## Training Manuals

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### Summary

Most things in Andromeda don’t follow the rules to which Cora has devoted her life. Sarissa’s manuals have guided her through most difficulties as they came up—but questioning her sexuality and having feelings for her commanding officer? Cora’s not sure she wants Sarissa’s advice on that.

A fun slow burn between F!Ryder and Cora.

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Hey guys!

This is a new fic that exists outside of my Nuggets universe!

CoraxSara

Lots of smut and fun times to be had—so this is obviously NSFW adult fic. Going to try my hand at writing a slow burn romance, and actually decent smut scenes, but I’m a bit of a spaz lately so we will see how it goes. <3 (Mainly I’ve been dying for a slow burn Cora romance and some graphic Cora smut and I think I have to write it myself).

Hope you all enjoy.

Most things in Andromeda don’t follow the rules to which Cora has devoted her life. Sarissa’s manuals have guided her through most questions—but questioning her sexuality and having feelings for her commanding officer? Cora’s not sure she wants Sarissa’s advice on that.

Chapter 1:

Ryder sank into the bench in the galley, ration bar in hand. That sucked. Granted most of the asari on the ark survived. But that didn’t make the fact of missing people any easier to bear. There were families. Damn Kett. If Ryder needed a stiff drink after a mission—this was the one.

But they’d made the jump to light speed and were trailing behind the asari ark to meet the survivors at the Nexus and help them dock.

“eh? You okay?” Liam shook her from her thoughts, standing beside her and motioning to where she sat on the edge of the booth, “Budge over?”

Ryder did so, gathering her tablet and the notepad on which she was scribbling notes based on the Kett data SAM provided her, “I’m…eh.” She rubbed her eyes, “We got them out but… damn.”

“I read Cora’s report.” He nodded along with her.

“Yeah. You know then.”

“I know you guys got them out. And Sarissa royally screwed up. But at least the ark made it.”

Ryder wished again she had something stronger than coffee in her cup, “They haven’t made it yet. But they will.”

“They will. Can only travel so fast. We’re on course right alongside them.” Liam repeated. He was always good at sounding confident.

Ryder wasn’t so much worried about that. She was worried about her second. The door to the biolab hadn’t opened since she’d stopped in to see Cora after the mission—finding her with watery eyes and her head in her hands and very much needing alone time.

Everyone’s human. Even Sarissa. Asari? Turian? Everyone’s a person? What’s the
expression for that? Nonetheless, the sentiment was the same. All of them could make a choice with dire consequences. They weren’t going to win everything. And that bothered Ryder the most—when was she going to make one of those mistakes? If the woman who’d trained Alec’s second, the one who was supposed to be the Pathfinder, could screw up like that; how bad could Ryder herself?

“You want to talk about it?” Liam pressed.

Ryder inhaled and laughed—her usual defense mechanism, “Well. You know. Sarissa is Sarissa. And Cora…well, Cora’s as expected. And the Kett still caught Sarissa—the one who wrote those commando books—off guard and forced her to make that choice.” Ryder shook her head, not looking at him, “Just…damn.”

He puffed out his cheeks and lowered his voice, “How’s Cora doing?”

Ryder glanced sideways at him, “How do you think?”

“Right.”

They spent a few moments silent before Liam was the one to break it, “She and Sarissa were close.”

“Yeah. Sounds like it.”

“Were they….Are they?”

“Are they?” Ryder looked at him, unsure what he was getting at.

“I’m not…trying to intrude but it’s a small ship. Seems like Cora cares about her a lot. Hard to see someone you care about in that situation, even if it was an old thing—”

Ryder suddenly understood what he was getting at, “Oh! I don’t think so.” She stated, “She’s not into women.”

“Asari though. A lot of asari don’t consider themselves women.”

“I uh…” Ryder paused, laughing for real this time. At herself more than anything, “Might have…propositioned when we were at Eos those few weeks. And she said no. And no asari either. No, she just liked Sarissa a lot. They have plenty to talk about on the Nexus.”

“Ah.” Liam stated, “But I’m saying I hope she’s alright.”

She has been in there an awful long time. Though, Ryder wasn’t sure Cora wanted to be bothered at the moment. Liam finished his own coffee and stood up, “Better get some sleep before we’re on approach to the Nexus. Seriously, Ryder. My door is open.”

“Thanks, Liam.” Ryder stood up as well, heading for the hotshot and flicking the switch to heat the water. One of the few things Andromeda had in large supply was asari tea. A bland yet pungently floral smelling beverage upon which Lexi and Cora seemed to sustain. Though Ryder herself wasn’t a fan of hot water that smelled of a florist shop, Cora was, and Cora could probably use to be checked on again.

She poured it into one of the mugs with the magnetic bases, and carefully lifted it from the counter. Alright. Hopefully she’s not asleep. Now that some hours passed, if Cora needed to decompress by talking to someone, Ryder figured it was the least she could do for her.
Cora hadn’t moved in a while, and she couldn’t bring herself to. The seam on the sheet metal in the wall was the only thing she could focus on.

If she didn’t stare at that stupid little line with the rivets she might think about other things, and she didn’t want to think about them right now.

She’d thought about it enough.

Sarissa had been wrong in the way that she, a huntress, never should have. She should have protected her Pathfinder. Her data hadn’t been worth it. But that was Sarissa—laser focused to the point of bad mistakes. To the point of others dying for her to reach her objective. Cora pressed her hands to her forehead. *Always pull back. Always see the broader picture. Don’t get lost in the fire of the moment.* Teachings which Sarissa wrote but apparently couldn’t follow.

Several emails already, pinging on her omnitool, all from Sarissa. She’d read the first one.

Incoherent, guilty apologies and rambling. A non-sensical report. Cora didn’t speak or read the asari language well, but even translated, it hadn’t made any sense:

Running on sentences, repeated words, and cut off thoughts.

Sarissa was compromised. Cora hoped the asari version of a PR department were able to yank her aside before they reached the Nexus.

The additional emails (ARK LEUSINI Report, ARK LEUSINIA REPORT EDitted, ARK LEUSINIA REPORT EDITED 2, ARK LEUSINIA REPORT 3 Final Edit) remained unopened. Cora was in no mindset to read incoherent reports. Sarissa in worse condition to be writing them.

Ryder had suggested to let Sarissa remain as Pathfinder, and for her to admit her mistakes to her people and leadership herself.

*This is going to be a fucking shit show.*

Cora straightened, and looked to her omnitool. Her legs tingled from the position which she’d folded herself into to try and meditate hours ago.

It had helped some. Not as much as it normally did.

*Maybe should do a reading. One of the manuals—*

And then the thought cut off. The typical self-soothing method of the past five years. Gone. Within a few mere moments. Cora couldn’t stomach reading line after line, reciting them mentally in the soft voice Sarissa used for teaching.

*What the hell, Cora? Why did you put so much faith in her? Hypocrite.* And the lack of mood to read manuals paired with the day’s events made a lump burn in her throat. Cora pressed her face harder into her forehead and heaved three deep breathes.

*Still a huntress. Doesn’t matter.*

But that was a lie; to Cora it did matter. Sarissa left her Pathfinder to die. They needed paths through the scourge but needed pathfinders more. Sarissa’s position was to defend Matriarch Ishara with her life. And she’d left.
Something tapped her door, snapping Cora from the current train of pity. Enough to rattle her from the focus on the burning feeling in her throat and behind her eyes as well.

“C-“ The first attempt to speak was more of a croak, but hearing herself make such a noise ripped Cora back to reality, “Coming!” Her voice sounded normal. Cora limped to the door on tingling legs, folding her arms over her chest.

“Hey.” Ryder looked tired too, holding a cup of tea. She offered it out wordlessly to Cora, “Take it. Don’t say no.”

“Ryder—” Cora held up her hands.

“That’s an order.”

She forced herself to crack a smile, “Yes, ma’am.” Her commanding officer was at her door. Cora cleared her throat and stepped aside, “Forgive my appearance right now. Would you like to come in?”

“Ma’am?”

“The proper way to address a woman of higher ranking than I.”

“Okay. Appreciate it. I’m wearing pajamas so really just…don’t worry about it.” Ryder smiled at her, “I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

“Thanks, Ryder.” Cora appreciated the sentiment and her dry throat the tea. Ryder stepped past her. She was wearing flannel pants, a men’s cut from the look of them, rolled around her hips to make them short enough to not cover her heels.

“Fuck, Cora.” Ryder sank onto her desk chair, “I’m sorry. You don’t have to talk to me. I know the asari probably are far more eloquent than I am with this kind of thing. Hell, my dad even was. Here I am trying to talk about the shit we saw today. But I’m here if you want to talk. And I understand if you don’t, is what I’m trying to say.”

Cora pressed her lips together, trying not to smile, because it wasn’t appropriate to smile right now, but Ryder wearing those stupid pants sitting on her desk chair trying to fumble out some words was a welcome change to her brain’s hole of sadness for both the asari and herself.

“You’re a good pathfinder.” Cora managed, she sank down on the edge of her desk, “I was glad to have you there. Thanks.”

Ryder waived her off, “You saved us. You’re the biotic commando. We needed biotics there and you had them—and kicked freakin’ ass despite that bomb that got dropped.”

“Thanks.” Cora hunched, resting her still folded arms down over her belly.

“So you and Sarissa. Have you talked?”

“She sent me some reports. She’s compromised. They’re basically unreadable, even untranslated.”

“You read common-asari? I should have known that.” From Ryder’s tone one might have thought it was a big deal.

“Only a little. I’m not fluent.” Ryder made her feel better regardless. A warming in her
“You must think your second’s a real idiot though, huh?” Cora looked down.

“Why? Because you had a mentor? Who you really cared about?”

“I shouldn’t have let her in like I did. I had her on a pedestal.” She absentmindedly pushed her bangs back, then dragged her fingers through her hair, “But I’ve learned.”

“I don’t think you should stop caring about people. She screwed up. But she’s still Sarissa.”

“Maybe. But that was a big mistake, ma’am.”

“Ryder. Or Sara, you know.” Ryder smirked at her, “You make me feel weird sometimes.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, Ryder. But you’re not your father’s daughter.”

Ryder smiled at that, “Oh thank god.” She clasped her hands together and looked at the sky, “Sorry, dad. Love you. But we’re mom’s kids.”

“You have some of his mannerisms whether you like it or not. Don’t get too excited.” Cora let herself smile. The first example being the way Ryder pressed her lips together when she was thinking. The second being what Cora internally coined as the ‘Ryder isn’t impressed face’: brows furrowed together, eyes narrowed, and head cocked to the side. The Pathfinder had half of Alec’s genetics whether she wanted to or not.

And there it was: the Ryder isn’t impressed face and Cora saw her transform into a younger Alec wearing flannel pants.

“Ugh. We took after her. Him and I got along, but he was my commanding officer. Not my dad. Even before Andromeda and all that. It was a strange dynamic in my family always. But you and Sarissa. It seems like she really meant something to you Cora, and I hope you can still be friends.”

“She did.” Cora sighed, “Really a lot.”

Ryder reached out and touched her elbow, “Hang in there, Harper. Maybe it will be better after tomorrow.”

“How long until docking?”

And SAM, in his omniscient glory, answered Cora before Ryder could, pinging through the speaker on her omnitool: “Seven hours, twelve minutes, and forty-seven seconds until docking at the Nexus.”

“Thanks, SAM. Guess I ought to try and sleep some. Thanks for the tea.”

“Yeah.” Ryder stood, “Me too. And finish the reports.”

And Ryder sauntered off, swinging her hips with the stupid oversized red and black flannels. Cora watched her disappear down the hallway until the biolab door swing closed. Cora sank herself back into the desk chair.

‘It seems like she really meant a lot to you’.

Because she did.

Cora had been delighted to hear of Sarissa coming to Andromeda. Often she’d wondered if
she would see Sarissa again. To get to speak with her one on one.

    Because she does. She does mean a lot.

How often had she fantasized about that one on one meeting? Seeing a familiar face. Getting to sit down and go through the manuals. Drink tea and learn from Sarissa herself. It made something tingle inside of Cora’s chest.

Sarissa would probably laugh herself into oblivion. Some human wanting to sit and study the manuals with her?

But to Cora that thought, fantasy, hope—whatever she wanted to call it. That had been carrying her through the last weeks in Andromeda.

    There’s always Ryder. That thought made her smile as well. Ryder in here, with her long sleeved sleeping shirt riding up and her flannels rolled around her hips, talking her Ryder ramblings and making Cora smile.

    We got a good Pathfinder, Sarissa. You’d better learn a thing or two from the way she takes care of her people.

And with that, and another ping of an email—(re: FINAL DRAFT. LEUSINIA REPORT. ARK KETT INCIDENT)—Cora decided it was time to try and sleep.

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Chapter 2 is coming soon! I promise most of this fic does not have this serious of a tone.

Plus lots of shore leave ramblings <3

Thanks for reading.
Chapter 2

In which a bunch of women get drinking and have no filters.

Graphic sexual content. NSFW.

Chapter 2:

Sarissa and she hadn’t talked. Sarissa had been stretching—the routine Cora knew. It was a meditative warm up she learned when she’d started boot camp with Talien’s Daughters. Sarissa had nodded to her, and motioned for her to join, and they matched their breathing and movements.

Dropping to lunges in silence, balancing on their toes and reaching their arms up to the goddess.

She synched her exhale to Sarissa’s, counted to two, then inhaled. Cora led on their inhale, and they met again when they stepped backwards with their right feet, bending at the waist and touching palms to the floor.

There was a chant that went along with this sometimes. Cora knew it by heart. But they stayed silent. Exhale. Relax shoulders. Step up. Right leg up, plant left heel. Cora breathed her focus up her body, into her chest to stretch her ribs and then past her head.

Shoulders to the left. Right leg down. Both heels planted. Match exhales.

She hadn’t gotten a lot of sleep, and it made focus hard, but Cora willed herself to only think about the movements.

Left leg up, plant right heel. She wobbled in her posture for a moment, sensing a sideways glance from Sarissa (meaning Sarissa wasn’t well focused either).

Both heels down. Hands to heart. Pause. Find your breath. Breathe away tension. Breathe. Even upon finishing their practice, the two remained in silent, although Cora admitted the centering made her feel better. At very least more prepared for calm conversation with her formal idol.

Keri T’Vessa bounded to them, attempting to snatch some of Sarissa’s attention. But it was short lived before leadership snagged her back into their offices.

And Cora was left to herself. Heading to the Pathfinder office where Sarissa was likely being interrogated was not appealing and left her short a comfortable Nexus spot to hang out.

She turned on her omni-tool which had been switched to \textit{do not disturb} while she and Sarissa practiced and found a group message.

\textit{Anyone want to join me at Vortex? It's been a while since I've been off the ship.} –Suvi

Cora decided that was a far better option than wandering the wards and being side-eyed as one of the Pathfinder’s teammates.

She snuck her way back to the docks, gripping the railing as the tram vibrated down its magnetic tracks. Other passengers paid her no mind, staring off distantly.
A few women in the back mumbled about Kett and the asari. One started spouting some outlandish conspiracy theory in which the asari were bringing Kett prisoners back with them and Cora happily tuned it out, opting to focus upon the ripples in the paint of the handrailing and try to center her mind for another few moments before it certainly would begin to run again.

**Vortex. Off to Vortex.**

Suvi, Ryder and Vetra were huddled at the end of the bar, Ryder turning and waving to her when they made eye contact. Cora sat herself on one of the stools. Though she hadn’t planned on having a drink, Anan poured her a shot of whiskey without prompting and slid it across the bar, “You earned this.”

Maybe her past as an asari commando was more common of knowledge than Cora thought. “Thanks.”

“Got them home. It’s good to see more asari here.” Anan winked, “Let me know if you need anything.”

Cora smiled. She didn’t normally shoot whiskey, so she let the small glass rest in front of her for a moment and realized the second reason Anan had poured her a drink: the conversation that was ongoing.

“No. Don’t call me ma’am.” Ryder was saying. Apparently, her needle remained stuck there from the previous night, “Not in causal conversation.”

“I find it sort of flattering.” Vetra set herself in one of the chairs, “I’d like it.”

“Your friends though? I feel like we know each other too well.” Ryder continued, “Yeah, flattering when I’m working but not when we’re on shore leave.”

“I still side with Vetra.” Suvi leaned on the bar, “Attractive, too.”

“Oh, in bed it’s hot. We’ve already established that. In bed she can call me ma’am all day.”

“She?” Suvi swiveled on the stool, “Got a girlfriend we don’t know about, Ryder?”

“Keri, right?” Vetra added.

“That was once.” Ryder slammed a shot down, shaking her head.

“Did she call you ma’am?” Suvi asked.

“I don’t kiss and tell.”

Vetra snorted, “Yes you do.” She made a whirring noise, “What a lucky girl if she did.”

“You want to call me, ‘ma’am’, Nyx?”

Vetra flared her mandibles and straightened her shoulders, “All do respect: think you’d be calling me ‘ma’am’, ma’am.”

Ryder puffed out her cheeks and dissolved into her hyena laugh, taking Vetra and Suvi with her. Cora was fairly certain that this wasn’t flirting between the three of them—Ryder was Ryder. Cora had seen Keri T’Vessi wrapped in a bedsheet because somehow she’d lost her shirt between
Ryder’s cabin and the Nexus docks. *Pays to be an early riser. I know that story is a true one.* Considering Liam wasn’t here Cora was surprised the conversation had come so deep into this hole, “You might want to drink. This is the same circle we’ve been in for a while.” Anan advised Cora, nudging her shot glass toward her.

“No, I’m fine.”

“You might want to drink. This is the same circle we’ve been in for a while.” Anan advised Cora, nudging her shot glass toward her.

“Do women call you ‘ma’am’ often, Vetra?” Suvi giggled at her.

“Depends on who they are.”

“Is the Aria T’loak thing real?” Ryder pressed.

It was Vetra’s turn to flare her mandibles again, “What Aria thing?”

“First name basis and I don’t even know who she is.” Suvi giggled.

And then they turned to Cora, “Bet the boys call Cora ‘ma’am’.” Ryder cackled, turning over her shot glass on the napkin.

Cora shook her head, “Pace yourself there, Pathfinder. Wouldn’t want to carry you home, ma’am.”

Ryder’s eyes sparkled the decorative lighting, she tossed her head back and let out another laugh, clapping her hands, “Only if you bought me dinner first.”

“You’d have to get me some drinks.” Cora smirked and tossed back her whiskey. A moment of clearing her throat while Anan who was incredibly good at her job nudged forward a glass of water for her to chase it with, “And I think you’d be getting me dinner.”

“Oysters, right? Isn’t that what gets women going?”

Cora crinkled her nose, “Didn’t they used to slurp those things raw?”

“‘Hell’s an ‘oyster’?”

“A slimy thing in a shell that people eat raw.” Suvi told Vetra.

“Sounds repulsive.” Vetra said, “Have you done it?”

“They’re delicious.” Ryder spun to face her, “And they get the ‘ol wheels oiled if you catch my drift.”

“The wheels oiled?” Suvi sang, “I think you mean ‘juices flowing’. :”

“So that’s how you got Keri? Fed her oysters.” Cora held her hand up when Anan came to pour her another shot, but Suvi and Ryder gladly took the next round.

“Actually, she happened to like my charm.”

“Do oysters work on asari?” Vetra was searching for extranet pictures of the shellfish with a distinctly turian look of repulsion. Mandibles clenched against her face, “They look like slime balls.”

“They’re good.”

“Ugh.” Cora snorted.

“Where are the girls?” Suvi leaned back to peer around Cora, “Thought there might be
It’s hardly past the morning.

But Cora kept that to herself. The Tempest crew operated on their own time, and after the Ark Leusinia incident their crew was certainly in need of blowing off steam, “There’s a lanky turian boy there, Cora.” Ryder said.


Cora turned to look to be a good sport. She recognized him from Operations but didn’t know his name. One of the radio techs, orange face markings and a tan carapace. He was with a human man with a greyed beard, “Not my type.” She turned back around.

“Not even the human?”

“Neither of them.” Cora was going to have to get ready for another shot if this conversation continued.

“What is your type?” Ryder pressed, “Come on. There’s got to be someone attractive here. Even if it’s just for a night.”

“I know when I see them.” Cora answered, and it was honestly the best she had, “And I’m not sure I need to see them walking around the Nexus afterward.”

“Eh. Just pretend it never happened. Keri and I worked that out. Oh. She’s cute.”

“Where?” Suvi was suddenly interested again. An asari scientist, wide-eyed and dressed in her work clothes. She joined the Operations turian and grey-bearded human at their table, “Damn… she’s in a group.”

“Just go. Talk to her.” Ryder said, “Do it.”

Suvi whispered back something which Cora couldn’t completely catch over the music but sounded like “waiting for an opportunity”.

Cora watched the asari. She had wide eyes and a wider smile when something said at the table made her laugh. She was lean—built more like a woman who worked a lab than one who worked a battlefield, but Cora was used to being surrounded by commandos, “She’s nice looking, Suvi.”

“See? Cora agrees. Just walk up and ask her.”

“I’m not advising anything.”

A group of people who Cora didn’t know, but recognized Ryder as Pathfinder, filed in. Within a few minutes it had divulged into Vetra having a meeting with new contacts, Suvi flirting with a different scientist woman and Ryder attempting to grind front-to-front on an asari.

‘Grind’ being an overstatement— Cora wasn’t sure what Ryder attempted to do was fully considered dancing by any definition, but her hands were firmly clasped on the asari’s ass and she was winding her hips back and forth, rolling forward into the woman’s. The asari was going in for a feel of her own.

And Cora ripped her eyes away at that point. Anan held up the bottle and Cora nodded, sitting back
on her stool to have another shot, “On the house, those two. ‘Many as you need. As a thanks.”

“I’ll pay for them.”

“Not letting you.” She smiled, “Go. Have fun. Cut loose.”

Cora thanked her and feeling awkward sitting alone, left. She walked past Vortex’s small dancefloor in time to see Ryder with the asari woman’s back pressed against the wall. Ryder swung her hips, working her way to the floor and hooking her fingers on the woman’s waistband to pull herself back up. Something tugged in Cora’s stomach, and she pulled her gaze away again, thankful to be able to slip out of the bar doors without anyone seeing her.

The sudden relative quiet and brightness of the docks was startling. Cora’s ears rang from the thumping music.

They’d all be back later. And she was exhausted. Time to get some rest and then talk to Sarissa if the opportunity presented.

On the walk back to the ship her stomach tugged again, a warmth traced from her naval to between her thighs and a different, pleasant heat across her face. Whiskey.

Damn, Cora. You really need to get action yourself. Having someone walking home with her now would be nice. Maybe a soldier—one of the APEX members. Her hand in his and them laughing together.

What is my type? Hmm. Had to think of someone to fill the role in this little fantasy (and to have a real answer next time Ryder or Vetra asked).

Who was the last person she’d been with? That cute Alliance marine with the olive skin who she’d met when she was with the Talien’s Daughters.

It has been a while.

