing. I'm sorry you have to be gone for a while." He sighed to himself, "I heard about
Satima's ventures in the sentarian system. Can't say that I'm not disappointed, but the reports from
Shepard's top alliance officials say she's going for an indoctrination therapy session in two weeks? I
hope it works."

Garrus lowered his gaze. Has this information reached every high-ranking official on Palaven? If so,
is his Father disappointed also? "Thank you, Councilor.", he replied.

Daxis nodded, "Of course."

The vid screen ended with Garrus turning around to Shepard and Natalie. He walked forward
towards them. "Looks like I'll be gone for a bit. If I'm lucky the turian council won't take long telling
me how my hybrid daughter is a danger to the galaxy." Garrus tried to be facetious, but his own
attempt at the jest failed. He didn't look forward to the visit, despite the personal excitement to see his
father and sister again. "Charlie… do you think that going to earth will help?", he wondered.

Charlie tilted her head, "You really are worried about her?"

Garrus nodded, "I know you are too, it's just that… I'm not sure how I can help her."

Charlie stared at him, as Natalie stepped closer. Searching their faces with her hazel eyes. "I can
help.", she began. "I know I go back to school tomorrow, but when I get home, we can go to the
arcade or the presidium parks." Her hopeful response touched them both. Charlie wrapped her arm
around Natalie's shoulder, bringing her in for a hug. "That sounds like a good idea. Only, let me talk
to her first. See if she's up for it."

"I'll wait in my room!", Natalie replied excitedly, running back down the hall.

Charlie crossed her arms, "I didn't mean today…", she tried to speak.

Garrus laughed to himself, leaning in closer to Charlie and placing his arm around her waist. "If I had
asked you back on earth when we were fighting the reapers, if you envisioned us together and with
kids, what would you have said?"

She smirked, "Us? Kids?", Charlie smiled at him, before it faded into a worried frown. "Honestly, I
wouldn't have thought this far out. I mean, surviving the reaper war and keeping your ass alive was
hard enough work. But raising a family? I think I've met my match." She looked to him sarcastically.

Garrus squeezed her waist tighter to him, "Saved my ass? I believe it was me, that had your six in
every mission."
"Oh, I see. So, your confessing that it was my "ass" you were staring at in every mission?", she smirked.

He pinched her, "The vids back on the SR2 did speak of human male's interest in a female's behind. I just wanted to see what the fuss was all about." Garrus brought her face to face with him, teasing a turian kiss. "Turns out, I was very interested in yours."

She grinned, accepting his little peck on her mouth. "That's good to know." Charlie sighed, backing away. "Pleasantries of our passion aside, we have other problems."

"Like what?", he asked.

"I've been sent on a mission as spectre to handle an assassination attempt on Gesin Sar'manak. The new batarian leader. I'm pretty sure it's Fantar." She looked down the right hall, then the left. A concern on her face. "I leave out tomorrow."

Garrus's mandibles twitched in irritation. "I leave tomorrow as well. That's not good."

She agreed. "Jack is headed back to the academy, and there's no one that's not busy with keeping this galaxy together. I'd hate to use a babysitting service. Natalie hasn't had any time to spend with us."

"Spirits.", Garrus started. He paced in front of her, looking down the right hall. "I know one person who is free for a while." He insinuated.

Charlie shook her head, "That's not a good idea. Especially now. Garrus, we're supposed to be helping her. Not dumping Natalie in her lap and leaving them both alone on the station."

"Satima and Natalie are sisters, now. They both have to get used to it.", he pointed out. Garrus looked down, returning a calm gaze to her. "We need to speak to her, today. She handled Natalie's welcome yesterday. A week of normal family activities could do her good."

Charlie sighed heavily, "That's just it. Satima has never had a family before. I'm worried at what she would do, or how she'll handle that type of responsibility."

"Then let's talk to her now.", Garrus insisted.

They stood in front of the door, hesitant at first. It's been less than twenty-four hours and Satima needed her space and quiet. Unfortunately, that was about to be disturbed. Charlie knocked gently on the door. "Satima? We need to speak.", she tried in a motherly tone.

Only silence made the response.

Garrus began," Satima, you need to open the door. Don't make us do it for you."

A minute passed when they exchanged glances, then a barely audible voice spoke from the other side of the door. "… it's not locked…"

Charlie stepped through first, annoyed by the darkness her daughter stayed in. Garrus turned on a desk light. They both searched the room for her, only to find Satima behind her bed, against the wall. She sat with her knees to her face, still in the same clothes from yesterday. Satima looked so pale and tired.

Charlie leaned down, observing with a worried gaze. "How are you feeling?", she asked.

Satima stared away, "Like shit."
Garrus stood to the side, "Honest answer."

Charlie eyed him, returning her gaze to Satima. "We need to talk."

"You always need to talk.", she sighed in frustration. "What is it this time?"

"Your mother is leaving on a mission tomorrow, and I'm heading back to Palaven. Official reaper business.", Garrus informed.

"And that involves me how?", Satima questioned curtly.

"We don't have anyone to watch Natalie while we're away. This caught us off guard, Satima.", Charlie explained.

Satima narrowed her stare in confusion, then proceeded to sit up, standing in front of them. "So, send Natalie back to the academy."

Charlie stood with her, "The academy is for biotic and gifted children. Natalie doesn't possess biotic skills. Satima...", Charlie rubbed her temple in an oncoming headache. "Whether you like it or not, you are her big sister. We need you to take care of her, while we're on duty."

"No way.", Satima complained. "I don't babysit children. Don't get along with them."

"How about the kids you helped get food and medicine in the lower wards for, with Ronin?", Garrus questioned.

Satima shook her head, pacing away from them. "We don't get along. And don't talk about him again!"

Charlie watched in anger. "Are you sure it's not just you, that doesn't get along with anyone?"

Garrus stepped between them, knowing the eventual argument that was boiling over. "Alright.", he started, taking his glance from Charlie and to Satima. "I know you're an adult, but I'm tired of this attitude. Now, we're going back to duty tomorrow and we need you to take care of your little sister. Don't make me ask again." He warned.

Satima looked away, upset. They made a connection back on the Normandy, and Garrus stood by her side, listening to the anger and fear that she felt. She should respect him and Shepard. With a nod, Satima faced them. "Okay. I'll watch her."

Charlie sighed in relief, and tried to smile at Satima. But the girl wouldn't have it. They left her alone for now, giving Satima time to process this. She'll come around, and when they get to earth. Satima will finally get the help she needs.

Normandy Docks
Next Morning

Satima cleaned herself up, and quietly joined the "family" at their departure. Shepard intends to take Garrus to Palaven. They'll be traveling together, while she is stuck with the human girl-child. Natalie was practically dotted on, placed between them during their familial embrace. She looked to Satima, who preferred to sulk to the side, a scornful expression warning the girl not to speak to her.

Shepard hugged Natalie one more time," Ok. Remember to go straight to school. If you need anything, contact me through vid-comm. Satima will take care of you."
Natalie, who had grown a few inches since being in the academy for a month, nodded. "I will."

Satima led Natalie to the cab, when Garrus stopped her. He stared at Satima, "Whatever you feel, whenever it happens… don’t take it out on her."

Satima's expression suddenly changed to a self-consciences concern. She couldn't look him in the eye and pretend things will be cheery.

Garrus grabbed her arm quickly as she tried to walk away, squeezing roughly. "I mean it.", he glared. His voice stern this time. "Natalie cares about you. She sees you as a sister, so be one to her. Even if it's acting. And when we get back, we'll deal with your problems directly."

Satima nodded, shamefully. She followed Natalie into the cab, and navigated it to the girl's school.

Garrus watched. Spirits, this is stupid.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for stopping by. :)}
Paragade

Chapter Summary

Garrus is alerted to the alliance’s secret research. Troubled, he puts the information aside, still fixed on helping Satima. Shepard enters the role of spectre again, but this time-goes rogue. She finds herself in a position that questions her own motives, and integrity. Are her brutal actions reminiscent of Saren?

Satima pushes herself to bond with Natalie. The Shepard-Vakarian family take time off, and go for a day out of fun on the citadel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Palaven

Three days later

Administrative Defense Advocacy Center

After docking in the space port, Garrus made his way directly to the Public Judicial Chambers. He already received a message from Agripenex. Two of his lieutenants from the reaper division he commanded before his mission to Lithera, met him on the second level.

Lateillia and Nerris, brought a report regarding their research into reaper cybernetics. A little project he put together with a few salarian scientists. Something personal, and completely unauthorized.

"Commander Vakarian, here are the results you wanted upon arrival.", Lateillia informed.

Garrus nodded, briefly catching her glimpse of Nerris. Both come from a regiment that were stationed against the reapers. And both had witnessed their fellow soldiers fall to them.

He guessed they might have formed a little private affection during that time. Always insisting to be together on every project. Nerris stared ahead, either unaware or trying to throw off his Commander’s detective wits.

Resuming his study with a smirk, Garrus overlooked the data. It seemed promising, but a snag stopped the results from being plausible. He wondered if there was a way to obtain more detailed knowledge about reaper tech, without alerting other officials.

Lateillia gazed with blue eyes, determined to find an answer to her commander’s research. She respected Vakarian, and his family. Proud to be under his division, alongside Nerris of course.

"Something wrong, sir?", she inquired.

Garrus looked up, "Nothing other than disappointment. Not from your department.", he answered. "We'll keep trying. In the meantime, I have a meeting with the small council. If you could send this message to my father. I would be grateful." He gave a turian smile.

Lateillia and Nerris saluted, "Sir!"

Nerris stayed still, while Lateillia began walking away. Garrus noticed his hesitant stance. "Something else you'd like to report?", he wondered.
"Sir.", Nerris began. "It's something I came by during the daily report. Something about a rumor from the alliance."

Garrus gestured him to stand next to an alcove in private. "You know how I don't like rumors, Nerris. But go ahead and tell me what you found."

Nerris checked the area before speaking. "That the alliance is also conducting similar research. But it's somewhere we don't know about. That's all I have." Lateillia stood next to them, already nervous about this development.

Similar research? Garrus wondered what the alliance was up to. He sighed, "Thank you, Lieutenant. I'll follow up with it later."

They left promptly, while Garrus stared. He observed the all-turian building. Old memories of his youth, serving on a turian dreadnought for a few years before joining C-Sec, replayed in his mind. He suddenly wondered how Charlie was doing.

Tereshkova System
Antibaar

The New Hegemony was placed in a subterranean facility by the council, and manned by the alliance. The human military acted as controlled guardianship, leaving Gesin's people on this planet as wards of the council.

Most of the surviving batarian civilization had been placed in the lower arms of the citadel, with many that were mated to asari, relocated to Thessia or Illium.

This facility protected its inhabitants from the severe cold weather above, providing heating coils throughout and hydroponic systems for food sources. Gesin contended with the complaints, but knew the alliance was being more than supportive to his people. They and the council, promised to help them find a world, even if it starts here.

Level two-Control Room

Brev started her day with the same routine. She got up at pre-dawn hours, dressed in the mechanic suit, and continued with the rounds her small crew oversaw. The control room powered the main generator and four conduit stations. If one malfunctioned, her team would furnish repairs.

If more than one malfunctioned, the main flux of power would be diverted to their new leader-Gesin Sar'manek. His role is to oversee the evacuation of all five levels of their people to safety.

Traitors, all of them.

Over a dozen families resided in the fourth level. With many more landing outside in the shielded docking port. Alliance personal were stationed to an outpost nearby to keep the port active and safe. A courtesy, Gesin would say.

Brev feels it's a way to monitor them. And why not? For years, their kind have been a thorn in the batarian people's side. Suddenly gaining favor with the council all because the turians decided to play war with them, over thirty-two years ago.

A hasty and overly ambitious evil. She never trusted or liked that Shepard. Convenient the commander, or... captain now, couldn't stop the asteroid from decimating her colony, and the reapers from slaughtering her people.

She stopped at the locker to rummage through a tool drawer. A wrench will do nicely.
All of that was years ago, and now, everything has changed.

This underground "haven" had whitewashed metal walls to reflect the cold surface, and the lack of comfortable beds further irritated her. The coming assault brought a pleasant smile to her batarian features. Many of Brev's people passed by her on the way to the conduit. Two sliding doors and a few security mechs blocked the first two electrical outlets.

Glass walls shown the blue tinted stone in the planets rocky caverns. Maybe an attempt to give the "slaves" a view to a dangerous beauty. Once through the elevator, Brev arrived on the last level. The second set of power conduits were in the last room of this corridor. One of the security mechs were down and being repaired, while the other two had been sent to patrol a local upset from a few disgruntled mechanics. Brev's plan is coming around perfectly. She walked through the door, nodding to a worker, then approached conduit four.

It had a large conductive spire, surrounded by smaller poles that sent pure energy inside its core. Conduit five had the same structure, delivering power to the sub-levels efficiently. Brev pretended to work on four, opening the panel to the wired pathways and digital array that served as information for the power stations. Her comms came on.

"Brev, our people are ready. The outpost is secure and I have a team waiting outside the base to assault."

It was Fantar.

"Excellent my leader. I am ready to begin the sabotage.", she alerted in private.

The other batarian worker was not a part of their plan, like many of the batarian inhabitants. Soon, they will face a choice: servitude or freedom.

The com-link ended, with Brev severing wires and placing her wrench inside between them. It sent a powerful jolt straight to the data frame, causing the spire to overload. Sending dangerous electrical sparks outward, that also damaged conduit five.

She began backing away watching for an affirmation of the event, as the other worker peeked in curiosity. He glanced to the open panel, his eyes widening in fear. "What are you doing?", he ran to the conduit to stop the overload.

Brev shook her head, and held out a hidden pistol. "Step away, brother!"

He ignored her, unaware of the danger he is in. Brev looked away while he continued to stop the overload, then she pulled the trigger. He fell back with a groan, dead.

Hiding behind the sliding door, Brev watched the conduits explode. Minimal fires spread, but the overhead sprinkler systems will stop that. They don't want to destroy the base, only take control. And taking away their main source of power will do just that.

She ran back down the corridor hearing gun fire, wielding her pistol. Brev opened the door to the wide basement, seeing Fantar's men kill the alliance, and take Gesin's loyalist hostage. One of the mercs in charge spotted her, and sprinted towards her direction. They stood to the side, giving careful glances to the scene. "Brev, we need you to head the militia at the outpost. Fantar has changed the objective.", Jenruc explained.

"What?", she asked alarmed.

He handed her a data pad, a rifle and armor. "The council has been tipped off, they're sending a
spectre here." His eyes glared, "They're sending the Shepard."

Brev gripped her new weapon tightly. The Shepard!

He grinned, "And this time, Fantar has promised she won't escape."

Normandy

Shepard overlooked the flight to Antibaar. It's been awhile since she's set foot on this planet. A long while. Her hair neatly in a bun, she placed her hand on the top of Joker's chair, waiting for his input. He noticed her uneasiness. "Captain, we have the planet on screen, I'm hailing the surface but there's no answer."

EDI turned to them, "The Alliance outpost com-link is active, with multiple broadcasts going through. But none are alliance signatures."

Shepard narrowed her gaze in concern. "Hack them. Tell me what you find." She begins to leave the cockpit heading for the cargo bay.

Cortez is readying the Kodiak, prepping the engines and running diagnostics. Everything had to be checked more than twice since they returned from Lithera. Shepard arrived from the elevator, walking out in a hurry to her armor station. He noticed she had a stern look about her.

James careened up to him, "So, is it me, or is the Captain a little too broody since we left the citadel?"

Cortez finished the data run, "I think it's about the Satima mess. She's concerned, is all. I would be too, if my future daughter had reaper capabilities."

James smirked, "I don't think it's just that."

Shepard had put on her under suit, mechanically placing each piece of armor on her body. She finished, turning around to find her weapons already laid out on the workstation. James was standing to attention, half-way geared up.

"Ma'am! Ready to assist."

She raised a brow quizzically, then shook her head. "I need to go solo on this one."

James began to protest, "But, you always take a team, Lola."

Shepard cut him off, "Spectre business. If I need anything, you and Cortez can crash land through the outpost." It sounded sarcastic, except for the serious expression.

James wanted to argue, but kept his big mouth shut. Shepard could put him through a wall if she wanted too, her shorter height didn't make a damn bit of difference. And it didn't make a difference in princess Lola, either.

Under orders, Joker flew the Normandy to the surface five miles from the outpost, to a make-shift camp containing land rovers.

The Captain jumped off the ramp with a worried set of crew members observing. She waved them off, verbally telling Joker to orbit back into space. Shepard made her way through the freezing snow, into the camp.

There were no assigned mechs, and no security. The heated hab had no one inside. She noted this,
trekking to the land rover, opening the side hatch and getting in. Shepard took a seat, turning on the holo display and pressing the panel for drive. She took a deep breath, exhaling loudly before taking off for the mission.

Shepard needed to be alone. It's stupid to do this without a team, but they would just poke and prod about Satima. About family life and what the Alliance is going to do. She's fought batarians on her own before, but this time, her head isn't clouded with saving civilians and her fellow marines.

It's filled with fear, for Satima.

The rover pushed forward, spurting snow from its tires, as Shepard carefully drove to the outpost. Closer inspection gave her an idea of what is going on. Her comms broke through.

"Captain.", its EDI. "Those broadcasts are orders from a batarian named Fantar. The base is overrun."

Shepard exhaled in quiet irritation."Thanks, EDI.", she replied.

"Captain?", EDI asked.

Shepard cautiously parked a few feet away from a rover garage. She turned off the vehicle, and quietly opened the hatch. "Yes, EDI?", she whispered in annoyance.

"You should've taken a team.", the AI warned.

She spotted a group of batarians, checking their rifles, and speaking to each other. "EDI, unless you have something important to my mission to relay, turn off the comms!" She ordered sternly.

The com-link ended, with EDI and Joker exchanging worried glances. She resumed her navigations functions. "But it is.", she explained.

The batarian mercs gathered around taken alliance personal. Shepard hid behind supply crates to listen.

"Fantar wants this place secure, but we have to shut down the comms. Our broadcasting could catch the attention of an alliance vessel.", one of them complained.

"Or a turian.", the other spat. "Since they're bedding the alliance, no doubt they've started protecting they're precious soft humans as well."

Shepard felt an anger at those words. She knows what these scum are insinuating. Her attention was caught when one of the alliance officers quipped back at them. "Yeah, better watch out or all our turian lovers will come through those doors any second and kick all of your asses!"

Shepard shook her head, stifling a laugh. That reminded her of Satima, then suddenly she heard a hard slap. The batarian hit the woman to the floor. He stood over her menacingly. "One more word, human-and your life will be forfeit."

The other merc stepped closer, "I thought their lives were already expendable?"

"Shut your trap!", he shouted. "They don't know that, yet.", he grinned to them.

Shepard brought out a frag grenade, priming it. The mercs walked off to the group, standing around the entrance to the outpost. She peeked over the crate, studying where the hostages were, then leaned back holding her arm out. Adjusting her arc of the frag, she lobbed it with all her strength.
It bounced off the ceiling, straight into the middle of the group. Shepard heard one of the mercs yell "grenade"! Then it exploded. Thick smoke clouded the garage, as she leaned out from cover. Shepard looked at all the red paint over the walls and ceiling. Messy, but efficient.

The alliance security team on the floor watched in trepidation before focusing on Shepard. The woman the merc hit sat up, a bruised eye staring right at her. "Captain Shepard!", she exclaimed.

Shepard knelt to them, taking a combat knife and breaking the zip ties on their wrist. "How many are in this outpost?", she asked.

She gave the woman her knife so she could free the others. "Ma'am. Twenty of the bastards, not counting the ones you killed down here. More could be on the way. They're being led by a female, Brev. She sabotaged the base."

The captain motioned for her to follow. "Can you raise a separate com-link to my ship? The Normandy is orbiting as we speak."

The lieutenant answered in excitement. "Yes, Ma'am!", she replied.

"Good. Take your men and secure this garage. Once I've dealt with the others here, I'll give you a rendezvous to lock down the outpost.", Shepard ordered.

With an eagerness of a cadet, the young woman set out on her orders, proud to have received them by the legendary Shepard.

Shepard sighed, turning to the entrance of the post, and began her infiltration. She passed the remains of the previous group.

Through the door, she stayed to the wall, carefully venturing up the winding hall. Up top, four mercs were overseeing a change in shifts, when she hid behind a rail, overlooking the docks below. The shield that kept the dangerous freezing weather out, let in another set of shuttles. Damn!

More mercs piled out from them. She can shoot her way to the other side, find this Brev and end the assault on the post, but it wouldn't stop the oncoming shuttles. Where are they coming from? She turned on her comms to contact that alliance woman. "Ma'am?", the officer responded in a whisper.

"What's your name, soldier?", Shepard asked.

There was a pause, then the younger woman replied, "Myra, Myra King."

Shepard leaned out from the rail, spotting two batarian mercs coming her way. "Have you established a private com-link from the Normandy yet?"

"We're almost to the com station in the basement. But, we've ran into a snag. There's four mercs down here. We'll need a distraction.", King informed.

Shepard sighed in irritation. So, that beats a more quieter approach. She needs to find out where those shuttles are coming from. "Right. Distraction, coming up."

She stood up, aiming her rifle and shot down the mercs. Their cries echoed in the open expanse of the docks, as the other mercs piled out and took cover. Shepard hid behind a console station, when her comms came back on. "That did it! Uh, whatever you did. We're clear to work.", King exclaimed.

Five mercs made an advanced towards Shepard. She leaned out and shot one of them, injuring the
Shepard laughed, feeling cocky. "Every time someone tries to take me hostage, they end up dead! Don't try it!", she yelled at them. She then tossed another frag into the fray, injuring several of the mercs. These guys are not well trained. Fantar must be getting desperate.

A female voice echoed throughout the docks, "I see the infamous Shepard has arrived. We've been waiting for an opportunity like this. You see, Gesin may be the focus right now, but our real problem is YOU!"

Shepard killed three more mercs. That's six out of the twenty King reported, and ten more had just arrived. She took cover again, leaning out to watch the next set try and ambush her. "What do you mean the real problem?", she demanded.

Brev laughed, "You think we would openly take this base and attack your alliance so quickly, and without preparation?" Her amusement became apparent over the comms. "Shepard, this was all for you! A well-planned ambush prior to your… execution."

Shepard sat tight, thinking. The council was so convinced this was a real attempt to kill Gesin. Maybe it still is, but with the bonus of her? She looked up, leaning from a wall partition and took out two mercs. Lobbing another frag and running towards the sound of more shuttles. If she could turn off the shield and compromise the base, then the mercs would have to evacuate. Her comms came on.

"Captain!", Joker blared.

She perked up at his voice, quickly thinking of her orders. "Joker, send Cortez with a shuttle to pick up alliance personal. I'm bringing the shield down in this base."

"But, that would leave you vulnerable to the temperatures outside.", he argued.

Shepard sighed loudly, "Joker…", she shouted.

"Ma'am, yes ma'am. Cortez is on his way.", he complied reluctantly.

Shepard opened her link to King. "Officer!"

"Yes, Ma'am.", King responded.

Shepard had to wait, as two mercs attacked her. She held one off, delivering a hard blow to his jaw, while the other knocked out her leg. She lifted her gaze quickly, to send a strong warp to the merc. King could hear the scuffle and worried. After a few minutes, shots were fired. She feared the worst, but heard Shepard's feminine grunts, then the comms went static.

"Captian? Captain Shepard?", she shouted into comms.

"Here.", she heard another grunt. "Just readjusting myself." Shepard had been hit on the head, but her medi-gel was keeping a more serious injury from taking over. "I have one of my team coming down to pick you and your men up. Rendezvous to the camp five miles east."

"But…", King protested.

"King. You've done a good job. But I need you to help contact the alliance and send them here. We may have more hostages in the base. Understood?", Shepard waited.
King hesitated, but replied. "Yes, ma'am. Good luck out there."

The comms ended, with Shepard spotting the barrier station. She made a dash for it, dodging weapons fire, and dispatching a merc with her omni-tool.

Brev came on. "Shepard, what are you doing?!"

She continued to hack the console, opening the barrier locks. "You know damn well what I'm doing. I suggest you find a nice warm spot to hide in. Once I'm done with Fantar, I'm coming for you.", she warned.

Brev grunted in anger. 'The Shepard is sabotaging the shields, get your asses to the base, now!'

Shepard took out her pistol, and fired into the console. Brev was running out of time, and soon so will she. The shields started to fade, while mercs ran to the doors. Emergency lights flared, and most of them were shut out. Batarians slammed their fists on the panels, trying anything to get inside the outpost's base, but it was too late.

Shepard put her helmet on, watching them all succumb to the suffocating freezing temperature from the outside. That makes no mercs waiting here for her.

A little voice inside warned her of the implications of such a brutal way to stop them. But she knows this was the only way. Many innocent lives at the habitat base were at stake, and not just alliance lives, but batarian lives as well. Brev shouted over comms, barely audible through the harsh blizzard winds now inside the docks. "You're a heartless bitch! They deserved to die with honor!"

Shepard's suit was warning of a breach if she didn't get inside a shuttle first. The hatch opened for her to enter, "You lost that honor when you attacked civilians for revenge.", she countered.

She navigated the shuttle to the base, already being shot down by merc controlled mechs. Shepard barely made it beside the old entrance, before the shuttle was overwhelmed by them. Opening the heavy base doors, she ran inside, closing them promptly.

The hall was quiet, as she cautiously walked through. Mercs were arguing how the outpost was compromised. Her comms came on.

"You may have infiltrated the base and disabled the post, but I still have the upper hand.", Fantar warned.

She snuck behind the merc to the edge of the entrance of the lobby, wrapping her armored hands around his head and twisted hard. "Really? Let's see how that plays out.", Shepard smirked. The other merc tried to run, but she gunned him down. This ruthless behavior reminded her too well of Satima. Is this the kind of training her alter taught the girl?

Further inside, she cleared the lobby to see a large storage bay, and several doors leading off to other parts of this level. She heard grunting followed by talking. Shepard leaned out from the door frame. Five alliance officers were lined up, execution style.

Two mercs surrounded them. Shepard had to stop this.

"This is justice for the deaths of our people.", the merc in the far-left corner stated.

An alliance male, struggled in his restraints," You're all delusional! It was the reapers that nearly wiped out your civilization. We're just trying to help."
The mercenaries scoffed. "Help! This is servitude! Trapped on this base, on a world that can't even sustain life. Our home world was beautiful, perfect. And your human warrior destroyed it!"

The alliance soldier struggled in upset, "Shepard is a hero! She wouldn't have let the reapers destroy your planet if she could help it. We're not enemies anymore!", he argued.

The merc signaled to another batarian behind the alliance officer. He stepped to him, aiming his pistol to the man's head. "When you meet your gods, ask them why they were silent to your pleas for mercy.", the batarian grinned callously.

The alliance officer closed his eyes, "I won't ask for mercy, I know where I'm going."

Shepard aimed her rifle perfectly at the merc's head, let out a breath, and fired. He fell back, the pistol firmly in his grasp. The other merc ran down the hall. She leaned out, shooting him in the leg. Brandishing her omni-blade, Shepard stood over him and effectively ended his life.

After freeing the officers, she looked at the man who was about to be executed. "What's your name, Officer?"

"Peters, ma'am. Boy we're glad to see you here.", he replied in relief.

Shepard gave him some of the weapons from the dead mercenaries. "Take your men, and form a barricade in the lobby. Block the door. No one in or out. Understood?", she ordered.

"Ma'am.", he saluted.

She glanced to all them. "This base was attacked in hopes to lure me. It worked.", she sighed in disapproval. "Fantar is out to kill Gesin. I won't let that happen. Neither will I let him take another alliance life."

"Ma'am?", Peters began. "There are batarian families on level four being held. They got nothing to do with this."

She narrowed her gaze, "Noted, Peters." Shepard made her way down the elevator. If she can get the batrians that are not involved to form a militia with the remaining alliance, they can take back the base. But that was a big if.

The doors opened to mercenaries rounding up male batrians into a transport crate. Cramming them like animals. How low have these men and women gotten to treat their own people like this?

Shepard threw a warp knocking them back, then using her rifle, and taking them down by surprise. She ran to the crate, releasing the others. "Run for the elevator, and meet with Peters in the lobby. I'll comm him ahead you.", she informed.

One of them stopped, "Our mates, our children?!"

She stared at him, "Nothing will happen to them. I promise."

Shepard watched them leave inside the lift, she pushed forward to the third level by stairwell. "Peters.", she commed.

"Ma'am.", he responded.

"I've sent those batarian civilians your way. Arm them, gear up and form a militia. Your taking back this base.", she explained.
On the fourth level, Shepard hid behind a plant basin. A merc was pushing a batarian woman to the side, while others hissed and circled around their young. He touched her arm, giving a devious smile. She slapped him. "You bring no honor to your name doing this!", she shouted in anger.

He grabbed her hand, twisting it to her back. "There is no honor in defiling yourself with humans.", his voice thick with disgust.

Shepard wasn't about to witness this. She pulled out her weapon, and aimed. But not for a vital area. The merc fell to the floor, as a shot was fired. It echoed loudly. He covered his thigh, red blood oozing through thick fingers.

The female batarian snapped her head in Shepard's direction, while the merc moaned in pain. She nodded to the captain, hovering over the merc. "Serves you right, Karlac.", she spits on him.

Shepard stepped to her. "Are all of you all right?"

"Yes.", the female replied. "I'm Taie. Our males were rounded like slaves and taken from us. What a disgraceful act.", she shook her head, as Shepard observed. "You probably think it's justice that we suffer the same fate as your human colonists did, years before the reapers came?"

Shepard disagreed. "No matter how I feel personally. This is still wrong. No one deserves to be slaves, not even an enemy."

Taie looked surprised, then continued. "And are we enemies?" Her deep brown eyes searched in a quiet fear.

The Captain leaned on one leg, eyeing her. "No. I've saved your men and sent them to the lobby to fight with Peters. Now, after the children are secure and safe.", she leaned over Karlac, grabbing his weapon and handing it Taie. "How about we add a woman's touch?", Shepard winked.

Taie smiled, "Agreed." She turned to Karlac and kicked him hard. The women who offered to help, dragged him into a storage closet and locked the door.

Shepard smirked.

The fifth floor had more mercs that Shepard dispatched as she ran into one of the conduit rooms. The two that were still active prevented the cold from freezing everyone in the base. She found the console, quickly finding the damage reports of the other two on the fifth level. And a report of Gesin's whereabouts.

Her comms crackled to life. "Captain. Alliance is on its way. We also found the source of those shuttles. It's a defunct base, hidden thirty miles from your position. They're sending more your way.", Joker informed.


"Yes, Ma'am?", James spoke.

"James, I need you to lead a team to the outpost, find the batarian female named Brev. Take her into custody and secure the docks. More shuttles are coming in. We can't hand them the opportunity to corner this base.", she explained.

"Right on it.", he replied.

Shepard downloaded information from the console, "Joker, what's the Alliance's ETA?"
Comms opened, "Thirty…. forty-five minutes, tops.", he answered.

She finished with the data. "Ok. Comm Peters, and James. Take King with you. She knows the outpost well."

"Captain.", he replies.

Shepard turns around when the comms ended, a hard blow to her head knocked her back over the console. She fell forward, and laid on the ground, facing the ceiling when Fantar hovered over her. He smiled, then hit her again. Knocking her unconscious.

Back on the citadel…

Satima waits to pick up Natalie. She leans against the sky cab, staring down a walkway. It's been three days, and already she's thinking of disappearing. It would be wrong to leave the kid alone without anyone, but maybe… maybe she could contact one of Shepard's friends?

Natalie approached her with a smile. "Satima!"

The hybrid turned to her, opening the side door to the cab. "Get in.", she spoke sternly.

Natalie's smile faded, and she complied without a word. After Satima settled next to her, the cab flew on auto command back home. The ride was uncomfortable, and quiet. Natalie opened her satchel and brought out a data pad containing her sketches. She showed it to Satima with pride. "I drew the citadel today!", she exclaimed in excitement.

Satima grunted in annoyance and rolled her eyes, crossing her arms. "I don't care."

Natalie swiped the pad to reveal another picture. "I also drew the Normandy again. My teacher says it's better than my other sketch. She says I'm getting really good."

Satima looked away, but caught a careful glance.

After they left the cab at the parking pad, the girls took the elevator to their apartment. Natalie ran in, taking her things to her room, while Satima left for the kitchen. There's got to be some liquor around here, somewhere? Natalie appeared behind her. "What are you looking for? Is it food that dad eats?! I know where it is!", she pushed past Satima and rummaged through the cabinet.

Satima stood back, as the girl's words stung. "Dad?" Somehow, she can't imagine that man as anything fatherly. But, then again, he was the one that interceded and prevented her from being foolish with her life. Natalie presented to her a box of packaged food. "Here!", she beamed.

Satima took it, feeling a bit overwhelmed. Natalie ran to her room and brought her "homework" to the table. Getting to it right away, as her "big sister", watched.

With a sigh, Satima let some of her anger go. This child didn't deserve any vitriol from her. She took a seat next to the girl, and looked at her sketches. "These are pretty good.", she began. "I like the one of the Normandy."

Natalie looked up in surprise, "Um… thanks?"

Satima set the pad down. "Hey, you wanna get out of here, and go someplace fun?"

"But I have to finish my work.", Natalie protested.

Satima grabbed the pad and overlooked what it was Natalie had been doing. Human reading. She
tossed it aside. "That's not that important. I mean, we have translators. I don't speak human and look at how well I can communicate with others.", she explained

Natalie stared at her.

"Right.", Satima agreed. "Good point. How about this? We go have some fun, and come back early to finish this up. Deal?"

Natalie glanced to her homework, then back to Satima. "Let's go!"

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Shepard woke to comms blaring about an alliance ship sending shuttles topside. Batarian mercs were panicking, arguing to bug out and forget the mission. Fantar shot one, and injured the other. He stood over Shepard, as she struggled to stand.

Moans were heard from the left of her in the dim room. She turned her head to see Gesin tied onto a damaged conduit. His head bleeding from a wound. She grabbed hers, already reeling from the blow. Fanter paced around her. "Well, now it ends here. There's no escape for either of us.", he mentions.

Shepard sat on her knees, "Maybe not for you.", she remarked.

He held back the urge to strike, staring towards Gesin. "I'll show the whole galaxy the folly of this false leader. And how quick the humans are to betray an alliance."

Shepard scoffed. "You betrayed that alliance! You started this when Emerson took power on the council. This was your plan to destroy what little hope your people had left."

Fantar glared to her. "NO! It was you, who destroyed my people!" He got dangerously close to her face, his hot breath causing her to hold back a gag. "You and your reaper spawn."

He motioned for one of his lackeys to turn on a vid-com. The droid hovered in place. "People of the galaxy, I have your precious Shepard. Soon I will execute this traitor and reaper lover. The false leader, Gesin Sar'manek will follow.", he announced.

This broadcast reached the citadel. A batarian fanatic hacked the news broadcasts systems, displaying the feed.

The council watching in fear, calling c-sec to find the source and shut it down.

Down in the lower wards, Satima and Natalie were at the arcade, when many people rushed in to turn on the large holo screen. She gasped to see Shepard injured, and obviously at the mercy of this crazed fanatic. Natalie started to cry, while she attempted to shield the young girl's eyes from this horrible outcome. "You can make it, Shepard. Come on, break free. Kick his ass.", she pleaded in thought.

Meanwhile, Fantar continued his raving, while Shepard glanced to Gesin. His injury looked grave. She needs to give him her last medi-gel. There were only two mercs, and Fantar, left. It's a risk, but she's gotten this far through cocky advantage. But Garrus has already warned her of that.

Fantar motioned for his men to hold a gun to Gesin's head. "Now, we will end this useless alliance, and end the Shepard."

Gesin moaned in pain, but could not respond. Shepard made a start, when a loud boom resonated above them. Fantar growled, "What's going on?!!"
One of the mercs stepped in front of Shepard, "I'm reading an uprising. The alliance is fighting back and they've blown our squad on level two out. Sir, there are alliance ships coming through by the dozens!"

Fantar shouted in anger. "Kep-lac! Kill them both, we don't have time anymore."

Shepard rose from her position in the middle of the argument. She reached out and grabbed the merc. They had a short scuffle, with Shepard hitting his head hard on the conduit's metal panels. Blow after blow caused a wound that splattered red blood on the surface. He was dead in minutes.

She reached down to his body, in front of a shocked Fantar, and used the pistol to kill the one holding Gesin hostage. Fantar turned, running to hide behind the other conduit. Comms blared. "Fantar! The alliance soldiers have the post. I can't outrun them!" It was Brev.

He snarled. "Then die with the rest of them!" Brev didn't respond. He stood up, leaning out with his weapon. "Shepard! I suppose you believe you are secure in this victory?"

The vid was still running, with the entire galaxy privy to what they were saying and doing. Shepard prepared her pistol. "I am." She leaned out to aim, hitting the metal next to his head. Fantar hid back into cover. "And I'm tired of your shit!"

He opened fire, missing her in his anxious reflexes. "Perhaps, for all to see, we should show who is the real soldier. Who has the real honor in battle."

Shepard smirked, "You ready for it?", she warned.

Fantar threw his gun down with a roar, charging out to the middle of the room. Shepard tossed hers aside, already preparing to use it when need be. She ran out, dodging his incoming attack. Fantar tried to knee her in the gut, but she stepped back, taking a hit to the jaw.

Shepard blocked another blow, using her forearm to hold his right hand out and head butted him. She then punched him square in the face.

It was a brutal and bloody brawl, with both getting pummeled. She wouldn't back down, sick of his scheming and his blaming. She held her two hands together, using them as a hard strike on his head. Shepard hit twice more, knocking him back and down on the floor.

Fantar crawled backward, his eye swollen and blood seeping down his high positioned nose. Shepard straddled him, delivering blows. Batarian blood splashed on her armor, dotting her face as she broke his nose. He stopped moving for a moment, when she finally paused.

Shepard stood over him, as he suddenly stirred and began laughing. "You see?", he pointed to the droid camera. "Everyone knows what a ruthless bitch you really are. You don't back down from a fight, not because of honor, but because you want control. You want to dominate and dictate who lives or dies. Just like…", he coughs blood", … a reaper."

Shepard steps back. His words burrowed deep in her mind. It struck a chord, and one that always kept her up at night. That alternate future was not a separate path. It was always hers. Since the beginning. Gesin moaned, as she turned to him.

Shepard limped forward, holding her side, wincing in pain. Her face was plenty bloody and bruised. She found the medi-gel, administering it to Gesin, and started to help him down.

Fantar slowly leaned from his position on the floor. He spotted the gun he threw and reached for it. Before he touched the cold metal, a shot was fired. His head snapped back from the force of the
Shepard aimed, panting in desperation and inner turmoil. She had no choice. He would never stop. Would he? Gesin grunted, slouching to the floor. She sat next to him, as he began to breathe better. The bleeding stopped and he opened his eyes. "Shepard?", he asked. "How… how did you find out?"

She chuckled, "I can't mind my own damn business." Shepard helped him to lean against the conduit with her. "Just stay still. The alliance will be here soon.", she assured.

Hours passed, with the alliance rounding up the remaining merc faction. Brev was arrested and taken into custody by James. Peters and King worked together with the other batarians to fight off the mercs in the base. It all worked, thanks to Shepard.

But the captain stayed in the medbay, receiving medical treatment from Chockwas and watching over Gesin. He needs to survive, or the batarians are doomed. Hackett walked in suddenly, unannounced. She stood to attention, "Sir!"

He nodded, "At ease, Captain." Hackett paced to her side, glimpsing Gesin. "You did one hell of a job today, Shepard." He started. "Not only did you quell a rebellion by yourself, but showed this galaxy how dangerous the batarians really are. Which is a shame."

Shepard raised her sore, bruised brow. "What does that mean?"

Hackett sighed. "They're being evicted from Antibaar by the council. They'll have no place left to go, but the terminus system."

"Damn.", Shepard blurted. "It's all my fault, again.", she despaired.

Hackett looked at her. "Shepard, you're not responsible for them. If Gesin survives, he can lead them into a better future. Perhaps in the long run, it's best they stay to themselves for a while. Away from influence."

"You mean fanatical influence?", she quipped. "The council is punishing the majority for the actions of a few. That's not right, and you know it." Shepard argued.

Hackett stepped away from her. "What are we supposed to do, Shepard? Give them a continent on earth to settle?" He realized his tone, and calmed himself. "Shepard, I know your heart has always been in the right place. But, there are times when we must step aside, and let them work out their own problems. It's how people grow, it's how they survive."

"Sir?", she began. "I have a friend on Omega. I think we can at least make a deal to give Gesin the protection he needs out there."

Hackett nodded, "I'll see what I can do. In the meantime, get some rest. You've got an eager family waiting for you at home."

Shepard nodded, watching Hackett leave. He proceeded to the CIC, catching comm specialist Traynor at the Normandy's display. "Traynor. I need a private comm call to Alliance command."

She turned swiftly, giving a dutiful salute. "Yes, Admiral." Traynor resumed to her console, prepping the Normandy's QEC for a call. "Quantum-Entanglement engaged, sir."

Hackett nodded, making his way to the war room, bypassing a few crew members. Inside the QEC,
he closed the door. It would be the first time that door was shut for this kind of private call. The
digital display came on with static filled pixels forming a female. Her figure was too obscure, but he
knew the person well. "Admiral. Have you seen the violent display our heroine has portrayed? I
swear it's no better than her own spawn."

He stood to attention, an expressionless manner. "She was under great stress. Taking an important
and dangerous mission alone. Shepard did what she does best. Get the job done."

A gaze of scrutiny to his response peered at him."Ah, yes. She gets it done. But this is the first time it
was done in a manner that causes the council and the rest of the galaxy to rethink our Alliance." She
leaned forward, a distinct prominent nose could be seen. "I have always respected your judgement.
And Shepard is a great woman, a great asset to this military. But, she needs to reassess her methods.
I'd hate to see her duty as spectre, outweigh her duty to our people."

Hackett sighed deeply as the call ended curtly. He can't ignore that something is happening to
Shepard. Some kind of change. It all started when Satima appeared. A young hybrid, capable as her
mother, and just as dangerous. But just as vulnerable, too.

Anderson would've had the answers. Somehow. He's not here anymore, though. And Shepard could
use some mentoring of her own. Hackett left quickly. He had a few more ideas to analyze.

The Normandy docked with the citadel, as eager onlookers gathered to see Shepard. Her heroism
broadcasted to millions on the station, and billions more in the galaxy. But a darker side was also
displayed. The same kind of quiet fear that followed her hybrid daughter.

She left the hatch, shocked to see dozens of crowds surrounding the warship. Khalisah ran up the
ramp to her. "Shepard. You've arrived!", she smiled. "I've been waiting to get an interview."

Shepard sighed, "Why?"

They both began walking towards the crowds, with Shepard aiming for the elevator out. Khalisah
continued," Your fight against rogue batarian factions."

"Look.", Shepard stopped, facing her. "I'm not in the mood for an interview right now. Can you take
a rain check?"

Khalisah noticed the captain's bruised features and tired expression. "Oh, of course, how rude of me.
Shepard, when you're ready, say, in a few days? Contact me."

Shepard nodded, getting into the lift for home.

Satima and Natalie eagerly waited in the apartment for Shepard. After watching what happened two
days ago, Satima had to stay in Natalie's room while she slept. The girl's nightmares caused her to
scream for her mother. It was disconcerting, for Satima didn't know which mother, Natalie was
calling out for.

Satima would lay awake for hours, thinking on the violent display. Shepard has never acted that way
before. It was a bit scary. Reaper behavior. She sat on the floor next to Natalie. They finished with
the project of a banner made for Shepard, when the door suddenly opened. Their mother stepped
through, her expression relieved. Both girls looked healthy, and most importantly, happy.

Natalie sat up, rushing across the room to Shepard, wrapping her little arms around her mother's
waist. She knelt to the girl's height, wiping a loose tear. Natalie sobbed. "Why were those bad men
hurting you? Where did you go?", she asked.

Shepard sighed, "They didn't hurt me. I had to stop those bad men from hurting others. It's over now,
Meanwhile, Garrus had made his way back from Palaven in anticipation to meet with Shepard. He finished his reports and taken early leave to go home. With the broadcasts of the batarian raid, and Shepard's violent fight with Fantar. He worried about being away for too long.

Upset he missed her at the docks upon arrival, Garrus called a cab and flew it fast back to the presidium. Those reports fresh in his mind about the alliance's secret division. There's something in the back of his mind, warning him. He just can't put a taloned finger on it, yet. Garrus had just walked up the hall to the door to hear Natalie and Shepard.

