To Be Whole

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Summary

Garrus and the Normandy crew try to get on with their lives after Reaper War without their beloved commander. During the rebuilding some lose their way, others find it, and some of them come back from journey's they thought they'd never have.
Chapter 1

Thanks to my one-shot "The Entry" I've decided my attempt at a Garrus and FemShep fic to well. Bring up why that journal entry exists. Post ME3 of course with a little bit more closure. Not exactly a happy ending, but you know hey we all can't have them. Though Garrus and Shepard can and will get there's along with a few others of our favorite friends. Please READ "THE ENTRY" It'll help things make more sense when a certain conversation I have planned happens. Mostly about my FemShep as a kid though at the risk of spoilers. But your call.

Also to tell you the truth I'm not going to have the Normandy be marooned on some backwater planet. Rather let's just say thatThe explosion of the Citadel caused a burning in the Earth's atmosphere giving it that weird look. I think Bioware got a little lazy with some of their background art and character design *COUGH TALI COUGH* anyway I love this series and here's anew series for you all to enjoy to help me get inspired to write along side my original fictions! And of course the Relays are just shut down. For awhile and also rating is because of well...things that'll happen later.

Chapter 1

He stood atop the crumbling building. His visor was blinking every few minutes as it had been for days. The tech was wearing out from damage, but he had more important things to do with his time and it was still working for what he needed it to do so he didn't mind the occasional fritz. Though truth be told the constant cutting in and out of the music in his ear was more annoying than the occasional blink. Still he did nothing as he scanned the ruin of the city called London.

It had been nearly a week since Shepard had disappeared. The Reapers were destroyed along with several thousand geth and unfortunately EDI. No one knew why but Shepard and he wanted nothing more to find her and get some answers. His Valiant was shaking in his hands as he looked around. It was all rubble for the most part. Bodies of Reaper forces littered the grounds and worst of all were the Reapers and he just wanted to shoot them all over again.

It was their fault that she was gone. Their fault that he'd barely slept over the last few years, and now after so long of fighting rest was out of his reach.

The crews around him were making noises. The machines of the humans and other members of the armada were busy removing the bodies. Separating allied troops from their enemies, and engineers were working on building temporary housing units and hospitals. Many of his friends had gone into the hospitals.

Kaidan, James, Jack, and Liara were all being treated and would be released soon. He'd gotten off with some burns and a bruised ribs and a dislocated shoulder. Miranda and Javik had unfortunately perished in the fighting. Miranda was able to pull off an amazing feat and take down a Reaper with her fighter squad by exposing a weakness in their target. It was a victory but a loss that was felt no matter your personal feelings for her.

Javik had sacrificed himself in a showdown with a Reaper that was trying to kill him and James. The Prothean died in his attempt, but so did his prey and he was given an honorary burial along side the others who had fallen.

Kirrahe and Wrex made it out with minimal injury but they still felt the losses and many were worried about Joker who was found crashed in the jungles of a place called South America along with the rest of the crew and the Normandy itself. The Reapers had ignored a portion of that land in
hopes that the plants would help the next cycle.

The crew and Dr. Michel were fine, but with Joker's condition he was touch and go and Dr. Chakwas had made a special trip from the Crucible to help him.

Garrus scratched at the new scars on his face and growled loudly as he pulled the Paladin from his hip holster and shot at a nearby Reaper. The war was over but the pain was still fresh in everyone's minds. Several of his friends were dead, no word on his family and with the Mass Relays not functioning many people were unsure of how they'd all survive.

The quarians, Rachni, and salarians were working round the clock to get the technology up and running. They were examining the code the Reaper's used in hopes that it had something to do with an IFF that was keeping them from restarting them. And while there had been mild success they were still a ways off from getting them working.

Behind him he heard a noise and turned with his pistol, the setting for armor piercing set but he was prepared to fire an impact round and send the threat off the edge of the building. The threat however turned out to be Wrex who had his shotgun prepped as well. They stared at each other for a moment before slipping the guns back into their homes and embraced as brothers.

"To what do I owe the honor ,Wrex?" His scars hurt as he spoke and his jaw was stiff from the missing plates around it.

The krogan snorted loudly, his new scars stretching and bleeding a bit as his muscles twitched. "You know, I hate to say it, but I'll be glad to be heading back to Tuchanka."

The remaining mandibles on his face twitched as Garrus heard this. "You're not staying? I thought you'd be staying to help in the search."

Wrex scratched the back of his neck and shook his head. "I never said I was leaving this second. I'm going to stay behind with a small squad. The remainder of the soldiers I've brought are going to be starting the trip home. It'll take longer than we want, but I won't unleash a bunch of pissed off krogan on Shepard's planet."

He looked at Garrus whose eyes were focused on destroyed city. "You think she's alive don't you?"

"If she's dead then I'll gladly pitch myself off a cliff."

Wrex raised an eyebrow at this statement. "Really? So what Liara was telling the truth about you stealing Shepard out from under her." Garrus's fingers twitched at the statement and Wrex let out a laugh. "Relax, Vakarian. What you do on your personal time is none of my business."

The sniper scratched his scars and chuckled. "Yeah, well from what she's told me I'm a bit better than Liara in certain aspects of the bedroom."

The warlord let out a groan. "Keep that to yourself, Turian. I'd rather not know what those fangs of yours have bitten into."

Letting out a loud laugh, the turian gave his friend a smile. "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

"What?"

Garrus waved his hand. "It's an old human phrase."
Grumbling the krogan turned looked out over the wastes. "You need to get back to your own people."

"I would if I could, Wrex. But, she needs me."

Wrex turned to his friend. "Are you sure about that, Vakarian?"

The krogan received no answer.

The next morning, Garrus awoke in his bunk to the sound of trucks rolling by. Removing himself from the hard mattress, he pulled his gun out from his foot locker and slipped it into it's holster again and stumbled out into the cold morning. He hated how Earth's temperature and climate could change so quickly, but it couldn't be helped.

Nodding to a few turian subordinates he headed to the command post where he met up with Admiral Hackett and the Primarch.

"Garrus, glad to see you're up and moving. Is the shoulder any better today?"

He nodded but kept left arm in its sling. "I'm supposed to check in with Dr. Chakwas after this meeting." He looked around at the piles of data pads and paperwork. "I take it the rebuilding isn't going as quickly as we want it to?"

Hackett shook his head and did his trademark scratching of his chin. "It's going better than expected. Earth did suffer large amounts of damage but we were lucky they didn't hit major resource spots for lumber and minerals. Humanity was their target so only large areas of the populace were hit. Still infrastructures are down and along with the rest of the galaxy there is little to no trade routes. And thanks to the Crucible we're all effectively stranded here for as long as it takes all of our engineers to figure out how to get the blasted relays turned back on."

"I talked with Wrex yesterday. He said he would be sending a large portion of the krogan army back to Tuchanka."

Primarch Victus nodded and let out a sigh. "In truth we do need them to leave. The krogan have no enemy to fight here and with a large portion of the our military here it is a wise move. Wrex has shown skills as a leader keeping his people under control. But again just like with the relays it will take some time for us to send them home, but there is a plan for that."

Garrus was curious at this. "What plan is that, sir?"

"We're working on repurposing Reaper drive cores to be retrofitted into our ships."

He felt his mandibles flinch at this announcement. "Are you sure that's wise? We don't know the amounts of power we're dealing with or if it could possibly bring a Reaper back online."

"There's nothing to worry about, Mr. Vakarian. I will be heading this project."

Admiral Xen appeared and took her place at the table. "We've figured out a way to safely remove the cores from some of the smaller assault machines. Their drive cores have to power much more devastating weaponry than most of our ships, along with the being able to transport such a large amount of mass as well as survive trips in deep space. By our calculations repurposing one of these cores could grant a ship of ours speeds fast enough to reach a system like the Krogan DMZ in a matter of days." She tapped the front of her mask and Garrus could tell from many months around Tali what she was thinking.
"And I take it you haven't figured out how to do that without killing the crew flying the ship?"

"Or without causing a massive amount of collateral damage."

"So, you're looking for a pilot, a ship, and a crew. I think I'm fresh out of those at the moment."

With a wave of her hand, Xen sighed. "I don't need the Normandy. I already have the schematics for the retrofit and I can apply it to other ships. If there was one thing Shepard did before she went and got herself blown up it was to upgrade that ship as much as she did."

Garrus felt the urge to pull out his gun, but was stopped by one an Alliance soldier who shook his head.

Though the scene was not lost on the admiral. "My apologies for the crass words, Vakarian. I meant no offense. Truly my people are indebted to the Commander and I meant my words with the utmost respect. But, well tensions are high and our people must return to our home world just like the rest of the armada or else we will not last long."

There was a sincerity to her words and Garrus felt his anger subside, but not by much. Putting the gun back, the turian looked between the leaders and asked. "So what is the plan then if you don't need the Normandy?"

Xen turned her attention back to the turian. "Simple, we need Shepard."

Garrus couldn't believe what he'd just heard. "Really? Shepard? Why? We don't even know if she's alive."

"And yet you were still planning on attempting to form a rescue party, if I'm not mistaken?"

He froze in place at Victus' accusatory tone.

"Well, I guess you could call it that." There was no reason for him to lie and doing so would do more harm than good to his plans. "But what does this have to do with getting everything working again."

"It's the Catalyst, Vakarian."

"The Catalyst? You're telling me that we need Shepard for the Catalyst? The Catalyst was on the Citadel. We can't access it because the Citadel is destroyed."

"That's not necessarily true, Garrus." The voice came from behind him and when he turned he saw Liara limping toward him with Kaidan, Kirrahe, Wrex, and to his surprise Urz.

"Are you sure you two should be here? If I'm not mistaken you have a few more days before discharge don't you?"

Liara and Kaidan laughed while Kirrahe stood off to the side analyzing the situation as Kaidan spoke.

"We have about four more days of bed rest but Liara was called in to give her analysis on the situation."

"It seems only fitting as I was the one who handed over the device blue prints to the Alliance. But I digress," she pulled up her omni-tool and moved to a file before enlarging it.

"What is that?"
The file was a mash of symbols that Garrus could identify as prothean but without the cipher he had no clue what they said.

"With the help of Javik and some deeper research I was able to deduce that the Catalyst was not actually an item, but a being. An organic that was supposed to bring about an end to the Cycle once the Crucible was inserted into the Citadel."

They were all quiet for a moment until Garrus asked, "And you're thinking, Shepard is somewhere still in the Citadel?"

"It is possible, but I'm..."

Her voice trailed off and Garrus knew why. He did his best to fight the tears but one escaped. "I understand, Liara. But," he took a deep breath, "she deserves to come home."

For a few moments they were silent until Garrus said, "You have four days people. Get some rest." And without another word he left the command post.

When he arrived back at his bunk, he removed the dog tags and stared at them.

Lieutenant-Commander Leela Shepard
Service No. 5923-AC-2826

He pressed them to his mouth and mimicked a kiss as best he could. "I'll bring you home."
Chapter 2

So it looks like there's some positive vibe about the first chapter so yeah let's go. No reviews yet but maybe you'll be getting into this soon! Decided to throw in journal entries here and there to give Leela a presence in the story.

Chapter 2

I hate this. Everything about it, but I need to do it. Once again another group of recruits from Arcturus somehow found out about me and tried to make my life a living hell. My C.O. did nothing about it and neither did the other recruits. I'm the only one left from my original group. The others all made it to at least N4 status and decided to drop out, but I need to stay despite the circumstances and again I had to prove myself with my fists while everyone watched. I'm sporting another black eye and my nose was almost broken again but the C.O put a stop to it just before I got my face crushed and was sent off to the female medical officer along with the woman who'd started the fight. The guy who fought with the girl at least ended up worse than me, but he'd get off with a slap on the wrist most likely.

The medical officer has asked to put in a word with the brass but I told her not to. I have something to prove to Dad. I told him I'd do it and he's waiting to see me come out with that N7 logo on my armor and I won't let him down. Tomorrow I'm back into the fray. My eye should be healed up and it's marksmanship training along with hand to hand before survival training in the jungle. Maybe once we're out there I'll be able to earn some goddamned respect.

I love you, Mom and Dad. Hopefully you'll never have to read these things.

September 5th 2177

Garrus shut the journal and stretched. He walked over to the weapons table and pulled his Vindicator out from the gun closet and set it on the table. Staring at the gun his mind continued to drift back to the journals he'd been given the day before. He had two more days before their mission and he couldn't sleep no matter how hard he tried.

He'd barely spent the night in her bed over the past year but he'd gotten used to her soft body next to his. Pounding his fist into the table he sent spare parts flying and stomped over to the journal and took a chunk of paper into his hand and prepared to pull when a voice stopped him.

He didn't know who the woman speaking was but he answered. "What the hell do you want?"

"Sir, Admiral Hackett and Dr. T'Soni have asked for you to join them in the command outpost for your mission prep."

Turning around, he closed the journal and set it on the bed. When he looked up he just averted his gaze back to the spare parts on the ground and waved her away. "Tell them I'll be there in a few minutes. I have a few things to clean up."

She nodded and stepped away from his quarters while he dropped to the ground. He stumbled around for a bit on his hands and knees until gathering every bit he could. Supplies were short until they could figure out a regulated system and every bit was as valuable as a piece of gold at the moment.

When the pieces were finally gathered, he picked the journal back up and locked it in it's case with the others and headed out into the night. The sky was a little clearer than it was a few days ago, but
it was still cold and from the reports from the ships the explosion had done something to the planets atmosphere. Turning up the heat inside his suit, Garrus headed out and almost immediately ran into the same woman from a few minutes prior.

"I thought I told you to report to the admiral and Liara."

She brought up her omni-tool. "I sent a text message."

He mentally kicked himself for being so foolish. The relay may have been down, but omni-tools still worked and he felt like a fool for thinking she'd actually walk away from him. He'd been feeling like he was being watched the past couple of days and he figured she was either the one who had been following him or was at least in charge of it.

"That was rather, smart." He was distracted and sealed the entrance to his bunk and turned to her. "Can I ask why you've been following me around for the past few days."

The woman scoffed and relaxed her stance. There was a knowing smirk to her face and she shrugged. "I'm impressed by you Vakarian. But, unfortunately even now my job is to be as discreet as possible and I cannot divulge any more information that.' She stuck out her hand. "Until I'm allowed to divulge my identity you can call me CT."

Taking her hand, he gave it a firm shake and was impressed by her grip. He could tell that she could handle herself but there was something about her that didn't sit right. But he had orders he had to follow at the moment as well so he could afford to give her a pass.

"Well, CT it's good to meet you, but keep an eye out. You aren't the only one with a knack for keeping themselves hidden."

Rubbing her nose with her thumb, she chuckled, "I'll take that wager any day, sir. But for now I think we better not keep Hackett waiting."

Making their way through the evening crowds, Shepard took notice of the large pulsing formations of lights. Construction crews and military operations were the only things running at the moment. Occasionally omni-tools played videos and music or the sound of people laughing over drinks and rations after a had days work could be heard, but in the dim light the ever constant reminder of Reapers on the horizon while the engineers attempted to extract what they could to help with recovery.

CT remained quiet as they walked past the soldiers coming on and off duty. They saluted while civilians kept to themselves and went about their work fixing buildings or tending to families or anything that kept their minds those who could at least function properly. Though the sounds of the suffering weren't loss on them.

As they passed by the medical quarters they could hear the sounds of soldiers and civilians suffering from injuries both mental and physical. Chronic pain, loss of limbs, internal injuries, mental anguish. Garrus had seen them all throughout the course of the past few days. He'd been sitting in the medical bay until recently, the Normandy crew was given a small section to themselves but as his injuries were less severe than the others and he was given free reign to leave.

He still made daily trips to check on his friends and the soldiers, but he only made the trips as long as necessary.

When they arrived at the command post, Garrus was surprised to see CT walk in with him, not to mention Kaidan, Wrex, Liara, and Jack standing their with Xen and a familiar looking varren. The
beast immediately rushed to him and nudged his hand.

"So, they found a way to bring you along Urz?"

The beast barked loudly and sat down staring at him with expectant eyes. The turian shook his head. "Sorry boy, no pyjack meat this time."

The varren snorted but nudged him all the same before settling next to him.

"So, I take it we found out some startling information since you had to disturb me from getting a good nights sleep again?"

Xen shook her head. "Well other than some mild success in removing a few cores from our enemies I would say no." She turned to Hackett and nodded, "Now if you'll excuse me I must return to more important matters."

When she left, Garrus shook his head. "And Joker says the stick up my ass needs to be removed more often."

Wrex let out a loud laugh while Kaidan rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Well they have more important issues to worry about. Humanity has their planet but everyone else," he trailed off but they all knew the answer. That didn't stop him from adding, "I'm beginning to think this might not be such a good idea."

The silence was broken only by the occasional beeping of the machinery.

"Well, either way the actual purpose of your mission is to not locate only Shepard."

They all turned to Liara and Hackett. "And what do you plan on having us do on the Citadel if not find Shepard? Round up food and supplies?"

They all chuckled at Jack's comment but Hackett nodded. "That is the primary goal." He looked to Liara who pulled up the locations of the three remaining arms of the Citadel while the others looked on in stunned silence.

"Umm…Admiral…no disrespect but how are we supposed to search for supplies? The Citadel has no power. Even if we were to discover rations and supplies, how can we be sure whatever is in there will hold up?"

Hackett turned to Kaidan while Liara chuckled. "That is why we are only going to be looking for tech, dry rations, and of course things like this." She pulled up what looked like a memory shard that Javik was known to have. "These are data caches. That have been discovered by the drones sent in by the teams. They've discovered large quantities of data that are now available for us to access if we manually hack into them."

"Tali would love this mission."

They fell silent again as they remembered what happen to the engineer. During the fight, she'd set a bomb to detonate to cover their escape. The only problem was one of the giant krogan-turian hybrids got it stuck on one of its spikes and she was forced to detonate it too soon catching her in the explosion.

At the moment she was fighting a severe infection thanks to her leg needing amputation and she was in more pain than any of them could imagine. Liara and Kaidan owed their lives to her, but at the moment they couldn't do anything to help her except pray.
"Let's not dwell on what we can't change at the moment. But instead look for possibilities to help those suffering."

The admiral had Liara pull up some footage and pointed at the location magnifying it. "I take it you are all familiar with the area we are looking at?"

They were indeed intimately familiar with the area that Hackett was pointing at. It was Zakera Ward and despite what many merchants said, there were plenty of products on the ship for them to salvage. Including food and weapons.

Snorting Jack asked, "So, what? We're just supposed to walk out with the shit in our arms? Hell, Admiral I can barely use my biotics since the fucking relays went to shit and now you want me to help remove literally TONS of food and ammunition?"

He adjusted his hat, and looked uncomfortable for a moment, but when he looked at Jack his stare froze her in place.

"No, Instructor. I do not intend for you to lift them out yourselves. What I intend for you to do is act like a god damn adult and follow your orders to help keep your students and other people from dying due to starvation and lack of proper medical care! So I'd appreciate it if you'd hold your tongue and listen before opening that mouth of yours before I silence you myself!"

All of their blood turned to ice at the admiral's voice. He was a man known for his composure but they could tell the stress of having to coordinate so many operations was getting to him. Deciding it best to interject, Garrus spoke.

"If that's what you think is best admiral, we'll need a pilot and supplies of our own if we're to do this mission. Is there anyone we can talk to?"

He pointed to the woman, CT. "She's your requisitions officer and will be going with you to report on your progress back to me and the remaining human leaders. Garrus you're responsible for the Primarch's reports, and Liara you're their for the Asari."

"And what about my people, Admiral?"

The grizzled man turned to the krogan and nodded. "Wrex we will divide up what we can upon retrieval. There is a lot of ground to cover. Restaurants, hospitals, clinics, stores. We know that there was a large amount of change to the Presidium but that was made nearly inaccessible after the explosion. And the people we had stationed on the Crucible are looking into the area where the explosion emanated from."

"That's why I was able to figure out that the Catalyst needed to be an organic being. Something to do with the link between organics and dark energy was found in the data banks of the we're studying. It seems the Reapers knew of this and it may have been the primary focus of their harvesting us."

"So you're telling me that's why our biotics are shot to shit? Because the explosion altered our ability to use them? And that we were harvested and murdered just because of shit they created? I though they were all logical and shit where is the logic in that?"

Liara shrugged. "It seems the most likely explanation, but until we can get more information it is merely speculation at best."