The heat in her belly throbbed. Phantom hands gripped her waistband while she punched the pad to the door. Someone pulling themselves up her body by her belt to meet her nose to nose. Her own back against the wall.

Oh, please be no one on the ship.

“Cora!” Jaal boomed. Her belly throbbed, a nearly painful ache between her legs when she clenched her muscles in surprise.

“Hi, Jaal.”

“Mother, this is Lieutenant Harper.”

A chorus of ‘hellos’ from his mothers and siblings came from the video on his tablet as he held it up for Cora to wave, “Hello everyone! Nice to meet you.”

Okay. Said hi.

Thankfully it seemed Jaal didn’t want to stay and chat with her either. He stepped back into his quarters, faint voices of his family, the sliced textiles for his current sewing project slung over his shoulder. The door slid closed and Cora paused, looking back and forth as if someone knew what she was about to go and do.
Who cares. You’re alone. You’re off. Where was I?

A vidcom filled with Jaal’s family had ruined her libido for the moment.

Forget them. Where were you? Getting played with.

Her body was more than ready to pick up, still desperate for pressure between her legs. Wetness soaked through the thin material of her panties. Another experimental clench brought her the almost painful twinging of needing to be touched.

**Against the wall. Grabbing you by the pants.** She backed herself against her own wall, fingers dipped into her waistband. Her belly twitched, and Cora sidestepped, leaning herself back on her bed. Legs spread—damn she’d love the weight of someone on her, pressing between her legs, lips against hers.

Lips against neck. Cora pushed her fingers on herself, over the material of her pants, and let out a frustrated huff. She yanked her shoes off and then shoved down the restrictive, thick initiative trousers, taking one of her socks with them.

More like it.

She dipped her hand into the waistband of her panties. A light brush over her soft skin. The coolness of her fingertips made her hips lurch and belly clench. Cora closed her eyes.

Her mind took her to Vortex, back to the dancefloor.

This is stupid. I would never do anything in public.

And at that the fantasy switched to after hours, giggling and trying to dance. Some faceless handsome guy grabbing on her ass, hard, hard enough to manhandle her a little. Cora inhaled and pressed on the sensitive nub between her folds.

Oh fuck, we can’t do this here.

**He grabbed harder. She relished in the roughness, pushing into his hands.**

But after hours. Why the hell not? It was a stupid daydream and it had been an awful long time since she’d done this. Too damn busy and strung out to even think about it.

Cora picked up her pace, fingers sliding up and down, core muscles clenching.

**Back against the wall. His hand down your pants. That’s it.**

Her faceless fantasy decided to kneel in front of her. Oh. Fuck. That. Yes.

The scene in her head shattered when she did, hips quivering and rolling into her fingers as she finished far too soon, snapping her back to the dim glow from the greenhouse unit and hum of ship machinery. Cora exhaled, pinching her thighs together to quell the aftershocks.

Maybe you need to follow Ryder’s advice and find someone after all if you can’t handle people on a dancefloor.

Cora kicked off her panties and went to rummage in her drawer for a clean pair and her sleeping clothes.

You need rest is what you need.
Imma just apologize to Cora due to the content matter of this chapter~

Your comments and kudos give me life <3
Chapter 3

Shout out to my comment and kudos folks! : ) I’m off work for the week so I’m trying to crank out some chapters before I head back there and have batshit hours again.

Chapter 3:

They were set off for Kadara before Cora had a chance to properly see Sarissa. But they’d exchanged emails. It was a start. She could stomach speaking to her electronically again without her heart racing and throat tightening, despite the Leusinia incident fresh in her mind.


Cora kept with her practice, and as the *Tempest* hurtled its way closer to Kadara Port, she felt better.

*Probably for the best. You’ll both be fully cooled off when you get to talk face to face.*

—

“Fuck, you’re flexible.” Ryder muttered through her teeth, bending down.

“Practice.” Cora answered her, audibly exhaling (as apparently you were supposed to in yoga).

“How do you get you heels on the floor? This is downward dog, right?” Ryder’s wrists and palms ached, and she did her best to walk her hands backward. Her hamstrings screamed at the movements and she stopped, finding balance up on her toes.

“Yes. It’s downward dog.” Vetra answered, being a turian and able to fold herself like a pretzel in ways no human could. She was upright, taping at the console, uninvolved with yoga this time.

“Where’s Jaal? I need his support if I’m doing yoga.” He always provided good commentary when he joined the sessions.

“You have Cora and Lexi.” Vetra answered.

Cora straightened herself and lifted one leg. Ryder followed her up, albeit less gracefully.

Lexi had her eyes closed and a smile, stretching her leg behind her, nearly touching her head with her foot. “Less talking. More yoga. Or Lexi will get mad.” Cora said. But Lexi had on her noise-cancelling headset and was ignoring them. Cora had the same blissful yoga look, and it filled Ryder’s chest with warmth. She and Lexi were happy when they did this— Ryder was glad to join them and enjoy the pleasantness of the experience.

She didn’t know anything about yoga. But Cora was on par with Lexi in that department as asari commandos practiced something very similar. Cora always moved slowly when Ryder joined them, watching her from one eye, and letting her mimic her poses.

“Oh. Shit.” Ryder muttered, hopping on one foot, trying to keep her balance.

Cora didn’t look at her anymore (Cora’s eyes closed. She had entered Cora-yoga-mode): “Breathe down through your heel and up through your crown. Align your chakras. Breathe up to the Goddess.” Normally that was Lexi’s coaching, but Lexi wasn’t coaching today.
“I’m not an asari. I don’t have your skills.” Ryder muttered, but did her best to center and take Cora’s advice. *Inhale through your nose, stop being a spaz.*

Vetra cleared her throat, and Ryder looked up to see her standing effortlessly balanced on one leg at the console. Unflinching in the pace of her typing.

*Show off.*

“Helps if you’re not hungover.” Cora still smiled, a long exhale. Ryder exhaled with her.

“I’m not hungover.” Ryder closed her own eyes, switched legs, and had to hop again to find her balance.

“You don’t look hungover.”

Was that sarcastic? Cora-yoga-mode was hard to read, “Good.” Ryder swung her head toward Cora as she’d said it and the movement threw her off balance. She had to sidestep to catch herself, brushing her shoulder into Cora who remained rock steady.

Exhale. Ryder was behind Cora, she focused a moment to synch their breathing, noticing Lexi was also matched with Cora despite her headset. Apparently, that was important in asari commando training—bonding in their sisterhood by breathing the same rhythm. Cora stepped herself into a different pose, arms outstretched. Ryder scrambled back to her space, matching Cora’s movements, “Not at all.” Cora murmured, “Topple the other direction, will you?”

“Sorry, Cor.”

Exhale. “You’re getting a little better.”

“I don’t know I am.”

“You are.” And Ryder stood and focused and centered herself, matching her breathing to Cora and Lexi’s.

They had a day’s flight to reach Kadara. Might as well make the most of it.

—

Ryder had been running back and forth across the port for hours. Between Reyes and Sloane she felt more affinity to chicken without a head than a Pathfinder. Looking for evidence, speaking with a salarian at the market who said he was going to refuse to serve anyone from the Nexus but changed his tune when Vetra swooped in with her impeccable timing and a box of salarian snack crackers.

She chewed her lip in concentration, knowing she needed armor and a squad before taking on the rumors of murdered angara in the badlands. Ryder continued through the mental checklist of things she needed to handle tonight.

*Better be worth it.*

At the lift she located Cora, standing with square shoulders and her arms at her sides. She scanned her vision back and forth, “Standing guard?” Ryder asked.

“Some idiot thought he could make off with the *Nomad* last time we were here. Thought one of us should stay close to our equipment.” Cora answered, and Ryder felt a pang of guilt. How
long Cora had been standing in that spot?

“Bet you scared him.”

Cora rippled her biotics the way only asari commandos (and Cora, apparently) could, “Bet I did. He actually offered to buy it.”

She sounded amused, but Ryder was stuck on the guard service her XO had been burdened with, “Oh, Cor. Tell me you haven’t been standing here all day…”

“An hour. Maybe two.” She shrugged.

“We’ll be out of port soon.” Ryder tried to assure her, not sure how accurate that was, “I’ll have you come when we go out in the badlands. But out of curiosity— how much am I driving around?”

Cora popped her lips, “Negotiations fell apart when he asked if I came with it.”

“I hope you fucked him up.” Ryder snorted, but felt another pang of disgust that someone said that to Cora. *Come on. She deserves much better than half the shit she’s put up with.*

“Trust me. I made him regret it.” There was amusement in her voice.

But Ryder didn’t share that amusement, at least not at the moment, “Really? Damn it. Good. Sure he deserved it.” Ryder pushed a stray strand of her bangs behind her ear.

“Certainly did. He ran for it.”

But okay, she was Ryder. And Ryder could only hold her jokes in for so long, “So uh… what would have been your price?” That was so inappropriate, but Ryder was mad about someone propositioning Cora in such a way, and humor was always her best coping mechanism.

“For the *Nomad*?” Cora chuckled, “I think I would have had some explaining to do.”

“I meant the other one but let’s forget I asked. I’m actually pissed—”

Cora burst out laughing and Ryder couldn’t help to as well. They stood, backs leaning against the filthy port wall as they cracked up, ‘guarding’ the lift which brought them both to the *Tempest*’s docking place and the slums, “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

“You couldn’t resist, could you?” Cora straightened herself up, arms folded over her stomach.

“I really couldn’t.” Ryder felt her cheeks growing hot. Her lack of filter was going to get her decked one day. It wouldn’t be the first time in her life, but better behavior was a conscious effort now that she was in Andromeda and the Pathfinder, “Sorry.”

Cora pressed her lips together, “Not for money. He’d have to give me something else. What’s the point of money in Andromeda?”

Ryder snorted, “Now I’m curious.”

“Alright, ma’am. Let me think.”

And Ryder snorted again, unable to stop herself from laughing, “You’re really answering me?”
Cora puffed out her cheeks, “No. Got nothing. He was pretty gross.”

“He sounds like charmer.”

“Almost as charming as you.”

But Ryder was overtired, and despite how hard the rational half of her brain screamed at her to shut her mouth, her jaws kept flapping—“Yeah so what if he came with chocolate? Roses?”

Cora turned to her, straight faced, “Do you know how many people have brought me chocolate or flowers, Ryder?”

**Whoa. Damn.** Well okay, she’s Cora, of course people have brought her roses and chocolate. Ryder blinked, “You bragging now?”

“I wish.” Cora leaned her head back against the wall, a satisfied smirk on her face, “They were asari.”

“Is that a normal thing for asari commandos?”

“A normal proposition, if that’s what you mean.”

“Well…did you?”

“No.”

“Damn. Should have kept a black book. How many we talking? Twenty?”

Cora chuckled, “That’s a tiny lie. More like one brought me a rose once. But you get the idea—asari are romantic.”

“Cora Harper. Charming the ladies. Or should I say ‘lady’.”

“The point is I have been offered roses before.”

“Well, then maybe I ought to find someone to offer you chocolate too. Then I can get them to make deals with you for me.”

“This is getting complicated. Teach me how to charm the boys and maybe we can work out a deal, Ryder.”

“You making deals with me directly now?” Ryder was still laughing, “You know I don’t charm the boys.”

“Depends on what’s on the table. What sort of deals are you brokering behind the scenes?” Cora sounded so damn amused. She was Cora—too sharp to ever grain the upper hand on her through teasing. **No wonder Alec liked you. You could probably talk circles around him.** Sara’s father had a habit of forcing her into a proverbial corner during any conversation they had, usually making her feel more interrogated than anything. But Cora had a different edge and she was incredibly self-aware, enough so to get around Alec’s typical debate tactics. Ryder found it very satisfying to imagine.

“Depends on what you want.”

“Alright, Pathfinder. I think we’re ending this conversation.” Cora was still grinning, “When are we going to check out that camp Reyes wants us to look at?”
Ryder stared out from the across the railing, closing one eye and holding her hand out to the sun, measuring the distance between the setting orb and the horizon, (“Somehow I don’t think that’s as accurate on this planet as it might be on Earth.” Cora commented).

“Soon. Now. Not a lot of sunlight left. Let’s get moving.”

Cora opted to be the one to answer the question of a passerby rather than Ryder, allowing the Pathfinder space to call and rally their team before a squad was sent into the Kadara badlands. Such missions typically required all hands on deck, especially in a place as unknown Kadara.

She was more than willing to entertain the questions of one of the Port’s residents. Especially if it saved Ryder being ambushed.

“What can I do for you?” She asked. The man was human, standing nearly a head shorter than her. His omni-tool open, reading off what Cora could see were bulleted notes. Mousy red hair and a freckled face.

“I have something you might find interesting. Nice biotics. Was hoping to talk to you.”

Being complimented on biotics wasn’t a compliment. Not when you were a human with huntress grade weapons. Cora swallowed a sudden dryness in her mouth, a chill of self-preserving instinct down the back of her neck, “Were you?” The good mood she’d found laughing with Ryder diminished, instead marred with suspicion.

She didn’t say anything else, silent and staring into him. He blinked and averted his eyes, “I…Uh…You’re the Pathfinder’s biotic human?”

*Obviously.* Cora didn’t grace that with a response, instead waited, staring him down. He’d started this conversation and he could finish it. The man continued, “Listen…I’m working with some people here. We want to make things in Andromeda different for kids than they were in the Milky Way. Especially humans—you know firsthand, I’m sure. We’ve got some experimental stuff. Would love to get your opinion—”

“‘Experimental stuff’?”

“You’re trained. We have biotic suppressing tablets, more comfortable amps, pills to take to stop your amp from overheating. More, too. They’re safe. We know that. We don’t have anyone as trained as you to test them. It would be an honor. And you’d be helping kids—kids like you were, I’m gue—”

“You don’t know me.” Cora didn’t care that she cut him off, “And forgive me for not throwing myself on this opportunity. Nice talking to you.” She took a step back, trying to signal to him that she was done with the conversation.

“In case you’re interested. I’ll forward you my info.”

*I’m not.*

“No thanks. Have a nice day.” She said. Joining in step with Ryder to take the lift back to the *Tempest.*

The Pathfinder eyed her, and then looked over her shoulder where the mousy-haired man watched them, “What did he need?”
“Biotics.” Cora answered. She grit her teeth when her omni-tool pinged with the notification sound of a new email.

Ryder looked at her strangely, “Did he offer chocolate and roses?”

“Even better—experimental drugs. And no. I didn’t take any. That was…strange.”

Ryder peered at him, eyes narrowed, muscles in her chin twitching. Cora recognized the behavior as her subvocalizing to SAM. Within a few seconds Ryder answered, “SAM has no idea who that is. So there’s that. He’s probably a very reputable person, Cora. Definitely take whatever he offers you.”

“Good advice, ma’am.” Cora watched Ryder crinkle her nose at the ‘ma’am’ while punching the keypad to let them into the Tempest, “I’ll remember it.”

“If my crewmates are taking drugs off strangers at Kadara port I’m certainly doing something right.” They stepped through the airlock, opening their lockers.

“Who’s doing what now?” Kallo swiveled in his chair.

“Don’t ask.” Cora called over her shoulder, opening her locker for her armor.

“Harper? Jaal? You two ready to come out?” Ryder asked over the radio, “Vetra, Drack, can you work the port? See if you can find any information on these killings? Peebee’s on the remtech. Kosta, you’ve got an eye on the radio frequencies?

Kallo and Suvi keep an eye on the ground conditions—meet us for an extraction if anything gets too hot on mine or Cora’s signal. We should be three hours, tops. Radio contact for everyone at all times, understood? Everyone good?”

A chorus of ‘yes, ma’am’ and ‘aye-aye’ both echoing over the radio and around the bridge.

“Great. Five minutes. Be ready to move, people. That sun’s going down and let’s be back before then.”

—

Thanks for reading!
“I know all of your kind isn’t like those exiles we saw today. The galaxy is a better place without Mallox.” Jaal’s hand came to Ryder’s shoulder, squeezing firmly. She closed her eyes and exhaled, “The angara withholding water was wrong as well. Cruelty is universal, I’m afraid.”

His words didn’t make her feel much better. She exhaled again, trying to steady herself. Reyes certainly hadn’t expected such a scene when he’d mentioned to her the tensions between angara and Milky Way species in the Kadara badlands.

“Still. I can’t believe they’d poison them like that. It’s disgusting.”

“As was the treatment of the starving Milky Way species at his ‘inn’. A place where they were supposed to be safe.”

Jaal was right. Ryder was military, she’d had to defend herself before, but killing was something you never got used to—nor did she want to.

“They fired on us. I guess one less predator like that is good for everyone.” She puffed out her cheeks, hand resting on an ice bag from where Mallox had sprained it when making a grab for her pistol.

(“Just a sprain. I’ll inject you with some medigel. Should be no pain in a day or two.” Lexi told her, and as an added perk she’d learned how unenjoyable it was to be stuck multiple times in the back of her hand).

“I agree.” Jaal told her, spinning to leave her in the galley with a report that was making her nauseous to write, “You’re a good Pathfinder, and a good woman.” He added, “Thank you for looking into the deaths of my people, all people, even exiles from both of our worlds.”

Ryder nodded, “Thanks, Jaal.”

He gave her a nod and disappeared from the kitchen. Drack came in, showing her a new rifle mod which he’d been tinkering with, “Good to have you in our corner, Ryder. Get rid of that turian Mallox scum.”

“What makes me qualified to judge?” Krogan saw battle as more a part of culture than humans did, but Drack was always good on this sort of advice, “Seeing that shit?”

Drack sighed, sitting down across from her, gathering his rifle into his lap, “Eh, kid. There’s a lot of messed up people out there. Doesn’t matter who they are. And the way I see it, sometimes we’re better off without them.”

Ryder wasn’t sure she was comfortable with that, “What makes me qualified to judge?”

“Nuthin’.” Drack turned over the weapon in his hands, popping out the clip, “Extended, holds double the rounds it used to.” Ryder took the empty clip.

“Useful. Get it in port today?”
“You bet.” He answered, taking it back when she offered it across the table, “But Nuthin’, kid. Nuthin’. When you get in situations like that it’s them or you. They give you no choice. You really think Mallox would have let you walk out of there? He’s a coward—poisoning his enemies. Running a boarding house infested with vermin where the residents die of dysentery. All around screw up if you ask me.”

“Still doesn’t make writing the report any easier.” Ryder muttered, and after gathering his own dinner, Drack left her at the table.

“You did the right thing. Sometimes it’s not easy.”

“Thanks, Drack.”

She took her tablet, ration pack, and coffee and headed for her own quarters.

It was well into night at Kadara Port where they were docked, but Ryder remained too keyed up from the evening’s events to go to bed. She had reports to write, and it was still making her feel sick.

There likely will never be an easy way to write a report about people being poisoned. Nor about abuses such as the ones Mallox and the angara committed toward one another.

I know, SAM. Still gotta do it.

She sat at her desk and opened her computer. The holographic keypad flickered to life around her fingers, hand aching as she begun to type.

Remind me the day and time this happened. Nexus-Andromeda standard.

SAM provided her with what she asked, and Ryder got to work. She wrapped herself in her sweatshirt, doing her best to compartmentalize and separate herself from what she was typing. Damn my freakin’ hand. And the ache in her hand made it real for that moment—real people shot at them; real people died. He’d left her with pulled tendons in her hand and wrist before she’d wrenched the pistol back and Mallox reached for his own gun and she pulled the trigger first and he crumpled.

Ryder puffed out her cheeks.

Compartmentalize.

Someone tapped on her door.

Lieutenant Harper is outside.

Thanks, SAM.

“Come in!” She called over her shoulder.

“Ryder.” Cora stepped inside, “Sorry. Wanted to check in. Also— I have an electrolyte lozenge if you want it. As thanks for the other night.”

“What other night?” Ryder squinted.

“You know…after Leusinia. Thanks for bringing me that tea, I needed it.”

“You don’t have to thank me, but I’d like that tablet if you aren’t gonna’ eat it.” Sugar was a rare
commodity—even if it was fake medicinal candy like this.

Cora held it out to her, “I think they’re gross. Reyes gave it to me.”

“Ah, so that’s why you didn’t eat it.”

“Meh, you find most happiness through your stomach and might need a pick me up. Plus, I offered it to you instead of Gil so you know where my loyalty is.”

“That’s fair.” Within seconds Ryder had the tablet out of its paper wrapping and into her mouth.

“Thanks. Hey. You alright?”

“I’m fine.” Ryder had a feeling she was lying.

“Really? I’m not.” Ryder stood to look out her still open window. Lights and distant shadows of people milling about in the slums, “Shit. When they said it was the frontier they weren’t joking. Looks so normal from back here. Like any other Port.”

“Isn’t it surreal?” Cora sobered, “I’m… very glad you’re the Pathfinder.”

“Glad you’re not mediating brutal murder cases?” Ryder pressed her hand to her forehead.

Cora had a foil package with a metallic straw—biotic recovery gel. Sugar slurry of her own. “Hey. I’m here with you.”

“I’m glad you were there.” Ryder sighed, “You’re professional in ways I hardly can be.”

Cora sunk onto Ryder’s couch, “How’s the hand?”

“Hurts. Injections in the back of your hand aren’t that fun it turns out.”

Cora winced, “Ouch. Feeling better?”

“Better than I was. Medi-gel is a gift.” Ryder flexed her fingers for Cora, a square of gauze was taped on the back of her hand. But Cora stared past her. Her eyes averted Ryder’s, planted forward at the wall, “How are you, Cora? Honestly?”

“Would be better if this hadn’t happened back to back with Leusinia. But it is what it is, right?” Ryder frowned, “How’s the implant?”

Cora’s hand went to the base of her skill, “It’s fine. I have a nice one. And they don’t overheat like they used to. Your father was biotic, so he probably had those old issues.”

“He did. Cold towels on the neck. Headaches. All of it. I remember that.” Ryder said, reaching out her fingers, “Can I?”

“The amps are small—I have a new one. Asari military made.” Cora said, turning her head down and offering her neck out to Ryder, “You won’t be able to feel it.”

A thick scar at her hairline made Ryder wince for her, wondering how many times she’d endured it being opened. She touched lightly over it, unable to feel the device implanted beneath her skin, “Does it bother you?”

“Not really.” Cora lifted her head and fixed her bangs, “Don’t notice it unless I’m overusing or there are mass effect fields. But damn, Ryder. Last week we brought down a hero in front of her entire
ark…this week…well…this?” Cora had dark circles beneath her eyes, “How do you sleep?”

“I don’t.”

“Me neither.”

And they both laughed. Probably because they were overtired. Or because the only alternative was being sorry for themselves, “Oh it’s bad.”

“I know.” Cora raked her hands through her short hair, “Trust me.” And despite laughing, she still looked sad. Ryder knew she probably looked sad herself. Her eyes burned, and she didn’t desire trying to sleep tonight—*good thing you have reports to finish.* “Do you need help?”

“I’m good, thanks. You probably finished your report, haven’t you? You’re fast at that.”

Cora pressed her lips together, “I did.”

“I think I’m alright.”