Satima stared at Shepard, as Natalie turned to face them both. The hybrid stepped slowly, her eyes wavered, but she held the gaze. Garrus entered the room quickly, looking for Shepard, when Satima wrapped her arms around the very woman. "We're so glad you're alright.", she spoke.

Shepard was surprised but held her eldest close. "So am I.", she chuckled.

She looked up from Shepard's shoulder to see Garrus, smiling at them. Satima stared, "...dad?", her voice above a whisper in surprise.

Shepard heard her words, as Satima leaned back, clearing her throat. "Garrus? We didn't know you were going to be back yet."

Natalie ran to him as he scooped her up. She hugged his neck, "Mom is ok, now. She told me." He looked at Shepard. "I can see that." Personally, worried over her bruised face. Garrus let out a sigh of relief. They're all together again, safe and away from the galaxies troubles.

Satima seemed mentally preoccupied when Shepard touched her shoulder. "What have you guys been up to?"

Natalie jumped down, running to her room to bring out her sketches. They circled around her, to view her proud work. Satima silently watched in satisfaction.

Dinner was quick, with Natalie barely able to stay awake long enough to talk. Satima kept thinking about Shepard's brutal assault on Fantar. He deserved it. But, to see the good part of her mother pulled down to a level only Reaper reveled in.

She noticed her new sister leaning on her arm, yawning wide. "Tired yet?", she asked the girl.

Natalie smiled, "No. I wanna stay up."

Garrus chuckled their way. "Looks like bed is in order."

He sat back in his seat with a nod, while Satima took Natalie to bed. Shepard watched a little amazed. This little family is all she needs to ground her. Everything will be ok, and the galaxy will finally have peace. Right?

That evening, Natalie and Satima had fallen asleep together in the girl's room. She slept better, knowing her big sister was around.

While the apartment stayed in quiet, Charlotte and Garrus made love, enjoying each other's physical pleasures. Their intimate time together had become slow, gentle. Shepard enjoyed every minute with him, but a more hungrier side to her thoughts crept in. With the girls across the room, any amount of loud noise could wake them. Concern them. She finished on top, content with what they have for now.
Shepard laid on his chest, resting, while he overlooked some data that was sent during their
lovemaking, from Palaven command. Always the dutiful officer, she smirked. Either with home, or
with her. Garrus usually chose her first.
Charlie gazed up to him. "I've been thinking."

He put the tablet down," About what?"

She lowered her gaze to his chest, tracing his leathery hard abdominals. "About my career. In the
alliance." Charlie breathed, "We both have dangerous jobs, keeping this galaxy safe. And now we
have children to care for. I know Satima is grown, but Natalie isn't. It wouldn't be fair to force Satima
to raise her while we work light years from the station."

Garrus placed his long taloned fingers in her hair, brushing the soft red stands through them. "Are
you thinking of retiring?"

She nodded against him, "Maybe work for something local?"

He smirked. "C-Sec?"

Charlie slapped his arm, laughing. "They couldn't handle me!"

Garrus rubbed her naked back, looking around the room. Sky car engines passed by their window.
"Maybe I could retire. It wouldn't make the hierarchy happy, but I won't miss their protocols."

Charlie sat up, staring at him. "You can't risk your career over me! Garrus you're really good at what
you do. Don't quit now!"

He sighed, then gave her a turian smile. "Afraid I'll lose my position to the primacy?"

She shook her head with a laugh. "I thought you didn't like that fact?"

Garrus sat up straighter, lifting Charlie closer to him. "No, but it does come with perks." He mused.
"Like, maybe retiring someplace tropical?"

Charlie giggled, then stared off as her smile faded. "I'm serious about this.", she looked at him again.
"I can't explain my actions on Antibarr." Charlie glanced away. "Being a soldier is what I'm best at.
Helping people, putting the bad guys away. But, motherhood? And in such a sudden manner, that I
can't decide whether taking down a terrorist will scar my children for life."

He put his finger to her chin, bringing her to face him. "Satima understands better than most, what
has to be done. Natalie... she'll grow up in a more peaceful galaxy because you stopped Fantar." He
placed his head against hers. "Whatever you decide. I'm right behind you. Always." Garrus kissed
her.

The next morning was filled with a better mood. Shepard knew there was only a week left before
Satima headed for earth. She wanted to spend that time getting to know her daughter. Uniformed for
the day, she ventured from the bedroom, and peeked through the sliding door frame of Natalie's
room. There, she found both girls sharing a blanket on the floor. Satima had her arm wrapped over
Natalie, sleeping soundly and looking secure. It almost brought Shepard to tears.

She smiled, leaving quietly to the kitchen.

Garrus had already been sitting at the table waiting for her. He observed Charlie's happier demeanor.
Placing his dextro safe coffee down, he gazed with a mandibled smile. "Did you see them?", he
asked.
Charlie sat across from him, her eyes watery. She wiped them gently, giving a light chuckle. "Yeah.", she replied. "It's like the past few weeks didn't happen to her. Like...", she thought for a minute. "Like, she's been home, the whole time."

Garrus felt her words in his heart, leaning forward to touch her hand on the table's surface. "We're going to make it through this. She'll get better. All it takes is to spend some time with family."

She agreed, nodding. "You were right. It's what Satima needed."

He gazed off, sighing to himself. "Charlie. Weeks ago, Satima asked me something I was too afraid to answer."

She looked up to him, concerned. "What did she ask you?"

Garrus resumed his coffee, averting eye contact with her. "She asked me if I loved her.", his gaze suddenly resting on Charlie.

She sat back, unsure of what to say. Or ask. Charlie stared at him, her expression turned bothered. "And what did you say?"

"I didn't say anything.", he replied. "I don't know what to do with that question." Garrus moved his cup to the side, leaning over the table and placing his turian sharp elbows over the surface. He firmly put his taloned hands on his face, covering them to sigh heavily. "I'm a foolish and complicated man, Charlie.", he complained.

She smirked, looking away to the counter, finding her gaze settled on him lovingly. "Garrus, that's a question you'll have to answer yourself. From what I know, you've been a supporting father and friend since you found out who she is. Don't doubt your loyalty to this family, because your scared of your feelings."

Garrus uncovered his face, and chuckled. "You know me. I don't like this thing called "emotions"."

They laughed together. Natalie heard the commotion, and ran down the hallway to the kitchen. She held her hanar toy, rubbing her eyes with a yawn. "What are you guys laughing at?", she asked.

Shepard sat up from her chair, walking over to Natalie. "Nothing. Are you ready for a big day?"

Natalie looked up, stunned. "Big day? But, I have school."

"Not today. You're spending time with your famous mom, and dad too!", Shepard explained.

"Really!", she squeaked. "I can't wait to tell Satima!" Natalie ran back to her room. Her child-like voice chirping away to the hybrid woman. Soon, they both emerged, with Satima looking not too "excited". Natalie continued to drag her through the living room, chatting fast about getting to skip school, and going to someplace fun. Satima sat at the table, next to Garrus. She held her hands to her ears, irritated.

"KIN SHA! I hear you, Natalie!", she yelled.

Shepard looked at Garrus, who shoved his coffee over to Satima. "Not a morning person?", he smirked.

Natalie covered her mouth, and began whispering. "I'll just get dressed.", she backed out quite comically to her room.
Satima leaned over the table, laying her head next to the coffee, and pushing it away with disgust. "Awful stuff.", she complained. "Need. Stimulant."

"Nope. You need a shower and to get ready to have a fun day!", Shepard informed with enthusiasm.

Satima stared, narrowing her eyes at her, "I hate you when you're cheerful. I miss the serious Shepard."

Garrus laughed, "Keep it up, and she'll show you."

The happy family strolled along the silver strip to visit the arcade. Everything seemed normal, while onlookers stared or gave a courteous smile.

Holo signs emitted a neon glow over the walkways, reflecting on the newly polished paths. Keepers kept busy at terminals with careful glances to the station's citizens. Satima tried not to dwell on that. She knows they are waking up, becoming more aware. But it still terrifies her.

Outside of the arcade, Jacob and his wife Brynn were speaking to a set of students from Grissom. It was a rewarded trip for their hard work. These kids will be the next line of biotic defense for the alliance.

Shepard approached them with a smile. Brynn turned to see the family, holding a squirming child in her arms. "Commander! Er… I mean, Captain. What a pleasant surprise." She tapped Jacob's shoulder to alert him.

He faced Shepard with a warm smile. It had been a long while since they've last seen each other. The party seemed ages ago suddenly. "Well! Look who's finally taking a break and socializing.", he jested in sarcasm. Jacob reached out to shake her hand. "It's good to see you, Shepard. We've been hearing about so much of you lately." Jacob's expression seemed concerned. He nodded to Garrus with a wide smile. "Archangel! My boy!", he shook Garrus's taloned hand vigorously, "You look damn good!"

"Thanks. You too!", he replied. Garrus looked over to Brynn and her child. The boy had to of been two years of age. His little brown eyes stared with a smile. "This must be the new edition you guys were speaking about a long while ago."

Brynn nodded, "Oh yes. My little monster." She laughed. "How are you two?"

Shepard and Garrus exchanged a look, "We're surviving. Protecting this galaxy is hard enough. And now?" she gestured to Natalie who was standing next to Satima. "We have a family of our own to worry about."

Jacob observed Satima, who busied herself with her omni-tool. Natalie stared, not only confused, but curious. "Right.", he spoke. "The girl the reapers created, from you?", Jacob asked.

Shepard cleared her throat as Garrus chuckled nervously. "You could say that.", he agreed.

Brynn struggled to keep her little one from jumping out of her arms. "Uh…", she began. "We should get going now, there's a nap this guy has to follow. It's been wonderful meeting you again, Shepard. And thank you, for everything."

"You don't have to thank me, Brynn. Without your help and the other scientists, the crucible might not have been finished in time. It was a team effort.", she smiled to their son. "And it was rewarded well."
Jacob walked forward, and gestured to hug Shepard. It was short, but she could feel the emotion behind it. He's happy now, with a family and safety. Cerberus almost took that away, and the reapers nearly made it permanent. "By the way.", Shepard began. "You didn't… name him… after me? Right?" Her expression contorted to uncomfortable with the silly and ridiculous notion. But she wasn't sure if Jacob had been joking, two years ago.

He laughed out loud, shaking his head in jest. "No! No, we didn't.", he leaned in, "Brynn would've killed me."

Shepard chuckled, "I can see that."

Brynn shook her head, "I'm sorry Shepard. We didn't mean to offend."

"You haven't offended anyone. If anything, I'm beyond relieved. There's enough Shepard's going around the galaxy, already.", she smirked. "So, what's the little guys name?"

Jacob stood close to Brynn, taking his son into his arms. "Eric. We had a good friend who died from Cerberus. We wanted to honor his name."

Shepard reached out with her finger so Eric could grab it and squeeze. He stared at her, and said "hi". They all amused themselves at the small child's words. While Satima watched uncomfortably. It's just a baby. An adorable, pudgy, big eyed talking mass of plush cuteness. She sulked back, can't get caught up in this.

Satima glanced to Natalie who had already been over to the child to hold him. Khin sha! Not her too?!?

Minutes of everyone taking turns holding the human baby, the Jacob and Brynn family had finally left to her relief. Shepard watched them leave the district. She stared around to see Satima give a slight glance in caution to her surroundings. An unusual occurrence. Shepard dismissed it for now, while Natalie led Garrus to a holo poster of the newest Blasto film.

Satima walked off, standing to the side of Garrus and Natalie, in an observing manner. Her daughter, all grown up and standing at a distance that felt unbearable. She'll never know what it'll be like to carry her, to bring her into this galaxy naturally. To raise her, teach her, guide her. It's all a fantasy. "Charlie. Ready to head inside?", Garrus called out to her.

She nodded, as they walked inside the arcade. The place was buzzing with teenagers and young adults. A few older ones playing the more dedicated and hardcore games. Natalie ran to one that let you play musical notes. Each one lit up in different colors. The one you touched last, was the color that corresponded to the prize above it.

She hastily tried to get a volus plushy. Shepard stood over her, helping the girl land on the orange light. It played some obnoxious tune that irritated Satima. She looked around, watching people go nuts over simulations and vids of fights or space flight.

Loud chatter echoed from the kid friendly bar that served only juice and other ice concoctions. Satima turned to see Garrus was nowhere in sight. Where did he go?

Shepard helped Natalie score two asari, another hanar and a drell. But the kid really wanted that volus. "Ugh… mom, can't you get it?", she whined.

"I'm trying!", Shepard shouted, too busy keeping track of the musical lights. She figured out a few patterns. It won't be long before that volus was toast. Um, hers.
Natalie stomped her foot with a loud moan. "It's too hard!" She stared around in agitation, when an older human male approached. He had a long scar over his right eye, that was a different color. A smile that looked unused and scary. She stepped back, gripping her mother's arm. "Mom?", she pointed.

Shepard nearly had the bastard, but Natalie stole her attention. She caught the girl's frightened expression, turning in alert to see, Zaeed? "Wha… what are you doing here? I thought you were busy helping terminus colonies?", she asked, confused.

Zaeed crossed his arms, as his aussie accent carried loudly around them. "Those useless sacks of meat? Na. I got bored of that real quick. So, I figured I could take out more baddies for you. You know, for old times sake.", he answered.

She laughed to herself, typical Zaeed. "Well, at least I know I won't have to worry about batarian pirates or any of Omega's gangs trying anything." Shepard noticed his sudden stare to Natalie, while the girl hid behind her.

He lifted his gaze to Shepard with a smile. "Been busy?"

Satima continued searching for Garrus. He wasn't getting a "kiddy" drink, or playing any of the games. What gives? He can't be anywhere in the arcade. She decided to track his visor's last known location. Which is…. Palaven. Of course, he would have it saying that.

Outside the arcade, Satima found a crowd piling around the entrance to Armax Arsenal Arena. She passed a vorcha trying to get her to bet on his con cards, and entered a lobby. Up the stairs, she found people hovering over large windows that overlooked something.

Closer inspection showed that it was an arena. Satima watched a group of turians fight holographic geth. They scored, and people cheered. The small squad huddled together, probably talking about their next strategy, when they piled out, taking positions.

Satima peered closer, and saw something she didn't expect. "That hooky playing bastard!", she yelled. Some of the people didn't like what she had to say. She ran to the arena entrance lobby, and planned to wait. She's getting in on this, whether he likes it or not!

Zaeed handed two volus plushies to Natalie while they sat at the juice bar. She hugged them tight, sipping her drink furiously. Shepard sat next to them with a smile. "Thanks, Zaeed. You know, you're actually pretty good at those machines."

He dismissed her compliment. "It's childish. I'd rather be ripping vorcha guts and fighting krogan. But, we have peace and all." Zaeed brought out a flask of whiskey. "Which by the way is putting a serious halt to my lifestyle.", he smirked.

Shepard shook her head in mirth. Natalie played at the space flight simulator, dodging meteors and pirates. It reminded her of Satima. And a small thought of how it could've been if she had her, instead. Zaeed stood up, hiding his flask. He unsettled himself, giving a gruff grunt, and beginning to leave. "Well, Shepard, it's been nice. But I got a date with an arena later. See you and the little one sometime?"

She nodded, when he spoke again. "Oh, and that reaper kid everyone is so damn afraid of. Tell her she's a hell of a badass to cause the council to piss their panties.", he smirked.

Shepard shushed him, "Zaeed, you're in a kid's establishment!", but he was gone.

-------------------------------------------------------------------
The door for the arena entrance pinged, and Satima ran in. Her weapon of choice firmly in her grasp. Garrus and another turian were taking cover behind a simulated damaged wall. They were so busy talking and cutting up, that a geth nearly had them!

With a loud shot echoing over their heads, they peeked to see the geth destroyed. Satima stood in front of them, a playful smile across her face. "Paying attention is the key to not getting shot, you know.", she smirked.

Garrus stood up, chuckling. He could see a good similarity between her and Charlie. It was eerie, but comforting. "So, you found me? Don't tell your mother, or she might actually shoot me." The other turian smirked alongside his comment.

He nodded to Satima, then walked past her. "I'll go and check on the other guys."

Satima glimpsed him leaving, now settling a gaze to Garrus. "Why didn't you stick around the arcade?" She then strolled towards him, putting her armed weapon to her side, relaxed.

With a quick sigh, Garrus answered. "I met a friend of mine from years ago in c-sec. He survived the reapers and Udina's coup. I guess… I wanted to spend some time with him." His tone seemed relieved and heavy.

She glanced down, understanding. "That's a load of bull, Garrus. What's the real reason?" Satima stared at him.

Garrus gave a wry chuckle, nodding his head at being caught. He gazed to Satima. "I'm clearing my head."

She smiled, "We Vakarians need to do that from time to time." The next round suddenly started. Satima looked up, and saw a new group of geth appear. "Mind if I join?", she asked.

Garrus gave her a turian smile, and handed her his sniper. "Welcome to the team." His approval was a long time coming. More than a year of it. Satima took the weapon, staring. Now, she's finally apart of their group. She's a Shepard, and a Vakarian.

During the firefight, many arena observers cheered on the squad. Shepard and Natalie appeared to watch, shaking her head, and folding her arms. The score board was high, with individual scores from each teammate below the grid. The chosen enemy was geth. An old favorite. As long as the real geth didn't come by from Ranoch for a visit to see this, that is.

The rounds were getting quicker. The team did well with Garrus leading them. Shepard observed his marksman accuracy and perfect scores. It stirred a sultry thought in her mind.

Another score was fast overtaking his, as she noticed how Satima guarded Garrus during the battles, helping the team to regroup if the geth swarmed them.

This may not be real, but Shepard noticed the smart responses to threats that her daughter displayed. The rest of the team, including Garrus were having fun. But Satima, seemed to actually regard this as training.

Natalie was in awe, cheering them both on and enjoying the fight. Shepard tried to smile, enjoy the fun with everyone. But there was that nagging again. No matter how much fun there is, how much time Satima spends in a calm atmosphere. She still has her past in the back of her mind. Always there, always pulling her back into old habits. Next week, she's going to earth. And maybe, finally… get the help she desperately needs.
Thanks for stopping by. :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter Summary

On earth, Satima receives treatment for indoctrination. Chambers has been given full charge of her therapy, and it seems some hope for the hybrid's recovery is near. But a shocking turn of events, disrupts the plan. Shepard learns the dismaying truth of her child, and leaves the station of Omega, for earth.

Chapter Notes

Welcome!

Three days before departure to earth.

Satima stood in the small hall to her room. She leaned against the wall, her hybrid gaze peering at the family sitting around the table. They looked content, with big smiles and loud laughter. Natalie was doing so well in school. Her grades, were excellent, and her talents for pictures—even better. The small child had grown taller, healthier. She didn't need Satima to sleep in her room anymore.

Which disappointed the hybrid. She knows it's good that the girl can finally feel safe, but for Satima, that feeling will always be there.

With a heavy sigh, she pushed herself to join them at the table.

Natalie had finished to run to school, again. She was going to be late. Garrus left to a meeting with the turian councilor. Something about a reaper division. It was just Shepard and Satima alone now.

She barely touched her food, a thought in her mind hindered her from continuing. There's only a few days left, and Satima doesn't want to leave without saying goodbye. Now lifting her teal gaze from the bowl of breakfast, she stared to Shepard.

Her mother glanced over to her, setting the coffee down to probe Satima's stare. "Is there something you want?", she asked.

Satima nodded, gulping nervously. "I wouldn't ask this normally, but… I need to speak to him." She exhaled, already feeling sick to her stomach.

Shepard kept her stare with a different expression. "Ronin?"

Her daughter gave a wry chuckle. "How did you know?", she answered with sarcasm. Pushing her food away, looking downward.

The captain understood what Satima is feeling right now. She knows there needs to be closure between them, before the girl leaves. Unlike last time, Satima is not running away, and she doesn't want to disappear from Ronin's life without saying her farewells. "I'll see what I can do.", she offered. "But I can't make him listen. You'll have to figure that out."
Satima lifted her gaze, surprised and relieved. "Thank you, Shepard!" Her pleading voice touched her mother's heart. They sat for a little longer in silence.

The embassy
Two days left

She stood in the lobby, full of nerves and uncertainty. It had been nearly two weeks since she's spoken to Ronin. He wasn't happy with her accusations. Satima can't blame him.

Citizens ignored her for the time. Seeing her more often on the station and not threatening anyone-might have eased some tensions. Satima had tired of standing for so long. Ronin's briefing with his own people's councilor was taking a while. His own people?

Aren't they her people, too?

She paced, looking out the window into the presidium lake below, glancing to the small gardens with multi-colored flowers. Murmurs behind led to snickering. Satima turned her head slightly to see a group of young people. Their cruel grins and smirks followed her when she tried to sit away from them. Not everyone is afraid, but there are some who are just ignorant. After asking Shepard to help her find Ronin, she won't let them scare her off.

She'll sit right here, and wait for him. Until then, Satima will endure being ridiculed, for a little while.

Ronin stepped out from Daxis's office in a defiant mood. He's done with their little mission. She's been here for over a week, they can monitor her that way without him. Down the hall, his heavy footfalls echoed past the spectre's offices.

He continued, preoccupied in thought about Jaine. She wanted him to move in with her and Kaevus, her brother. Spirits, he was so glad to see them alive after the reapers were destroyed. Her message of their survival had helped him focus on his duties. If he had not received information, Ronin would've abandoned the citadel to find them. He owed her that much.

Ronin hadn't seen them before the beginning of the war. Jaine stayed on Omega with her brother, where she worked. She set the boundaries clear. He never bothered or contacted them again. Then, after the reapers came and where destroyed, he met someone. She was younger, but impetuous, dangerous. And he lost himself in her. But she left him too.

Ronin can't hold Satima's apprehensive tendencies of their past relationship against her. He can't hold her to small lies or being pushed away. If Satima knew the truth of why he was so close to her to begin with, it would break her heart too. At first, he was just following orders, but then she grew on him. Maybe he ended up rebounding on her? Maybe not.

As he finally reached the elevator, a familiar voice shocked him from his thoughts. Ronin turned in an unsettled manner, already troubled by her presence. "Satima?", he began, unable to meet her gaze, "What are you doing here?" His tone sounded less than surprised.

When he finally looked upon her, Ronin viewed a different person. Satima looked better, no longer sickly and had a softer demeanor. She cleared her throat, now stepping closer to him. But not too close. Satima knows he wants space between them. "I had to meet with you.", she answered, her gaze worried.

Ronin clicked his mandibles, then led them to a corner in front of a window of an empty office. "If this is about what I said at the docks…", he spoke.

Satima shook her head, "No, and yes. But not what you think." She sighed, with a saddened look. "I
wanted to apologize to you, about my attitude and how I disrespected your ex-wife. I let my
emotions get the better of me, and lashed out against you."

He blinked his avian gaze, glancing away in personal shock. "Satima..."

"Just let me finish.", she insisted. Satima looked down, exhaling in a nervous manner. She lifted her
hybrid gaze to him, "I know how broken I am. I know I need help. That's why I'm leaving for earth.
Something the alliance has planned for me. It's... it's an indoctrination study."

Ronin stared, "A study? What's going to happen?", he wondered, alarmed. Nowhere in his
debriefing in the past few weeks, was he told this. Is this new? Something the alliance put together?

Satima shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not sure. I hope whatever it is, it helps me to get better. Hackett
has ordered it, and I agreed.", she answered. "I'm scared to death, Ronin," she sighed in fear, "but...
I want you to know, how sorry I am for being... me."

The emotional toil of words made her nauseous. She wanted to be with him, like before. But that was taken away when she left. Satima looked at him, again. Seeing how conflicted his expression was.

Ronin didn't answer at first. His gaze searched and moved about her. It seemed he was concerned,
but then he suddenly averted his stare. Replying in a bitter tone. "Good luck, Satima."

She swallowed a hard pain in her throat. Watery eyes cleared when Satima attempted a smile, and
began walking away. He didn't accept her apology, or goodbyes. Ronin is done with her, and she
doesn't blame him. Satima left inside the elevator, with Ronin staring into the reflection of the
window. He didn't like what he saw. A hardened stare looked back at him. He was the one being
cruel now.

His feelings for Satima were confusing and painful. Jaine and Kaevus waited for him to return. She
wanted to rekindle something they had some time ago.

His time watching Satima for the council is over. He warned Daxis to never ask about it again. He'll
quit! But his own turian counselor assured him, the council itself, will no longer bother the matter.
And now, she's going to earth. The alliance proposed this indoctrination study.

He doesn't trust this. There's something in the background that was planned, and Satima's walking
right into it.

A message popped up on his omni-tool. Jaine was letting him know they're at the docks. Ronin
closed his eyes briefly with a sigh. He has feelings for Jaine. He missed Kaevus and their glory days
as mercenaries. They need family to take care of them, and he's the closest to family they've got.
They're his responsibility.

Ronin stares at the crowd of people in the embassy. But... what if Satima is his responsibility, too?

The day arrived when Satima will depart the citadel and head for Earth. She stood with her family at
the alliance docks. Natalie didn't want her to go, but Satima explained the best she could how this
will help her get well. In the past two weeks, she's accepted her role as a sister to the human child,
and promised to never let anything happen to her.

Shepard and Garrus waited with their hybrid child as the shuttle for the alliance ship came. He
watched his children stare away at the docks.

Garrus looked down in thought. His children. Something he's desired, but since the reapers, never
thought would happen. In his days of c-sec, the time spent to stop the collectors and even the last
battle on earth. He held on to that one hopeful thought. His own family. And now he's standing with them, waiting for a military escort of his only hybrid child. A young woman so unique, and yet... so feared.

Within minutes, the shuttle hovered over the platform, with a perfect landing. The hatch opened as four marines piled out. They were armed and armored. This alarmed the family.

All, but Satima. She oddly felt a small comfort in it. One of them scanned her, and nodded to the others. A female marine stepped to Satima, "Hybrid. It's time.", she ordered.

Shepard walked between them, eying their weapons and combat readiness. "Is this necessary? Hackett didn't relay an armed escort to earth as his orders, to me."

The female marine glanced to another, who began speaking. "Ma'am. These are his orders. To be escorted to earth, under guard."

Natalie clung to Garrus. He understood what it meant. Shepard didn't back down. "His orders? To treat my daughter like she's an enemy?!" Her gaze narrowed in upset, when Satima chimed in. "Mom. Let it go. I'll be okay."

Shepard turned to her in surprise of this new attitude, "Satima?"

She hugged her mother quickly, backing away to follow the marines into the shuttle. Satima was allowed to stand, and watch them as the small vessel took flight. The hatch started to close, with her giving them a smile.

They stared on as the shuttle left the docks. A tiny dot in the distance that agonized Shepard. Garrus put his hand on her shoulder, concerned and saddened. "She'll be safe under guard. Safe on earth. It's what we wanted, and all we can try to hope for."

Natalie hugged Shepard. The human child had a bad feeling.

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Citadel Spectre Office

Ashley skimmed the files sent to her by Hackett. With the council officially stopping all surveillance on Satima, including Ronin's request-she alone has the exclusive access to the hybrid's life.

All investigations, all the data... packed into two terabytes about the directive, hive and the sentarians.

The Alliance is depending on her as the only other human spectre, to keep an eye on the reaper-born woman, and all her dealings. There'll be a meeting soon with the council. Something Shepard should be a part of. Ashley feels wrong with this scenario. The council is so convinced the alliance hero will turn on them and shield Satima. Even if the hybrid became dangerous. But, Shepard would never let her daughter hurt anyone.

She's more than a spectre, or alliance soldier. More than a hero. She's their friend.

Ashley turned to the monitor as it downloaded vid files. The vid of Shepard pummeling that merc Fantar, sent a shiver down her spine.

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New York-Earth
Alliance R&D
Satima stared out the shuttle window, sitting next to the pilot. Their short journey had been silent, with the hybrid feeling more and more alien by the minute.

The four marines watched her warily, one of them kept a pistol over his lap. Spirits, these guys are ready for her to go full reaper. She's afraid to even speak, or they'll start shooting.

Comms came on, with a clearance for docking coming through. She turned back to face the window, seeing a giant metropolis of both damaged and refurbished buildings around them. They settled on a roof of a tall grey building. An overcast sky threatened rain. Satima was tapped on the shoulder by the female marine, and she got up from her seat. Another female- the pilot, taking in a breath of relief.

The hatch opened, and small droplets of rain started to fall all around. Satima was led out under guard, just like on the docks. There were so many of them, ready to gun her down if she made any strange or sudden movements.

Shepard would've been fuming at this, but she's not here. A good thing too. It would just complicate this whole ordeal. An ordeal Satima feels she deserves.

Ahead, the sliding doors opened with a quiet swooshing sound. Hackett and other officials appeared. One of them, a dark-haired female, looked familiar. An olive colored gaze narrowed towards her. Hackett stopped in front of the hybrid. He stood at attention so perfectly, "Satima Shepard. Welcome back to earth.", he spoke.

Satima gulped, looking down in respect. "Thank you, sir."

He eyed the guards that brought her, and they proceeded to leave. The shuttle had left. "Follow me.", he led her through the doors behind them.

Inside the top floor from the roof access, they passed by offices and many alliance personnel in blue and white uniforms. There were humans sitting in chairs speaking with some of them. A few of those humans had missing limbs and crazed stares. This must be the place.

Hackett started to speak. He gestured around him, and ahead of them. "This is the research and development building. The top floor is where the priority patients are attended." Satima looked around while he continued. "We are progressing with some of them. There are more than a few survivors who had firsthand experience under the servitude of the reapers. They were indoctrinated slaves, until Shepard stopped the madness."

She glanced to him, worried about the implications. "They did bad things at the reapers demand?", she asked.

"Yes.", Hackett answered, standing in front of an elevator. She walked in with him and two other marines in tow. The lift descended. "Very, bad things.", he left off.

Satima swallowed hard. He meant her as well. What a shame she is to Shepard. "Admiral. If I may ask?", she began. "What is going to happen to me?"

She stared at him with that hybrid gaze. Hackett felt pity on her. "You will receive treatment, like the rest. But not on the top floor.", he resumed.

The lift's holopad displayed numbers. It went past double digits to single, displaying an odd symbol she wasn't familiar with. Within minutes, the elevator stopped as the door slid open. Hackett and Satima stepped out, the marines still following.

This area of the building wasn't heavily staffed, but enough guns stood at attention to warn her of
good behavior. They continued down a long corridor, until reaching the end of the hall. On each side of
the new room, were terminal stations and staff that attended it. It's a padded room, with small
comforts of a bed and walled washroom.

She felt a marine touch her shoulder, prompting her to turn to him. He nodded for her to enter.
Satima reluctantly went inside, facing Hackett now. The admiral couldn't look her in the eye. "We
must take precautionary steps. When you're cleared of being a danger to this facility and our
personnel, you will be moved."

"Moved?", Satima wondered.

Hackett lifted a worn gaze, "I meant it, when I promised Shepard you will receive help." He tried to
smile at her. It faded quickly. "There are developments happening. Processes I can't control. I will
return soon, with the news."

Satima nodded with a heavy sigh, backing away while the door closed. She stepped further inside, in
front of her cot, then turned around to the door again. Emotions tormented her, she could feel so
much inner agony at this. Satima walked to the corner of the room, leaning on the wall and sliding
down. With a heavy sigh, she accepted this help. And hoped those developments, were not
something bad.

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Kelly Chambers woke up to a beautiful new sunrise. She had been stationed to earth, since fully
joining the alliance. Her work with indoctrinated military personnel being the primary focus this year.

Before, it was patients on the citadel, then on a colony. After that whole scare with the plague from
the sentarian's galaxy, she decided to go home. Then she received a summons to stay. Luck? She's
not sure.

During her time on the SR2, she developed her counseling skills with the dysfunctional, yet capable
crew. Then the collector's attacked the ship, taking her and others. Kelly felt she was doomed. But,
Commander Shepard saved her life. More than once.

Hackett's new summons to aid the hybrid terrified and excited Kelly. She's never seen this girl up
close before. Following reports on the extranet, or listening to gossip while working in the colonies.
Kelly visualized what the reaper-born would look like.

Now dressed in uniform, she left for the R&D building.

Central New York was up and running well, with most of the outer buildings receiving
reconstruction. The reapers didn't win, and she won't squander this gift.

On the top floor, the sunrise became a full blue day. Rays of the new light poured through the large
windows, offering warmth to the patients that took a calming break in it. A staff member led her into
a board room. Hackett stood to attention, nodding to her. "Chambers.", he began. "Have you been
given the debrief on the hybrid?"

She brought out her data pads from under her arms. "Yes, sir. I'm ready to meet with her.", Kelly
exclaimed with enthusiasm.

Hackett nodded, always looking so dour. He seemed occupied with a message, before resuming his
steel gaze to her. "Good. She's in the basement levels. Floor eight.", he informed.

Kelly gulped. Basement? Is she that dangerous? "Sir. Is it possible for me to request… aide?"
Hackett understood her fear. "You'll already have two of my best marines with you. You won't be alone."

She nodded with a relieved smile. "Oh, thank God.", she mumbled. "I mean, thank you, sir."

The ride down was unnerving. Kelly thought of how this girl must look. She's seen reaper abominations before. And up close. When the elevator door slid open, she hesitantly stepped out. Following the guard down a long corridor. Why is it so dark down here? Are they trying to scare the pants off her?

Kelly stopped at the room near the end of the hall. She courteously nodded to the staff overlooking the terminals. A window appeared over the right-hand wall where they stood. "Ah, so it's two-way? Can she also see us?", Kelly inquired to the guard.

He smirked, "No. She's been sitting in the corner since yesterday. Hasn't moved. She won't eat, and barely slept." He put in his security code, "Good luck." The guard walked away.

Kelly felt a little sorry for the mini-reaper, until she stepped closer to the window. There, she observed a human looking woman. She wasn't grotesque or scary at all! One of the staff looked up from the terminal. "Ma'am. Whenever you're ready to go in, let us know."

With a nod, Kelly approached the door. She held her tablet, closing the screen until she was ready to use it. In a big exhale, she signaled for the door to be opened.

Stepping through, Kelly timidly approached a chair and table. Setting her things on it. Displaying the tablet and datapads of information. She sat in the chair, now looking towards the hybrid who was staring intensely at her. It gave Kelly a fright, but she didn't flee. Instead, she continued to see how agonized the subject looked. She was in pain.

Clearing her throat and crossing her legs, she began. "Good morning. I would like to introduce myself. I am Kelly Chambers," trying to smile, but it faded when the hybrid continued to stare.

That teal avian gaze, surrounded by darkness, sent chills down her spine. A familiar image crossed her mind. She knows this young woman is Shepard's reaper child. But she's also Garrus's. And that intense stare pierced right through her. "Yes, well.", she unsettled a bit in the chair. Placing a tablet on her lap, now typing. "I was told you have refused to eat. Are you not hungry?", she asked.

The hybrid turned her gaze away without speaking.

"Are you feeling ill?", Kelly wondered. A continued silence echoed in the room. She was getting a little irritated by it, "You will have to speak eventually." Her more curt tone brought the hybrid's attention.

"Or what?", she responded.

Kelly raised her brow. She responds to negative tones? "There is no "or what" here. Only help." she reached for her data pad, turning on the screen to see files, and picked one. "Your name is Satima. You are a hybrid of human and turian origins."

Satima shook her head in irritation. "No. I just woke up this way.", her heavy sarcasm and defiant mood caught Chambers off guard.

Kelly lifted an annoyed gaze, resuming. "And you're indoctrinated. In fact, created by the reapers.", she spoke aloud, now staring at her information instead of Satima. "Hmm. Fascinating.", she repeated.
Satima sat up straight with a probing stare. "What is it you want? Why are you here?" Her expression confused.

Kelly cleared her throat again, putting the pad away. She met the hybrid's gaze. "I am here to help you. And if that means we sit here for hours saying nothing, or if you would like to tell me about yourself?" She left off, hoping Satima would begin to open up.

Satima sighed, "No one can help me. Except..."

Kelly leaned out in anticipation. "Except, who?"

The hybrid stared at her, then averted the gaze. "How classified is this information? Will any of it harm Shepard?"

Kelly was surprised, "Satima, no one knows where you are.", she assured. "Shepard may know you reside on earth, but not where. On top of that, everything you say or do is classified. This whole building is held liable to your safety.", she revealed. "And ours."

Satima met a slight glare from this Chambers. She accepted the reply. "Fine. What do you want me to say?"

The psychologist sighed, "Anything you need to. You can start from the beginning or you can start with now. I will be held accountable for the privacy of what you tell me."

Pulling her knees to herself, Satima rested her head on them. Wrapping her arms around the long legs. "Why don't you ask me something, first."

Kelly reopened her tablet. "All right.", she typed away, then looked to the hybrid. "I want to get to know you, who you really are." Uncrossing her legs, she sat more comfortably with the table slid next to her. "Tell me of your childhood. Anything you would like to speak of?"

Satima lifted her head. Her ashamed expression ringing clear. "Ok.", she spoke timidly. "My childhood."

Eight days later.

Shepard was on Omega. She stayed in Afterlife, speaking with Aria about the straggler adjutants bothering residents of the station. There was something wrong with them. They seemed slower, less capable of their biotic powers.

No one has been hurt by them, yet. But it was a matter of time. Aria gave in to the constant complaints of the gangs about the situation. She was starting to lose control of her station, if she didn't stop the reaper abominations now.

If Shepard would help her with this problem, then she could promise a new district all to the batarians and their leader, Gesin. Mining jobs, tech openings and more than a few bartender slots would help them with income. She was being very generous. And she owed it to Shepard. After, the adjutants are gone.

Aria watched the new captain wave off drinks, while she sat on the couch. She wasn't relaxed or even interested. She was worried. And it played in small lines forming around her pretty pouty mouth.

A dancer rubbed her blue body against the window panes of the newly opened VIP room. Shepard
was unamused, and Aria caught the look of a human male staring straight away. She snapped her fingers, and one of the turian guards dragged the guy off. "Shepard, I'd like for you to hunt down the adjutants and get rid of them. That's the only way my people can be safe."

Shepard turned her gaze to the station queen. "That could take weeks, or months, Aria. Gesin needs that district now.", she argued. The music reverberated in the club. Its hedonistic sound pounded in her ears.

Aria shook her head, "Work with me, Shepard. I need assurance for my station." Her purple gaze narrowed at the captain. It wasn't a fair one, but Shepard is the only help she can count on. She watched the Shepard lean out on the edge of the couch, her eyes darted back and forth in thought. Without looking up, she agreed. "Alright, Aria. I'll do what I can. But, I gotta sound the alarm on this."

Unsettled, and more than a little worried. Aria held her hands clasped tightly together over her folded legs. "And what kind of alarm are you sounding off for?"

Shepard sighed, knowing how hard this could be. She lifted her gaze sternly. "The Alliance."

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Earth-New York
Alliance R&D

Kelly entered the room again, now carrying a bag with all her data pads on the hybrid. She set them
down on the floor, reaching for one, when the bag spilled over.

Tablets littered the area. Kelly sighed in irritation of her clumsiness, when Satima picked up the devices. She handed them to Kelly, who returned a smile. "Oh, thank you." Kelly set them on the table, now sitting in the chair provided.

Satima brought her own, and sat across from the counselor. "How was your day, doctor?", she asked.

Kelly looked up to see a bright question in the hybrids eyes. She cleared her throat, opening a tablet. Bringing up the past few days conversations. "It was pleasant enough."

The hybrid brought her legs under her, sitting perfectly in the chair with a balance that took years of training. Horrific, emotionally scarring training. Kelly spent her nights rereading the terrible tale of this young woman. All she's been through, all that shaped her to be the unstable mess she is today.

One harrowing step after another, the hybrid lost friends and family. People she barely knew, but connected in a way she'll never forget.

Kelly always observed Satima's responses. She's put together a report for Hackett days before. He replied solemnly. The Admiral sent a copy to Shepard.

Satima waited with patience, looking around her new room. The bed was at least comfortable, and being able to bathe in private was a major plus. She stared at Kelly. It was a relief to finally talk to someone that she didn't have an emotional tie to. Sometimes it takes a stranger. But Kelly was no stranger to Shepard. Satima asked about her time on the SR2, and how she survived the collectors. The retelling caused her doctor to break out in tears.

Satima offered her apologies in bringing up the past.

Kelly smiled to her. "It's all right." She put together some notes from days before, and began with the session. "Yesterday, we spoke about the last time you saw your mother. This Reaper? You told me that she controlled you to fight Archer. The man who designed you?"

Satima nodded," Physically.", she answered. "He designed me physically. Alternate timeline. Reaper conceived me."

Typing on the tablet, Kelly resumed with a concerned stare. "How were you feeling, when that moment happened?" Noting the fact that reapers can create unnatural pregnancies through their tech.

The hybrid unsettled, "I remember the command to kill him. There was a cold… haze. In my mind.", she began. Her eyes widened in memory. "I could see what I was doing, but… I had no control. I think."

Kelly recorded every word. She was afraid of what this means. Poor Satima, and the rest of the indoctrinated victims. She set her tablet down, leaning out. "And do you… have this feeling, anymore?" Her worried tone caught Satima's attention. She gulped, shaking her head. "I don't know."

Kelly leaned back, exhaling in concern. Her puzzled expression searched the room. There was never a thorough examination of the young woman. No physical interpretation of the medical science, the reapers used. With all that Satima recounts, including her abilities. Were they making another human reaper, like her mother? Or is this something more?

She shook her thoughts, noting them for later. Continuing with another question. Something that
could be quite serious, personality wise. "During your time fighting the infected in the sentarian galaxy. You recalled experiencing changes to yourself—a distinctive behavior that became a darker side to you."

Satima nodded.

Kelly observed, then resumed. "This alter: you've named. She exhibited a more violent agenda and openly attacked your superior? Do you remember any feelings or specific triggers, that could've caused this?"

Satima stared in confusion, then closed her eyes to remember that black, stormy night. Stranded in the middle of the jungles on Lithera. All the infected rachni coming for them, hungry to tear them apart. She reopened her eyes suddenly, almost losing herself in the moment. "I was angry. Afraid. I felt helpless, and at the mercy of my surroundings."

Interested at the account, Kelly began typing away. "Have you felt this way before?"

Nodding in agreement, Satima answered. "Many times. It was this past year that she became real." Her gaze was frightened.

Kelly felt awful for pressing this memory. It could have strong attachments, not only to indoctrination, but to Satima's mental health. Something all the victims have in common. Closing her tablet's screen window, Kelly gave Satima a pitiful gaze. "I have my suspicions, but the diagnosis is not complete." Now piquing the hybrid's curiosity. "Personality disorders can stem from trauma. In your case, it began in childhood. I would like to start a series of trigger responses. See if this other you will come out."

Satima shook her head furiously. "That's too dangerous! She's been put away, and I won't let her out!"

Kelly placed a hand on the hybrid's arm. "I'm not afraid. There's a reason why, you shouldn't be too. She's not a monster waiting in your psyche to hurt everyone. She's a response you summon, because there was no one to protect you for so long."

Satima's eyes became glassy. Rimming with fresh tears as she felt conscious of the possible truth. Could it be? That all this time, it wasn't a hidden reaper danger, but herself trying to survive?

Before any words could be spoken again, the door slid open with alliance marines stepping through. Satima and Kelly stood. "What's going on?, she asked.

They circled around Satima, and with another scan, grabbed her. She didn't fight back, but flinched. Her hands were put behind her back, zip tied tightly. A male stood in front. "Satima Shepard. You are charged with the deaths of the crew of the Inglorious and Admiral Marsden."

Kelly shook her head in confusion. "What's the meaning of this?"

They began taking Satima out. The marine faced the doctor. "Orders from command, ma'am. Hackett wants you on the top floor, now."

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Hackett paced in uncertainty. The new Alliance command has made its evaluation of the hybrid. A trial will be set, and all the evidence of her therapy will be pit against her. He never meant for this to happen, promising Shepard her daughter would be taken care of.

Now there's talk of a research division stationed somewhere in the far reaches of space. And it's alliance!
Kelly entered the room, already vexed and completely freaked at the occurrence. "Admiral?", she spoke aloud.

He faced her, "Chambers. There has been a grave turn of events.", he stated. Hackett's steel gaze was empty, but his eye twitched in stress. "From the reports of the past year in a half, and with your records of the past week, alliance command has decided that the hybrid is to be held accountable for her actions."

She swallowed, nervously clutching her bag of information on the hybrid. "She's no danger to anyone, no more than the rest of the patients."