Garrus snorted. "To hell with speculation I want answers."
They all looked at him and he scratched at his scars. "CT, please get us enough supplies for a three week trip into that section. I want as many video transmitters as you can get, and as many communicators as well." He looked up at Hackett, "Can I also put in a requisition for a light truck. A Grizzly or even a Mako? If we're going for supplies I'm going to need a way to transport them to a landing zone for the ship you'll be lending us."

Hackett nodded. "You're right about that Vakarian. I'll see what I can scrounge up. Though a vehicle the size you are requesting may be a bit difficult to maneuver but I think we can find a few Kodiaks to lend you. Is there anything else?"

"I'll need specs on the areas we're going into. If there's food and the like, maybe we can find a way to get emergency power running in a few of the areas. And also as many oxygen containers you can allow. I hate for us to explode thanks to a lack of atmosphere."

"Actually Garrus, the only thing still fully functional in the remaining portions of the Citadel are in fact the atmospheric controls. We'll have oxygen and some warmth but nothing else save for what we take."

They all stared at Liara. "How is that possible?"

It was Kaidan who spoke. "I thought they were all connected through one primary power source?"

"Again it is one of the mysteries we are trying to discover about this technology."

"Then let's hope those studying it can give us the answers. For now everyone pack up what gear you can. I want us ready to go in two days. Think you can handle that, CT?"

The woman snapped to attention and exited the command post while the others stared at Garrus in surprise.

"What?"

Hackett looked away from them while Jack smirked. "We thought you were more cock sure about getting your pussy back, rather than helping scour for supplies."

The vulgarity annoyed Kaidan and Liara while Wrex laughed his ass off.

Smiling, Garrus shrugged and said, "I'm doing what she passed on to us. To put the needs of others before our own."

That got the group quiet and he saluted them. "Let's make her proud." The group snapped to attention and they dispersed for the evening.

A couple of days later Garrus was sitting in the cockpit of the freighter they'd been lent going over the schematics Hackett had given him.

"We're approaching now, Garrus. Are you ready for departure?"

He gave the pilot a pat on the shoulder and headed down to the shuttle bay where Liara, Jack, Kaidan, CT, Wrex, and Urz were waiting with Cortez who would be piloting the Kodiak.

Grabbing his gear he nodded at all of them, "All right, let's get to work."
Chapter 3

So onward with chapter 3. Got a little bit done on the novel so off to work on this. Are we holding up okay everyone? Liking where the story is going? I'm getting hits so I'm gonna say "Yes." enjoy Also i took some liberties with certain aspects of how Shepard became an N7 because it's never really stated so...*shrugs* I came up with something that might work.

Chapter 3

"Holy shit!"

They had entered their third building for the day. So far their searches had yielding no positive results yet. It had been three days since they'd landed and each place they found was either littered with bodies or empty. And it was unnerving to put use the term lightly. The houses that were empty had no bodies and no food in them adding more to the mystery of what was going on.

But they weren't worried. The size of the area they were in was large enough that if you followed the rules of mathematics they would end up hitting pay dirt eventually.

When they landed, they were shocked to find out that the results of the probes searches were correct. When they landed the atmospheric controls were in full effect, the temperatures were still functioning at the same levels as they were before the explosion, but other than that there were no functioning lights or anything leading them to believe it was an emergency protocol that had been initiated at the time of the explosion.

Other than that, they weren't surprised to find a large amount of bodies littering the grounds. Corpses of reaper troops, Cerberus soldiers, civilians, mercs, they were everywhere and the smell wasn't helping so they decided to keep their masks on. To no ones surprise a few of them had to stop when they found a few empty rooms. When they removed their masks and helmets a few of them emptied their stomachs in whatever receptacles they could find.

They may have been battle hardened warriors, but the conditions that they saw without the rush of adrenaline and fear of life rushing through them took their full effect.

Garrus, CT, and Wrex were the only ones who kept their composure.

Over the past few days it grew gradually easier, but still difficult and they decided to avoid buildings with the largest amounts of bodies in them. Which unfortunately included a couple of small hospitals. While they wanted to search, their health was more important and without a larger crew the job would waste too much time.

Still they marked each building with a tab for the next trip.

But for now they were sitting in a small clinic in one of the wards going through a few things when Jack discovered a large cache of crates filled with medical supplies behind a fake wall.

Upon inspection they were able to figure out the majority of the medication was geared for turian and human use, which meant the asari could also benefit from it. They even found antibiotics for the quarian fleet and a small stock hold of weapons, armor, and even a few hundred pounds of amino and dextro based foods. Tagging the crates, Garrus made a call.

"Cortez, we need you to follow the signal I've set. We've found some supplies that need immediate transport to the supply frigates."
"On my way, Garrus."

He looked over his squad and added, "Make sure you have the mechs ready to load up the supplies. I'll be leaving Kaidan and Liara to help oversee loading."

"Copy that."

"Where do you want us to meet up with you?" The major asked as he began taking inventory on his omni-tool for the reports later that night.

"We'll be heading to the next shopping district. Should only be about twenty minutes from here. Load it up as quickly as possible and forward our findings to the necessary people."

The order came from CT, but Garrus let it slide. There was no real leader of the group but they all trusted each other enough to know that when someone spoke it was what the others were thinking. Kaidan nodded while Liara eyed the woman with suspicion as was her new habit.

From the corner of his eye he saw Wrex shake his head and the Shadow Broker went back to her duties while Garrus checked his visor. Over the past few nights he'd been able to make repairs to it. The targeting system was still a little off as he found out during an early morning practice session, but he was one of the best snipers around and he had no problem shooting without it. But his tracking beacon for Shepard was still not functioning. He knew he should just uninstall it, but Wrex had been right in his suspicions a couple of days ago.

Heading back into reality he moved the squad out of the building and with Urz leading the way he heard Jack and Wrex sharing battle stories.

"So then the station is going down and I finally manage to get aboard an escape pod and as I'm floating away I'm just staring out the pod window as this massive giant explosion rocks the moon and leaves a big ass crater in it."

Wrex let out a loud laugh while CT sighed at the juvenile way they were acting. That got the biotics attention.

"Got something to say up there?"

The older woman turned her head and sneered. "You're lucky that little incident didn't kill anyone."

The biotic snorted. "You're right, I am lucky. Truth is I'm glad I didn't hurt anyone but at the same time it was fun as all hell." There was a laugh in her voice. "And just because you're some Alliance hot shot, don't think your shit is any better smelling than mine."

They were about five minutes out from their destination and Garrus was hoping this confrontation could be held off for a while longer, but it was inevitable. The stress had been piling up and even with the finding of that small bit of supplies it didn't help with everyone worrying about how they would all survive for very long.

They came to a halt and before Garrus could stop, CT, the woman had her fist cocked back and into Jack's face while Wrex just casually stepped to the side and fiddled with his shotgun. Garrus let out a loud groan and prepared to stop them.

"Don't do it, Garrus."

Turning to the krogan, the sniper spat. "They're going to kill each other."

"No they won't." The former mercenary set his shotgun on his back holster and watched as Jack
threw the woman over her shoulder. Even without her biotics Jack was still a force to be reckoned with.

"How can you be so sure?" Asked Garrus, holding himself back from using a concussive round on the two women.

Wrex chuckled as CT planted her elbow into Jack's stomach before the biotic planted a fist into the top of the older woman's skull.

"If they were trying to kill each other Jack would have used her biotics and CT would be using a gun or her knife to end this as quickly as possible."

Garrus's eyes followed the women for a moment and he saw what Wrex meant. Though they weren't as powerful as they had been, Jack's powers were still well beyond the scope of most humans and CT he had come to find out was skilled with a blade and a gun. But they were just using their fists and he remembered his days with a certain female soldier when he was in the turian military.

It was a similar situation, though Garrus knew it wouldn't end with the two of them creeping off together later and watched silently until CT finally won with a knee to Jack's stomach. The biotic crumpled to the ground, followed shortly by the soldier and Garrus and went to the two of them. He was certain they'd be bruised tomorrow, Jack had a cut lip and CT a bloody nose, but save for a few scratches they were none the worse for wear.

"Are you two finished acting like children?"

CT nodded and plugged her nose with a bit of tissue from her hip pouch before handing a bit to Jack who thanked her.

"Hell of a right cross you got there, CT."

The older woman chuckled and gave Jack a pat on the back. "You aren't too bad yourself. I'd hate to see what state I'd be in if you'd used your biotics"

Jack shook her head and stood up just as Kaidan and Liara came up with happy looks on their faces. "Face it lady, your head wouldn't even exist had I used my powers."

The biotic extended her hand and pulled the woman up with a small grunt as Garrus shook his head.

"Everything go all right?"

The major nodded. "No problems at all and we kept a couple of extra medi-gels just in case." He looked over at Jack and CT who were still smiling stupidly about their fight. "And from what I can see we were right to suspect that."

Jack shrugged and spat a bit of blood out on the ground. "Come on, Major. You've never gotten into a fist fight just because you were pissed off?"

"Not since I was ten, Jack." He looked them over and turned to Garrus. "Have you even gone into the building?"

Garrus shook his head and grinned. "We were hoping you'd show up with the small pool filled with Jell-O."

"What's Jell-O?"
Garrus and Kaidan coughed nervously at Liara's question and Jack took her by the shoulder and began whispering in her ear. A few moments later, Liara was in Garrus and Kaidan's faces, her own face a much deeper shade of blue than normal.

"How is it that you two know of such things."

Kaidan shrugged and said, "Well it's not that uncommon of an event on human planets. I've never been myself, but I have a few friends that are into those sort of activities."

"And Garrus, what about you?"

The turian scratched his scars and laughed. "Leela may have taken me to a few when we were on shore leave in a few of the seedier parts of the Citadel." Liara's hand came up and with a loud pop he felt a small stab of pain.

"I bet you learned about it during one of your stupid research escapades and forced her into it."

Garrus could hear the jealousy in her voice but straightened up and flexed his jaw a bit before saying, "Actually it was not my idea. She was the one who suggested it when she found out it was going on where Chora's Den used to be. All I did was agree with it and I wasn't having nearly as much fun as she was." Liara could see in his face that he was hinting at Shepard joining in on the festivities by more than just cheering.

"Shocking that with you being the Shadow Broker and an asari you still don't know about these things."

Liara shot a look at Wrex who just continued to grin. "Why didn't she tell me about it?"

Kaidan made a grimace and wandered off with CT while Jack grabbed Wrex and began heading into the collapsed building.

When they were alone, Liara let a few tears fall and Garrus held her. It was a sad sight to see. Though they were a long-lived race, Liara was more than a kid out of her teens and Shepard had been her first real love. He hated what he had done, but he hadn't planned on doing that to Liara, if anything she was a sister to him and like the others he'd die to protect them and hoped that she and Shepard would get back together so he could get over his own attraction. But instead he ended up finding out that she was just as interested. He'd been out shopping for weapons parts while she and Shepard had met on Illium. And he'd been left behind on the Hagalaz mission but even then he'd steered clear of her when she was on the shipand he was aware of their conversations, but now he had a chance to at least apologize.

"I'm sorry, Liara."

She slammed a fist against his armor. "I know you are, Garrus. But it doesn't change the fact that she is gone."

He stroked her crests and nodded. "Maybe, maybe not. But," he pushed her back and lifted her chin with a finger. "It won't do any honor to her memory to cry about it right now."

She wiped the tears and nodded. "I'm sorry, Garrus. I said some hurtful things to her about the two of you and I just wanted…."'

He laughed, "Don't worry about it. I'm pretty sure I would have done the same thing if I was in your shoes."
She straightened up and wiped the remaining tears, though it didn't do much to help the condition of her eyes. And with a nod they headed into the building where they found Kaidan and CT scrounging through bathrooms on the lower floors. They'd been lucky to find a few medi-gel packs in dispensers along with other sanitary items.

"Where's Wrex and Jack?"

CT pointed up. "With Urz. The damn beast smelt something upstairs and they followed after him."

A second later they heard the stumbling of steps and Jack screaming loudly as she slid into the room on her knees holding up two large bottles. "We are going to party tonight!"

Taking one of the bottles Garrus saw that it was a form of high end alcohol and was surprised that it was both dextro and amino friendly. The other bottle, Kaidan took and smiled. Shaking it at CT. "It's looking like things may be going our way."

The officer took the bottle from the Spectre and read it carefully. "Find a few jugs of water and I'm more than willing to suffer through the hangover."

At that moment, Wrex and Urz appeared with bundles of medi-gel and more food stuffs. His lip curled as he growled at Jack.

She shrugged and gave a nervous chuckle causing the split on her lip to bleed a bit. "Sorry."

The krogan turned with a growl and thundered back upstairs with Garrus and CT following quickly behind him while Kaidan, Liara, and Jack went about taking inventory again.

Upstairs Garrus and CT let out gasps at the sight. It was a larger cache of supplies than the last one and he was certain they would need Steve to make at least three trips for all of it. Luckily there were lifts they could use to transport the cargo down into the streets for pick up. As they went through the boxes. They found more food and medical supplies as well as clothing but no weapons or spare parts for ships or computer systems. But still he signaled the human female to send out the message while he and Wrex went about fixing the lifts.

A few hours he was bidding Cortez and another shuttle pilot a good trip while they went onto the next location. This trip was difficult as the deformed bodies of whatever happened on the Citadel made an appearance once more. By the time they stopped, they hadn't found anything for the evening save for a hidden supply of water that would have kept the crew of a dreadnaught saturated for a few months.

By the time Steve and his pilot friend showed up again, they had set up camp for the night and when they were gone, Jack opened up the two bottles and he shared a toast with them for a finally productive day.

Liara didn't join in on the festivities. She set to work coordinating what forces she had left and it seemed to brighten her mood when she finally got a message from Feron that he was safe.

As he sipped at his glass he began to read from the book once more.

"I haven't been able to sleep in days. What happened on, Akuze, my team, my squad mates, we were slaughtered. All of us save for me by a damn thresher maw. It was massive and it's spit. I watched them burn in front of me. Screaming in agony as me and the others ran. I tried to save them. I tried to distract it with some of my biotics by sending down rocks on top of its head but it wouldn't give up the chase.

We ran forever, my fellow marines dying one by one. Some of them sucked into the ground and
others, God…the others were eaten or melted.

I can't sleep, the dreams still haunt me and all I can see is Vanessa laying in front of me. Her breaths ragged as I tried to clean her wounds. Her apologizing to me for what she had done a couple months ago. I told her not to worry about it but she shook her head saying that there was nothing I could do before thanking me and letting go as I did nothing but cry.

I was given ten marines to keep safe and none of them came back. My own injuries pale in comparison for what they gave up.

The analysts are calling it a freak accident. Something that we couldn't stop. I'm the only survivor to come off that world with the last person I thought I'd ever see rotting in front of me.

I was lucky that my beacon worked and when I was picked up the first thing they told me was that I'd done a good job.

Again I cried. I had failed in my mission. I was a member of the N7 training program and I could only save myself.

After my surgeries they sent in the shrinks who wanted to talk about my past and the things that happened on Akuze. I told them to drop it. It had nothing to do with what I was going through now but they said that I should be thankful for what I had gone through as a child. I lost control and sent them flying with a biotic push telling them not to make light of the dead.

I was left alone after that save for the nurses. None of them said anything as they changed my bandages and checked my I.V. Finally Mom and Dad showed up and I felt a little better. Dad's been retired for a couple years now but Mom was an X.O. on a dreadnaught now. She'd been given special leave to come help me.

When I told her I didn't want her to be there she just smacked me upside the head and said, "You best watch your tone with me young lady. I'm not so old that I won't bend you over my knee."

At that point we heard a cough and Mom and Dad immediately straightened up and saluted. I couldn't see what they were looking at but when I finally saw I tried to straighten up and salute but my shattered arm and ribs wouldn't let me.

He waved his hand away and asked to speak with me in private. My parents gave concerned looks but nodded and when they were gone, Admiral Steven Hackett sat down in front of me.

I asked him what to what I owed the honor and he shook his head and apologized for sending us in with so little intel. It took me by surprise having one of the most decorated soldiers in the Alliance apologize to me, but I kept quiet about it.

He went on about how they should have realized what was happening and had given us better equipment or warning and that because of them fifty good people were dead. He also apologized to me for the treatment I received during my training.

When I asked what he meant his face dropped and he said that he was well aware of my treatments and reassignment surgery before basic training. I clenched up but he shook his head saying it didn't matter. He said that what the Alliance needed was people like me and from out of his pocket he pulled a small package and spoke.

"What is inside this is not a consolation, nor is it out of pity, or disrespect to the lives lost on that mission nor as a way to make up for the suffering you've endured. I'm presenting this to you because you have earned it. You have served the Alliance honorably and with integrity. You have
survived missions, lead people into battle and come out alive. You have shown the willingness to survive, have saved lives when you could, and have shown the honor and integrity that the Alliance has tried to stand for. And I ask that when you are cleared to join us, that you stand with those receiving this honor and bring those who have bled with you the honor and vengeance they deserve."

I took the parcel and opened it and inside was an N7 badge and the insignia for a second-class warrant officer. All I could say was that I'd think about it and he nodded.

Before he left he turned to me and gave me a salute. "You've done us proud, Shepard. And I hope that you will make the right decision."

That was two days ago and I still haven't gotten back to him. My body ribs are feeling better but my arm will need more time to heal along with my body from the dehydration. But in a week they will have the N7 induction ceremony. I've been thinking about it a lot lately. Thinking about those who died shooting for this dream.

Over time I had earned the respect of the other candidates. They knew I could do the job, just like them. And while none of us were friends, we were comrades and that was more than enough. After five years I'm finally starting to feel like I belong and I know that if I don't accept this I will do myself and them a great dishonor.

Still won't help me sleep any better.

December 12th, 2177

He shut the book and drank from his glass of alcohol before taking a sip of water. Jack and Wrex were singing loudly at the top of their lungs while CT was curled up on the ground with the liquor bottle, a small bit of drool seeping from her mouth.

Liara had gone to sleep as well away curled up in a blanket next to the heating lamp.

He thought he'd turn in to when he noticed Kaidan staring out into the Wards.

Getting up, he walked to the window and stared out with him and noticed the dark mounds of bodies beneath him.

"It's never going to be the same is it?"

Kaidan shook his head at the question. "I suppose not. It's kind of funny," he added with a small chuckle. "So many races used this place as place to bring peace and order to the galaxy and in three short years we expose it for what it was, thus destroying the entire illusion that has been built up for millennia."

Garrus chuckled and handed Kaidan the rest of his drink. The human drowned it and coughed before speaking. "But, we're alive. And thanks to her, we have a chance to finally control our own destiny's."

The turian nodded and scratched his chin, "That's true Kaidan. But right now, we are only at the beginning of our destiny."

The major laughed and clapped his friend on the shoulder. "That may be. But right now, I think enjoying a brew, a shot, and a steak sandwich with my sister is a pretty good start to this destiny."

Garrus's mandibles quivered momentarily at this and he asked, "You have a sister?"
The biotic nodded and smirked. "Yeah I do. You might know her. About five-foot-eight, hundred-and-thirty-five pounds. Biotic, naturally red eyes, and hair that looks purple under the right light. Has a turian boyfriend with a mangled face." His grin broadened. "I think you know someone like that, right?"

Garrus laughed and slapped the biotic on the back. "I may know someone like that. But if her brother tries anything I may just have to put a foot in his ass."

Kaidan laughed as well. "Just make sure you pay for my sandwich and medical bills."

"No, promises Alenko."
Chapter 4

So now to chapter 4! That's it; that's all I got. Sorry. Though I kind of want to see some of these scenes come to life. Oh well, I'm not trolling for art. *shrugs* though it would be interesting to see what people actually do compared to how it plays out in my head. I think every writer wants that.

Chapter 4

"What the hell did you do?"

Garrus was sailing over a small wall while Jack and Kaidan laid down supporting fire. They were in their second week of scouting the ruins and out of nowhere gunfire fell on them like a typhoon. Loading ammunition into his Valiant, he turned around and let a concussive round fly. The round exploded taking out two of their attackers before falling back behind the covering.

"Me? All I did was touch a cabinet!"

Wrex stood up with his shotgun and let out a familiar blast, but a round caught him in the shoulder and sent his shot wide. He cursed and emptied the chamber and attempted to throw a biotic blast but his efforts proved pointless.