“You sure? I’d hate for you to be up all night, Pathfinder.”

“Maybe it’s your turn to get some sleep.” Ryder crunched the remains of the sweet artificial-fruit-flavored tablet Cora brought her.

“I was going to meditate anyway. I need to after that.” Cora stretched her neck, “Would talk to Sarissa, but it’s not a good time.”

Ryder wondered if it would ever be ‘a good time’, but she kept that to herself, “Right.” And Cora just looked sad again. Ryder didn’t know what else to offer her, so she blurted out the only thing she had: “Do you hug? Do you want a hug?” She’d drowned plenty of her sorrows thus far in meaningless physical contact—thus hugging her friend seemed far more meaningful than most of the questionable coping she’d engaged in. Offering seemed right. Cora deserved a hug if she wanted one.

Cora actually smiled at that, “Sure, Ryder.” She stood up and held her arms out.

Static charges snapped on Cora’s clothes when they met Ryder’s—*biotics.* She felt stiff and musclebound beneath Ryder’s arms, almost cringing when Ryder gripped her around the waist. Ryder let her hold slacken and Cora raised her arms up to gently give her a pat on the back before she pulled back. *Okay. Not a hugger. That’s okay.*

Ryder felt sorry for asking, “Thanks, Ryder. I appreciate it.” Cora said, “If you need anything, I’ll be up.”

*She’s a good sport. We don’t deserve how good of a sport she is.*

“Me too. That goes both ways.” Ryder added quickly, and Cora still smiled at her, disappearing out of the door.

*At least the distraction you seem to be having after that encounter might make it easier to write, Pathfinder.*

*Thanks, SAM. More like wondering how awkward that must have been for Cora. Can we not call it an ‘encounter’?*
Yes, Pathfinder. But her vitals had a notable spike. Perhaps she is nervous to accept physical contact.

Exactly. It was awkward. So let’s stop talking about it.

Yes, Pathfinder.

Leave it to SAM to make it even harder for her to write her report under the guise of being helpful.

---

This isn’t working.

Cora shifted her position from sitting crossed legged to lying flat on her floor. Breathe in.

Why are you so stiff?

Breathe out-two-three-four…

Why did Ryder just hug you?

Granted humans were far more informal about physical contact than asari. She had her friend Janae, but they were of the same rank and knew each other intimately.

These were the sorts of nights she wished she had someone. Someone who wasn’t afraid to be in close physical proximity with a weapons-grade biotic. Someone who really wanted to distract her from all of this.

Hopefully Ryder hadn’t noticed her reflex to stiffen or wasn’t offended if she had—Cora was just out of practice hugging people.

It wasn’t a mannerism of hers.

Guess Ryder’s into it.

But it felt nice, being physically close to someone. She hadn’t embraced anyone since leaving Janae behind in the Milky Way. And that train of thought made Cora homesick so she made a conscious effort to stop thinking of it.

Andromeda was her home now. You were just a useful freak back in the Milky Way. You’ve moved up. People were willing to hug her and share a ship with her here, seemingly unconcerned with her skills. Ryder appeared more fascinated with her amp than put off by it. Cora appreciated that.

She just wasn’t used to it.

Deciding her mind was circling too fast to successfully meditate, and tailbone beginning to protest lying on the hard floor, Cora sat up. Her spine popped, and she stretched the stiffness for a moment, one hand coming up to where her amp was implanted. The ghost of Ryder’s brave fingers still on the back of her neck.


Ryder treated you like you were normal.

She isn’t afraid. Not at all. She grew up with Alec. It’s normal to her.
And for some reason that thought made Cora comfortable enough to crawl into her bed, attempting to read one of the asari romance novel downloads with which Janae loaded her omni-tool before she left.

---

Thanks guys for sticking with two slower chapters. And I know the whole Reyes Kadara missions aren't really related to Mallox but I wanted to write about it! Smut in the next one ; )
Chapter 5

Ok this is definitely a lot of smutty Cora action going on, so you’ve been warned :o NSFW

The formatting sucks a little but i’m being a lazy crap about fixing it right now. Thanks AO3 lol :)

Chapter 5:

“Oh, fuck yes.” Ryder rolled her tongue, the *Nomad* engine roared and propelled them up a rocky incline. The tires popped off the ground at the crest, prompting Cora to snag the handle on the door.

“Forget about the struts.” She muttered.

“Easy on her struts, Ryder.” Gil complained from the back seat.

“But she does have good shocks.” Ryder commented, “And you got to admit: that engine is a little sexy…” She let the vehicle coast down the next hill, Cora watched the Kadara landscape zoom past them.

“It is pretty out here.” Cora murmured. The sky was a stark blue, stretching against red sand mountains. A few wispy clouds gathered on the horizon. Despite its toxicity, the sea-green color of the water was striking in the light.

Peebee snorted (of course she did): “Except for the part where the water will literally kill you?”

“Kind of dangerously beautiful.” Cora added.

The asari sitting behind her clicked her tongue, “Okay. I can get on board with that.”

“Thought so.”

“Ryder, let’s get to this Remnant. And let’s drive over more hills.” Peebee suggested, poking her head between their seats.

Gil groaned, “I mean, only if you put it in the higher gear.”

A grin spread across Ryder’s face, “Let’s do it.” She stomped the clutch and knocked the *Nomad* up to the next, accelerating them for another gravelly hill.

“Oh, faster, baby.” Gil said.

“Oh, I will go faster. Like it like that?” Ryder bumped up the gear again.

Pebee was giggling and Cora smirked, shaking her head, trying not to laugh at their antics when the three of them let out a series of moans and hoots. But alas, laughter was contagious.

“Don’t stop.” Cora managed.

“Never crossed my mind.” Ryder murmured, gripping the steering wheel with her gloved hands. Muscles in her toned arms flexed beneath armor plates when she leaned forward, crinkling her nose. The tires dug in and propelled them up, but catching more air resulted in a jarring landing—
“Now she’s gettin’ rough.” Peebee commented.

“Nothing wrong with that.” Cora whistled.

“Your wish is my command, ladies.” Ryder laughed, bumping the gear back down as the road in front of them became relatively flat.

Gil turned to her, “You still talking about the Nomad?”

Ryder cocked her eyebrows up, eyes glued to the sandy expanse in front of them, “You talking about something else, Gil?”

“No.” His answer came in the fabulously dry Gil voice, “Just glad I’m not the only one who enjoys a strong engine under me.”

“Glad we’re on the same page.” Ryder eased them along the path, the tall dark arms of the Remnant site reached from the ground in the haze before them.

“I think I prefer being the strong engine.” Peebee informed them and retreated from between the front seats to her own.

“Great addition.” Gil drawled.

“I thought so too; that’s why I said it.”

“Now that it’s all settled.” Ryder parked front of the structure, “No movement on our sensors. And none detected by SAM. Stay focused, you all know how remnant are.”

Cora breathed her biotics through her body, feeling goosebumps cover her arms and static electricity crawl across the back of her neck. She was ready—“Aye, aye.”

Boots on sand. The sudden warm and gusting Kadara wind snapped her out of the relatively safe bubble of the Nomad. Bots, if anything, but still too dangerous to let her guard down. The sand danced on the wind, swirling dust across the platform.

Cora hazarded a step up onto it.

And sure enough—the trademark sound of assemblers waking from their slumber. Electronics whirring and powering up, “Remnant!” Cora’s shout ripped from her throat. She flared her biotics and charged. Ryder hauled her rifle to her shoulder and slid on her knees behind the edge of the platform.

Inhale. The mass effect fields rippled around her, eyes locked upon the two bots which were lumbering toward them. Ryder and Peebee both out of her firing line, in cover. Exhale. Release.

And she let the charge she’d gathered blast from her fingertips. The air turned to waves around her, disrupted by her fields. But she’d hit her target—both at once. The force twisted the bots in half, sparks flying, and they toppled into a pile of metal limbs.

A dull throb settled in the base of her skull, arms and head heavy. Cora inhaled again, pivoting on her heels into her own cover. Ryder and Peebee leapt upon the platform ahead of her, the sound of a rifle firing. Inhale. Breathe heels to head. Center. Training she’d had since her Alliance days and taken to the extreme by the asari. Sidearm out, cocked, safety off. The pleasant static feeling returned across her body after a moment of recharge and Cora propelled herself after her teammates.
“Just a creeper! It’s toast!” Ryder shouted, “Any more?”

“Don’t see any!” Peebee called back.


She traversed the platform beside her teammates, “I think we’re clear.” Ryder stated, “take a lap around the outside. See if we can flush any more out.”

And they did. Cora minded her steps, using her field to cushion them on the gravel. Her implanted amp vibrated at the back of her head.

“Clear.” She said, only loud enough to be picked up by the radio, reaching the end of her lap around the platform.

“Clear.” Ryder echoed.

“Clear.” Came a few moments later from Peebee who’d already holstered her weapon and had her hands on an ancient storage canister.

Ryder came to Cora, fist tapping affectionately on the chest plate of her armor, “Slick work. Look at that. Works better than bullets on those guys—” Ryder motioned to the dead bots on the ground.

“She is a commando.” Peebee shrugged. Gil joined her side and the two of them begun picking through pieces of the tech. Normally Gil didn’t come out but this was a simple grab for the Nexus scientists—they’d requested any Remnant tech which could be spared and considered valuable, and Peebee and Gil were the best two to make the assertion of what to haul back.

This site was well hidden from the Outcasts at the port, protected by the mountain range and detected only by SAM’s scans. Cora—from personal experience—trusted SAM’s tech far more than anything the Outcasts and scavengers in the badlands had.

At least as far as we’ve seen.

Cora opened the motion sensor on her omnitool—nothing save for the four of them. She kept listening for the sound of tires on gravel or the scream of a shuttle, but only noticed wind, “Everyone’s got to get home and sleep tonight. That’s going to be an order.” Ryder mentioned, “We hop on the Tempest with the tech, figure out the vault and then go.”

Cora wasn’t opposed to that. Their morning started with a slew of errands across the Kadara badlands, followed by playing impromptu ambassador with Vetra at one of the bars to appease a local group hell bent on attempting to vandalize anything from the Nexus ‘for spite reasons’, until reconnecting with Ryder to grab Peebee and Gil and drive to the middle of nowhere finding scraps of tech for Nexus scientists.

It had been a long day, but thankfully quieter in the sense that nothing as disturbing as the situation with Mallox occurred.

“You going to let me drive back?” Cora teased, “Seemed like you were enjoying it an awful lot.”

“I do like being in control—” Ryder sobered as soon as she said it, maybe trying to be more professional for Cora (and Cora was still unsure of what to think of the nature of their newly
developed teasing relationship), “But, honestly, if you really want to you can.”

“I like going for the ride.”

“Good. Because I’m about to burn some of her rubber.”

Cora laughed. *Jeez. We’re really overtired. Tease her. You did enough yesterday,* “Can’t say I’m opposed but she might want you to go gentle.”

From the look on her face, Ryder was coming up with something suggestive to say but Gil poked his head from the pile of dilapidated containers through which he and Peebee were rummaging, “Think we’ve got a decent hull.”

Peebee tossed an empty container aside, “Most of it is junk here.” She made a face of disgust, “But enough to fill a box.”

“A small box.” Gil added.

“Like a shoe box or a normal box?” Ryder tried.

Peebee motioned to a pile, “What size is a small box? What is a normal box?”

“A small moving box?” Gil clarified.

“What is a small moving box? What size is that?” Ryder continued, “Enough to hold this? It’s a not a bad haul.”

Gill shook the wrinkles from the folded nylon bag he had stuffed into his pack, “It’ll fit in here. Easy enough to carry.”

Ryder sounded pleased: “Well, if that’s all there is—great! Let’s head home.”

They piled back into the Nomad.

And Cora knew they were just being crass and joking around about the *Nomad* and driving it. Obviously. But they all must have been getting more action in Andromeda than she, because, embarrassingly enough, she was starting to feel rutty about all of this joking around.

Not about driving the *Nomad*, but the comments had started to push her brain into a rabbit hole which she couldn’t drag it from.

*Like it rough? I like being in charge.* Those lines had *totally* been joking, but they kept playing in her head.

Her faceless fantasy muttered them to her, pushing her down on her bed.

Cora grit her teeth and snapped herself back to the present. Peebee moaned as Ryder twisted the key, “Listen to that.” Ryder commented.

“I usually am not into it, but this *Nomad* girl sure is sexy.” Gil continued as the tires begun to roll.

*Oh my God, really? We’re still talking about this?* But the conversation itself wasn’t bothering her so much as the fact that they were just joking, and Cora was the one *not taking* this conversation so far, but she was *actually* getting needy for some damn reason. She crossed her legs tightly, clenching her muscles, trying to think of something else.
“Get rough with her again. Like a lover.” Peebee was saying.

And both of those things made it worse. **Guess this isn’t even innuendos anymore.**

“Only if she begs for it.” Ryder muttered.

“Oh my god.” Cora was able to make her voice sound unimpressed. ‘only if you beg for it’. **Damn it, Ryder. That’s a good one. If anyone ever said that to me—damn it.** “Seriously?” At least she still sounded professional.

“Sorry.”

“I make them beg for it.” Peebee shrugged.

“Wow, no wine and dine or nothing?” Gil continued.

And they were flying over hills, headed for Kadara Port. Cora’s mind wandered to ‘wine and dine’. Oh, when was the last time someone was romantic with her? Almost never? But what happened after the wining and dining was where her brain wanted to stick. On the being pushed down; the pressure between her legs—

She ignored their slew of commentary, watching the scenery pass by. **Kadara. Still working.**

“**You’re quiet, Cora.”** Peebee commented.

“Just enjoying the ride—” They cackled in response, “You’re all ridiculous.” Cora snorted, and shook her head.

**Tempest** returned safely into the cargo bay. A quick debriefing from the day in the conference room with the whole crew and they parted ways. The ship was unusually quiet—a tired bunch. A lot had happened in a short period.

Hell, it was hardly five days since Leusinia.

Cora had mostly forgotten about her thoughts while riding in the **Nomad** until she reached her quarters after her turn in the shower and the door locked behind her. She paused.

**SAM, if you’re watching. Scram. My authorization.**

**Yes, Lieutenant.**

The daydream wasn’t a bar, this time. It was here, in this room. A relaxing evening after her long day.

It started with wine, even though she didn’t have any at the moment. Cora’s freshly showered self, sitting at her desk chair in her robe, watching her partner come in her door.

*I’ve been waiting a while. Are you going to take care of me?*

‘**Only if you beg for it.**’

The scene played out in her head.

*Please?*

And then she flopped herself on her bed again.
She was too anxious for this to draw it out for long. Cora ripped open her robe, roughly dragging her own hands over her chest and then down her body until she reached where she needed to be touched.

*Please.*

She was indulged. Middle finger of one hand pushed inside of herself and other hand to rub circles on her clit.

*Be rough.*

Cora increased her tempo, thrusting her hand and unable to stop her hips from twitching as the coil inside of her tightened. She arched off the bed, closing her eyes and mashing her hair into the pillow.

*‘More begging.’* No, that imagined voice was far too feminine.

*Redo.*

*‘More begging.’*

*That’s better.*

Cora remembered where she’d ended last time, with the figure in front of her bending down. The imaginary partner enacting the scene slid down her body, pressing a kiss on her naval and then meeting her with their hot mouth. Cora kept thrusting her hand.

A ghost tongue worked over her and she arched further, eyes closing.

The coil inside her belly released and Cora let herself collapse onto the mattress.

*‘I’ll make you beg more next time.’* And the voice of her fantasy was female again, clear and familiar. Long brunette hair tickled her belly, tan skinned hands gripping her thighs.

Cora blinked and shook her head, pulling her hands away from herself and drawing her knees up.

*No. Nope. Let’s not go there.*

And so she didn’t, instead pulled her robe back around herself.

*Need to find a guy to do that.*

---

**Thanks for reading :)**
Hey guys.

I’m a roll with this so I hope you guys enjoy reading it as much as I like writing it :) 

Like it? Hate it? Think I need a lifetime ban from AO3? :P Let me know in the comments below.

Chapter 6:

Cora had fallen asleep curled in the soft material of her robe, awakened by the sound of her omni-tool pinging. The noise startled her from the pleasant, dopamine fueled rest. She shivered and pulled the comforter closer around her.

Quiet. Why quiet? Electricity tingled down her spine. Ship at port. That’s why. All okay. Engines supposed to be off. The typical mental checklist.

KADARA OFFER

Well, it wasn’t flagged as an emergency. Cora blinked and yawned, looking at the time on her omni-tool and disheartened when she realized she’d only slept for two hours. Fabulous.

Guess scam emails really are a thing out here. Poor Drack.

But it seemed to be from a private account. She blinked again, squinting against the relative brightness of the screen. Cora clicked on the email with her finger.

Hello Lieutenant Harper,

My name is Dr. Madeline Traverse. My assistant approached you at Kadara Port. You are a woman of immense talent and we would love to have you on board for the project we are working on.

The Project:

Develop a line of both biotic focusing and suppressing medications which are more “gentle acting” than those currently on the market (fewer side effects, less come-down illness, non-habit forming).

All of our products are made with natural ingredients and safe for cross-species use. Initial trials on low level biotic humans have shown extremely promising benefits, including but not limited to:

-Increased stability and control during times of stress and celebration.

-Increased mental focus

-Decreased occurrences of headaches.

-Decreased static and accidental firing (ideal for children playing contact sports!)

As Alec Ryder stated, the Andromeda Initiative serves to be, among other goals, a place
where biotics such as yourself can fill civilian functions rather than solely military ones. For such a future, products as ours are essential.

Thanks for reading, and I hope you will talk with us in person.

--Madeline

Cora was left wondering how in sweet hell they’d gotten her personal email address. Maybe it was listed by the Nexus somewhere. One more thing to mention to leadership when they got back —(‘uh, hey, yes…could you not give my contact information out to everyone in this galaxy. Thanks.’).

She curled in her blankets. It was warm and cozy and Cora was content. But it nagged her: a future in the galaxy. Not as a weapon. Cora turned over.

Ugh. You’re going to have to reply to this lady, aren’t you? Damn her conscience.

First the email to Ryder:

Hey Ryder,

Sorry it’s late. I was approached again by those researchers on Kadara (the drugs guy…I know…). Sounds like they actually have some promising stuff. Would you be okay with me bringing a sample of whatever they’re claiming they have back to your SAM to scan it? Shady... but on the off chance it’s useful we should help them, right?

--Cora.

She curled herself back up. Over the night she received both Ryder’s blessing and return correspondence from Dr. Traverse asking to meet her in person the following morning on Kadara. Cora managed to sleep again until a half hour before her alarm. She took it as a win, stretching and getting herself ready.

She wasn’t on Ryder’ squad this morning, meaning she had plenty of time of play the part of a civilian and meet this Dr. Traverse.

The woman was friendly enough. Pretty dark hair pulled back and thick rimmed glasses. She shook Cora’s hand in a firm grasp when they introduced themselves, “Lieutenant Harper. So glad to have you.” The woman beamed, and then, awkwardly enough, hugged her.

Cora stayed stiff, this time not guilty for her lack of returning the gesture, “Come in, come on.”

A small locked medical office. An empty waiting room with a few posters portraying alien flora which Cora didn’t recognize. Sharp smell of cleaner. The woman led her into the single room of the clinic. A bench with covered with white paper which Dr. Traverse patted as if she wanted Cora to sit down on it. Crunching paper beneath her wasn’t something she considered remotely comfortable, so Cora opted to remain standing, “We’d love to get some baseline vitals on you.”

“Baseline?” Medics never made her comfortable, but something was soothing about Dr. Traverse. She was petite, middle aged, and had a straightforward way of speaking. Cora didn’t feel trapped in her office.

“Vitals. So we can monitor any changes you might have. Don’t worry—” She quickly added, “Nothing to really worry about. Just to know any how and if the medications show up in your
Cora deemed her friendly enough. She allowed her to record her heart rate and blood pressure, take her pulse, draw a syringe of blood from her left elbow and pluck a few strands of hair from her head.

She left with a sore arm and a packet of nondescript white pills which were supposed to be ‘relaxing and calming for biotics’. Make the abilities less likely to ‘misfire’ and provide a sleepy, happy mood’. Considering it was an ‘herbal supplement’, Cora had severe doubts about its efficacy; but no stranger lately to the struggle of sleeping—decided it was worth a try.

She made her way back to the *Tempest* with the packet in her pocket. Dr. Traverse seemed legitimate enough, although she still wasn’t going to take anything without Ryder’s supped up SAM scanning it.

Cora set the packet into her desk drawer and was glad for the time on the *Tempest* to play catch up with the never-ending onslaught of Nexus paperwork.

And then the airlock opened. It was a whirlwind like always—Ryder when she rode her post-mission adrenaline. There were muffled shouting voices and whooping. *That sounds more like shouting. Guys, what are you doing?*

The intercom on Cora’s wall crackled to life, “*Meeting! Now! Kallo! We need to get to the Nexus. Begin undocking procedures and skip the pre-flight checks.*”

“*Ryder?*” Kallo’s voice.

“*Now. There are bombs headed for the Nexus. Knight is terrorist. Now, Kallo!*”


And Cora was standing, rushing out her door, feeling pleasant reverberations through the floor as the engines roared to life.

--

“I said: one of Knight’s devices already went off. Ryder. You better know what you’re doing.”

“Kandros.” Ryder said, slamming the button to open the door to the *Tempest*, “I’m sorry…I was held up with…something.” Working with SAM to build the device for Alain had placated him enough to spill the intel that this was happening in the first place.

Cora was at her side. She had to consciously tell herself not to flash her biotics. *Be a normal human. We’re on the Nexus. Find the EMPs and disable them. Ryder has a SAM in her head.* She settled herself. Ryder turned to her, giddy and trembling, “Act natural!” She hissed.

Cora stared forward and squared her shoulders. Ryder was her superior in this sense, and she had Cora’s unwavering support, “Aye-aye.”

And they were through the airlock, jogging past the docks of the Nexus, “Cora?”

“What?”

“People are staring.”
“…Let them?” They were running through the docks. It wasn’t a thing normal people did. Cora wasn’t sure how else to advise her on that.

A few moments pause, “Okay.”

“Let’s walk, let’s act natural.” Cora suggested. Whatever that meant. Cora followed Ryder as she swept with her scanner, “You know the locations?”

“Vaguely. One’s over here.” Ryder broke into a jog again. Scanning back and forth along the row of potted fruit trees. Cora watched her, “Be my body guard.” Ryder practically hissed and looked over her shoulder—

“What?”

And Ryder had climbed into one of the pots, resting on her knees and peering behind the row.

“Body guard! Act natural!”

Ryder caught her foot around one of the narrow trunks and nearly tipped the pot over, “Is there … one back there?”

“No, Cora, I just thought this would be fun—ow.” She drawled and half-stepped, half-fell into the opening between the wall and the plants.