Hackett continued his stare. "In four days, there will be a closed trial here on earth." He looked down, when Kelly spoke up.

"Does Shepard know?", she accused. Her eyes staring in upset. "This is her daughter we're speaking of!"

He lifted his gaze. "No. Not until I contact her." Walking around the table to face the window overlooking the sunset, Hackett spoke again. "You'll be asked to speak as a neutral party. All the sessions will be reviewed prior to the trial."

Kelly started to protest, when he turned to her with a hopeless gaze. She couldn't believe this! How will Shepard handle this, better yet… how will Satima?

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Omega

An alliance squad had been sent to help with the adjutant problem. In a few days, they managed to find one, and dispatch it. Shepard overlooked the lower district schematics, helping with the hunting parties, when she received a message from Hackett.

Taking a break from the little mission Aria gave her, Shepard boarded the Normandy. She proceeded to the war room, and opened the terminal over the old display. It was a report sent days ago, on Satima's progress.

She's in New York, at the alliance R&D building. Kelly Chambers is her psychologist. Shepard leaned over the computer to continue reading. The files were troubling and there were many. Categorized and heavily descripted.

Opening a file, she read its contents carefully. It was a last summary of her daughter. Kelly has diagnosed her with complex-post traumatic disorder. There are other notes highlighted. One that reads "Childhood". It defines clearly about problems with lack of judgement, fragmented and disconnected memories. Then she reads a file on early adulthood. The words "lack of trust, social isolation, and self-destructive behavior" appear in bold letters.

She tapped an icon with a vid attached. It was Kelly. Shepard turned up the volume. The doctor sighed heavily.

"This is Chambers-KCR4. That's my stupid alliance code. Anyways, I've been speaking to Satima for days now. She is the most fascinating person in this whole galaxy. More interesting than her mother.", she states.

"That being said: she is also the most dangerous. She's gone for years without treatment of her symptoms. At every corner, there's always been a villain waiting to take advantage of her.", Kelly took a sip of her coffee. "I spoke to her of relationships, and how she felt about them. She's seen one
young quarian die for her. What a tragedy. Satima's had no positive adult role models in her life."

Shepard looked away. The captain was getting nauseous, all the while Kelly went on and on.

"There's never been a thorough discussion on her anatomy, especially since she's a hybrid of two species. And even though she’s been trained to be the reaper's soldier, she's not a mindless husk, or one of those abominations. She’s a person. An advantage many have taken."

A knock was heard on the door, and Kelly turned off the recording. The vid shut down.

Shepard stood back, shaking her head in personal disbelief. All that she’s been angry towards Satima for, all that she's accused the girl of. It wasn't fair. None of it.

"Captain. You have an incoming vid-com from Admiral Hackett, in the QEC.", Traynor alerted on comms.

She stared at the terminal ahead, then sent the copy to Garrus. They should be reading this together. Shepard made her way to the qec, and turned the vid-com on. Hackett's image looked more graven than ever.

"Admiral?", she began.

"Shepard.", he spoke. "Have you received the report from Chambers?" His tone heavy.

"Of course.", she replied. Already in a bitter mood about it. "Is there anything else related to it?"

Hackett leaned forward, as if he could step out of the image chamber, and stand with her in person. "It's about Satima. But not a report. A command."

"For what?", she wondered.

"You are formally summoned for Satima's trial in two days' time. Any missions you are in command of are to be halted, and your presence on earth immediately.", he revealed.

Shepard stared in surprise. "What…"

"Shepard, don't take too long. This is urgent.", he finished. His image distorted and faded.

Trial? What the hell is going on?
Trial

Chapter Summary

Satima is put to trial, with a hasty new Admiral rushing through the facts. Shepard feels it all to be a set up, while Garrus attempts to balance the field in the court. Unfortunately, plans have been made, and the hybrid... meets an old foe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Palaven

Garrus sat in the chair, leaning over his desk while reading the files that Charlie sent him. He lifted his worn gaze to see the sunlight painting his office floor in metallic silver tones.

All this back and forth between the citadel and his home world was starting to wear him down. Being away from his family put stress in his mood lately. He missed Natalie too much. And Satima?

These files troubled him. Thoughts clouded his hope for her. And the lashing out, all the distance she put between them, could be ultimately his own fault. If he had been the upright officer his father trained him to be in the first place, Garrus wouldn't have let paranoia pit his anger and fears on Satima.

Her arrival terrified him. The truth became walls caving in on his life. And Shepard was caught in the middle. Trying to care for her reaper child, and trying to make him see the family they had been given. He wished there was a way to understand her. All his efforts didn't echo a fatherly bond, but that of a friend.

His computer turned on disrupting the thoughts, sending a message from earth. The avian blue gaze darted between sentences, until he looked up in shock.

Garrus sprinted to the elevator, already out of breath. Staring at the lift's doors, he tried to figure out what the alliance is attempting with these accusations. And why now, suddenly?

He watched and waited as the doors opened, carefully walking out among a crowd. Some of them gave him stares. News is spreading quickly. He can hear the terminals echoing from the citadel's bulletin station. Garrus reached the entrance to the administration building. His cab waited on the platform.

Once he sat inside, Garrus leaned over the panel. His thoughts turned into terrifying scenarios. What if the alliance set an elaborate trap for Satima, fooling Shepard with empty promises?

Setting the cab to auto, Garrus shook his thoughts aside. He'll arrive to board the shuttle at the docking station. There's a ship waiting to take him to watch his daughter be handed to the wolves.

Turian Board of the Small Council

Agripenex waited in her office for Vakarian to show. She stared out the wide windows to the city
below the building. It's been two years since the reapers defeat. An anniversary is coming soon for
the entire galaxy.

Many races want to celebrate their freedom from the reaper's harvests. It will be an honored
spectacle. But something every person could use. Thousands of people will be at the citadel.
Troubling. She's been a commander for so long, before becoming the hierarchy's official. Those
instincts were sounding off at this.

With Malen discharged from his position, she's had to overlook several candidates. But she needed
someone who wasn't in opposition of other races, and had sound judgement with experience. The
door slid open with Tiberius Vakarian walking through. His son resembled him greatly. "Councilor.
You requested a meeting with me?", he wondered.

She gestured for him to sit, and waited until the room was quiet again. "You've been an officer and a
soldier to Palaven for a long time. I'm not too sure how to address you nowadays.", her tone light
with jest.

He adjusted himself. then met her gaze. "You can stick to Vakarian.", Tiberius winked.

Agripinex nodded, then proceeded with her summons. "Vakarian.", she began. "I have an opening
in the small council. As many of you know, who are invested in the hierarchy-Malen has been
discharged for poor conduct. Among other things."
She brought him a datapad. "You've been close to the hierarchy and the small council for years. I am
asking you personally, to accept this offer." Agripinex stared at him with her urgent tones.

He viewed the tablet and its contents. An alarmed expression forced him to click his mandibles in
response. "Councilor.", Tiberius looked up to her. "This is about Satima."

The worried gaze she gave him caused concern. "Yes.", she admitted. "There are events in progress
that are in review as we speak. I am leaving for earth in a few hours. You must become a part of this
council, or the future of your grand-daughter will be extinguished."

Tiberius couldn't look at her, only stare about the room in upset. He remembered Garrus, and how
much this will cause strife between them. But if his council will prevent the humans from executing
his grand-daughter. He'll have no choice but to deal. "I'll accept.", he glared to her. "After you give
me the details of what in the hell is going on!"

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Earth
Central New York-Alliance R&D

Satima waited in her cell. She sat next to a wall, rocking back and forth. She knew this was coming.
If the Head Archon on Lithera didn't execute her for those heinous actions, it was sure this galaxy
will. And now they're preparing a trial to send her away, or worse.

Kelly came into the holding room. She nodded to a guard who let her in the cell. Walking slowly,
she came close to the hybrid, kneeling down. "Satima... are you alright?", Kelly asked in concern.

The hybrid looked up, "How can you ask me that?" Her gaze watery, accusing.

Kelly tried a reassuring tone. "I'm your doctor, and it's my job to help you." Her voice was strained
from upset. There's so many things going wrong here.

Satima chuckled, averting her stare. She stopped rocking her body, and let her legs sprawl out.
Shoulders slumped in defeat. "You honestly believe you were sent to help me?" With a smirk, the
hybrid glared to her. "It was a lie, so I would reveal just how unfit I am to exist."

Kelly held a gasp to herself, shaking her head. Is this new alliance so cruel?

0900 hours-next solar day
Mass Relay jump-Earth
Tribunal Board
Secondary Alliance Command-Council and Administration Chambers

The panel of five high ranking officials had taken their seats in the medium square office. An idea to keep the trial obscure from other councils. Chief of Command Ruth Marsden overlooked the board room, eyeing the cramped sides of officers.

The oak walls darkened the space despite the bright sunlight coming through the large windows to the left. Behind them, the door opened for more officers to push the now overcrowded room. Many of them decided to lean against wall partitions, scanning the area while waiting.

Ruth looked up from her data pad to see Agripinex of the turian small council walk through. She had such a disciplined composure that made most of the human officers stand erect. She reached the board, taking a seat next to the officer. There was a silent glance between them. Most of the evidence and data had been discussed on vid-com. A conclusion between her people and their government pushed an agreement. Three more officials came through the entrance.

Rear Admiral Samantha Grey, Captain Finely Daniels and Admiral Hackett himself.

Within an hour, all the board were prepared for the trial. The men and women in the background were quiet, when a new captain stepped through. The legendary Shepard, herself.

In alliance uniform, Shepard slowly entered the tribunal, eyeing the officers who gave salutes or quiet stares. None of them would dare say anything to her. She's responsible for saving their lives. And now she's here, because her own reaper hybrid daughter is responsible for taking them.

At the left of the accused podium, she stood at a small table. Waiting for the command to be seated like the rest of the board. Her emerald gaze narrowed towards them. Whatever they have planned, they will not put Satima away. She won't let them. Even if it means treason.

Turian officials came in, taking their places alongside the human officers. Some of them knew each other, offering handshakes and mumbled murmurs. A good chance that most of these men and women shared a time in the battle field, trying to survive the reapers.

Lieutenant Nerris walked in with Garrus behind. The new Commander of Logistical strategy had plenty of tactics up his sleeve in the battle field. But it was a justice board he wasn't entirely prepared for. Three times he's had to defend his daughter, and now he's against a double onslaught of both human and turian governments, trying to put her away.

Garrus stood on the right side of the podium, glancing to Shepard. They've had no time to collaborate or speak since the summons. Away on missions abroad, or for him-home.

Ruth stood, staring to everyone. She nodded to a marine, who signaled from his omni-tool. Satima was led in by four guards. She was cuffed, with her hands in front. Staring around her with the gaze of a frightened animal, she could see the indifference thrown at her.

Shepard didn't look. She didn't need to show emotion, only a sure gaze to the board. And Ruth.

At the podium, the hybrid was left to stand with the guards taking their places to the sides. Garrus
stared in worry. Humans aren't very good at understanding turian facial expressions. He hopes these ones can't see the fear in his eyes. Agripinex glimpsed his upset, wishing this never had to happen. But she warned him over a year ago.

Satima is a danger to the galaxy. She may not mean to be, but clearly the hybrid is incapable of making logical choices.

Chief of Command Ruth Marsden began, glaring to the reaper born who sulked. "This tribunal has been set, pending the evidence of the dreadnought class Inglorious and the death of its crew. The spread of the deadly pathogen, and the negligence involved."

No one spoke, listening carefully to the accusations.

Ruth continued with a harsh tone, narrowing her amber eyes to Satima. "Can you understand me clearly?"

Satima's heart pounded heavily. She lifted her gaze enough to peer at her. Observing the tight auburn bun on the human's head and dark blue uniform. "Yes.", she replied.

Tablet in hand, she read aloud the prosecution. "You crash landed a dreadnought bearing the classifications of the Sentarian military on Nepmos. Carrying a hazardous plague and high-risk contaminated rachni, capable of devastating brutality." Her words stung the room. "That outcome took lives, hybrid. Why didn't you immediately alert the alliance of the danger therein?!"

Satima lowered her head in shame. Shepard caught this display and spoke aloud. "She was too terrified! Satima lived on Lithera for a year, battling the rachni planet side."

Hackett stood up, speaking over an emotional Shepard. "Chief Admiral, Satima is young. She's been through a traumatic childhood and its effects have shadowed her every step."

The Chief checked her evidence from the data pad with an unamused stare to its contents. "You were psychologically evaluated recently." She held the tablet in her hand, reading aloud its conclusions. "Born to indoctrination, created by the reapers and trained to be a deadly assassin. And yet, you were given free rein all over this galaxy?"

Hackett spoke, "Madam, to correct this. Satima Shepard stayed on the Normandy for the duration of the reaper war. She had a definite hand in their defeat." He never wavered in his gaze, his voice never cracked.

Shepard could feel the relief from his defense. She glanced to Satima who was shaking. Her hands steadied themselves on the podium edge.

Ruth raised a brow, then nodded to an officer who opened the sliding door for Kelly to come through. She shook with nervousness, but tried her best to remain calm. At the table Shepard occupied, she stood next to the legendary soldier. "Chambers.", Shepard acknowledged.

Before she could say anything, Ruth began. "Relay to the board, Ms. Chambers, your final conclusions of your week study of the hybrid."

Kelly took a breath and spoke. "Madam, my conclusions are only scratching the surface of the psychological trauma this young woman has suffered. It can't be solely used as final data with only a week's worth of study."

Marsden stared in disapproval, then turned on an audio log of one of their sessions. "This is
Chambers-KCR4. That's my stupid alliance code. Anyways, I've been speaking to Satima for days now. She is the most fascinating person in this whole galaxy. More interesting than her mother."

The crowd listens intently, with Kelly staring in personal dismay.

"That being said: she is also the most dangerous. She's gone for years without treatment of her symptoms."

Kelly looked stunned. "That... that-that is a private recording of my sessions with Satima! It's confidential!"

"It doesn't remain confidential when the subject is on trial for murder", Marsden replied. She cast a scowl towards Garrus. "Murder.", she repeated. "That is a crime. An offense an ex-citadel security officer should be well familiar with." Her tone echoed with such vitriol, the entire room unsettled.

Garrus stared back in personal disdain of her. Satima is no murderer. She's no Sidonas, and nothing like the scum from Omega.

Hackett continued. "Despite the evaluation, Satima has never shown alliance or support for the reapers. Even under indoctrination."

Captain Daniels stood. He wore the same uniformed attire as Shepard, but not as many medals. Shepard waited in trepidation as the slightly older than her-man, was about to speak. "Satima is no heroine in this scenario. She brought back a bio-weapon that could've wiped out several species. Including us! I was in the colony weeks after their return. The people that were infected looked like husks. Much like a reaper would do.", he accused.

Shepard shook her head. Before she could counter, Agripinex nodded to Garrus. He stood to attention, nervous but composed. "I command a division that specializes in the reapers. The pathogen was... reaper related. But Satima did not create it!"

Ruth had a veiled expression, but for an intense scrutiny through her stare. "No, she did not create the pathogen. But she did harbor it, and hide the implications of the deadly virus without alerting anyone to it. Not the alliance, not Admiral Marsden, and not Captain Shepard." Her gaze narrowed at the real heroine.

Shepard returned the criticizing tone. "Take a look at the psychological evaluation again, Chief Marsden. It paints a clear picture how my daughter suffers from a traumatic childhood. She displays social isolation, and lack of trust for a good reason." The Captain stared towards the board. "Can any of you imagine what it's like to be a helpless child in the grasp of monsters?"

Daniels sat down, sighing to himself. Hackett continued to loom over the panel, while Shepard spoke. "Satima has bad judgement, and is not without her flaws."

Ruth was not impressed or stirred, slamming her tablet on the board table. "Satima knew the implications of what she brought with her, Shepard. A virus, that killed hundreds of alliance, and many more colonists!"

Shepard began to counter again, but was cut off.

Chief Marsden stared down the captain. "When Satima entered this galaxy, she brought with her, aliens from another time. Who can easily overtake us! She almost destroyed the integrity of this galaxy through irresponsible actions.", Ruth vented in anger. "This hybrid was designed to eradicate us! It is your down right refusal... to see the truth, only because she shares your dna!"
Shepard glared toward them, an anger fuming in defiance to their accusations. Agripinex could see the issue that has overtaken the entire trial. "Chief Marsden, perhaps Rear Admiral Grey could take your place, in leave of your personal attachment to this trial."

Chief Marsden regained her composure, "No one will relieve me.", she argued. "I am here to make sure that there will be no repeat of what happened on Nepmos. No repeat of what she is."

With an alarmed glance, Shepard focused her confused gaze on Ruth. Satima kept a new stare to her. This Chief Marsden was determined to see her punished. Ruth turned her gaze to Garrus, a sure thought in her mind. "You may have your own reaper division, but so do we. And it will comprise of our most talented scientists to study this individual before us."

"Wait.", he started, stepping forward. Closer to the panel, and now glancing to both Hackett and Agripinex. "You cannot mean…"

Rear Admiral Grey handed a tablet to Ruth, stepping to the side and waiting. Daniels stood too, not ready for the decision.

"This trial is now under a private judicial hearing.", Ruth decided.

Satima was taken away, out of sight from the rest of the crowd. Everyone was made to leave, while Shepard and Garrus waited with the board in silence. The room now vacant, save them. Ruth took her chance to show the aggressive anger welling up. She leaned over the board table, now glaring openly to the captain as Hackett tried to intervene. "How can you defend that thing?! She's not a normal occurrence. Nothing about her is right!"

"Chief Marsden!", Hackett began. "There's nothing about Satima that should warrant this kind of hate."

Shepard stepped to the board, her stare sending chills down Daniels spine. "I don't give a damn about how you feel. She's my daughter, and no one is putting her away! Would you get rid of more than half the galaxy, for being indoctrinated?!"

Ruth smirked, now looking to them both with a twisted pity. "I'm going to be perfectly honest with you. And I want you both to understand this. Clearly." Her amber eyes glistened with an internal fire as she prepared her decision. "There is now way, that girl is leaving this planet freely." She took in the silent realizations between them. "Since her arrival, she's been nothing but a liability to you both. To your careers, your reputations. Your families."

Garrus looked down, remembering how Satima could've infected his entire planet with her irresponsible actions. He sighed in response.

Hackett stepped away from the board, and stood next to Shepard, hoping his best soldier and the galaxies hero doesn't do anything stupid.

Ruth leaned up from the board table, crossing her arms. "Shepard, I want you to realize that she's not really your daughter. You never had her. She may carry your genetic markers, but nothing more. There is nothing tying either of you to her, except your own foolish hearts." she stated. "Let her go. Stop fighting for an ideal that you both know can't end happily." Her gaze softened in concern. " Satima... is... dangerous.", Ruth spoke emphatically. "She must be put away now, before she can do anymore harm."

Shepard could feel reality closing in on her. The walls of this room were crumbling and in her mind, she knows that she's already lost the right of her child. With a sorrowful stare and dry mouth, she
spoke. "There is nothing you can say, that will change my mind about Satima. I did not raise her, and God knows if I had that chance. We wouldn't be here today."

Hackett averted his gaze from the board. He let Shepard down by offering empty promises.

The captain continued, "You can't pretend she's nothing more than some… thing, you want to put away for your own safety. She's a living, breathing person. Satima's done good in this galaxy and abroad! Helped thousands of people!", Shepard argued.

Ruth stepped away from the panel, walking around the table, now face to face with Shepard. "Captain, she's not your little girl. She never was." Her amber stare piercing straight into Shepard's resolve.

That statement became a dagger plunged through Shepard's heart. The stinging pain caused her to blink in response.

Garrus felt hollow inside. There wasn't bone, or organs. No heart, or lungs. Just… empty. Ruth is absolutely correct, but still so wrong. The other Garrus is the real father to Satima. Not him. But he could still try. Can't he?

Ruth reached out and put her hands on Shepard's shoulders, using this moment of stunned defenselessness to feign concern. "You both have a responsibility back on the citadel, your home. Don't you think she's wondering where her parents are?" Standing back from them, Ruth continued to reveal her judgement and plans. "It's over. Satima will be transferred to an undisclosed facility. Neither of you have the clearance to know of its location."

Shepard shook her head. "For how long?"

Ruth gathered her things and began leaving. "For as long as it takes to keep this galaxy safe."

Shepard watched the Chief Admiral leave. The door slid closed behind her. Satima was gone. All hope was gone. Hackett stood to the side, wondering what he could've done to prevent this.

The captain looked around the room, a bewildered expression of doubt. "This had to of been planned?", she finally spoke.

Garrus tried to touch her arm, "Charlie…"

She pulled away. "I'm contacting Liara. She'll know something." Shepard hastily left as well. Leaving him behind.

Garrus wanted to follow, but he had a nagging question in his mind. Turning to Hackett, he asked it. "What is going to happen to my daughter, Admiral? She willingly came to earth for help."

Hackett stared downward, "I had planned for her to receive treatment, even give us insight into the mind of a purely indoctrinated subject." He met Garrus's gaze, "Satima is special in a way none of us can imitate. And that kind of paradox, frightens this galaxy."

The Admiral looked to the large windows into the city. "Commander, my intentions were to help. Never to harm your family. Never to harm Shepard. That woman deserves more than medals, or places of advancement in the alliance." Hackett sighed, his hands behind his back at ease. "She deserves peace. And I thought I could give it to her."

The room was silent. Kelly sniffled at the reveal. She looked between the men, already knowing the perplexed thoughts that prevented them from soundly defending the hybrid. "The best…", she
started. Now getting their attention. Kelly swallowed, then proceeded. "The best way to help her, is to continue with our duty to this galaxy." She stared at Garrus, "You know Shepard will need you. She respects your judgement on this matter. Your other daughter will still need a father. Be one to her. Use that opportunity to learn how to help Satima."

Garrus nodded in agreement, even if it means a small defeat for now.

Kelly glanced to Hackett, nervously staring at the table he stood next to. "You've got to have some sort of pull in the alliance to get Satima out of incarceration, and whatever that research facility is. Someone out there can make a difference. Somehow. Continue to support Shepard's defense for Satima."

Hackett stood to attention with a renewed expression. "Chambers. I like the tactical way you're thinking. It seems you've picked up a few ideas during your time with Shepard on the Normandy."

She chuckled lightheartedly. "Thank you, Admiral."

Garrus began leaving, when Nerris caught up with him. "Sir? What are your orders?", he wondered.

At the door, Garrus trailed the floor's carpet with his defeated gaze. "Nothing. We do nothing, but wait." He led them out to the hallway, full of alliance who were gossiping. In the lift, Nerris waited for the doors to slide closed. "But, sir? We can do something about this situation. There's still rumors about that alliance station..."

The relentless talking angered Garrus, pushing his tactical mind from finding a solution. "Lieutenant! Shut up!", he glared.

Nerris complied, clearing his throat and backing away. "Apologies, sir."

At the bottom floor, Agripinex waited in the far side of the lobby. She waved Garrus and his assistant over. Reluctantly, he followed her to an empty meeting room. Much smaller, with only a few chairs surrounding a square table.

"Commander, I need to speak with you on this urgent matter.", she began.

Garrus slammed his own datapads and files down on the table in upset. "About what? How much you warned me of Satima's destructive behavior? Or maybe, you'd like to gloat over the fact she's being taken away to spirits knows where?!"

His angered gaze stared her down. She didn't blink, but lowered them in apologetic pity. "I am sorry for the outcome of this trial. We did not expect for it to turn this way. Chief Admiral Marsden has proven quite tactical and most elusive in her judgements."

"And what is that supposed to mean?", he asked, in a curt tone.

Nerris kept an ear out for the door, all the while learning the more irritated side of his respected commander. He couldn't hold it against him. The hybrid is his child, and this trial sounded fixed from the start.

Agripinex stepped closer, nearly as tall as Garrus, and giving him a stare reminiscent of Shepard. "Because the hierarchy did not mean for Satima to be taken away. Only incarcerated in a widely known research facility on Illium. The asari are making advances using their own biotic techniques, with indoctrination."

Garrus stared with a new expression. A fearful one. "You mean... that woman kidnapped my daughter with the alliance's help?"
Nerris perked up his attention now. This has gotten beyond strange, and quite possibly… illegal?

"Yes. And also no.", she sighed in frustration. "The trial was set with a fixed outcome. Your father is behind the suggestion." She waited as Garrus let the information sink in, before proceeding. "I put him on the small council, to save her from the human's anger. Although it is justified, Satima—the hybrid, is more than a war criminal or reaper experiment. She has done good before. And the hierarchy, finally acknowledged it. Albeit too late."

Garrus brought out a chair and took a rough seat. He buried his head before them. Agripinex felt so much pity towards him. Nerris stepped forward. "Sir?, he spoke. His commander lifted a hopeless gaze to him. Nerris continued. "You can fight for her even if she's being put away somewhere we don't know. Latellia and I can still conduct our research, and find a way to cure her. With that proof, the alliance will have to try something. That…", he picked up the datapad, and typed in something.

Agripinex watched and wondered what the young turian lieutenant had in mind. He then handed the information to his commander. "She's still part turian. And our government isn't done with our own trial for her, just yet."

Garrus overlooked galactic laws and treaties. The alliance can't put her away without a joint consensus. And what Ruth did, was against those laws. He looked up to Nerris, standing slowly and gratefully gripping the young turian's shoulder. "Thank you."

Nerris nodded in satisfaction.

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Normandy
Alliance Docks

Shepard paced in the QEC, waiting for Liara to show up. Her frame finally actualizing from the pixels. "Shepard? What's this about an urgent message?"

"They took her, Liara! The alliance took Satima. Put her away at some place I'm not allowed to know. Me!", she laughed in sarcasm. "I'm Shepard! I stopped the reapers, saved this galaxy. And my own people take away my child, stating she's too dangerous!" The amount of stunned anger put Liara on edge.

Her blue gaze lowered. "Shepard…"

The captain continued to rant and pace. "If she were a small child, would they still do the same? Would they put a defenseless little girl in a cage?!"

"Shepard…", Liara continued.

"She's been the reaper's slave for so long. Lost and afraid. Satima sacrificed everything to save earth!", Shepard yelled.

"SHEPARD!", Liara shouted. Her voice echoed loud enough that the captain finally listened. Liara straightened her composure, and spoke. "There was a meeting between the council, a spectre and me. A second meeting followed with both the alliance and the turian hierarchy. Satima is not well. She's been indoctrinated for too long. Until there's a way to help her. She needs to be put in a safe environment, away from other people. For a time."

Liara felt so terrible. Javik had warned her about Satima over a year ago. She didn't listen, and the girl brought back a virus capable of wiping out civilizations. "Goddess. Charlotte, I am so sorry. But it had to be done. I promise you, Satima is safe. She'll get the best treatment, the best care. And when she's shown progress. You can see her again." Her voice sounded sweet and assured.

Shepard felt an emptiness bury her tears. She looked up to Liara with a hateful expression. "I will never.... forgive you for this."

"Shepard?", Liara voice, confused.

The captain stepped closer to the display, leaning forward with her hands tightly gripping the rails. "Satima warned me of your intentions the first time she was on the Normandy. And it seems she was right."

Liara folded her arms over her chest in a defensible manner. "My intentions never harmed anyone. It certainly did not bring a plague here, either." She glared in upset at Shepard's words. "I'll do what I can to keep this galaxy safe."

Shepard stared, "And I'll do what I want, to keep my family safe from you." She glared back in anger. "I'm warning you, Liara. Stay out of my way when I find her."

"You're being a fool, Shepard! The alliance will charge you with treason! You'll lose the respect of the entire galaxy.", Liara cautioned. Then she stopped herself. Shepard mentioned that it was a place she was not allowed to know or enter. But… it's supposed to be Illium. Liara looked back on a hateful gaze.

With a smirk, Shepard leaned back from the rails. She crossed her arms in a smooth response and a raised brow of satisfaction. "So be it."

The vid call was cut.

Liara stood in the station's communications room, stunned. Javik waited silently. He stared away, contemplative of Shepard's words. "The Shepard does not understand the consequences of her actions. She is blinded by foolish love for the reaper abomination."

Liara snapped in his direction. "She's a mother who's lost her only biological child to paranoid conclusions. Conclusions you helped seed in this galaxy." She stomped away from the vid panel.

Javik followed behind. "My advice is sound. The hybrid brought danger with her."

"She rectified that danger.", Liara replied.

Javik stopped, annoyed. "You put the blame on me? When it was you, who set the meetings in place as "Shadow Broker", to this galaxy. Shepard may have become the sword of the people, but you are now the shield." He stepped closer to Liara, reading her gaze with his yellow stare. "You did not have to follow my words, but you chose to. And now, you must reap the consequences of your own judgement."

Liara sighed, looking away. Her blue features overshadowed with doubt. "What if my judgement was too hasty?" She shook her head. "Javik, Shepard expressed that the alliance had taken Satima to a hidden base. You don't think there's something else going on, do you?"

He averted his stare from her confused expression. "Use your contacts to find her. And when you do, speak to her yourself. Form your own judgement from there."
She scoffed. "No matter what answers I find, Shepard will never forgive me."

Minos Wasteland
Fortis System-In Orbit of Aequitas
SS Argos, Alliance Reaper Division Vessel

Satima woke abruptly when a marine aggressively pulled her from the shuttle. She fell asleep somehow, on the journey to the system, not knowing where they are. Led inside the dimmed airlock of the ship, Satima listened to the hatch locks shift with pressurized air releasing. The hissing noise un-nerved her.

Once through, she was practically dragged to a holding station. Satima was scanned by a harsh orange light, injected with something in her arm. It stung and turned an inflamed shade of red. Probably a chip of some kind.

Walking between the marines, she was brought to a four-way hall. She could hear other people murmur in rooms leading down one of the corridors. A painful groan followed another. What has the alliance put together? And why does it feel so sinister?

Shaking the dread, she followed the marines to another room. It had a similar two-way mirror, and a cot. What sort of incarceration is this? Nothing about this place indicated safety or help. Quite the opposite.

The ship that she viewed had white hull walls, much like the alliance ships on earth. Bland halls and insignificant parts of the rooms mimicking a tasteless feel.

She heard a clicking sound as the mirror cleared. Marines came in the room, distracting her. They surrounded Satima, as she stood still, head lowered in a submissive attitude. It would be best to show them she's serious about changing. Kelly offered her insight to some of her problems.

Maybe this seems sinister, because her instincts were just spooked?

A voice then echoed through comms, forcing Satima's blood to run cold. Whomever is in charge of this universe, please don't let it be him. It can't! She turned in terror to see a familiar figure staring back at her. His cruel grin widened, sending waves of fear through her.

"Hello, Satima. Welcome to the Argos. We're going to be busy, helping you to eliminate the effects of indoctrination."

Her left hand shook uncontrollably. "...no..", she whispered in fear. Satima stepped closer to the mirror, to see if it was an illusion. "You're dead. I killed you!", she shouted.

With a pitiful gaze, he spoke. "No, my dear. You did not." He gave a nod to one of the marines in the room, and she was knocked unconscious.

Chief Admiral Marsden overlooked the room, alongside Captain Daniels. "Are you absolutely confident, you can find a permanent solution to our problem?", she demanded.

Archer watched the hybrid be taken to the bio-chamber. The implant the alliance had put in his neck sent small pin pricks of pain throughout his nerves. It was their attempt at control. And it worked too well, unfortunately. "Of course.", he turned to her gaze. "Satima is my design. All that she is, will benefit the galaxy. In all aspects." His tone mockingly assured.

Ruth raised a brow with a scoff. "It better. Or I gave the enemy a sacrifice it doesn't deserve." She
walked away from the viewing room.

Archer stared off. His mind overflowing with plans. "A sacrifice well deserved, indeed.", he mused.

Normandy
War Room

Shepard overlooked the trial's conclusions. There are indiscrepancies in the information. Especially with the hierarchy. She wonders if Garrus knew anything about this? Considering how much time he's spent on his planet.

Always away. Never home, or with her. Not as much as they used to be. He's been going on and on about a project to help Satima. Was that it? Handing her over to the alliance?

No. The New Alliance. Anderson would've never stood for that sham of a trial. Satima is such an asset, that without her, they'd all be dead!

The door opened with Garrus walking through. He hurried down the stairs to her. Reaching out to put is arms around Charlie, but she anticipated his movements too soon, and stepped away. Wondering off further from him with datapad in hand. "You know about your people having secretive meetings on Satima?", she accused.

Garrus sighed loudly, "Not until recently, no. I did speak with Agripinx.", he began.

Shepard folded her arms, datapad still in hand. "Oh, really? About what?", she eyed irritated, a deep tone in anger.

He understands how she feels, but this new attitude was surprising. "Satima.", Garrus revealed. "My father is now in the small council. He suggested that she be put in a research facility. To get help."

Before Garrus could continue with what Ruth did, Shepard's expression turned sour.

"Your father?!", her tone became bitter. "So, your family decided the fate of OUR child!" Shepard threw the datapad on the grated floor. "Son of a bitch.", she spoke to herself. Now looking to a stunned Garrus. "Go on. Tell me what other great ideas your father has!"

She glared with a fury, all the while he backed away. His gaze upsettingly confused. Shaking his head, he spoke. "I'll wait until you're feeling better, Shepard." Garrus turned around and left silently.

Charlie relaxed her stare, and lowered her gaze in a shameful manner. With a sigh, she regretted the temper towards him, and the way he said her name.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank all the readers, and their kudos. Thanks to everyone for taking a look, and I hope you all have a wonderful day. ;)

Things to Come

Chapter Summary

Shepard's anger strikes hard against those that she trusted. Garrus attempts to use diplomacy to gain allies for his mission to free Satima. A divide begins to grow in the galaxy. And a small affection blossoms.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Citadel-Empassy
Human Councilor's office

Ashley sat half-slouched in the chair, staring hard towards the files on Khalee's desk. The fine details of the folders and how they stacked sloppily, caused an unnecessary irritation on her nerves.

It wasn't the papers that bothered her, it was the odd way the trial went on earth. Not only was this the hastiest court in decades, but they treated that hybrid like she led the reapers themselves to this galaxy.

Sighing in silence, Ashley waited on the councilor. Patience is wearing thin.

A simple curiosity struck her suddenly, about the hybrid. She herself, did not spend a whole lot of time around the kid. Satima... seemed out of place. Everyone knew she didn't belong, but was that a good reason to keep the hybrid at such a distance?

If time were different, circumstances changed? And Satima was born as the first hybrid child, raised by Shepard. She'd be that girl's godmother, probably.

Ashley hasn't seen Shepard for weeks. Even before all this trouble, it's been months since they last spent time as friends. Drinking and watching people from a bar or reminiscing the good times on the Normandy. As she recalled those good times briefly, Khalee walked into the office. Her exasperated expression and partly-brushed hair gave away to the little time she's had to process the recent events.

"I'm sorry, Spectre Williams. This whole issue with Shepard's hybrid child has been a- if you excuse the term-a shit storm.", she stated. The councilor sat at her desk, deeply exhaling while eying her files. "Dear God. It's all so confusing!", Khalee explained, flustered and annoyed.

Grabbing the files, she flipped through folders, then used her tablet to scan a few pages. "Advanced tech and old knowledge.", she mused. "I'll still prefer paper to digital copies. You can't hack paperwork.", Khalee laughed.

Ashley sat up now, crossing her legs with an empty smile.

Khalee observed, "I know your meetings with T'Soni couldn't have been pleasant, but the intended trip to Illium was canceled.", she revealed. "Chief Admiral Marsden has made some unauthorized and yet, supported changes."

Stunned, Ashley quickly uncrossed her legs and leaned out of the chair. "Councilor? What is going
Staring at the files before lifting her gaze to Ashley, Khalee handed the spectre the tablet. “She wasn’t sent to Illium. The recommendation was cancelled, and a new facility chosen.”

Ashley skimmed the results, only concerned with a few details. “Somewhere else?”

A worried stare settled on the aware spectre, as the councilor nodded. ”And no one, not even us, has the authority-to know where.”

Ronin watched Jaine prepare herself breakfast. Kaevun had just come in from a night's worth of bar hopping. He smirked in thought. Same old Kaevun, same old tactics. And still very single.

"Are you sure, you're not hungry for anything, Ronin?", Jaine asked again. It was a worried tone he'd been familiar with since before.

He thought about this setting, replaying the old days on Omega and how they’re little family used to be. Jaine was mothering the room, all the while still careful of her own dealings. She nurtured the notion of their family, and one day even slipped an idea of expanding it.

But Ronin had been too deep with the blue suns. He stayed clear of the vigilante-Archangel. Keeping Kaevun safely away from any stupid jobs. Didn’t matter. His hapless, foolish brother in-law had dug a deeper hole in debt to the merc gang.

And an offer that Ronin received anonymously, fished him out. All to the anger of Jaine, who blamed Ronin for living a merc life to begin with. Dragging her brother along, and nearly getting them all killed.

She left him, cut ties. And he found a distraction in his new line of work.

"No.", he replied, now helping Kaevun to the table for hot dextro coffee. "I didn't sleep well last night. Can't really eat right now."

Jaine shrugged her feminine shoulders, the smaller carapace responding to movement. "Suit yourself, love." She then sat down opposite her brother, who was cradling a headache. He leaned in to her touch of his plated brow. "You drank too much again, didn't you?”, she worried in feigned concern. Jaine abruptly slapped his mandibled jaw. "Too bad!"

Ronin laughed at them. He had missed this.

"Ow!", Kaevun shouted. "Stop hitting me!", he demanded.

Jaine swallowed a sip of her own coffee with a sly gaze. "Not until you get a mate that'll do it for me.", she stated.

Kaevun growled at her, but it was pretty pitiful. He rubbed his jaw, beginning to leave the table. "I'm getting some sleep."

Ronin watched him leave, "Don't forget you have that new shift in the warehouse tonight. Gotta start helping out around here."

The loud irritated groan made them both laugh at the table. And for a reason he can't finger, it briefly reminded him of Satima. Ronin shook the thought aside and began speaking to Jaine. "I was thinking, since I'm free for a little while. Maybe we can go to the casino tonight?" He viewed her
"Maybe." Jaine lifted her violet gaze to him. The soft features of her mandibles moving to a beautiful turian smile. "I wouldn't mind a tour of the wards, though. You know? Someplace quiet and... dark?"

Ronin leaned further out from his seat, almost over the table. An anticipation in his stare. "I know plenty of places than can provide that.", he insinuated. Spirits it’s been a long while.

"I'm trying to sleep, not have nightmares about you two screwing in some alley way!", Keavun yelled.
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Normandy-en Route to citadel

Garrus paced in the cabin. Charlie came back eventually, and in a better mood. Not happy, but at least she was done chewing his head off.

He doesn't know what his father had planned. Agripinex explained her own scheme to help Satima. It was a nice gesture, even if it did sour in the end.

There was a nagging idea, though. And Garrus is sure there's answers to be found on Illium. He wants to desperately find Satima, but without sound science to back his plan of helping her. The alliance would do everything to keep her locked away.

The other problem-is Shepard.

Garrus sighs in disappointment. He couldn't keep Satima safe. None of them could. All the while Charlie's looking for the support in her friends, the people she's saved from the reapers. For help.

No one is offering.

Charlie opened the bathroom door, freshly showered and dressed for her meeting with the council. She cut her hair shorter than it was.

Garrus was getting used to the long strands of red softness. "Wanted a change?", he smirked in affection.

She glanced to him, heading for her desk to put on the new dog tags she acquired while in incarceration nearly two years ago. Right before the reapers came to earth. Her mood seemed irritable again. Charlie thought about ignoring him, but this is Garrus. Her lover, her friend. They're mated!

So, why is she being such an asshole to him?

"I… uh, I wanted to make it easier to put on my helmet.", she answered.

Garrus nodded, "Makes sense." He stood beside her, watching her play around with the desk and all the little items of her carrier displayed. She'd rather keep them on the ship, then at their home on the citadel. "After our meeting with the council. I'm going back to Palaven. I paid for a caretaker to watch over Natalie. Give us the freedom to track down Satima."

Charlie stared off. She didn't like leaving Natalie alone like this. No real explanation, and no family. Orphaned again. Charlie shook her head briefly, "It's a good idea, Garrus."
The room turned silent. A distant feeling crept between them. How did this happen? And why are they letting it divide them?

"I'm going to check my old room. See how the gun's holding up.", Garrus offered, leaving the cabin.

She didn't respond. Only feel a bigger hole drill into her heart.

It was a bad dream. Started off with screams and reaper war sounds, then it turned into an empty space.

Ronin traveled on a path, through a hazy fog. He lifted his gaze to consider a black sky. Only, it couldn't really be this dark? Illumination paved a way for him to follow. On and on, until he reached a metal door. Looking to the right, he saw it expand into a long wall. Maybe miles down. The same for the left.

The door wouldn't open. He tapped it, knocking and speaking. Nothing happened.

The darkness echoed, but it wasn't reapers or the sounds of their victims anymore. It turned into one voice. Small and fading. The voice was crying.

A woman's voice.

She cried softly, muttering at times. He could hear it better through a new crack in the metal door. Ronin became curious and peaked through with his avian gaze. In shock, he viewed a half nude human woman, surrounded by strangers in lab coats.

His heart beat faster. This wasn't right. She was injected and prodded. Ronin wanted it to stop, but he couldn't look away. He started to cry out Jaine's name. Desperately wanting her to wake him up.

No one did. And this woman's cries got louder, turning into screams.

Ronin felt angry, an overwhelming amount of anxiety hit him. He started to claw at the metal door, shouting. "Leave her alone! Get away from her!", his mind would roar.

He was able to jam his taloned fingers in the crack and force it open, hearing the metal screech and bend to his will. Finally, Ronin was free to stop them. Just as he approached them, they disappeared.

He looked down to the woman. Something was oddly familiar about her. Ronin reached out and touched her shoulder, turning this creature towards him. Stepping back in shock, he viewed Satima, and her blood red eyes. Black veins grew across her face, reaching out in a darker purpose. He could only stare at those eyes. Her mouth began to move.

"Ronin?"

Violently jolting from his bed, Ronin nearly knocked Jaine off the other side. She sat up quickly, placing her softer taloned-hand on his arm. "Ronin? What's wrong?", she wondered in concern.

It took a strain to calm himself, slow the hyperventilation he was experiencing. Jaine sat up, on her knees, and took his plated forehead into her palms. She wiped the cold sweat and gazed into his dilated eyes. Spirits, they were almost black from fright! "Ronin, it's ok.", she held him to her carapace chest. "I'm here. It's ok.", Jaine reassured.

Ronin couldn't focus on her. He badly wanted too, but all he could think of, was the crimson gaze the hybrid had given him.
Council Chambers
Presidium Tower

Ashley exhaled loudly. She stood outside the door to the council chambers. The elevator behind her let people in and out, all the while she remained. Some would give a strange stare, wondering why she was just standing there!

The spectre didn’t pay them any attention. She had her own problems clouding her mind. Shepard’s voice rose and fell with each sentence containing a little more… vulgarity. Instead of the smooth diplomatic responses, Ash was hearing an eerie similarity to Satima.

Her omni-tool pinged. It was time to take the petitioner’s stage as the second human spectre, and the woman who helped the alliance put the hybrid away.

Shepard glared at the council, completely unsatisfied with their explanation of why they supported Satima’s incarceration and fixed trial. Khalee apologized twice. Once in the office and a second time before this hearing.

Daxis spoke with Garrus alone. He had relieved himself from the hearing as it began. She wondered what he was up too, until Tiberius’s image showed through the holo vid platform. He stood with an emotionless expression. That same damn poker face Garrus can get.

His explanation of the idea to send Satima to a new research base by the asari, irritated her. How dare he presume the role of parent, bypassing her and Garrus!

Williams took her slow ascent up the long steps, to stand beside Shepard. She wasn’t close, keeping a distance.

Ashley tried to communicate with a friendly glance. Her previous commander, now captain, ignored it. That must mean she knows who the spectre was. And Shepard never forgets.

Khalee nodded to Ashley after the full account of the councilor/Alliance meeting was discussed. “Spectre, relay to the council, and Spectre Shepard—what the meeting with Doctor T’Soni entailed.”

Bravely, Ashley began to speak. She didn’t look at Shepard, only staring towards the council. “Weeks following the Sentarian pathogen incident, officials from both the Alliance and the turian Hierarchy, examined the hybrid’s… relation. To the reapers.”