Jack snorted in laughter as she pointed to Liara and then to the stairs. Kaidan saw this and nodded to Garrus who looked at the women. Jack kept her hand hidden and made a familiar set of hand movements and he gave her a thumbs up.

"We'll cover you," he signed back.

Jack then took Liara and Urz up the stairs on the other side of the room while a grenade sailed into the room. Grabbing CT, who was in the middle of lining up a shot with her own sniper rifle, Garrus threw them behind a counter. While Kaidan and Wrex dove to opposite ends of the room leaving them both exposed.

Kaidan did a somersault while Wrex kind of fell like a beached whale making it difficult to recover as the major responded with a flash bang. His aim was a little off, but it caught their attention as the flash bang erupted in a burst of light and smoke.

Three of the enemies grabbed their ears while another shouted at them. He couldn't place it but he was certain he knew the person speaking but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"GARRUS WILL YOU PAY ATTENTION!"

The sound of CT shouting at him shook him from his thoughts just in time for him to move out of the way of a bullet.

"Thanks!" She responded with a wave of her hand and sent a round sailing out of the window hitting one of their attackers. He let out a scream while the leader cursed at him for being so stupid before letting out a curse of her own.

Urz could be heard snarling and several of the people sent out shots but their screams indicated that the beast had been victorious. They heard another gunshot go off followed by a bunch of swearing from Jack and the sounds of a fists meeting flesh. Getting out from behind their cover, Garrus led the squad up the stairs and found a collapsed pedway that Jack and Liara had used as a makeshift bridge.
They wasted no time in making their way across. It took both Kaidan and Garrus to pull Jack away from her victim and they saw the reason why. Liara had taken a bullet in the shoulder and she was bleeding heavily. Signaling for CT, Garrus removed Jack and held her against the wall while the woman took care of Liara.

"It's okay!" Shouted the woman as she cut open Liara's outfit and poured disinfectant on the wound. "It's a clean shot! Straight through and no major arteries hit." The woman began whispering to Liara who was nodded and shaking.

Garrus's grip relaxed slightly and he felt Jack try to fight but he slammed her against the wall again.

"She's going to be fine, Jack. But you won't be if you fight me again. So choose your next move carefully."

The words came out even more threatening than he planned and he saw a momentary glimpse of worry in the former criminals eyes flash before nodding.

"Kaidan, come and remove her guns before I let her go.'

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

Garrus bared his teeth at her and the biotic opened her hands in submission. "Okay, okay. You win, just don't go all nature documentary on me." She still had her self satisfying grin on her face and even teased Kaidan with some mock moans as he patted her down for extra weapons. "Lucky for you I'm a cheap date."

Kaidan gave a nervous chuckle and stood up giving Garrus the signal that she was clean. When he let her wrists go, Jack winced and rubbed her wrists as Garrus looked over her latest victim.

Her knuckles were bleeding and she gave one of them a quick suck before saying. "Crazy fucker tried to set off another grenade. I had to take him down."

The man's face was no where near as bad as the damage Jack was known for inflicting, but still he could see that the man had a broken nose and was in need of medical attention. Shaking his head he pointed to the collapsed pedway.

"Go and get one of the first aid kits. Kaidan put in a call to Cortez. Tell him we need an emergency evac."

"Well that's awfully nice of you, Archangel."

At that moment a spark in his brain lit and he stared at the direction of the door to see Aria standing there. Her pistol was in its holster and she had a rare smirk on her face as Jack came back with the medical supplies.

"Fancy meeting, you here Aria. Along with," he noticed the suits of the men to be a mix of Blue Suns and the women were most likely Eclipse mercs left behind during the attack. "Glad to see another friendly face around here."

She scoffed. "Me? Friendly? You think just because the galaxy's gone to shit I'm going to make nice with you people?"

Garrus shook his head. "I don't expect you to, but I know you. And I'm betting you haven't been
able to find a way off of this station. Have you?"

Aria tried to keep her composure but her anger eventually exploded and she fired off an entire thermal clip into the building across the way making Wrex chuckle.

Loading in a new clip, the asari pointed it at the krogan. "Laugh again, and I'll remove your quads one at a time."

Wrex pulled out his shotgun and actually fired off a round barely missing the former gang leader. "You forget who you're dealing with, T'Loak. You'd do better to shoot me first and then threaten me."

The asari snorted and stuck her pistol back into it's holster and leaned back taking a look at her people. "You're right about that, Wrex. But I'm not stupid." She turned to Garrus. "What the hell are you doing here anyway? I thought you were all on Earth trying to be heroes."

Garrus shrugged, his shoulder twitching slightly from his injury. "War is over, Reapers are dead and we have a large amount of people that need any left over supplies we can find." He could see the humor in the asari's eyes and he quickly added. "I'm sure the remnants of the Council and Alliance would gladly compensate you for any information that you may have stored in that pretty head of yours."

The asari tapped her chin in mock thought. Garrus knew her too well to know that she wouldn't refuse the deal but she loved to play her games when she knew the pieces were set to her advantage.

After a few moments she looked up and nodded. "Very well, but I want whoever is in charge on the line by the time your pilot shows up."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! You're going to cut her a deal just like that?"

Jack was glaring at the asari who returned the glare with a smile of her own. "You forgot the golden rule, Missy."

Jack pushed back Garrus to try and attack the asari but was sent flying back by a biotic wave which caught the attention of the others. Immediately those that weren't tending the wounded had their gun aimed at the asari who just laughed.

"I'm an asari and am almost as powerful as a matriarch. Unlike the rest of you I don't need an amp to blast you all into liquid shit."

Garrus hesitated for a moment before ordering his comrades to lower their weapons. Wrex growled loudly while Jack cursed in the back ground.

"Kaidan, how are we doing on getting Steve here?"

The major raised a hand and said, "All right, Steve. We'll let you know if anything else happens. And make sure there's a med team available. We have injuries on our side as well." When he finished, Kaidan dusted off his hands. "He'll be by in an hour with a second shuttle. He's in the middle of a drop off."

Aria looked down at her men and scoffed. "Can I please get my phone call or am I going to have to get my lawyer?"

About half an hour later, Liara was resting comfortably against the wall. Jack and Kaidan were
taking care of her while Garrus and the others proceeded over the negotiations.

"And you're certain that everything is in working condition?"

It was Sparatus and Esheel that joined them. And it was Esheel, the new salarian councilor, who seemed the most concerned about Aria’s find. Though the Councilors were more figure heads now than anything, their decisions still held weight in the upcoming battles and the fact that Sparatus had even survived was a miracle. Tevos was aboard a repurposed dreadnaught receiving medical attention, and the last they heard it didn't look good while Valern had died in the battle.

"Of course I'm certain. I'm the one who procured the equipment while you all were fucking around."

Garrus could see her anger rising in the form of dark energy emanating from her hands. It was a bit frightening to see her have so much power while Jack and the others without their biotics. From what he heard it wasn't just the biotics who were having problems as many people with cybernetics, including the quarians were having issues since the relays were destroyed.

Though from what he could gather from aria’s conversation with the Council and Hackett the quarians were recovering quickly though the work on the research on the relays had progressed mere inches when everyone was expecting yards.

"We seem to be getting off topic. Are you willing to grant Aria and the remainder of her forces the proper, 'gratitude' for giving us these supplies?"

Three of the most powerful people in the system looked at each other in silent conference for a moment, then Sparatus nodded. "Very well, we shall grant you your requests, upon our validating what you say. Garrus, you and your squad shall accompany her save for Wrex and Liara."

Wrex snarled, "The first action I've had in weeks and I'm getting pulled out of the thick of things."

"That's precisely why we're pulling you. The rest of your fleet is having the same, 'issues' as you are. And we're unsure of how to proceed."

Wrex scratched his plates and spat on the ground. "Fine, I'll come back. Garrus? You think you can keep these women in check or am I going to have to lend you my quad?"

Garrus's mandibles flared in a grin. "I took those back on Virmire when you shit yourself standing up to Shepard."

"If we can bet back to the task at hand, gentlemen." It was Hackett that interrupted him. "Wrex, you and the wounded will be brought back on the shuttle. Aria, you're going to stay with Garrus and the others. CT? Can you handle examining the equipment?"

The soldier nodded. "It shouldn't be a problem, Admiral. But if you could send another tech along it'd be a big help. Especially with the tech she's claiming to have found."

"If it gets me off this pile of shit station I'll do whatever you want." The tapping of her foot said otherwise, but with the majority of her forces stationed elsewhere she had little choice but to comply.

"Glad you see things our way"

"I don't see things your way, Councilor." Her voice was venom as she spoke. "I'm doing this because I have no choice. And if I had another way to get out of here you'd be damn sure I'd be on
my way back to Omega. And just so you know" she puffed herself up and approached the holograms. "You even think of double crossing."

"I can assure you Aria that we will honor our end of the bargain upon us receiving the supplies."

She deflated slightly, and nodded, "So long as you remember your place."

Only Hackett showed no fear at her threats and while the Councilors shut down their communications he remained and said to CT and Garrus, "Cortez was on the line during this conversation and is meeting up with a couple of other shuttles. And Aria," the asari barely gave him a look as he said, "your threats are as empty as the Citadel and don't think I'm going to allow you to continue making them when you're in just as much trouble as us. Hackett out."

He shut off the communications channel before she could respond but it didn't stop her from kicking the wall sending a chunk of it flying with her biotics.

As they waited, Jack was pacing back and forth, keeping an eye on the Aria and her men while Kaidan kept an eye on Liara. Her wound was stabilized, and she looked to be able to move around, but the loss of blood was getting to her.

"I'm surprised she was unable to pull up a barrier. I forget how weak the Maiden stage was."

Liara sat up and turned her attention to the former leader of Omega. "So, my powers are going to return?"

Aria shrugged. "I don't know. You're in the Maiden stage of life. It's possible you might upon entering the Matron or Matriarch stages. Consult a fucking professional instead of me."

"And what about us?" Asked Kaidan who was handing Liara her fourth bottle of water while CT did the same for their other victim. Jack and Wrex were near the more energetic followers of the older asari, anger and suspicion in their eyes.

Pulling out a thin cigar from her breast pocket and lit it. Blowing the smoke from her nose she scoffed. "The fuck if I know. Every single biotic that I know of who is not an asari has lost full use of their powers and the people in my employment that use cybernetics have found their implants and limbs a little, worse for wear."

Garrus and the others thought they heard actual concern in her voice, but it was short lived as Cortez and a few more shuttles arrived to take the injured, Wrex, and the rest of Aria's men as collateral. They looked glad to be rid of her but she showed no signs of caring.

When they were gone, Aria stamped out her cigar and dusted off her pants. "Let's get this shit over with."

That night they were lucky to find a collapsed gym with a functioning generator and for the first time in a while they didn't have to use portable power sources and they discovered a supply of nutritional snacks and juices. While it wasn't a gourmet feast, it did the job of breaking the monotony of their M.R.E's. After their food though, Jack made a discovery that put everything on hold. They found the gym's showers and found them functioning with clean water. The greatest thing was that the water was actually hot.

After the women had disappeared he, Kaidan, and Moris, their engineer, entered the men's room and remained quiet while the women laughed and talked. The hot water felt good beneath his plates, and after so long of dealing with filthy clothes and bathing from water bottles, a hot shower was just what he needed. He didn't even bother to clean himself, instead he just let the stream beat
against him. He heard the muffled sound of Kaidan's voice as he walked out of the showers with the other human. When he was gone, he mumbled something as he rested his head against the wall.

Lifting his head he let it bang down gently against the wall and repeated the motion again, and again. The movement becoming heavier and faster as he repeated the words, "Damn it." And with each blow, the words growing louder and the bangs louder.

Finally after several beatings he heard the voices of Kaidan running in with Urz and Jack and he collapsed to the ground punching the puddles of water beneath his form. He tasted salt in his mouth and tried to hide the tears but his words had become a muddled mess of choked sobs and he could see his blood dripping into the water. He felt the water shut off and his body grew cold but he didn't care.

His mind was racing back the moments before the final push. He'd been left behind again, but he knew why. She wanted to spare him the pain. The pain of seeing her leave him. It was an unspoken acknowledgement between her and all the crew. The fatalistic charge into battle. Liara had been with her, and so had Kaidan. Garrus had been with Edi scouting out another area and had been under heavy fire until a burst of red energy put a halt on everything.

When he was finally able to gather his thoughts, he looked over the wall to see the reaper troops they'd been fighting dead. When he'd turned to congratulate Edi on their victory, he saw the body of the A.I. collapsed and her head resting gently against the wall as if asleep. He'd been forced to carry her back, but to the command outpost and when he got there, he saw Hackett standing with the other leaders, their heads bowed as he approached.

Setting Edi gently on a medical gurney he asked what the problem was. His only answer was Hackett handing him a set of N7 dog tags. He couldn't bring himself to say anything or even cry.

Now he was sitting on the floor of a shower, cold, naked, and dry heaving as he clutched the tags dangling from his neck, swearing loudly as Kaidan tried to coax him through it.

When he regained his ability to speak, Garrus thanked his friend and asked to be alone for a few moments.

"I'll be outside the door if you need me. Jack, can you bring me some of his clothes?"

The biotic simply said, "Okay," and left them alone. Standing up, Kaidan looked down at his friend.

"You sure you're okay?"

Garrus nodded and reached up to the faucet. "Yeah, I just need a few moments to myself."

Kaidan said nothing else and left. When he heard the human thank the corporal, he stood up and turned the water back on to warm himself up. He looked at the wall and noticed some of his blood on it and placed one hand on the smear of blood and the other on the dog tags and whispered.

"I'm sorry I did that." He heard the metal clink against his plates and laughed. "Yeah, well next time you better stop me, because I won't be able to."
Chapter 5

Chapter 5 folks. I'm doing this mostly to get over a family thing. My grandmother died on April 29th and the funeral was this weekend May 11th so I'm doing this as a way to cope with my grief, though I'm watching lots of stand up. But you know I'm doing okay guys. Sorry to be a downer but here's something for ya.

Chapter 5

"Garrus?"

He looked over his shoulder as she stirred in the bed, they had saved her from the Bahak system almost a week ago and they were on the way to meet up with Admiral Anderson. He knew why, and she had been avoiding him preferring the silence of her quarters. It was only the night before she'd invited him up.

In the past month they had done the impossible again. No one had died in the fight against the Collectors. The people they'd recruited were still on the ship, they'd even beaten the Shadow Broker on top of the Collectors earning an ally with the resources to rival The Illusive Man.

She didn't show the signs of her stress, but he knew what was going on. She had a certain code of conduct she always followed as was her job as a symbol of the Alliance but now…after everything she was showing the signs. When he'd entered her quarters he saw large piles of dishes scattered amongst other bits of trash. Her clothes were tossed everywhere, liquor bottles were strewn about and even Boo, her hamster, was wandering free. It amazed the turian that he hadn't escaped the room and been killed in the vents.

After making his way through the stench and garbage he found her curled up on the ground next to the nightstand where her clock was staring up at the ceiling. Her hair was out of its usual pony tail and was a tangled mess. Her clothes were stained and he could see holes in them where she'd ripped off the Cerberus patches and hadn't even bothered to fix them. When she saw him she gave him a sad smile and whispered.

"Hold me?"

He was more than happy to oblige.

And now the morning after as he was about to leave, he was once again climbing into the mess of a bed and pulling her close. She was so soft against him despite her hard muscles and he found it much more enjoyable than the hard bodies of the females of his species though he did have to be extra careful not to scratch her. And despite the scent of liquor clinging to her body she smelt better as well. He gently raked his fingers through her hair as he listened to her breath. At that moment he realized his true feelings for her, but he couldn't tell her. They knew what was about to happen and it would only make it all the more difficult. And so he remained quiet listening to her gentle breaths.

Pulling her closer to him he rested his chin on her head and she pushed up in an affectionate manner. It was the closest thing to a kiss he could describe to her amongst turians due to the feelings and rush of hormones it brought on. He felt his throat vibrate and heard her laugh.

"Find something to laugh at?"

She kissed his scars and nodded. "Though if I told you, you wouldn't understand." She rested the
back of her head against his shoulders and crossed her arms over her chest. The Cerberus uniform twisted as she moved to glare up at the ceiling. "This isn't going to end well. You know that, right?"

His mandibles quivered slightly. "Do you mean the situation with Anderson? Or...."

She shifted uncomfortably and he could feel her tighten. "Both."

He felt his hand grip tighten on her but she didn't touch it. Instead she sat up and ran her hand over her face and whispered, "I'm sorry." He could hear tears in her voice and reached out for her when she stopped him with her barrier.

"Leela, if you need anything from me."

She nodded and whispered. "I know, Garrus. But thank you for everything." She looked back and smiled at him, here eyes red from the tears. "Just do me one favor."

He gave her a fond look. "Just give tell me what you need, Commander."

She leaned in and kissed him. It was slow and though he couldn't return it in the manner she was accustomed to, he knew what she was telling him. When she broke away from him he nodded and pressed his forehead against hers. Their eyes closed for a moment and a gentle creak of the springs he got off the bed. When he reached the door, he took a moment to look back at her and wished he hadn't. Her hands were shaking as they clasped together before her forehead came to rest on them her mouth moving silently as she stared at the floor. And despite wanting to wait with her until Anderson arrived, he left without a single word.

"Garrus? Garrus? Wake up!"

He mumbled something under his breath and blinked his eyes slowly before rubbing the sleep from them. Looking around he was confused about where he was and when he lifted his head it pounded in pain and he felt a wave of nausea sweep over him.

"What the hell did I do?"

Kaidan appeared over him with a reproachful look on his face and a gallon of water in one hand and a pill bottle in another. "You ended up having one of your moods last night."

With a bit of help, he sat up and felt his stomach lurch and turned to the side of the bed praising the spirits for the magical bucket that was before him before relieving himself orally of his dinner from the night before. Kaidan jumped back a bit and laughed quietly to himself before handing him the items.

Taking a few of the pills he placed them in his mouth and swallowed them before chugging the water. Some of it dribbled down the side of his mouth but it felt like nirvana. When he lowered the bottle he wiped his mouth and asked, "Any word on the next transport?"

Kaidan pulled up a chair and looked out the door. There were several people wandering the hallways of the apartment building they were hiding out in with the people Aria was working with. They'd been there for nearly a month thanks to what the building offered them.

When they'd first arrived they had expected to find mostly mercs, but instead found C-Sec officials, civilians of all creeds, and even a few military personnel. It was strange to see them all together working with Aria, but times were desperate and though Aria was a cold, ruthless bitch, even she admitted to being unable to turn these people away.
Arriving with Aria had granted them immediate access and though she was in charge, many people banded together for protection from other groups as a precaution which Garrus put a stop to right after they’d confirmed that Aria’s story was true and the shock at seeing what Aria had stockpiled was more than enough for her to earn her passage out of the apartment building.

As she’d left very few came by to give her their thanks and she responded in kind, but the words were hollow and from what Garrus could see she was glad to be rid of them. But once she left, it was up to Garrus and the others to take over and so they did. Allowing anyone to leave to go when the shuttles came with and left with supplies but many chose to stay. Most of them were people with combat experience who had nowhere else to go so Garrus and the others with him had been given the task of using the apartment building as a base of operations. It was large enough to hold several hundred people and each of the fleets had sent soldiers, engineers, medics and other people to turn the apartment into a base of operations.

And though it was rewarding work finding the supplies, it gave Garrus too much time to think, and when he thought he drank, and when he drank as of late bad things tended to happen.

After swallowing another large amount of water he asked again, "Any word on that transport?"

Kaidan shook his head as he stared out the door of Garrus's room. "Nothing yet. We aren't the only ones having things for pick up and with the salvage operations finally yielding results everyone is starting to argue over where supplies should go and Hackett and the others are having trouble sorting it out.” He took a bite of a granola bar and spat it out with a disgusted look on his face. "From what CT's contact said it'll be another four days before we get another transport."

Garrus took another sip of water and gently set his feet over the side of the bed and growled. "So, the infighting's already started?"

Kaidan nodded and rubbed his head, pain washing over his face. Garrus didn't know if it was a migraine or a tension headache but it didn't matter. He was beginning to feel one rise up above the hangover.

"Yeah, well most people are ready to attempt making their way back to their colonies or home planets to see about rebuilding. And they all want supplies."

Feeling a bit of bile enter his throat again, Garrus spat it into the bucket and rinsed his mouth again.

"You think they'll call us out to help deal with the fighting or leave us here?"