Okay. Dumb question. She’s disarming a bomb. Ryder is disarming a bomb. Well, SAM was. Ryder was impersonating a fish which had been caught and slipped out of the catcher’s hands and started flopping on the dock. Cora heaved a breath, rolled her shoulders back, and stood in front of where Ryder was fidgeting around behind a row of trees, “How’s it going?”

“SAM’s working.” Ryder whispered back, “Anyone suspicious? Looking concerned?”

Cora scanned back and forth. An asari working on the hydroponic plants set up at the docks stared at them. Cora smiled and waved. The woman waved back hesitantly, quickly averting her eyes back to her data pad and continuing her work, “No.” Cora lied, “Well… maybe. Someone was watching. It’s fine. Just do it.”

“Okay.” Ryder breathed, “Whew, c’mon SAM.”

Just a Pathfinder crawling around your plants. Don’t worry about it.

We’re professionals.

“Got it!” She proclaimed, popping up from where she’d been crouching. Cora offered her arm to help Ryder balance as she clamored over the pots again. Ryder gripped her wrist and then her hand, nearly falling. “Got it. Shit.”

“Good work.” Cora breathed, releasing her when she stepped down and Cora was satisfied she wasn’t going to fall, “Where next?”

“Operations. Liam and Vetra are already there seeing Kandros.”

“Let’s go.”

Onto the tram (“Act natural,” Ryder said loudly enough for their entire car to hear it and look at them sideways). Cora stepped off at Operations with Ryder trailing behind her.
The next device was hidden in the wall by Kesh’s office. SAM and Ryder were quick on this one. “One more. Based on Knight’s data.”

“Let’s do it.”

Cora noticed Sid eyeing them, both she and Ryder gave the young turian a smile before hurrying down the stairs. “There!” Ryder pointed, “In that vent.”

“I guarantee Sid will come down here.”

“Oh, Sid is definitely onto us.”

“Maybe she’s busy with work.” Cora figured. The less questions asked the better. No one needed to ask them anything right now.

She and Ryder struggled to jimmy the vent cover loose. Cora used her omnitool, twisting the screws far enough for Ryder to finish the job with her fingertips. They both managed to drop the metal piece in their furor to pull it free. A deafening clatter as it hit the floor.

Cora stiffened and looked up.

“Staring?” Ryder asked, still looking at the wall.

Almost every tech working in the room had paused to look at them, “Yep.” She breathed, “Can you get in there?”

The vent was eye-level. Ryder’s scanner picking up the device from even higher if Cora was reading it correctly, “Maybe.” Ryder leapt up, trying to pull herself in, but the smooth material and narrow space was proving difficult for her to grip.

“I’ll give you a boost.”

A few moments of struggling. Cora pushing her up by the knee as she tried to leap in. More people were watching. Ryder’s palms against the vent sent reverberating echoes through the wall each time she hit it, “No, ow. Not working. It’s too narrow. I need to get both arms in there.” Ryder said.

*Oh fuck.* Ryder needed her omni-tool close for SAM to interface, and she needed to stay steady for him to maintain his connection for something so delicate as this. This jumping around business wasn’t going to work. Cora dropped to the ground on her hands and knees, “Cora?”

“Shut up. Stand on me.”

“Shouldn’t we get a chair?”

“Do we have time? They’re bolted to the floor at the computers.” Cora hissed through her teeth. They were too short for the turian legs and not adjustable. It was a great source of Nexus Operations contention.

People were definitely staring.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Ryder. You won’t.”

“Oh-kay.”
Cora kept looking at the floor, planting her palms down and tightening her abs to support her back when Ryder stepped up on her. She did her best to hide her cringing from Ryder’s heels digging into her, “You okay, Cora?”

“Yes.” Through gritted teeth.

“Okay, I’ll be fast. People are staring.”

Well, they might be staring but we’re not inciting panic. Cora counted the lines on the floor, biceps burning, and palms and knees aching against the tile. She gritted her teeth and stiffened her muscles. Ryder lost balance and dragged her toe across Cora’s back.

“Ow.”

“Sorry. SAM, c’mon.” Ryder stood on her toes, suddenly. Cora closed her eyes and did her best to remain steady with the shift of weight, now off center on her ribs and hip.

“So…You’ve never of heard of a step ladder?” Liam sounded more amused than he should have been considering they were disarming bombs.

(Ryder is standing on your back to disarm a bomb! Goddess, this is not happening).

That was not a comforting thought. Cora forced herself to stop thinking it, “Desperate times.” She answered him through gritted teeth.

“I can imagine. Asari commando to this—Andromeda has not served you well.”

“I always support my commanding officer.”

“A chair?”

“They’re bolted to the floor.” Cora groaned.

“…Right I forgot about that. And they’re short.”

“Why didn’t they install adjustable chairs?” She lamented, doing her best to hold up again as Ryder had to shift again.

“Most the turians ripped them out of their stations.” Liam continued, “Jesus, Ryder, don’t fall—”

“Got it!”

And Ryder sent herself off balance, crumpling into the wall. She knocked the sensitive spot between Cora’s ribs with her heel and the woman yelped, crumpling to the floor and bringing Ryder with her. Liam caught the Pathfinder beneath one of her arms. Cora groaned and rolled onto her back, eventually seating herself against the wall beside Ryder.

Ryder pressed her face into her hands, “Sorry I was standing on you.”

“At least the EMPs are gone.” So they’re not technically bombs. But catastrophic, yes. Cora released the breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. The sudden surge of adrenaline from escaping another too close call sent waves of tremors through her hands and kneecaps. Tile cool and soothing against her bruised back.

“Let’s never do that again.” Ryder said, “You’re the best.”
Cora gave her an affectionate pat on the thigh, appreciating the compliment, “We’re never speaking of this.”

“It’s on camera so you can show Sarissa later.” Liam said. Cora glared at him, “Hey. Sorry. Bad topic. You guys had an audience is all. And more than one photo was taken. Bright side: don’t think anyone realized the actual severity of the situation.”

“So much for ‘acting natural’.” Cora closed her eyes, “The original plan was not to be noticed.”

“The Pathfinder climbing on her second in the middle of operations.” Liam shrugged, “Sure no one will talk about it.”

“It will blow over in an hour or two.” Ryder commented. Cora scratched at the sore bend in her arm where Dr. Traverse pulled blood the previous day, “That’s a nice bruise.”

“Blood pull. She got me good, didn’t she?” Cora flexed her arm, “that lady on Kadara.”

“I hate that she did that to you. Cora, stop letting weirdos do things to you.” Ryder gripped Cora’s wrist when she offered it, straightening her arm to look at the damage, “First that and now me ‘climbing on you in operations’.”

“I’m starting to feel like it comes with the job.” Cora chuckled. Ryder moved her grip to Cora’s elbow, tracing the bruise with her thumb. Liam reached across her lap to poke at the discolored skin with his forefinger. He was a technically a field medic from his rescue days and Ryder took a training once. It was hard to keep their hands off anything.

“Now I have ‘weirdos’ touching my injuries. Stop.” And they did, retreating to their own personal spaces on either side of her.

Ryder’s hand flew to her earpiece. Her eyes darkened, and she scrambled to her feet, “Kandros.” She held up her hand to Cora, motioning for her to stop, “I’m coming alone.” She emphasized the word, glaring at both Liam and Cora, “Don’t shoot her. I can talk her down. Let me talk to her.” And Ryder was running for the trams.

“Are we going?” Liam asked Cora.

Cora pushed herself to her feet, “Yeah. We’re going. Grab the car behind Ryder.”

Damn. She’s a good Pathfinder.

Because if there was anyone in the world who was going to save Knight from the snipers whose position was now crackling over their radios: it was going to be Ryder.

Cora pressed her radio, “Ryder’s good, Kandros. Let her do her thing. We’re coming for backup behind you, Ryder. We’ll stay at the tram unless you need us.”

“Standing by, Lieutenant Harper.” Kandros said.

“Thanks, Harper. I got her.” Ryder was already on the train. Cora and Liam had to run to catch the last car.

“Copy that, Pathfinder.”

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I don’t know why I felt a need to write out the Firefighters quest, but I did feel a need to have Ryder climbing on Cora in Operations.

Thanks for reading : )
Chapter 7

I suck at monitoring AO3 so if any of y’all have any Cora fic, or any Cora smut fic. Please self promo to me : )

In which everyone has exceeded their flight time limits, are forced to take downtime on the Nexus, and have way too much time to think.

Mildly NSFW at the end.

Enjoy

Chapter 7:

“Where is your crew?” Addison asked for the third time, still seated at her desk.

Ryder sighed, leaning back on her chair, “Working on the ship? Around? I’m not their keeper, Addison. We’re getting ready to head back to Kadara.”

Addison was strangely quiet. Her eyes flicked from her screen to Ryder and back again, “I just downloaded flight logs from the Tempest.” She pressed her hand into her mouth, leaning back in the chair.

Her body language unnerved Ryder. “Uh…Something bad?”

“The Tempest …Ryder. Out of the last two hundred and forty Nexus standard hours the Tempest has been airborne for a hundred and seventy. Do you think that’s accurate?” Addison softened, searching her before flicking her eyes back at the screen, “That can’t be accurate.”

Ryder paused, puffing her lips out, “We’ve gone from Voeld, to Kadara, to the asari ark, to here, to Kadara, to here again. It might be…It’s only been ten days? I think?”

Addison looked at the screen, puffed out her cheeks, and pointed to the automatic log update from the Tempest leaving the Voeld port. She flipped the monitor around to let Ryder view. The little text with the coordinates of each landing and flight duration which the computers recorded with each movement of the ship, “Ten days.”

“Wow, it’s been busy.”

“Ryder…you know there are flight time limits, right?”

She blinked, “Sure. Twelve hours in twenty-four averaged out over thirty days for space travel.” She was tired. There was no denying that. But sitting here grilled by the Colonial Director sharpened her, “But this is Andromeda. And we haven’t been observing them—”

“We have been.”

“None of my people have had a proper day off since I can remember. Flying on the ship is the closest thing to downtime anyone has.”

“Ryder. Flight time limits exist for a reason. I’m afraid you’re going to have to be grounded
“We need to get back to Kadara.” Ryder stood.

“Are there any emergencies currently ongoing on Kadara?” Addison clasped her hands together, “Harper writes very detailed reports. I don’t believe anything at Kadara Port warrants leaving the Nexus tonight. And besides. You’re too far over flight hours. Your people need a break. I think you’ve earned one after today.”

“We’ll take a break on the flight, Addison.”

“This is regulation, Ryder. Initiative regulation. Our threat level has decreased from red to orange with the recent successes in Heleus. Meaning we need to start observing the flight limit hours.”

“‘Red to orange’? What does that even mean?” Ryder squinted. She was too tired for this and rubbed her face in the hopes it would help her make more sense of what Addison was saying.

“It means the threat level has decreased.” As if it was as simple as anything.

“No…I mean how is that quantified?”

Addison bumbled over some explanation about research and statistics, Ryder still had her face pushed into her hands, “My people need rest.” She continued, “They can rest on the Tempest.”

“While it’s grounded on the Nexus, yes. That’s a requirement, Ryder.”

Ryder exhaled.

Cora will hate this.

--

“I hope you can find it in yourself to still work with me. That’s all I wanted to say.” Sarissa stuffed a steaming mug of floral asari tea into Cora’s hands. She blinked at her.

They’d been silent since she’d arrived at Sarissa’s Nexus quarters at her former leader’s request. Cora had never seen Sarissa at loss for words, and it made her uncomfortable, “Sit.” Sarissa continued, “Or. You don’t have to.” She slumped into one of the chairs at the small countertop space set up for eating. Cora sat across from her.

“I’ll still work with you.” Cora said, almost too quickly. She didn’t want to lose what she had with Sarissa—the teacher, the mentor, the friend. But her mouth had moved too quickly, and her rationality had to catch up with the promise she’d just made, “But trust, Sarissa. We need to work on that.”

“No one trusts me. They respect me but don’t trust me. Not anymore. Brought it on myself.”

You did.

But Cora didn’t like kicking people when they were down. Nonetheless, her silence probably was as much of an answer.

“Trust has to be rebuilt. You’re a Pathfinder now. Your people need you.”

A few more moments of silence passed between them. They sipped tea and Cora matched
her breathing to Sarissa’s, trying her best to feel comfortable in her presence. Mug comfortably warm in her hands. Breathing. Across from Sarissa. Warm mug. Cora found her center and relaxed her shoulders.

“I’d like to invite you to the asari gala if you’re on the Nexus for it.” Sarissa said, “You’re one of us. One of my huntresses. And I’d like to have you there.”

The asari threw more parties than the other species combined. Cora had already heard rumblings about a gathering in celebration of the return of the ark. “If we’re in port. I’ll be there.”

“Good. Hope I see you.”

And Cora left after a few more minutes of uncomfortable small talk. Despite the awkwardness, having time to sit face to face with Sarissa and put some things on the proverbial table felt like a weight lifted from her chest. For the first time she felt she was regaining a sense of normalcy in her life. A new normal. One with the oddball Tempest crew and asari huntresses on the Nexus.

Where to go, where to go? Pathfinder office.

It was the only quiet place on the Nexus to think and do her work. She made her way there, Ryder and Addison startling her from her wandering thoughts when she came through the door. “Hi, Cora.”

“Pathfinder.”

It seemed like she’d interrupted a meeting between Ryder and Addison. Cora put her head down and attempted to slip around them, “Hey! Cora.” Ryder called from her chair, and Cora turned to face her, “We’re past our flight hours. We all have to take the next forty-eight hours off.”

“As in…time off?”

“Yes.”

“I have paperwork—”

“I don’t care. Leave. Go on a date.”

“Ryder.” Cora’s eyes flicked to Addison, “I have a lot of paperwork.”

“You turn in the most reports out of anyone, Harper.” Addison smiled at her, “Take a rest.”

“Cora, listen, sweet woman who takes care of everything—we have moved from a code red to a code orange.”

Cora wracked her memory (and she considered herself to have a good memory) to figure out what the hell Ryder was talking about. Alec never mentioned a code red, or any color-coded codes for that matter.

“A what?” She asked, “What’s a ‘code orange’? Should I know that?” It made her worry for a moment. Had she missed a memo, an email? What you get for rolling over and going back to sleep without checking your email.

“It’s a Nexus code. Threat Level Orange. Meaning things are more under control.” Addison was smiling. Addison never smiled. What was wrong?
Cora looked to her commanding officer for the guidance which she felt she needed in this situation, “Ryder?” And Ryder was standing.

“Yeah, exactly. It’s more under control.”

“What does orange versus red mean?” Cora pressed, looking between the two of them, feeling like she was missing the substance of an inside joke.

“I honestly have no idea.” Ryder answered, “Cora. Out. I’m coming with you. Mandatory time off. I don’t make the rules.”

And Ryder herded her out the door of the pathfinder offices like some animal in the videos about farming Cora enjoyed watching as a child. “What are we doing?” Did that mean she was asking Ryder to hang out with her? Cora supposed she wasn’t opposed to relief from being alone in her quarters.

“Something fun. What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know.” Cora told her, “I…”

“You don’t know how to do not work?”

“I do, actually.”

“Do you?” Ryder laughed.

“Frankly, I don’t know you could tie your shoes without me.” Cora settled on, and Ryder laughed again at that.

“Hey, even super biotic commandos need breaks.”

“It’s not good for us.”

“Well, you might want one when you check the news next time. Word travels fast in Andromeda.”

Cora side-eyed Ryder and opened her omni-tool. Current events displayed on her extranet home screen—the trending article boasted a picture of Ryder’s ass sticking out of the vent in operations and Cora making the most unflattering grimace she’d ever seen herself make while being stood upon.

**PATHFINDER RYDER AND LIEUTENANT HARPER: ANDROMEDA’S BEST HOPE?**

And she clicked out of the extranet at that.

“What are you doing?” Cora asked Ryder, “For fun, I mean?” Mainly she needed ideas. The thumping music in Vortex wasn’t what she was in the mood for, her plants were fully tended for the day. Sitting alone in her quarters wasn’t appealing either, as much as her achy body longed for sleep.

“Probably lying on my couch and watching movies.” Ryder answered.

“You sound like Liam.” Cora sat down beside her on the tram (for once there were seats available. It wasn’t a shift change).
“You can join me if you want. Do you still have those relaxation pills or whatever for SAM to scan?”

Cora sighed. Dr. Traverse had sent her two more emails asking for her review of the tablets, “That lady keeps asking me about them.”

“Well…keen to share? I’m not a biotic…but if they’re relaxing and SAM says they’re safe…” Ryder trailed off, “I’m not opposed. I could use some relaxation.”

Cora snorted, “Maybe it won’t work if you’re not biotic.”

“Maybe it will.”

“Maybe it will kill you.”

And they both laughed, “I think I’ll gamble it if SAM says it’s okay.”

“Should we tell Lexi?” Cora had been debating that honestly, although: ‘hi, Lexi. I got some drugs from a random lady on Kadara’ was the literal last thing she wanted to share with her personal doctor. She really ought to tell her. *It’s a supplement. It won’t do shit for you. Just try it and write both Lexi and Dr. Traverse an email.*

“No. We shouldn’t tell Lexi.” Ryder answered, quickly, “and you have to stay with me so I know you’re not working. If you want to, of course.”

“Fine.” Cora was amused at that notion, and certainly not opposed to good entertainment.

She fished the little packet of pills from her desk drawer and brought them to Ryder.

*They’re herbily based.* SAM told the two of them, his words buzzed into her head. *From their composition they are entirely safe for human physiology. Some ingredients are shown to enhance a calm mood based on irreputable studies. I would not be concerned.*

“Can I?” Ryder asked, “I’m tired. I could use a calm mood.”

“Sure. Knock yourself out.” She offered the packet out.

“You should take two at least. You’re a crazy biotic huntress.”

She might have taken offense if that was anyone beside Ryder, “Watch out.”

“Take three. Sleep. She gave you a gift. Use it. You’re on vacation. Get high.”

“On an herbal supplement? Not sure it works that way.” Cora ripped open the package after watching Ryder struggle with it. The Pathfinder took one of the white tablets and swallowed it with as much drama as an owl trying to snarf down a mouse.

Cora took one.

“SAM? Can I take more?”

*Based on scans, it is likely you could take the whole bag and feel minimal effects. Although from a common sense perspective I would advise against this course of action.*

Cora took a second. Maybe that would help.
She settled onto the couch on the opposite side of Ryder. Ryder wanted to watch an old drama about surgeons. Cora wasn’t sure she was fond of it, but it was mindless enough for her to curl against the couch arm and zone out.

Okay. She was tired. And she was feeling tired rather than restless.

_Maybe it works._

Eyelids were heavy and the constant nagging thoughts about her emails and reports softened to the background of her mind. Cora yawned, “Tired?” Ryder reached out with her foot and poked Cora in the shin.

“Maybe if you don’t touch me with your feet.”

“Sorry. Are you high yet?”

“No.” Cora yawned again, “You?”

“No. But it is a little relaxing. Like a cup of tea minus the tea.”

“You don’t drink tea.” Cora and Peebee were the _Tempest’s_ resident tea drinkers.

“I do.” Ryder arched her back against the couch and stretched her arms over her head, “Just not asari tea. It smells like shit.”

“It does not.” Cora poked Ryder this time.

“The fake shit they spray on flowers at florists. Yes it does. I think this’s a placebo effect.”

Cora rolled her eyes and curled down further, face against the pillow. At least for all of Ryder’s quirks—she kept her room and its belongings clean. It was strange being so calm, so ready to close her eyes and sleep. Some human lady on the screen monologuing about something which didn’t make sense to Cora since she hadn’t been paying enough attention to comprehend the details.

“SAM just told me that it’s more likely that we’re both overtired than the pills are doing anything for us.” Ryder answered, “He says the change of routine and safe place is letting us rest.”

Cora nodded along, “I think I agree.” Though she did feel good, pleasant. Like she’d had a single glass of wine. Just enough to take the edge off, “Goodnight, Ryder. I’ll be asleep if we keep watching this.”

“Goodnight, Cora. You can call me ‘Sara’, you know?”

“You’re more of a Ryder.”

“Everyone says that.”

“But goodnight, Sara.”

--

Cora became restless on the couch (though she was restless everywhere, lately). It wasn’t unusual in their line of work as Lexi told them over and over.

She dreamt of one of the women in her commando unit, an acquaintance who’d been left behind in the Milky Way. The strong one. Tall and silly, always had a smile and a good joke. Cora
and she hadn’t been close. She dreamt of her soft lips pressing on hers. A warm tug in her belly.

Gallenia. That was her name.

Cora was mostly asleep, aware only of her physical location—the Pathfinder’s quarters. Safe enough to go back to her dozing. To her soft throw pillow.

Gallenia leaned against her in her dream. It was comfortable, natural. Cora trailed her mouth down her neck, between her collar bones and over one of her breasts.

And that jarred her awake. Middle of the night cycle. The silly hospital drama still playing on Ryder’s computer, Ryder herself curled up and asleep on the other side of the couch. Cora’s neck ached.

Why are you dreaming about women? Get it together, you’re not into that.

But it was easy in her dream. Taking Gallenia’s breast into her mouth, the moan that she made when Cora had traced her teeth over her soft flesh.

That was fun. That shouldn’t have been fun. You’re not into that.

But as she worked the kink from her neck and tried to replace the imagery with a man. A human. But she couldn’t. Cora was in the mood for soft skin, now. Perfume. Stop.

But she couldn’t.

Okay then? Why was her brain being this way? Was she this overtired?

Or maybe…you’re just into it?

But she never had been. Cora licked her lips, tightening the muscles in her abdomen. Between her legs ached, and it didn’t ache for a human man. She ached to continue the dream she’d been having. To let Gallenia have her way with her.

You would know by now if you’re into that.

Cora inhaled and let her breath out slowly. Her knees were stiff. She wanted to stretch out but couldn’t. Not with Ryder sharing the couch. Cutie. She was hugging the other pillow, blanket over her head and sound asleep with one foot on the floor, “Goodnight.” Cora breathed, carefully standing as not to wake her. The door to Ryder’s room opened silently when she pressed the panel and slipped out.

Cora returned to her biolab and was happy to lie upon her bed. Perfume. Soft skin. Resting her head upon someone’s chest. And again—for whatever reason her brain wouldn’t entertain that someone being a male. Someone sweet and talkative who didn’t mind her biotics. And the warmth of lying against another human. It would be nice.

Maybe you are into it. Just in fantasies, right? Just fantasies.

Cora checked her email, and aside from a reminder from Dr. Traverse about reporting her experience with the sample pills, nothing which needed her attention.

Able to get comfortable and stretch her legs out, Cora fell back asleep. She’d email Traverse in the morning. Lexi too. That was probably for the best.

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Thanks for reading. More action coming soon : )
Chapter 8

Hey! Shorter, slower chapter but we return to the action in the next.

Your kudos and comments give me life.

Chapter 8:

Ryder woke up to find herself on the couch and her laptop still running and Cora missing.

*Cora. You better not be working.* She yawned and curled against the pillow. Ryder hoped she wasn’t.