Clearing her throat, she continued. “It was a joint consensus that she was too dangerous left to her own judgements. Liara…”, Ashley stopped herself, resuming. “Doctor T’Soni, helped with conclusions that the hybrid is a liability to this galaxy, and the security of its people.” Looking down with a remorseful expression, she finished her reveal. “It was her insistence, that the reaper-born be given treatment by incarceration.”

Shepard was glaring at Ashley. Williams felt the hairs on her neck stand.

“Only she didn’t go to a place that was long decided without me.”, the Captain interrupted. “Satima, was taken to a base no one knows of. Not even the council.” Now placing her displeased stare on the council, Shepard furthered accused the officials. “Your paranoid conjectures, and hasty decision has torn a family apart. You lied to a victim of the reapers. Putting all the blame of your galactic troubles in her lap.”

Khalee sighed, “Captain. We are deeply troubled by the alliance’s decisions, now. Satima should’ve
been pardoned from her actions, due to the redemptive qualities she possesses. She did help secure this galaxy from the harvest of the reapers. And we let her down.”

Shepard stared off, arms crossed and a deep scowl of disappointment. The council can’t help. Her own friends betrayed her trust. She’s had enough of everyone’s excuses. None of them can be counted on again.

This will be a mission she alone must do. Let Garrus play the diplomat this time. Let him conduct his research into oblivion! Shepard will find Satima. And she’s starting to get an idea of how to do it. Even… if means treason.

In the lobby, Garrus watched Shepard glare away at the keepers. Since Satima’s accounts on them, c-sec has been extra cautious in the whereabouts of these sentarian ancestors. He got up from his seat, annoyed by thoughts. Standing next to her.

“Is there anything you want to talk about, before I leave?” His tone saddened.

Shepard continued her fixed gaze, “No. I’ll be heading out soon myself. Natalie is doing fine with the caretaker.”

He waited for her to stop brooding and turn to him. Smile, cry, shout… something! Looking away, Garrus started to walk off. “I’ll vid call you in a week.” As he wandered into the stairwell, Garrus glanced back to her. “I love you.”, he thought. Now leaving the presidium tower and the citadel.

Ashley watched from afar. She could tell there was something between them, something dividing their once amorous affection for each other. Shepard reserved herself in a cold and distant manner. The captain is angry. So very angry.

Timidly, Ashley decided to speak to her. Shepard didn’t turn to the new commander’s presence. She only listened. “If you came over here to apologize, I will snap you in half.”, Shepard suddenly spoke. A spiteful tone that stopped Ashley from approaching.

“Shepard…”, she began. Her demeanor now submissive and miserable.

The captain turned around and put her hands behind her back. Standing at attention with a cold stare, now directed to Ashley. “Tell me: since you’ve been so preoccupied with my daughter’s wellbeing, lately. Was it the spectre, or the alliance soldier, that feigned friendship to put Satima away?”

Ash averted any visual contact. “You know, I’m both Shepard. I didn’t do this to hurt you. None of us did. We wanted to prevent the galaxy from taking matters into their own hands about the hybrid. If she were suddenly targeted by rogue operations? Even if she successfully defended herself, the way she handles an enemy is destructive. Frightening! She is resourceful and broken.”

Shepard’s stare softened, swallowing an angry reply. “She has a name. It’s not reaper-born, or hybrid. It’s Satima.”, she stated. “A name the other me gave the abomination you hate so much.”

The captain hastily walked by Ashley. “Shepard!”, she reached out to the bypassing woman. It was no good anymore.

No longer trusting anyone she knew, Shepard proceeded to the Normandy. There’s an idea itching to be used.

Mars Base
Alliance

Javik sat on his knees in a meditative state. The beacon pulsated, showing images of the reapers.
With the war over, he spent time searching for meaning in his life.

First, he followed T’Soni to her home world. Listening to the litany of the temple priestesses that survived the harvesting. Asari have beautiful singing voices. Carrying tunes to a pitch that pierced his soul. Although, he would never reveal it.

Liara led him to another adventure. One that became a testament to the hybrid’s dangerous dealings. After the sentarians cured the plague, he continued to stay with T’Soni.

Soon, he began spending more time with Liara. There was a pull between them, and she could feel it too. But to Javik, this would not be affection. Merely… a beneficial and mutual understanding. He had longing to touch her soft skin. Gaze into her deep blue eyes, and maybe something more?

No. This is nothing more than a physical longing. Would she consent to this feeling? He had only one way of finding out.

Stepping through the door to her office, he passed the many vid screens and terminal stations she had put together. All heavily encrypted. He had no need to pry into her affairs.

Liara hovered over files. Her brow furrowed in worry while she quickly scrolled through data on the computer. “This can’t be right? There’s nothing out there but old geth bases. And even then, the quarians have been cleaning out those facilities.”

Javik stood beside her, his yellow eyes settling on the curvy frame. He trailed her back, going all the way down. Averting his stare to clear his mind. “Liara. I have a query.”, he insisted.

She shook her head, feeling irritated. “Not now, Javik.”, Liara waved him off. “There’s too much to rummage through.”

He watched her in anticipation. “You are annoyed? Unable to find the location of the hybrid?”

Liara glanced to him, confused. “Yes.” She returned to her computer.

“Perhaps…”, Javik started, “We can work together, and distress your mind to be clearer.” His heart beat a little faster. It’s been more than fifty-thousand years, since his last physical exertion. She was so focused on the data, that he suddenly—with emotion, slammed his hand on the papers. “I am asking you to engage in intercourse with me! It will help using physical pleasures to block out the failure.”

Liara quickly snapped her stare to him. Is he? “Are you implying that we have sex!?” she shouted. Now stammering and backing away. “Wha… what makes you think I would agree?”

Javik could feel the energy in the air shift to an unpleasant staleness. This was as humans say, a bad idea. “If you do not wish to engage with me, then I will no longer bring the matter to attention.” He left her to the work, quickly moving down the stairs.

Liara couldn’t understand, after nearly these past two years, why he would suddenly ask her this? It’s not like she doesn’t have a life! She’s been with others before. Last year. Using an extranet chat room. By herself.

Sighing, she overlooked the dead-end leads. Satima is somewhere in this galaxy. Hidden in plain sight. Illium could’ve helped her, but the alliance had other plans. Or, Ruth… had other plans. Sister to Admiral Ron Marsden. The man who was killed, by Satima’s negligence.

Javik resumed his mediation in the beacon room. It was getting late on this planet’s timeline, with most of the alliance personal retiring. A quiet setting overtook his embarrassed and upset mood. It was a foolish notion, being with her.
He didn’t expect Liara to agree. Her noble nature molded the personality he became drawn to. The naivety of his people she clung too, entranced him. Yes, he’s been falling for her. His heart is the most foolish, after all.

Javik twitched from his thoughts when the door opened behind him. Someone hesitated to come through, now walking to him. A soft sigh became louder as the person sat beside him. He opened two of his four yellow eyes to see her.

“It’s so strange.”, Liara began. “I’ve had all this time to settle and be normal. But I choose to watch this galaxy instead.” She laughed to herself sadly. “I choose to watch the woman I loved. See her and my good friend, form a family. Something I’m ashamed to admit… I’ve become jealous of.”

Javik observed her with a raised brow. “You were in love with… Shepard?”

Liara nodded in response to his question. “Oh, yes. She never reciprocated those feelings. I never pushed.” Staring at the beacon, she continued. “I tried to find comfort in someone else. But it was too much work. It’s easier to control the galaxy, than emotions.”

He leaned to her, reaching out and touching her arm. “You never have to feign emotions for me, Liara T’Soni. I will always be a willing companion, in times you need comfort.” Javik’s smooth accent sent a shiver to her.

Liara parted her mouth, breathing a little more heavily. “I do have an emotion for you.”, she smirked weakly. “I don’t want to be alone, anymore.”

Javik gripped her arm gently, pulling her to him. He firmly pressed his mouth to her soft lips. Hearing a whimper of satisfaction. Liara welcomed his touch, taking her hand to feel the difference of his pre-collector physiology. Such a curious thought. And a desirous notion.

Pulling her back, Javik gazed to her glistening stare. “Will you become one with my mind? Share in my memories?”, he wondered.

She tilted her head in curious amusement. “Yes.”, Liara smiled, her blue gaze turning into a solid coal stare. “Will you embrace eternity?”

He tenderly pressed his palm to her powder blue cheek. “I will embrace all that you are, Liara T’Soni.”

They laid together in sight of the beacon. A prothean reminder, of the wars to come.

Joker resumed the diagnostics of the Normandy’s systems. Even with EDI insisting she can attend to her own body, he pressed on with the matter. Both the ship and her personal-vividly physical presence, were always on his mind.

That and other things. Things that could break his pelvis. Or so the majority of the Normandy crew wisecracked about.

Shepard approached him with a sour expression. She’s been on edge since Satima was taken by the alliance. He couldn’t help but feel unhappy about the situation himself. Considering all the Cerberus mistakes Shepard pulled to stop the reapers from coming too soon in the galaxy. Satima’s little ventures weren’t all that bad.

And let’s not forget how the hybrid kid managed to keep Shepard alive during the front lines on earth. No one was prepared to lose Shepard. He most of all, besides Garrus.
Turning to ask what her plans were, and if there were any missions abroad as spectre. She settled a
stare that shot through his question.

“Joker. I’m heading to earth.”, she ordered.

He tilted his head, now taking off the SR cap to scratch a nervous twitch. “Uh… is there another
trial?”, he wondered.

Shepard crossed her arms, seeming vexed. “Just take me to earth.”

Whoa. Joker resumed to the navigations panel. Sending the coordinates for the ship to follow. “All
right. Earth coming up.”

EDI viewed Shepard leave, waiting for the captain to be no longer present on the deck. “I am
worried.”, she voiced. “I have become fond of Shepard, and how she has always defended my
existence. Organics have been unkind to Satima.”

Joker brought out the data for the relay in the Serpent Nebula. “I agree.”, he sighed. “Shepard has a
plan. She’ll get her kid out of trouble and back on the Normandy.”

Seems like the only place she’s ever not in trouble.

In orbit of earth.
Lower New York
New Slums and Projects

Finn and his gang worked inside the Hub. A nightclub that was put together with damaged
buildings, and a few hidden reaper parts. It was good to take a piss on the hull of one of those things.
Good to show who won.

Too bad the woman that brought the victory, was an alien loving bitch. Being the last of the original
gang, lucky to survive the reapers. Finn turned on the lights to the bar, bringing out another crate of
beer. Simple stuff. The more heavier liquor was hard to acquire.

Not like the rest of humanity is busy making booze anymore. There’s too much rebuilding and alien
loving parties. At least he had a good few groups coming to his place. Ready to discuss their plans to
build human only trade.

That night, a dozen or more people piled through. With the galactic celebrations coming underway in
a few weeks, plenty of bodies ready to be drunk. Drown the memories, bury the pain.

He welcomed a bachelor party. Danced with a pretty woman, then began his rounds. It was turning
to a good night. Right up… until he spotted a familiar emerald glare, and bright red hair.

She stood at his bar, ordering a shot of the cheap stuff. Downing it with ease. There was
something… changed about her whole look and demeanor. Finn took his place in front of her,
leaning over the counter to stare. “Well, I’ll be damned. If it isn’t the fun-loving commander?”, he
jested in rude sarcasm.

Shepard cocked her head to him, then took another shot. Her quiet response raised his curiosity. Finn
continued, “So. What has the great Shepard doing here?”

“It’s captain, now, Finn. And I’m here to employ loyal assholes for a mission.”, she answered.

Taken a back, he leaned off the counter. Finn stared in confusion. “What do you mean employ?”
Shepard smirked, facing the crowd. The unaware humans dancing and drinking, enjoying peace that her daughter helped secure. “The alliance has found it necessary to kidnap my child, Finn. You know the one.” She glanced to him, “The hybrid you detest.”

He shook his head. “Yeah? Well good riddance.”, Finn spat, now taking a quick shot.

Shepard licked her lips with an irritated chuckle, now standing.

Finn was knocked to the ground in the alley. He spits up blood. Looking to Shepard as she picked his sorry ass up, slamming him on the wall of his club. One punch to the gut and hit to the groin. She let off him, backing away to wipe the red off her knuckles. He stared to her with a bloody nose. “Seems like you can’t take the merc out of the soldier.”, Finn complained.

Shepard glared to him. “Now, Finn. Are we going to discuss recruitment to rescue my daughter, or am I going to have to knock a few more teeth out?”

Finn spit more blood, wiping his injured nose. “Why would I help you, Shepard? You defend the aliens, now. Protect them!”

She exhaled calmly. “Not anymore. Not until my child is returned to me. Those aliens helped put her away. They’re not innocent in this matter, and neither is the alliance.” Taking a step to him, watching him flinch. Shepard ripped a piece of her shirt, now offering it. “I’m going to pay you as spectre. Four million creds to put a team together and help me get her back. When she’s safe and secure on the Normandy, I drop you and your crew off the nearest station. You find your own way home. Deal?”, she explained.

Warily, Finn took the cloth and cleaned his face. The number of creds she’s dropping seemed like a pleasant dream. “On one condition.”

She crossed her arms, waiting impatiently.

Finn stood straighter now, more confident in their dealings. “You rename this little merc group the Reds. You establish us as the official leader, before… you leave my ass on a station in the middle of nowhere.”

Shepard narrowed her gaze. If she openly did this, her status as spectre and alliance captain would be questioned. “Fine.”, she agreed. Leaving to reenter the club.

After three in the morning, Finn brought two of his closest friends to Shepard. They met in the back of the bar, where all the booze was stacked. Two men stood before her, as Finn introduced them.

“This is Love and Payne.”, he leaned closer to her. “Don’t ask.”

The men smirked as Shepard stared unamused. Finn continued. “They both were a part of the ground resistance. Had issues fighting beside those turians. Payne’s dad was a soldier in the First Contact War. You can kind of guess why he doesn’t like them.”

Shepard put aside her personal feelings. This was to help Satima. “Wonderful. And Love?”

Finn nodded for the man to approach. Love stepped to the left side of the room, revealing a panel to the wall. He used his omni-tool to scan and send a signal. It opened with more than a dozen illegal weapons on display. Shepard moved to the gun rack, running her hand along the smooth contours of the pistol she eyed.

“Weapons procurement.”, Finn boasted.
Shepard had plenty of weapons on the Normandy. Their armory is always stocked. But… having unchecked arsenal that did not lead back to her, sounded like a good idea. Nodding her head in approval, she voiced her satisfaction. “Good. Nothing to trace us.”

Love smirked.

“Well, Shepard?”, Finn began. “We got your soldier, and we got your weapons. What more do you need?”, he jested.

She eyed him, using a one-sided smile to catch his intentions. “Trying to take the majority of the four million for yourself, are we?” Shepard picked up a black rifle, handling it with expert ease.

Payne stepped forward, an angry expression glaring to Finn. “You said it was one million! More than three-hundred thousand each!”

Love grunted with a growl.

Finn changed his manner, in anticipation of these men turning on him. ‘Hey! There’s plenty to go around.” Now reaching for a gun behind his back, preparing to point and aim.

Shepard was too fast, grabbing the weapon and pressing the muzzle to his temple. “Alright… Finn.”, she backed him up, grunting to keep him from wriggling away. “You will tell these dedicated men, that they’ll get their fair share. There is no screwing anyone! No killing, unless I say! Got it?”

Love and Payne stood side by side, a satisfied gaze on Shepard. Finn couldn’t understand if she meant it, or is this the establishment, he demanded. Shrugging her off and backing down, Finn gave in. “Ok, ok.”

Shepard holstered the pistol to her side, staring at them. “We’ve got more work to do. Bring me your best people. I don’t want newbies. I want mercs.”, she ordered.

As they left to comply to her demands, Finn brought out a datapad. “I’m not sure what your angle is here. But I kinda like it.”, he grinned.

She scoffed, rolling her eyes and taking the datapad. “What’s this?”, Shepard wondered.

“Someone who’s good at finding people. He had to leave the citadel. Got his ass beat by an angry turian. Long story.”, Finn took a hard gulp of beer. “Used to be c-sec. You’ll want him for this little mission, you’ve cooked up. He’s greedy enough to join.”

She doesn’t know if the universe is this small, or if this is really hell. Shepard stared in surprise at the picture of Harkin. Now lifting her gaze to the room. Garrus is gonna just love this.

-----------------------------------------------

Palaven

Tiberius waited in his home for his son to show. It was getting dark out, and he knows Garrus had been arguing for hours with the Primarch. A hearing for Satima could’ve been possible, if she were here. Without her own witness, it would be another maybe scenario they’d follow.

And turians don’t stand for maybe’s.

Solanna had been preoccupied with a turian man at the shipyards. He was happy she started socializing again. Not staying around, worrying herself over whether he’s comfortable or lonely.
He’s far from lonely. Meetings every day in the small council and vid calls to the citadel council, keep him more than occupied. That, and staying awake long hours thinking of what to do for his children. Now that he’s the only parent they can turn too.

Garrus hurried in, sitting roughly on the couch. He exhaled harshly with a furrowed plated brow and intense stare. The Primarch didn’t allow another hearing. He could tell.

They sat in silence for a while. Garrus always liked to over analyze a problem more than he should. Hyper focusing on the issue, instead of the angle. Tiberius couldn’t stand the disappointment any longer.

“Just listen to me.”, he began. His low flanged tone echoing in the quiet room. “I know you want to argue the importance of what the alliance has done. But it won’t do any good staying on this planet and shouting.”

The setback fresh in his mind, Garrus looked away. “And what do you propose we do? Since my rank and history have no presence in the safety of my kid.”, his tone irritated.

“Continue your research and go to Illium. Speak with the asari scientist and medical specialists there.”, his father replied.

Garrus glanced to him. “How does this help?”

Tiberius leaned out of his chair, concerned over the upset in his son’s voice. “When you get Satima back. And I have a strong feeling, you will. She’ll need that treatment, and dedication to her well-being.”

“Dad.”, Garrus spoke. “What if I’m no good at being a parent? I can’t even take care of Natalie. Some asari caretaker is the one raising her right now.” He argued in dismay.

Tiberius stood up to sit next to his son. Leaning out to meet his avian gaze and worried expression. “The fact that you’re risking everything- from your carrier, to your relationships, means what a good parent you are becoming.”

Garrus unsettled, “I love Charlotte, Dad. But I think… she’s angry I couldn’t do something to help Satima.” He cleared his throat, clasping his taloned hands together to stare off in the living room. “She’s decided to find her without me.”

His tone sounded hurt. Tiberius didn’t like hearing that. The galaxies power couple, facing adversity and species difference out in the open. Only to be torn apart by anger and opinion.

“She’s dealing with this setback in her own way. I believe what Shepard fears, is losing those she loves to elements she can’t control. And the one thing that cannot be controlled, is how people feel.”, he stated.

Garrus shook his head. “Then I guess, we go to Illium.” He sighed in discomfort.

Tiberius stared longer, now looking away in memory.

Chapter End Notes

A lot has happened between the last chapter and this one. There's been loss, there's been
pain. I hope you enjoy this chapter. And thanks for stopping by.
Chapter Summary

At the mercy of the Argos, Satima finds herself face to face with an old foe. The alliance has a foul secret, and an ex-agent is about to uncover it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Minos Wasteland  
Fortis System-In Orbit of Aequitas  
SS Argo, Alliance Reaper Division Vessel

Her eyes opened to the blinding brightness of a sterile room. She feels constrained, and totally helpless. Or is that fear?

Comms break open in the quiet space as she struggles to fully waken from whatever drug she was put under. "Good morning, Satima." That voice. It's familiar cybernetic echo forcing a chill through her body. "We will be conducting a certain experiment. One that you are familiar with."

Wriggling her wrists against the restraints, Satima focuses her attention elsewhere as someone in a lab coat brings a reaper device to the room. A human male, trying too hard not to stare at her. The device is set on a console with scans beginning to reveal the reason it's still active. But how? There's something too bizarre happening here.

Her mind calming, as a curious question starts to surface.

"Archer… how? How is this possible?", Satima manages to ask, unable to see him. Laying across the table, all she can view are square white tiles on the ceiling of the room. It's also cold. Unnaturally cold.

Moving a cybernetic hand across the keypad, he begins to type sequences. "You have a special medical circumstance that could help pave the way for many indoctrinated subjects to be treated."

Archer reveals. "This means there will be experimentation. But with your cooperation, only."

Satima tries to turn her head, watching more of these strangers in lab coats set up devices. "Are these restraints a form of "cooperation"?" She could only imagine the smug stare he's probably displaying right now.

Archer remains silent.

Satima shows defiance against the men that start to place odd attachments to her head. Forcefully trying to place the pieces over now thickened hair. Something was turned on, and an electrified jolt sent a shock of pain through her body. Satima groaned. What the hell was that?

Archer spoke again over comms. "I apologize for the pain. We have to keep precautions against your true nature."

And what was her true nature? What exactly is she?
Doctor Nox overlooked the recent data of the hybrid's reaper connections. This young woman should've been put away when she arrived. Her connection to the reaper devices are too much of a risk.

They activate and thrum with life, as if a reaper was waiting in the dark of space to hear its call. But there is none. Not of the machines. Only a single organic, that has more to her very genetics than anyone thinks.

All the data from that fateful interaction on the crucible displayed on screen. Nox viewed patterns. Sequences of the thrall data that matched the same information from the hybrid. And the alter Shepard.

Reaper- as Archer named her.

The Shepard today does not exhibit the same technology as the other, but her implants, and the Lazarus project that brought her back from the dead- do. Even with this minor amount of data, she'll never consent to tests. Unless she were brought here as well.

It's a small step away from a big problem. An issue her genetic daughter carries.

Hours after the first run of tests, the hybrid was sent to rest in her own small room. A bare cell, with enough cheer to turn blood cold.

Archer visits the engine core of the Argos. Staring away at the blue light for a beating heart of this station. And the only place he can find silence. The Directive's call is gone. The reaper machines are gone. And Reaper, too... is gone.

Everything he once knew, all the details to the dark galaxy he catalogued. Rewritten. And he had the hybrid to both blame, and thank. He had time to think while incarcerated on this station. Moved from level to level. A former shell of himself.

They rebuilt parts of him, implanted a control chip, and waited as he recovered.

Nox had overseen his very own reaper abomination. A fully integrated, synthesis cyborg, of sorts. He wanted to hear this creature's tale. And Archer... had much to say. The droid spilled the secrets of the reapers, their will and the Directive's truth.

On Mars, and Luna-a small group of N7's were used to comb the landscape for remains of the crucible debris. Among the remnants of the ship's hull, they found bits of armor. Nox got to work with the discovery, finding traces of nano technology, and other materials not known in this galaxy. And not revealed to the Sentarian leaders that came and went to visit their ancestral home.

Nox observed the object during thought. A silvery metallic vein was etched inside the arm guard. He scraped it off to see what exactly he would find. The discovery was shocking.

Archer was quickly brought to him, to analyze this new find. He studied the traces of reaper tech, and confirmed what is was. Synthetic imprint of Reaper. What's left of her.

The droid knew this discovery will cause ripples. All that Reaper hoped to stop, eradicate of the reapers themselves... she still managed to leave behind.

Archer knows better than Nox, of what to do with it. The problem... is how Satima will react. How will she understand there was more to her little implant than what anyone knew? Can he make her see the truth, or will she continue to harbor too much blind hatred?
He smirked. Her hate for him was not unfounded.

"Archer. Nox has new data he wants analyzed."

Blasted comms, disturbing his thoughts. "I'll be on my way."

The dark of the corridors reminded him of hive. It's only when he reaches the third levels that the blinding brightness of the hulls, disturbs him.

Inside the research station of the labs, Nox waited impatiently for the reaper droid to enter. "Archer. I have something about the hybrid.", he informed.

Curious, he picked up the pace, to stand beside the alliance scientist. Nox revealed the data on a large screen. "The recent tests have shown a pattern." Tapping an icon, and using his fingers to enlarge a spot on the monitor, Archer observed the information.

"The sentarian implant... it's recording neural data?", he spoke.

Nox agreed, "And there's a signal. Since the sentarians have command of their own devices, there's no way we can follow it through. Pinpoint a location, maybe."

How foolish these alliance loyalists are, to reveal such a thing to him. Archer made note, and continued. "Have you finished with the data from the reaper device test?"

"Of course.", Nox replied. Pushing his glasses back on the slightly crooked nose. "Her connection is stronger than any patient I've tested. The device, as well as others, respond to her in fascinating ways."

Tablet in hand, he led Archer out of the room, and among other scientists busy at their stations. This large facility has served well for the alliance military to plan treatment for indoctrination. Mostly.

The rest is always in preservation of humanity, and its place in the galaxy. Better angels or not, Archer knows these people would've been equally suited to Cerberus.

They stopped at the door, while Nox opened it with a scan of his retina. Familiar.

"The hybrid has attempted escape twice. Putting three of my security in med-bay. I must say, she is exceptionally skilled, and capable. A strong will to fight. Too strong." Nox continued through the hall, with Archer in tow.

He couldn't help but to smile, knowing that strong will was all in thanks to him. And of course, Reaper. "And you want me to tell you how to quell her resolve?", Archer insinuated.

The scientist halted at a door. Turning to the droid, he handed him the tablet with a grin. "I don't want you to tell me. I want you to do it yourself." Nox leaned in closer, "Considering your close relationship to the hybrid, and how much you've enjoyed tormenting her."

Archer took the tablet, his own surprise stare and empty smirk masking a real problem. Nox began leaving, as he contemplated the disturbed feeling he got. Things have changed. Time is not the same.

He and Satima, both, are not the same.

His plans will be invaded and destroyed, if this Nox fellow continues with this more twisted scenario. These people should be grateful for her interference, but instead, they fear it. Were they
privy to the true enslavement of the directive, this place would not exist.

Funny then. That maybe the real reason the reapers had always won. Were that the people who had been born every fifty-thousand years, or so. Have been unworthy of redemption? Tainted by their own darker impulses to control, and desires to be apex, themselves.

Archer shook the thoughts. There is no time for philosophy, and the hybrid waited for him to show.

Yes, he'll speak to her, and tear down the precious walls she had worked hard to build. But not to further damage her now broken psyche. Not to leave her open for more tortuous assault. No.

He'll train her to understand everything. And lead Satima to help him, with little... reaper ... lies.

Satima woke with a fright. Her head ached.

Since the scans and pulses from the reaper devices, she's felt split between reality and dreaming. The visions came and went. Reapers, fire and ashen lands. Nothing would grow back in their wake. Not for thousands of years.

Voices echoed, whispered or shouted. Names and words, that meant nothing but gibberish to her. All, save one language. One sound. Sentarian.

Satima heard their plans to protect the leviathans, but it was no use. The Intelligence turned on them. Creating the first reaper-Harbinger.

As the scientists pushed her mind to meld further with the devices, she began to seize from the strain. They had to stop the tests, and help her recover. Their precious reaper-born must not be harmed, or killed.

She hated them all.

She hates all of this galaxy. She hates her mother, she hates Garrus. She hates every one of them.

The anger fueled enough strength for her to stand, wavering from the small uncomfortable cot. As she attempted to walk around, to pace in frustration and pain. Archer is alive. The universe is cruel, and dark.

And this new villain... Nox. His empty stare through glass lens, and unconcerned expression, that made Archer seem more emotionally sound than she thought before. Satima leaned on the hull wall of her cage. A dimmed space that felt cold. Her undersuit clung to the chilled flesh, and sore turian plate on her spine.

They took samples. Cut pieces from her.

Sliding down in despair, the hybrid tried to feel sad, feel angry again. It wasn't working. She can't anymore. The time she spent with them, fighting and living, and learning... the time that was wasted.

Is up.

Finally, catching a whimper of regret with hand over her mouth, she shut her eyes tight. Muffling sobbing sounds, while the past replayed vividly. It all came down to the most pivotal moments for her. A moment she'll never forget. Jormun.

Spirits! He died because of her. Never making it back home with the scrap for treasure that she promised if he helped with Haven. Spending more time with her in the cockpit, and fighting off
mercs for fun. His family never knew what became of him, and his pilgrimage.

The pain stung in her chest, as the final wave of grief took hold. She loved him. And she let him down.

Wiping her face, Satima calmed. Now hearing footsteps outside the echoing hall, to her door. It was one set. A heavy pace that reminded her of what future she's facing. The door opened, with bright light blinding her strained eyes.

He looked upon her sprawled position on the cold floor, seeing a familiar setting from years ago. Archer knelt to one knee, facing her. She didn't flinch like years before. Her turian teal gaze darkened in defiance to him, meeting with a steel stare.

He observed in surprise, now glancing down to break the tense moment. "Satima.", Archer began. "Would you like to meet the other patients of this facility?"

She took in his words, shaking her head in disbelief. Patients? So, there are others, here? Satima then stared down, her eyes darted between thoughts. "Why?", she asked, lifting her gaze back to him.

"What is this game you're trying to pull?"

Now standing, he leant her his hand. "It is not my game, but the alliance's. Let's show them how hive plays it." His assurance sent a chill down her spine. And a sly smile, to her face.

Omega
Gozu District

Miranda waited in the warehouse, while her salarian friend contacted his eclipse superiors. She absolutely cannot stand them. So obnoxious, and quite ridiculous in their dealings. Unfortunately, she had no choice. Miranda promised to consider Rassa's whereabouts. And she meant it. Even if it took a year, or so.

With Shepard busy in the ordeal of her daughter, Miranda set out to use her own skills and find the other ex-cerberus agent. And of all places to go, she chooses Omega. While the adjutants were being handled by the alliance, there was some distraction for her own dealings. She waited as a comm call came through her omni-tool.

"This better be an emergency.", she answered.

"You need to come home!", Oriana pleaded.

Miranda sighed. "Ori, I'm working. Please, don't call again. I'll be home when I'm through.", she asserted.

Oriana complained loudly, "What are you doing that's so important? I need you here!"

"Ori. I'm cutting the call and blocking for now. I'll see you in a week. I love you, be safe. Goodbye!" Miranda cut off her sister's pleas.

Ori is a skilled tech. Always snooping in her business too. It was fun at first, but Rassa is dangerous. And will use every ounce of information to get back at her.

Miranda snapped her attention to the salarian returning. His deep green complexion giving off shadows from the dim building. "I've got your info. You got the creds?", his voice terse and rough.

She typed a quick command on her omni-tool. "Done."
He gave her a piece of paper, and ran off. Miranda eyed him, but knew there was no ambushed waiting for her. She quickly left the warehouse, choosing an alley. The ground is wet and smelly.

Opening the paper, she revealed a name of the ship Rassa used from eclipse. Typing it in her tool, she walked to a flaming barrel used by vorcha and burned the information. Smart to use something so primitive.

On her shuttle she procured, Miranda used her navigations systems to find the last location of the Artemins. It trailed off into the Minos Wasteland. She tapped the commands, and sat down in the pilot seat.

Leaving the system of Omega, the ex-agent wondered what it was that Rassa is after. The system itself is home to nothing, save a few empty mining facilities. When the reapers hit, they came in force in all directions. Even in Minos.
She directed her shuttle through the relay. Hitting several others to reach the wasteland systems. Maybe she should've contacted for help this time?

If Shepard hadn't arrived in Sanctuary-on Horizon, she'd probably have died from the reapers or her father. Protecting her sister was all that mattered, but all those innocent people the Illusive Man experimented on. Killed, to find the secret to controlling the reapers.

It was madness.

Her systems alert sounded off to the arrival in the Nebula. She began her scans to find emissions of the freighter Rassa used. It would be a matter of time, before that insane woman is finally and permanently, in a cell.

Satima waited in the lift with Archer. It seemed odd to be standing here with her enemy. The man who designed her. He didn't budge or make a sound. Only stand erect, perfect and reaper like. She shook her head against it.

These patients he's going to show her. It felt... unsafe to trust him. But with no choice, and considering how the galaxy viewed her, Satima will have to comply. There's no one out to save her now. No family member or friend who'd care. And why should they?

The lift stopped gently with a pinging sound alerting to the level they arrived at. Archer led her out to a medium sized lab. Ahead, a large square window looked into a open hall, with rooms on each side.

These rooms were shut tight. Faint voices could be heard through them. She followed behind him, feeling more of a dread as they came near the console of this room. "What the hell is this?"

Archer typed in commands, and placed icons. "This is the critical bay. The subjects here are what's left of the most dangerous and indoctrinated organics.", he revealed.

Satima glanced his way quickly, a worried expression stared into the hall. "How dangerous?"
Normally, she would question Archer if he hurt them or caused this insanity. But somehow, Satima had this feeling that he wasn't hiding anything.

Archer opened the door of the first one to the right. "Human-Male. His name is Sam.", his voiced echoed a little in the near empty lab space. Satima peered closer to the glass, trying to find him.

A silenced fear fell quickly, before Sam's body and face had been slammed against the pane. Satima jumped back, her heart racing. She could see more than just a dangerous influence of indoctrination. "Spirits!", she called out loudly. "He's?"
Sam's empty illuminated gaze watched them. His mouth agape with only moaning sounds to follow. His blue scalp stopped to circle a small patch of brown hair. The skin had been turned to the hardened ashy tone, while reaper tech pulsed on the surface. Tiny glowing pieces that showed how far the reaper's dragon teeth had influenced.

A large medical vest covered his torso. How is he still alive?

The droid stood still, unwavered by the abomination before them. He stared at a horrified Satima. "There are times when the indoctrination wanes, and Sam surfaces. He can recall the last week before the reapers. And he remembers what they have done to him."

Satima stepped closer, now feeling such pity as she never experienced before. Her own troubles and pain, seemed trivial. If she were like Sam? Covered in reaper tech, and half-crazed. She'd hope someone would have the decency to put her down.

Her eyes became glossy with emotion. "Archer... why?", she now turned to him. "He's suffering."

Archer agreed. "Unfortunately, my dear. There's nothing I can do.", now typing an icon that led to a sharp pinging sound. One that made Satima cringe.

Sam listened, then followed this sound back to his cell. The door closing with a whoosh sound.

"Though, I would've preferred to end his suffering, and use the opportunity to study his ability to retain some part of himself.", he viewed the disgusted stare Satima gave him. "Doctor Nox wants to study poor Sam alive, and intact. Just as much as he prefers to study you, alive and intact."

Satima felt nauseous, wanting no part from such horrible intentions. Archer stood closer. "You know better than they do, what the reapers are. So did your mother. I would like a chance to understand more about their technological advances. Compare them to the Sentarians. And in the meantime, you can help me.", he stated.

The hybrid sighed loudly, shaking her head. "This is all wrong.", she lamented. Now pacing, thinking of ways to escape again. But what about Sam? And the rest, he hasn't even shown her yet. Satima lifted her defeated gaze to him. "I won't help if it means torturing these people."

Archer knew she would feel that way. "That is why you need to explore what you are. Untapped abilities that could help them."

She scoffed, making her way to the console to overlook the hall. "I'd rather put them out of their misery." Her expression became angered. "Then put Nox out of his."

Good.

"Will you help me with this project? We can work together to fool the alliance, and find a way to truly discover a cure for indoctrination.", he beamed.

Satima gave him a mocking side-glance. "Aim high, Archer."

He chuckled, standing next to her. "There are other pawns in place, Satima. Rassa, your mother's enemy, is part of my plans."

She started.

"But.", Archer lifted a hand to signal reassurance. "I will make sure she does not harm anyone. I need someone on the outside, who can do a bit of smuggling from the terminus systems."
He knew this will definitely get Satima riled. "What?!", she began. "I'm the smuggler. Me! You know that.", Satima pointed to herself in upset.

"Yes. You were. Now you're in the place of reaper. And a place that can do the good you've only dreamnt about.", Archer argued.

Satima backed down. He's right. Too right.

Rassa paced on the deck of the freighter. She had just put down the three crew members. They were getting nosey. Supplies that Archer wanted were getting too loud.

Her life had been turned into one chaotic mess after another. Since the clone's failure, and that hybrid brat's interference, Rassa has had no choice but to take whatever postion she could find.

Then Emerson fell through. She had enough of failed leaders.

Archer alarmed her when she first met him. A reaper droid with terrifying words. He spoke to her on Omega, while alliance ops surrounded them. His intentions seemed... curious.

He needed her expertise. Not just for information, but also in precuring it. Just like she precured the cat-6 mercs, and just like she precured Sparatus's death. There's an insane circle of doubt and excitement that won't let her stop. A tiny voice says to stop. She can't.

At least this voice is hers, and no others follow it. The reapers are gone, right?

The ship stated its arrival in the Fortis system. With a sigh of relief, Rassa hurried the vessel along to dock. There was a radar warning on the console. A lone shuttle had appeared. Following close behind her. Curiosity peaked. Rassa led the little ship along, and wondered what fool was in it.

Satima agreed to have her implant scanned. Archer wanted to use indoctrinative beta waves to see if she could hear a call. Or if there was a way she could find to stop it.

It's all speculative. Even if she could block it, that only meant her privileged circumstance or implant gave her the ability to do so. Indoctrinated victims never get a say. And they always fall into the same pattern.

The device was plugged into the system. Archer began his data scans, sending the copied sounds to her implant. Nox stood at the doorway, now even more curious as to how the droid managed to get Satima to agree. He would keep a close eye on Archer.

Satima felt a strange pull into her mind. Flashes of reapers and their harvests startled her. Heart rate spiked. Two other lab workers stood by to monitor.

Archer's voice came through comms. "Can you push their call out of your mind? Satima, can you try to block them?"

She didn't answer. Her eyes blinked in confusion, and she began to feel faint. A calling had been placed in her mind, and she felt utterly helpless against it. "Archer... I can, can't... turn it off. I can..

Satima lost all consciousness. She fell into a well of red light, swallowing her whole. Landing suddenly in a forest of oily trees.

Their shadows moved about her.
She stood with a fright, now ready for the dream to end. It continued. Terrified, the hybrid tried to slap herself awake. Nothing. Satima pinched her arm, bit her hand. Still, nothing.

The oily trees cast a darkness so cold on her helpless form. Her heart pounded against a weakened resolve. She's not alone. And there's a call in the deep of this place. So familiar, like the Leviathan and his kind. Echoes of a sound came rushing towards her, and all she can do is listen.

"You have run far."

A voice spoke, sending chills down her spine. She couldn't see or find anyone. "Hello?"

"Distanced yourself from the truth."

It sounded neither male nor female, but a mix of the two.

The hybrid started walking, feeling more pulled toward a direction. Straight through a path of grey fog. "Where are you?", she called out. Now pushing lose branches of oily trees aside. Staining her face and hands. "What do you want?", Satima demanded.

She started to run fast, reaching to the voice that called her.

"Retribution."

Satima forced her way through the now closing-in trees. Catching herself, as she nearly fell over a sheer cliff. The voice spoke from ahead, in a bright clearing of sky. A dark figure remained, hazy and far.

"I know where you are. And I can promise you, this will end in your tears."

A force pushed her, snapping her head back violently in the lab chair. She could hear a crack, and felt pain in her neck and shoulder. Archer's voice boomed over the comms, as the lab technicians gave her a sedative.

She could only stare away, now unable to speak or move. Was it shock? Why can't she speak? Her mind spoke a million words, and none of them could be heard.

Meanwhile...

Miranda hid behind the emissions trail, hoping to stay invisible behind the freighter. She could see a large metal object was coming up on both ships. Quite large and long. To her surprise, it was another vessel. The scan revealed it is military class.

Other lone shuttles came back and forth. Just a few.

This place was chosen for its elusive properties, she suspects. The freighter closes in on the landing hub with docking tubes being directed to greet it. Miranda remains hidden, until the ship is fully docked. Waiting another hour to prepare with a pistol, and her biotics.

If Rassa has friends, and no doubt she does, Miranda will have to fight them to capture her.

Using the smaller shuttle bay, she lands with no one in sight. Cautiously, Miranda leaves it running. Thrusters set to minimum to fill the bay with a low hum. Steadying her aim, the ex-operative leads out the hatch with pistol first. No one seems aboard, or so it looks. The sound of pipes and engines echo in the hold. There are dropped tools on the floor. A hot soldering gun burns the metal grate. People were here. Recently.
Further inside the hold she spots an elevator, taking it to the second floor. Stepping out into a larger space, the quiet atmosphere sends a chill of realization to her. The lobby is vacant. Miranda should've waited at the fringes of the system, alerting the Normandy to her location. She's trained, dammit! Not a rookie! The lights flicker on quickly, sounds of footsteps echo around her.

"So, you're the one that followed me?!"

Rassa's voice forced Miranda to turn around in her direction. The agent was surrounded by guns. Alliance guns. "I'm here on orders from Captain Shepard. This woman is a dangerous war criminal."

They didn't budge or respond.

She eyed their demeanors, still holding her pistol firmly towards Rassa. "Did you hear me?", she spoke in an irritated tone.

A man walked out among them, dressed in alliance blues. His dull gaze stared towards her. "We hear you plenty. The problem is, you're not supposed to be here." Captain Daniels nods to his men.

Rassa crosses her arms in satisfaction.

"That is an ex-cerberus agent. Is she working for you?!", Miranda tried to probe.

Daniels titled his head in agitation. "This is a classified facility, on a classified ship. And a project you're not supposed to know of." He turned to Rassa. "You got sloppy. Do it again, and your mechanical friend won't be able to save you this time."

Rassa scoffed in a childish manner, befitting her charm and wit.

Miranda tried to start, but was met with guns.

"Lawson.", Daniels looked up on his omni-tool. "I'm afraid I can't allow you to leave."

She pointed her pistol at him. "And why is that?"

He smirked, signaling his men to detain her, "Classified." Miranda used her biotics to knock them back. She skillfully kicked a marine, using her pistol to injure the other. Running back to the shuttle hold, she used the lift back down. Shepard's going to hear about this!

Whatever the alliance is doing, can't be good.

Miranda runs out of the elevator, reaching her shuttle. Once inside the ship, she starts the sequence to leave, but a swift hit knocks Miranda over the console. Hitting her head over the panel's holo grid. It flickers in and out, as she slides down and off to the floor. A sharp pain stung above the brow. Rassa stands over her with a grin, "Oops."

Groggy and in pain, Miranda wakes while being dragged across the white floor of the ship. She struggles, but her hands are cuffed tightly. "Alliance bastards!", she shouts.

They bring her to Captain Daniels. He stares at her in pity. "You could've turned around and left. No one would've believed you about seeing a ship in the wasteland."

She scoffed. "Shepard would.", Her glare criticizing him.

Daniels raised a brow, getting closer to her. "That's information, I would've kept to myself. Now...", he looks to an open door.

Miranda follows his gaze to see Satima strapped to a chair. Her own stare is lifeless, as long wires
attached to a reaper device are quickly being removed. What did they do to her? Is she even alive? Daniels voice once again distracted her. "You can never leave. We're doing important work here." Dragged off, Miranda screamed to the hybrid. "Satima! Satima, can you hear me!"

She was tossed in a darkened cell. Her cuffs undone, and the door shut tight. Miranda banged with biotic hands, but it was useless. Staring into the black space, she slid down a wall.

Has the alliance turned on the galaxy? Had humanity gone completely mad? Her thoughts raced between dozens of conclusions. All of them more sinister than the previous ones. This has to be a bad nightmare... some kind of awful dream that filled her mind while she slept over the console. The black of the room did not change. And neither did the sounds of pitchy screams below her.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer. I own nothing that is ME, Bioware related ME, etc. This is a work of fan-fiction writing.
Abomina**tion**

Chapter Summary

Garrus is close to a solution to indoctrination. Shepard makes a decision. Satima and Archer see different truths.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Illium**

It’s been thirteen days. Garrus waits patiently in the shuttle. Anxiously sitting on the edge of his seat, popping his carapaced neck and constantly going over the possible conclusions to this conference with asari scientists.

Will this work?

The shuttle rocks a little from the turbulence of an oncoming storm. He peers ahead from the back to see small veins of lightening, illuminating the grey sky. Many citizens rush indoors from the pouring rain. Dark clouds prevent the hazy afternoon sun from shining off the polished buildings.

Garrus views from his seat's window, the landing platform his ride is approaching. Several asari have gathered awaiting the next ride, or so he thinks. All sharing the same lab wear from the medical facility they came from.

This is it. His plan, his purpose. To rescue Satima from her nightmarish past and make things right. Maybe for everyone.

Foolish? Of course, it is.

A roaring echo emitted from the now hovering shuttle while streams of cold rain washed the silver metallic surface. Garrus used the panel to the hatch, hopping down a few inches from the opening to the platform. The rain was heavy now, a wet downpour that turned on his visor's automatic thermal imaging.