The major shrugged. "Most likely they'll keep us here while they sort it out. It's more or less the leaders of the fleets getting antsy and if they get out of control things could get very bad, very quickly."

Garrus sighed and rolled his neck. He felt it pop and sighed. "Two months after a war that could have ended all life and we're back to fighting amongst ourselves? Sometimes I wonder if the Reapers were really doing us a favor."

Kaidan scoffed at this. "I refuse to believe that. We've earned our right to live. And I'm not going to waste it feeling sorry for myself over things I can't control."

Garrus stared at the floor but he could feel Kaidan's eyes on him. He knew that Kaidan was biting his tongue and Garrus knew why. Ever since they'd set up base, Kaidan had taken over where Garrus had started. The turian was once again showing how much of a failure he was despite his increase in rank. He was late to meetings, rarely left on missions, and was even going so far as to
not even bother getting behind cover when they entered into fire fights and on occasion forgetting to switch his clips to use rubber rounds.

Standing up, he wobbled a bit before regaining his composure and looked at the biotic. "If you're going to say something to me, Kaidan than spit it out or just leave me alone."

Kaidan took a few deep breaths and coughed. "Last night you were on the seventh floor, alone, where that broken ledge was."

He didn't even need to ask Kaidan why he was up there. It was simple enough to figure out and he instead he asked, "Did I at least come quietly?"

The human shook his head, "CT had to tranq you."

Nodding, Garrus drank some more water before sighing. "Thanks for getting me."

"No more alcohol, Garrus."

The mandibles twitched nervously but Kaidan stood his ground. "Everyone knows it and we'll be checking on you." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small book similar to the one in his pack and handed it to his friend. When Garrus took it with a huff he asked, "How can you even read what's on the pages?"

He tapped his visor with a smirk. "This translates most of the known languages to turian script. Plus my father was a high ranking official so I had to learn at least English as a child. Though don't ask me to speak it or else we'll all be sitting here for the next few days while waiting for our underwear to get cleaned."

Kaidan curled his nose at this response and shook his head. "I'll take your word for it, but do me a favor and read these. You seem to be in a much better mental state if you can read bits of those daily."

Looking down at the book and gave a dry laugh. "I wouldn't say I'm better."

He felt a reassuring hand on his shoulder and looked Kaidan in the eye. "Maybe not, but at least when you were reading these you weren't contemplating on discovering what a seven story fall will do to your body."

Having no argument, Garrus gripped the journal tightly. "You haven't read these have you?"

He shook his head. "They aren't mine and you knew her better than most of us, despite her open door policy."

"Thanks."

"No problem."

At that moment a young turian soldier appeared in the door way panting heavily. He stopped momentarily and saluted them. "Major Alenko. Vakarian, sir. We have a bit of a situation that requires your attention."

"Usually that's what situations require, soldier. What's the problem?"

The turian gave Garrus a confused look before shaking his head. "I wasn't given the specifics, sir. But I was told by Dr. T'soni and CT that your presence was required immediately in the basement."
That caught both their attention and with a quick glance at each other they headed down to the basement.

It was cluttered as usual. The basement had been set up as a research lab for any tech they found that could be used to figure out the inner workings of the section of the Citadel they were on. While they hadn't made as much progress as Xen and her teams were having with the drive cores, though the most they'd been able to do was get them started. And on top of that the researchers Garrus had working with them had been able to discover useful information about the fact that each arm of the Citadel had it's own power supply completely independent from the Catalyst keeping atmospheric and gravitational functionality in working condition. Meaning that resettlement would be possible to help ease the tensions of the fleets if enough supplies could be located.

Still that wasn't what bothered Garrus and Kaidan. It was the fact that Liara had called them to the basement. She'd been brought back only the week prior. Her arm healed sufficiently and her eagerness to discover the truths about the Citadel and the galaxy were as strong as ever. She spent very few nights in her room, preferring the cot next to her work station and she only ever asked for someone when she found something interesting.

Reaching the basement they found a large group of people gathered in a corner muttering quietly. Moving through the crowd of engineers, Garrus and Kaidan came to a stop at Liara's desk. Several screens were up on display. Some with research notes and translated documents that she was sending off to the Crucible and other squads of engineers.

Their concern though on the screen that was in front of Liara whose eyes were darting across the screen while CT chewed on her fingernails in anticipation. Tapping her on the shoulder, Garrus crouched down.

"Liara…" She turned her gaze from the screen, her eyes were wide as she looked at him. "What's the matter?"

Blinking a few times she licked her lips and said. "You're familiar with what happened during the explosion, correct?"

Garrus nodded. "Yes, I was there on the ground fighting when the explosion hit. I heard the researches say that it's possible that the explosion wiped out all synthetics with Reaper code in their programming."

She turned back to the screen and hit the button. "Watch closely."

Looking to the screen, Garrus waited patiently along with Kaidan who looked just as confused as he felt. After a few moments the video Liara played for them, Garrus and Kaidan's jaws both dropped when they saw something stumble across the screen but only the turian spoke as the stumbling form came into focus.

"By the spirits. EDI?"
On to chapter 6...and trust me…I have plans! Do not think what I'm doing is just pointless. I approach many of my stories as character studies so that's what is going on right now. I see too many fics where we only concentrate on Shepard and you spend a large amount of time with the crew, so why not focus on them for a bit. I have a plan so yes there is a method to my madness.

Oh and for a portion of the fic just look up "Mass Effect: Scale Itch" on Deviantart by ghostfire… I've made that picture head canon.

Chapter 6

Garrus and Kaidan were in the garage that they called the armory loading up on fresh clips and checking their weapons. There was a heavy silence between them as they finished their preparations. They had a few days supplies packed up and were waiting for Liara to have the information of EDI's last known location sent to them.

"Are you sure we should be wasting our time following this shit? Is it really going to hurt Joker that much if he actually has to sleep with someone that won't kill him because his bones are too fucking fragile?"

Giving her a confused stare, Garrus asked, "What the hell are you talking about?"

Jack pointed at the image of EDI entering some ruins. "Well why the hell else would we be wasting our time with this?"

Cocking a clip into place, Kaidan sighed. "Garrus brought EDI back to the camp after the explosion. She was off line and last we knew she was being contained on an Alliance vessel. But as you can see, that isn't the case."

Hopping up on a nearby table, she popped a bit few bits of candy in her mouth and asked, "And you're sure it's EDI wandering around? You don't think someone might have, I don't know turned her back on?"

Slipping his sniper rifle into its holster, Garrus grunted. "That's precisely why we're following her. Only a few select people have access to her, and the geth, well we know what the geth platforms are being used for." Jack and Kaidan both shivered at the prospect of the quarian's plans for the large amount of geth bodies and ships, but unless given the orders it was none of their business.

"Fine, but do we really have to take him? EDI isn't even organic she doesn't have smell like anything." Urz growled at then barked but she just laughed. "Do something about it you scale itch spreading bastard."

Urz ran toward, fangs bared and Jack hopped off the table in a boxing stance going into a mock fight with the beast.

Garrus shook his head and pointed to the end of the garage. "If you two are done playing around, I figure you would like to earn your keep." Urz stopped his fighting but turned back and snapped at Jack after she kicked him in the hindquarters.

"Serves you right you." When she looked up from the varren she saw Garrus and Kaidan staring at her with disgusted looks. "What the hell are you fuckers looking at?"
"How did a varren that's never been on the Normandy spread scale itch?"
Jack shrugged and said, "The fuck if I know. All I know is the worm gave me a preventative vaccine after a few people got it." She looked at Garrus who immediately scratched his head getting Kaidan's attention.

"Garrus? Do you know how it got on the ship?"

"I'm only guilty of going planet side. But I took an oath of silence to not speak on the matter."

Jack kicked a garbage can and stomped off muttering, "Fucking turian….can't get him drunk…"

Kaidan gave Garrus a knowing look and the turian was prepared to answer when his omni-tool beeped. Thanking the spirits silently, Garrus answered the call to see Liara and CT's faces. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your calling me?"

Liara rolled her eyes at Garrus's mock attempt at flattery. "Your flirts aren't exactly inspiring confidence in me before this mission Garrus."

Heading toward the door, the turian opened it. Urz immediately bolted out and relieved himself on a dilapidated car. "Oh that's real attractive."

"What is attractive?"

"Never mind. You have some information for me?"

CT nodded. "I'm uploading it right now. It looks like you have two day trek to it."

"Are you sure that we're going to find her?" Kaidan asked, patching into the feed. "I mean EDI isn't exactly stupid and if she's running at even a fraction of her normal capacity she won't stay in one place long for fear of being discovered."

"We've pulled the drones but not before installing several cameras. And from the looks of things she has not left the place where we spotted her no has she decided to acknowledge the cameras. Though for EDI I wouldn't say that's unusual."

"What's more unusual than a supposedly deactivated AI walking around in her artificial body?"

Liara gave him a smile. "This is a good thing if she is up and working Garrus. If EDI is awake it means that the geth could reawaken as well."

"And if they've been reset it means that they could attack if we turn our weapons on them."

Garrus looked at Jack wit a look of admiration. "And people say you're only good for teaching people to blow shit up."

Jack flipped the turian off before climbing down off the pile. "Well I've lived this long and I we all owe Legion a debt."

Nothing else needed to be said and Liara was interrupted by another call. "Shit, Liara it's the Primarch. We'll keep you posted."

Hanging up the call, Garrus opened up the map in his visor and they began their trek across the rubble as he talked.

"Primarch do what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"
"You know why, I'm calling Vakarian. Clearly you screwed up in determining as to whether or not that A.I. was actually deactivated."

Pushing open a door, Garrus raised his rifle along with Kaidan while Jack and Urz covered them. After checking that the hall was clear they continued on as Garrus asked, "I was fighting, Reaper troops, sir. After the explosion I saw them fall down and EDI wasn't moving. So, I made the agreed conclusion that the deactivation was a result of the explosion."

"Did you even bother to run a diagnostic on it?"

"Of course I did. But then again, my crew's tech was in the middle of receiving medical attention due to her leg getting blown off so my work wasn't as thorough as hers."

He heard Victus sigh and his finger tap on something. "Don't think I was sitting idly on the side lines Vakarian. I have spilt more blood than you'll ever know."

"Then you should know that not in the middle of a combat zone even the most careful expert can make a mistake."

He heard the Primarch's teeth grind. "Just take care of the issue, Vakarian. Spirits know what will happen if the public got ahold of this information."

Garrus heard a beep in his ear and turned his attention to the task at hand. The trek was long for the day, the path they were taking was completely demolished and there were no signs of anyone even being in the area. They didn't know if it was because the Reapers had hauled the bodies away, but the darkness and lack of a decent light source was sending chills down all their spines.

It was strange being on the Citadel and not seeing the normal hustle of life. The once vibrant station was now desolate and decayed like the major cities of the planet below. The trek was slow. Without the cars or the mechs, they had to be very careful when climbing through the rubble and despite their better judgement they didn't stop until the next morning covering most of the path before settling down.

Resting comfortably on a far wall with Urz snoring beside him, Garrus watched Jack and Kaidan doze peacefully and smiled as he pulled out the journal and read the date to himself.

"October 7th 2172 to January 4th 2173."

He had to have guessed this was the first journal Shepard had written and despite the urge to read it. He simply tucked it back into his pack and fell asleep to the gentle snores of the beast beside him, but not before pulling a hip flask of his combat belt and drained it.

The next morning he woke with a start. Urz had let out a loud bark and immediately he grabbed his sniper rifle and saw Kaidan and Jack taking cover behind a few pillars. Jack had a familiar pair of goggles on and Kaidan his helmet. He waved his hand and Kaidan gave him a sign back. Slipping his helmet on, he activated the night vision and once after giving Kaidan a thumbs up, the major deactivated their light source and they waited quietly.

Urz was growling loudly but with a click of his tongue, Garrus was able to silence him. But he wasn't about to keep the creature from incapacitating someone they would identify as a threat. Keeping his weapon steady he slowly scanned the darkness looking for any sign of life. They had cut communications with the base camp and between their suits in case any one had radio scanners, which they knew EDI did, and relied on hand signals that Shepard had forced them to learn on their time aboard the Normandy.
It was an effective battlefield advantage since it was of Shepard's own design, but if they were fighting a reactivated EDI that wasn't fully aware of who her opponents were, the signals would either help them or destroy them if the body could access those files. Walking forward, his feet barely making a sound he scanned the room before hearing a shot ring out. He felt his head jerk back and cursed as the bullet ricocheted off his helmet.

Turning in the direction of the shot, he swept his rifle back and forth trying to find the person who fired. Taking a few steps forward, he heard Jack shout and watched as she got the wind knocked out of her and clutched her stomach as something hit her in the face sending her against the wall.

He saw Kaidan's gun flashed and saw a small jumble of electricity appear but couldn't make out the form but he could make out the distortion as the creature moved toward him. Steadying his aim he let a shot out and watched as the round made contact with something but it refused to stop. But it gave Kaidan just enough time to send out the familiar pulse of electricity.

Garrus shut his eyes from the flash of light and when he opened them he could make out the sinewy form of a geth in a dead lock with Kaidan. Before he could move, Urz was rushing forward and using the power in his legs, sent the platform flying into the wall.

Before Urz could sink his fangs into the geth, the synthetic kicked at the animal and sent him soaring. The geth stood up and activated it's stealth mode and disappeared before Garrus could shoot it.

"DAMN IT!"

Kaidan turned on his flash lights and headed over to the injured biotic. She was sitting up and coughing loudly clutching her side.

"Was that a fucking geth?"

Scanning her with his omni-tool Kaidan nodded. "It looks that way. Bastard looked like a modified Hunter. But the important part thing is that it didn't kill us."

Turning off his night vision and switching to the flash light, Garrus wandered over to where his bullet had made contact and found some strange fluid on the ground. Crouching down turned on a particulate scanner he'd had installed in his helmet and let it take in the information. When it beeped the targeting system began scanning around him and finally he got a hit just past Jack and summoned Urz with a snap of his fingers.

Immediately the varren was at his side and he pointed at the liquid. The creature sniffed it and growled loudly and barked rushing to the door way. Running past Jack and Kaidan, Garrus paid no attention to their screams as his feet flew across the ground racing after Urz. They ran for what seemed like an hour, twisting and turning between the buildings. The only sound was his haggard breaths

He was barely able to keep up with Urz until finally they stopped in front of destroyed restaurant. Urz was breathing heavily and drool was dripping from his tongue. Garrus felt the same way. Switching to his assault rifle, he switched to his armor piercing rounds and proceeded slowly. His hands were shaking due to the lack of oxygen and he took big gulps of air to try and steady himself. He didn't know where they were, his tracking had been knocked out again because of the bullet the geth had fired at him.

Proceeding slowly, he heard glass scrape the ground beneath his feet. When he took what he
thought was his tenth or eleventh step he heard something crash behind him and turned on his heel and immediately dropped into the standard combat firing position only to curse under his breath at discovering it was only Urz sniffing around for any sign of their quarry.

Snapping his finger again, the beast backed away from the stack of chairs he'd just knocked over and stood followed where Garrus pointed. Once Urz was in sight, Garrus followed him into the restaurants kitchen. Urz tried to back out and Garrus could tell why, despite varren being known to eat just about anything they could get their hands on, if it made them sick from the stench they wouldn't go near it. And from what Garrus could tell, the refrigeration was broken in this restaurant and even he wanted to vomit but they couldn't turn back.

"Settle down boy. I need you to find out where it went. Can you do that for me?"

Urz looked up at him, as if pleading but lowered his head again and began sniffing loudly. Proceeding with caution, Garrus kept Urz close in case of traps. The beast may not have been his, but he knew Shepard had a soft spot for him and he would keep the creature safe.

After several minutes of watching him sniff, the animal began pawing at the floor as if trying to dig its way through Crouching down he pulled out a knife and tapped around the Urz's paws. He could hear something was off with it as if it was hollow. Activating his omni-tool he started a scan and found an interface hidden in the walls. It was a simple code for him to break and after bypassing it he heard the floor creek open and headed down the steps after telling Urz to go back for Kaidan and Jack.

The varren grunted and left much more quietly than when he entered. It was stupid for him to go in alone, but he didn't have time to waste. The sighting of EDI and the geth that attacked him took priority and they'd didn't have time to waste. He was surprised at what he saw beneath the restaurant. Several rooms were barred off, but it was the fact that those rooms existed that got his attention.

When he reached an open door he found the room littered with mech parts and weaponry. And he figured out why the geth had taken refuge in such a location. Though the parts weren't as advanced as what the geth used in their platforms many of them could be used to make basic repairs to the bodies and the weaponry they used.

After checking his fifth room he heard a familiar buzzing noise and shut off his flash light. The hallway was dim, but light from a room further down the hallway guided him. As he grew closer he could hear other bits of the buzzing noise along with the sounds of a female voice. He couldn't identify who was talking but the fact that he could hear them was enough for him to set a few proximity mines near by incase he had to make an escape. Though the explosion wouldn't be enough to stop them permanently it would be enough for him to slow them down while he headed back to Kaidan and Jack. Or at least hide until he could open a communications channel.

Getting closer, the voice became clearer but so did the other voices. He was certain he could hear voices that were similar to those of humans and other species but before he could decipher them everything got quiet and a familiar voice said, "I know you're there. If you wish to survive I would high recommend making yourself known to us. We do not wish you harm, but if you do not deactivate those mines you have just placed you will be harming more people than you realize."

Knowing when he'd been caught, Garrus appeared and put his rifle back on his back and deactivated his bombs before looking up and seeing EDI standing amidst a group of geth, humans, turian, batarian, and other races and all of them with weapons trained on him.

Shaking his head he asked, "Honestly EDI after all we've been through you can't expect me to take a few precautions since you decided to escape from the Alliance after I carried you back to the base
camp?" He just noticed for the first time that his microphone sounded a bit off and would have bet anything it was because of the bullet his helmet had taken earlier.

Her eyes narrowed at this inquiry but her gun remained level with his neck. "I'm sorry, but I do not understand the reference. I've just recently reactivated in the past few weeks and am concerned that the lack of my presence may have been noticed. And your presence here confirms my suspicions."

"Of course people are going to notice you missing EDI. How many fully self-aware A.I.'s are running around living in a hole with a bunch of civilians along with a bunch of supposedly dead geth."

The geth he had damaged earlier cocked it's gun and he couldn't help but laugh. "I think you'd need me to calibrate you before you could fire that thing properly."

He looked at EDI's face and saw her eyes widen and motion for them all to lower their guns. Reaching up he pulled his helmet off and she gave him a smile. "I must say the odds of finding you here are astronomical, Garrus. But," she gave a small pause, "It is good to see you."

"Likewise, EDI." His own smile being portrayed by the gentle twitching of his mandibles. "But before we get into that I'd like to know how you and a bunch of geth ended up here and shooting at myself, Jack, and Kaidan?"

Setting her gun on her hip, she told the others to wait for her as she led him back into the dark hallway. As she sighed, "Garrus, even I don't think I can fully explain why I'm still alive."

He placed a hand on her shoulder. "We'll take our time. But let's head upstairs. I don't think you want Jack coming in here after what happened with your injured geth friend."

She gave a small laugh. "I think that would be most wise."
Chapter 7

Chapter 7! And yay for EDI! Now to explain how they are still alive, much of the next page is for Jack's benefit. And uhhh around page five gets a little weird clinical weird not like disgusting weird. But please read my fic "The Entry" this chapter has a massive like revelation that was made relevant in that fic as that fic is in a sense both the Prequel and Epilogue of this story. seriously it will help your sanity. Hell I expect to lose readers because of this chapter but you know what I stand by it.

Chapter 7

Jack was cursing, again, and Kaidan was laughing as he watched her hop around in pain after once again failing to engage one of her deadly biotic punches. Garrus was taking another couple of sips from his hip flask while EDI laughed at this. It was strange to hear her actually have a laugh, but to Garrus it was quite soothing. There hadn't been a lot of laughing over the past couple of months, and hearing the digitized laughing of a fully self aware artificial intelligence was probably the best thing he'd heard in awhile, though the sadistic nature of the laugh was a little unnerving.

When Jack finally stopped her cursing, EDI said, "It's nice to see you as well, Jack. I would like to apologize in advance for the actions of one of my new companions. He is by nature what humans would describe as 'jumpy.'"

This caught Garrus's attention. "So, he's got a personality then?"