*Better go check.* Imagining Cora pouring over another report in the middle of the night roused Ryder off the couch. She stood up, turning off the drama series which had timed out on its playing, and heading for her door. A quick look around the ship proved that the door to the biolab was closed.

Ryder didn’t want to wake her if she was asleep. *Yeah. Don’t knock. Not appropriate, it’s her off time.* Everything else around the *Tempest* was quiet. The lights were off in the medbay and the crew quarters. Soft murmurs of conversation from Jaal and Liam in the cargo bay, but Ryder didn’t intrude. She was tired herself and decided to return to her room.

That had been embarrassing when she’d propositioned Cora.

* Mortifying that she’d asked her second for something more than a professional relationship. She was a straight woman, mourning Alec and her Pathfinder job, and hadn’t wanted that. But Ryder still cared about her, in a different way now than her initial crush.

Cora was able. Very able. She looked after them all, knew her job, and filed the best damn reports of anyone in the Initiative.

*And you literally stood on her back yesterday.* Ryder had to find something for Cora to repay her for that level of public embarrassment, especially after the article. *Maybe Vetra has a line on some chocolate. Or a potted rose plant. Rose bush?* *What are those called?* Ryder supposed what type of plant it was didn’t matter, more that Cora loved her plants. And Cora’s love of plants was great for the Initiative having plentiful samples returned to hydroponics.

She’d keep an eye out.

Ryder looked at the spot where Cora had been on the couch, missing the company of a fellow person spending the night with her. She fell into her own bed.

*She’s really good, and she’s going to get burned out at this rate. You have to do something for her.* Ryder decided. *It’s a good thing Addison forced everyone to take this break, maybe. Liam got to stay and talk to those customs girls, Jaal had all that time with the angara ambassadors, Vetra with her sister…* Ryder ran down the list.

*Suvi hung out with Gil and Kallo at Vortex. Drack has Kesh. Peebee was somewhere.* Everyone got a break in, it seemed. Even if it was as small of a success of getting Cora to lie down for a few hours.

Ryder decided she had one way to make sure she was sleeping—she typed out an email to her.
Hey Cora,

Thanks for hanging out. I hope you’re sleeping. : )

Goodnight.

--Ryder

She was very glad that Cora didn’t reply to the message (as Ryder assumed she would have if she was awake) and decided to turn off her alarm for the morning. As soon as she was up, she’d go and see Scott. Then they could worry about getting back to Kadara.

--

Cora felt surprisingly well rested in the morning. Maybe Dr. Traverse had something. But herbal supplement or not she was uncomfortable taking anything like the pills long term.

She was a huntress, and to keep her abilities as honed as they were, she needed to avoid regular use of anything she was uncertain of.

Lexi was available as always. Sitting at her desk, paging through articles on her data pad. “Cora. How are you?” Cora tossed the pills on the counter and Lexi eyed her, “What are those?”

Cora nervously sunk onto the stool next to Lexi and told her about Dr. Traverse—apologizing for not coming to her sooner and feeling rather foolish about taking two of them the previous night.

“Well, SAM is a good judge for these things.” Lexi answered, and Cora was surprised to hear her compliment him. But that was Lexi—she was always non-judgmental. And that made Cora feel even more down on herself for not mentioning Dr. Traverse to her in the first place, “I think based on what they are they shouldn’t be dangerous to you. But be cautious about it.” She took them into her hands, looking at them through a magnifying light she had on the counter.

“Things like this form habits. Or at least can.” Cora finished, “I know. And I don’t intend on using them regularly. I guess…just tested them for her.”

“I’ve taken herbal supplements marketed to asari for helping sleep and anxiety.” Lexi told her, turning over the bag in her hands, examining it from the other side beneath the light, “They look like professionally pressed pills and the scan results aren’t worrying. Might be better than turning to something else if they work for you. There’s no shame in it.”

Cora didn’t want to make it a regular thing, but she appreciated Lexi’s words of advice, “I don’t know I want to use them all of the time without knowing fully what they are. Apparently, Dr. Traverse has more for me to try. A biotic focusing one which she emailed me about this morning. I want you to look at it first.”

“You have far more biotic training than I do given your background, Cora. But I’d rather you not start with that one in the field.”

“Agreed. Wholeheartedly. You wouldn’t judge me too much if after you and SAM look at the composition and deem them safe that I tried one on my off hours first? Maybe with you around to give me blockers on the off chance they screw with me?”

“Of course not.” Lexi reached out and touched her elbow, “I think you’re one of the more rational people in Andromeda. And that course of action seems fully rational. I have to say this—
these are medications that we can scan, but we don’t know where these ingredients are sourced and some of them seem to be Andromeda-native herbs. At least in these ones. And these are being composed on Kadara, which is working hard to be Andromeda’s version of Ilium.” Lexi pointed to the bag, “So there’s always going to be a risk factor for allergies or other side effects.”

“Right.” Cora puffed out her cheeks, “Stupid. I know. But if I just…” She shook her head. This was strangely difficult to talk about sometimes, and she was extremely thankful for Lexi’s quietness, the privacy afforded by this medbay, “If I had just had a few moments of normalcy when I was a kid. If biotics had been normal for humans like they are asari and everyone third person I met didn’t act like I was a time bomb…It would have made a lot of difference, is what I’m getting at.”

Lexi smiled, nodding along, “I think what Dr. Traverse is doing is admirable. You’re telling me that they might not be things you want to use regularly but you want to support and help their existence?”

“Yes. That’s exactly it. They could have helped me when I was younger. Before I had asari training. If I hadn’t gotten asari training.”

“This all sounds really rational, Cora. And I think you’re going about this intelligently.”

“Thanks, Lexi. I appreciate it.”

And she was out. Cora bumped into Vetra in the hallway, and the two of them ended up retreating into the armory to have their morning tea and coffee together and pretend like either of the two of them knew how to have a life outside of work.

She was thankful it was Vetra. Vetra understood this struggle of not sure what to do when they weren’t allowed to be busy, “Where’s Sid?”

“Work.” Vetra answered, sitting down at her desk, “And apparently we aren’t allowed to work.”

“How many of your contacts have you emailed?” Cora smirked, and Vetra flared her mandibles.

“That’s not technically working.”

“I think it is.”

They were both chuckling, “How many reports on your side? Emails?” Vetra pressed.

“No reports, actually. Because Ryder and Addison threatened me not too.” Vetra laughed out loud at that, and Vetra had the best contagious laugh to get Cora going with her, “I’m so pathetic, Vetra.”

“No, you’re just good at your job.” The turian straightened, snacking on some of her cereal. They made small talk for a while until Cora finally worked up the nerve to dig a little deeper.

“Hey…so…sorry but you’re one of my best friends out here…and uh…can I ask you something kind of personal?”

Vetra blinked at her, shifting so she crossed her hocks beneath the chair that was too short for her. “Uh-Oh.”

“Oh, jeez. Forget it. It’s stupid. Never mind.”
“No. You’re committed now, Harper, I’m curious.”

She rolled her eyes and leaned her head back. This was totally a spur of the moment decision. But Vetra was pansexual, she’d mentioned at one point casually, and Cora had questions. Honest questions. Mainly about her own experiences and hoped Vetra wouldn’t laugh her out of this room: “So…Women…straight women in general.”

“Straight?...Oh, you mean…oh.” Vetra blinked at her, “I’m not a ‘straight woman’, so that might be something to ask…someone else.”

“Um…I guess I’m wondering. Do you think straight women typically…you know…want to experiment with women?”

Vetra looked too amused, “You flirting with me, Cora?”

Cora rolled her eyes. Damn it, Vetra. “No. No. Sorry. I’m trying to be serious here.”

“Oh.” Vetra stated and sobered herself, “Sorry. Okay. What are you trying to say?”

“You know…when you think about things…I like having…relations with guys but lately…”

“You check out women all day?”

“I do not.” She held up her hand, making a stopping motion at Vetra who cocked her head sideways, “I don’t. A lot of the people I admire in my life happen to be women. That doesn’t mean I’m ‘checking them out’.”

Vetra looked at her incredulously, mandibles against her face, “…right.”

Cora rolled her eyes, “I don’t.”

“Okay. What are you trying to ask me?”

“Okay….so I know I’m into men. Human men. Really exclusively. But lately…” She trailed off, “Well…you know.” Okay, maybe Cora wasn’t as close with Vetra as she thought, because trying to express her ‘personal time’ habits was feeling pretty mortifying.

“You got with an asari? Finally?” Vetra tried again, “I don’t know.”

“I only get off to women lately.” She finally spat out. Vetra blinked slowly, “Sorry. I know you don’t want to know that.”

“Wow, Cora.”

“Sorry.” She wrapped her arms around herself and her face was hot, eyes planted on the floor.

“No. Not that. I don’t care if you tell me those things.” Vetra said, “But you’re trying to ask me if you’re straight or not?”

“Well, that’s normal for straight women, right? Being ‘heteroflexible’. Because men really have worked for me in the past…”

“Sure.” Vetra shrugged, “Or you’re just into both men and women?”

And Cora blinked, “I think I would know if I was.”
“You check out a lot of women, Harper. I’ve never seen you look at a man the way you do Sarissa and Ryder—”

“Woah! Not Sarissa, and not Ryder.” Cora shook her head, she was blushing again, “Ryder? Seriously? She’s my C.O.”

“Come on. The whole standing on your back thing?”

“To deactivate a bomb!”

“She’s the only one who comes to do yoga with you and Lexi. Just saying. Even if you don’t have the hots for her…well, it’s pretty obvious she’s interested.”

“I’m her subordinate.” And I shot her down once. And that’s over with. And that’s a no. Gross. No. Not Ryder gross. Ryder’s cute. But I’m not into it. That’s Alec’s daughter. And I was his subordinate. And that just feels weird.

Vetra inhaled, “Okay, listen. I’m going to try to give advice and I’m not sure how well this is about to articulate.”

Cora hung on her words.

“It’s Andromeda, Harper. It kind of sucks. But it’s a fresh start. So…make the most of it. Explore. Try new things. I know humans like to label this shit but turians don’t. Do what feels right.”

“That’s good advice. Thanks, Vetra.”

Yeah. Got to find a nice boy on the Nexus. That’s all. You haven’t gotten laid in over six centuries.

“But seriously.” Vetra said, “You deserve something good. I wouldn’t count out any of it.”

“Thanks. That’s really nice of you.”

And they sat and swapped Nexus gossip and for once, didn’t work. They weren’t allowed to, after all.

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Thanks for reading! I’m sorry this chapter is a little slow but I felt like it’s needed as a Segway into more action in the next : )

More coming soon. I'm riding my roll as long as I can with this fic! Yummy angst included. <3
Chapter 9

Remember guys! Come flail with me on tumblr: Jkit45

And I had today off and got soaked in the cold rain this am and I have parked my ass on my couch sooo here’s another update for the same day.

Thanks so much to all my lovely readers!

Chapter 9:

Cora’s body was electric, arms trembling with exertion. The purging cloud from the Kadara vault licked the edge of the barrier she held.

“RYDER!” Liam shouted. She glanced from the corner of her eye. Ryder was still interfacing. The cloud drew closer, pressing against Cora’s field. It vibrated on impact and she groaned, planting her feet, pressing out to extend the barrier around Liam as he had to reposition himself to keep providing cover from the onslaught of bots.

She grit her teeth. The electricity went up and down her spine, arms quivering, barrier bigger. More of the deadly steam pressing against her field as it rolled through the opening of the door, “Ryder?”

“GOT IT!” Ryder shouted, “Let’s move.”

Cora kept her barrier up. Breathing in her nose, breathing her biotics from her toes to her head and projecting them around her, “We got you, Harper! Keep it up!” Liam shouted, and she trotted sideways, finding it the best way to maintain her field position and move quickly.

“How are you?” Ryder shouted. More gunfire. Her barrier pinged with remnant fire, each shot reverberating through her arms and shoulders. A violent rattle from a nullifier crashing against it. Cora growled. It bashed again. Gonna have to do more than that, asshole.

“Fine! Keep moving!”

“Go, go. We’re almost out!” Ryder shouted.

Cora was last into cover, heart pounding, breathless, dispersing her barrier in a blast which sent bots flinging and disrupting the cloud enough for the three of them to put their heads down and run.

She fell into stride beside Liam and Ryder, arms aching. She scooted around the next door jamb. They were almost out—the only thing standing between them and the well was another doorway teeming with remnant. Liam already had his sights on a breecher.

Cora threw up a fresh barrier hardly in time to deflect the laser blast aimed at her. The cloud was behind them. No time to think. They scrambled through the doorway.

“Assemblers!” The stone barrier slammed as they stepped through, sealing the cloud behind them. One less thing to worry about. Glowing lights brightened in the floor with an electronic whirl as the vault begun its start up operation. Cora scanned desperately for movement.
There they are.

The three scrambled behind cover again, the stone edging of the footpaths built into the vault. Cora let her barrier drop.

No time to recover. She told herself. Rest when you’re dead. She pulled a charge up her body, head throbbing, implant vibrating at the back of her neck. Cora gathered a field in each of her hands, sending both into the bot. The fields crushed it between them, twisting and flinging the drone into the stone wall.

Ryder’s gunfire made short work of another.

“We need to get out of here!” Liam shouted.

“Working on it!” Ryder called back. There were too many bots and they were sitting ducks walking out onto the platform, “Cora! Above us.”

She still had her fields in her hands, turning her head up. Breechers. Three of them. She hurled energy toward the ceiling, catching two of the bots and flattening them against the stone. Bits of crushed metal rained down on their helmets.

Gunfire took out the third, from whom she wasn’t sure. “Are we clear?” Cora shouted over the ringing in her ears.

“No movement.” Ryder panted, “Move up!”

And they did. Cora vaulted herself over the stone block, jogging for the gravity well. Liam jogged backwards—watching their six. Ryder had her scanner out, omni-tool glow wrapping around her fingers while SAM interfaced with the tech to return them to the surface.

The strange feeling of her stomach leaping in her chest while her feet lifted from the ground and she was pulled back to Kadara’s badlands by the unseen force around them. Ryder tipped her head back and extended her arms.

Cora closed her eyes, breathing deeply and willing her amp to stop vibrating, her headache lessening as it had time to cool.

Liam whooped over their radio connection; breaths echoed in their helmets.

“Kadara’s water is already showing changes! Remarkable, ground team!” Suvi’s voice, “Everyone okay?”

“Ooff.” Cora hadn’t been ready for the ground to meet her feet so hard where the well deposited her back at the surface and crumpled. Ryder collapsed beside her with a yelp.

“That’s a hard landing.” Ryder groaned, rolling over.

“Bend you knees.” Liam said, his form looming over the two of them while they pushed themselves back onto their knees. He offered his hands to each of them and tugged the women to their feet, “Everyone okay?”

“I’m good.” Cora breathed. Fingers and toes worked, she could stand up. Her arms and shoulders were going to hate her in the morning and she felt sluggish—mentally and physically—from lack of sugar.
"Yeah!" Ryder answered, and then to Suvi: "We’re good! Woo, that never gets less nerve wracking!" The Pathfinder tore off her helmet and ripped down her hood, hair halfway free from her braid.

Sweating and knowing the air on Kadara was safe, Cora popped open her own face shield, inhaling the cool albeit sulfur smelling air.

Ryder and Liam leapt at each other, suddenly. That wasn’t unusual for them. They attempted a chest bump, armor plates clacking against each other, and then wrapped their arms around each other, ‘Fuckin’ eh! Go team!’" Liam howled.

And the celebratory hugging and patting made it’s way to Cora and dragged her into the bunch. Ryder practically jumping on her with her arms wrapped around her neck and Cora grinned and gripped her around the waist, Ryder started to spin them. Legs and arms wobbly with adrenaline, Ryder hopped up and down and kept them going in a circle. Cora laughed and squeezed her tight. Liam tapped on both of their shoulders with the sides of his closed fists and Ryder flung her free arm around him.

The sudden change in position made Liam sidestep into a rock and loose his balance ("Oh, shit!") Cora and Ryder tumbling down with him. Cora landed in the scrub, laughing and rolling onto her back.

"Look at that sky.” Blue and perfect. She didn’t remember the Kadara sky looking so beautiful.

“Good planet for a garden?” Ryder tapped her in the belly with the back of her hand and then patted Liam on the helmet. Cora stayed resting for a moment, catching her breath.

_Sugar pack. Recovery gel. Now._ But she was too tired to pull it out of her pack. She’d chew a square of sugar once she got into the Nomad. For the moment she enjoyed real air and being alive and coming down from her adrenaline.

Liam’s chest heaved beside her.

“Drinks tonight? Let’s get the heck—” Ryder punctuated the word with a kick to a stone in the sand, “Out of here!”

--

"Lieutenant Harper.” Dr. Traverse patted the bench with the paper on it. Cora didn’t sit, “So glad to see you again.” She smiled. Her dark hair was pulled in a French braid down her back, glasses shining under the humming florescent clinic lights.

Cora was sore and tired, and not really in the mood to see a doctor after the day she had, but supposed she didn’t have to really do anything with Dr. Traverse that she didn’t want to, “May I?” She opened a health scanner on her tablet, “Lie down?”

“I took two of the pills one night. It’s been five days since you scanned me before, I doubt anything has changed so much.”

“You mentioned on your email.” Dr. Traverse didn’t seem to press the issue about her lying down on the bench, and Cora was thankful for that. As trustworthy as this woman seemed, this still was a clinic at Kadara, and Cora wasn’t terribly fond of being here in the first place, “Can we pull blood?”
“I took them three nights ago.” Cora shook her head, “It’s out of my system by now.”

“Okay. That’s fine.” She puffed out her cheeks, producing another packet. The pills were green capsules this time, unlike the first set, a warning label in both Cora’s mother tongue and the common asari language which advised against taking more than the suggested dose, “They’re biotic enhancing pills. Should make it easier to gather a charge and enhance mental focus. You can try one now, if you want.”

“I might wait until I have my medic near me and a scan of their ingredients.”

“Nothing unsafe, I assure you.” Dr. Traverse continued.

“Have other people taken them?”

“No adverse reactions.” She told Cora, “They were happy with them, actually were able to sustain a charge—people with very minor and poorly developed abilities. No one like you.”

Cora smiled and sighed, “More reason for me to take them when I’ve got my personal doctor with a syringe of blocker waiting.” She had a sneaking suspicion that Dr. Traverse had never seen huntress-grade biotics go awry.

“I have blockers in the drawer. Can fill a syringe now if you’re comfortable with it. Then we’ll get cracking.”

As much as she would have loved to lose control in a back alley medical clinic on Kadara port and be stuck with chemicals which would hobble her defenses and make her feel like literal shit, Cora knew it wasn’t a viable option to her. She’d been given blockers before as was standard practice in the Alliance for first aid treatment on powerful biotics, and as a kid. They never felt good. But Dr. Traverse was grinning like she didn’t realize she was a clinician working on Kadara and probably had never administered blockers in her life and thus never had to deal with a biotic subsequently knocked on her ass, “I’ll try them with my own doctor. I’ll record everything I feel and have her take my vitals and I’ll forward you what she records.” That made Cora more comfortable.

She didn’t believe that her biotics needed to be enhanced. But maybe someone somewhere would need that extra push, and who better to try it on? If her biotics didn’t spaz out, maybe most wouldn’t. And again, after the ‘relaxation pills’, Cora found herself doubting the efficacy, “I understand the concern.” Dr. Traverse said, “But I do have gentle working blockers— another new development. Supposedly less the side-effect fevers and headaches from them.”

“I’d rather my own doctor. But thank you.” Cora answered a little more curtly.

She backed off, “Understand, understand. But do email if you try the relaxing pills again, will you? I’d be interested in your biotic usage while using them as well.”

“It felt like a glass of wine.” Cora continued to use that analogy, “A little bit of buzz, and I wouldn’t have wanted to be in combat, but I don’t think a single—or two in my case—would have really hindered me from misfiring. If anything, if it’s an impairing substance in some form, probably would make misfiring more likely. At least for biotics like mine.”

“A relaxing substance. Not so impairing…” Dr. Traverse pressed.

*She’s not a soldier. She doesn’t get it. She’s naïve.* “Relaxing or impairing. Same thing. It’s not for combat. Period.”

“Exactly. It’s for rest. We’ll work on something stronger.” She nodded along, “These are
geared toward civilians, remember?"

“Right.” That was true. Cora was overtired; she had to stop herself from getting bristled, “Thank you.” Cora tucked the packet into her pocket, “I’ll try one. Give you the report.”

“I’m looking forward to it. Thanks again, Lieutenant.”

--

“You look worried.” Ryder commented. Cora was propped on her elbows. Guess you’re not hiding it to well. This was a little too reminiscent of when SAM-E had enhanced her biotics and the nightmare that unfolded from that.

“I get nervous in med-bays.”

“They’re not really comfortable places.” Ryder offered her hand, and Cora after a moment of hesitation, took it.

“This is voluntary.” Lexi said, “You don’t have to.”

“I should. And it’s a good night for it.”

“Cora, you really don’t have to.” Ryder backed Lexi up, rubbing her hand between the two of hers. The gesture was warm and soothing and Cora was thankful for her words, “It’s your choice. I can leave if you want.”

“No.” Cora said, “Stay…in case.” In case she lost control. The Tempest wasn’t a good place for a runaway biotic, but Ryder was relaxed and comforting in that relaxed body language. If anything happened, Ryder was the best woman for the job. If worst came to worst she could squeeze her hand and ground her through a bad biotic-blocker night, “Keep that tazer ready.” Cora steeled her nerves and laid back on the cot for Lexi to scan her vitals. Ryder gave her hand another squeeze before releasing her to let the arches move back and forth over the bed.

They’d figured the pills would have no effect. There were some unknown ingredients but both SAM and Lexi again deemed them safe enough to proceed.

“I’m dying to target practice.” Ryder mentioned.

“You’re an ass.”

“You’re going to be fine.” She assured, softening, “Are you sure you don’t want Drack?”

“I’d rather be tazed than concussed.”

“Getting tazed sucks. I’ve been tazed.”

“Me too. Wasn’t that a fun day at Alliance bootcamp?” Cora sighed in relief when the arches over the bed finished their scans, propping herself up on her elbows once more.

“That’s your baseline.” Lexi said, “We’ll scan again in a half hour and an hour and then at two hours. For an oral medication, you should be at full efficacy by an hour.”

“Thanks, Lexi.” Cora swallowed the pill and then found herself sitting quietly and talking about nothing with Ryder.

“Feel anything?” Ryder asked after a few minutes. Cora shook her head.
She puffed out her cheeks when she reached a half an hour, lying herself back and smiling when Ryder patted her hand, “Am I okay?” She asked Lexi. Lying flat with the two of them peering down at her wasn’t comfortable either.

“You’re fine. Your heart rate and blood pressure are elevated but you’re anxious.” Lexi commented, “Hard to say if the pill is contributing to it.” Cora let out a breath that she didn’t realize she was holding.

“Ugh, this is stressful.”

“You’re selling your body for science experiments, sweetheart.” Ryder said, Cora went to laugh but realized Ryder was strangely not laughing about it.