Moving forward, he was greeted by an asari with amber eyes, dark violet skin, and a forceful hand. She shook it in stride, as they hurried into the tall building. She shouted over the loud thunder behind them. "I'm Doctor Valene. I oversee the indoctrinated asari patients here."

Inside the main lobby, Garrus was given a small towel to wipe off the downpour from his armor. His father advised him to come in more formal attire. He guesses he'll never get used to being relaxed. In any situation.

With a nod to the towel, he resumed following Valene. "Doctor. Do you know why I'm here?" he wondered.

The lift opened in the lobby, while many more asari poured out to empty it. She held out her hand in gesture to the open door. "I've been briefed by your council. I know of the trial on earth about the hybrid. She was to come here. But...", Valene left off.
Garrus shook his head in disappointment. Valene stood next to him, her omni-tool glowed while she finished setup icons. "I lead this project here on Thessia. There are many asari under my care. She would’ve been gently looked after."

A quick ride of the lift led them to the 15th floor. They stepped out to a fully staffed division of scientists and matriarchs. All working together to find a permanent solution to the reaper's thrall. Lab stations and holo grids were swarmed by asari, as they busily worked together with salarian scientists.

Valene spoke over the background noise of murmurs and mutterings from the groups. “The salarian meeting went well recently. We have a few here this week, that have been studying genetic material of a creature. One that could release spores to control you.”

Garrus remembered the thorian. He also remembered how that damned thing spread so much danger through both realities.

Whether it was humans, or his people. Garrus is sure every species is working around the clock to find a way to stop the remnants of the reapers madness, that was left behind.

Valene tapped his arm, leading him to a hall. "Although the hybrid is not here, I'm sure we can find something in the meantime that can help every species who suffers.”

Through the door, they stopped in a sectioned off lab. Garrus was handed a data pad. He quickly perused it, before asking. "Is this your results?"

She nodded, "Basically." Valene crossed her arms. "A reaper's indoctrination can be fed through intricate and undetectable sounds. Quietly emitting their... voice, to subjugate and control you."

Details Garrus is all too familiar with. Which is why, since he was a part of Shepard's crew, the heirarchy gave him that "task force".

In front of a large holo screen to the wall, the asari began showing Garrus the data to their efforts. "It's been over a year.", she widened a vid of an asari, already indoctrinated. Clawing at herself from the inner agony of the reapers signal. A frequent assault of the mind. "Every time we tried to enter the darkness, it fought back.", Valene spoke, poetically." And every time it fought back, it would manifest to destroy my people that are afflicted."

Garrus watched, listening to the eerie tone of voice that Valene spoke in. She sounded as if there was a more personal aspect to this information.

On screen, two more asari came in to view, grabbing the indoctrinated as their eyes turned black. The biotic specialists reveal an ability that Liara showed before. The mind purge technique. "What's happening?", he asked, confused. Unsure if there was a difference to the asari's abilities, and circumstance.

Valene stopped the footage. She sighed, turning to him. There was a different look to her earlier eerie stare. "Mind cleanse."

Garrus glanced at his data pad, then back to her. “Can you elaborate?"

"Apologies.", the asari turned back to the holo screen. More vids came into view, all stacking into tabs. "We have no choice but to use this technique. It's effective, yet runs risks." Her amber gaze settled on his negative stare.

"Risks?"
Valene lowered her eyes, "They will lose memories, sometimes a part of themselves. It's", she stared at the holo screen. "It's more or less a lobotomy." She could tell from his changed stance, he didn't like hearing this.

"Biotic implants have become more powerful over the past decade," she began, "and sophisticated in their design. Resulting in better control of the biotic skill, helping even non-asari biotics from uncontrollable headaches, mood disorders and eventual neural deterioration."

Garrus shook his head in annoyance. Were they thinking of lobotomizing Satima?! Was that his father's intentions? Couldn't be!

She sensed his hesitance. "Asari do not suffer these symptoms, but our people, with extensive knowledge of biotics, were very capable of making implants to help those that weren't like us."

"Are you trying to sell me something, here?", his tone more agitated than his mind.

"The Shadow Broker, who is still around somehow, has obviously shown a great deal of pity on the asari people. And, quite generously, given us all the resources we could possibly need. Including dangerous, and classified information that the alliance had regarding a particular asari scientist, whose mother became an enemy of our nation-for example."

Garrus knew immediately who Valene was speaking of. His attention was completely undivided, and fully alert. What was Liara up to? More importantly, what was Valene getting to? "Go on, Doctor.", he pushed.

"Taking apart reaper control, asari before, like Liara’s mother- were able to offend the effects of indoctrination. Placing a piece of themselves in memory, using their unique telepathic capabilities and biotic conditioning.", she revealed.

"But, those asari that were able to exercise this ability at the time, were powerful biotics, and centuries old. Older than me. And it is with this knowledge, that the asari are confident they can combat long term indoctrination.", she stopped, her excitement from the personal knowledge dying down. "Except we’ll have hundreds of people wondering around with fresh lobotomies."

With a loud sigh, Garrus scanned the holo screen vids once more. His stare fixed on them. "You’ll be crippling more people than saving them, doctor.", he faced her, "Risky or not, we're not all asari with biotic conditioning."

Valene crossed her arms, "And I am well aware of that.", she stepped forward. The glow of the screen caught a highlight in her richly hued amber eyes. "I'm trying to find a better way to help my people, and your people, and everyone who was their slave-by not shattering their minds. And leaving an enormous gap of what they once were, all so the little whispers can't reach."

Garrus blinked, reading her vitals in instinct with his visor. Her pulse had spiked, with elevated blood pressure. She was scared, and serious.

The asari doctor let out a long breath, clearing her throat while taking a step away. "Which is why we need your findings, and the tech you have stored on Palaven."

What the hell? Garrus set the pad down on a console, looked around with a cool and calm attitude. He leaned in closer, towering over the asari, now. His gaze suddenly fell on her, intense and alarmed. "And just how did you get that kind of information?" His tone subtle, but warning.

Staring, Valene too, leaned forward. "Because the Shadow Broker told us about it. And by us, I mean me." She leaned back, turning to wander away to a computer panel. "Don't worry, Mr.
Vakarian. Unlike the alliance, our business and intentions really do mean well."

He shook his head, looking back on the indoctrinated asari. Garrus remembered what happened with Satima and Liara. That mind purge, or cleanse. Whatever it is. And apparently, just how dangerous it truly can become.

Citadel
Council Chambers

Khalee overlooked more information from the freighter that wondered into the wasteland. An alliance station unmarked—had been sitting there for a while. And it proved a most elusive spot to stay in.

The captain of the vessel expressed concern, when his ship was boarded and raided by alliance military. His second in command argued what the deal was and one of the soldiers shot him in the leg.

Troublesome news regarding a military that belonged to earth. And Khalee at one point, belonged to them too.

Colonies in the terminus still do not trust alliance. No matter the efforts or good intentions. And then another rumor runs across her desk, of heavy alliance presence in the outer rim.

Building something.

She filed it all together. Summoning a meeting with the council. Something had to be done. Her part in helping find Satima would have to be put on hold for now. Until then, she’ll make a public inquiry of the station, so far out of the way from everyone.

Argos

She opened her eyes quickly, sitting up in fright. Loud breaths catching in the dark, cool room.

Spirits, she's sweating like it's Palaven. Satima calmed down. Wiping the salty droplets from her hybrid brow. Leaning over the cot, she thought about her nightmare.

The dark shadowy figure looming over her, suffocating her until she can't breathe. No sound can escape her open mouth, no thought from her mind.

Red vines reach out to touch her skin, searing into the flesh. Burning itself like a brand, a permanent mark of what she is. Boiling her skin, like the pod she was forced in from Calon's demands. All those years ago.

Thoughts of it alone, creep up to strike her mind, and plant a raw headache. She rubs the sore temples, sighing out loud.

"I can sedate you for sleep, so you can get rest."

Archer stood at the doorway, silently watching her. Satima sat up quickly to his voice, dismissing him with a wave of her hand. "Go away.", she demanded.

Stepping forward into the room, the droid stood in place to watch her pour water. Sipping uncomfortably as he stared. "Something you need?", her tone rough.
With a smirk, Archer unsettled. "Yes. There is." He walked to her, while Satima held the urge to step back. Old memories and all. Archer scanned her neck and shoulder. The light of the device highlighted her teal gaze. “You’re healing quickly. Not as fast as Reaper did, but then again, she did remove all the implants.”

Satima blinked in confusion. "How did you know?"

Archer leaned back, "I watched her use the crucible pulse to purge your system. It could've killed you. Reaper technology is not something you just... pluck out." His grin sent a shiver to her.

He resumed his scans, all the while Satima thought of her time on hive. "What else have you done to me?", her voice solemn.

Archer stopped his scans with an annoyed expression. “Nothing more. You were designed to be unique. And to have all the privileges and abilities as Reaper did. ", he revealed. "In fact, your connection to the reaper's remnants are a good sign." He started to leave, as she followed him out into the bright hallway.

Her tone became irked, with an irritated attitude towards him. "A good sign of what?", she shouted.

He kept his stride, now speaking. "You don't need reaper tech to survive.", he replied. "Unlike Reaper and the Shepard, your mutations became more organic. Which is fascinating."

Archer watched her step to the hall door, beginning the stroll to the upper decks. His creation, a design that has managed to stay alive against all odds.

Satima stopped, turning to him with that childish stance. “You coming?”, she urged. Ready to help the reaper subjects, afflicted so.

Deck 8

Sam sat in the corner of his cell, ready for the same call that always came around noon. It would beckon him with pain, forcing him to lose control of what he wanted to do. Which is to not leave the cell. But he couldn't fight the signal. Not for long.

He wanted to also acknowledge another signal.

It's faint at times. Always the same message. Sam couldn't tell what it was. Satima's presence seemed to make it go away. The signal would bounce around, trying to seep in her mind. He could see it... but she didn't?

The door opened in a rush, and the static came. A whining pitch, itching, clawing at his mind and saying to obey. And Sam did.

Satima waited in the hall as the poor creature emerged, already half crazed. His husk eyes stared around, mouth agape with a scratching sound. Most of his vital organs have been repurposed to the reapers technology. No need for sustenance, or even sleep. All that remained was his mind. What's left of it.

She stood still, hands clenched with anticipation and fear.

"*Link with the device, find a voice that he will hear.*", Archer's voice echoed through the comms.

Satima cocked her head slightly, an irritated confused look displayed. She never felt in control of herself, never. How could she force a reaper's last call to bend to her will?
But these times she spent with Sam, and the others. Satima can reach them, somehow.

Sam snapped his half-husked head in her direction. She could hear the loud piercing screech of the asari further down. Nearly banshee form.

Satima's thoughts were quickly broken, when Sam lunged forward, full speed towards her. She began to take a step back, her body's movements of a scared child.

"You are in control, Satima. Don't break the link."

Right, the link. The same link she felt when that black figure tried to kill her, while the reaper device emitted signals of madness. There is no control, only fear.

Sam grabbed her by the shoulders, she winced with an unsure cry. He shrieked at her, raising a hand to harm, when Sam suddenly stopped.

Whispers echoed between them. She had shut her eyes to him. But the quiet sounds were not the reapers of dark space. It was different. More familiar.

Sam's stare narrowed fully on the face of the hybrid. Whose crimson gaze burrowed into his mind.

Carefully, Sam let go, stepping away in a crouched manner. The hybrid kneeling to him. Her arm outstretched, with a surrounding hand towards this creature caught between life and hell. "S..Sam.", she stuttered, unsure. "Can you hear me?" Her heart raced with this interaction. Maybe Archer is right, and she can help all the indoctrinated people with just a simple link?

Just like the reapers, just like Her.

"Very good, Satima. Don't break contact.", his voiced soothed in assurance. Archer's gaze unsettled. "There seems to be another signal.",he alerted.

Satima reached out slowly, while Sam flinched away. She could hear his heart beat. It was a good sign. That he's still more alive, and human than an abomination. Her gaze became glossy.

"Is it me?", she wondered. "Can I do that?"

Archer did not find comfort in that scenario. But he doubted it, when the scans came up with a different opinion. It was coming from across the galactic grid.

Satima continued to influence a dialogue with Sam. He didn't speak with words.

This man had a family, a life before those machines came. And when they impaled him on those spikes, he became a half monster. Nearly killing them all.

A small child with golden hair in a loose braid ran through a field of large yellow flowers.

He followed close behind. His snarls and grunts for the hunt narrowing in on her. She kept looking back, tears streaming her soft cheeks. Suddenly tripping on a rock in an opening of the field. The monster ready to strike, while her screams were deafening the area.

A shot echoed, forcing him to flee.

Above the girl, alliance ships came in the defense of their planet. The little girl still crying in the background as Sam regained enough of himself to keep running. Until he found a river, and followed it away from the home he had grown up in.
For two years he was shut away, like an animal. A cage for the reaper monster.

Like her.

Sam stared on, until she blinked. Her watery gaze turned back dark and teal. "I'm so sorry.", she whispered to him. "Was she your daughter?", the hybrid asked.

It was surreal for her. She could see his thoughts so clearly. But it all ended with a loud sigh of dissatisfaction.

"Satima, the link is broken. You need to leave the hall, before it becomes dangerous."

She turned to the large glass window, viewing the displeased expression of Archer. Satima resumed facing Sam, who suddenly growled, hitting her back hard. He ran to his cell.

Archer sent two security staff to assist, but she stood. Waving them off. A red patch of irritation from the assault on her left cheek, burning.

Ignoring it, Satima quickly left the observation lab, and the deck altogether. She's no hero. No cure. She's an abomination, too.

Normandy-mid flight of the Sol system

Charlotte overlooked her desk's terminal screen.

Many names of her crew were scrolling down in terms of highest rank, to lowest. Good men and women. Loyally serving the alliance. Charlotte could not drag them into this mess she’s putting together.

There was a message, days old, that kept popping up every few hours. It was from Natalie. The child she had abandoned for the one that was taken.

Charlotte never imagined herself as a mother. Not even when she made her relationship with Garrus more permanent.

And then Satima appeared in her life.

Just as loud and ever present, as a positive pregnancy test.

Oh, she tried. During the time Satima had run off to the Sentarian's galaxy. Charlotte researched fertility, obsessively. If Satima exists, so can the possibility of having another one.

Never telling Garrus her more truer intentions, other than amorous affections. Sometimes three times a day in a week.

An exhausting week, that put a sneaky smile to her face.

Poor Garrus. Tried so hard to keep up. All she needed was for him to... Anyways.

The reality, and the results... were not what she had expected. Or wanted. She couldn't conceive from him.

For a time, she sat in a dark cloud of personal pity. It wasn't fair. But neither is this universe.

And so Satima's very existence was even more important to her. The other Charlotte had somehow carried her. Even if it was for a short time. That's a little miracle she'll not see rotting away in some
cell.

That Reaper woman, her. Would shout to fight and keep their daughter safe. For she is their daughter. The both of them. One and the same.

"Captain. You have a private call."

Traynor barged the thoughts. It was good she did. Sitting in loathing for hours doesn't get anything done. "I'll take it in my cabin.", she ordered.

The terminal screen went black, then clicked to an image. A male image.

"Shepard! So, you really did survive the war?", his voice gruff and irritating. He smirked, shaking his bald pale head. "Guess the rumors of a clone was bogus?"

She locked her door, turning off the cameras per her own alliance codes. "I wouldn't say bogus, just...", she smiled to herself. Aware of a twisted irony in the back of her mind. "Dead.", Charlotte's eyes settled to his startled gaze.

"Well", Harkin replied. "I guess it's good to see someone sane in your place." He checked his omni-tool, glancing behind him. "I got a message saying you're looking for help to find someone? But before you get started, let's go over our history together."

Charlotte rolled her eyes with a sigh. There's no time for this.

Harkin's expression became pissed. "The first time we met, you'd rather drink acid, until I spilled the whereabouts of Garrus."

She remembered his perverted advances well.

"The second time we meet, you let him beat the shit out of me!" His voice getting louder. "Leave me to rot at c-sec. For months, Shepard!", his face red from shouting.

Charlotte sat back comfortably, smirking. "As I remember it, you were the one hiding a wanted man. And when Garrus wants something...", she leaned in a little closer to the screen. "You give it to him."

Harkin furrowed his brow in personal disgust. "Save me the intimate details." He watched someone, or something... go by. By the sounds of the street he was on, it could be Omega. Harkin finally narrowed his gaze in anger. "Then come your reaper friends to slaughter everyone for their sick shit!"

His image becomes distorted, before he continues. "I escaped on my own, perfectly fine in my own hiding spot. That no one knows about!" Harkin leans in closer to the display, "So why the hell are you calling me?"

Clearing her throat, and sitting up with a commanding glare, Charlotte speaks. "My daughter has been taken by the alliance, without my knowing her whereabouts. They have her locked away somewhere in this galaxy. And I need people who don't give a damn about the alliance or its loyal followers, to help me. Got it?"

Harkin suddenly laughed out loud, wiping his eyes and letting out a heavy breath. "OOoohh, man! This is gold! Absolute gold!", he continued mockingly. "The Commander- excuse me...", he gestured with a hand over his chest. "The Captain of the Normandy! Asking me, for help... to find the reaper hybrid?!!"
Charlotte clenched her right fist hard, almost piercing the palm of her hand with semi-sharp nails. Reaper hybrid. Abomination. Names that meant evil.

The ex-cop calmed down, taking a deep breath. Harkin sighed, shaking his head at her. "You're serious?", he jested. Watching Shepard's unamused expression. Glancing around him again, he faced the display. "You're going to be paying me big time, Shepard. This will cost you.", he warned.

She lowered her gaze subconsciously to a picture sitting on the left of the terminal. "I know.", she replied. "I'll secure whatever you want."

Harkin licked his lips in anticipation. "Alright.", he agreed. "I know all about the trial. Hell, the whole galaxy knows. Seems you've had a group of alliance ass-kissers who didn't exactly agree with you. Or even care to show respect to your service." He started walking off into a crowd. Club sounds resonated from the screen of his surroundings. "You can't play good cop on this one, Shepard."

Charlotte understood. But does it mean she needs to hurt others, to find Satima? Like she hurt Fantar? Harkin’s voice shook the thoughts.

"Wonder which one of them is easy to track down?", he grinned. "Give me a few days."

Shepard glared to him. "You have one."

He raised a brow, then nodded. "Ok. One."

The screen went black. Charlotte's heart pumped hard. Her head was already aching from anger. She wanted to pummel that weasel faced shit.

Calming herself, the captain made a call. It was to Natalie's caretaker. She can't risk anymore direct messages. So, she's going to give strict instructions preventing her young daughter from doing it. Charlotte can't have attachments to this rebellion. And when she finds Satima, she'll cover up the process from her too. Both of them won't know how far their mother had fallen, to keep them safe.

Thalia Medical Research Industries-Illium

Valene paced, data pad in a nervous grip. It shook, causing her to drop the device. She grabbed the phalanges of her hand, holding tightly. Telling herself to breathe.

Parts of herself remained from before. The mind cleanse was rough, but she managed to keep some of her identity. But not all asari are lucky. And neither will be other species, if they don't find a way to combat indoctrination. Soon!

The door to her office opened. An invasion of breathless footsteps caught her attention. It was Malani! She held out a data pad to take. "Doctor... we made a... we made a!", she had to lean over and grasp her knees to catch a breath.

Valene took the pad, seeing to the scientist. "Deep breaths, Malani. Take your time.", she urged.

Vakarian was currently on vid call with his father and Agrimenex, when he got the message to meet with Valene at the secured lab. Apologizing for the interruption, he quickly used a cab from his hotel. Thoughts racing as to what had happened.

Her researchers stood by waiting, when he came through the lab door. "You have something?"

"Yes.", she replied, elated. "I know how to combat indoctrination for everyone." Valene brought up
"Asari biotic conditioning, requires rigorous meditation and kinetic training. We can meld our minds with another's nervous systems. When we share memories, when we make love, when we choose to conceive. We can also take a piece of ourselves, our happiest moments and tuck it away. Use it to banish indoctrination!

"But you said only matriarchs with centuries of biotics conditioning can do this?", Garrus blurted, confused.

Malani stepped forward with an excited expression. “We can make a block, to stop the other signal that was left behind. We can even use another brain wave to subtly send messages of happy chemicals.”, she revealed.

Garrus glowered with a disappointed sigh. "Happy chemicals?", he stated. This was a colossal waste of time.

She stared at him intensely, "I know it sounds... unusual. Especially when dealing with reapers, and their tech."

He raised a brow at Valene. Gesturing in great upset. "And this is what you think will stop indoctrinated people from psychotic behavior?!" Spirits.

The asari scientists exchanged glances, when one of them moved forward. "If you build a biotic amplifier, implant it on a receptor in the brain. You can filter what goes through. Your normal neurotransmitters are allowed to function properly. Meanwhile, the indoctrinated signal is filtered out, and blocked. The subject will then be able to function with full clarity, and total control. No mind cleanse, no lobotomy."

Liara stood among them. Gasps were heard from the surprised asari in the room. Her gaze settled on Garrus. Remorseful and worried. "Happy chemicals.", she smiled.

Garrus walked in stride with Liara to the testing labs. She led him personally. "Valene is the closest we've gotten to an answer, and Malani is a genius. A bit... simple in terms. But she did come up with this theory. After all, it has been a personal vision of hers."

"Personal?", he asked.

"Yes. She was once indoctrinated herself.", Liara answered. "Most of them have experienced some form of indoctrination. My world fell, remember? There were pockets of resistance, just like on Earth. And just like on Menae."

He stopped before the door, feeling awful for the memories. "Why are you here to help? Charlotte mentioned your plans for Satima. And how you tried to put her away!"

Liara shook her head in upset. "I didn't know what that woman had planned. I... for all my knowledge and privilege, I didn't prepare for a single person's hatred. I'm sorry, Garrus. I am doing all that I can to help find her, and to find a cure. Or at least something that will help."

Garrus felt confused. He didn't know whether to trust Liara, or to ask if she's spoken to Charlie recently. It's been more than a week, and even Natalie can't speak to her. Which is strange. "Liara... I... thank you, for trying to make things right."

She gave him a tired smile. "Well", gesturing to the lab. "Let's get started. The real work begins, now."
How long has it been? Eight, ten days?

Sitting on the cold floor of this “cell”. Grey walls surround the ex-operative, threatening a claustrophobic cage.

Bare rations are given twice a day. She preserves them, in case she escapes. No. When… she escapes. It is a matter of time.

She’ll need something for her strength, and medical supplies for the hybrid. God knows what they’ve done to her.

The image of the blank stare worried Miranda. Could it be permanent damage?

During silent speculating, the door to her small cell opened abruptly. A man walked through. Or it resembled one.

His wide blue eyes, glowing unnaturally. Settling on her, while she sat crossed legged on the floor. Miranda wondered what this thing was? And why suddenly, it chose to enter this room?

“They’ve almost abandoned you here. The technicians and workers of this station. Since you were locked away, out of sight and mind. I almost forgot, as well.”, his voice not human. Not anymore.

He stepped forward, the door closing behind. His careful movements led him to where she sat. “Who are you?”, Miranda asked.

“A scientist.” His answer was simple, but there were lies behind it.

Miranda summoned the courage to stand, a little weak from not partaking in the rations. Hidden inside a dent of the metal tiled wall, right behind her. “Are you responsible for torturing the hybrid?”, her tone accusing.

He lowered a gaze with a smirk. “Not anymore. It was a voluntary experiment.”

“For what?”, Miranda demanded.

Raising a brow, the scientist began to pace away to the other wall. She knows he’s not human. He resembled EDI, from the Normandy. But different. Sinisterly different.

“That is something you don’t need to worry about.”, he assured. Turning to her. “You on the other hand, are.”

She didn’t like the sound of that. Miranda prepared herself, a slight biotic flare. “Touch me, and I use your mechanical body to open this door.”

There was a loud laugh that echoed around them. He leaned on one leg, a surprised expression. “And could you?”, he mocked. “Use your weak biotics to hurl me through this solid door, and escape?”

Miranda knew he was trying to intimidate her. She leaned her head closer to view him. “There’s no harm in trying.” Her gaze narrowing towards the villain.

His expression changed suddenly into a stare. The air shifted in the room. The villain walked closer
to her, until she felt the threat of his presence too real. Miranda hurled a biotic blast that barely budged him. Ready to defend, the ex-operative tried to deliver a blow, but he dodged it.

A cold metal hand reached out and grabbed her by the throat. Slamming her body against the wall. He held tightly, but not to kill. Only hold her still. His blue glare piercing into hers. “I know who you are, Miss Lawson. Your days in Cerberus were well recorded.”

She writhed from his touch, feeling the unnatural strength he wielded against her.

“There are forces at work, beyond the petty visions and paranoid claims of the alliance. Beyond this galaxies control. It will come here.”, his grip loosening, the sound of his voice breaking in a personal terror. “And I fear we will not be able to stop it.”

He let go, as she leaned over, coughing from the rough treatment. Miranda lifted her eyes to see him swiftly walk out of the open door. But it didn’t close. She stepped forward to see him stand in the doorway. “I want you to leave. Surveillance is offline, and a shuttle is prepped for you.”

Miranda couldn’t believe him. “You’re just going to let me go?” Now standing directly in front of him. “What if I go to Shepard, tell her everything?”

He tilted his head in thought, sighing quietly. “By the time you return with the Shepard, it will have already been too late.” The scientist gazed at her. “Go. Bring the Shepard here. Let this place be exposed. And the division that lies within the alliance.”

Without another word, he hurriedly walked away. Straight down a hall.

Miranda couldn’t make a guess with his cryptic message. Stepping out, she heard a small crunching sound. Looking down to her feet, Miranda viewed a data device.

Picking it up, she read the map of the station and the quickest route out of it. Right into the shuttle bay.

Quickly, Miranda began to trek further into the hall, stopping to peek at two alliance officers talking on the other end.

They stood in front of the elevator she needed to get to. Surveillance may or may not be out, but unless that thing got rid of these people. She’s not going to be able to “quietly” leave. Amid these thoughts, an alarm sounded. The two officers left after it.

She breathed out loud. It was time to escape.

Down the lift, the doors opened to the same lobby she came through. The same place she was ambushed. All Miranda needed was to reach the next door ahead, and she was free to the shuttle bay.

Stopping at the next entryway, the operative felt this was too easy. Had to be.

She turned around to see a small army of alliance… but it was empty.

Screams were heard in the hall she came from. Along with the cry of a banshee? No. Not possible. What is going on?

A man came rushing out the other end. Blood had splattered over his lab coat, and the right lens of his glasses were cracked. He had a terror-stricken stare. Which settled on her. “You!”, he shouted. Running towards her. “Take me with you!”, he signaled.
Miranda wondered quickly who he was. She held the data device close to her, arming her biotics. “Not one more step.”, she warned. “What’s going on? Who are you?”

He looked over his shoulder, frantically breathing. “I’m... I’m Doctor Nox. I was head of the alliance’s reaper division, on this station.”

Nox knew she wasn’t a regular here. But he didn’t care at this time how she got on, or where she was the whole time. This week has turned into a hellish reaper nightmare, that was set loose on him. “Please, we need to go.”, he tried,

Miranda stayed her ground. “Not until you tell me what this place is.”

Gun fire echoed above them, and around the lobby. Shouts of orders were heard. More screams, some human, some not human. Nox became more frightened and anxious. “We don’t have time!”, he yelled.

Before she could get any more information out of him. Nox ran forward, only to be gunned down. Crawling away from a stunned Miranda.

She looked around to see Rassa on the balcony above. Her rifle aiming, as a devious grin displayed on her features. “Go on. Play your part in his game.”, she spoke.

Miranda glared, “You’re deranged.” She turned to run through the lobby door. Exiting to the lift.

Miranda ran to the shuttle, accessing the panel to enter. She looked out the view window, remembering Satima. The shuttle lifted off, exiting with haste through the bay doors, and abandoning the hybrid to whatever had been unleashed on that station.

Miranda promises a swift return. But only she can reassure herself.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for stopping by!
Chapter Summary

The station crumbles into chaos after the indoctrinated are released. Shepard plays her part. And Satima is broken.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Argos-48 hours before

Satima stared ahead, while strapped to an examination chair. They waited in her room, then pounced on her. She could've fought back, but instead chose to block the blows to the most important parts of her body. Satima attempted escape in a pattern of thoughts. Diving into reasons while they pummeled her until weak and bruised. Each hit was a reminder of their anger.

A hate towards someone that no one could understand.

Nox had sent that team to take her, while Archer busied himself on the cell deck. He couldn't have the droid interfere. Which was odd, considering their past. Why was the relationship changing between them? And what benefit could Archer have possibly gained?

Indoctrinated subjects were being moved to a public facility with the citadel breathing down their necks.

They were found out, exposed by a simple trade vessel. But the alliance had a backup plan.

The first three decks were designed to distract the common observer. A place were the more afflicted patients could focus on their rehabilitation. And it did work. So, now they must give up many good subjects to the local salarian research station.

All was not lost. They had the hybrid, and with her, a few more heavily indoctrinated abominations. Waiting to be studied.

Nox stood next to Satima, a satisfied smile to his thin face as she winced in pain. Her labored breathing turned into occasional wheezing. They might have gone too far. But he'll worry about broken bones later.

His perfect chance to completely invest his attention in this creature before him was almost too good. Nox started to speak to her, catching the hybrid's now aware stare. "Archer's research into your link with reaper tech was good. Your reaction a fascinating watch." He took a needle, with an attached wire to a terminal. A stand-by screen displayed.

Crude tech, hastily put together, either out of cruelty or desperation. The instrument was a few inches long. A slender piece of metal that was held above her. "You have many fascinating qualities that are inside you. Your brain, and your sentarian implant. For instance."

Satima was startled. How much did Archer reveal to this man? "How did you know about the implant?"
Nox stepped in front of her, "Your ancient friends have been here for more than a year. Visiting abroad, bringing with them tons of information. Scientific, medical.," he mused. His smile dying down. "It's only recently that they've stopped. Who knows why?"

Stopped? Satima wondered what it meant. Did the Head Archon forbid his people from coming to their ancestral home, all because of her? She hoped not.

Satima stared up as Nox walked around to her side. He placed the tip of the slender needle over her right ear. Aiming further up. "Now, this is where your implant was placed?", checking the computer screen. "It has a neural block that prevents us from scanning it any more than we'd like. I can't have that stopping me, hybrid."

Satima gulped. Whatever pain is brought on, she'll endure. This is for the good of everyone. Shepard would be proud knowing how brave and how strong she's gotten. And even more surprised at how different her treatment by Archer has been.

A change that frightened her at first.

Can a villain truly change? Could she?

Nox wasted no time pressing the needle into her flesh. She gritted her teeth in surprise. The bastard didn't even have the decency to warn her first!

Satima made a grunt, as the instrument pricked the skin until it broke. Allowing him to tap the healed skull.

She held back a yelp. That spot was sensitive, sending a dizzying wave to overwhelm her. Now grunting in pain, gripping the edges of the arm rests her wrists were bound to tightly.

"Ah, yes, there it is." He turned to a technician, who pressed an icon on the screen. A small laser burned through neatly to the implant. Throbbing followed, as her body sent painful alerts throughout.

"Nox...", she began. What is he doing?!

He didn't acknowledge.

Satima was feeling very strange. "You don't... you don't know what can happen!", she tried.

Nox kept pushing further in, while Satima whined in agony. Until he stopped. The computer beeped, followed by an acknowledgement of finding something. "There.", Nox spoke in trepidation. His eyes followed the results on the screen. "There is something... relaying? This location."

Before the doctor could continue, Archer knocked him to the floor. "If ever an idiot was born each day, no one could trump you." He insulted heavily.

The doctor stood, pushing the cracked glasses back onto his crooked nose. He glared in upset, "How dare you, strike me!" Nox used a data pad to control Archer, cause him pain. Anything to punish this reaper droid. But nothing happened. "How?", he feared.

Archer stepped to Satima, carefully pulling out the needle. Her expression of discomfort worried him. Strange. "I am not unfamiliar to pain.", he glared at Nox. "Or control."

The technician reached out to tap the security screen but was stopped by fear. Archer had stared her down. "That would not be wise, my dear." He grabbed Nox by the arm, twisting and pulling the doctor to the terminal. "Now that this station is cleared, we can get to real work. Tell me, doctor? Do
you remember my description of hive?"

Nox shuddered.

"Oh, good. You do." Archer released the eight remaining indoctrinated subjects from below. Nox had two of them killed, for fear they were too dangerous. He regretted not finishing off the remainder.

"What are you doing?! They will destroy this station!", the doctor argued.

Archer let him go. Freeing Satima from her restraints and putting an arm over his shoulder. She leaned against him, weakened and sore. "This isn't a research station. It's a playground.", he grinned at Nox. "My playground."

Outside the lab, Archer helped Satima to the med station. Kneeling over her, he scanned the hybrid's body, frowning at the barbaric way she was treated. Had he known, or rather-should've known. Archer would've pushed Lawson to take Satima with her.

She might not have left, regardless. Sam was the one thing that drove her to try. Satima could connect to him, see his memories. And Archer's own continued research was greatly improved by her trials.

Alarms echoed loudly around them. She groaned, laying on the cot. "Archer..."

He stood up, his mind playing out many scenarios. "The Shepard will be here soon." Archer listened as the first abomination was loose on this floor. Closing the door to the med station, sealing it from the inside. "The signal is relaying. But it is not one I am familiar with. I fear it is connected to you."

She tried to sit up, only falling back for him to reapply another pack of gel. "You must heal, Satima. You'll need strength." The medi-station's window looking out to the hall, revealed the one banshee that wandered in hunger. Archer stared at it, unafraid.

"You'll come to, shortly." Putting a pistol next to her, now. "I'm not sure how they will regard you. Sam may or may not be a danger to you, Satima."

He sent a message to Rasa, confirming the shuttle's readiness and Lawson's cell number. Loose ends to release, pawns to move. Whatever that signal is coming from, it's influencing this galaxy no one prepared for.

Walking out the other door, Archer sealed it too. Protecting Satima from rage filled subjects, and a divided alliance military.

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Secondary Alliance Command-New York

Security officer Smith sat preoccupied with the latest news from the citadel. His desk was a little messy, covered in two old coffee mugs, food wrappers and paper work. Not to mention the stack of data pads with complaints.

He didn't want to acknowledge them right now. There's too much happening in the galaxy for a lieutenant’s concerns to take priority.

Scrolling his omni device, there was something about batarian hostages, asari biotic discoveries, and then a little article about the new bakery opening downtown. Good news there.
Smith kept skimming the top headlines, until he heard an "ahem" at the front of his desk.

Usually this lobby is bustling with officers, but when noon arrives. Hungry stomachs take over. It's perfectly quiet, and exactly why this person is a nuisance.

"Set your complaints on the stack over there, coffee is in the next room. And no, we do not have any recordings of a trial that did not take place here in this building.", he rudely explained. Another louder ahem, was the response. Smith looked up, "Listen..."

"Listen to what, Security officer? How you'd rather sit on your ass all day and read about everyone else's lives, or would you like to open the door to my office?", Rear Admiral Grey complained.

Smith stood up, dropping his pad with a salute. "Ma'am! Sorry, ma'am. Right away, ma'am!"

He unlocked the secure lift behind his desk, as Grey continued forward. "Remind me to have your extranet privileges revoked in this building.", she warned.

He sat back in his seat, already cursing.

Grey entered her office from the top floor. A large view of the rebuilt city displayed before her. It was a bright beautiful day. Fluffy clouds moved effortlessly in the blue sky, while alliance shuttles dotted the atmosphere like small black birds.

Pouring coffee and taking a seat at the wood grained desk, something that took a lot of haggling to get. She opened her terminal, logging herself to the alliance's data base. Pulling up the last recordings of the trial, and effectively deleting them.

One thing to get off her mind. Days have passed since that trial. A full week of nerves that made her think twice.

With the hybrid safely locked away, the rest of the alliance can relax about Captain Shepard's reaper child. Barely a reaper. Maybe in behavior.

She returned to some reports that were made the previous day. Being stuck on earth makes her anxious, and bored. Alliance personal is thin. Stretched throughout this galaxy to enforce a presence. Some of which their galactic neighbors don't like.

The turians have been accommodating enough. And the asari are too preoccupied with themselves, and their damned researches. That really, none of them have noticed the new outposts.

All set-in places that the alliance is forbidden to occupy for now.

Reapers have heavily relied on those vacant parts of the systems to invade. Without a defense and early warning system set up, they were quickly overtaken. And nearly wiped out.

It was a slaughter. One she'll never forget.

Her support for the alliance is strong. Many good men and women died to help Shepard. Many more perished to keep the fight alive, while the then-commander, played diplomat.

Thinking about the past will not help build new colonies or grow their military into the powerful galactic force it was always meant to be. A little ambitious. But it felt every bit as right to enforce, then before the reapers.

That's why the reaper division is important. That's why the alliance sees the potential in using that
girl to better understand the reapers.

They were so formidable. So powerful, destructive and unmatched. Waiting in dark space to take them, to... what did the report of the captured indoctrinated subjects say? Oh, yes.

Sleeping gods.

Grey gently nodded the thoughts away, taking a sip of her now warm coffee.

Does she hate the hybrid? No. Grey understands young foolishness when she sees it. Can it be entirely her fault of what happened to the Inglorious? Not really. But Chief Admiral Marsden-Ruth, saw to that. She took a personal blow by the actions or inactions, of the hybrid. And soon punished her for it.

Report one was almost finished, when the office door opened. Admiral Hackett strolled in. His tired gaze overlooked the room. "Rear Admiral.", he acknowledged.

Grey stood, "Admiral. Are you hear to pester me about the trial again?", she wondered.

Hackett smirked, "I have already concluded that at this time, there is nothing more I can do." He spotted a chair in the corner of the room, next to a potted fern. Sitting, his bones ached from the all the years of service that's finally catching up to him. "Command is sending me out to check on our outposts. Secure the sights, make reports. All the field bullshit that makes us look busy, and not guilty."

"Guilty?", she repeated, stunned. "We're not guilty of anything." Grey replied.

Hackett sighed in disappointment, staring out the large windows to the city ahead. "The hero of the citadel's kid is locked inside some hidden station. In space, or on a planet. Who knows? Being experimented on by our people, all for the sake of safety and revenge." His gaze narrowed to her. "I'd say that's guilty."

She dismissed him, walking around her desk to where he sat. Crossing her arms in dissatisfaction. "If you think protecting this galaxy from reapers makes us guilty? Good. We had to act. There are consequences to allowing something like her wander around, unchecked.", she argued.

"And Shepard?", he asked.

Grey looked away. "I respect Captain Shepard. I trust my life, and the lives of everyone on this planet to her. But I don't trust how she feels about the hybrid."

Hackett observed her shamed manner. "At the end of the day, after all the wars and all the battles. After everyone starts to forget the reapers. There will still be a mother, waiting for when she's allowed the privilege of having her child back. And the alliance will do all that it can to prevent it."

He got up swiftly. Eying her in silent vexation, turning to leave. Hackett glanced a picture on her desk, shaking his head. "If your child was taken from you, Samantha. Would you do anything to get her back?"

She slowly turned to him, arms still crossed. "Anything." The answer leaving her mouth sent a shock of reality to her.

Hackett left quietly.
Normandy

Joker made his way to the cockpit. Limping a little from not stretching as he should. His muscles ached, but the bones in his legs felt unsteady. EDI urged him to let her help.

No way is he letting her help him to the men's room!

He almost stumbled forward, past the doorway before catching himself. An alarmed expression that turned into a sigh of relief. Can't have the pilot sit with broken legs. Not like he's using them, really. Except to pee.

Joker smirked, taking a comfortable seat in front of his pilot's console. The Normandy sailed smoothly in orbit of Earth. A place he'd rather leave for a while.

Was never his home. Born a colony kid, Joker had not felt any pull to see earth, or live on it. Space is his home. And the Normandy his sweet ride.

"Shepard is leaving to alliance command.", EDI spoke from her seat.

Spooking Joker, who thought she was in the core room. Like she stated before nature called. Breathing aloud, he started to run diagnostics, keeping busy. "Thanks, EDI."

For the heart attack.

"Joker."

He nearly jumped. "Captain.", his voice suddenly higher pitched. Joker cleared his throat and repeated in a deeper voice. "Uh, yes Captain?"

"I'm leaving for a little while. Keep the Normandy prepped, and in orbit. We may be heading out soon to a little mission.", she informed.

"Yes, ma'am."

It's been quiet for days, always checking in on earth. Orbiting earth. Getting messages from earth.

Earth, earth, earth, earth!

So, what the hell is going on?!
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

New York
Alliance blocks

Night was falling. More than stars twinkled above the skyline as a dark purple sunset overtook the landscape easily.

Shepheard stood on the street of the apartment complex. Newly built, filled with local alliance personal that were landlocked until further notice. Not much action to be had, since the reapers are gone. And since everyone is getting along so well in this cesspool of a galaxy. Why bother?

Shepard's sour expression helped push back any one from inquiring. That, and her casual attire. No alliance blues for her to stick out in.

Nothing to bring attention, although her face is plastered everywhere. In every shop, business. even recruiting lines. She didn't like it. Never did.
Her career is not a dream. It's a nightmare. One she wished she could wake from. A burden that no longer had the appeal of "protect all to show how much humanity cares."

The one person that mattered in this fractured military is gone. Her mentor.

Anderson was more of a parent to her then those women at the orphanage. And more of a friend then the other kids she ran with, in the reds.

Her comms opened. "Are we doing this, Shepard?"

Shaking the past aside, her conscious began to question this action. What if this does nothing but more harm?

Ruth did this. She punished their family, divided them. Charlotte resolved herself to go through with it. Shepard's always been a woman of action. And has never backed away from a fight. No matter the enemy.

Inside the building, she found the men ready at the elevator. They took it to the twenty-first floor.

These men that waited to collect on her promises. Eager to inflict horrors on anyone that tried to come between their greedy ambitions.

So, why is she with them? Why use them?

"The lone wolf you were meant to be", she repeated to herself.

Images of Reaper, staring her down in full authoritative devotion to her own will, clouded her thoughts.

A loud ringing thrummed in her ears, but no one else had noticed. It stopped abruptly when the thoughts of her brutal retaliation against Fantar played out. He deserved it. The batarian was in the way of her plans, and an oath to Gesin, she meant to keep.

Shepard waited in silence, while Finn couldn’t stop bragging how this will pave the way for the new Reds.

Flashes of old memories from those days made her moody. She did things not to be proud of. Hurt people. And this jerk is trying to remind her of it.

Shepard lashed out, grabbing his shirt collar. An anger to her expression, while she pulled him close to her face. Glaring in irritation. “If you don’t shut your damn mouth about the Reds! I’ll toss your sorry ass off the roof of this building!”

There was heavy emotion to her tone. Something that Harkin listened to on the open comm of their little visit.

She pushed Finn away from her, resuming her sour gaze while standing still. Incompetent, weak simpletons. Wasting her time.

All but Harkin. Who did and could, give her opposition.

Finn nodded vigorously, fixing his shirt in anger. Muttering the word bitch to himself. A smirk displayed on his annoying face.

Once, when they were all stupid teenagers. Heavily in the gang on the streets, he’d seen her naked. No one knew. Not even the lookouts of the abandoned warehouse.
Watched her mount a rival gangs leader and subdue him with the sex appeal of her bright red hair and bold green eyes.

Helped that she had one hell of a body too. Finn glanced at her, trying not to get the attention again. She still did, but Shepard would sooner kill him than use him.

Returning to his memory, he had stayed perfectly quite behind the makeshift wall, while she pretended to giggle and play with that older idiot.

Then it happened. She pummeled him, beat him down. Blow after blow, using the heavy end of an unopened beer bottle. Blood splattered her face and naked chest.

Finn nearly pissed himself.

But why?

Why murder a nobody that the Reds could care less about?

Because Shepard was defending a friend from an assault. One that the bastard thought he could get away with.

Shepard was never innocent. She only got a little soft. Push that woman, hurt the ones she cares for... and you'll be dead before morning. He shuddered.

The "captain's" only downfall from being a great merc leader, are her own damn feelings. If they get in the way of this ambush, someone is going to either die or be seriously injured.

Finn hoped it won't be him.

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Grey had walked in to her home. The lights were on dim, and the spacious windows covered. "Lauren?", she called out, now walking through her living room. "Honey, did you remember to stop by the doctor's today?"

A lamp illuminated the area in front of her. On the chair, sat Captain Shepard herself. She stared in emotional toil. "Where is my daughter?"

Grey stepped back, before hearing someone near her. She turned to a rifle strike.