EDI nodded and smiled. "Yes, as you are well aware, Kaidan and Garrus, Shepard brokered the peace between the geth and the quarians allowing the geth to integrate Reaper based code into their systems and allow for them to become individuals rather than a hive mind. Thus making each geth come to the awareness of themselves and over several weeks grow a personality all on their own."

Jack looked confused, "And how would you describe your own personality, EDI?"

EDI paused for a moment, a reflective look on her face. "I was originally built as an artificial intelligence for a military installation. My main processes were to protect the base that I considered my body and that thought process transferred over to the Normandy and it's crew. Upon talking with Shepard she made me realize that protection wasn't enough and I modified my parameters thanks to our discussions. I came to realize that the needs of the many outweigh my own thoughts on self preservation. Though I would still prefer to protect myself and Jeff over others, I have come to my own conclusion that by doing so I would cause more harm than good as each individual can affect the lives of others in more ways than just what they do in their professions."

Jack's eyes looked like they were about to bulge out of her head as she processed this. "So you came to the conclusion that you wanted to protect people and help others because you 'felt' you needed to?"

EDI gave her a knowing smile. "In a manner of speaking, Jack. Though at the time of my decision it was calculated after processing my memories and seeing how others protected me, I felt that it would dishonor them if I betrayed that trust and sacrifice for my own personal gain."

The just shrugged. "Whatever. As long as you're still the same old EDI and are willing to help us out, you can do who and whatever you want."

EDI looked a bit stunned at this revelation but her eyes showed genuine gratitude at the woman's
answer. "Thank you, Jack. That is rather nice of you to say."
Jack chuckled and gave EDI a pat on the arm. "You've saved my ass plenty of times and after the
shit I've done I have no right to stop you."

Garrus snorted at Jack who flipped him off before adding, "So how the hell are you and those geth
still even functioning?"

EDI's brow furrowed at this inquiry. "To be honest, I am not completely sure. I remember fighting
with Garrus, and then, nothing until I woke up aboard the Alliance vessel along with a few extra
bodies I had shipped to the fleet using the Cerberus systems while we were at the Headquarters. It
was simple enough to put the body into the container I was in after hacking my way out."

Kaidan's face was intense stare was on her and the silvery mouth asked, "Is there a problem, Major
Alenko?"

Rubbing the back of his head, the major sighed. "I'm just a little confused EDI."

"If there is something you aren't understanding I would be happy to filli n the blanks."

Garrus watched Kaidan and knew what was on his mind. He had been thinking the same thing
Kaidan was saying.

"You told me that you considered the Normandy your body and the drive core your heart and that
you could only use this platform in the range of the Normandy's communications equipment, am I
right in this assumption?"

She nodded.

"So if the Normandy has nearly no power in it thanks to the crash it took after the battle, that would
mean the A.I. core is shut down. How are you still moving?"

Garrus could see a familiar blue glow to EDI's eyes before she answered. "That information is
actually blocked from me, Kaidan. I am concerned with this myself and would like to know the
answers but I figured locating you all was priority. Though I apologize for hiding myself for so
long. The shuttle I climbed aboard dropped me off a short way from here and after finding the
survivors you saw Garrus I felt I had to help them."

"Dropped you off?"

EDI smiled, "I may have momentarily caused a small problem with their drive core forcing me
them to land. And when they exited I simply slipped out the back and made my way here after
picking up several life signs."

"And that geth who shot us?"

EDI shrugged. "Like me they are based upon Reaper technology. The best we've been able to
come up with thanks to the lack of an integrated network is that due to our preferences in our
programming that despite our Reaper code enough was to keep that explosion from doing to us
what it did to the Reaper troops. Though I am rather skeptic about this. As Kaidan pointed out with
the Normandy shut down I shouldn't even be alive. Rosek and Irani instead have hardwired
themselves to their platforms until upgrades can be made."

"They have names?"

EDI nodded at the turian. "Yes, Irani repurposed herself to help with medical issues and Rosek, the
jumpy one, is more apt at infiltration than anything else. That is why he ran from you. He seems to have decided that the best way to stay alive is to try and avoid organics as much as possible."

"That didn't stop him from attacking us."

EDI sighed, "When he feels pushed into a corner he tends to over react. He forgets that many organics will listen should he decide to actually speak, but."

She trailed off and Garrus scratched his chin. "That's was rather stupid for him to do. He's lucky that we weren't aiming to kill," he paused and turned his stern expression to their friend, "and he's lucky that I found you or I would have set off those explosives."

"I'm certain they're most grateful for your discretion on the matter and giving us the benefit of the doubt." The voice was from a volus, his respirator hissing loudly with every few words. He was one of the few people in the room that Garrus noticed wasn't carrying a weapon.

"And your name is?"

EDI stepped back and pointed at the round ball that was the woman. "I present to you the current head of Elkoss industries, Maian Elkoss the first wife of the former head of the company. It is because of her that many of the people you've seen alive are even surviving."

"Thank you, EDI."

Her voice was heavy with air. She seemed much less formal than most volus but her voice carried just as much weight as one who stood at the head of a powerful family. "You have our thanks, Earth-clans and Palaven-clan. As EDI said I am Maian and upon the death of my husband I now hold majority control over Elkoss industries."

They all nodded in polite response but it was Jack who broke the silence. "What good is having control of a company going to do for us? We didn't come for a company, we came to figure out why the hell EDI is suddenly up and about. What can you offer us?"

Maian pulled up her omni-tool and pulled up a video file. We've been stranded here for weeks scrounging to survive. Luckily my husbands company had several stockpiles hidden for emergencies. It took us a few days to clear the rubble to get to where you found us."

She looked to Garrus and the others her breathing nervous. "Have you come into contact with the mercs that have been scavenging?"

Garrus nodded. "We've taken over their headquarters under the orders of what remains of the governments here in the Sol system. It's safe, plenty of food, and we can get you off the Citadel should you wish to leave."

The volus let out a long sigh of relief. "I appreciate the offer. Thank you, Palaven-Clan."

"I much prefer Garrus."

She stepped back in surprise. "You're the crew of Commander Shepard?"

Garrus looked at Jack and Kaidan who lowered their eyes. "Former crew, ma'am. The Normandy has been destroyed and body."

He felt his throat close and saw EDI's face lock but he could see pain in the artificial eyes. There was a gripping silence save for Maian's respirator, as if a moment of silence was being taken.

Finally she spoke. "I am sorry to hear that. It is not unexpected of course, but she has my deepest
respects as do you all. It is such a loss."

Garrus wanted to punch her despite the kindness in her voice, but he kept himself in check. "Thank you for the words, ma'am. But if it's all the same you said there were stockpiles of supplies from your company?"

She nodded, "Absolutely. This was a small one, but there are a couple of larger ones nearby. My huband was able to skirt around many of the Council's regulations. Our legal teams were second to none and the supplies I have been able to access using what little of the system we've repaired seem to be in good order. But I doubt my people will be willing to leave this place. Some of them were born on the Citadel and there are children as well who wish to not leave." Her breaths were a little quicker as if nervous of what they might do because of her requests.

Garrus activated his omni-tool and asked for her permission to transmit a file. When she did he sent the communications signal of Admiral Hackett and the remainig Council members. "I will forward them a message with your requests. I'm certain they will accommodate you. As your books have said these are times to forgive debts and worry about helping others than ourselves."

If she wasn't wearing her mask, he could swear she was about to cry, but instead she wheezed. "Thank you, Garrus. As payment for your kindness I feel I should show you something. Would you please follow me down?"

"Are you sure that's wise? I nearly blew you all to hell a few minutes ago?"

Maian turned back and tutted. "Please, Garrus I think they'd be understanding of the circumstances if not, then we will send you on your way and I shall contact the people you've given me the communications for. But not after a bite to eat and a good nights rest."

Looking back at the others, Garrus saw Jack's hand swelling and her breathing become more ragged while Kaidan looked a little beat but none the worse for wear. He figured if they had to go, leaving Jack behind would work to their advantage the only problem was convincing her to stay if it was necessary.

Heading back down, they found that the underground shelter was now fully in swing. The lights were on and the former clutter was actually cleared away rather quickly revealing that many of the rooms Garrus had found blocked were in habited by families. As they walked with Maian little kids came up to them and began pestering them with questions. Mostly Jack about her tattoos and scars. She scared them off with a few comments, but the kids always ran away laughing, which made her groan in pain and clutch her sides.

They made their way back to the room where Garrus found them trying to patch up Rosek. The room was now empty save for a turian female and the geth he figured to be Inari due to her body design. The turian looked up at them and stopped, dropping her tray. The sound caught Garrus's attention and he dropped his rifle.

"Garrus?"

In an instnat he was on her, lifting her off the ground and she was laughing madly. Kaidan and the others stared as they spun around and danced madly. Their voices garbled as they spoke so fast the translators couldn't keep up. By the time they were done, Garrus had tears streaming down his face while the female brushed them away.

"You really are a bad turian."
He laughed and pulled her close. "I never thought I'd see you again."

She pulled him close and their was a loud purr from her throat. "Same goes to you big brother."

Hours later, Garrus was sitting in a room, Kaidan was snoring loudly while Urz dozed happily at the foot of his bed. While he fumbled around with his visor. It still wasn't working properly after being shot, but it had been through worse and he finally got it back to a working condition. He turned it over in his hands and looked at the names of his old squad mates. The scorch mark where he'd crossed out Sidonis's name was still visible. Shepard had talked him out of killing the bastard and he'd accepted it.

Sidonis had a choice and made it. It was a bad choice and he was dealing with the consequences. And Garrus, he was still feeling the weight of his.

Reaching to his hip he took the flask out and drained the contents and shook his head. Kaidan mumbled something in his sleep but he ignored it. Instead he picked up a sodering iron and began to gently move it along the metal. When he was finished he pulled the journals from his pack and looked them over. The numbers stared at him. The one he had been reading marked with the number fifteen the other number one. He tapped his fingers along the covers of both of them and let out a loud sigh and pulled open the one marked with the number one.

March 21st 2172

So I decided to take Dad's advice and start writing this journal. Though I'm not in the military yet, but I figured what the hell I may as well start with the events prior to the beginnings of my illustrious career as he calls it. But what to start with well I guess I can say now that I finally had the surgery. It's done and it's gone. It's weird I've had it my whole life and I voluntarily let it go and now I feel whole and complete. Which is rather unusual because sometimes I still think it's there.

Dad laughs at me some times, teasing me about it but it is in jest. He's my Dad and he's supported me my whole life so I let him get away with it and then well he shuts up for a few days after my retaliation.

I can hear him snoring even back here in my room and let's just say things are incredibly uncomfortable no matter how I position myself. And above that the doctors said I had to continue the shots. But I suppose it's a fair trade if it keeps me who I am. So I figure what's the occasional shot and discomfort?

Mom is still worried about me as we haven't heard back from the Alliance about a recruitment appointment. I had to give them my medical records and let's just say we aren't optimistic. I figure it's a long shot so I even applied for a few colleges as a back up plan. I secretly think Mom is postponing my appointment but then again I can't blame her. My scars are still fresh and a physical can't be done until I'm healed and I'll still need to get back into decent enough shape thanks to my "recovery" as they call it and I know Dad is just waiting to put me back through the paces of his work out regimen.

I honestly think the man was born a tank with the amount of exercises he makes me do. But he always said, "Men in the Alliance are tough, the women are tougher. But you, Leela will need to be ten times what they are just to earn their respect."

Sometimes I find myself praying that I don't get the call.

But I'm here, with them. Dad's snoring on the couch a couple of beers in front of him and Mom is out shopping and I'm alone. I'm thinking that I'm actually rather lucky. A lot of people like me go
through a living hell no one can imagine and sometimes all alone, even with their families there. But here I am with my parents and I can't help but think I'm an incredibly lucky; I guess the word woman is now legally and physically accurate. I even had my identification all changed earlier this year. Scared the living hell out of the people at the licensing department but I just smiled at them and at the fact that they had to follow through with it. Did they deserve my being a smartass? Probably not, but I figured one time it would be fun to mess with somebody.

Still though I'm scared not only about the military but what will happen in my life from this point on. I was dumped - well this time I did the dumping. Mostly because once again I backed out when things got too "intense." Once again I feel like a victim to someone with a fetish. Maybe things will be different in a few years. I hear the gap between the mind of an eighteen year old and a twenty-two year old is rather large. Maybe then the people I'm interested in might actually give a rats ass about what I was before. Mom says I should just keep it to myself. But they have pictures of me everywhere as who I am now and who I was before. Questions will come up, and I've hidden too long and I won't hide again.

Anyway, Mom is yelling at Dad meaning I have to help with the food.

God I sound like a whiny little brat. I'm going to blame this on the estrogen shots.

Garrus laughed at the comment and was prepared to shut the journal when he saw ink on the back of another page he turned it over and couldn't help but laugh again at what he saw.

Dad is one crafty bastard. He's using the hormone excuse for me since I blew up at mom for calling her on her bullshit about hiding the phone calls from me. Looks like I'm getting a ton of new books and an expensive dinner. Sorry Mom, you brought this on yourself.

"What's so funny Garrus?"

He looked up at the door and saw Solana standing there with a bottle of what looked to be rather expensive turian brandy. Giving a nervous look over at Kaidan, Garrus saw him asleep and left the room quietly with Urz hot on his heels.

When they were far enough away from the door, Garrus replaced his visor and said, "I was just reading something about her."

Opening the bottle, his sister took a sip of the liquid and he could tell it was the good stuff. "Who is 'her'? Commander Shepard?"

Taking a swig of his own he shuddered at the strength of it and gave it back to her as they exited the ruins and sat down under the stars. Gazing up at them longingly he said, "Yeah, Commander Shepard."

He felt his sister's eyes drilling into him and he looked at her out of the corner of his eye. "What's that look for?"

She gave him a knowing smile and punched him in the arm. "You really are a bad Turian. You know that?"

Laughing as he stretched out his legs he pulled the dog tags out of their hiding spot and smirked. "So what if I am. Still managed to help save the galaxy."

She passed him the bottle and stretched out her own legs, the brace creaking gently. He felt a pang of guilt at the sight of it. "Yeah you, sure did. Dad's proud of you."
He stopped mid drink. "He's safe?"

She shrugged. "He was the last time I talked to him. He sent me to the Citadel like a lot of people
did thinking it'd be safe while he joined the fleet after we left Palaven. Talked to him the day
before we got transported here without consent. Haven't heard anything yet from him but he said if
I saw you before him to let you know that he was at least proud of you and to thank you for doing
your best to help, Mom."

He knew Solana was telling the truth. There were few things he knew for certain in the universe
and one of those was that his sister was an incredibly honest woman when she had a bit of alcohol
in her.

Garrus took another long gulp of alcohol. He'd never been the turian he was supposed to be but he
tried. He'd even snuck some Collector DNA to a salarian scientist to help his mother. Problem was
his efforts were too little too late. But he was there for her in the end, and she died in peace. That
all seemed like years ago and for a while him and his sister passed the bottle back and forth before
she asked.

"So, you've picked a human?"

He nodded. "And she picked me."

"Bet that was an awkward night."

He barked with laughter and didn't stop for a few minutes earning looks of concern from his sister
and Urz when he finally stopped he coughed.

"A little bit."

She laughed, "I bet that's what she said when she saw it."

They both laughed at this and Urz got up and headed back into the restaurant. When they finally
calmed down he shook his head. "It wasn't as bad as you'd think. Difficult yes, but it felt right. One
of the few things that I'll never regret when I die."

"Even if it means denying Dad a few extra grandkids?"

He shrugged and set the bottle down. "Even if we could, she wouldn't be able to."

"Sterile?"

Garrus nodded, "In a manner of speaking. But even then I probably wouldn't have been able to give
him a few anyway."

"Why's that?"

"Seventh story ledge and me black out drunk."

He didn't need to say any more for her to scoot over to him, the gravel shifting under her frame and
she pulled him to her shoulder as he pulled out the journal. "These and the dog tags, Sol. That's all
anyone can find of her that isn't some sort of recording."

She rubbed her head against his and gently sang a song from their childhood that their mother
always sang to them. It calmed him and he purred against her chest as she sang. When she was
done he sat up and laughed. "Thanks."
She nudged him. "Feeling better?"

He shrugged, "Finally feeling something."

She took his hand in hers and squeezed. "It's a start."
Chapter 8

I figured out something for chapter 8. Thanks Raven-Jade-Wolf for helping me with a few things. And I bet I lost readers thanks to the last chapter. I told ya guys to read "the entry" before this so you wouldn't get shocked by what happens later. Oh well, thanks for the readership it is appreciated. And next couple of chapters are a bit brighter in tone. I was watching The Muppets writing this and I finish it off at "rainbow Connection." I feel we need a bit of something else besides Garrus being surly.

Chapter 8

His head was pounding, again. He hadn't even had anything to drink the night before, well that he could remember. He tried to lift his head but it fell to the pillow again and he felt like he was going to be sick. If he had drank and the Primarch and Hackett had been told by Kaidan he would have an even larger headache than what he had now, and the stick would be used as the tool that he was beaten with.

Vision blurred he looked around the room and cringed as his eyes rested upon a lamp. His visor was on the small crate he was using as night stand. Reaching over he put it on and activated it. Once again it was broken and he racked his brain to figure out why but his head felt like it had a bullet pass through it when he tried. He remembered being sober for the past few days, the first time in awhile but the cause of his headache escaped him.

Sitting up, he felt his stomach churn.

"Shit, not again." He looked around for a bin and found none but after taking a few deep, solid breaths he felt his stomach settle. Slowly moving his legs over the side of the bed, he rested his head between his knees and continued to breathe deeply as his head continued to pound. After a few minutes he felt better and lifted his head slowly. The pounding was still continuing and he could hear the kids running around outside screaming loudly. It didn't help, but it didn't hurt either.

Laughter was good, they were young and had lived through hell, but they grew strong from it and even those that had lost friends and family were finding reason to laugh. It'd only been a short time, but things were looking up for the Sol system and for them as well. At least in terms of survival.

Maian had been true to her word and with the help of several droids the arm of the Citadel the supply base was located on was slowly beginning repairs. Liara on the other hand had been working with the engineers on finding a way to the power supply of the arms. But the Keeper tunnels they planned on using were locked by codes of origins far older than the Reapers. And more advanced.

It was not a pleasant thought for them to be stuck without access to those tunnels. They had yet to see a single Keeper and the lack of them being around was too terrifying comprehend. Garrus was of the mind that they were possibly better off without them, but he knew of their value. They were designed to care of the Citadel and without them, he didn't want to think how badly things could go if they couldn't fix the life support functions.

As his vision became clearer, he felt a familiar nudge on his arm and chuckled. "Hey, boy."

He raised his head slowly and Urz slid his head on to his thigh. Garrus finally noticed that he was in his civilian attire. The pain made it too much of a problem to think about, but he definitely remembered being in his combat uniform the night before. "Must have stripped in my sleep. What
do you think?"

Urz snorted at him before followed by a loud grumble. Scratching between the tendrils on his
carin's head. "So no one fed you while I was asleep?" Another snort came from the beast Garrus
pushed himself up gently off the bed. He wavered momentarily but Urz moved behind him giving
him support.

His head was still splitting, but the nausea was less prevalent. "Thanks, Urz."

The varren wandered around his front and toward the door, keeping within two steps of his new
master as they wandered through the crowded hallways. His vision was still fuzzy, but he could
make his way through the crowd easily enough. Especially with Urz forcing people to back off just
by making a simple grunt.

Many knew he was harmless without provocation, but a varren was an intimidating sight even
outside the battlefield. He apologized to a few people who responded in kind. Even a few children
came up to Garrus and began talking with him. He saw some turian kids who had been on Earth,
most likely political refugees from the embassies, human kids, and a few asari. Most ranging from
six to fourteen. All of them stood in awe of him and tried to ask him questions but when he tried to
speak it ended up sounding more like a hoarse growl.

When he was finally able to speak he growled, "Dry throat, kids."

With that they left him alone and when he finally came to the stairs, he gave took a deep breath and
began his slow descent. It went smoothly for awhile and Urz was able to keep him up right until
his foot caught the edge of a step and he went tumbling down the stairs. He could hear Urz barking
as he tried to stop him, but it didn't help and soon he felt his back plates slam into the wall making
his head explode in pain.