“I’m not selling it. I’m not getting paid. And this whole plan about being tazed by you and injected by Lexi if this goes south will be a bad night for me. So yeah…—oh! Wait.” Cora felt a warmth spreading through her body, less anxious suddenly. It was pleasant. Her body felt electric. Like she could easily flash her biotics if she wanted to. Easier than normal. Her focus sharpened, each knock of the machinery around her, the hum of the air scrubbers on the ship.

Calm.

“Do I need to taze you?” Ryder was leaning back on the stool against the wall.

“I don’t think so… but stand by on that one.” She felt okay—better than okay. Certainly not like she was going to snap into a dangerous loss of control, “No. I don’t think so.”

Lexi touched her shoulder, both she and Cora flinched when a static charge snapped between them at the contact, “You okay?”

“Yeah. Feel really good all of a sudden. A lot better. Energized.”

“It works?”

“It works.” Cora chuckled. Damn she felt good. Like she could go do the vault thing over again, run away from another purge cloud or whatever those things were. The deep muscle aches and dull headache from the day’s high volume biotic use faded to the background, “It works.”

“Do you know where you are?” Lexi asked her.

“The medbay. *Tempest.*”

“What’s seventeen times twelve.” Ryder asked.

Cora squinted as she was thinking, “Two hundred and four.”

“Shit, you actually know that one?”

And Cora laughed at that. Ryder made some kind of motion at Lexi who held up a pen, “Hey Cora? What do you think of this…pen?”

When she turned Ryder flicked her in the back of the head. She whirled around, “Ow! What are you doing?”

“Sorry. Testing if you were going to lose control.”

“No, I don’t think I’m going to lose control.” Cora shook her head, “What do you want me
to look at.”

“Nothing. Sorry.”

“You’re both the worst. Just seeing if I could get tazed?” Cora smirked, “No luck this time.”

“How’s your implant?” Lexi asked.

Cora’s hand went to the back of her head, “I’m not noticing it and don’t have a headache… so good?”

“Should we scan you again? You’re going on an hour.”

“Yeah. It’s working.” And Cora found herself surprisingly comfortable to lie down and laugh with Ryder over making strange dramatic faces at each other while Lexi started the scanner.

“Vitals are fine. Better, actually. You’re not anxious anymore? Should I pull blood and run a panel for Dr. Traverse? You said she did that last time.”

“Is it bad to be giving my blood to a lady on Kadara?” Cora asked, cringing. She offered out her arm regardless. Whatever. If she could handle Traverse poking her with a needle she could handle Lexi. It was too late to rethink the ethics of it all, as Dr. Traverse already had the original sample.

What the hell could she do with blood? Probably nothing. My DNAs already all over Kadara just from breathing there. Doesn’t make any difference.

“Kind of too late to go back on that. Want my hand?” Ryder offered.

“Sure.” Cora gripped her. Maybe it was because she was more relaxed than in Traverse’s clinic, or Lexi was so damn good at her job or both, but she was done with the pull before Cora noticed it.

Ryder rubbed her knuckles and then placed Cora’s hand on down on Cora’s chest. She took Cora’s other arm and then manipulated her so she was crossing her arms over her breasts. Cora rolled her eyes and allowed herself to go limp while Ryder played with her arms, flexing her elbows and letting Cora stretch against her. It felt good on stiff muscles, and Cora was in no mood to pull away from the firm yet harmless grip on her wrists, “Wow, you’re letting me annoy you an awful lot.” Ryder reached up and ruffled her hair—okay. That was enough to get her to cringe away.

“I know you really want to taze me and I’m going to make that impossible for you. Now will you stop?”

“You know how to crush a lady’s dreams.” Ryder said.

Cora snorted and sat up, “But I do feel really good. Well rested. And I didn’t before I started.”

She rode it out another hour with no change. The feeling faded eventually and by the third hour of nothing dangerous and she, Ryder and Lexi chewing through a bag of popcorn provided by Vetra, they deemed that she was unlikely to feel any adverse effects.

Jaal knocked and entered the medbay. Tense. Wired. Like he’d seen a ghost. Although it was fading, Cora still felt the hyper-alertness, focus locking on Jaal, every muscle twitch in his cheeks as he spoke. “Ryder.” He said, voice quivered.
“Everything okay, Jaal?”

“A group of angaran resistance are stranded on a world near here. They have schematics about how to shut down another exaltation center. It’s a planet covered in ice water and their ship was damaged on landing. They’re angara, but cold and wet and without food…” Jaal trailed off, “We need those schematics. And… I’m so sorry to ask, Ryder. But we’re the closest ship.”

“How close?”

“Fourteen Nexus hours.”

Ryder paused, Cora figured she was thinking, “Sounds like my people need that intel just as much as yours do if there’s another exaltation place somewhere. We need to go.”

“I think we’re their only hope, Pathfinder.”

“Alright. We’ll set a course. Now. We can continue at this port later. I’m sure Sloane wants a break from us, anyway.”

Jaal and Ryder exchanged a few more words, ending with Ryder calling for Kallo over the intercom.

Cora stood. She felt good, normal upon standing. Ready to evac angaran resistance members.

“Think you can sleep that shit off and be ready to go?” Ryder asked her.

“Aye-aye.” It was already fading. Cora had no concerns. She felt good, and despite the mental sharpness, comfortable enough to lay down and sleep.

“I’ll clear you before you go anywhere.” Lexi said.

“Of course. Thanks.” And she bid her goodnight. Cora helped Ryder plot the course for the Tempest with Kallo, and fell into bed for a few hours of sleep.

Alright, Dr. Traverse. Maybe you do have something.

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Thanks so much for reading, guys. I’m liking how this one turned out a whole lot so I’m excited to see what you guys think : )

I would like to make a PSA that you shouldn’t accept drugs from strangers. Even if you have a friend standing by to taze you.

Goodnight, everyone : )
Chapter 10

Thanks to all my readers <3

Chapter 10:

“Looks like a nice place.” Ryder muttered sarcastically, standing at the front of the ship. Images from their launched probe buffered on the holographic screens.

Oceans with high, capping waves. Chunks of ice floating in the water

“Hell of wind gusts.” Suvi said, “Storms all over the planet. Atmo is safe for most Milky Way species and angara.”

“Can we land?” Ryder asked.

Kallo exhaled, “We’ll see how the wind is.” He said, “We’re locked on where the distress signal is coming from.”

“There’s a floating remnant wreck large enough for starships to land. It’s where they set down. The planet is all ocean. Cold.” Jaal explained, leaning eagerly forward against the railing beside Ryder.

They peered out at a striking navy blue and white world. It is a handsome planet.

“Moving in.” Kallo said. Ryder watched the atmosphere rush past, thick clouds and punishing winds slamming into their hull until the sky opened and they were above a beautiful, indigo ocean.

“Look at that.” Suvi whistled, “Isn’t that something?”


“Yes.” Jaal answered.

“Alright, Kallo. Get us in.” She said.

Suvi shouted: “Kett incoming!” The flight radar pinged in front of her.


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The Tempest couldn’t land on the pitching platform. Kallos impeccable talent allowed him to hold the ship steady and low enough for them to leap from the ramp with jump jets. Despite her suit, Cora swore she felt the wind through the seams. Harsh gusts whipped across the remnant wreckage, chucking her sideways as she landed, boots slid on the ice coating the metal. The ocean swells rocked it beneath their feet. Rolling and falling over each crest. She grit her teeth. Distantly, she saw a kett soldier lose balance, going onto his knees as he tried to scramble into cover on the unsteady footing.

Cora threw out her arms, pushing up her barrier and sidestepping on her toes. She matched her breathing with the swells of the platform. Become your environment. Suit your environment. Don’t
And Cora did. She relaxed, letting herself sway with the waves, keeping her barrier until the four of them were able to make it to cover. The navpoint pinged on her omni-tool, marking the apparent fox hole where the resistance members were pinned down, “We’re trapped!” An angaran voice over the radio, “One of us is injured.”

“This is Pathfinder Ryder. We’re coming for you—” The rest of her transmission was lost, icy water lapping over the edge of the wreckage. Another gust.

Cora’s helmet displayed a life support warning, advising against extreme cold and dampness.

“Ryder.” Kallo that time, “If you can make it to the other side, I might be able to hover the ship long enough to get you all on board. The wind is picking up. Won’t be able to hold her for long.”

A massive swell knocked the platform sideways, seawater pouring over the edge. The spray coated Cora’s facemask. Cold. Peebee groaned and slipped, clutching tendrils of icicles to stop herself from sliding further.

The platform glistened with uneven, wind-polished sea ice. Just what we need. Great for combat. They lurched over another swell, Cora’s gloved hand gripping into the ice to steady herself. Good thing you never got motion sick.

“We’re coming for you! Locked on your position!” Ryder assured the resistance members, “We’re coming!”

Be advised. SAM buzzed, this storm is getting stronger. The wind is gaining momentum. I recommend extraction before the Tempest is no longer able to land.

“Working on it, SAM!” Ryder cried.

Another shower of salt spray over them. The droplets formed ice crystals at the edges of her face shield. Wind whipped around them, “Our suits won’t handle this for long.” Cora breathed.

“Make it fast, then.” Peebee had her back shoved against the ice, “We have to move.”

“Hard when you can’t see with this spray.” Ryder groaned, “Everyone be on your toes! And watch the ice. Slow and steady.”

“Maybe the storm will scare off the Kett.” Jaal hoped.

But it didn’t seem they were so lucky. A barrage of gunfire erupted around them, Cora put up her barrier.

“Fuck, there’s a lot of them.” Ryder growled, “Cora? We’ll cover you!”

“Aye-aye!” She dropped the barrier, seeing Jaal with his machine gun on his shoulder. She pulled her biotics around her and used the field to propel herself forward. Thermal rounds warped around her, thrown off their course and shattered by the mass effect fields. Ice and debris flung around her, shoved out of the way by Cora’s fields.

Once sure she was distant enough from her friendlies, Cora flung her fields outwards, tossing rubble, ice, and the alien foot soldiers who’d been unfortunate enough to get trapped in it.

Ryder over the radio: “That’s our path! Let’s move! Good work.” Cora slumped into an old, icy
service trench. Her lungs and muscles burned, implant aching. That was a lot of expenditure.

She needed to breathe.

Cora kept her eyes on her three team mates, they picked their way through the ice. Ryder fired to the right, hunched over, “Our flank!” She called.

Peebee spun on the ice, raising her pistol.

Cora leapt from her hiding spot but it was too late. She slid on her knees across the ice, cringing and creating a barrier with her right hand while Peebee howled in pain and crumpled, clutching her thigh.

Knees aching through her suit, Cora scrambled to Peebee’s side. She draped an arm over her, holding her barrier against a fresh barrage of machine gun fire. It wasn’t a well developed barrier. Cora closed her eyes and channeled her focus. The gunfire pounded against the field, rattling her shoulder and her palm and knees on the ground.

The platform rocked beneath them. Cora grit her teeth. Her suit her life support meter pinged again, telling her she needed to get out of the wind. Spray from a massive swell threatened to shake her focus.

Oh, fuck. Peebee. But the asari was moaning in pain underneath her—alive, breathing. Jaal and Ryder managed to flush the Kett flanking them, enough so for Cora to let her barrier to flicker and reposition herself.

Her arms quivered, hands and feet ached from the cold. “Cover.” Cora growled, “We need to get her to cover.”

She knew Ryder had her hands on Peebee, was digging in her pack for medigel, “Clean through your thigh, suit’s ruptured.”

“At least…” Peebee gasped, her face twisted behind her mask, “We can breathe here.”

“That’s a plus.” Ryder chuckled humorlessly, “Now let’s get you up there so Cora can let down this barrier.”

Jaal slung Peebee’s arm over his shoulder. She moaned in pain again as he hauled her up.

Blood ran down her armor, wet purple immediately freezing. Breathable air or not. Cold. She’s going to go into shock. That was more Liam’s department than Cora’s but all of them had field training.

Cora stepped sideways again. Holding the barrier long enough for them to tuck themselves into the service trench. The relief from the punishing wind was welcome in their cover. Ryder stuck Peebee with medigel, quelling her bleeding, “Peebee’s hurt. She’s going to need the medbay.” Ryder said over the radio.

“I’m mostly alive.” Peebee replied to that, “Don’t get…” She inhaled sharply and leaned her head back, “Too excited.” Ryder used omni-gel to patch the charred hole in her suit, Peebee whimpered at each maneuver of her thigh.

“Let’s get these guys and get out.”

“The Kett are falling back.” Jaal mentioned.
Cora’s head throbbed, her arms felt like jelly. Peebee shifted herself, leaning against Cora.

“Pills!” Ryder shouted, Cora slumped against the barricade with Peebee resting on her shoulder. The asari swore and clutched her thigh when she tried to move again.

*You need Lexi. Now.*

“What?” Cora panted, leaning her head back. Her breath steamed the inside of her mask as the suit systems were unable to keep up with the cold dampness on the other side of the face shield.

Peebee quivered. She was freezing, “Those pills, Cora. You have them?”

“One.” She answered through gritted teeth, “Think it’s a good idea?”

“No!” Ryder shouted, “But we have a lot of ground to cover and—” Ryder cut off, also motioning to Peebee.

*And a man down.* Cora finished internally. The red feed on the inside of her helmet turned darker, telling her that the life support of her suit was going critical. They couldn’t last through a night here, not in the cold. They weren’t angara and had no proper shelter.

Ice crystals clung to Cora’s armor from the ocean spray.

Unable to see the horizon from the trench, the rocking motion of the platform felt more violent. The metal pitched and groaned beneath them, “This fucker better not sink.” Peebee moaned.

“Hang on, Peebs. We’ll get us all out of here soon.” Ryder murmured.

“We’re gonna need Cora for that.” Peebee replied, looking straight at her.

“Ryder.” Cora said, looking for guidance. With the atmosphere breathable she could get a pill into her mouth.

“Do it.” The Pathfinder ordered her, and so Cora did. She overrode the protocol on her suit, the cold air knifed into her cheeks and eyes, irritation tears promptly gathering and freezing in the corners of her eyes. Cora brushed it away with the back of her glove and choked down the pill with her dry mouth. She tucked a sugar chew into her cheek and slammed her face shield closed.

Her face throbbed, ice crystals melted from her eyelashes in the relative warmth of the suit. Her limbs quivered with both cold and exhaustion. The fast absorbing sugar helped, sharpening her mind, “It’s too cold.” Ryder said.

“We need to move.” Cora agreed.

“Yes, ma’am.” That was Jaal. He was out first, laying down another round of suppressing fire while Cora held her barrier and Peebee hopped with Ryder’s help.

“They know what biotics are.” Cora said, ducking again behind the next pile of rubble as distant kett machine guns barraged them, “They’re staying too far for me to reach them.” And she was too exhausted to charge in. They couldn’t afford to get flanked again. Too few of them and too many kett.

“Sons of bitches.” Ryder muttered, “Keep moving up! With the wind the kett should be evacuating soon too! They’re not suicidal. How’s that pill doing?”

“Nothing yet!” Cora growled.
Jaal shot down a soldier who’d gotten too bold trying to advance, “Almost to where the resistance members are dug in. We’ll all get out together.”

“Good plan.” Cora panted.

Jaal nodded to her. She gathered her charge again. He provided cover as Cora blazed forward, barrier active around her, a howl catching in her throat while she channeled the energy forward, catching another gunner and sending him soaring.

Cora ducked her head down before seeing where he landed. Ryder and Jaal joined her, Peebee hobbling and leaning on Ryder.

They located the resistance members tucked into another vent. Colder than the Tempest ground team was. The cluster of them sat stone still, arms tucked against their chests—conserving energy, Cora realized.

She was feeling better, now. The sugar or the pill she wasn’t sure, but it didn’t matter. What mattered was that they needed to get the hell off this platform, “We don’t have the plans.” One of them said, “They’re on the shuttle. In the wreckage.”

“Where’s the wreckage?” Cora asked.

“Can we get it on the way to the extraction point?”

The man, who Cora assumed was the current leader of this small resistance group, gave a small nod, “We’re weak and cold, but we can do our best to help fight. There are a lot of kett.”

“We know.” Ryder stated. Peebee quivered and nearly toppled, “We need to get her out of here. Hang in there.” She wrapped her arm around Peebee’s waist as to steady her. She was non-weightbearing on her injured leg. Helmet tipped back and chest heaving through her suit.

Oh, Peebee. You’re not looking good. Omni-gel or not her suit was breeched. This planet was too cold and wet for a breeched suit. We need to move. Yesterday.

Cora felt static in the small of her back. Enough to flare her biotics, “I’m good.” She turned to Ryder, “Let’s go. I can hold a barrier.”

“That’s an awful fast recharge after a lot of use, Cora.” That was Lexi. Why was Lexi getting involved in this? “You guys need to get Peebee back.”

“I’m fine.” Peebee’s voice breathy, “We need those plans!”

“Alright team. Stay together, check your targets.” Ryder said, “Let’s move. We’ll keep moving. Cora will have a barrier, and we’ll make our way to where Kallo can hold the Tempest.” She returned to the man who’d taken the leadership roll, “Can you show us where that shuttle is?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Cora had her barrier up. The soreness had left her arms, she still quivered, but that was from the cold.

“Maybe it’s best to split up?” Ryder continued, looking at Peebee, “Jaal? The kett are falling back, according to SAM. Can you get them out of here? Cora, think you and I can get that data from the shuttle?”
The pill was starting to work—she recognized the feeling from when they’d experimented with it in the medbay. Static gathering around her, a mental calmness. Despite her face shield fogging everything felt crisper, better.

“Yes. We can get there.” Jaal answered, “Are you sure you want to split up?”

“We need that data.” Ryder growled, “Get to the ship. You have a clear path. We’ll be right behind you.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The platform rocked again, Ryder grabbed the edge of the vent. Cora felt more balanced than ever. She wanted to move, to use this charge gathering in her fingertips, “SAM says it’s a clear shot to the Tempest. Now’s your chance.” Ryder was more forceful. And Jaal nodded. He helped Peebee to stand against him, who moaned uncomfortably when she had to place too much weight on her leg.

Get her treated. Good.

Jaal slung Peebee’s arm over his broad shoulders, “See you soon, Pathfinder.” The angara struggled to their feet. They were stiff in their movements, arms trembling around their weapons. One was injured, cradling her arm to her chest.

“Let’s get out of here soon.” Ryder said to her.

“Agreed!”

They made their way out of the vent, back into the open. A kett solider leapt from behind weathered crates, he screamed and flung the butt of his weapon into Cora’s helmet, barely clipping her face plate. A crack spiraled across the glass.

“Bastard!” She growled. The charge had been waiting. He hadn’t known what hit him, probably only that he was flying through the air.

“Careful!” Ryder shouted, “Don’t let your guard down!”

She was aware of one of the resistance members flinging Peebee over his shoulder, the group of them running. Cora felt every twitch of the platform. The pitches of the waves. The sound the spray made when it hit the ice on the deck.

“Too much cover! There are stragglers!” Cora gathered a charge again, arms trembling.

She felt good, though, and she had charge. She flung it outwards around them, toppling the crates and sending debris flying, “One way to clear a space!” Ryder shouted.

“Desperate times!”

They jogged for the shuttle. She felt too good, suspiciously good. Cora had a sneaking idea that this would hurt in the morning. Huntress or not, biotics were finite— as was the toll they took on the human body. Nothing hurts now. No headache. You’re fine.

“CORA!” Ryder shouted and then something else, but Cora’s heart knocked in her ears. A cardinal. A kett woman enveloped in her orange cloak of energy. She hovered toward them.

Okay, this was fine.

Cora gathered her charge while Ryder rotated into cover, positioning her rifle on her shoulder and
laying into the being before them. Ryder’s rounds bounced off her barrier.

Cora flung the charge at the woman with a scream, another scream from the cardinal as she’d hit her, sending her crashing through a pile of frozen crates.

But the cardinal was still charged herself, eyes set on Cora. She gathered her own energy and flung it into Cora.

Barrier up. Despite the barrier, the force sent Cora staggering backward and slipping on the ice. The cardinal took her moment, and the ground disappeared beneath Cora’s feet, body slammed against a sheet of ice gathered around some panel.

_That’ll hurt in the morning._

Everything still worked. Arms and legs moved. Cora let out a howl of rage and gathered her own charge again, propelling herself back on her feet. She unleashed the strongest blast she had, bowling down the cardinal. The woman lay crumpled on the ground. Cora’s charge remained around her, bathing her world in an iridescent blue.

Cold air licked her face.

Fuck—her face plate was gone. Someone tried to come over the radio but she could only hear gurgling.

That had been a strong charge. Stronger than she’d intended. But she still felt good; and had another one ready. She and Ryder were running again, meeting the already iced-over shuttle wreckage.

Cold wind on her face, “I’m going for the computer!” Ryder looked her up and down, concern across dark eyes beneath her own helmet, “Can you cover me?”

“Yes!”

Charge up. Barrier extended around them. The only challenge this time was salt spray, a violent gust of wind tore old plating from the deck of the ship upon which they stood.

“How much longer?” Cora asked. Her arms were quivering, nose running from the cold. But she didn’t feel tired. She felt like she could keep going.

“Not long! Are you okay?”

“Peachy!” She was fine, holding the shield.

“That’s a hella nosebleed, Cora!”

_Crap._ It was blood, not mucus.

Cora spit when the blood came to her lips, stomach churning, “I’m fine! I feel good!” SAM was trying to interface, Ryder had tucked herself into the ruins of the shuttle.

“We’re at the ship…. Made it safe…..” Jaal’s voice was lost in a garble of wind and static, much harder to hear with the wind whipping and no longer having a functional helmet.

Some stragglers tried to fire at them.

_Shoot all day, boys._ Cora flung out her barrier again. The kett gunners joined the cardinal in the pile of rubble.
Another charge.

You’ve got some moves, Dr. Traverse.

Cora’s legs and knees trembled. She figured it was the adrenaline. Keep going. Ride this roll.

“Cora, you’ve got to be spent!” Ryder shouted, “Thirty seconds! Let’s get home!”

“I’m fine!” Cora quipped, but a fresh shuttle of kett. Her recovery time was slowing down, returning to normal. Cora could probably fling that shuttle, but the headache afterwards might be crippling, “We need a new route!”

“Got the plans!” Ryder leapt from the wreckage, she crouched in cover and fired while Cora joined her. She panted. Fuck, she was breathing hard. It was battle excitement. She hadn’t felt this winded when she was standing up. Keep moving. Can’t stop.

Had to ride the adrenaline as long as they could, “Which way?” Cora asked.

“Slow down, Cora. You’re heart’s in the danger zone.” Ryder said, suddenly, “And you’re ...” Her helmet. Her damn helmet. It was breaking along the seams, a scream of static in her ears from the damaged receiver had her tearing it off of her head.

“What?”

“You’re spent!” Ryder shouted, muffled in her own helmet now that Cora was without a radio connection.