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Loud ringing stunned her senses. Along with the pain to her right temple. A wet stream of blood ran the side of her face from earlier. Now drying as a dark stain. The cut above her brow ached.

"What... what the hell?", she wondered aloud. Now looking around her, to see two unfamiliar men in the corner of the living room. They were debating something. Grey heard a female voice order them to simmer down.

She tried to move, but her hands were twisted behind her in that same chair Shepard occupied earlier. "Shepard?", she asked. "Why? What is this?"

Shepard stood in front of her. A cold stare that sent a shiver of nerves to Grey. The captain leaned over her, face to face. "All I want is answers. Nothing else has to happen."

Grey scoffed in shock. "Nothing has to happen? You just attacked me!"

The captain lowered her gaze, leaning back up to stand over the Rear Admiral. "They attacked you."
Her expression stern. "Rear Admiral.", she announced a little mockingly, beginning to pace in front of her. "I'm here for the whereabouts of my daughter. I want nothing else. Just her location. After I've freed her. I'll face a trial of my own."

Grey stared in disbelief. "If you plan on attacking me again, I'll make sure your trial is just as hasty."

Shepard eyed Grey, quickly pulling a chair to sit across from her. "Are you threatening me, Rear Admiral?"

Grey gulped once, feeling the weight of this insane interrogation. What has happened to the hero of the citadel? Surely, she can see her feelings for the hybrid is causing her to act on sudden impulse. "No. I'm giving you an answer.", Grey replied.

"I'll deal with the alliance later. My only concern is my daughter."

The rear admiral was becoming more aware now. Her head injury had begun to clear. "She can't be your daughter, Shepard. You never had her. What has she done to fool you into this twisted thought? Is it indoctrination? Captain, the hybrid has done so much damage to you."

Shepard stared in surprised anger. Love and Payne (idiot names), gazed to her, feeling their stares weighing down. She's not insane. Satima has not controlled her! Something with this statement pushed the captain oddly. "Where, is she?", she asked again. Her tone vexed.

Grey shook her head. "I won't tell you anything, Captain. Even if I did know the exact location...", she looked the woman up and down in disgust. "You've earned nothing but my disappointment in you."

Unsure, Shepard made a quick call to Harkin. Getting up to resume her private conversation with him. "You said Grey knew the location.", the captain accused.

Harkin smirked, strolling outside a cafe on the street across from the building. "Of course, she knows."

He laughed to himself. "Typical."

Shepard glances to Grey, who sat quietly. Waiting. "She's lying to me..."

"Yeah. Because the alliance really doesn't want the hybrid getting free. There's a whole detail of officers at this place she's being held. But I couldn't get the location, because "Rear Admiral Grey" had it deleted from the alliance’s data base. She works at command, Shepard. She's not innocent. Don't worry. I have a backup."

The comm ended. Shepard angrily approached Grey, who tried to talk about the call. "Was there something wrong, captain?"

Shepard wandered into the kitchen, quickly emerging with a butcher knife. She needs to threaten, that's all. That's all!

“My daughter.", she stared at Grey.

The woman refused to answer the question.

Shepard paced, twirling the knife with trained skill. Training that was instilled into her child. Her mind felt overcrowded. One end pushing her to do what's right, free Grey and apologize.

The other? Wants her to strangle that woman until she feels the same pain, Shepard feels inside.
Grey gulped. Something clearly has been wrong with the captain for some time. And no one reported it! Maybe it was she, that needed to be locked away? Did they put the wrong woman on trial?

“Is my duty, Shepard, to uphold the alliance’s vision and protection of our system. And galaxies beyond. You swore that same pledge when you joined!”, she gazed with pleading eyes. “Remember who you are, Shepard! You’re an alliance soldier. Not some crazed maniac.”

Charlotte stared around her, unable to make eye contact with her accuser. She closed her eyes, forcing invasive thoughts to quiet.

Her daughter at the mercy of alliance soldiers. The people she swore to serve with honor and distinction. Her life for their will.

Shepard opened her eyes, lowering her hateful gaze to Grey. She’s not the alliance's war pawn anymore. And neither will Satima.

Grey began speaking. "Captain, think about this..."

She shouted in pain, as Shepard plunged the knife in the woman's thigh. Her upset stare now fixed on Grey. "Where is she?!", Shepard shouted.

"You stabbed me!", Grey yelled, tears of agony trailed down her face. "You're insane!"

Shepard twisted it, "I want my daughter! Give me the location, now! No more games."

Grey cried out, gritting her teeth in memory of the training for torture. She won't give up the information! "If you go after her, the alliance will destroy you! Your career, your family. Everyone whom you've ever cared for!", she argued.

Shepard held back tears. There's no going back. Yesterday was a dream. And tonight, is a hellish nightmare. Dooming her to the role she had always meant to play. Resolved to deal with the consequences, she leaned down. "Samantha. " Her voice breaking in emotional strain. “Don't make me compromise myself again.”

Grey could see the pain in Shepard's eyes. But she can't let what's happening go. Looking away in her own disappointed anger.

The captain sighed aloud, knowing Grey was not about to answer so easily. She's a marine first.

And an alliance loyalist.

Before she could think of another way to get the information out, Harkin came through the door. He dragged a teenage girl, forcing her to stand between them. "Shut up!", he shouted to her, as she sobbed.

The captain was suddenly brought back from whatever dark hold she was under. Even Grey could feel a difference in the atmosphere around them.

"What is this?", Shepard demanded.

The girl had a fully robotic leg, already having trouble with standing. Had she been injured during the reapers assault?

"This is Lauren Grey.", he pointed out. Grinning to Samantha. "She's joining our party."
Grey viciously wriggled against her restraints. "You bitch!", she roared. "How dare you feign concern for a child and take my own!"

Shepard stared at Harkin. "This was not in the plans." What has she allowed?

Lauren viewed the shape her mother is in and started whimpering. "Mother! Oh, God..."

"It's okay, baby. I'm okay.", Grey assured, trying hard not to hyperventilate.

This moment stung Shepard to the core. "Harkin, let Lauren go.", she ordered.

Harkin scoffed. "And let this little bitch run away and tell the cops? I don't think so. You wanted me to find your hybrid. And I've given you the means to do so."

Grey winced from the pain of the knife in her leg. Love stepped forward, flanking them. They were loyal to the creds. All the while Finn waited outside to deter any persons from inquiring.

This has gotten out of hand, and maybe Grey was right? She's lost her damn mind. Shepard loves Satima, will do anything for her.

"Harkin.", Shepard stared.

The ex-cop knew she had decided to not go through with this. He shook his head. "You know what makes you so unlikable, Shepard?" He brought out a pistol, "Your damn conscious."

He opened fire, pushing Lauren ahead. Shepard caught the girl, lowering her down quickly to the floor. "Lay flat! Don't get up!", She turned to Grey, as Love advanced. "This is gonna hurt." Pulling the knife from her leg, while the Rear Admiral screamed. Throwing it expertly in the chest of the merc.

Payne took cover, shooting up the living room. Shepard brought Grey down to the floor. She rolled away to a couch. Fluffs of stuffing spurting out, as each bullet exploded within the material.

He looked up to see she was gone, only to have a vase slammed against his head, dropping the pistol. Payne scampered off to stand. Shepard ready on the other end.

They advanced to each other. She head-butted him, punched his gut. Payne withstood, back handing her hard across the jaw.

Shepard felt the jolt of her face, side eyeing him with a smirk. "Alright, asshole. Let's dance."

She deflected another blow from him, kneeing his groin. Payne grunted in effort, as Shepard delivered another blow to his gut. She upper cut him, taking her foot and kicking out his knee.

Payne fell forward on one leg. Shepard took her hands, folded them together, and brought it down to his head. He didn't move.

The captain wiped sweat from her brow, breathing heavily from the assault. She watched a disgraced Harkin abandon them, running away. Finn following behind.

So much for his Reds.

Grey stood, limping with Lauren behind her. She aimed the pistol at Shepard. The captain raised her hands in surrender, wondering what was going to be done. Until Samantha spoke.

"Duck."
Following the command, a shot was overheard above her. Shepard quickly turned to see Love on the floor in his own blood.

"He was never going to go down.", Grey explained.

Shepard nodded, sighing out loud. Lauren ran to the bathroom for first aid, while her mother stayed to speak with the captain. Aiming the pistol again, “I can't forget this, Shepard. I don't think I'll be able to forgive it, either." She limped towards the Normandy’s captain. "I can’t let you leave. Your suffering, clearly.”

Shepard acknowledged. "I am."

Using quick reflexes, the captain grabbed the pistol, turning it on Grey.

Lauren walked in, dropping the pack to the carpeted floor. Shepard stared her down. “Open your mouth to scream, try to run out the door, and I’ll put a bullet in your mother’s good leg.”

The girl nodded, covering her mouth to muffle a loud sob. She walked over to the open doorway, closing it in silence.

Grey didn’t understand. “You… you stopped them from hurting my daughter. Protected us… why are you still doing this?!”

Shepard tilted her head in pity of Grey’s question. “They were useless. I know that I can do this alone. And you were going to stop me from finding my daughter.” She hinted with the pistol for Grey to move back.

Carefully, she complied, eying the weapon and where it pointed. “You know I won’t give up the location.”

Her omni device lit up. Data was being streamed from a hack. “What… what is this?”, Grey demanded.

The captain smirked, “A hack. You see, I can’t trust any of my organic friends. The people whom I’ve”, she chuckled, “Quite literally died for.”

Grey was feeling dizzy from the knife wound. Blood stained her pants leg. “So, you enlisted your illegal A.I to help you?”

“Illegal?”, Shepard began. “She’s a person, not just code. EDI has been the perfect advantage against the enemy.”, she waved the pistol around, which made Grey nervous. Shepard continued, “Whether they be reapers, Cerberus… or you.”, her gaze narrowed.

The hack had finished.

Grey stared in anger, “Are you going to kill us?”

Stepping forward, the captain pushed Grey aside, as she winced from the sharp pain of her wound. “No.”, Shepard revealed. “I’m not a monster.” Her tone so sure, with a commanding gaze.

Shepard turned around and shot out the rear admiral’s good leg. Grey falling with a shrill cry of agony. The captain can’t have Grey reaching for help too quickly. Leaving her child to choose to nurse the wound, before sounding off an alarm.

Shepard resumed leaving, tossing the unmarked gun in an automatic trash bin. EDI had ensured the
contents will be emptied before security reaches the floor.

Lauren stood, frightful of this woman. Her mother calling for help.

Grey managed to lean up, a hostile glare following the traitor out the door. “The alliance will vilify your name! They will destroy you!” Her shouts fell short of the hallway.

In the lift, Shepard held in her emotions. “Not if I destroy them first.”

She quickly arrived at the Normandy, briefly setting out of the shuttle. Cortez stared at her distant expression. "Uhm, captain?", he started.

She waved at him. A sudden change of face that sent a chill down the engineer's spine. “Good job on that upgrade to the shuttle, Cortez. Keep up the good work.” Shepard's tone so calm and welcoming.

He saluted but shook it off. A confused look that also carried to James.

On deck three, Chockwas was returning with another crew member from the lounge, when she spotted Shepard emerging from the elevator. Her mood seemed off.

"Charlotte?"

Shepard stepped into the lift, dismissing the whole conversation. "Busy day with alliance command.", she lied. "I have a report to finish. If you don't mind, doctor. Please send EDI to my cabin. My computer seems to be having trouble with connecting to the alliance data base."

Chockwas nodded in confirmation, staring at the overly cheerful expression Charlotte displayed.

Once the door closed, Shepard’s expression soured. The ride was dizzying. Turmoil of what she did caused her to be nauseous.

Inside her cabin, the door shut without a sound. She leaned against it while slowly sliding down. Charlotte began to sob, burying her face between her knees.

The feeling of helplessness, abandonment by her friends. And a galaxy that is ready to take away everything from her, no matter what she sacrificed for them. It all drove her to do unspeakable things.

She's Reaper. Nothing has changed in that scenario. Grey didn't deserve to be tortured by her, or for Lauren to witness a well-regarded alliance captain, shoot her mother.

What would Satima think? Garrus would be so furious. So angry at her. And Harkin! Has she gone mad? Is it indoctrination?

Shepard raised her raw eyes to observe the room. Lonely and quiet. After she finds Satima, frees her. She's done.

If Grey will accept a resignation, handing over the Normandy. Maybe it will be enough, so she won't spend life in a military prison.

Wiping her face, she stood up. It's time to finish this and face the music.

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Relay route to the Sol system

Miranda found the Normandy's signature on her ship's radar scanner. The warship was just in view
as she sent a comm call.

"This is the SS-V Normandy. Who is sending this comm call?", Traynor inquired.

Miranda swallowed a dry throat. "Thank God.", she replied. "I need to speak to Shepard!"

Traynor exchanged a confused glance to another crew member. She opened the comms. "Umm, the
captain is busy at the moment. And you haven't told me who you are."

Joker had been making his way to the mess deck, when he overheard the call.

"Listen to me! I know where Satima is. I was just there! Please, tell Shepard that Lawson is waiting
in the shuttle marked 22-S1."

Joker stopped in his tracks, pushing himself in an expressive limp to Traynor's station.

"Hello? Are you still listening to me?"

Shepard and EDI had just appeared from the elevator.

EDI’s loyalty to help Charlotte felt odd.

She even sided with her decision to hire a merc crew, using them to get information from the rear
admiral. EDI finished acknowledging the order Shepard had given in the lift down. "I will promptly
put the location on you map.", the A.I informed.

Nodding in approval, the captain noticed the stares of her current crew. "Something up?", she
wondered. Thinking they stayed a few minutes too long in this system.

Joker crossed his arms, "Miranda is in a shuttle, literally outside our front door."

Shepard gazed in confusion. "Why?"

Traynor resumed the reveal, with hands behind her back. "Because Miss Lawson knows where
Satima is."

Medbay

Chockwas saw to Miranda's dehydration. Shaking her head in a motherly manner to the woman's
tales.

"I must've been locked in that cell for almost two weeks.", Lawson chuckled dryly to herself. "More
like a box."

Shepard paced, already anxious. The Normandy had been steadily navigating through relays. "Did
you see anything else? Hear anything?" Worried about Miranda's information on Satima's well-
being. They're torturing her. And all Grey can do is try to deny her the location to save her own
child!

"I was freed by a man. Well, I'm not sure if he is one.", Miranda revealed.

The captain paused, "Man?"

Lawson had gotten off the examination table. "There was something about him that mimicked EDI's
body. But different.", she nodded in memory. "His voice was unsettling. He spoke of forces at work.
Something with that notion terrified him."
Shepard stepped closer to Miranda. Her gaze unsteady, "I know who he is. I just thought..." Her head ached as memories of the crucible played out.

How he had her at his mercy, how Satima begged for her life.

"Shepard?", Miranda asked.

"I'm fine.", the captain dismissed. "We're on our way now to Satima's location." She began to leave the med-bay.

Miranda opened her omni-tool. "Good. I've sent the information to Liara. She's the one that pressed me to investigate. I'm glad I did."

Shepard stopped, turning swiftly to Lawson. "Liara! She's the one who helped orchestrate my daughter's incarceration there!" Stepping quickly, face to face with Miranda. "She's an enemy."

Miranda couldn't believe what she heard. "Even if she did do that, maybe Liara realized the alliance wasn't so trustworthy. That's why she sent me?"

So many maybes there. Shepard can't count on that. Relaxing back into a more confident manner, the captain made her way out. "Stay on the Normandy, Miranda, until I clear the station and have Satima."

Chockwas watched Charlotte's demeanor. Something has changed, quite suddenly. Her friend's outlook has become shadowed.

Although she believes in Satima's innocence. She's inclined to believe the opposite, for Shepard.

Argos
Present
Deck 5-Medi-Station

She heard shouts through the doors. Echoes of gunfire kept waking her from falling back into a dreamless world.

Parts of these sounds were similar to ones she's known before.

A shrill cry, following the sounds of muffled grunts and desperate gasps. Reloading a heavy thermal clip and unloading the rounds into a body. Thuds, groans and then a scream. A banshee screams.

Satima's gaze opened in shock. Fear surrounded her.

How long was she out? And where was Archer?

Something touched her left side, as she began to stand. Satima viewed the small weapon and grabbed it. It had a full clip, but just one. Could she put them down? She's fought a banshee before, but even then, there was backup.

Satima could very well be alone on this station. And if some of the alliance personal survived, holed up in some barricade, waiting for a rescue.

She'll have two enemies wanting her life.

Loud banging on the hall door, caught her attention. Satima held out the pistol, armed and ready to shoot. Without answering, she noticed whoever it was had hacked their way in.
She leaned against the wall from the doorway, quietly in preparation.

Similar, alright. Except it isn't the directive's soldiers she's hiding from.

A woman in security armor ran in, her breath laboring as she leaned over her knees. Trying to calm down.

Satima closed the door, aiming the pistol steady, as the station officer turned in stunned surprise.

"The hybrid?!", she feared.

Satima stared at her, unsure of what to do. "Yes, I am. What's going on out there?", she questioned.

Eying the muzzle of the pistol, the woman replied. "That droid-thing! Sabotaged this station. He released the subjects on us." She gulped, hands steadying upward to show a surrender.

"Hmph.", Satima thought aloud. "I guess no one knew his intentions." She lowered the gun, still staring hesitantly. "I was locked in here."

"That would explain why your cell was empty.", the officer spoke. "We can't find him. Captain Daniels suspects the droid escaped through the shuttle that was taken right when this shit show started."

The hybrid nodded, listening to the chaos out the doors. "How many of the alliance are left alive?"
"Handfuls per deck. We're trying to regroup back in the lobby. Deck two.", the woman answered.

Satima looked around for a weapon. Finding a scalpel. She put it in her boot, turning to the officer. "You already know who I am. You mind telling me your name?"

Straightening her armored jacket, the officer hesitated before replying. "Station Officer Blaine"
"I sometimes walked your floor."

The banshee screamed again. Throwing debris from open labs with her dark biotics. Satima glanced to Blaine. "I can help you. Whether I can stop her from attacking or give fire support. We'll get you back to the group in the lobby.", she promised.

Blaine was unsure of the hybrid's intentions. They had all been told how dangerous, and untrustworthy she is. She's a reaper abomination, just like those things from the deck below. "I'll lead the way.", Blaine offered.

Carefully the door was opened, as the two women stepped out silently. Satima held the pistol out, aiming with precision. She watched the hall, listening.

Blaine moved ahead, also using her standard rifle to check the four-way. Nothing. "Either she's hiding behind us, or she left this deck. In which case is even more terrifying, since the thing could be waiting for us there."

Satima checked briefly behind them. "If she's at the elevator, I can give a distraction. Get in and go."

Blaine stared, averting the stunned expression back to the halls. "Alright, hybrid."

With a sigh in annoyance at the "title", Satima led forward this time. Stopping at the end of the second hall. There were a few bodies. Blood stained the once pristine walls and ceiling. Scuff marks from boots tracked around them. "They fought tough. Didn't matter, though." She pointed out.
Blaine took a quick scan. "Survive the harvest only to die in a controlled vessel, by the reapers.", she spoke in disgust. "I'm so sick of it."

"Everyone is. Including me.", Satima observed.

Ahead, they stopped at the entrance to the elevator floor. Blaine leaned into the doorway, as Satima crouched, ready.

"I thought you served the reapers? Used indoctrination on the Normandy?", the officer asked in confusion.

Satima shook her head with a dry smirk. "Ridiculous.", she spat. Her gaze fixed on Blaine. "Is that what they told you? The alliance?"

Blaine swallowed, fearful how this young woman can be trying to control her right this minute. She held back the fears and answered truthfully. "Of course, they did. It was a warning to all alliance personal and military about being close with those who were indoctrinated. That's why we're building more facilities like this. We have enough reaper devices to help us research."

Shook from the revealed information, Satima now understood the folly of these people.

Despite all the data Shepard sent about harboring those devices, and what happened with several colonies who found one. No one listens. "Blaine, being around a reaper device puts you at risk.", she explained. "I may be indoctrinated, myself. But I cannot exhibit the same amount of abilities the reapers possessed. I am flesh and blood, although the only of my kind.", she lamented. "I did not control the Normandy, or Shepard. Believe that."

The hybrid's argument seemed sound. Her voice was sincere and emotional. But Blaine still felt caution dealing with her. "We should try to escape this level."

The pair proceeded, carefully watching their backs for the banshee. Blaine quickly tackled the interface of the panel, rerouting power from the other halls, and damaged lab computers. A minute passed, then two. Both feeling nervous.

Satima paced cautiously, staring down each hall. One that had gone dark made her jumpy. Trying all she could to keep a calmed attitude. She's never been matched alone with that banshee.

Sam, the other husk-like humans and one salarian, were the only ones that could be reasoned with. For a short time. That asari, however, was another problem.

"I'm almost done.", Blaine alerted.

Nodding in confirmation, Satima retreated to the officer. Ready to jump into the lift and get to the lobby. Captain Daniels is there, probably with a firing squad. She'll be gunned down. But then maybe he'll just incarcerate her again, and things will go back to normal. Just minus Archer. Who fooled them all.

Where is Rasa?

The lift came up, with the door readying to open. "Ok.", Blaine stepped back a little, "We're home free."

Satima stood next to her as the elevator door opened. Her surprised stare settling on the exact horror that they feared. The hybrid pushed a panic-stricken Blaine out of the way, accepting the biotic blast that flung her backwards into the wall. Unmoving.
Blaine ran, shooting her rifle sporadically. She sprinted into a lab, hiding behind the terminal desk. A technician’s body was beneath with her. She stared at the single gunshot to the temple of the man's head. He gave up. Should she?

Her rifle's clip had been emptied. She had a pistol left holstered at the hip. But it was gone. Must have fell out, or maybe she forgot? Oh, God! It's getting closer.

The banshee's heavy footfalls approached the doorway, her breath chilling the air. A husk like claw gripped the edge of the door, as she started to enter.

Blaine began hyperventilating. She's not a soldier. This was supposed to be a good job. A good position. Her eyes closed, as she held back a sob.

A shot was fired. She opened them to apprehensively look over the desks edge. The banshee had backed away, roaring to whatever had attacked her. Another shot fired, and the bullet hit her arm.

Satima stood at the end of the hall, two pistols aimed. She stared at the creature, tried to connect. There was nothing but static and echoes. Even her own crimsons gaze didn't faze the toothy grin, the asari abomination held. "Ok", she resolved. "I see you're not open to talking. Only killing." A stronger aim took hold, with the clips now being emptied into the banshee.

The hybrid running down the hall, spraying thermal lead death, pushing the thing back. She stood in front of the doorway to the lab Blaine had been in. Watching the creature retreat. "Let's go!"

Inside the elevator, they waited for the door to close. The banshee now warping her way to them. Blaine kept hitting the panel, cursing for it to work. Satima stared ahead, her heart frantically pounding. They won't make it.

She held out her left hand, determined to stop the banshee from hurting them. Something happened that hasn't in a while. And something more that was terrifying to her.

Red biotics flung outward, throwing the banshee back. It's cries of injury and hinderance hurt Blaine's ears. The door finally closed.

On the way down, Satima glimpsed her arm. It was covered in red husk skin. Archer said her reaper tech is gone. But he also spoke of something that was organic about it, now. If he were still here, she could ask him.

While he sat in a cell, bound to a magnetic chair.

Blaine realized how close they were getting to the lobby deck. Her fears about the hybrid and the near-death experience controlling her better judgement. She grabbed the lose pistol from the hybrid's hand. Pointing it to her head, as she stood behind. "When we get to the captain. Are you going to run?" Her voice shaky from the earlier fight.

Satima stared ahead, lowering a darting gaze that went over the lines of the floor. She knew it wouldn't matter. They all see a monster, just like the banshee. No more fighting it, no more fighting them.

"No.", she replied.

The lift's door opened, with a scene of Daniels and his squad barricading the entrance. Rifles aimed, as Blaine slowly pushed Satima out the elevator. She revealed herself. "I have the hybrid in custody."
Daniels stared in satisfaction. "And deck 5?", he wondered.

Blaine shook her head, "All dead, sir. The banshee has been heavily injured. A small team can take her out."

He stepped away from his team, now face to face with Satima. Her shorter stature didn't stop his looming glare. "Where's Archer?"

Satima's lowered gaze did not move. "I don't know.", she replied submissively.

The captain smirked in disappointment. "No surprise.", he leaned in to her. Forcing an uncomfortable feeling. "Considering you have no friends on this station. On anywhere... you foul reaper abomination." His tone so thick of vitriol. It made Satima cringe.

Blaine lowered her gun, stunned by his personal distaste of the woman that just risked her own life, to rescue hers. But she shook it off again. The hybrid may have been trying to help, but deep down she's just an experiment. She's not a person. Never was. Only a reaper.

Daniels turned to his team, shouting orders with pride. "Take the reaper-born! Put her in the reception room, bound and watched."

Two alliance soldiers complied, as he faced Blaine. "Good work, officer. You would make a fine soldier. Meantime, help secure the cages for the remaining creatures."

Remaining? They didn't kill all the reaper things from below? Why? They're dangerous!

Blaine saluted sloppily but followed her orders. She glimpsed a vacant stare from the hybrid as a soldier hit the back of her leg, to make her kneel. While the other bound her wrists.

Her conflicted feelings will get the better of her, if she doesn't leave this deck and fast.

Minos Wasteland

The Normandy navigated through the system, as Joker followed the coordinates to the letter. Shepard had already armored up, allowing James to help.

She didn't want too but going it all alone could prove a problem if this station got wind of her heinous actions against Grey. One she can't make up her mind on whether or not she regrets.

Outside the cockpit, the captain and Vega waited for the ship to dock with the large station. There was no traffic. No comms open. It was dark.

Something had happened. And if Archer is truly alive, and on this alliance installment, this "division". There's no guessing the horrors he's inflicted in it. Including to Satima.

Shepard stepped to Joker, leaning over him. "Hurry, Jeff. We need to get in there and find her."

He heard the desperation and pain in his captain's voice. Joker worried too. Satima didn't deserve what they did to her. Locking that poor kid away, and not letting Shepard see her, or know where she was.

What has the alliance become?

EDI confirmed approach and docking success. Shepard taking off into the bio chamber before being released into the docking tube, along with Vega.
The weapons were primed and ready, when Miranda suddenly showed. Her small pistol at the hip. "Shepard.", she called.

The captain stood akimbo and fully annoyed. "Lawson, I asked you to stay behind. You're still recovering."

Miranda shook her head, "Don't worry about me, Shepard. I can fight.

Vega put his rifle over one shoulder, sighing aloud as they waited in the tube. "Don't worry, Captain. I can carry you both.", he winked.

Shepard eyed him, while Lawson quietly chuckled.

Further down the tube, they cautiously opened the docking door to shouts and orders.

The sounds of heavy debris and equipment moving around, alerted the team to slow. Shepard held out a hand. Looking out to the open lobby doors, they could see a group of alliance soldiers. Miranda stepped closer to Shepard. "I wouldn't trust them. They assaulted me, put me in a box for a week."

"Yeah.", the captain spoke, carefully watching them as the elevator in the far part of the room opened.

Two men held down a husk creature. It yelled and squirmed from them. They kicked it, dragging the thing to a cage. Once it was placed in there, someone came running out of another room, unseen.

'Wait! Don't hurt him! I can control him, give me a chance!"

The woman's voice sounded familiar. Shepard made a start, but Miranda held her down gently. "Wait, Charlotte.", she cautioned.

Watching uneasily, the team observed Captain Daniels walking among another squad. He glared at the voice from the opposite end and nodded to his men where she was. The sound of a rifle hit, and subsequent groan of a blow, prompted Shepard to stand.

She was ready to take them all on.

Vega and Miranda followed, when the husk creature ran out of his cage. Roaring at them. He lunged towards Daniels, who smugly held out a pistol and aimed.

The shot stopped the creature in his tracks, as he laid dead with a thud. Satima stared in shock. Unable to do anything but watch this poor man be gunned down like a feral animal.

A woman stepped forward with a stunned expression. "Sir, the instructions were to keep this subject alive. Alliance command has sent the evacuation vessel and wanted a confirmed retrieval." Blaine gulped, holding the pad with all the information. She didn't glance to Satima, who was still staring.

"We have what we need, right here.", he turned to the hybrid. "She's enough for them."

Daniels was done with this place. It was a bad idea to start with. The alliance couldn't give straight orders, or answers. Intel was constantly shifting. Like there were myriad sides to command.

He approached Satima, aimed his pistol to her head. All the while Shepard glared, aiming her rifle to his from the shadows.

Daniels glowered at the hybrid suspiciously. "You wouldn't be trying any reaper tricks on us? Are you?"
She sat up on her knees with a defiant stare. "I can't control you. And if I did, I'd put the next bullet in your brain."

He scoffed, shaking his head in disbelief with a wry chuckle. Daniels started to ready his shot when a voice shouted to them.

Miranda stopped Shepard from killing him, and walked out in the open. They need a living testimony to this place. "Is the alliance now killing incarcerated prisoners?"

The barricade soldiers, and a few security officers took aim. Already shaken from the earlier skirmishes on the previous decks. Many people had died.

Captain Daniels took aim with them, now laughing aloud in stunned surprise at Shepard's presence. "When that trade vessel revealed our location to the council, I knew it would be a matter of time." He scowled. "Did you ask the droid to help you arrange this madness? Or was it just fate?"

His accusatory tone echoed around them.

Shepard never lowered her weapon, settling a commanding expression to him. "You deserved whatever Archer unleashed. Your stupidity astounds even the simplest vorcha.", she mocked.

Vega and Miranda stood on each side of her, ready to fight and take off with Satima.

Blaine stood forward, shaky and unsure. She didn't want a shootout. If Shepard was right to come here, stopping this disorder. Then she wants to help by mediating between the two parties. "Sir.", Blaine began. "Let Captain Shepard through. If she's here to help clean this mess..."

Daniels turned on her in anger. "She's not here to help! She wants that thing sitting over there!" He paced back and forth in the middle of the lobby floor. "I served on the Inglorious when it was overrun by those infected bugs, watched good soldiers survive the reapers, only to be torn to pieces-ripped a part by those things!" He shouted, waving his weapon about, as his men stood guard.

Feeling the pain and hate for the way Shepard allowed her reaper brat to bring chaos and destruction to them.

"I also commanded a ship. Ordered men and women to die, all so you could have the advantage of bringing this galaxy together against the reapers."

Shepard tried to block out his venting, but everything he said sounded right. People died, horribly, sometimes alone. While she played mother to a girl she never had. Ruth's accusations echoed painfully in her mind, now.

"I'm sorry."

Daniels stopped speaking and followed the same stare Shepard had towards the hybrid.

The girl struggled with her own emotions, a gaze that became watery narrowed in pity to him. "I am truly, sorry... for what I did."

She moved her wrists uncomfortably, her body unable to sit for too long on sore knees. "I have done horrible things." Satima looked away in shame. "The reapers raised me to be the unstable thing I am. And no matter how hard I try to do the right thing, it always backfires."

Daniels watched, unmoved but listening. The rest of the room was quiet.

"Throw me in the darkest cell you can find. Seal me in, lock me away from everyone. Keep this
galaxy safe from what I am.", tears dropped one by one from her teal eyes. "I won't fight you. I'll be
good."

Satima's agonizing apology stung Blaine. Shepard couldn't believe how docile the girl had become. The
fire and rage inside her hybrid daughter had been extinguished. What did Archer do?

Captain Daniels averted his hateful stare. Now resuming a determined glare to Shepard. "Even a
monster can recognize its own evil.", he blamed.

Shepard loathed him, wanted to put her hands on him! She needed to tear his words apart, and stuff
them down Ruth's throat. There was an idea that suddenly came to mind, and hopefully one that
would work.

"I am using Spectre authority to take her away from here. Alliance command will have to speak with
the council about this. Until then, she's in my custody. Not yours!"

Miranda felt relieved. Finally, the captain is using her wit and not brute force. But Daniels would not
comply. "I don't recognize any spectre authority, or the council's here. Only alliance command. And
I will use the full force of my command, Shepard... on you.", he warned.

Satima shook her head. "No... wait..."

One of the barricade guards had enough. Shepard was no longer loyal to the alliance or her people. She
was indoctrinated, just like the rest of them. He opened fire, missing her entirely, but aiming for
Satima. The shot bounced off the floor in front of her, causing her to fall to the side. She witnessed
the tragedy, bound and unable to do anything.

She won't use control. She can't!

Shepard opened fire, shooting the guard in the shoulder. Another one fired, as they all took cover.

Vega used the doorway, while suppressing any advanced soldiers. "This is loco! Why would they do
this?"

"Something is wrong here.", Miranda informed, dodging a bullet and letting a warp catch a soldier.
"Whatever the alliance had planned with this station, was sabotaged from the start."

Blaine lowered herself to the deck's floor, crawling to Satima. She remembered the hybrid had hid a
scalpel in her boot. Reaching for it, while the girl watched in surprise. "I almost forgot about that!", she mused.

The officer smiled, using the slender knife to cut the plastic zip ties so harshly wrapped around
Satima's skin. Red marks from the material stung as the ties were finally loosened. Blaine tried
helping her up, "Come on. We can take cover in the reception room and use the fire sprinklers to
distract them."

Satima smirked, "Good idea!"

They kept to the wall, carefully sprinting to the room. The hybrid opening the door. She had settled
at the desk, using the computer to set the sprinklers. Blaine watched with a hurried expression.

An alarm came on, shocking the two squads out of their determined battle. Water rained down on
them, causing the soldiers to stop. Daniels was furious. He shouted orders for them to keep firing, but
it didn't work.
Shepard signaled for her team to stop the gun fire, waiting to step out and reprimand Daniels. It all seemed to finally end with the fresh water clearing up a once hostile atmosphere.

Satima stood with a warm smile to her new friend.

Blaine was elated at her choice, feeling better that she didn't succumb to whatever the hell was happening to them all. Turning to face Daniels and his pistol.

He fired. Shooting a bullet through her neck.

She fell back on the floor, grasping at her throat, trying to breath. Her mouth filling with warm blood.

Satima fell to her knees, taking her hand and putting pressure to Blaine's wound. Blood still pooled, without restraint. Blaine tried talking, struggling while she drowned in her blood.

The barricaded soldiers couldn't believe it. They were ready to watch the reaper born die, and ready to fight their way-the right way, through Shepard's command.

Daniels stepped back, gun to his side. His defeated gaze lowered in despair. "I knew the hybrid would control one of us. Attempt to make her escape. It's a shame she chose an innocent woman to do it."

Miranda viewed the doomed woman's impending death, while Vega stared in vehemence.

Shepard stood to the left of Daniels, a hateful expression caught his attention. "An innocent you murdered.", she accused.

The gasps of the officer were louder.

Satima held the wound still, watching her fade. Blaine fixed her dilated stare to the hybrid. Trying to speak. "Don't...", Satima insisted with a sad smile.

Blaine's gasps stopped with a transparent vacant gaze. It was over.

The hybrid closed her eyes, letting out a shaky breath. Everyone was silent, and solemn. This didn't have to happen.

Shepard spoke, "Let's go, Satima. There's nothing left we can do."

Satima opened her eyes again to nod in rehearsed compliance. She slowly stood, unable to glance to Daniels or any others. Walking with her mother and Vega to the entrance. Miranda spat in disgust to Daniels. She soon followed behind.

Daniels overlooked his actions and watched the red blood circle the pretty blonde hair of Security Officer Blaine. He resumed his blank stare to view the hybrid turning around, sprinting to him.

She raged at him with a readied fist. Applying it expertly to his jaw and knocking him down. Satima held him with her body, delivering blow after blow. An uncontrollable violence she once expressed to someone else that hurt her.

Vega wrapped his arms around Satima, lifting her off. He threw her down to the deck, as she stood up quickly, ready to kill Daniels. Shepard held the girl back, pulling the hybrid to the docking tube. Her screams of rage echoing around them.

Miranda observed the bloody and beaten captain. She signaled to one of the stunned officers. "You. Get him to your med bay, quickly. Keep him stable. Shepard will want him alive to explain why the
alliance is allowing reapers to roam freely on "division" stations."

Chapter End Notes

Every time I post a chapter, a grey hair appears.

Thanks for stopping by!
Chapter Summary

Plans come to light. Hackett meets the Normandy at the Argos Station. Can Shepard escape the consequences of her actions? Or will everyone else pay for self-interest?
Rated M

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In relay transit

Archer observes the last ten minutes of the lobby on the Argos from his shuttle's terminal screen. Satima became a weapon of uncaged violence, unleashing her anger on a loyal fool of the alliance. A hate that had been simmering under the surface for some time.

A hate that was meant for him.

He felt pity towards her. She did everything she could to defuse the situation. But to no avail. An innocent died, and the reapers once again proved their power in paranoid whispers.

Whispers that are relaying off Satima's implant. Archer plans to investigate the coordinates of the relay.

Did the sentarian's know? Was this something planned by their people?

Rasa stood behind him, watching the vid replay. A devious grin and obnoxious laughter betrayed her once solemn face.

Archer chose to ignore her. This poor girl's usefulness will soon burn out. She too is bound to their will. They are all.

Thalia Medical Research Industries-Illium
Twenty-four hours after the discovery.

Garrus sat alone in his room at the facility. The asari gave him a nice spot, with a single window view of the skyline. A rising sun that spread orange rays across building roofs. Many skycars zoomed past, as he took this time to think.

Nerris is working hard to put a case together against the unfair advantage the alliance has taken. As soon as Valene is done with the analysis of the new implant, he'll be on his way to the citadel. Standing in front of the council himself to present his findings.

Liara kept to herself, usually alone on the enhanced cargo vessel she now uses. Javik had apparently asked to stay on Mars. Guarding the beacon and trying to commune with it's past, and secrets.

His terminal suddenly pinged to life, snapping him out of thoughts. Garrus took a seat quickly, tapping the icon to view the messages from his data mail. Two were new. One from Palaven, which is obviously his father. And the other a quick message from Liara.
He opened hers first.

"I've word about Shepard. She's done something, that I'm not sure, I can fix. Please meet with me in Valene's office. It will be secure."

He gulped hard. What did Charlie do? Or did someone do something to her?

Flashes of his family in peril punched straight to the gut. Garrus had to calm himself, or he'd be on the next flight off this planet!

His father also sent word. Opening the mail hastily to read in such a hurried pace, Garrus almost misread it.

"Latellia has found your answers. Nerris will be waiting for you to return soon, to petition the council for a private audience. Of which I'm sure you will be granted. Unfortunately, your wife has decided to play rogue, and personally attack a fellow alliance officer. This could have a serious effect on your efforts, and Satima's future. You need to stay in touch with Shepard, she's a mother in pain. You should've been there more often at the beginning, son."

Garrus could almost punch through the screen. His father had a quad to insinuate the he wasn't an attentive enough husband?!

Wincing from the hurtful past of his sick mother, Garrus remembered how he made the choice to fight the reapers with Charlie. Instead of going home and saying goodbye to her. Solanna couldn't forgive him.

Even if it met the reapers were delayed for six more months.

She called his mission, and words... garbage. Putting it politely. He felt so insecure about whether he was doing the right thing. Those feelings go all the way back to Omega, and further to the day he started investigating Saren.

Spirits.

Turning off the terminal, Garrus lowered his head in defeat. Life beats him down enough, he doesn't need his father to remind him of his duties. Charlie had pushed away, refusing help.

Yes, he knows she's hurting! But, so is he.

Poor Natalie. She needs her parents. His youngest is all alone on the citadel, waiting for them to finally come home.

Valene's Office

Liara paced, biting her nails so hard, she bit into flesh. A quick yelp forced her to stop. Only to stare out of the large windows to the biggest and loftiest city, near the Terminus. She could do it again. This time as the Shadow Broker.

Smirking in thought, shaking her head at the idea. "If that title even means something anymore."

Goddess. What is she thinking?

Liara turned swiftly as the door opened, Garrus stepping through with a depressed mood hanging like a dark cloud. "I need to know what she did." he asked.
He slowly sits down on a couch, easing his taller self to attempt comfort. His mind full of scenarios. She stood in front of him, arms crossed and concerned. "Shepard attacked Rear Admiral Grey. Remember her? From the trial."

Garrus nodded, leaning out to stare away at the floor ahead.

Liara tilted her head slightly, angling to see his gaze. "She stabbed and shot the woman for information about Satima's whereabouts. Shepard got what she wanted, Garrus. But it's going to come at a heavy price."

He felt sick. This wasn't like Shepard. Garrus stood slowly, a vacant stare to veil the amount of hurt he was dealing with. From their accusations. "And what do you want me to do about it?"

Releasing her arms to relax at the sides, Liara's expression changed from confused to vexed. "Had her six."

The broker began leaving, as Garrus yelled. "I can't make her stay! Dammit, Liara! She's "Shepard"." His voice broke up at the name. A defeated gaze looked away, "What am I supposed to do with that? How am I going to help her?"

Liara stood at the doorway, upset. "This is my fault. All of it. I knew from the beginning, right after the reaper's defeat."

Garrus returned a clear stare, wondering what she meant. The notion she has known something for the past two years, and not tell him, both frightened and angered him.

"What did you know, Liara?" his sub vocals low and probing. Garrus stepped closer to her. He can't take anymore secrets. No more regret of what he could've done.

The agony in her deep blue eyes met his stare. Liara opened her mouth to speak, suddenly fearful of damaging her friendship with him. It would be cruel to not say anything at all, though. Closing to swallow harshly, she proceeded. "It wasn't Satima who is the most dangerous, and unpredictable... Garrus." She looked to see how he is taking this. "I've been studying this aspect, for some time. And unfortunately, it is real."

He kept staring, unnerving her from continuing, but she pushed forward with it. "It has always been Shepard. All this time. She's endured the heaviest amount of indoctrination; a person can stand. It was planned, after I confirmed the diagnosis, that while Satima stayed on Illium, and received treatment."

Liara could feel the room shift. The little delicate scales on the back of her neck fluttered in fear. He didn't speak, only listen. She almost took a step back. Why? It would never be in his nature to suddenly attack her.

Her eyes shifted from him to dart back and forth in this awful thought. However, he did attack Satima, twice. Garrus can be irrationally paranoid. Oh, goddess! Are they all indoctrinated?

Snapping to attention, Liara blurted the rest without hesitation. "Shepard was to be taken to the Argos. Archer has extensive knowledge of indoctrination, Garrus. All I'm trying to do, is save her. And Satima. I loved Shepard."

This fell flat on a raging mind. How could she even say this to him?

Love Charlie?
Garrus has no sympathy for this woman. He took such a step, it seemed he leaped right in front of her at the doorway. His avian gaze fuming with such hatred at Liara for her damn schemes!

His mandibles clicked, turian mouth moving in a barely contained grit of disapproval. Garrus grabbed her by the lab uniform she favored so much. Pulling this asari close to his face, a threat he would pose to any person that came between him and his mate. "Don't you dare, ever presume to love Charlie. She's my wife, my mate!"

Liara's expression became abhorrent at his verbal warning towards her. She could warp him out the window.

Struggling between Garrus's accusations and anger, Liara pushed away the intrusive thoughts of hurting him. Goddess help her, something is controlling them all!

He let go, feeling it no use to act like a crazed lover. Turning away swiftly to show her his armored back, Garrus spoke in a loathing tone. "Your misguided affections for Shepard, might have destroyed her for good. Never mind her reputation with the alliance, and the galaxy." Shaking his head, disappointed. "Only you can make this right. For Shepard, and Satima."

Liara tried to speak, but to no avail. He won't listen. Not today. No one could see how Shepard was coming apart so rapidly. Her actions were either ignored or justified by a scared council.

How dare she hide everything, from everyone! Even Javik did not know the real reasons. All the while, Liara tried to figure out how Ruth managed to obstruct the alliance's plans and put Satima away on Argos.

That poor girl, at the mercy of the one person who tormented her on the Hive station. She was right weeks ago, and she's right again now. Shepard will never forgive her. And neither will Garrus.

_argos orbit_
_minos wasteland_

Satima's rage quieted down in the docking tube. Shepard didn't have to pull her anymore. She seemed detached, pushing herself to leave the station behind.

At the hatch door, Joker swiveled to see a relieved Captain and her daughter. Instead he got a good look at blood stained hands, and an empty glance.

Good God, what happened?

Shepard waited in the war room, while Satima stayed on deck three. Chockwas was going to have to look at her. See what had been done to the girl during the past week and a half.

An alliance vessel is coming. And with it, doom for her family. She can run, but it would be futile.