His arms felt like metal as he attempted to push himself up. He could feel his chest leave the
ground, but the shaking in his arms kept him from getting more than a few inches off the ground
and Urz was barely able to help with getting him into a sitting position. Scratching the beasts head
as he leaned against the railing,

The pounding in his head was getting worse and his ears began ringing. The nausea was back as
well. Focusing on his feet he felt his mind regain some amount of composure but his vision was
blurred on top of everything else. He felt something leave his mouth, it tasted horrible, and his ears
popped every time he took notice of the shape of Urz's mouth.

A shadow stood over him as his vision began to fade. He heard several voices but all he took notice
of was strands of hair hitting his nose. It smelt like a fruit he'd seen her eat, he remembered her
calling them strawberries.

"Leela."

And then the world was black.

He heard a scraping. And opened his eyes, she was sitting at the couch again. Her Eviscerator and
Paladin laying out on the table. His guns were still in the corner, she never touched them. Her face
was covered in gun oil and the tooth brush she used on the parts was so used that it was
permanently stained black. He never understood her obsession with such an archaic method of
cleaning. Climbing out of the bed he shook the sleep from his brain and heard her laugh in the
corner.
"How long have you been up?"

She didn't take her eyes of the guns, her arms moving furiously to clean out some of the build up. He couldn't help but admire her body. She was soft that was for certain, but he could always see her training shine when she was in her bed clothes. It was always the same, a pair of shorts and a tank top that clung to her less than voluptuous frame. He couldn't help but laugh when he mentioned how her hips looked supportive. He remembered that night and felt stupid at trying to impress her. He was always an idiot when it came to romance, but she just made him feel even more awkward. But after their date, he finally felt that she was his and on their first official and was grateful that she had returned his feelings.

"I've been up for about three hours now." She replied as she wiped a bit of sweat from her brow and smiled in satisfaction at her work. She began reassembling the shotgun and looked at him with a smile. "You're getting old Vakarian."

He scoffed and took a sip of water from the bottle he'd brought up the night before. They'd stayed up talking late into the night again before falling asleep. Her curled against his chest as she snored heavily. Looking at the clock he figured that he'd been asleep for six hours. Looking at her he could see the bags under her eyes and parted his lips. She pointed the toothbrush at him, the bristles glistening with oil as they dropped onto the towel beneath them. "Don't you even start with me, Vakarian. Or you can spend tonight in the main gun calibrating yourself while the rest of us go out and have a little fun."

Getting up he let out a loud yawn and felt something hit the back of his head. "HEY! I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING!"

When he turned she was staring at the table as she began reassembling the shotgun. She kept her face firmly locked on the gun. Despite her hair being down from its usual pony tail he could see the corners of her mouth twitch, as she reinserted one of the springs in the pump. Once she'd finished reinstalling the pump, he sat down on the couch and focused his gaze on the back of her head. The smell of gun oil was intoxicating and he couldn't help but feel a little warm as he watched her.

As he watched her work could see her the muscles in her shoulders bunching up and he knew she was getting nervous. She was never afraid to express her feelings on a situation and when she tried to lie it was like watching a dog try and deny it had gotten into the garbage. Slipping slowly off the couch like a slinky he let his legs slowly go beneath her knees and brought his nose close to hers and sniffed loudly as he ran a claw gently on the back of her neck. His claw tracing along the scars that had formed from years of combat and surgeries.

She immediately shivered as the filed nail tickled the skin and he laughed. "You're a horrible liar, Leela Shepard."

She snorted and went back to her work as he wrapped an arm around her stomach and watched her put the weapon back together.

"Why do you use such an odd cleaning method? I have equipment that could probably clean it in only a few minutes."

She set down her tools and leaned back holding up her hands. They were stained black with grease and calloused from all of the fights she'd seen.

"It's because of Dad."
Her voice was actually rather happy as she said this. He'd seen her writing in what she called a "journal," on many occasions but he never bothered asking her about it. He'd accompanied her on many missions and based on when she wrote in them he knew what they were about. And if she felt necessary to talk about it she would say so. The only time he'd ever asked about them though she had mentioned her father, Mercutio was his name, and he listened to her. And from what she told him of her father he definitely lived up to what little information the Alliance made public of him.

"Tell me the story."

She leaned back into him. Her legs stretched out like his and, her feet barely making their way halfway down his shins. She laughed loudly at his request.

"You're going to have to tell me some stories about your family one of these days, Garry-bear."

His mandibles flared at the usage of her private name for him. "Well, I'm not much of a story teller and," blew a bit of air behind her ear and she shivered again, "and you know how much I love to listen to drone on and on about your escapades."

She elbowed him but he made no sign that it bothered him and he gripped her wrists tightly. "Now, now, be a good girl and maybe I'll buy you that new choke gauge you've been eyeballing."

Turning around she stuck out her tongue before saying, "I'll hold you to that."

There goes five thousand credits. Was the thought that went through his brain before resting his head on her shoulder.

"So explain to me why oral hygiene products are required in cleaning a high powered shotgun."

Rubbing her head against his she laughed. "Well humans haven't always been fortunate enough to have weapons like this. Ours were a bit more archaic. Instead of using high powered bits of metal accelerated by mass effect fields we used plastic shells with brass caps that were struck but a lever inside the gun that shot out small balls of metal."

"That was gunpowder right?"

She nodded, "You've been studying."

"Well you know me, Shepard." He gave her a gentle tap with his stiff lips on her neck. "I love studying."

He ran his fingers across her bare stomach and she was barely able to hide her laughter. "Yeah, yeah, you're a regular Casanova."

"No thanks, more than one of you is enough." She pulled her head away from his. When he looked at her he saw her eyes widened in shock and he shrugged. "He came up when I was looking up famous human romances."

She snorted and returned to her previous position before speaking again. "Well the gunpowder would build up in the guns. And if there was too much build up the guns would misfire and hurt people." She picked up the tooth brush and twirled it in the light. "Dad grew up using guns like those and had a small collection he brought with us. Parts were hard to find and he took care of them religiously on top of teaching me how to fight he taught me how to shoot and just being an all around awesome dad."
He took the toothbrush from her hands and they stared at it for a few minutes before she pulled up an old video with her omni-tool. She couldn't have been no more nine in the picture and her hair was down to her shoulders and she was wearing a hoodie and shorts as they threw cards down on the table laughing as they played. She was sitting in the lap of a large man who could have only been her father. From what Garrus found out he was roughly six and a half feet tall, with brown hair, tan skin, and nearly three hundred pounds of solid muscle.

On the inside of his forearm was a large N7 tattoo and his dog tags were on top of Leela's head in an attempt to block her view of the cards. She kept turning back and yelling at him to stop taking cards from the deck when she wasn't looking.

"Make me stop!" His voice had a slight accent he couldn't really place.

His voice was a deep booming sound and probably scared more people than he'd intended to in his life, but when he yelled at her it was nothing but joy.

Finally having enough she turned around and took the dog tags and slipped them around her neck and stuck her tongue out. "You're a cheater, Dad!"

"Oh really, my little passerotta?" He dropped his cards and began to tickling her. Their voices nothing but laughter as the video came to a stop.

Setting the toothbrush down, she turned on her side and buried her face in his neck. Grabbing the blanket off the couch he pulled it over her. Her breaths slowly turning into gentle snores.

"Commander Shepard?"

It was Traynor no doubt calling her for another communication.

"What is it, Sam?"

"Oh, Garrus I'm sorry. Is the commander available?"

"Is it urgent?"

"No, I'm certain it can wait."

"I'll wake her up in a couple hours, Traynor."

"Wake up, Garrus."

He blinked his eyes and shut them almost immediately, he thought he'd gone back to sleep with her in his arms but something was wrong with this picture. There was a bright light in his eye and he tried to speak but his throat felt like it was clenched shut. He growled loudly and heard a familiar voice.

"Relax, Garrus we'll take the tube out momentarily. I just had to check your pupils."

It was Dr. Chakwas and he noticed that the walls were oddly white and there was a blue sky out the window.

He stayed still as the pulled the tube from his nostrils and he hacked loudly and clutched his throat as Chakwas put on a fresh pair of gloves after washing them and pulled out a small container from a fridge. She opened it and pulled out an ice cube and he shook his head.

"Open."
His mouth dropped and she gently placed the cube in his mouth. His throat felt a thousand times better but still too sore to speak and after he chewed up the first one she fed him another. The process repeated for a few minutes until he waved his hand and spoke.

"What the hell happened?"

She put another cube in his mouth and looked out the window as if expecting this. "You took a heavy blow to the head while going on a patrol with a few of your new recruit's a couple of weeks ago."

"WEEKS?"

His voice was a raspy growl and she nodded feeding him another cube. He wanted to feed himself but his hands were too heavy.

"Don't force it, Garrus. But yes weeks. You were on patrol doing scavenging work. Jack had been called back to help Dr. Sanders with some work testing out new amps and implants. Liara was too busy cracking codes, Kaidan was called away by Hackett and you were left behind with CT and some other people to run the outpost until they could return."

She gave him a couple of more ice cubes before continuing.

"So while out on patrol, you happened to walk by a building where some mechs were working. They unfortunately did not pay attention to what was going on and you took a large chunk of concrete to your head after pushing the soldiers out of the way. It broke through your shields and cracked the casing on your helmet. The damage was equivalent to what Dr. Eva did to the Major. Though getting through your plates made the task several times more difficult and you're lucky the medics on your arm of the Citadel were able to get the swelling down and Cortez was on his way to pick you up. Though that tumble you took didn't help matters."

He rested his head against the pillows and exhaled loudly. "Was I unconscious the whole time?"

She chuckled at the question. "You were conscious many days, but not cognizant of what you were saying or doing. But, you responded well to the people who came in, though there were a few times when CT came in that you got a bit handsy."

He wanted to die then and asked the question he didn't want to know the answer to. "How bad was I?"

She put another couple of ice cubes in his mouth, "Not as bad as you think. You just played with her hair a lot and kept talking about how much it smelt like strawberries. And she amused you with idle chatter."

He thanked the spirits for keeping him under control. "How soon can I get back to work?"

She sighed and gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder. "You'll have to take a couple of weeks off. Enjoy some of the nicer places we have here on Earth."

"A couple weeks?"

She nodded at the despair in his voice. "Garrus, you've been going non stop for over a year. I know what you've been doing to your body. You need to take a break and get yourself together. For her."

If there was one person he couldn't say no to besides Shepard, it was Chakwas. Sighing loudly he nodded. "Fine, I'll take a break." He turned to her and twitched his mandibles. "Fine, but I have a
few conditions before I even agree to this."

Three days later he was inside a small shuttle staring out over the mountains of the country called Italy. He remembered Leela talking about it a few times. It was one of the countries her parents had taken her too on their trip and her father's home country. It was a beautiful place and he could see where many of the old ruins had lay, some were still intact and while they were gorgeous he couldn't help but admire the scenery. As they flew over the landscapes he could see smaller Reapers littering the landscape but a prefabricated village had been set up and he couldn't wait to get out of the shuttle even if he was confined to a wheel chair the next few days while Chakwas monitored his progress.

They landed in the small village nestled in the mountains and when the door opened he rolled himself out the door and took in the crisp cool air. He heard a rhythmic thumping behind him as it came down the ramp behind him turning to his right he saw Joker with his crutches, James with his arm still in a sling and a few of the other members of the Normandy crew come out of the shuttle. Looking up at the pilot he smirked. "I thought you guys could use a break from the hospital."

James gave him a pat on the shoulder and sighed loudly. "Not a bad choice, Scars."

"Thanks a lot there, Paco. Just make sure to save me some wine."

"Not on my watch, Garrus."

The arms master swung his large rucksack over his shoulder and headed toward what looked like the soldier barracks and laughed at Garrus as Solana came out with her own bag followed by Joker who was looking rather surly.

"Something wrong, Moreau?"

Joker shook his head. "No, Garrus. It's a beautiful place. I just wish…"

Garrus reached up and gave his friend a gentle pat on the hand. Joker had just received news about his sister and his father. Neither of them had made it off of Tiptree add in the loss of EDI on top of his legs being mostly shattered and you couldn't even imagine the man living up to his former nickname.

"We've all lost something, Joker. But there's always a bright side."

"And here I thought it was my job to make everyone feel better." His voice was as dry as a burnt piece of wood.

"Normally yes, but take a look at James."

Joker did his best to fight looking at the soldier. But finally he broke when he heard the laughs from their friend and he couldn't help but look. Garrus saw disbelief, anger, fear, sadness, and finally bliss appear on his face as he began slowly moving toward the silvery form wearing a set of combat fatigues.

After staring at each other for a few moments, EDI smiled and pulled him gently to her as his chest shook violently while Urz sat next to him panting happily.

He began rolling his hands along the wheels as Solana walked beside him. "You've done a good thing for them, Garrus."
Shrugging he heard the clank of the dog tags against his chest. "They've earned it."

Authors note

Passerotta I believe is Italian for Sparrow.
WARD TO CHAPTER 9! So you guys holding up okay? Good? Glad they got a little ray of sunshine? So am I…was starting to bum myself out. I would just like to state that I am a very stream of consciousness writer. I have a point a, b, and c I like to get to but a lot of times I just pull things out of my ass. Almost like filler while I sort things out but the events usually have some connection in the grand scheme of things. and the silliness of this chapter is well a glimpse into my brain at times. But I find my sanity in the end…usually….though why I chose to ship a particular pair of people is beyond me. And the ending to this was once again a stream of consciousness thing that just grew out of nowhere. I hope you enjoy it.

Chapter 9

"OH THIS HORSESHIT!"

It was James and Jack this time cursing and Garrus laughing in victory. They'd been in the mountains for nearly a week and Garrus was finally starting to feel like his old self. Despite the limitations Chakwas was enforcing on him earning no sympathy from the others who had spent several consecutive weeks under the woman's hawk like gaze.

"Just wait until she has to take a catheter out of you while you're conscious, then complain to me about her getting a little to close for comfort." Was Joker's response as he downed another soda earning a wary look from the doctor.

But for now James, Garrus, Jack, and Cortez had escaped from the woman's talons with a few rifles and several clips of practice rounds. Along with some empty wine bottles filled with water. Cortez was watching from a rock with Urz drooling in his lap enjoying his latest cup of wine. His injury from the crash wasn't bothering him and he had been their pilot to the valley Garrus had spotted. They'd set up on a large ridge and despite the lack of peripheral vision out of his now defunk right eye he handled the Kodiak easily.

Chambering another round, Jack pointed the Mantis out over the ledge and shouted for James to throw her fifth bottle. The bottle sailed out over into the valley its metallic casing shimmering in the early afternoon sunlight before she let out another round and cursed as she missed making Garrus and Steve laugh loudly.

"Should I just set them up on a rock and put you five feet away with a shotgun?"

Turning on her heel, she enjected the spent cartridge and threw the gun at Garrus's head. He caught it easily and twirled it with the practiced grace of a ceremonial rifle men. He placed the butt of it on the ground and smiled with his hand on the rifle.

"Fuck you, Garrus. You're the one responsible for the rifles! I bet you fucked with the sights while we weren't looking."

Rolling a another twenty feet back he handed the rifle to James who loaded it while Garrus removed his visor. Jack's eyes grew wide and he laughed as he covered his left eye with a large clot. "You called me out, Jack. So I'm calling you on your bullshit." Catching the rifle out of the air, Garrus held the gun in his lap while staring out at the valley. "PULL!"

James sent the bottle flying and Garrus waited as Jack stared out at the valley watching the bottle. Her mouth began growing into a large as she watched the bottle begin to fall into the forest. It was...
almost out of sight when suddenly there was a loud shot and the bottle was seen to explode in an eruption of water and glass.

Jack let out a loud roar and ran at Garrus who was pushing his chair up to her. When he arrived he pat her shoulder.

"There there, Jack. Give me thirty years and I'm certain you'll be able to hit it when it's ten feet from you." She raised her fist to punch him but he could see her fight the temptation and slowly her fist dropped to her side before shooting back up and slamming into his shoulder.

"Screw you Garrus. I still think you set the sights."She stormed off to Steve and dropped onto the ground next to his rock and opened up another bottle of vintage wine they'd found in an abandoned cellar. But not before shaking her hand where she'd hit one of his shoulder plates.

Making his way to James, he watched the arms master check the sights on his Phalanx. The human seemed lost in his thoughts, which to many wouldn't see a big deal. James was often seen as a person who lacked depth, but after growing closer to the human, Garrus knew that despite his lack of technical know how, James was capable of deeper thoughts. He just lacked the experience many people required to notice such things.

And from his time working with humans, Garrus realized many of them were like that. But it couldn't be helped, his species had millenia to become accustomed to galactic life. And in only thirty years humans had gone from being a nuisance, had earned a place in the Council, and above all a human had rallied them to fight against the creatures that had been responsible for the deaths of trillions for countless eons. So he'd learned to give them the benefit of the doubt.

"Something bothering you, James?"

The human tossed him a bottle and Garrus gave it a heavy chuck. James took a moment to line up his sights and let off a round. The bottle exploded and the human gave a momentary grunt victory. Reaching in for another bottle he shrugged.

"I've just been thinking about everything that's been going on while I've been in a hospital bed."

Giving the bottle another throw, Garrus watched it explode in rather beautiful display of colors and nodded. "Yeah? Anything in particular you've been thinking about? Or is it just the random jumble of thoughts?" He tossed another bottle to Garrus who gave another grunt and the bottle exploded a lot quicker than the other two.

"I'm guessing it's a bit more than that?"

Holstering the pistol he took one of the bottles and opened it. "You guessed right, Scars." he drained half the bottle in one swig which surprised even Garrus. "Shit's getting better right?"

Looking out a giant Reaper corpse the former vigilante shrugged. "In a manner of speaking. Still a long way to go, but I did receive some good news."

James snorted into his drink and shook his head. "What is it this time? They found another stash of supplies? Or wait, they finally found a way to get everyone home? Or better yet they found the body so we can..."

His voice trailed off and he scratched his head, "Sorry about that."

Garrus raised a hand and took out one of the bottles and twirled it between his fingers. "Don't worry about it." He gave the human a quick smirk, "I'm dealing with it, but I figured you'd like to hear
that Tali's in recovery."

James eyebrow twitched at the news. "Sparks? How'd they pull that off?"

"Large amounts of anti-biotics to help with the initial infections followed by an upload from a geth that recently reactivated to run that viral program and several hours of surgery to prep her leg to receive a prosthetic."

"How much longer she got?"

The tone was not lost on Garrus and he covered the smirk with his hand. "She's got a few more weeks of rehab, but they're using her with Liara to help crack the codes on the remanants of the Citadel."

"That'll cut several years off their work."

Garrus let out a loud laugh and James chuckled. "I hear she's already made headway that's baffled most of the people they have stationed on the Crucible."

James fidgeted as Garrus spoke. "Yeah, I expected as much."

Unsure of what to say, Garrus stared out at the valley and sighed. It was such a beautiful sight, even with the Reaper corpse sticking out of the forest but he was unsure of what to say.

Needless to say it didn't have to be said, as Cortez and Jack appeared out of nowhere and pulled him off the boulder.

"What the hell is the matter with you two?" Shouted the arms master as he was put into a choke hold by Jack and Cortez sat on his chest.

"Say it!"

"Fuck you, Esteban!"

"Say it, James because I'm tired of hearing you whine about it!"

"I said no! This is stupid you're acting like a couple of kids!"

The pilot took a swig of wine and shrugged. "And I lost my eye dropping you into, London! So you're gonna open that meat head mouth of yours and admit it you son of a bitch!"

James broke his foot free of Jack's leg and kicked his best friend off of him and rolled onto his stomach. Even with one arm he was able to pick Jack up and attempt to shake her off like a dog with a bad case of fleas.

"Get off of me you psycho bitch!"

"NEVER!" Jack raised her empty wine bottle like a sword swinging one armed like a pirate on a mast.

Garrus couldn't help but laugh as Urz barked and snapped at James heels forcing him to stay near the ship as he tried to get Jack off his back. Cortez pulled himself up off the ground and began a school yard chant that Garrus had become familiar with in his studies of human society.

He couldn't believe he was seeing it from adults, but then again they were drunk and he'd done stupider things than singing, "Sparks and Vega sitting in a tree."
"F.U.C.K.I.N.G!"

The only thing that was disturbing about the situation was Esteban was the one doing the spelling.

After several more minutes of stumbling around, James finally lost his balance and went tumbling to the ground like a fresh cut tree. Jack did a weird mid-air pirouette as he fell and just missed landing on her feet and fell on her tailbone cursing loudly while James fell on his back.