“Not yet I’m not!” The wind ripped down the hood of her under suit, hair flinging in the gusts. Cora cringed from a shower of sea spray, icy droplets across her head. She wiped her nose bleed with the back of her glove, spitting again.

Maybe that would have concerned her if they weren’t about to be pinned down by kett. Cora shook her head. The wind hit her face.

They both dropped their heads and scrambled away as an explosion rocked the platform. Kett grenade.

Cora’s mouth was dry, the awful medicine aftertaste of the sugar square. A tall glass of water was in her future, “Take it easy!” Ryder shouted, “I don’t know if you’re feeling pain right now, but I’m feeling it for you!”

“No pain!” Cora assured. The few moments to catch her breath had her ready to run when SAM illuminated the best path for them. They bolted, Cora had her barrier again. Her legs quivered and she slipped on the ice, jamming her knee. The hit startled her, but her armor bore the brunt of the impact.

“You okay?”

“Fine!”

The Tempest hovered above the platform, engines screaming as loud as the wind. More kett. She was running on wobbly legs, riding the ends of her adrenaline high.

“CORA!” Ryder shrieked.

She had to get rid of these guys. They were too close to the Tempest. She gathered another charge
and howled, spinning the fields around her and launching them out—

Her body was shaking. Cold and tired. Rest when you’re dead.

“CORA!” Ryder shouted, gloved hands gripping the sides of her face, “Your radio’s gone, but you need to stop! Your vitals are bad!”

“What?” The sudden grip startled her out of her focus. She lost her charge.

“Run! Come on!” Her body quivered, knees knocking. Ryder helped her haul herself up the ramp of the Tempest. Distant wind as Kallo closed the doors and Ryder kept dragging her into the cargo bay, “I’m fine.”

“You’re spent as shit you need to rest.” Now she was being dramatic, but Cora wasn’t opposed to rest, either. This is going to hurt in the morning. That’s a lot of biotic use.

“I’m fine.”

“Cora. You’re not fine. Sit and breathe holy shit.”

She gasped for air. It was a strange feeling. She didn’t feel winded but her lungs seemed to think so, gasping so hard she had to collapse to her knees, “Ry…der..”

“Holy shit. Let’s never do that again.” Ryder was making her rounds, checking on people, yelling for an update on Peebee, but Cora focused on her own breathing. She couldn’t seem to get enough air, gasping and panting.

She dropped to all fours, blood dripping from her nose. Her arms quivered under the weight of her upper body and she crumpled upon the cargo bay floor.

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Thanks for reading. Hope all my American friends had a happy Thanksgiving <3
Chapter 11

I absolutely adore medical science and medical angst so have fun, guys. Thanks so much to all the people who have commented/kudos :3

Chapter 11:

Cora leaned heavily on her, holding a reddening wad of paper towels from Gil to her face with a quivering hand. Ryder gripped her wrist, taking her weight on her shoulders, “That’s it, keep walking.”

“I’m fine.”

“I know you are, Cors.” Ryder placated, “Suvi! Help?”

_Cora is far overspent. She needs medical attention. Toxins from the breakdown of her muscles have likely been released into her system. Beyond that, she’s hypothermic._

_I know, SAM._

_She needs to be seen by Dr. T’Perro._

She will be. As soon as Liam has that cot set up. Ryder was following Liam’s advice now. Get her out of the wet and frozen armor. Get her into a lukewarm shower. Get her body temperature up. Lexi and Liam already had three people in the medbay, and he was setting up a fourth bed for Cora. Two angara and Peebee’s bullet wound,

“Ryder?” Suvi asked, eyes widening at the sight before her in the hallway. Ryder slapped the button to open the door to her quarters.

“Go to the medbay. Get a sugar chew and some scrubs from Liam. Tell him we’ll bring her soon.”

“‘We’?” Suvi looked at her.

“She can’t stand up.” Cora almost went down again, “I’m going to need your help! She’s freezing!”

“I’m just spent.” Cora protested.

Suvi returned with scrubs and a wrapped wad of sugar before Ryder managed to get Cora through the door to her personal washroom. Cora’s frozen hair rested against her neck, melting bits of ice wetting Ryder’s collar.

Cora pulled away from her, leaning herself into the wall and panting. Not as hard as she was— she’d at least been resting on the cargo bay floor earlier (if you could call face-planting ‘resting’). Suvi had the foresight to bring sterile gloves, “Okay, Cora.” She said, touching her back, “Oh goodness, you’re very cold. Don’t you feel cold?” Cora let Suvi pull the bloodied wad away from her face and replace it with a new one.

“She took a good hit to the face.” Ryder said. Still halfway in her own armor.

“Looks like it’s slowing down. Cora?” She still leaned with her forehead and forearm rested
against the wall, legs quivering.

“Spent. Overreacting. I’m…fine.”

Still catching her breath, “Sure.” Suvi said.

“Cora. I think you’re not feeling pain.” Ryder said again.

“I’m fine!” Cora snapped but made no effort to move.

“What’s wrong with her?” Suvi asked.

“Long story.” Ryder growled through her teeth, “But also not sure. Help me get her in the shower.”

SAM warned her again about how cold Cora was, “What?” Cora growled, squinting.

“You’re really over-expended Cora and for some reason your brain isn’t connecting to your body from that pill.”

“I feel great.”

“You don’t feel great. Can you even stand?”

“Ryder.” Cora’s knees gave out, Suvi and Ryder caught her in a tangle of arms. Ryder felt Cora’s body quivering against her—cold and tense.

“Can you start the shower? We’ve got to get her warm.” Ryder growled through her teeth.

“Ryder I will literally kill you if you shove me in there.” Cora’s voice was rough from overexertion.

A pause, “Noted.” Suvi and Ryder set her down in the bottom of the shower, she shivered, “We’re going to cut your suit, Cora.”

Please be okay. Come on, Cora. I’m so sorry I suggested this.

Cora needs medical attention immediately.

I know, SAM, I fucking know.

“Hold my hand. Keep talking.” Ryder said. Cora’s cold fingers wrapped around hers. Suvi pulled scissors down the front of her suit. She and Ryder were able to tear the sleeves of the spandex free and pull it from her body. Cora groaned in displeasure and Ryder took that as some attempt to ‘keep talking’. Suvi, who still had the gloves, tilted Cora’s head back into the water. She scrubbed the blood from her face and lips, murmuring to her.

Ryder was extremely thankful for Suvi in that moment. Her own heart rattled in her chest. Normally she was good at this, but seeing Cora in this state was making her an anxious wreck, “I think your nose has stopped bleeding am I hurting you?” Cora didn’t get hurt. She was Cora.

“No.” Cora exhaled. Ryder tried to make herself useful, dragging her fingers through Cora’s hair with a handful of shampoo, thankful that the warm water had defrosted it.

“No.” Cora exhaled. Ryder tried to make herself useful, dragging her fingers through Cora’s hair with a handful of shampoo, thankful that the warm water had defrosted it.

“Okay, good.” Ryder scrubbed the soot from her head, tipping her back into the water to rinse.

She was panting again, eyes lulling back and forth, “Cora?” Suvi asked. Cora was suddenly limp, head falling into Ryder’s arms. The water from her hair soaked Ryder’s own under suit.
“Cora!”

Suvi swore, digging her knuckles into Cora’s sternum.

“Ow…!” Cora pulled her head out of Ryder’s hands, squeezing her eyes closed and clasping her hands to her chest, “Are you…?” She blinked, eyes focusing more so than they had in a while, “My clothes…? Are we in the shower?”

Cora breathed hard, still making no effort to move, “Yeah…sorry.” Ryder stated, she reached up to turn the water off, “How are you feeling?”

“Oh…ow…fuck.” Cora leaned her head back. Suvi handed her a towel and Cora struggled to pull it over herself.

“Yeah. You had a day, sweetheart.” Ryder stated. She took the towel from Cora, toweling off her hair and then draping it over her shoulders.

“We have clothes for you.” Suvi said. Cora tried to reach out for the shirt and slumped down, sighing deeply.

“Sara?” And that made Ryder worry for her. Cora was looking to her, unease across her eyes, “I can’t…I’m never taking those pills again.”

Cora sucked in a breath. Suvi helped her pull the much-too-large scrub shirt over her head.

“Can we stand you up?” Ryder asked, reaching for Cora’s hand. She took her hand but made no effort to move.

“I’m freezing. I don’t know…if I can.”

Guess you’re feeling pain now. Eyes closed and face twisted, Ryder hurt for her. Especially with the level of expenditure she’d put out minutes earlier. “Do you want sugar?” Suvi asked softly. Ryder rested her free hand on Cora’s quivering knee.

“No.” She breathed.

“Are you in pain?” Suvi pressed further.

Something squeezed in Ryder’s chest when she nodded, Cora pressed her forehead into her palm. Ryder rubbed her knuckles, “It’s…It’s starting to hurt…It wasn’t. I felt so good…hit me like a wall.”

“Well, you did hit a wall. Literally.” Ryder frowned. Cora still made no effort to move, “Do you need Jaal to carry you?”

“No. It’s just going to hurt to move.” Cora struggled to her feet with Ryder and Suvi’s help, making a pained noise and falling limp against them. They half dragged her into the medbay. She was cold despite the warm water, shivering against Ryder. Suvi and Ryder set her on the bed.

“Okay, nice and warm and cozy.” Ryder stated, “Okay…medbay…But at least it’s a bed.”

Wide amber eyes looked at Ryder. She lay limp on the cot, watching the movements around her with her eyes rather than moving, “Your muscles?” Ryder asked, taking her hand again.

“Yeah…” Cora heaved a breath, “Over expended…and tired…” She closed her eyes, “It hurts a little right now.”
Based on her breathing, Ryder knew Cora wasn’t well. Seeing her limp on a cot was enough of a hint. Cora didn’t lay down in unfamiliar places. Period. She closed her eyes and sighed heavily. Quivering, side of her face pressed into the pillow. Oversized scrubs tangled around her.

Cold. She’s cold. Blanket.

Ryder elbowed around Liam and Lexi to pull blankets from the cabinet.

She draped the blanket over Cora, and to her surprise, Cora reached up and took her hand again, “Are you okay?” Ryder asked her softly, patting the back of her hand. Suvi stroked her hair.

Bad question.

“Fine.” Cora breathed. Liam pressed an oxygen mask over her face.

“You look like you hurt, Cora.” Suvi said.

“You’ll feel better soon.” He assured, “We’ll fix you up in no time.”

Within seconds he returned with a kit, a needle and tubing, “Okay, Cora.” Ryder rubbed her hand, “You’re going to be fine.”

She still had her eyes closed, face twisted in pain, no effort to move, “Alright. Hold her shoulder.” Liam stated.

“What?” Liam pulled down the shoulder of the shirt, swabbing the area beneath Cora’s collar bone and opening his scanner. Ryder realized he was starting a larger line in her chest, “Squeeze my hand, Cora.”

“This will be a sharp poke.” He warned. Suvi picked up her opposite hand.

I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Ryder pressed Cora’s shoulder. Cold fingers clamped down on hers.

Cora cringed violently and gasped. Ryder squeezed her hand, “I know. I know. I’m sorry.” She rubbed her shoulder, wondering if it was worth anything as a distraction from Liam and the needle. Cora remained shockingly stoic.

“Okay that’s the worst part.” Liam stated.

Ryder figured she must be in bad shape to tolerate that so well. She again found herself hurting for her XO, a phantom ache under her own collar bone. Liam taped the tubing into place, hanging a saline bag on the stand beside the cot.

“Ryder.” He said, “Go. Go get yourself warm. She’s going to need scans and to be on fluids overnight at least.”

Cora was there, trembling with her eyes closed. Her own under suit was wet, feet numb in her boots. Ryder grappled with the idea of pulling her hand from Cora’s tight grip. Suvi noticed, leaning forward toward Ryder. She still held Cora’s other hand, “I’ve got her, Ryder. Go get warm. Lexi will need to look at her.” Suvi smoothed over Cora’s forehead. Suvi was good, nurturing, hadn’t awkwardly asked her out a few weeks ago. That’s what Cora probably needed right now.

“Right.” She said, still unable to pull herself away, “Sorry, Cora. I’m so sorry.” She released Cora’s hand, “I’ll be back. Soon. Promise.”

Did Cora even want her at her side? She had asked Ryder to stay with her last time she’d been in the
medbay. A day ago when she was trying those stupid fucking pills. Now she was cold and uncomfortable and lying in such an unnatural, afraid-to-move way that Ryder wondered if anything didn’t hurt.

Ryder would be back. Soon. And she would stay with Cora as long as she wanted.

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Thanks for reading!

Poor Cora. I love this angsty crap : )
Hey guys! Sorry it’s been a minute. Been busy with life and new job and moving : )

Also. Considering Tumblr might be exploding (?) I am interested in moving to pillowfort or dreamscape. So let me know where y’all are headed and I'll come flail with you.

Because I am 100 % the type of person that when someone tells me I can’t do something, I’ve got to do it. And of course now that Tumblr says no to NSFW I’ve got lists upon lists of Cora x Janae and Cora x Ryder sex head canons that I’M DYING to post.

<3 <3

--Jkit

Chapter 12:

Cora licked her dry lips. Her neck ached and lower back screamed at every idea of moving. There were voices, faraway.

She closed her eyes. Something was stuck to her face.

She was on the Tempest. They’d made it back. She couldn’t move.

Each breath expanded sore ribs. Cora kept her eyes closed. She had to breathe, forcing more air into her protesting lungs, wheezing as she exhaled.

“She’s in pain. She has to be.” That was Suvi.

She was. It was almost unbearable. Cora just breathed. She didn’t dare move.

“Cora?” Lexi this time, eyelid forced open, “Can you hear me?”

She paused, catching her breath, “Y..Yes.”

“Okay. You’ll feel better soon.”

Cora blinked against the lights of the med-bay, cross eyed at the mask on her face. Okay. It wasn’t as bad once she dared to arrange herself in a more comfortable position, “Do you know where you are?”

“Yes…Hi…Lexi…”

Why couldn’t she catch her breath?

Lexi’s hands pressing hard on her stomach, forcing her eyelids open, “Cora. Where are you?”

“Med…bay.”

“That’s good. Does this hurt?” She was pressing her belly. Cora’s lower back ached. Her fingertips and face burned from the blood returning to her frozen extremities.
Ryder. If Lexi was going to keep poking her she needed someone to cling to. Ryder could tolerate her tearing on her hand. Cora reached out, “Ryder?” No one was next to her. Cora felt like they were talking around her. She had so much to say but couldn’t get her voice.

“She’ll be back soon.” That was Suvi, smoothing her hair.

“Breathe…” Cora panted, “Can’t…”

“Get painkillers in her, get her on a medigel nebulizer and push the fluids—” Cora closed her eyes again, trying not to let the world fade from her.

Last time she was in a medbay, she slept for nine weeks, “Don’t…” Cora struggled to catch her breath. Her body hurt. Everything was sluggish and tired. It was frustrating.


The painkillers dulled the world around her. What had she wanted to ask Lexi? Cora couldn’t remember. Just that she was frustrated and wanted to go to her biolab and be where she was comfortable.

An unpleasant, medicine tasting steam through her oxygen mask, but Cora’s pain dulled, and her body was exhausted. She sunk into the pillow.

Why had she taken that pill? Why had she done something so reckless? She wanted to cry. Tears burned in her throat.

*It’s the painkillers, Harper. Get it together.*

She breathed, fading in and out of a painful, restless consciousness.

“Hey, Cora. You’re okay.” A firm hand on her forehead steadied her.

“Ryder.” She sighed, breath echoing in her mask.

“Can I do anything?”

“I should…” Cora closed her eyes, “Do something.”

“Don’t do anything.” Ryder brushed over the back of her hand, “Sleep.”

And Cora did.

Her night was a blur.

Ryder talked to her for a short while about the time Scott was engaged (Scott was engaged at one point? Did she dream that?), but Cora couldn’t remember the finer details. Ryder’s hand rested on her head, thumb stroking her forehead as she spoke.

A particularly unpleasant few minutes of Lexi manipulating her sore joints to assess the extent of damage.

“I’ll be back soon, Cora. Hang on. The meds will help.” Ryder let Cora cling to her hand and kissed her knuckles when Lexi adjusted the line in her chest.

Cora blinked. Her body ached, eyes burning from the light in the room. She adjusted herself on the crunchy pillow.
The realization of her location crashed upon her, heart caught. *Oh shit.* She startled, lifting her head. Hand went to her throat. *Oh thank Goddess.* No breathing tube in her throat. No ventilator. She could breathe. Just a cannula under her nose. Cora exhaled again, startling Ryder who’d been sitting beside her and reading from a datapad, “Hey. You okay?” One of Ryder’s hands came to hers.

“Fine.” She could talk now too. Her throat felt like she’d spent the night yelling over music at a concert, but she managed more than short gasps.

“Good.” Ryder smiled down at her. Cora bit her lip and pushed herself up on her elbow.

“Get me out of here.”

“You’re staying the night, babe.”

“How long?”

“What?”

“Ryder.” She swallowed the painful lump in her throat, “How long was I sleeping?”

Ryder seemed to get it. She clasped Cora’s shoulder, “Not long. Four or five hours. It’s the middle of the night and you’re in pain—lay down now.”

Cora exhaled, and despite her discomfort, followed Ryder’s order to rest back on the pillow. She was tired, “Okay.” Vague memories came back. Peebee. Peebee got shot, “Is she…is she okay?”

“’She’? You mean Peebee?” Ryder said, “She’s okay. It was a flesh wound, just hit some muscles and was painful. She’s recuperating in the escape pod with a cast and medigel. Less internal damage than you have.”


“What about the angara?”

“One’s up and about.” Ryder answered, whispering, “The woman is still sleeping here. They’ll all be okay. So will you.”

“No more pills. I’m sorry, Sara.”

“No. Shh. I told you to do it.”

Warm water and Ryder holding her head up and Suvi and SAM and Ryder all talking at once, “Did you guys…shove me in the shower?”

Ryder paused, “Sorry. You were freezing.”

“Fuck.” Cora sighed. Well, that was embarrassing. At least she had clothes on now. A shirt many sizes too big. Tubing taped above her breast which she hesitantly reached up and touched and inhaled sharply as she realized how sore she was.

“Leave it alone. You have to stay here until you get more fluids and finish the med infusion.” Ryder pointed to a bag hanging above her head, “Relax. Try to.” The cot was warm and comfortable, as was Ryder’s hand in hers, thumb running over her knuckles.

Cora had the phantom feeling of Ryder’s hand on her head. Fingers tracing her hairline and
brow. That would be nice right now. She’d never ask that from her, but she turned her head toward Ryder, “Thanks for being here.”

“Of course, Cora.”

“Are you okay? Jaal?” She grew tired, world faded again as the haze of painkillers claimed her.

“I’m fine. We’re fine. Shh, rest. Do you want me to leave you alone?”

Cora was so tired. But the idea of being alone here in this cold room wasn’t a pleasant one. “No.” Cora sighed, “I loved the Scott story.”

“You heard that?” Ryder sounded happy.

“Barely.”

Ryder laughed, forehead tipped into Cora’s shoulder. Cora leaned her head into Ryder’s, “Okay, then.”

“Do you need…to sleep?” Cora asked her.

“At some point.”

And she did what she might have done for some of the commandos she was closer to: Cora scooted herself over, “Lay down with me?” The painkillers were pulling her down fast. She was cold and needy and tired (always hated the damn side effects of these things). Her mind was as sluggish as her body.

“You don’t mind?”

“I don’t want to be alone.”

“Oh. Me neither.” Ryder curled beside her, impressing Cora at how gentle she was. A stark difference from her normal bull-in-a-China-shop way of carrying herself. Her head rested lightly against Cora’s shoulder, hands on her arm, knees against her thigh.

Warm. She dozed off, Ryder’s hair tickling her cheek.

“I’m sorry Cora.” Ryder said at some point, “I’m glad you’re feeling better. I couldn’t do this without you.”

--

Thanks for reading, my friends and yay for fluff.

Also I totally have an idea of a Cora x Ryder or Cora x Janae kink scene so I could REALLY nail my Tumblr coffin.

Xoxo love you all, hope you enjoyed <3
Chapter 13

Thank you guys so much as always <3

Check me out on pillowfort: https://www.pillowfort.io/HillBillyHarlot

—

Maybe it would have been weird if it wasn’t so comfortable. Cora woke up with a clearer head and the IV bags disconnected from the port.

Lexi smiled at her. Ryder snored softly against her shoulder.

Cora smiled back. She felt better. There was paperwork to be done and her body was healing, at least enough that she felt she could certainly stand up and walk. Sore, sure, like her first day at asari boot camp when she’d expended her biotics and hardly made it away from the rest of the group to vomit.

That had been rather embarrassing.

One of the asari had nearly puked on their Drill Sargent’s boots. Another few hadn’t finished the obstacle course.

At least she’d somewhat held her own.

It was the first day of commando boot camp, after all.

But she felt as bad now as she had the morning after that affair: worn out, weak and sore.

Cora didn’t move, she didn’t want to disturb Ryder (who she knew struggled to sleep as much as she did). She could rest here a few more minutes. It seemed the angaran woman had left the medbay. The two normal beds with the scanners were reset, clean paper set upon the foam surfaces.

Lexi never waisted any time with that sort of thing, “Where are we heading?” Cora whispered to her when she walked over.

“Nexus.” Lexi answered, “I suggest getting seen by the human specialists on the Hyperion.”

“I feel fine.”

Lexi cocked an eyebrow, “Probably a little sore. The circles under your eyes are as dark as one of those Earth rodents.”

A what now?

Cora supposed she was glad she wasn’t looking in a mirror. A hand up to her hair found the top sprawled and matted. She’d deal with that later. “I’m better.”

“You are. But I wouldn’t recommend doing that again. Rhabdomyolysis isn’t something to play with, reversible with prompt medication, but still dangerous and painful— as you realize. I’m writing you to desk duty the next few days at least. Drink water. As much as you can.”

And Cora, with muscles too sore to properly lift her arms and arrange her hair, couldn’t find herself arguing, “Right. Thanks, Lexi.”
Ryder awoke with a sharp inhale, lifting her head quickly as if she hadn’t realized that she was sleeping on Cora, “You okay?” Cora asked her, pushing herself up to a sitting position.

Okay—stiff and sore. Nothing a day or two getting caught up on paperwork wouldn’t fix.

“Yeah.” Ryder slung her legs over the edge of the bed, yawning, “Sorry. I fell asleep on you.”

“You were tired.”

“Yeah. Also…pill or not you totally saved our asses on that platform. And we got the data.” Ryder yawned again, “Mission successful. But let’s not do that again.”

“I’ll email Dr. Traverse.” Cora rubbed her eyes, realizing the tubing was still taped to her chest, “Lexi?” She motioned to it. That would be a nice bruise.

“I’ll take it out.” The Doctor assured her.

Ryder stretched, “Go gentle on Dr. Traverse, Cors. You saved all of our asses.”

Lexi cleared her throat, “An apparent side effect of blocked pain receptors? Pain exists for a reason—that’s how your body tells you you’ve reached your limit. That’s hard to find without a field test, and incredibly dangerous. You were lucky that didn’t turn out worse.”