Daniels lays in the med-station of that sickening place. He deserved to be beaten down, like the rabid dog he is. Satima did well.

Overlooking the holo interface in front of her, she remembers the reaper war. Satima standing here, hanging over the image of the crucible. Trying to find a way to save them all.

"Captain. I have received a command to my neural interface from an alliance ship. The code is from Admiral Hackett."

EDI's words hammered into her thoughts loudly. What exactly can Hackett do, to prevent the
alliance from hurting them more? Her spectre status forces a neutral hand from the council. But would the galaxy split itself on her behalf?

Shepard sighs loudly, smoothing her shortened red hair back. Emerald eyes stare ahead into a bleak future.

She leaves for the cockpit, stepping behind Joker. Opening the command console via her omni-tool. The feeling of intense nostalgia filling her mood, from the time before all of this. When she had won her spectre status, and the right to fly the Normandy.

When Anderson had handed over a life he was denied. And gave her the chance she needed to show them all how worthy she was.

With a heavy sigh, Shepard proceeds her comms command. She must let her crew, her family know... what's going to happen.

It is not their fault. Only hers.

"This is Captain Shepard. As most of you know, I have been pushing a mission as spectre to find the classified hybrid."

Joker turns his head in stunned surprise to her settled gaze.

"I've... done things, I'm not proud of.", her voice breaking slightly. Shepard catches herself from emotions, returning to her speech. "But the alliance we were once loyal to, has lied to us. Using my daughter in unsanctioned experiments. Using reaper tech, we all know... is dangerous."

Satima stares at herself in the ladies room, before vigorously washing Blaine's blood off her hands. She rubs them raw, burning and stinging the flesh to clean her mistakes.

Shepard's voice echoed in faded sentences. She can't undo this so easily with words.

Joker returns to the view of the Minos system. Bright stars burn in the cold of space, while his captain tries to explain what he fears might destroy this family once and for all.

"Their iniquitous behavior forced my hand, and in the process, I have committed a criminal act to gain knowledge of this place."

She grips the edge of Jeff's chair, "I will do all that I can, to make sure this family is not held accountable for my actions. That all of you are not viewed in the same light as me. You deserve the best future. And most importantly, my full gratitude... for always believing in me."

Shepard turned off the comms for the ship. Jeff shook his head, standing in upset. He stared at Charlotte, reaching out to her arm, tightening a concerned grip. "Whatever you did... I'm not leaving your side or command. I don't care if I sit in a cell for the rest of my life. You're my sister, my best friend. And just like Garrus, or Liara... or Ashley. If you're going to hell, then I'm coming with you."

EDI stepped to them, her mechanical hand smoothly, and gently touching over Joker's. A confident smile to Shepard. "I will always be here for you, Charlotte. Whatever help you need, only ask." As Shepard was surprised to hear her name being spoken by EDI.

Traynor emerged behind them, with a few crew members. They saluted.

Shepard felt such relief. They were always going to have her back, no matter what. The only question now burning in her mind, was Garrus. Will he too, always have her six?
Satima made her way to the medbay, greeting Doctor Chockwas. The moment of her mother's speech had passed, as the good doctor stopped scanning after listening to Shepard's comms. She gazed at Satima, watery eyes mixed with a worried expression. "My God... What did your mother do to bring you home?"

Satima didn't have the answers. She hoped Shepard did not succumb to despair and hurt someone. But if she did, Satima won't abandon her. She knows all too well, what it's like to fail.

Hackett's ship came through the relay. A vessel that brought the feeling of dread for the crew. Shepard stood on the deck of the CIC, waiting... unwavering. Whatever news he'll bring, she deals with it. If her little family is left alone, it'll be worth it. Worth the sacrifice.

Docking tubes were set into place, as Joker sat nervously. A cold sweat prompting him to take off his cap constantly.

Hackett boarded.

He was followed by a small team of marines, like before when they were planning the reaper war.

Are they going to take her? Shepard stood erect. She's a captain, now. One step closer to the rank of admiral herself. Or was, rather.

"Captain. War room.", he ordered sternly.

The marines stood on the deck, as the two war heroes trekked to the infamous room. Staring opposite each other, Shepard began standing to attention, when Hackett narrowed his gaze and spoke. "Before you display yourself as an alliance soldier, remember who it is you're trying to fool."

Shepard stopped midway, keeping her arms still to her sides. Her resolute gaze cut through the once usual file and rank. He didn't stand before a subordinate of command. Hackett was in front of a woman with every option at Her own command.

The aged admiral shook his head slowly, breathing aloud in the most depressed mood he's had since losing the majority of his fifth fleet to the reapers. "You've betrayed your duty, captain. ", he began. "Assaulted an admiral and threatened her family."

He stared in personal disappointment to her, "Do you understand what you've done?"

Shepard averted a gaze, only to return a twitchy expression. "Do you know what they were doing, Hackett? Did you know they harbored a dangerous reaper villain?"

Hackett sighed. Ruth told him nothing about the Argos. Only the rage filled orders of Grey filled his thoughts, as he was sent by command to apprehend Shepard. And get Satima back into their custody. "Is she on this vessel, Shepard?"

The captain crossed her arms, now bothered by his ignorance. "Yes. Medbay with Chockwas."

Chockwas finished scanning the hybrid, putting in the database her findings. Shepard had walked in, the admiral in tow. She turned to face them, nodding in respect. "Admiral, Captain. Here for Satima's evaluation?" Can no one leave this poor girl alone?!

Shepard motioned in agreement to the doctor, as Hackett began to cautiously step closer to the half-breed child the reapers helped create. But then, it would not be appropriate to call her a child anymore.
It had been some time since they last stood in the same room together. Since his promise that was broken, to help her from the effects of indoctrination.

This young woman openly gazed back at him. Unafraid, unlike before. Her relaxed demeanor surprised him, while dark teal eyes searched his face.

"Satima. I have questions to ask you. Are you able to answer them?", he wondered aloud.

The hybrid gestured silently, awaiting his query.

Hackett stood straighter, now trying to use his knowledge to read her. "During your... stay. On the Argos. Did you ever encounter a reaper droid?"

The hybrid's face suddenly switched from solemnly docile, to a sarcastic laugh. She gave a wry smile, so genuine it made everyone nervous. Satima looked away, shaking off the humor. "Archer. His name is Archer. He was given full command over many experimentations through me."

Shepard could feel her blood boil. She knew it! Those shits put her daughter through more torture. How in the hell is Satima to finally be free of her past abuse, if this galaxy keeps treating her this way?!

Admiral Hackett glanced to Chockwas, who was standing behind them. Her saddened stare over Shepard, and the girl, spoke enough. "Doctor. I'd like to review your medical findings."

She left to her desk, retrieving the tablet with uploaded information on Satima. Hackett viewed the data, while the doctor spoke. "Signs of electro-shock. Probably to stabilize her from responding to their experiments. Mostly used in batarien camps, years before."

Shepard stood next to Hackett overviewing with him. Chockwas continued with the medical analysis. "Her collar bone has been broken. Unusually so. I'd thought to find signs of physical trauma, but there was none to inflict this injury. Although, there was trauma from an attack elsewhere, as I found traces of medi-gel applications that were mostly recent."

Satima stared past them, remembering all that had happened in the past few hours. Her mother now gazed with a teary expression. It quickly turned into hostile bitterness.

"There has been tampering with her sentarian implant. Seems someone had tried a manual neural upload, via computer interface. And by manual, I mean something like this." Chockwas quickly stepped to her counter, retrieving a long needle. "It seems plenty of illegal crude medical instruments were used to obtain whatever information they were looking for."

Hackett lifted his steel gaze to the hybrid. "And did this Archer, conduct these types of experiments on you?"

She turned to him, shaking her head gently. "Archer tried to keep Nox from dissecting me alive. The good doctors of the alliance didn't want me dead. But they don't have a problem listening to me scream."

Shepard was shaking from rage. Voices echoed around her, whispers crept in her mind. It seemed so easy to go back and make them hurt. Put a bullet through Grey's skull. Drag Ruth from her safe alliance office, and...

"Shepard? Are you listening?", Chockwas asked.

The captain looked at the doctor quickly, blinking in confusion, "I was... thinking about something.
Continue, doctor."

Hackett gave the tablet back to the doctor, worry of the captain's mental state. "She revealed this is evidence that you were right. Unfortunately, Shepard. You tried to kill Grey. Even as a spectre, I don't know how you can justify that. To anyone."

He let her down. Anderson would've spotted the problem and used his personal friendship to connect with Shepard. Putting away her desires for revenge, and find a way to locate Satima, nonviolently.

Satima stared at her mother, now getting off the medical cot. Slowly approaching, standing face to face with Shepard.
"You should've thought of Natalie first."

Those very words stung Shepard to the core. It was as if an unspecified force, that blinded her to the future of those consequences, were lifted. She couldn't meet her daughter's gaze. They were accusing, loud and piercing. Something she inherited from her father.

QEC-Normandy

Hackett waited as his call finished going through. Ruth's image showed, along with another. Chief of Command, Darwin Kester.

His narrowed copper gaze followed a fierce expression. This man was the closest in line to full command of the alliance. Ruth, Grey and Hackett himself, all under a command by someone who could very much rival Shepard.

He was new, an upcoming unsung hero that became overshadowed by Shepard's longer service and harrowing story.

Kester was a lieutenant-commander. Following the orders of Anderson groundside, on earth. He had many victories but witnessed many horrors. His unfailing confidence helped plenty to believe that Shepard could bring the galaxy together and win against the reapers.

He did more than was asked of him and suffered many scars along the way. While Shepard became Captain, received accommodations in duty. Kester had been given command of earth's strongest military. And this information about the hybrid, and Argos... did not please him.

Furthermore, the man was entirely unreadable. Maybe he lived a hard life before the alliance? Maybe it was in his nature.

One thing is certain, he had a strange concern for Shepard. Loyalty? Was he entrusted to always safeguard the Shepard's? No matter the consequences?

He knows he's reaching out too far. Kester knew about the command's decision to put Satima in an indoctrination facility. But Argos? Could that have been his decision, also?

Hackett feared the worst was to come. Kester could be an ally of Ruth and put an end to the Shepard's for a long time. He didn't want to see Charlotte incarcerated again. And did not want the hybrid to be tormented by the cruel, once Cerberus scientists, the alliance had brought on.

Kester sighed aloud, deep and most likely with some anger. "Admiral Hackett, I understand you are currently on the Normandy."

Standing to attention, hands behind his back in respect, Hackett stared ahead to answer. "Sir, I am."
The tense setting created these silent intervals. Kester seemed to be thinking, when Ruth blurted in rage. "Have you apprehended her, yet?! And that thing? Are you an alliance soldier, or is protecting a criminal more important?"

Fiery amber eyes glared towards Hackett. He didn't answer, only waited as Kester raised a brow in suspicion. "Hackett.", he began, "I am ordering you to bring the Normandy, along with Captain Shepard, and her daughter. To earth. Await further instruction when you arrive through the relay."

Ruth stared in stunned confusion, as Kester ordered the admiral without asking any of her questions. He ended the call abruptly.

As they moved from the qec room on earth, Ruth pushed her way in front of him. "You were given your position because you know firsthand the horrors of the reapers. Why are you not ordering Hackett to arrest Shepard?!"

Kester stood silently, now eying her to move back. Ruth complied, following him eagerly. "It has been made to my attention, that the orders I gave earlier this month, were not followed to the letter. That some of my top-ranking officers in this military had taken matters, and my orders, in their own hands."

Ruth stopped, realizing what he was getting to. She shook it off, "Sir. I am right to switch the command, to keep this galaxy safe. No one else knew what was planned, except for that asari."

At the lift to the alliance lobby. Kester turned to her. "We knew that Shepard was in no stable condition to continue with her missions. We agreed to take our hero captain for extensive studies on Argos. Use that droid to bring Shepard back from the hold the reapers still have on her. And you went out of your way, defying my orders as your superior, to punish a child?"

He smirked, getting into the lift, alone. His copper gaze stared at Ruth. "Go to the citadel. Make your case. Further sully the alliance name, for your revenge."

Ruth fearfully stared in confusion. "What are you about to do, sir?", she gulped.

Kester was unexpressive before the lift's door closed.

Hackett stood back, breathing a small sigh of relief. Kester over rides Ruth's command. He didn't say to arrest Shepard, only bring her to earth. If she'll come willingly.

Outside the QEC, he bumped into Satima. Viewing a worried glance from the half-breed woman. She lifted her worn gaze, beginning to speak. "Hand me back to them. Say I indoctrinated Shepard, and that's why she did whatever it was to get me back. It was my fault. Natalie needs a family, and I can't let my mistakes ruin that for her."

The words from Satima troubled him. Hackett tilted his head to observe this young woman, and her secret sacrifice.

Putting a gentle hand to her shoulder, the aged admiral tried to smile. Wrinkles formed around his mouth, and eyes. A steel colored gaze settling on her. "You both do so much to protect each other, that your situation remains on the edge of a knife, because Shepard's never settle."

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Satima scrunched her round face in apparent confusion. She didn't entirely understand what Admiral Hackett meant. "Sir... I..."

Hackett removed his hand with a chuckle. "I'll probably lose my position because of you two. Hell, I know I will." His own amusement at the thought still puzzling the poor girl. Looking at her concern,
he continued. "I believe you know, or at least feel... something is wrong in this galaxy. The alliance has made a terrible mistake by using the very tech that almost killed us all. You, Satima... are a counter to it. And these people in their safe offices, guarded ships, have forgotten that. I know something is happening here."

He shook his head this time, no longer amused with this conversation. "It... isn't too clear. But, I know you can see it. Better than any of us."

She began realizing, now.

"That's why, I'm going to escort the Normandy back to the citadel. To the council. A place the alliance has no jurisdiction. Not even on a spectre."

He swallowed, "And where a trial cannot be made private without the rest of the galaxy knowing."

Satima wanted to believe he's right about this. That her mother could use spectre status as an excuse. But no one seems to be following the rules anymore.

Hackett led the Normandy from the Minos system, all the way back to the Serpent Nebula. Daniels had been stabilized onboard the vessel of Hackett's command, and woke from his assault by Satima. He cursed loudly from the medbay. Vowing to have the reaper-born turned into a living example.

Ignored for the most part by the admiral, Daniels quieted down. Deciding to wait until they reached alliance command. Only they didn't.

With the Normandy docked, Shepard led Satima to the embassy. Hackett in tow.

A representative of the council had arrived to greet them. Khalee wanted to make sure Shepard was supported, despite the reports about Rear Admiral Grey.

Garrus had returned. Agripenex with his father, along with Nerris and Latellia, arrived from Palaven.

Everyone was going to meet openly inside the presidium tower. Not a small office, not an enclosed trial. But an assembly.

Soon, the alliance officers would arrive. Presenting the real danger. Both Shepard's will be on trial. Will there be a different outcome this time? Or will the two women rebel and become traitors of the galaxy. All for the safety of one another?

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: Bioware/EA own all ME story, characters, etc. I do not.
The Game

Chapter Summary

Consequence are at a standstill. Alliances are torn apart. The ideals of family, become a faded dream.

Citadel Tower
Council Chambers

Politicians and bureaucrats filled the audience chambers before the petitioner's stage. Those of the council races stood in groups of loud crowds, while many of the non-council species waited in packs.

Eagerly listening, watching as a second committee was summoned again, in the case of the hybrid.

Ashley paced around the top of the stairs. She waited for Hackett to show with Shepard, and her child. If her previous commander did attack Grey, how can she even look at her the same way again?

During these two horrible weeks of mixed intel, all Ashley could do was blame herself for the alliance's lies. But since Shepard has decided to be this unhinged version of an antihero, she'll have no choice but to side with them.

Stopping briefly with a loud sigh, Ashley couldn't believe her thoughts. She blamed Shepard for Cerberus's actions, all because they brought her back. Hounding her about the attack on the Mar's base, as her then commander, accepted the complaints and accusations.

Joker was right. She's an uptight, by the book-alliance bitch. And sometimes, a little too proud of it.

Gasps were heard among the loud crowds. The spectre looked up to the very woman she's been agonizing over. Hackett was stern as usual, never giving away his truer feelings on any matter.

Shepard didn't seem shamed, or disturbed. In fact, she gazed before her in a justified manner. How?

How can she walk in here, and say what she did was right?

Opposite ends of the stage were being filled by the representatives of each division. Military, science, reapers... and opinion. Strong ones. Shepard stood with Hackett on the right side, eying Ashley as she stayed with the alliance committee.

Rear Admiral Grey had a cane, limping along side Chief Admiral Ruth Marsden. Both women were narrowing a predatory gaze, one that could almost be a threat to Shepard. She smirked considering it. Neither of these women had the skill or the balls to put her away.

Shepard lifted a sure brow, staring with a fixed cocky grin.

Khalee had Satima in the private council chamber. Tevos and Valern already began taking their council positions, waiting a little impatiently. The salarian was always a nervous bird.

Daxis relayed his arrival from the docks with Garrus and his own division. Agrippenex showed an
hour before.

With the alliance now ready, and Shepard being represented by the council spectre authority. All that was left were for the turians, and hybrid to show.

Councilor Recess Chamber

Satima sat in the firm chair uncomfortably. She can't seem to settle down. There's no reason to fear anything anymore. All their intentions are always quite clear. Being around Archer again, has closed some older terrors from hive, though.

He didn't directly harm or torture her. She was... almost equal to him. He even suggested she was in the role of Reaper, now. How odd. So horribly odd, and wrong.

But Satima played his game. It seemed safer and in her better interests.

Nox would've damaged her permanently. In any way that gave him progress finding the key to indoctrination, and the reapers.

Unfortunately, the only damage he'd been successful in so far, was physical. She wondered what they did with her samples, wincing to herself, as a painfully sharp ache disturbed the nerve endings to her plated spine.

Khalee touched the hybrid's shoulder, briefly alerting her. A glance was all the girl gave. The councilor took a seat across, hoping to help the hybrid relax before the meeting. "We are on your side, if you're worried about that."

Satima nodded, "Thank you." She lifted a hopeless gaze, her mouth contorting to move but nothing came out. The hybrid shook her head, staring off in upset.

With a sympathetic sigh, Khalee waited with Shepard's child. Minutes passed by unbearably. Her omni device pinging to the impatience of the rest of the council. The crowd outside in the great chambers were getting restless.

Finally, Daxis arrived. He walked through without a word, settling his veiled gaze on Satima. The councilor nodded to the doorway, as Nerris came in, followed by Garrus. His avian stare searching to the hybrid.

It's been long enough under the torturous care of the alliance. He wondered what she went through, quietly shutting his mind in case he forces awful images from an overactive imagination. She stares quietly, before sitting up, standing in place. A grave expression shadowed any hope of a happy reunion.

Daxis speaks, breaking the uneasy feeling of the room. "It's time we begin the summons. There's a lot on the table, and a lot more at stake." He faced Satima, "Councilor Tevos has voted in agreement that the asari division can help you. Their open invitation has been made public. No more secret arrangements will be made in your supposed health and benefit."

Khalee stepped closer to Satima, "That means this will be your choice. We know the alliance has accused you of murder, and deliberately unleashing infected rachni on one of their fleets. However, while you were on the Argos, information was pieced together. Which clearly defines the sentarians putting you in a position of command (so to speak) without first testing your mental capacity to do so."

Satima raised a brow, confused mostly by the longer explanation of this woman. Nerris could see the
reason quickly. He offered his own, simpler version, sympathetically. "They knew you were indoctrinated, and still used you to service their military. Usually an administrative no-no."

He stepped closer, continuing his report. "But, since the sentarian's laws do not apply with our galactic ones, it can be excused as diplomatic difference. You were banished by them but are still classified as sentarian. Therefore, you're here on quite a loose diplomatic immunity."

Garrus smirked in surprise, with an elevated mood that put him in definite good spirits. He acknowledged to Nerris, "Remind me to promote you and your team. Looks like I could actually retire.", winking to Satima.

Daxis opened the door, gesturing for everyone. "Looks like we have a solid way to help the hybrid."

Filing out, the group took their positions on the stage. Either as councilor, or division agent. Garrus stood with his team, Agripenex and his father behind. They were in a different meeting amongst themselves. He didn't have time to speculate, now noticing Charlie on the stage.

Already unable to look at her. Garrus has had no time to truly process what she's done. Split in two different mindsets on the matter.

One where he believes she did only what a mother would do, and the other accuses her of cocky desperation.

His foolish heart will never leave her. But that doesn't mean it was right. Even then, the Shepard he knew from the reaper war, before Satima... would've made a better choice.

Their daughter is not the cause for Charlie to become indoctrinated beyond help! But Liara didn't say.

Khalee stared around the chambers, taking in the larger crowd of citizens. Waiting for the biggest argument since the reapers. Shepard is accused of much, with everyone wondering how far their hero has fallen.

Ruth stepped forward, her amber gaze glaring to the council. "I know you have prepared to defend the hybrid. That reaper-born you believe you owe fealty to. But that woman, "she now pointed to Shepard, "She has betrayed the very duty she swore an allegiance to!"

Her voice became louder, full of loathing toward the captain. "Hiring thugs to plan an ambush on Rear Admiral Grey, and physically assaulting her over the location of the hybrid. Information that was well hidden, it seems, do to Shepard's unstable state of mind!"

The Chief Admiral was good. Playing judge and jury as if she were born to it. Her words can strike down to the core of the issue, but the truth as to why Shepard needed to use a lowered approach was the most sought-after reasoning.

Considering every approach, she's ever made, was wholly for the good of this galaxy. She killed reapers, their monsters and safeguarded the future of every person by using any means necessary. But, can this spectre use reasoning to explain an action so out of touch with herself?

Shepard pushed forward, nearly in front of Ruth with a glowering attitude. "I used spectre authority to demand the location of my daughter! And out of respect to the alliance military, I used hired men to aid me in search of answers. Not my crew, and not your permission!" Her glare settling on the defiant woman.

Grey limped to them, face to face with Shepard. An accusing expression as she spoke. "You
traumatized my daughter! Threatened to hurt me if she didn't comply to your demands!"

The captain didn't reply, as the council shouted to the louder crowd below them. "Quiet!", Tevos ordered. The elder member of the asari public, already unsure of allowing Shepard her continued spectre authority.

C-sec started to push back the groups of confusion. All the way to the very back of the bustling chambers, where golden eyes stared, watching, as all this insanity came to light.

Hackett privately spoke to Satima, while she stood with the turian division. "You need to say something, and now. Shepard was wrong, of course. But her actions reveal a deeper motivation behind this."

The hybrid nodded, hesitantly stepping out of place from the corner. Now in full view of everyone, turning to face the council. Clearing her throat, she knew her personal account of what the alliance did on Argos, and what they were hiding, would be damning evidence. Despite Shepard's actions.

They will be punished for the reapers darkness. And as the hazy sinister figure from the device stated on that station. It could definitely end in everyone's tears.

Shaking the dread aside, Satima began. "They had live reaper tech."

People started to simmer down, listening in trepidation of the girl's reveal. The council waited, while Ruth realized how the Shepard supporters would win this round. Her stunned demeanor froze her in place, as she closed her eyes in defeat.

Grey stared at the hybrid, wishing she could give Shepard the same pain and humiliation that was forced on her.

The human councilor stared openly with a fearful expression. Please, God. Don't let it be so! Don't let everyone hear how the alliance lost too many good men and women with common sense and left this galaxy at the mercy of leftovers. Khalee gulped hard, clearing a shaky tone of voice."Can you repeat that again?", she asked in alarm.

Satima lowered her gaze to avert any real eye contact from them. It's hard to recount her own actions, especially regarding Captain Daniels.

Remembering Station Officer Blaine, and the feeling of total helplessness. Her grim words now echoed in the forum. "I was used to contact reaper signals. With live reaper tech. I witnessed living abominations, to which there is no explanation as to how they survived."

Shepard watched her daughter carefully. Cautious glances between them were not observed, except for one person. His intense gaze widened to the stress of this information from Satima. No other reaper division, including his, would ever think to contact the reapers through their own devices. Especially since they're dead.

"Spirits.", Daxis interrupted. "Even my own people keep that tech contained out of reach for safety from possible indoctrination."

Hackett commented behind the hybrid. "Tell them the most important aspect of this station, and its true purpose. Which is not to help those afflicted."

Satima nodded in agreement, "But to study them.", she said to herself.

"The Argos provided no psychological therapy, or medical analysis.", the hybrid stared forward, speaking more confidently. "They lied to cover up the darker implications of their research. No help
was to be given, or studied, other than to see what happens when they're in the same room as a banshee.”, she warily stared at the council.

Uncertain to say anything more but felt everyone should know the danger of her own past. Satima needed to explain how these people in the alliance have harnessed it for a short time. "They found and had knowledge of a highly intelligent, cruel sapient being. Who was recreated by the reapers, for their will. He was on board the Argos and given full custody of my person."

She stood her ground, feeling Ruth stand next to her with a hostile stare and harmful thoughts. Satima's indignant expression met the woman's, the intensity of her own avian gaze giving Ruth some pause.

Chief Admiral Marsden searched the hybrid in distressed anger. "I once saw a shamed girl standing in a crowd of people. Saddened, confused... unable to process the amount of pain she's brought to this galaxy."

Satima continued her vexed gaze, as Ruth attempted authority over her.

"You did kill my brother. A decorated soldier and survivor of the reaper war. You brought suffering from your "ancient civilization”., she stared to Shepard briefly, "Your mother's pride and self-interests may have protected you today. But it won't last long."

The threat echoed clearly. As Satima leaned in closer to her, dark eyes piercing through the woman's complaint. "It was not pride that brought me here. It was truth. You wanted to punish me, and I accept that. What I cannot accept, or allow, Chief Admiral... is the suffering of innocents, because of fear. Something you based off your own anger, and unwilling attitude to help those that absolutely have no will, to help themselves."

A shamed expression overtook Ruth's surprised gaze. She backed off, as the council ordered quiet once again from the congested chambers. Shepard would not be tried, not yet. Satima is untouchable, for now, as the defaced Ruth stated.

Satima viewed the chambers ahead. Archer revealed many things to her on Argos. Could she even say, mentor?

He was her jailer, her tormentor on hive, and killed the boy she loved. Everything has changed, or at least seems so. He's still out there, using Rasa to whatever means they're securing. Searching for that signal.

A reality the whole galaxy should fear.

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Alliance Embassy-Citadel

Khalee spoke with Agripenex and Daxis on the balcony, while Garrus stood at a distance. He observed Shepard closely, replaying Liara's words.

He can't imagine the fight that would break out, if they tried to take Charlie. She won't go down easily. Not like Satima did.

Garrus is seriously frightened at what extent this could become. How can he protect them without the council's help? He turned his mind to the hybrid daughter, all alone in the corner of the room. Satima sat to herself in one of the chairs, daydreaming away while everyone had something to say about the recent events.

They're going to be stuck here for a few weeks. Shepard can't leave. Not with the alliance-Ruth,
waiting in the nebula to strike.

In the meantime, all they can do is find a way to make sense of all this chaos. Any kind of information proving Shepard was a mother in need, could help her get off those charges. At least with no jail time. Her career on the other hand...

"Dad."

His mind was totally taken off guard by this one word. This title.

She stood directly in front of him, dark teal eyes searching his response. Garrus glimpsed everyone busy with each other and gestured for them to leave out in the hall.

Had he been an official spectre, they could've used the privacy of the training room across from them. Satima leaned on the wall, arms crossed with a furrowed brow. It seemed she had been thinking about something that bothered her.

Garrus ended up speaking first. "How are you feeling? Are you okay?", his genuine concern catching her attention.

She lifted a glance to his questions. "Yes.", she replied quickly. Shaking her head to this inquiry, "This isn't about me, though. It's about mom. I'm worried that she's... not well." Satima pointed to her temple. "Here."

He understood those concerns. Not knowing if Liara was just screwing with him, or really telling the truth. Spirits, he had trusted her for years. Cared about her being the shadow broker, and what it could do to her life. They were friends for so long. A family on the Normandy.

And he knew she always had secretive feelings for Shepard. Just, not to the point where she figured her affections knew better than all of them. Including his.

"We found a way, on Illium. The place you were supposed to go. If I can convince your mother to agree, she could be free of indoctrination.", he revealed. Free enough, that is.

Satima's eyes widened, "So, my doubts are true?" She swallowed back intense emotions. Her mother asked for help, before they fought the reapers on earth. And she promised. "I'll convince her.", Satima suggested. "I can prove it to her. Somehow."

Garrus tilted his head in anguish. She shouldn't have to go through this with Charlie. His dad could be right. He didn't see it from the start, like he should have. "You let me take care of this, Satima. Right now, what is more important, is your safety."

He only imagined the tortuous means she underwent at the mercy of Archer. The monster he witnessed on Ranoch, beat Satima like an injured varen. Garrus felt a little rage build up again. He needs to be the stability they both crave, right now. Shepard was their "immovable center", as Chockwas boasted years ago. But their center is starting to crumble.

The captain noticed them missing, unable to see why, with Khalee confronting her about the current issue at hand. Her crimes against Grey, and the alliance military.

"Chief of Command Kester is asking for you to return to earth. He is already complying with the council's committee about the live reaper tech on Argos." Her pleas for a little sanity fell on deaf ears.

Shepard shook her head with a dismissive smirk. "They just want me to step off this station. Waiting for a mistake.", she leaned in with a twitchy stare. "I'm smarter than them, and they can't stand it. I'll protect what's mine, by keeping a distance between us and that planet."
She started to head out, leaving them all to discuss the politics of brutal reality. Khalee scoffed out loud. "We defended you today!", she shouted. And that planet, was once your home. You sacrificed everything to protect it, before. Shouldn't that still be a priority, even if it's protecting that rock from yourself?"

The captain didn't turn around or acknowledge. Biting her lower lip in hesitation, sighing to herself. No one understands what she's going through. Everyone she thought she knew, had betrayed her. Tried to keep her and Satima apart. Throwing her hybrid away in some twisted place at the mercy of fear and opinion.

Shepard shook it off, leaving out the door to find Garrus and Satima talking. It appeared natural, reminding her of the times before she decided to take matters personally. She stood in front of them with an awkward smile. "Guess it's time to go home, again. For a little while.", she supposed, wringing her hands nervously.

Satima caught the oddness of her mother's attention and tried a warmer response. Putting her hand over Shepard's. "It's good to be back together, again."

Garrus touched Charlie's shoulder. His awkward gesture felt uncomfortable to her.

She played it off, hurriedly walking away with Satima. Charlie's avoiding him. He needs to reach out to her, before it's too late.

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Citadel Docks
Level four

Miranda waited impatiently, eager to finally go home back to Oriana. She made a short call earlier, alerting her sister that she was indeed well, and safe.

As safe as anyone can be on the citadel.

Outside the panorama view of the docking windows, Miranda watched frigates and vessels float by. Their engines rumbling the floor, and loud cores echoing off the metal hull walls of the station. Something normal for a change. Just knowing that business has returned to usual, people are pushing harder to make things work in this messed up place.

"Miranda."

She glanced behind her, to see Liara approach. The asari looked more troubled than usual, so to speak. "Well, Liara. What is so urgent that you need me to delay my ride home?"

Standing beside the ex-operative, Liara put her hands on the rails of the walkway, staring at the ships. "I have a burden I'm finding few people to trust in."

Miranda raised a brow, quizzically. "A burden? What's going on?"

Liara inhaled a hesitant breath, unsure but too tired to fight back the insecurities she held. "I've been lying to a good friend."

She nodded to herself, "I'm not a psychologist, Miranda. I dig up dead aliens and their artifacts, and occasionally broker sensitive galactic information.", Liara mused. "But, I know that causes problems in relationships to a degree, when you shatter someone's dependence on you."

Miranda didn't believe it. Liara is too much of a moral model to cause some kind of distrust amongst friends. "Whose trust, then. Did you break?
Liara shrugged off the question, "Death and rebirth can cause a terrible change in a person." Her mind wandered off into a deep thought, a memory and some images from years long past. "Too long.", she spoke in a quiet tone.

Remembering the Lazarus project, and the horrific way the woman's body had been mangled and decayed by her fall through Alchera's atmosphere, A broken shell she sold to a desperate and dark faction. "I had hoped your promises of rebirth would fix her. Bring her back, so the reapers would not win. But they did, somehow. They changed her."

Miranda weighed the cryptic words. She felt a need to reassure herself. The former commander proved how she was still the same Shepard before the collector's destroyed the Normandy. "Shepard does not follow the reapers, never will. It was Satima we thought would be a liability. She's the one that echoed their words, here on the citadel."

Liara shook her head against this. "You're not seeing the bigger picture, here."

Miranda began leaving from this absurd and vague conversation. Walking away from a desperate Liara, she stopped. "You think Shepard is a victim? She's defied the reapers, and their indoctrination, every step of the way." She quickly glanced to the asari. "We're all witnesses to that!"

The ex-operative has had enough of this discussion. The broker is confused and suddenly paranoid. Or maybe that damn talkative prothean has given her more "warnings"? The docks were ahead. Miranda began leaving, no longer interested in undermining what she knew of Shepard.

Liara shook her head defiantly, "We're losing her!", she shouted across the walkway, stopping the woman in her tracks.

Miranda wasn't there in the beginning, but she can tell there's a connection Liara wants her to see.

"To see someone fall apart to the weight of this galaxy and all her people, and be helpless to prevent it... I loved her.. and let her down." She lamented.

Miranda faced Liara, wandering back to her, "Just what are you getting at?"

Liara pulled them further away from onlookers, careful to make sure they were alone. "I stepped away and let another take the responsibility, while I played the hand of fate and destiny to everyone. I'm complicit in her actions, Miranda. I should've known she would spiral out of control from despair and madness."

Shepard was reborn years ago, but was still exposed to the reapers for long periods of time. Looking down, Miranda thought aloud in confusion. "How so?"

A keeper stalked by, glancing to them before it resumed its path. Liara eyed it, turning to speak. "A madness caused by something that no one could predict. The enemy trumped our hand by sending us a child. A genetically enhanced, hybrid. With Shepard's dna running through her viens."

Miranda considered this suspiciously. The broker's gaze did not blink. Her operative friend shaking a head in disbelief. "What you say is not fair, Liara. You forget I was made too, by my father's dna."

Liara relaxed, stepping back with a somber gaze. "Don't you see? A mother will do anything for her child. She'll love her unconditionally, no matter the sins." Liara spoke from a personal perspective Miranda could not sympathize with. "Are you saying we need to get rid of Shepard's weakness?"

Her words trembeld from the mouth with disgust and fear.

Liara remained silent, until she forced herself to speak. "I'm saying, that it wasn't Satima being
"locked away in a reaper station that we should fear.", she stared hard in uncertainty. "It's Shepard being locked away in her own guilt, for years."

"Guilt?", Miranda asked. "From the recent assaults?"

Liara shook her head with a heavy sigh. "It was always her. There... here.

Miranda stares at the broker in hesitance. "You're speaking of the alter-Shepard, aren't you?"

The former broker nodded."Everyone sees me as the villain, because I move them about to places they fear will do more harm.", she sighs aloud, unable to look in front of her. "All I'm trying to do, is beat someone at this sick game."

"Who's?" Miranda experienced a flash back, suddenly realizing Rasa's words from the Argos. "Go on. Play your part in his game."

Letting out a nervous breath with a shaky voice, Liara views the vessels once again, "His."

Home

The three of them stood outside the door. Staring at the green unlocking icon. So simple to touch and walk in. But there was this feeling of an invisible kinetic shield, stopping them.

Each one of them stood there with a different reason to hesitate. To turn back around and fix what's wrong first, before coming back to a familial setting that seems out of touch with reality.

Shepard reached out with a heavy sigh, forcing herself to be the one to open this door. The green icon lit up, dispersing into pixels as the metal piece opened.

Wandering inside, the voice of Natalie speaking to her asari caretaker, caught their attention. The woman looked up from the open kitchen counter to see the family ahead.

"Oh! Goodness! I wasn't alerted you would be home so quickly.", she stepped away to where Natalie was sitting at the table. "Your parents are home. Isn't that wonderful?", a pleasant smile played across her light blue features, encouraging the girl to greet them.

Two weeks seems like an age to a younger child. Ten years of age is teetering between independence and fears of abandonment.

Natalie stood, cautiously stepping into the main living quarters of the spacious apartment. Her brown hair was braided to the side, with large watery eyes staring away.

Shepard leaned down to kneel in front of her, emotions breaking her heart at the sight. To see the young face of her second child, waiting to be loved and cared for. By her. "Hey, sweetie. We're home now.", she began, speaking softly like the Shepard who was before.

Natalie's smaller chest rose and fell hard, her eyes rimmed with deep tears. She lifted a sad gaze to Satima and Garrus. A frightened expression washed over her childish features. They feared she would panic. Garrus stepped forward, gesturing calmly. "It's okay, Natalie. We were gone for some time. You don't have to try, until you're ready."

Shepard shot him a displeased look. She wanted Natalie to try! Hell, she's done nothing but secure a future for this family. Sacrificing everything she worked hard to earn, only to be rejected by this child!
Natalie could read the upset and anger of her mother's face. They keep leaving her alone with strangers, now. And expect a happy greeting from her? She scowled at them. "I hate you!", running away to her room.

Shepard stood, wanting to go after her. Satima stepped forward instead. "Give her some time.", she advised.

The caretaker approached them with a saddened glance. "I'm sorry. This sometimes happens when both parents are gone for a while. It would be a good idea to maybe take advantage of family counseling. To help the young one cope with having both parents that are on duty."

Garrus tried to say something, agreeing to some extent about it. But Shepard wouldn't have it. She turned viciously to the asari, nearly shouting at the top of her lungs. "And how the hell would you know?! Do you have kids? Do you deal with galactic horseshit on a daily basis?!"

The woman gasped with a hand to her mouth. "I... I'm sorry to impede." Now leaving in a hurry.

The door closed with Garrus grabbing Charlie by her shoulders, shaking her in confusion. Taking Satima off guard. "What the hell has gotten into you!! She watched Natalie for weeks, and took care of her.", his gaze searching for a desperate answer, suddenly turning into anger. "You almost killed an admiral of your alliance!" Garrus shouted his words at her. "They'll put you away, and there is no position... even I were the primarch himself, could I ever get you back! Why are you doing this?"

He got silence at first. Garrus shook her closer to him, a plea in his gaze. "Answer me! Why?"

She gripped his taloned hands, forcibly pulling them off her. Staring him down hatefully. ""For her." Her stare never wavered off of his, and only slightly gave away towards Satima.

Garrus gazed at her, unbelieving of how much she changed so quickly. He shook his head, promptly leaving the apartment. Shepard stared at his empty spot, to see a stunned Satima give her a worried look.

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Zakera Ward
Warehousing district

Harkin stares at a reflection of himself from the old warehouse windows. Now wiping settled grime from the pane, peering in to see an abandoned business. This is where they'll plan. He told Shepard this will cost her, and he meant it.

His payment will not be bought in creds, or delusions of power. He's been down both roads. She has to know you can't walk over people, forcing everyone to comply to demands.

A subservient roll between those in authority, real control. And those beneath the radar, the ones who can turn information into a weapon. His grin surprised him at the thought. His role as Fade, is over. Nobody remembers or gives a shit about the name Harkin. The one person who does is too busy playing family.

Bright lights are powered on, echoing machines come back to life in front of him. He could see Finn mess around, already recruiting cred hungry assholes of his own.

He's no shadow broker. His time of finding and hiding the useless beings who consider themselves collective races of intelligence, are done. He's a tool of vengeance now.

Shepard's house is a guarded shelter. One where she thinks they are all safe from the dirty side of this galaxy. That living in the presidium gives them security, and the right to use him as a means to her
own ends.

Harkin doesn't care how unstable she's gotten since before, or if she decides to kill all the councilors and run this place.

She needs to learn a lesson in humility. Something repeated in front of him and to him, for the past eight hours. He's fine being the tool for them. He gets a little noticed, receives a quiet position. With nobody caring whether or not he has the best intentions for humanity. So long as he presents what he promised.

The sweetest part of this "penalty" he gets to practice, is dragging that turian to hell, with him. A satisfied smirk played across Harkin's features.
"Just a beer."

An opened chilled bottle was passed along the scratchy surface of the bar counter. A strong turian grip handled it, holding the object with a slight hesitation.

He stared at the sticker label. It's pointless information unable to distract him from the pain of home. Garrus took a hard gulp of the cheap beer. Tasting a strong fermentation that had to of been brewed too fast.

The galaxy is trying to refill their cups of what they used to have. Exports of all kinds of goods, materials and booze. Stuff that the war, two years before, had deprived them of.

Ignoring the filler music, he stared away at the edge of the counter. Thinking. Conversations behind him were white noise when he blocked out everything but his own thoughts. Analyzing again and again what had gone wrong.

She changed so quickly. He thought surely it was because of grief towards the alliance and the council. Charlie was always so used to control, taking command of any situation and making it work for her.

Spirits, she had too. Fighting those machines was no picnic, to quote James.

He followed her every word. Never really had much doubt in her to begin with. Sure, at first he wanted to exercise some revenge on Dr. Heart. But she persuaded him to put aside his personal feelings of failing at catching the salarian.

Charlie called him on that, pointing out that civilian lives were not expendable, even if it meant catching a monster. So, he thought about it for a while. And eventually saw her point of view. Applied that to Omega.

But then, Sidonis betrayed him.

Charlie came back from the dead. Surprised the hell outta him, too! He thought she would be different, considering how much Cerberus couldn't be trusted. But he was wrong.

She was the same then, as always. And reminded him of it, constantly. Not being an uptight commander, no. But by her actions. That's something he's always admired about her.

Charlie could talk, of course. Lay out the law and make stubborn minds see the truth, but... her actions were louder and more painful to some.

Garrus chuckled, sipping his beer. Sighing to himself in these memories.

She stopped him from killing Sidonis. At first he tried to secretly hate her for it. Pushing her aside after their talk on the balcony. Charlie didn't stop pestering him over it. He eventually caved, revealing how part of him did not want to pull the trigger.

His anger and vengence were pushed out by her attentive actions. Something his father was probably talking about.

He had been so focused on Satima, trying to find a cure all for indoctrination, so he could bring his
daughter home. But somewhere in the middle of all that, he forgot to take time to help Charlie. Distract her from this pain, listen to her. She wanted to be validated in her search for their daughter.

Even though he loves her. A feeling isn't an action, and words fall short of helping, if no one isn't really doing something about it.

Charlie did. Now look at where they're at. She did something alright, and no one knows what to do about it. Except fear the outcome.

The beer became stale too fast. Losing its grain flavor and tasting more like the shipping containers it most likely arrived in.

Garrus alerted the bartender, handing him the liqour. He heard a voice cautioning him to say no, but his mood was more depressed remembering all those old times. "Whiskey."

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Back at the apartment...

Satima stared at her mother. Confused, searching her thoughts for a reason to their argument. She heard what Shepard said.

That can't be true. Shepard has never been so selfish, so one-tracked away from other dangers, that she forgets her real mission. Her real objective.

Her mother sat at the kitchen table, slumped over the surface. This is unusual. It frightened Satima to think how her very existence could be taking away this woman's sanity.

She forced herself to sit next to Shepard, attempt to communicate and help. Closely glimpsing any changes to character. Her mother had both hands resting on the table, clasped together in apparent frustration.

She started to speak, right as Shepard interrupted. "If I keep pushing Garrus away, I'm going to lose him."

The captain now lifting a sad gaze to her. Satima caught desperation in her words. Reaching out to touch Shepard's arm, she tried a smile that soured out into a frown, and an averted gaze. "He's just worried. He'll be back.", she hoped.

Shepard pulled back hastily, glaring to Satima. Her features were troubled, angry. "I did everything for you. I hope you're grateful for the consequences that come with it, Satima." Grabbing her daughter's hand, squeezing tightly.

Satima eyed the grip as the tightened fingers pressed deeply into her flesh. "You're hurting me.", she urged.

Shepard stopped, a stunned and hurtful gaze replaced the glare. She huffed loudly letting go, sitting up so harshly her chair overturned, stomping to the hall that led to the couple's bedroom.

Satima stared at that empty space. Closing her eyes briefly in turmoil. She doesn't know what to do. Alone in the kitchen, Satima can only focus on one scenario. If she can find him.

Ronin poured over the data from the council's find of the ship station Argos.

Spirits, what a mess. Classified files were highlighted, as he picked specific ones concerning Satima. He felt so awkward at his feelings for her.
She left a bitter taste in his mind. One he hoped being back with Jain would fix. That's a hazy situation he needs to address fast. Or he'll end up alone, with no one but his own foolish desires.