Rolling up to him, Garrus shook his head at the sight. "You're all insane, you know that?"

James raised his middle finger at Garrus and laid against the cool grass. "Yeah, well we're all damaged, Scars."

Shrugging, Garrus tilted his head at the shuttle. "Cortez!"

"Yeah, Garrus!"

"Set it to auto-pilot, we need to be getting back." He took a moment and sniffed his clothes. "Chakwas is going to kill me. Jack? You doing okay over there?"

The biotic raised her spare hand. "Captain Jack never needs help!"

Garrus shook his head while James sat up. "She's gone isn't she, Vega?"

"What was your first clue?"

After loading Jack into his lap, Garrus rolled both of them onto the shuttle and James initiated the auto-pilot while Garrus unloaded Jack onto a bench where she and Cortez continued to share the wine together. Rolling back into the pilots scene he watched James flick the lid of his bottle absent mindedly.

"They got under your skin didn't they?"

"What's it to you, Vakarian?"

Garrus simply shrugged and looked out the window as the village turned base came into sight. "It's none of my business, unless you do something to make it my business."

He heard a loud exhale as James tapped bottle even faster. "And who made you in my boss, Wheels?"

The shuttle landed with a small thud as the two stared at each other.

"I never said, I was your boss Vega. I've never tried to be anyone's boss."

"But you didn't stop yourself from immediately filling in now did you?"

He heard the moans of Jack and Steve as they tossed in their sleep. Taking a deep breath, Garrus tried to remain calm. "Where the hell is this coming from all of a sudden? Are you mad because I've been out working my ass off helping people for almost three months while you lay in a hospital bed?"

James drained the rest of his water and swished it around in his mouth before swallowing. "That's low, Scars."

"But the truth."
Tossing the bottle on the floor, James grumbled so low that only Garrus could make out the words, "….my planet….."

Rolling up to the human he gave him a sharp kick in the shin making James stand up and shout loudly earning a, "SHUT UP!" from the two drunkards in the back.

James stood up followed by Garrus, whose knees gave a small quiver thanks to the lack of walking and his brain injury. They stared each other down for a moment before James left and kicked Esteban's seat and helped his friend off the bench followed by Jack and left Garrus alone in the shuttle.

He tried to leave but his legs barely let him wander more than a few feet before having to grab onto a handrail. Swearing that he would kill Chakwas for her medical expertise, Garrus made his way back to the chair and rolled himself out of shuttle and nearly into Joker.

"Hey, Ironside! What the hell happened with James and those guys?"

Garrus adjusted the rifle on the back of the chair and shook his head. "Nothing of consequence. How're the legs?"

Joker shrugged. "Looks like I'm going to need some surgery since the implants Cerberus put in have gone to hell. What do you think?"

"Didn't you use crutches when we first met?"

Joker chuckled and slung the rifle over his shoulder for the turian. "Yeah but I'm allowed to at least get out of my chair."

Garrus fought back the urge to punch him. "Yeah well, I'm about to have a talk with Chakwas."

"Catscan didn't go well?"

He shook his head, "I'm hoping to find out today if I can get out of this damn chair. I'm tired of rolling every time someone ends up accidentally hitting me."

"Well at least you can put on the brakes if someone starts pushing you toward a cliff."

Garrus glared up at him. "Try that and you'll be needing more than a set of crutches to move around."

The clicked his tongue. "Good, that means bed rest which means I can get those pillows and gel-packs Mordin told me about." A perverse grin spread across his face. "Seems EDI found a body that comes with a few, perks if you get my drift."

"That's great Joker. I wonder if The Illusive Man took it for a spin before having Eva transferred into the body she used to bash Kaidan's head in."

All of the joy left Joker's being at te mention of The Illusive Man and what happened on Mars. "I liked it when you were using that stick in your ass to beat off the Reapers."

Garrus chuckled at the look of disgust on the pilot's face. "Relax, Joker I'm sure EDI took the necessary precautions."

"What necessary precautions?"

It was who spoke this time. She was finishing showing Solana her x-rays. The look on his sister's
face wasn't doing him any favors. They remained quiet while Chakwas helped Solana reattach her brace before the girl left after giving her brother a gentle nudge with her forehead.

When she left, Joker followed suit and left Garrus alone with the doctor. He felt nervous for the first time in a long while. From what they'd told him, the blow to his head should have crushed his neck and killed him, but it had instead caused major swelling to his brain, which was the reason for his wheelchair. They weren't certain to the extent of damage to his brain. But today he'd find out. Either way, the fact that he'd saved some people would be worth it.

"So, what's the news?"

"You know I'm not allowed to discuss the extent of your sister's injuries Garrus without her permission."

"I meant about my brain."

"Well there's no repairing that I'm afraid."

The both shared a good chuckle at the joke while she pulled out another set of scans. There were three and she took a few moments to make sure they were in the right order before placing them up and calling him over. He rolled forward and took a look at the left and then at the right he noticed a bit more red on the right which didn't sit well with him.

"Doctor Chakwas, I may be good at a lot of things. But reading a brain scan isn't one of them though I can guess the news isn't all that great."

She gave him a flick on the neck. "Better than what we thought, you should count yourself lucky. The amount of force that hit you should have killed you."

"So I've been told."

She flicked him again and tutted and pointed at the first. "This was the physical condition of your brain when you first joined the Normandy. Fairly normal, if a little wear and tear from the occasional drunken escapade among other things but nothing all that serious."

He nodded and pointed at the second, "And I take it that's the one from when I got shot in the face."

She nodded again and pointed at some slightly larger red spots. "You got lucky with that one thanks to Shepard's tampering with that ship."

He moved his eyes away from the middle one and looked at what was there now, the red spots were slightly larger. "And this one is from the concrete?"

She crossed her arms, a heavy sigh escaping from her mouth. "Among other things, yes. Those shots you took to the head when you were in combat and other things added to it, but this one…this one is by far the worse Garrus."

Removing the first two from the screen, she took a moment to carefully put another three scans up and pointed at them. "Your neck before," pointed at the left. It looked perfectly normal, the next looked compacted, and the third was looked far less damaged but still not as healthy looking at the first. "The middle is from when we got you onto the table and the third was taken the day before I woke you up. We had to keep your neck locked in place to make sure it healed properly with the implants but with the damage to your brain and neck…"
Her voice trailed off and he looked at her. "So am I stuck in this thing?"

Chakwas shook her head. "No, you can still walk, run, and shoot. But thanks to what happened to your neck you'll need periodic draining of spinal fluids to keep the side effects from getting worse. But you may also end up having problems with your vision, migraines, and the occasional issue with your fine motor controls and pain in your neck. If that happens you stay out of direct fire and give directions."

Garrus stared at the screen for a moment. He couldn't believe it. He'd taken out Reapers, mercs, geth, and even took a missile almost directly to the face. But now, now he was forced to sit back all because some stupid mechs hadn't paid attention to what they were doing.

He was thankful at that moment for Joker taking his rifle away from him.

"Will you be all right, Garrus?"

He looked at her and saw her holding out some tissue for him he thanked her and dabbed at the blood that was coming from the side of his mouth and nodded. "I think so, yeah. But, that doesn't answer when I can get out of this damn chair."

She chuckled and gave him a pat on the shoulder. "We'll get started on getting those legs back to working condition right now if you'd like."

A couple of days later, Garrus was in the back of the Kodiak. Chair free, though his legs were screaming at him due to their sudden use. In the shuttle sat Traynor, Jack, Kaidan, Liara, EDI, James, Aethyta who they had found only a week ago with a small band of asari commandos, and several others. They wished there was more but they would be leaving in two days and this was something that needed to be done.

Hackett had called them back into action and James, his arm now healed would be joining them. They sat in silence, no one prepared to do this but it had to happen. It'd been almost five months with no clear sign and they'd all agreed to do it. They'd sent out several encrypted messages to a few select people to join them and they weren't sure how to proceed but they would.

After an hour's flight they came to a stop at the location Garrus had read of. The area was still as it was described without a single Reaper in sight. The forests were replaced by several fields of tall grass waving in the distance. When they landed they found a few other shuttles waiting for them with people standing around waiting for them.

When they landed, Garrus grabbed his crutch and let the others out before leaving. He was surprised to see Major Kirrahe among them and several others, including Aria. Tali was there as well with Admiral Xen. Her artificial leg a silver beacon among her normally black clothes. But that wasn't the biggest thing about her everyone noticed.

While Xen chose to remain in her suit, hidden behind the mask. Tali had removed her helmet for the occasion. While her face was hidden, the were all stunned to see her silvery hair and eyes and the hint of cybernetics in her purplish skin. Garrus was certain he even saw a few ridges around her eyes, but with the veil she was wearing it was difficult to tell. She remained standing next to Xen while everyone greeted her. They noticed she saved James for last and gave him a somewhat longer hug than the others.

CT was there as well hiding in the background in her Alliance formals. Her face was kept locked on the ground, but for the first time Garrus could finally see just how old she really was. He wanted to speak with her, but Hackett took her aside and he turned to deal with their friends.
When his greetings were done, Wrex was there as well with a large box next to him. It was disquieting to see so many yet remember the faces that were gone. Jacob, Miranda, Javik, Ashley, several friends dead and gone but in the box were memories of them. Everyone had contributed something to it. A photo, an unreturned item or keepsake. But today they added in the final keepsake before it was put into the ground.

Next to the box was a hole, and in that hole was to go the box, but not without another memento.

No one said anything as he limped forward. The crutch in the hands of Kaidan as he approached the container. He stopped in front of it and removed them from his neck. He stared at them momentarily and kissed them before gently placing them next to a battered copy of "The Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson."

After giving them a lingering stroke he shut the container and with a hiss it sealed itself. With the help of Wrex, Kaidan, and Jack, they lowered the container into the ground. With the help of Aethyta they covered the hole and planted a tree in the fresh tilled Earth.

All that was heard were the gentle sobs of the living while those that weren't present cast their light on them from the clear skies above.
Chapter 10

Chapter 10! Yeah last one ended on a bit of a downer but I think something like that was needed. A way to show hat people are still hurting from the losses but are willing to move on. Not forget them, but know that they aren't doing any of their loved ones a favor. There were little hints in the story for future scenario’s. Hope some of you got them!

Also guys...Thanks. For those of you who have been reading this story as I post these. Just thank you for at least I hate to use the word accept, but embracing Leela. If you didn't get it from chapter 7 I hope you do so now. But well, just thank you. It means a lot to me that people, despite the fact that she's only shown up in the metaphysical sense, has been embraced by you guys. It is truly an awesome thing to see.

Chapter 10

"Run!"

They were once again in the middle of a firefight. It was the third one that week and their tenth in the past month and a half. And it was getting old real quick. Garrus was sitting in his perch, unloading round after round into enemies. They were still under orders to use rubber or concussive rounds to keep casualties limited. But with the way things were going, both sides would begin taking losses. And based upon how his team was reacting, Garrus was worried for the other side.

Unloading the heat sink, he popped a fresh clip in and set off three shots in rapid succession. Knocking down two of their attackers as the rest of the team slid behind cover.

"SCOPED AND DROPPED! Jack and Liara take the right to the windows. Take cover and draw as much fire as you can. Kaidan and James you go around the left to the pillar! I'll cover your middle! And try to take the heat off of you!"

He received confirmation on his recommendation and reinserted another clip and followed the girls for a moment. Jack and Liara were ducking behind cover and letting out rounds as often as they could. The enemy was onto their tactics though. From the way it was set up, it had been deliberate. A way to bottleneck anyone that came into their territory and take them for all they were worth. But Garrus and the others were saved by the fact that

They had moved to a quadrant of a new Citadel arm. This time into an industrial plaza. It stank, but was nowhere near as bad as when they'd arrived on the first arm. These people had had months to dig in, and seemed much better armed.

"James! How are we doing on reaching that pillar?"

The human grunted as his shields absorbed a small bevy of bullets. "We're going to need another minute! The major is disarming a few charges and I'm trying to keep some mechs from crossing the bridge and setting them off!"

"Shit." He whispered as he let out a concussive round that sent a batarian into the wall. "Liara do you have any flash bangs left?"

"That's a negative, Garrus! Jack anything left in your belt?"

"Fuck no! I used them all in the last fight we got in! And we're two days a way from the base unless we call for a shuttle!"
Reloading a clip yet again, this time with real rounds. Garrus looked in his artillery case and found a proximity mine. Loading it into the tip of his gun, Garrus took aim and fired it. As it sailed across the causeway he let loose a round and watched it explode several feet above their enemy. Most dropped their guns and screamed in pain as James and Kaidan made their way into the building while Jack and Liara took defensive positions on the ground.

Garrus reloaded rubber rounds and let the final two fly sending the others to the ground clutching their heads while Kaidan and James called for Liara and Jack to come up.

Keeping his rifle trained on the scene he asked. "What's going on you guys?"

He heard several people shouting followed by someone getting hit. People screamed but it was Kaidan he heard speak. "Everything is taken care of here Garrus, how is it on your end?"

Taking his eyes out of the scope, Garrus surveyed his surroundings like a hawk looking for its prey. "So far, so good Kaidan. Any of them speak up yet?"

He heard Liara's voice in his ear next. "We are not here to fight you! We are here on the orders of the…" Liara let out a grunt before growling in her Shadow Broker voice, "Do that again and I will sever your head from your shoulders!"

"With what? You asari have lost your biotics."

He heard a scuffle and Jack come on. "I've got a knife and your arms and are tied to your legs. That give you enough reason to talk."

There was silence for a moment. Garrus thought Jack had put his knife into the woman until she spoke. "What is it you want? We barely have any food for you to steal and this little scuffle cost us a good amount of our ammo and half our remaining mechs."

"We aren't here to rob you. As we said we were sent by the remains of the Council and Alliance military to help evacuate you to safer locations. We're working with other people to help rebuild the Citadel while the quarian fleet is working to get the relays working again." It was Kaidan this who spoke this time.

"The relays are broken? How did that happen?"

"From what we figured the Citadel released a large amount of dark energy that caused the relays to shut down thanks to a lack of power. It's also messing with the powers of all biotics."

"Not bad James, you have been paying attention."

"Screw you, Scars."

Despite the fact that it had been a couple of weeks since Earth, James and Garrus hadn't discussed what nearly transpired against them, but they were civil and it worked at the moment.

"Put the dicks away boys. We need to get these idiots inside. There kids in this shithole you've been hiding in?"

"No."

"Lying to us would be most unwise at this juncture, young lady."

It was a turian this time. "We aren't lying, blue. We've been here since the Citadel started moving.
We thought the Keepers were rounding people up for processing."

That caught Garrus's attention. "Did he just say, Keepers?"

"That's right, Scars. But I thought the Keepers were made by the Reapers? Shouldn't they have died along with them?"

As much as he wanted to leave his nest he kept his eyes scanning the vicinity. "Your guess is as good as mine James. Ask him where they saw it."

James relayed the question and the turian replied. "About three days hike from here, you have to go in on foot due to the amount of collapsed buildings. We don't know if it's alone, but it looked like it was wandering around attempting to fix a few consoles in the hospital we saw it in."

"Liara I take it you're interested in this?"

"Of course Garrus," her voice was all smiles as she spoke. "Finding a Keeper may help us gain a better understanding of the security protocols. Though making sure it doesn't self destruct upon our investigating it is another matter."

"Well what about just finding the guy who did the research?"

"Easier said than done. The guy who did the research went into hiding while we were working for Cerberus."

"Wait, you're talking about that salarian Chorban? Garrus didn't you say that you were able to access some of the old C-Sec files awhile back"

Garrus took a moment before responding. "If I remember correctly I think I was able to access a couple of old arrest records. You're thinking I might find him in the system, Kaidan?"

"Doesn't hurt to check. Hell, we might even be to find out about a few hidden cache's of C-Sec weapons Shepard helped procure."

Garrus let out a sigh and packed his rifle away. "Not a bad plan, Kaidan. I'll radio for a pick up from Cortez along with a few supplies for them."

"Roger that, Garrus. I'll keep the rest of these guys under control for you until we Steve gets here."

Settling back into his spot, Garrus made the call. Steve said he'd be a couple of hours. "What exactly are you looking for me to load up? We haven't been having as much luck here as we were on the other arm."

"Just bring them a few days worth of food and ammo. I'll have Kaidan leave a beacon with them so you guys can find them if there's a problem. Also bring a medic. I had to let off a proximity mind mid flight and I want to make sure none of them have any injuries from that or our dummy rounds."

"You got it, Garrus. See you in a few."

Shutting off the call, Garrus leaned back and noticed his vision begin to blur. "Shit." Was all he could muster as he closed his eyes. He kept them closed and waited calmly. When he finally opened them again it was back to normal. He'd have to make a call to Chakwas and report it. He always did and when made it back to the base he would end up having to take a couple days bed rest after they drained the fluids.
He'd barely just started the treatments, but going every two weeks was beginning to wear on his patience. Still, if it kept him in the fight he would deal with any amount of discomfort. He counted off the amount of fights they'd been in. While few and far between, they had been fairly tough since they were under no kill orders. Sometimes he longed for the days when it was as simple as putting a bullet in the bad guy. But now, that line was almost non existent. You didn't know if you were killing a hostile or killing an innocent.

He'd taken a chance today with his little stunt and he got lucky. Rubbing his neck, he felt the scab from the last one and growled. But decided to rest his eyes for a moment.

"Hey, Scars. Esteban's here, said we gotta get going. He's gotta drop us off at the Crucible."

"Damn it, why didn't you check on me sooner?"

"We did. Liara and Kaidan checked your vitals and from what they could find you were okay for a little bit. I've been checking on you every fifteen minutes to make sure you were still breathing."

Pushing himself to his feet, Garrus felt a rush of dizziness overtake him. He fell forward but was caught by James. Shrugging him off immediately, Garrus growled that he didn't need his help.

"Easy there big guy. Was just trying to help."

"Then don't bitch at me when I spend time trying to help make life easier for the people stranded here and on your planet."

James stepped back and raised his hands. "I wasn't trying to guilt you into that, but you're right, Scars. You're right." He stepped back and sighed. "I was mad, I've been mad for a long time about this whole shit storm. I couldn't help Earth until the end and when I could help them I ended up in the hospital letting others do the work for me. And you, you left your home planet to help ours. Your whole military did. But while we're here there's a chance millions more are dying and starving and we can't help them. We're as helpless as we were during the war."

Garrus rubbed his neck and scratched gently. "I told it to Shepard and I'll tell it to you. Turians are raised to believe if one person survives than the fight was worth it. Humans want to save everyone. It didn't happen, James and we can't help those who are stranded on the other side of the galaxy. All we can do is our best here and hope that we can get things working to the point where we can ease the suffering of those we can help."

The soldier stepped forward and stuck his hand out. "Under the bridge?"

Garrus shook it and picked up his rifle. "Yeah. Just make sure I don't make an ass out of myself in front of Jack. I got enough to worry about when we reach the Crucible without hearing her mock me."

He felt a hard slap on his back and laughed along with the arms master. "You can count on me, Scars."

The next morning they were on a shuttle heading toward what remained of the Crucible. Hackett and the others had flown it back toward the moon after depositing its pay load and the members of the Normandy crew were speechless at what they saw.

The Crucible was everything they were told and more. Several thousands of people from turians to humans. From Rachni to quarians. And even geth and salarians were still on board. All of them doing their best to crack to codes of the technology that stood before them. They waited near their docking bay, quiet and nervous. None of them had been called here and to now be standing in it...
after the war, they felt out of place.

None of them felt like they belonged on the Crucible other than Liara despite her claims that she would rather be working with them in helping the people that were stranded. But Garrus could see it in her eyes as she tried to catch conversations or sneak peeks at classified documents with her omni-tool. Much to the annoyance of the researchers that walked by them.

After an hour of waiting, their guide finally appeared with a small limp.

"Welcome to the Crucible. I'm sorry you all are being treated so rudely."

They all stepped forward and embraced Tali who laughed with each hug. "Yes the leg is fine. A bit squeaky but I've been giving it my own modifications." She tapped her heel and from her thigh a large knife appeared before disappearing with another tap of her heel. "I'm currently working on a spare that will hold tool kits and a spare pistol."

She was still wearing a veil similar to the scarf she wore on her helmet. She surveyed her friends, her eyes to only thing showing her smile, but they could see she was relieved to see them all despite the losses. "I've been told to escort you to the rooms in the barracks. Though Garrus, you are to follow me to the medical wing."