Yeah. She was. And the strange euphoria she’d had. Maybe it was the exhaustion—but they were lucky she didn’t spiral out of control.

“Don’t worry.” Cora exhaled, “We’re not doing that again.”

Okay, so maybe she liked the idea of getting cozy with women.

Ryder didn’t count. Ryder was her commanding officer. But lying next to someone sounded comforting, right now, and Cora rolled with the thought.

She was tired.

“Hey, love.” If she could say that to someone right now who was coming to curl up with her while she slept off whatever Lexi pumped her full of to counteract the damage she’d done to herself, she’d be quite happy.

She wasn’t in the mood for anything other than sleep.

A female body pressed against hers, and Cora sighed happily with her daydream, curling against her pillow.

They were en route to the Nexus and Cora knew that Ryder was busy and she and Ryder had spent plenty (almost too much) time together the past few hours. Was that weird? Her commanding officer had slept in bed with her, curled against her in the lack of space.

*It’s Ryder. Nothing’s weird with Ryder.*
Cora made her way to the armory, glad to find Vetra typing on her computer, “Cora! Feeling better?”

“Yeah. Great.” She leaned against the counter.

“I’m not sure I believe ‘great’. But you sure look better than last night.” Cora cringed inwardly at that one, “What’s up?”

“I wanted to talk to you again. About what we…. did ….I mean talked about. The other night?”

Vetra glanced sideways at her stash of items she had on the shelves, “So …you do want cereal after all?”

“What? No. I don’t really like cereal.” Cora shook her head and folded her arms over her chest (or tried to. Her biceps groaned in protest at the movement and she stopped short).

“Oh…The other thing? You and—”

No need to let Vetra even finish that thought: “So I’m going to the asari ark gala since we’ll be on the Nexus. And I was just thinking. Okay. Maybe…Maybe I do like…getting close with women?”

“Oh…kay.” She had Vetra’s full attention now (of course she did).

“So how did you …’know’?”

“Know that I like women? I don’t know. Just sort of did.” Vetra shrugged, “Maybe you should find an asari at that ark party thing. Sarissa?”

“Oh god.” But for some reason…Cora was willing to entertain that. And as soon as she entertained it, the buried memories of taking care of herself to a fantasy that was far too similar to Sarissa surfaced.

‘I’ll teach you to be better about holding your barrier. Maybe you need to be taught a lesson.’

Oh, God. Cora fought down embarrassment at the thought itself. How in the world had that gotten her off? No wonder she’d buried it.

“You okay?” Vetra asked her.

“Yes.” Cora shook her head, “Just…Okay. I find Sarissa attractive. But that’s kind of weird, isn’t it?”


“Recent events puts a bit of a damper on it.” Cora muttered.

“Also understandable. So you and Ryder last night?”

“We were just tired.”

“Okay.”
“Don’t give me that, Vetra.”

“Give you what?” Vetra laughed, “I think you should…experiment if you want to.”

“With Sarissa?”

“You said that not me.”

Fuck she was flushed, Cora hung her head, “No. That’s so weird.”

“If you could. No strings attached. Never speaking of it again. Just to try it. Would you with Sarissa?”

“I mean…if the world actually worked that way? But Vetra, it doesn’t.”

“Sure it does.” The turian was so calm about this: like they weren’t talking about Cora getting her box off to the asari pathfinder.

And the human pathfinder, for that matter, Harper. And that little thought jolted her.

“You okay?” Why could Vetra read her so well?

“Yeah…just…I don’t know. Was that weird to let Ryder sleep next to me? Let…no…I asked her. I would have with some of my old teammates.”

“Cora. It wasn’t weird if it wasn’t weird.”

“Right…but…” She trailed off.


“That’s a terrible rule.” Cora shook her head. Nothing like some good foreplay kissing. At least for her. But she didn’t say that aloud, “But…I guess I get where you’re coming from.”

“No kissing and telling. No one knows. But if you’re fantasizing about it, you’ll probably at least have fun.”

“Vetra, it so doesn’t work that way.”

“Why not?” Maybe it was rhetorical, but Cora didn’t actually have an answer for that.

Thankfully their subject changed to the Initiative and the murders and gossip about which people Vetra admired ended up turning exile.

Cora did have one thing going for her, she supposed:

She had a very nice dress. An impulse buy from the Milky Way. Made from asari fabric to hold up for a six century journey.

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Xoxo thanks for reading, guys.

If you want some graphic Cora x Ryder smut: https://archiveofourown.org/works/16953603
Chapter 14

If anyone hasn’t seen this gorgeous fanart of Cora, here it is (Bioware, please please give us a formal in Andromeda 2):

http://paragonraptors.tumblr.com/image/178527702491

Chapter 14:

“You said you needed tape?” Vetra had the roll on one of her talons. Cora frowned. A thick silver roll. Duct tape.

“That’s all you have?”

“It’s human. Super useful.” Vetra thrummed, “One of your species’ better inventions, if you ask me.”

“I don’t know if it’s good for skin.” Cora frowned, taking the roll from her and turning it over in her hands.

Vetra shrugged, “It’ll work, I’m sure….” Green eyes flicked her up and down, “What are you trying to do with it? Exactly?”

“My …breasts. They…I can’t wear this.” A glistening blue halter top with a plunge neckline and open back. What had she been thinking when she bought this damn thing from that asari lady?

It was six hundred years ago and you’d been in a coma for nine weeks. The straps over her chest were so much narrower than she remembered when trying it. The first full face of makeup she’d put on since they’d made it to Andromeda, her hair gelled back.

“Why not? Isn’t that what’s the tape for? We tape it on you?”

Cora had always been chesty. She frowned at herself and the narrow strips of fabric in the mirror, “I have to tape it on or the whole Initiative is going to see some headlights.”

Vetra let out her rumbling laugh, she took the roll of tape, “I’m sure someone there would want to see…er….headlights?”

“This is all you’ve got?”

“Yes. Unless you’d rather superglue it.” Vetra whistled. She tore off a piece and looped it around itself with surprising nimbleness, dangling the loop out to Cora on one of her talons.

The tape actually adhered well to the fabric of the gown, which was a pleasant surprise, “I can’t believe I’m duct taping my boobs into a dress.”

“Welcome to Andromeda.”

“Do you think it will stick?” Cora mused. It was iffy at best, but if it was all they had, it was what she was going to have to work with.

“Wow. You look good.” Ryder leaned against the door to Cora’s quarters. The typical Ryder smirk.
But what got to Cora was that she wasn’t dressed for a gala—in her normal initiative jacket and the stupid pants with the black seat and clashing scarf, “Sorry. I don’t have any tape.”

“You’re not going?” Cora hissed at her, more sharply than she’d intended, “What do you mean you’re not going?”

“It’s an asari thing.” Ryder shrugged her shoulders, stepping through Cora’s door to let it close. A gentle hiss of the hydraulics behind her, “I wasn’t invited. Fuck, Cors. You look fantastic.”

“You mean it?” Cora looked at her. Toes ached in the pumps she’d been dumb enough to buy with the dress.

“Course I mean it.” Ryder’s smirk turned to a shit eating grin as Vetra handed her another tape loop.

“Do you think it will stay?” Cora asked again. Why in the world was she asking a non-breast owning turian that?

“It is duct tape.”

Vetra leaned back, showing her avain characteristics as she cocked her head sideways while she focused on Cora’s gown, “It’s off center. May I?”

“Sure.” Cora didn’t care.

Vetra’s fingers pressed to her chest, lightly. She pulled on one of the edges of the fabric strips, “You need more tape.”

“Wait…you’re actually using duct tape?” Ryder snorted, picking up the roll.

“What’s the problem with duct tape?” Vetra had her hands on Cora’s breast again, arranging the strip, tucking another loop of tape beneath the material, “Erm…sorry, Lieutenant.”

You’re just being groped by the acquisitions official in front of your CO. It’s fine.

And Ryder stepped forward, “There’s no way that actually is working.” She muttered.

“I think it’s working.” Cora muttered, pulling at the strips on her dress, “See?” She motioned at herself without thinking. She was a ship kid. She’d been living with asari. She didn’t care if these women were touching her.

It wasn’t until her commanding officer joined the acquisitions turian in pressing on her boobs that Cora’s ‘what is technically appropriate in human culture’ half of her brain caught up with the fact.

Whatever. It’s fine.

“Hey it’s on there. How are you going to get it off?” Ryder asked, sitting on the end of the bed.

“That’s not the problem right now.” Cora told her.

“One issue at a time. Right.” Ryder stated, returning to her bed, “Gonna find some men dressed like that?”

“Not at an asari ball.” She snorted. Turians did a thorough job, and Vetra was no exception to that stereotype. She stepped back again, looking at Cora’s dress, and returned to adjust again, “Maybe a nice commando.”
“Oh, Cora!” Ryder sounded far too pleased at the revelation, “Finally getting into asari?”

“I don’t think so.” She lied.

Vetra made a knowing rumble. Cora fought back the heat which rose in her face.

Ryder flopped back on the bed, clicking her tongue, “I wouldn’t mind an asari girl climbing me.”

“Jesus.” A knock at the door, “Hello?” Cora called, “Come in?”

Liam paused. Vetra had her hands on Cora’s chest. Ryder laid with her knees flung apart and was motioning at herself.

“I have…tape?” His eyes darted between the three of them.

“Thanks. Vetra beat you to it.”

“What are you doing with it?”

“Taping a dress to her body.” Vetra answered.

Liam set the tape down, “All fun and games until you have to get it off.”

“That’s what I said.” Ryder didn’t move from the position she was in.

Cora “We’ll worry about that later.”

And she was off to the gala, heels tapping the tile floors of the Nexus. Vetra and Ryder had offered her a ride (“we’ll drop you off. We can barrow one of the cars from customs at the docks.”).

Cora politely declined.

She was ready. Puffing out her chest as she stepped onto the tram. She held one of the overhead loops to steady herself.

An asari seated on a chair at the end of the tram glanced her up and down. Cora met her eyes and smiled. The woman quickly looked away.

Okay. Get some action tonight. Go home with someone.

Was that weird after sleeping in bed with Ryder?

There’s nothing between you and Ryder. You’re just close friends.

The gala was already in full swing when she got there. Music was thumping, a human waitress shoved a glass of red wine into her hand.

Love a good red.

She’d expected sitting down and talking politics and hearing Sarissa give a speech, but it didn’t seem this ball was going in that direction.

Relax, unwind. Maybe it was her nerves talking. Maybe it was an excuse. But Cora downed her glass far more quickly than drinking wine was socially acceptable and reached for another from the next waitress.

Flirt gently with Sarissa.
She was overtired. And asari drank strong wine. Cora smiled when she saw Sarissa. Their eyes met for a moment and Sarissa averted the contact, gripping the elbow of the woman standing next to her and walking her away.

Cora blinked. Had Sarissa not seen her?

*You're the only human here and you have a bleached faux haw*.k.

She and Sarissa locked eyes a second time as she spun her apparent date, and again Sarissa was the one to avert her gaze from Cora’s.

And Cora could describe herself as a lot of things, but she liked to think that stupid wasn’t one of them. But here she was standing stupidly, clinging to the neck of a wineglass while staring through the crowd. Sarissa glanced at her a third time, Cora watched as Sarissa placed her hand on the small of her date’s back and guided her away from the dancefloor and through the exit door.

Whatever hopefulness Cora hadn’t realized she’d had inside of her burst at that moment. She was worn out, tired, sore.

She wiggled her toes into a more comfortable position in the pumps and felt like a human standing amongst asari—clunky. *Well. That’s that.* No, she hadn’t really expected to follow any of Vetra’s advice about Sarissa and no kissing but at least talking to her like an old friend would have been nice. Cora knew when she was being ducked. This was one of those times. And it hurt. Even if it was just the burst bubble from the giddy imagination of some scandalous liaison.

*Maybe she’s embarrassed. The whole Ark Leusinia thing.* But Cora’s own lack of Pathfinder title hadn’t made her disappear into hiding. She had a job to do, and so did Sarissa, and the odd behavior of Sarissa dragging her apparent new partner off simply left a bad taste in Cora’s mouth.

And it made this whole gala at lot less appealing.

She made small talk with an ex-commando who gave her advise about asari cooking which would have been highly useful when she was still in the Milky Way. Cora would have to write that down when she got home.

The party, typical of asari fashion, seemed like it was closer to ramping up than it was to winding down for the night cycle. Cora and her crew might have been on shore leave, but there was only so much small talk to be made with strangers, and apparently little luck to be had in the experimenting with women department.

Tired, and throat dry from long, shouting conversations over the thumping music, Cora found herself bidding farewell to a few acquaintances made and thankful for the quiet of the nighttime Nexus wards. A bleary turian holding a steaming mug nearly shouldered into her, not looking up from where he placed his feet upon the ground.

*Headed home. Time to get these shoes off.* Without the heat of the bodies in the small room, Cora hugged her arms around herself, pulling at the tape holding the dress to her skin.

*And get some rubbing alcohol to get this dress off.*

Cora let her mind drift until a figure stepping in front of her rattled her from her thoughts, “Cor! Hey.”

Ryder. She blinked and shook off her daydreaming, “Hi, Sara. You’re up late.”
“Yeah.” Ryder joined her while they waited for the tram, “Visiting Scott.”

“How’s he—” She cut off, not sure how to articulate what she tried to ask without sounding overly pressing.

“Same.” Ryder’s reply was fast, “They say he’s getting better, though. Hanging in. All I can ask for. How was the party?”

Cora hugged herself again, “Met some people. Pretty…boring, unfortunately.”

“Are you cold?”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re making me cold.”

“I’ll live until we get back.” Her skirt blew in the artificial wind from the vents by the tram station and a shiver ran up her back, teeth rattled in her mouth.

Ryder shrugged off her jacket, “I’m sweating in here. Take it.”

Well, she was wearing her hot purple scarf and another sweater underneath. Cora took the jacket, “Thanks.”

“Now you’re the Pathfinder because you have the badge. And I can have a day off.”

“Is that how it works?”

“Might be.” Ryder shrugged, “I don’t know how anything works.”

The tram whirred to a stop at the station and they clambered aboard, into a mostly empty car. Cora and Ryder sat beside each other, “How was Sarissa?”

“Don’t ask.”

“That bad?”

“Left without talking to me. Ran away.”

Ryder snorted, “Are you joking?”

Cora shook her head. A grin spread across Ryder’s face, and it was contagious. Within a moment they cackled, “You’re not joking?” Ryder cried, “Are you fucking serious?”

And for some reason they were still laughing, “Took her girlfriend and ran.”

“Rather than talk to you? How is she going to do this job? She’s been okay at Pathfinding from the reports but holy hell—” Ryder cut off, pressing her face into her palm.

Cora did her best to sober herself, “Maybe she just…”

“Has some issues?” Ryder finished.

She motioned at herself, “I was going to say couldn’t handle this all taped up in a dress.” Cora braced herself on the seat backs in front of them as the tram slammed its breaks at their stop.

Ryder clapped her hands and laughed, “Want to walk around the docks before we go home?”
“I would but not in these shoes.”

“Should we sit a minute, then? I don’t know I’m ready to go stare at the walls of my room.”

“Yeah. Let’s do that.”

They made their way to one of the benches overlooking where the Tempest docked. The occasional nighttime skycar zoomed past them, headlights reflecting in Ryder’s dark eyes. It was strange—the quiet here compared to the Citadel, “What are you holding?”

Cora looked down to the stupid fucking plastic thing with the crunchy wrapper she’d been holding since the door greeter handed it to her, “Um…Asari. The party favor.”

“They give out party favors? I think the last time I was a party favor I was ten and it was a cardboard hat.” Ryder reached out for it and Cora let her. A few moments of silence where Ryder did the thing where she bit her lip and cocked her head sideways and Cora laughed again, “Is this uh…?” Ryder let her hands fall into her lap, “They did not give you this at the door.”

“They’re asari!” Cora took it back.

“Damn, asari know what’s up.” Ryder said, “I should have had you get me one.”

“You should have asked.” Cora twisted herself when she laughed, catching the tape on her skin again, “I can’t believe I let Vetra duct tape a dress to me.”

“You do look good.” Ryder said, “And I’m sorry about Sarissa.” She tipped her head sideways, into Cora’s shoulder for a moment.

“Thanks for the coat.” Cora leaned into her, watching another skycar pass. “Want to… continue this conversation while I try to get tape off my chest?”

Ryder snorted, “How stuck is it?”

“Turians don’t half ass anything.”

“Especially not Vetra.” Ryder muttered, Cora opened her coat to let her reach out and see how well Vetra had taped down the article of clothing.

“It’s starting to hurt.” Cora commented, laughing, “But it stayed on.” She offered her hand to pull Ryder to her feet, “We need a bottle of rubbing alcohol from Lexi.”

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Thanks for reading! Sorry for the delay!

Fun times to be had in the next chapter!
Hey guys!

Sorry it’s been a while but here’s chapter 15. Thanks for all the love : )

There’s more sexual content in this.

NSFW 18+

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“Sara! That hurts!” Cora clutched the material to her chest.

“We just have to rip it off.”

“That’s my skin!” She hissed back, still holding the dress against her breasts, “Why are you sitting on me?”

“Because you’re being squirrely.” Ryder replied. Cora was on her bed, Ryder straddling her pelvis, “Can I just peel it slowly?”

“No. Ow. Ryder.” Her skin burned beneath the tape, irritated from the adhesive.

“Does it hurt, actually?”

“No, it feels great.” Cora growled through her teeth.

Ryder pulled back, swinging her leg over Cora to untangle the two of them, “It’s really that stuck?”

Thankfully it was the precious combination of both Nexus shore leave and the night cycle—no one was around to see this endeavor, “Ryder. If you try to pull it…I don’t know what I’ll do to you, but you will regret it.”

“Kick me in the shins?” She suggested, cocking an eyebrow and looking wholly too amused.

“Get that taser.” Cora muttered, still lying back. She was still sore from the fiasco with the pills, and the stupid dress stuck to her wasn’t helping the issue.

Ryder laughed, and she laughed with her, wincing while her skin pulled the type, “You’ve had a tough couple days.” Ryder stated, patting her on the leg.

“Don’t start with me, Sara. I will get that taser.” Cora groaned, working her way to sitting up without pulling the tape on her chest.

Sara snapped her fingers, “Alcohol.”

“Yeah I’m going to need another drink.” Cora realized she was being dumb as it was coming out of her mouth and what Ryder actually meant dawned on her, “Oh! Alcohol! Lexi!”

They scrambled out of Cora’s door, the cool flooring was soothing on her sore feet. She hiked the skirt of the dress up, too long without the heels. They made their way through the door of
the med-bay. Cora glanced back and forth, the lights were off save for the glow of the nightlight at Lexi’s desk. “She’s sleeping.” Cora whispered, “Must be.”

“We’ll be quiet.”

Thankful the plastic bottle of rubbing alcohol was on the counter, Cora grabbed it. Ryder snagged a bag of cotton rounds, “My room.” Cora said, and they headed for the biolab.

“Want to lay back?”

“Want to undress me, Ryder?” Cora said, she meant it as a snide remark, but for some reason, it hadn’t come out of her mouth that way.

“If you’re into it, you know I am.” Ryder quipped back.

Well, fuck. This conversation is crossing some professional boundaries. That was a chat for another time, and Ryder probably wasn’t interested anymore now that the Keri thing had happened and she was seemingly enjoying being one of Andromeda’s most sought bachelorettes.

You’re not interested. Ryder is your C.O.

But it was almost too late to backtrack on it, and Cora decided not to, rolling with the banter, “You rip tape off of women often?”

“Only the pretty ones.”

“I should be flattered, then.”

“You deserve all the flattery, Lieutenant Harper.” Oh, if it was anyone besides Ryder, that wouldn’t have made her blush, “Sorry, Cora. Do you need help, seriously?”

Cora soaked one of the cotton rounds. It worked but not as well as she thought it would. Where ever Vetra had gotten this tape, it was stronger than she expected it to be. Maybe the turian version of duct tape held stronger than the generic human type, “I think….I’ll manage.” There was a temptation to request Ryder’s assistance, but she shoved that idea to the corner of her mind.

“Is this goodnight, then?” Ryder asked.

“I think so. Goodnight.” Cora replied, and Ryder stepped forward, wrapping her arms loosely around Cora’s shoulder.

“Good luck. Email me if you need help.”

Cora patted her back, managing to be less awkward than before, “I’ll try not to need help.”

“In case you…”

“Rip my boob off of something?”

“Email Lexi, then. That’s not my field.”

“Right.” Cora pulled back, “Goodnight.”

And she returned to her biolab room.

A few dozen cotton rounds later and she had her dress off and freed from the tape. Her
chest was reddened, but the adhesive wiped off well enough. One less thing to worry about. Some mortifying scenario of Jaal (or anyone, really, granted how damn nosy these people were) walking into the shower block and asking her what she was doing scraping adhesive off her skin flashed into her mind. Didn’t come to that. Don’t think about it. Cora glanced at the shiny new toy courtesy of the asari gala on her bedside stand.

And once her mind started going that way, it was hard to stop.

*She’s your commanding officer.* Some voice in her head chimed to her.

‘SAM’. Cora subvocalized, ‘If you’re watching, listening. Scram.’

**Yes, Lieutenant.**

The awkward reminder that he was an omniscient being, keeping tabs on all of their actions around the Tempest.

Ryder’s phantom weight on top of her. Cora stretched her arms over her head. *Ryder’s hands grabbing her wrists and pressing her down, soft lips grazed over hers.*

*Stop this line of thought, Cora. You’re being inappropriate.*

But she couldn’t seem to shake it. *Ryder’s long hair tickled against her shoulder, teeth against her chin.*

Fuck. That would be good.

The stupid little silver thing she got from the asari banquet.

Cora took it into her hand, taking a moment to figure out how to turn it on. It quivered between her fingers and Cora tipped her head back.

*Lips against hers, Cora wrapped her hands around the back of Ryder’s neck.*

This was so inappropriate.

But she still imagined Ryder’s tongue flicking into her mouth, gentle hands running over her chest.

*Do something. Please.* Cora arched her back up, pressing the vibrating toy against herself and sighing into quivering motions it made.

*The warmth of Ryder’s mouth on her neck, lips and teeth dragging down to her collar bone.* Cora quivered and sighed, hips twitching against the toy. She pressed it harder on herself.

She melted into her finish. A few minutes of relaxing and breathing and clearing her mind before her…previous action caught up with her.

*Did you just get off to Ryder?*

**Dear, Goddess.**

Heat covered her face and she felt extremely naked despite being alone in her room. Cora pulled the blanket from her bed around herself and stored the vibrator out of sight, buried beneath her socks in the drawer beneath her bed.
What the hell is wrong with you? Imagine if Ryder knew that!

She would laugh Cora straight off the *Tempest*, that was for sure.

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Hey guys! Sorry it’s a short chapter. More fun and action in the next, it’s been an extremely busy week. Thanks to my readers : )

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!