Desires he has for both women.

Something else happened while the past two weeks of hidden agenda flew by. He was given a new assignment to watch someone. But not the hybrid.

Her mother.

Shepard has changed. The hero everyone once knew, looked up to—had become a rogue spectre to her own people.

He only hopes that Satima is strong enough to keep them together. If she too, hasn't been damaged beyond repair by the instruments of the reapers.

---------------------------------------------

Bright blue eyes gazed over the presidium below. Sweaty palms poured red wine gently into the glass. She sipped, trying to enjoy the fruity flavor and smooth texture.

Something she used to do to clear her head and relax over solving problems. Only those problems were not galactic sized.

Liara had finished reading reports from different groups, all reasoning that something felt wrong. A strange dread had fallen on the galaxy, and her people. No one could pin point where, or the how. Just... feel it.

She felt it too. Since the ending of the reaper war, she's always had a feeling. Javik's warnings never helped, but what if he was right?

He's the last prothean, the most seasoned soldier against the reapers. Knew more about the old galaxy than all of her years studying.

Javik counseled with his shard often. Seeing the last years of his people's avatars.

Maybe there's one about conspiracies?

Taking another sip, Liara turned her head slightly to the door opening. Ashley casually walked in.

Meeting in this small office borrowed from the embassy below, the women overlooked the vast station, as hundreds of people went by their business. Perhaps too aware to stop living and start hiding again. The galaxy needs stability. Even up until the end.

Ashley studied her friend's solemn features, noticing the open wine bottle. Taking a clean glass, and filling to the rim with the sweet red liquor.

Liara crossed her arm, the other holding out a cup almost empty.

"It's going to take quite a few glasses to get tipsy enough for the day, you know?"

Ash chuckled while drinking, gulping down quickly to respond. "Doesn't concern me.", putting a hand to her hip, while swigging the half glass of liquid. "This stuff from Thessia?"

The broker licked her lips in a twitch, glancing at the spectre. "This stuff...", she grabbed the wine...
bottle from the small bar table. "Is quite expensive."

Her human friend raised a brow with a smirk, "So, from Thessia."

Liara had poured a good bit before letting out a loud sigh, "Yes." She sat the near empty tall bottle down, walking away from curious eyes across the lake. Sitting on the edge of a plush teal couch. Cozy enough to lie down on.

"We need to talk."

Ashley followed suite, sitting in a chair opposite Liara. Taking a healthy gulp, placing the glass on a coffee table between them. "Usually these talks consist of me going against my instincts and friendships, all because that prothean had a feeling." She stared in disgust. "I'm getting tired of it, Liara. Satima was no threat to anyone. And now Shepard has attacked the alliance, causing a bigger problem than the both of us can handle."

The broker nodded, sipping her wine. She held the glass a little tighter, swallowing the courage to explain more. "Ash, what I did... was for the good of everyone.", Liara lifted a confident gaze. "I did not plan for Satima to be placed at the Argos. Illium was the plan, you know that."

Confused, Ashley shook her head. "Then what the hell was Argos for? A place where we placed the remaining Cerberus scientists and agents, to torture people?"

Her accusatory question grieved Liara. Kester had a strange summary of how to help Shepard. Although, the reaper droid Archer was a surprise. Maybe Kester thought Shepard could pry more information from him?

Whatever the reasons where, it vexed Liara more that she had gotten lax in her own informative contacts. The tethers of her reach were being cunningly burned away. Archer proved his intelligence with the escape of Argos. But was it really that hard to play a group of paranoid, pro-human staff?

Resuming to the conversation, Liara openly admitted some issue to what happened.

"I... I did not understand the alliance's intentions then. I work with them, out of trust to the humans, and loyalty to Shepard. But now... that trust has been misplaced."

Especially since Archer has sent a discreet message of his own. How he managed to send it to her personal channel, terrified Liara.

She sat her glass on the table, sitting up to pace around the room. "Satima is not a threat, you're right." She stared ahead to a painting of snow capped mountains, and flowery meadows. "But Shepard's blind maternal role for her, is."

She should tell Ashley. It was easy to confide in Miranda, but her own fears crept up at that thought. What if there's no one who will understand?

Ashley sat up in anger. "No! No way, Liara! I'm not putting Shepard away behind a cell. The last time she sat incarcerated, our planet was ambushed by the reapers."

Sighing, the broker faced her friend. "I had two scenarios for Shepard. They were put aside, temporarily, because I feared indoctrination was the problem. But it seems I was wrong. Her daughter is the focus." Liara stepped closer to Ashley, "Shepard was to go to Argos, while Satima received treatment. They were to be separated... for a time."

Turning back to the balcony, making her way closer to the view of everyone. "I didn't know that
Archer was alive. That... droid thing, that tormented Satima from the alter-galaxy."

Ashley wished she had pockets for her hands, but for now they would have to be placed at her sides. She tightened them, releasing an anger that would do no good. "I want to believe you, Liara. I really do. But right now, all I can see is how my friend used me to hurt Shepard."

She darted to the side of Liara, staring hard in upset. "I'm not a dog... some bitch; you can throw at Shepard everytime you want to play her better confidant!"

Liara quickly faced the alliance officer. "Rest assured, spectre. She has made it very clear that our friendship is over!"

Ashley shook her head in upset, backing away to quickly leave. Liara realized the tone, how her words echoed the spite she harbored from Shepard's warning.

"Ash!? I would never use you in that manner! Never! You're my friend, too." She tried to place a gentle hand on the woman's shoulder. Which was viciously pushed off.

"Friends don't use each other for their own means.", Ashley walked away angrily.

Scoffing in surprise, the broker chased after her. Grabbing Ashley's arm to stop her from leaving through the now open door. "Ash!"

The spectre turned in trained response, gripping the soft blue hand. Her eyes were watery, face flushed and hot. "We used to be friends. All of us! Now look at how we are!" She leaned in closer to Liara's dismayed gaze, with the broker able to smell the now tart breath of her friend. "Leave Shepard alone. It's all we can do, or we'll end up at opposite ends of the barrel."

Letting go of Liara's hand, Ashley ran out the door.

She's lost one of the only confidants there is against an ever changing, violent Shepard.

The broker sat back on her plush couch with a huff of disappointment. Leaning out to stare ahead, thinking... regretting. Shepard needs to step down. Do whatever is necessary to right her wrongs against the alliance, those women... her own people.

The thought brought on such a sudden anger, causing Liara to lash out biotically. Flinging her overly priced wine and the cups to the floor.

She's tired now. Confused, and hopeless to all this mess. There's no one to turn to that could understand. No one... except maybe, the hybrid.

Satima sat outside the door to Natalie's room. Staring away at pictures of random things.

Things and places that were a part of Shepard's life.

There was a place filled with lush jungle, ancient looking temples lined the edge to the bronze frame. Another picture had a desert landscape, few buildings that seemed like they were there ages ago. Windows looked blown out, sides of the structures were blasted and scarred.

Tuchunka. Had to of been. She was there, once. If briefly.

Following her curiosity down the wall, Satima's gaze fell on a sea of faces. Some in uniform, others
in armor. Or casual attire. Faces that smiled, smirked and even laughed.

Her face was there. Staring at the one person that needed her right now.

But Shepard stayed alone in her room. It does no good to keep this silence between them.

The hybrid stood up, took a deep breath and knocked on the door. Shepard's tone sounded moody and low, but gave her permission to enter.

Inside, Satima stepped to the edge of her mother's bed. Seeing her leaned over, hands out and folding in a visual loneliness. Sitting quietly next to Shepard, she played with her own fingers, trying to start a conversation.

"It's a little empty, now.", she nervously chuckled. "With just us wondering around this big apartment." Satima glanced at Shepard, not lingering too long or risk provoking more upset. It also seemed her presence alone caused some kind of turmoil inside this woman.

The room looked spacious enough. Comfy bed, nice furniture. Unless you were miserable. Which Shepard was.

Satima never sat in comfort. Everything she owned was scraped together or traded for more crude expenses. Keeping her ship running was always more important.

Shepard sighed, slightly moving herself to readjust from a uncomfortable bend. These feelings were hell for the both of them. "They took you from me. Locked you in a cell and hurt you." Her voice became shaky, "You've been through this before, on Hive. Right?"

The question absorbed into Satima, as memories flooded. There was never a full discussion about this. No time and no place quiet enough. But, shouldn't her father be present, also?

"Yes, like Hive.", she answered automatically.

Looking up, Shepard turned to face her. Deep sadness settled into the ocean of green her mother's gaze held. Such an intense and searching stare. Her features changed from a solemn outlook to anguish.

She sniffled, grabbing Satima's hand and holding it this time. No painful gripping. Glancing down, shutting her eyes tight briefly before opening them into a teary glaze.

Satima felt so awkward. Is she feeling the repercussions of guilt from her actions?

Shepard reached up with her free hand, cupping the side of her daughter's face. Caressing the smooth human skin, using her thumb to wipe away a stray tear that appeared over a cheek.

"I don't know what to do for you." Her words were innocent, truthful. Then her open demeanor changed, a darkening to her gaze. Shepard removed the caressing hand, along with the link of touch that had Satima feel so small and receiving. "I wasn't ready for you. But I still took responsibility. You weren't a clone or some botched experiment. You were my kid."

Her sudden laugh alerted the hybrid. Tears streamed down a weary face. "Nobody wanted you around, you frightened them. I wanted so badly to protect you, guide you." She wiped her face hastily, looking away. "You didn't want it."

Satima glanced down in shame. "I'm sorry. I did all this to you, I caused all this pain. Everything is my fault..."
Shepard cut her off, finding her shoulder and lightly shaking her daughter. "Don't.", she ordered. "It's both our faults, and our flaws. I should've left you alone. I thought I could fix you." She smiled sadly. "You didn't need fixing. You needed understanding."

"I can't undue your past. Just as I can't undue mine."

Now, questions flooded her thoughts. Satima wondered what it was about herself that made it difficult for Shepard to help change her? Maybe if she had come to this timeline younger, a figure more suited to the guidance of the famous Commander Shepard. Then, at least.

Not someone who had already become the outcast of the galaxy. A pariah among society.

She made this bed. Satima had known but always pushed it aside. All of this is her doing, to some degree. Opportunities for closure, open hands in friendship, open hearts to love. And she had pushed them all away. Delving in a darkness deep down she always felt at home with.

In this whole galaxy, this entire scenario that's been brutally and psychotically played out, all the chaos extends from her actions.

Satima stood up from the bed, staring down at the floor. Resolved once again, but not failing to go through with it. She'll leave this station. Go to earth with Hackett, and make things right. No repeats, no more rescuing.

They need her to find Archer. They need Shepard to kill him. He may have seemed changed, but the hybrid can never trust him. No one can.

"Let me go.", she uttered. Facing her mother.

Shepard lifted her gaze to the girl. "What?"

Satima knelt in front of her, an intense emotion settled over her hybrid features. "You're not responsible for me. I'm not a kid anymore. I can fight my own battles. And, whether I win or loose. It's not your accountability, but mine."

She watched a grave expression replace the bewildered glance. Shepard nodded.

Leaving the room, they wandered away to the hall outside the apartment. Satima stood above the stairwell of the next floor, before the main lobby out into the presidium.

"I'm going to look for him. We should all talk about this. And how to fix what happened between you and those alliance women."

Shepard folded her arms, leaning in the doorway with a smirk. "I may loose my career for that. But..", she let out a long soft sigh. Raised a brow in personal absurdity of herself. "Maybe it's time I stop trying to "Shepard" this galaxy."

Satima belted out a laugh. Letting her mirth die down slowly into a more sober minded mood. "Seriously. I think it would do you better if you pursued something else, besides a gun rack and the next target."

Narrowing her eyes, Shepard let out a harrumph of brief dissatisfaction, before shaking her head. "I guess I deserved that. After all, I did go rogue." She stepped forward, uncrossing her arms to place her hands on the girl's shoulders. "I had good reason, though."

A sincere stare forced Satima to look away.
"I should go... uh, looking for him. Get this awkward situation back to normal. Before you decide who the next victim is for causing me grief." She tried to chuckle, but the uneasy laughter fell flat.

Shepard brought Satima forward, embracing tightly. The hybrid holding on, remembering what it felt like to feel this safe and happy again.

"I'll try and reach Natalie. Apologize. Maybe she'll forgive me in a few years time." Shepard smiled, letting Satima go.

Parting at the stair top, the soon to be ex-captain returned to the door of her youngest daughter. Gathering courage, Shepard lightly knocked on the door.

Terminus systems relaying
Continuous jumping

Archer observed the navigations panel. Keeping a step ahead of any alliance or council vessels, and their curiosities should buy some time.

He's dealing with too many variables, so to speak. And a bigger one that Satima will catch on too.

Rassa proved more valuable alive than dead. He was impressed for a short time. Her lunatic ravings are starting to get cumbersome. She's indoctrinated, to be sure. How? That's the answer he's looking for.

The signal relaying off of Satima was coming from the Omega four relay. Something this entire galaxy should be trembling at. But they are too focused on Shepard.

Just like Reaper to distract so well.

However, Reaper she is not. Shepard is falling hard from total emptiness. A void so deep, no one can fill. The recent reports he stole from the broker's systems lay out a chilling perspective of the once beloved savior of the galaxy.

Scans were completing, as Archer overlooked the expanse of black space. Stars littered the divide between his small shuttle, and a few Quarian scout ships.

His hired gun stood beside him with a satisfied grin. "Just the perfect ship we're looking for.", her oak shaded gaze glittered with excitement.

She likes to kill. Her cleverness is not as astute as his, but it does not harm to have another available and capable body for a puppet of will. His will.

"Yes, quite. See that you focus more on acquiring the ship, and less on making a trail straight to us. We need this done with little difficulty." His glare and tone chilled her spine.

Rassa didn't show it. She nodded, smirked mischievously and began her automated distress signal.

Garrus finished his third shot of whiskey, and then started wandering at a booth to himself.

Dammit, he's a drunk.

No use in trying to deny it. He pushed his last shot to the side, and leaned over the table. A three fingered taloned hand supporting his heavy head, and overtaxed mind.
Why is he here? What good comes of drinking away the day, keeping away from those who need him? He didn't fall into that on Omega.

If he did, those two humans would've been dead. All over a simple piece of jewelry. Something that had a deeper meaning between them. A symbol of lifelong friendship and a forgiving heart.

Charlotte has definitely made it harder to forgive, lately. Not that he doesn't love her still... the issue is more about trust.

Can he trust her to let him in? To give him the time of day so he can at least try and fix things. There's questions he still needs answering. Satima is the source for a lot of it. He can't just ask her, though.

Spirits, it's hard enough to look at her without breaking down and feeling so awful about... everything!

He placed a taloned hand on the surface and started to feel queasy.

Closing his eyes, Garrus felt extremely dizzy, clearing his throat to keep any notions of vomiting down. Food! Yes, that will help.

No it won't.

Would definitely look disgusting coming back up. "Oh, boy...", he breathed. Trying to stand. Which didn't work out. Sitting in defeat in the booth, Garrus gave in to wait it out.

He really wished he commed Vega or Joker. They were running around this damn station... somewhere.

Satima walked in the little club, hands in pockets of her vest jacket. She stared around, remembering the location from a newly hacked visor. EDI is too awesome for words.

The bartender was busy flirting with a young woman, when she approached. Smiling in greetings, and hoping for a pleasant answer.

"Hey, have you seen a turian male? Wearing a visor, full set of armor... broody attitude?"

The turian bartender thought for a second, pointing to a booth in the corner of the room. Right across the dance floor.

Smirking, Satima pushed through dancing bodies to Garrus. Head on the table, groaning to himself. She sat down quietly, "SO!", she yelled, forcing him to jump up and stare ahead in intense agony.

Satima held back a chuckle, grinning widely. "You're drunk. Aren't you?"

Spirits. "No...", he tried. Catching himself from hurling all over the table. "Yes. How did you find me?"

Satima took his glass, swirled the freshly poured whiskey he decided not to die from, and tried it. This stuff could clean wounds.

"EDI.", she replied. Now setting the shot glass back down. "Shepard is waiting at home. She's going to try speaking with Natalie."

He opened his eyes with a sigh, lifting a throbbing head to weakly stare at his oldest. "Is she okay?"
Nodding, Satima lowered her own turian gaze. "I think so."

Her naive reply made him think of how young she still is. This is the first time Satima has ever been in a real family setting. And lucky enough for it to be her blood family too.

That's why he worries more for Natalie. A human child, whose adoptive parents are not a normal, most human children would ever be used too. He couldn't imagine if his own father were a human stepdad, or if his mother were asari?

Satima stared with a smile. Garrus sat back taking in a deep breath to settle a nauseous stomach. "What is it?", he wondered.

She shrugged her shoulders, fidgeting with the shot glass. "You just tend to worry a lot... but it feels normal. Like before."

Garrus tilted his head, "You mean... from that time?"

Nodding, the hybrid gave a deep sigh. "I want to help. In any way I can." She left the glasses alone, nervously eying the club. He could tell this kind of close conversation was unsettling, but she wasn't backing down.

"Shepard's emotionally drained. She's overworked, under-appreciated. With the worst scenarios of her life waltzing around the galaxy, causing trouble because "she's" the one out of place. And...", Satima looked away in sadness. "Too damn scared and stubborn to admit it."

Garrus began leaving his seat from the booth, as a curious Satima watched. He stepped to her and held out a hand. "Feel like taking a walk?"

She smiled, taking the offer and following behind.

They stepped out of the club to the ward. Wandering side by side in a silent but pleasant beat. "When I was working for c-sec, this area was one of my first patrols.

They passed by an Avina terminal, her smooth and one toned asari voice announcing the many levels of the citadel.

"Since this area was my first patrol, my father would walk it with me sometimes. I was fresh from the military, young and looking to dispense justice.

Satima joined the small laughter, smiling down while hugging her pocketed hands to her. "You were stubborn with your duties?"

Now on the stairwell, the pair strolled upward to the beginning of Zakera. A holographic neon sign lit the way all too well in turquoise. "I didn't like the way things were run. Still don't today.

Sky cars zoomed ahead as an open skyline to the ward's traffic zones drew attention from them. They stood at the cab port, watching. Satima then folded her arms comfortably, "We spoke similar, once. In my time. It was on Illium."

Her memory now becoming a little more clear the less nervous she felt. "You were drunk then." The hybrid gave a warm grin, shaking her head in apparent jest. "Kin Sha... you were mean. But, I got you out that bar and back on the ship. We were hiding from them in the city."
Garrus watched her demeanor and uneasy gaze. "You mean that Directive, right?"

She looked down, taking her left foot to kick at the curb of steel on the edge of the port. Her own memory suddenly fast forwarding in such a shock to her, that she kept thinking of that moment the old Garrus sacrificed himself to stop Archer.

Satima felt that pain again, as if it happened minutes ago. It stung hard, bitterly. And before she realized it, her mouth started to move. Eyes watered and nose runny from the guilt and burden of her life. Not once daring to look at him. She felt each word stumble out.

"You died. You left me." The hybrid slowly lifting a confused stare. She met his one visible eye, darting about her features. Looking for some kind of response.

He had none. Not yet.

She continued with emotion, trying hard to conceal their conversation from prying eyes. "And now you're alive, again."

There was upset at that word. Garrus stared away between them.

Satima wiped her eyes and nose with the long sleeve of the shirt she wore. Composing herself. "It's done. The past is over. I can't keep at this." Turning from him.

He grabbed her arm gently, catching her attention. "Satima.", Garrus began. "I understand you had a better connection with him. I don't want you to feel obligated to try it again with me. I want you to know, I'm always here for you. Friend or father. However you feel. It's up to you."

Staring, the hybrid tried a sad smile. "We should go home. Shepard and Natalie are waiting for us."

Shepard sits on the floor, knees to her face. She's losing her damn mind. Each day a piece of her falls away, and she becomes something that everyone fears or hates.

Is this what Satima feels like? Is this what she endures from this galaxy?

Oh God. It's horrible. The feeling sinks deep inside, cutting into her body and burning hard in the pit of her stomach. The loose thoughts of harm dangling at the edge, so easy to pluck and act on.

So easy to make them listen. Make them see.

Is she turning into Reaper?

A soft knock echoes off the door. Gentle footsteps change stance between nervous attempt and the thought of fleeing.

It's Natalie. A child of ten. So small, so confused and hurt. And Shepard can't stand herself because of it!

Those soft and gentle sounds were once something Satima made. Right before the reapers twisted it out of her. Grinded the girl into she was formed into what everyone hates today.

"Mommy?"

The year they've carefully planned to love this child, she and Garrus formed a trust as new parents. They mourned together their loss of Satima, when she left them, and hoped to keep a place for her. For when she returned. Natalie had lost so much. They didn't expect her to attach so quickly to them.
Shepard didn’t expect to find herself so open and broken from it.

No. Don't say anything. Please go away. I can't

"Are you in there? Satima is not here, and I'm...", Natalie's little whimpers travel to Shepard. She can hear the gasps of terror from being abandoned. "I'm alone."

Natalie stood silently now, waiting. Watching the door open normally with her mother standing on the other side. A strained gaze alerted her.

The child didn't move, afraid her new mommy would be angry again. Arms strictly to the sides, hands open and sweaty. Her little heart beat pounded like a drum against her chest.

All at once, Shepard leaned to scope the girl up into her arms. Holding firm with a strength that didn't harm, but comforted. Natalie laid her head over the shoulder, burying a distraught face into the short red softness of her new mother's hair.

Shepard held tightly, taking in the feeling of this moment of peace. Holding a child who wanted her to be a parent. All the while secretly wishing just once, it could've been Satima.

"Well, isn't this sweet?"

Her eyes slowly opened from the embrace, holding Natalie tighter to her chest. That voice sent a chill down her spine. Something she hasn't given into for a long time. Cautiously, Shepard stepped forward down the short hall. Standing in front of a sight she wished her child was not present to see.

Ruth.

She wasn't alone. Ten marines stood with her, along with Harkin. A disgusting smirk washing over his hardline features.

The large living space grew smaller. Her world was finally cracking with every breath she exhaled. There isn't a Shepard here anymore. Just Charlotte. A woman that became undone, and gave in to unspeakable things.

Charlotte let Natalie down, gently leading the girl to her side. Fixating an angry glare to Ruth. "Not in front of my child.", she warned. But it didn't come out so strong and commanding. Instead her voice sounded shaky. Emotional.

The woman raised a brow in quizical mirth. "What's interesting, Shepard. Is how in this moment, you request something denied to Grey."

Charlotte feared what would happen. But Ruth signaled for a marine. "Take the child down to the embassy. Find the Turian councilor. Inform them that she was found wandering the presidium."

Natalie gripped her mother's hand hard. Sudden tears dropped down her round face. "No. No!" She fought against the marine, kicking and screaming.

It took every ounce of strength for Charlotte to not fight back. Trying to undo the child's grip and assuring her. "It's okay, sweetie. Daddy will be you soon. It's okay..."

Natalie was dragged to the door as the marine finally shouldered her. Taking her to the cab ports down the stairs of the lobby.

Charlotte felt her heart break. This was cruel. But does she deserve it? They could've shot her in both
legs, traumatizing Natalie. Another signal sent two marines to apprehend her. Their grips tightening around her arms.

Three others stood behind. Guns ready.

She was brought to a satisfied Ruth. The woman's amber gaze settled on her. "You were once a respectable woman of the alliance." The Chief Admiral leaned in closer. "Now you're a monster. You... and your daughter."

Something in that last sentence worried Shepard. She looked back on Ruth, as she was pulled and dragged away like Natalie. Where's Satima? What are they looking to do with them?

And why did everything suddenly feel so cold?
Ronin followed the disturbance of worried citizens down the ward way. The presidium teemed with wealthy and politically important bodies. Merchants busied themselves with attracting concerned customers to their stalls. Several groups gravitated toward the guarded area, all of them reporting to c-sec.

He heard the news but couldn't believe it. It seems to be an annual problem for shit to spiral out of control, when it concerns the Shepard's. There's only one day left before the so-called station's celebrations. The day the reapers were defeated, and their galactic hero who stopped them.

Only now, she's become suspect. Her core values that were iron forged from the alliance, crumbled away to reveal a woman protecting her child.

Everyone seemed either confused or unmoved by the events Shepard caused. Attacking her superiors and going rogue, only to find the alliance more divided than Cerberus. Humans acted too individually from their goals. Too unpredictable. But the galaxy welcomed them anyway. And now he's dealing with whatever Shepard has once again left in her wake of despair and chaos. So much like her daughter.

His mind wondered to her again. How she felt, how she tasted in that elevator. He shook it all away. Forcing himself to remember Jain, and how good it felt to hold her, lay in Janie's arms when they slept together, feeling the warmth of her body. And sometimes listen to her shouting at Kauven for being such a useless turian.

Ronin chuckled, looking up to an asari hastily walking his way. He stood now, outside the lobby entrance of the posh apartments that Shepard lived in. The gift from a grateful citadel.

"Are you c-sec?", she asked, huffing from such a brisk run.

"You could say that. What happened here?", he wondered.

The asari looked behind her, pointing to the cab port. "It was right there. A group of them... alliance, I believe. They had soldiers and there was a woman in uniform. She was giving the orders and looked in charge of the team." His witness settled herself down, hands to hips with a confident expression. "I used to be a commando, working during the reaper war. I'd know a woman in charge when I see one."

Walking to the port, Ronin brought out his omni-tool. Scanning the area, bringing up the local camera systems. "How long ago was this?"

"An hour, or so.", the retired commando replied.

He found the footage, knowing full well who that woman was. Shit. Is the entire alliance behind this? Ronin turned off his tool, glancing to the asari and around him. "Anything else?"

She shook her head to that question. "We heard a kid's voice. But it was so quick before any of us here could catch it."

With a sigh, Ronin reached out to shake her callused blue hand. Whatever she did as a commando, demanded hard work. "Thanks."

Leaving him behind, the asari returned to a few news reporters, as the spectre proceeded forward.
through the lobby and up the stairs. There were no scuff marks from boots on the floor. Unlike the family to be compliant when a hostile situation formed.

The information about a kid worried him. Taking quick steps up the stairwell, Ronin spotted the hall their home entrance was built in. A c-sec guard stood by letting him through upon a quick scan at the front door that had been closed but not locked.

Once he stepped in, his trained gaze took in the scene. There was nothing out of the ordinary. No sign of a struggle, or any injuries. Knowing the family, neither of them would go without a fight. Unless.

He called out to the guard. "Is there any kind of footage from the stair?"

The guard presented his omni-tool. Sending what he had from the corner camera in the lobby. Ronin watched it closely, seeing them take Shepard out between five marines. She didn't fight.

Was the rest of the family present?

Ronin had made up his mind to return to the council. He needed to speak with the human-Khalee. Spirits knows just what in the hell is going on.

Shepard stared ahead. The marines guarding her every step, only not in defense.

They were prepared to take her on if she so much as flinched the wrong way. But she wouldn't do that. It was time she stepped in her daughter's shoes and become the monster they all feared. At least what Ruth and Grey feared. Maybe a few of the alliance... who knows.

All Shepard can focus on at this time, is what will happen to her little family. Will they tell her crew on the Normandy that she is a villain? Will they believe it?

Who will captain the ship? Ashley... or maybe someone else?

They stepped inside the lift at one of the lower ward docks. A place for storage of the many goods each world sent for creds. Dirtier, fouler than the presidium. The warehouse docks were a place that many of the less than fortunate citizens lived. It could almost pass for Omega.

Ahead on the docking station, a freighter hovered, latched in place by placement tethers. Waiting to steal her away.

She remembered all those times Satima had been taken off into unknown places. Away from her family and friends, labled an unstable experiment. Shunned, and even hated. For what Shepard did to find and save her daughter, the sudden rush of understanding filled her to the core. No wonder her hybrid daughter could not stand being with them.

She couldn't bear the shame, and neither can Shepard.

As they stood on the walkway, Ruth used her coded access to open the side hatch of the ship. "What are you going to do me?" Shepard's words echoed.

The woman turned slightly, glaring before resuming her irritated stare into the hatchway. "Putting you away."

Pushed on, the captain had no choice but to comply. She walked in line with the group. Her days of
military marches syncing her in tune with the marines. "Once you're on earth, neither the council or your spectre friends can interfere. You'll never leave home. And if justice is served... you'll stay locked away until you die."

Ruth's words echoed out in such vitriol towards Shepard. She hated them both. The hybrid especially. But Shepard smirked in mockery to herself. The same promises made to Satima no doubt.

Once inside the dimmed bay, the small team of marines continued to lead the shamed captain to her temporary quarters. Shoved through, she turned to the sound of the door closing to a tight lock. Loud pinging from the coded entry echoed. Ruth stood outside the door, completely satisfied. It was done. All that was left, is to secure the hybrid. As soon as both women are locked on board, the journey to earth will be swift.

Shepard stared ahead. There was nothing in this room. No chair or cot. Not even a bucket in case a person needed to relieve themselves. The admiral and her chief went out of their way it seems, to give her a luxurious setting.

Laughing aloud, the soon to be ex-captain and spectre, leaned on the nearby wall. Sliding down to sit defeated. She allowed it. This was right.

But if Ruth gets her way, Satima will be held on this boat back to a dark cell too. Shepard could not have that. She'll gladly serve time... again. As long as her hybrid child is left out of it.

With no way to communicate, thanks to a hack on the omni-tool, Shepard can do nothing but wait.

--------------------------------------------

Natalie tried everything to get away from the scary soldier. He gripped her wrist so tight, she felt it might crack and break!

Pulling her to the front desk of this embassy area, he rudely caught the attention of the receptionist. A sapphire skinned asari responded with an equally irritated tone. All the while Natalie pulled, and wrenched... even resorting to biting his arm.

He slapped her face, causing a surge of shock through Natalie's mind. As he continued to argue with the asari, she buried those hurt feelings. Satima wouldn't let anyone do that to her. And if her new dad saw that... this guy would be toast!

When her teeth found and sank into a small opened part of flesh between thick fabric and his gloved hand, he yelped, letting her go briefly. That was her chance. Natalie darted out from under him only to stumble, falling to her knees. His shouts echoed a panic in her. Her legs felt heavier suddenly, and she couldn't run!

Shaking, Natalie crawled forward, finding strength to get to her family. She stood up quickly. Running.

Where... she didn't know. This station was always so big to her. Too many places to remember. And without her parents or a caretaker to guide her. She was hopeless.

Darting around smaller crowds, further down the white walled walkway, pushing past many species of bodies. Natalie spotted another cab port. Typing in to see the areas she could escape too. The marine, as that awful lady called him, shouted towards her. Angrily stomping to her direction. Natalie's fingers shook from terror, making it more difficult to accept a destination.

She didn't have time to make a better decision. Punching whatever it would lead her to. Hopping in the available skycar, Natalie watched it raise up away from the raging soldier. Now proceeding
through sky traffic with efficient haste. Maybe she'll find Satima wondering around the landing area? Or maybe more marines.

Natalie buried her head in little hands. Tears crept in the corners of her eyes, as she sobbed. This is such a nightmare. It's terrible. She wished her mommy was here. In fact, she wished both her mommies were near.

But bad men had taken them away, and now... she's alone.

............................................................

Joker had returned from the mess on deck three. A fresh cup of hot coffee in one hand, and a data pad with the latest news in the other.

His quick run to the markets took enough energy from him, causing a sharpened pain in his lower back. Joker knows it's his body alerting him to the intense pain he should be feeling in his legs. That's something else he'll deal with later. Now that there is one.

Careful, slow steps was his pace now. He ended up getting used to the last two days being slow, and quiet. But that's what happens when the ship is docked until further notice. Not that he's complaining about the extra rest, or not looking forward to taking in the station's many attractions.

There're no reapers, no wars. Only... what Shepard has created. Which is an equivalent to a ginormous shit storm. Of sorts. And as with all little shits, the alliance must turn up its nose and act totally clueless to the fact Argos existed. He never really trusted or liked anyone who made more than him. Especially anyone who made more than him. But, after the reaper war, the alliance was actually doing better out here. Picking up the slack, forging bonds between species.

Joker glanced about as EDI stared away to her controls but gave a quick nod to him. Taking a sip of his coffee and finally sitting to his own console, Joker opened the extranet. News poured through fast. Everyone's view on the alliance was souring. Not a surprise.

The council defended Shepard as a spectre to be capable of stopping injustice and illegal actives from all governments, including when it concerns herself. Well, seems Khalee wasted no time in clearing the captain's name. He didn't know how to feel about it all. If his child were cruelly pinned as the source of everyone's bad luck, he'd be more than a little pissed too. Satima just doesn't have it in her to be evil, anyhow. Joker knows these things.

There's too much the overly pleasing child, trying to fit in and make her parents happy. Which sucks. He betted the real Satima is a total badass. And would probably end up besties with Jack.

That could be disastrous. Scratch that.

Joker looked over to EDI with a random but valid question. "Hey, EDI. Why did you help Shepard go rogue? Isn't it against your own protocols to hurt anyone that's not a physical threat to you?"

EDI stopped typing for a few seconds, then resumed with the smoothest fluid motions of her silver tipped fingers. "I view their perspectives on the hybrid known as Satima, in a negative manner. When do they decide, that I too, am a liability? A danger to the galaxy."

He chuckled, "Yeah, they already do. Since a living A.I. is actually illegal." Joker dismissed the idea of her being taken away and most likely pulled apart like some machine. "But the alliance hasn't
pursued that, you've helped in the war. You opposed the reapers, unlike those "heretic geth".

She stopped typing again, turning herself to face him. "Shepard came to me in despair for her offspring. She asked for my help. What she does with my help, is no one's business, but the captains."

Except the alliance and the council, oh, and there's also the rest of the known galaxy!

Joker scoffed in surprise. "Yeah, but... EDI! What if Shepard became unstable and "accidently" killed someone. Claiming it was self-defense? I've known her for so long, but... you can't deny there's clearly something loose up there right now. ", he argued with a finger pointed to the temple.

It was relieving to say it finally, and what he thought about it all. But he couldn't help to feel a little awful for talking out loud about it. Shepard has been through so much. She was prepared to die for them. Then Satima happened.

And like that... the massive light bulb in his head went off. Satima took away her sacrifice. Now there's only guilt and resentment left. A reaper gift. Indifference.

The cab ride started out quiet. Satima leaned on the door with an elbow, propping a hand to cradle her cheek. Staring out to watch the countless neon signs and holographic announcements of the ward.

Sky traffic was a little busy. Garrus opting to personally drive them home. He kept glancing to her solemn features, wondering how melancholy she had gotten. The memories she spoke of earlier caused unwanted pain of the past. He wished so badly, that he could make it all better.

"Satima.", he began. Feeling all the more awkward about the stupid idea he was thinking. "I have something I'd like to show you."

She turned her head to his voice, dark teal eyes reflecting the many shop signs of this ward. "What is it?"

Facing the traffic ahead, he laughed lightly. "It's a surprise. , Garrus smiled.

Spirits, he hopes this will work. He'll need to stop by the gun shop first, get something with blanks and good balance. She'll enjoy it. Shepard did. Just, minus the whole romantic airs of that time. This is more a... fatherly outreach?

Spirits.

Anyways, it would give him a chance to strengthen their friendship. And maybe help tighten her aim.

His hybrid daughter presented an eager grin. Satima relished the thought of spending more time with him. Talking or walking, it was nice to connect without someone shooting at them.

The minutes of endless traffic became suspicion when Garrus noticed one of the skycars behind moving closer than normal. He didn't want to give into his paranoid thinking. It was a bad habit, though.
Garrus kept a close eye as they passed one of the ports he intended to land on, not wanting to cause an alert to Satima. She continued to space out comfortably. But they moved close, now. The tip of the front end could practically kiss their tail.

Satima let out a soft sigh, glancing to him. Noticing how uneasy he drove. Always tapping for the back camera to show the behind of their ride.

"You have missed your destination. Please turn around.", the VI announced.

Turning to the back, she noticed the closeness of the cab. "What's going on?"

Garrus urged the ride forward, now raising the speed. "I don't know.", he answered honestly.

Satima could feel her heart beat faster. Something is wrong. She moved herself to watch them, only to notice a whining engine sound coming closer from her right side. Quickly, the hybrid faced the window, and the front of another cab charging at them.

She reached out, gripping his arm. "Dad!"

The cab hit her side with as much force as a ton of metal and engine could bring. Knocking the skycar out of its course. Glass busted out and in, flying around the cockpit of their ride like shards of shrapnel. Cutting, slicing and floating in dangerous motion.

Garrus hit the top of his fringed head on the roof of the inside, with Satima slamming into him, before being hit by the force of the other cab.

They careened down, spinning only twice, now striking the hulled floor of a ward level. People screaming, shouting, scrambling over each other to get out the way.

With a loud piercing sound, the cab skidded a few feet, hitting the jutting basin of a small flower bed. Sending it toppling over itself, again and again. Until it slammed into the wall further back on the level.

Satima sat upright, the battered cab sat in silence. Smoke rose in wisps above the vehicle. A hissing sound from the engine trailed with the damaged sound of the VI, urging immediate medical help. Her voice cracked with half-finished sentences.

Two of the offending cabs landed on the near empty deck. Their solid colored outer hulls were scuffed and dented. The front of the first cab had been bowed in from the collision of the vehicles. It wouldn't be serviceable anymore, now. Dark figures piled out. With a few doctoring minor injuries. It was clear they are soldiers, showing off their quick and plentiful supply of medi-gel. The group stepped forward to the crash scene.

One of them hovered over the broken vehicle, as he ordered the door be pulled open. This human wasn't in the similar uniformed attire or armor as the others. But a simple brown colored jacket over broad shoulders, and a smirk to his middle-aged face were very clear to one person.

Watching from a near crushed seat, glass blown out in front of his own avian gaze, Garrus attempted a groan of disapproval. It didn't sound coherent enough to him, and probably not to them, either. The man tapped his ear, as comms came on, "What happened?!" The tone of a woman in command spoke loudly in his ear.
"It looks like our marines were a little too overzealous in obtaining the target. There was another passenger.", he replied.

"Who?"

Harkin stepped back, walking to the side as the hybrid, all bloody and bruised, had been pulled out. "The father.", he smirked. "Seems like he's pretty banged up, could be serious."

Ruth's not-so happy voice shouted in irritation. "This compromises us!"
The ex-Fade paced around the other end, when the marines brought the cab car from the wall, revealing the door to open. Garrus fell out but remained conscious somehow. Such a tough bastard. He narrowed his turian gaze around him. Barely able to speak. All he could say is the name of his hybrid child.

"I wouldn't say so. If we leave him here, might be the medics don't reach him in time. Might be he dies, and then there's a bigger investigation."

"Fine. Bring him. Patch him up, set him out. Then we proceed with the target."

The comm call ended.

Harkin stood over his old c-sec "friend", as the turian's eyes struggled to stay open. Leaning down, he gave a treacherous stare. "It's good to see you again, my old friend. I told Shepard that little stunt with those alliance will cost her." A cold grim smile played across his hardened features. "Don't worry.", Harkin's rough laugh sent a chill to Garrus. "It's not you, they want to make an example of." He leaned down on one knee quickly, "Doesn't mean we can't have a little fun."

Garrus couldn't fight the intense pain anymore. Warm blood trailed down his face, as his head pounded in agony. He glimpsed Satima's limp body being dragged off into one of the cab cars.

The fight to stay aware and capable was quickly being drained from him. His eyes began to close slowly, fading out the scene of the crash into a nightmarish memory.

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She could feel every bump, every scratch on the surface of a floor, as someone dragged her like a sack. Her right arm was a little numb, a stinging sensation went up the same side of her back. Satima forced herself to open a gaze, revealing a dim ceiling overhead. Damp and rust colored walls surrounded them. She could hear loud large fans circulating in a slow rhythm.

Where was she? Where's Garrus?

Two bodies loomed over, picking her up with ease and setting her unceremoniously in a chair. Clamps were locked over wrist and ankles.

The hybrid's wits were regaining as they stepped back. A large industrial door opened in front of them, with bright light blinding her. Then it closed. Hasty footsteps came forward, as a female figure stood in front of Satima. "Look at this thing. Made to resemble us, but so flawed and so dangerous."

Satima swallowed a dry throat, licking parched lips. She tasted mercury instead of sweat. "Listen...", her cough interrupted. "I don't know why you attacked us..."
Her words were cut short, when a hand gave a firm knock across her jaw. Teeth rattled from the shock. Satima spit out blood but didn't waver. Instead, an angered stare settled on the woman before her. It was Ruth. One of the marines leaned in to the Chief Admiral's ear, whispering. Her eyes widened for a second, before she sighed in irritation.

Satima gulped down again, trying to prepare for another assault. The woman paced around her, hands behind the back in such military fashion. Her alliance uniform had been expertly pressed. The blue was almost illuminated from the lights, dim they may be.

"We have secured your mother. She's awaiting you in a cell in an un-named freighter."

The hybrid thought about the last state she left her mother in. Natalie was there! "My sister? Did you take her too?!", Satima demanded.

Ruth only stopped with a negative nod, "That child is not your sister. No more than you are fully human. She'll be with the embassy for a time, until your "father", can be safely released."

Released? From where?

"What do you mean by all this?" Satima struggled against her restraints.

"I mean for you and your mother to be put away. Forever. Once the galaxy understands the peace in both your absences, inquiries will stop. The alliance has put up with enough of your mother's rogue-like tendencies. Her past is too much a part of the duties she promised to uphold."

Ruth stood to the girl's right side. She glanced at the bruised, swollen arm. "And as for you.", now continuing to pace forward. "Reaper experiments cannot be allowed to jeopardize the continued efforts of this galaxy, and her people. You are too unpredictable in nature, and your own abilities, too terrifying. Even Archer pointed that out."

Here it was. The betrayal she feared from someone whom, she should've never trusted to begin with. Archer had played them all. He accomplished much, with all the available time that was thrown to him. The humans are not only blinded, but incapable of realizing the intentions of such a clever snake like him. Satima felt guilty too. She knew it would turn sour on her end, but still... she hoped.

"Shepard is not like me. She just needs help.", Satima tried. But even her own words sounded full of doubt. Ruth brought herself face to face with the hybrid. If there was pity in her body, it did not show in those fiery glazed eyes. "You want to protect your family. I respect it. Believe me, I understand this feeling more than you know."

Resuming, she turned around to leave. "That's what I'm doing. Protecting."

She stopped at the door to nod to a silent figure in the shadows. After the Chief Admiral made her exit, Satima's own panic elevated when she heard the pained groan of her father. Just a few feet away in the dimmed warehouse, the hybrid spotted him. Garrus had been equally tethered to a chair, head bent over with a steady drip of his turian blood falling to the floor.

His injuries were clear and can turn fatal. No. Not again. Please, not again.

Everyone started piling out, leaving in the same fashion, as Satima shouted. "Dad! Can you hear me?" She didn't say his name this time. The sudden rush of adrenaline in upset, made her louder.
"DAD!"

Her voice shook with thick emotion, tears welling up in her eyes, as a distressed Satima desperately tried to waken him. She screamed, thrashing herself in the chair to move it. The legs of her seat had been welded down.

"Dammit!", she swore. A raging violence overtook her senses. "Sons of bitches!"

The last person out, smirked, closing the door to the fading voice of the hybrid. Ruth waited further down the walkway of the under ward.

Harkin stifled a laugh. Standing before her. "It seems the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.", he mused aloud.

Chief Admiral did not look amused. "Shepard comes from such a background." Although it was meant as an insult to the captain's child-hood as an orphan, and later a back-alley raider. Her new agent in all this, didn't agree.

"Na. You don't go back with her "father", like I do. That hot-headed idiot had such a mouth, his own CO suspended him for a week. Of course, that's all-in part to the fact, Garrus here couldn't help beating the information out of a stupid smuggler."

Ruth crossed her arms. "Harkin. I want full guards on this level. No one is to interfere. Once the turian is stable enough to be moved, do so. And in a timely manner. We have to leave this station before their celebrations start." She looked around the area in a squirrely manner. Not a tactic most alliance display.

Harkin wondered what it was she scanned for, before agreeing. "Alright. I'll set up my men, but too many rifles waltzing around will look mighty suspicious."

"Then make sure it doesn't."

Chief Admiral Ruth hastily left them. Along with most of her marines. He was eager to get the ball rolling himself, but first... First, he gets to play. Yeah, Ruth gave him orders. But so, did Grey.

Little pieces for Shepard to treasure, was all she hinted. Harkin knows exactly what she wants.

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