"I expected as much. You going to come, James?"

The human missed putting the potato chip he was attempting to eat in his mouth and it fell to the floor much to the amusement of their friends. He looked at Esteban and Jack who were covering their mouths and narrowed his eyes at them. They both stopped their laughs and Steve pulled up his omni-tool.

"I got you sleeping, James. And you talk in your sleep. A lot!"

It was the others turn to laugh and James put the chips back into his hip pouch and nodded. "Yeah, I'll join you. If it gets me a way from these dumbasses. You need some help, Sparks?"

"Not at the moment, but I'll enjoy the company after dropping this baby off at the medical bay."

"And you wonder why I ended up with Shepard."

"I still have my shotgun Garrus."

"And you still have no geth to fight."

The trip to the barracks was jovial, which annoyed many of the researches who yelled at them for quiet but that stopped once they saw the Normandy crew walking through the halls. And it made Jack laugh each time she apologized when the eyes of the researches widened at the sight of the crew.

After a ten minute walk they were dropped off at their rooms. Garrus barely had time to drop off his rifles and pack before being pulled out by his collar into the hallway with Tali and James. As they left, the heard a loud laugh as Traynor made her presence known. She'd been transferred to help the geth and Rachni to figure out how to expand the QEC network.

He didn't bother to look back as they made their way through the sterile halls. It was like a giant assembly plant where each room was somebody working on a new piece of technology, code breaking, or agricultural advancement. Garrus had seen some of these already put to work, in certain parts of the Citadel arms as well as on Earth. While they would take time to fine tune the
processes, the successes so far were exemplary and had saved their lives more than a few times as well as help with repairing the landscapes of Earth.

As they walked by another room where a few geth, five of the estimated ten-thousand self reactivated ones, were conversing with engineers on drive core modifications, he found it strange that they had fought so hard to destroy the Reapers and yet their very survival may depend on the monstrosities that had set out to destroy them.

As they walked, Garrus found himself not saying much and watching Tali and James more than anything else. He didn't remember falling behind them, but truth was he'd invited James along for just this purpose. He couldn't help but smile when he saw James pull his hand away from Tali's when he caught sight of Garrus looking at them.

Finally they stopped in front of what was now officially the medical bay.

"So, will you two kids be okay without a grown up?"

James actually looked pale and Tali did her best to avert her gaze from Garrus. He just chuckled and gave her a knowing wink before entering.

It was filled to the brim with people from all over the Sol system. Some with minor injuries and others were in bed recovering from wounds similar to Tali's or worse. He stood to the side, watching as the doctors rushed between patients, administering meds and other people who were being brought from ships or parts of the Citadel and beginning emergency procedures. After so long, Garrus expected things to have settled down, instead they were slowly escalating.

Taking an extra seat, Garrus waited for a doctor. And as he did his head began to ache and his vision began to blur again. He wanted to take a pain killer but he couldn't. Not with him needing anesthesia at the start of his procedure. Instead he closed his eyes and rested his head against his knees.

"Are you okay, Mister?"

He looked up to see a little boy and girl standing in front of him. The boy human with olive skin and brown hair , the girl a young turian with black plates, green eyes and markings. They were holding hands, and based on his knowledge of humans he put the boy at about five and the girl at three. They were dressed in civilian attire and the girl had what humans called a teddy bear in her left arm while her other held her brothers hand.

He gave them a warm smile. "I'm fine, my head just hurts. What are you two doing here?"

The girl hid behind the boy and hid her face in his back. "We're here with our dad. He's been sick for awhile now."

That caught Garrus's attention. "What happened to him?"

The girl sniffed as her brother spoke. "He got us off world while Mom went to work with the turian military. Dad got sick due to an engine explosion when those aliens tried to take this ship, we don't know what happened to Mom." He pointed at a nearby bed where a deathly pale human man was hooked up to a series of tubes. "They said they were going to look for their families to take us in but we haven't heard from anyone."

The boys lip quivered and the girl clung to his shirt as she sniffled again. "Do you think he's going to die?"
Garrus reached out and put a hand on the girl's head. "I can't say, little one. But I can tell you that the doctors will do their very best to help him."

The children looked at each other and then back at him they both spoke in unison, "You promise?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I promise. But you stay next to him and keep him strong. That's what he needs right now more than medicine."

The girl poked her head out from behind her brother. "Are you waiting for some one, Mister?"

Garrus gave her forehead a little poke and ran his finger along her markings. They were an emerald green along her black plates they made a crown like visage on her small head. "Yeah, I am. But tell you what. Why don't you call me, Garrus."

She gave him a shy smile. "I'm Ismene Schneider." She then pulled on her brother's shirt. "Use your manners."

The boy shook his head at her, but his eyes were warm as he looked at her and then at Garrus. "I'm Kevin Schneider. Who are you waiting for?"

Garrus leaned back and noticed an asari doctor eyeing him. "I'm waiting for a someone very special to me."

"Is it your mate?"

Kevin told her to hush but Garrus chuckled and nodded. "Yes, she's been gone for a long time."

"Was she like our mom? Was she military?"

Garrus nodded again and their eyes grew sad. "Don't feel sad kids. Things like this happen in war."

"But if you're waiting, then what does that mean for us?"

He had no answer but still spoke. "It means that your mother is somewhere that she probably can't communicate with you. So keep your spirits up, and if you need help tell someone to contact me. My name is Garrus. Okay?" When they nodded he gave them both a pat on the head. "Now go back to your father."

The kids nodded and headed to their father's bedside. Halfway there, Ismene ran back to him, her teddy bear's head bouncing as she ran. When she stopped in front of him, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a small fist and shook it at him. "Here. To make your head better."

Garrus put out his hand. She placed her tiny fist in his hands and opened her hand dropping a small object in it before returning to her brother and father. Garrus noticed it was a candy only found on Palaven. He slipped it in a pocket just as the doctor arrived.

"Are you, Garrus Vakarian?"

He nodded and the doctor waved at him. "We have a small room set up for you."

"I'd rather have a bed out here."

The doctor shook her head. "I'm sorry, sir but it's the orders of the higher ups that you get a private room."

He stood up with a small waver and the doctor took his arm. "Easy, Mister Vakarian."
Rubbing his eye, he allowed her to pull him toward the private room. Climbing into the bed he turned on his side and let the doctor do her work. After curling up a bit, he felt a small prick on his neck and the only inclination of her work was the pain slowly leaving his head.

"The Admiral and everyone will see you in two days. For now, just rest and get your strength back."

Pulling the blanket up over his form, Garrus closed his eyes.

As soon as he drifted he was back on a battlefield, it looked like Tuchanka. Javik was laying waste to enemies while Leela was fire biotics at them, raising them from the ground before sending bullets into their skulls while he planted a proximity mine a few yards a head before taking out a Brute with a shot in it's eyes. They took a moment to look at each other, her hair haggard and her visor blinking as it tried to maintain it's function but her face was all smiles despite the gore and dirt.

"Come on, Garrus! Don't tell me you're out of the game already."

He kept his eyes on her and let out three more shots which dropped another Brute with ease. "I'm just getting started."

He woke up with a groan and sat up. His mouth dry and he poured some water into the glass. Some of it spilt from his mouth and he wiped his chin as he laid back down. His neck was sore as it always was after the draining. But at least he could see and his head was clear for the first time in a long while.

Finally the day came and he was sitting with the others in a room. Food on the table and plenty of drink. He noticed himself and Liara were the only two not to really touch the food. James and the others however inhaled it like it was their last meal.

When the doors opened, the entire crew stood up before being told to sit with the simple wave of a hand.

Hackett walked past them, his usual scowl on his face along with Sparatus, the newly recovered Tevos, and Esheel.

"I hear that you have all uncovered the possible location of a Keeper?"

It was Hackett who spoke while the councilors watched the group quietly.

"That's correct. According to the information and footage we received from some people we found on the second arm."

"What kind of footage?"

"Some kids had some mechs go snooping through a broken down hospital." Jack said over a mouth full of food. "Seems the mechs caught sight of the Keeper before the kids had them turn around and leave."

Tevos and Esheel looked at her with mild disgust while Hackett and Sparatus listened in quiet contemplation.

"We've helped them in exchange for the information. They're good kids. Young, a bit angry, but they'll prove useful in the end." Liara transmitted the video to the screen and they turned around. The quality was lackluster. Loki mechs weren't known for their high caliber optics, and they could
tell that it had been retrofitted with a night vision lens.

The Normandy crew watched quietly as the admiral and councilors stepped back to get a better shot of the footage. They could see the Tevos and Esheel looking doubtful but Hackett and Sparatus was analyzing each movement like a trained hunter.

Finally the footage they needed was shown and Tevos's jaw nearly hit the floor and Esheel was looking nauseous. Sparatus had mild amazement on his face while Hackett had the slightest hint of a smile on his lips.

"So, it is true. Do we know of its whereabouts or movements?"

"That's a negative, Councilor Tevos." Kaidan paused the film and sighed. "We only know of it appearing in the hospital. No probes were sent in, but we thought that your hackers may have found some information on the tunnels beneath the hospital."

Hackett rolled his shoulders. "Unfortunately our efforts have bared little fruit. The Reapers hid their secrets too well."

"Well I wouldn't say that Admiral."

A shimmer of light came from the corner. The eyes of the Normandy crew, all save for James shone at the sight of the master thief.

She took a bit of food from the table and swallowed loudly before sitting down and putting her feet up on the table.

"Ms. Goto, glad to see you've come back to us."

Kasumi smiled and pulled up her own omni-tool. The video footage of the Keeper disappeared and a map of interconnected tubes lit up the screen.

"Garrus, word got back to me about you looking for the works of some scientist named Chorban. I did a little snooping and found his files. Didn't take long and he was a sly little bastard. He was able to track the movements of the Keepers and even a few access codes."

Liara and the others "This will take months to navigate."

Hackett chuckled and looked at them all. "Major Alenko, Miss Naught, you will stay with me. As for the rest of you. I want you to begin scouring those tunnels. Ten day excursions and reports. If that is all right with the rest of you."

Tevos nodded. "Of course. I was willing to offer my support upon confirmation of the footage." She then turned to Hackett. "Do not think that just because we have lost our seat of power we are going to let you run the show, Hackett." There was hint of laughter in her voice that sent shivers down the spines of the Normandy crew.

With the meeting adjourned, the Normandy crew left save for Garrus who was asked to stay behind by Hackett.

"How are you holding up?"

Garrus scratched his chin and stared at the map Kasumi left up. His eyes flicked across it looking for the best routes as he spoke. "I've been better. The shakes and headaches don't help, but I'm alive. What do you need Jack and Kaidan for?"
Hackett chuckled and lit a cigarette. "Some researchers need a few powerful biotics to try out new prototype implants on. And I thought those two wouldn't mind the possibility of being back to one hundred percent."

Garrus pointed at the screen and the admiral nodded. The screen flickered momentarily and his omni-tool beeped when it was saved. "How long do we have"

"I'm giving you a week. And…"

"And she's right behind me isn't she?"

"Well you're no fun." CT appeared and saluted Hackett before turning to Garrus. "I'll get ahold of the necessary mechs and supplies while you formulate a plan."

"Thank you, CT."

She laughed quietly. "You are quite welcome, Garrus. I'll be sure to keep the strawberry shampoo on hand."

When she was gone he felt another headache coming on, this time out of sheer annoyance. "Spirits help me."

Hackett only gave him a reaffirming pat on the back before exiting the room. Outside, Garrus could hear him and CT laughing loudly.
Chapter 11

So Chapter 11..yeah..I'm kind of…I dunno hitting a bit of a snag. Let's see what I can do.

Chapter 11

"Well this is certainly unexpected."

Garrus couldn't help but nod in agreement. James remained dumbfounded and Tali, well Tali was speechless which was saying something. They had been wandering through the tunnels for about four days and decided to head back if they hadn't found anything the following day. They were one of several teams to make their way into the tunnels. It had taken them up until three o'clock in the morning for them to finally set up a course of action involving the tunnels.

The tunnels were massive. Easily as wide as the original width of the SR1 dotted with several entrances to the wards and other areas of the Citadel. They'd expected them to be smaller but after CT accidentally set off a chute beneath them that was the size of a manhole cover they understood the necessity for the size. These were used as much for the transportation of goods and disposal of garbage as much as they were a means of passage.

After that little heart attack they'd remained cautiously to one side, marking their path as they went so they could head back to their point of entry. The doors were to only be used in case of emergency, but they had popped into a few and found things and people in conditions that would forever haunt them.

Urz remained at the forefront of the group as they traveled, sniffing happily away in hopes of finding an odd scent. They were lucky there was light down in the tunnels. An ominous red light, but a light none the less. Their helmets were on constantly in case of toxic chemicals or other unsavory scents.

So far they had only reason to use one code and that was to gain entry. But after a two day hike they'd opened their first door to find a small nest of Keepers. Working on what appeared to be a large drive core.

"What the hell is it for?"

James' body jerked slightly but his brain fought the instinct and he just continued to watch.

"Tali, do you think you and Kasumi can access one of the consoles."

The two women looked at one another while James and CT began examining the Keepers. Garrus sent Urz in with Tali and Kasumi in case things got out of hand and waited near the entrance. There had to at least be a hundred Keepers in the room. None of them doing anything but working on the drive core. It was massive in size. Easily five times the size of the one in the SR2.

Using his omni-tool he activated the recording function on his visor. The HUD blinked momentarily and he began scanning the activities of the former Reaper servants. From what Chorban had said they may have been genetically engineered or the first species to be controlled by Sovereign and the others of his kind and with the Reapers destruction their survival was just as mysterious as everything else.

Walking clockwise he watched them. One Keeper would be adjusting something. The other cutting a length of wire. One would be working a console. Many with the same, and yet incredibly
individual tasks working seamlessly together amidst the gentle glow and hum of the drive core.

The Keepers acted as they always did, working in blissful apathy of the people around them so long as their work was remained unmolested. Tali and Kasumi each found a console to take care of while CT and James took care of their own work snapping pictures of the work the Keepers were doing and Garrus' eye didn't miss a single moment until Tali waved him over.

Shuffling through the crowd of insectoids, they were a lot heavier than they looked, he approached the engineer whose hand was shaking a bit.

"Tali, are you all right?"

She nodded as she pointed at the screen. "This data. It's incredible Garrus." He glanced over her shoulder at the screen. While he could read the words, his brain was unable to process the information and he said as much. Chuckling she said, "This drive core is one of several that are part of a network that powers the entire arm. Look." She pulled up a screen and showed several large areas like the one they were in blinking steadily, he could tell that they wouldn't be the only group to locate such a place. They hadn't ran into the other groups and radio silence was to be maintained unless there was an emergency.

"So, it helps us stay alive. That's good."

Snorting, Tali pulled up the information she had on her omni-tool and compared it to the file. "This is the core that we are looking at, and this is the core Xen had me working on when I was cleared for duty."

Garrus scanned them momentarily. "They're the same?"

"That's right. This one is the same as a drive core from a Destroyer class Reaper."

"Which means, what Tali?"

She waved her finger. "It means that this terminal might have control codes for the drive cores that we can use in the experimental ships that will be launching in the next few months."

"I don't like it, Sparks."

Everyone's attention turned to James who was shoving away a Keeper that was trying to take his gun away. "I'm not sure using this tech is a smart idea. What if those cores have Reaper memories stored in them."

Tali tapped the front of her mask. "That is a possibility. We aren't fully aware of the capabilities Reaper's drive cores and if there was a black box program installed…." Her voice drifted off as she began muttering to her self. "But the….and the amount of power divided by…the risk is…" She tapped the glass on her helmet furiously. "This information is too valuable to pass up." She sighed and activated her omni-tool and saved the data.

James gave a growl from his spot in the sea of green.

"Relax James. We'll talk with everyone before going forward with this. I don't think anyone wants to do anything stupid right now."

He kicked his way through the Keepers toward Tali and the others grunting as he began speaking. "Well I'm not getting on any ship with one of those drive cores. I can handle the geth. But a Reaper coming back to life? I'm gonna grab the nearest dreadnaught and ram it into the fucker the first
"Do you have so little faith in the engineers working on this project?"

He rubbed his nose before shaking his head. "I trust you, I don't trust that." He pointed at the core.

"But all our technology is based off the origins of that." Tali waved her hand in a mock grandiose gesture. James did not look amused.

"Yeah well the only thing I can say about our cores is that we knew where they were coming from and what was in them. I'd just as soon spend twenty years making one from scratch."

He stomped off to the entrance and past Kasumi whose hands were still flying over her keyboard. Tali shook her head when he was out of ear shot. "It's such a shame he thinks so little of himself."

Garrus watched as Urz began snapping at a Keeper that was trying to pin him down and clip his nails. "Have you told him that"

"He doesn't listen. He still thinks of himself as just a grunt. I thought Shepard had knocked some sense into his head. He even got the tattoo."

"Tattoo?"

Tali's body instantly locked up. "Shepard told me about it one night over drinks."

She was a horrible liar but he let it slide and instead turned to Kasumi. "You find anything interesting over there?"

The thief glanced up from her keyboard and nodded. "Plenty of old security files showing corrupt politicians, not that those are of any value. Medical records, those could come in handy. C-Sec files, ohhh the location of several armories. I think I'll keep that for my private use." Garrus gave a loud cough. "Fine," She groaned loudly, I'll forward an edited copy to Hackett. She turned gave him a glare. "You think a thief would be able to make a living in a society based on a barter system?"

"Is there anything else?"

She paused for a minute and stared at the screen. "This seems to be some video footage but I can't hack it. None of the codes I have match it and the algorithms are nothing like I've ever seen. It seems to be on a completely different security level. Even more difficult to crack than what Liara discovered on Thessia. And even those have given me problems in the past."

"So you can't break it?"

The thief shook her head as the keyboard shut down. "Sorry, Garrus. I'm going to need to head back topside and make use of the computers on the Crucible to deal with this."

"And I need to do the same with this core data." James let out a loud grunt near the door. "Oh shut up."

"Will you shut up for five seconds and listen!"

They heard only the hum of the core until it hit their ears. It sounded to the best of their knowledge like skittering. Pushing their way through the Keepers, Garrus felt like the were much more difficult to move than earlier. They continued with their work but they refused to move and the
sound that was once like skittering began to sound more like a rushing wave.

"What the hell is going on?"

It was CT who had decided to use her rifle like a golf club and knock a couple reapers out of her path. "What did you guys do?"

Looking at Kasumi's monitor he saw a flashing red light and cursed. "It's a security protocol! They think we're hostile! Tali!"

"I'm fine Garrus. CT climb on their backs."

Following the recommendation, the human followed the quarians lead and after a couple of attempts was able to gain enough footing. "Now what!"

"Walk on them!"

It was difficult but they followed Tali's lead and made their way out of the sea of Keepers. The women had a much easier time, but Garrus was a little more hesitant. Still, despite the fear of hitting his head he moved forward one step at a time as he watched the others at the entrance begin firing off rounds. The sound was growing louder and he couldn't make out the words of his comrades, and finally he stepped off the last Keeper and joined them.

"By the spirits."

His voice was lost even to him as he gazed out into an ocean of Keepers coming at him. He raised his hands and flashed several symbols. The Normandy crew all responded while CT looked confused. She waved at him and shrugged but Garrus just loaded a mine into his rifle and set it on the ground fifty meters ahead at the base of the tunnel. Tali sent out a combat drone which followed the trajectory of Garrus' mine, while James aimed his rifle.

Garrus raised his hand and waited, Tali's drone began to take out Keepers individually. If they made a noise they couldn't hear it. They fell one by one as it remained hovering over the mine and when they arrived at the mine James let loose a Carnage shot just as the drone set off the mine creating a large explosion that knocked a huge hole in the Keepers ranks.

They took off toward the hole, it was closing fast with the amount of Keepers they were contending with but Garrus raised his hand and switched to his Vindicator and let the rounds fly. Garrus kept CT close to him as he flashed hand signs to the squad. Kasumi's Locust was finding its marks and her Overloads were definitely knocking out Keepers. Tali's drones were providing them support cover and when they failed their explosions allowed for them to progress, albeit slowly through the ranks. James' size and grenades were doing their job as was expected of him. Garrus was dropping Keepers left and right, ordering them to advance and stop when needed. He could see what their salvation ahead. It was about two hundred meters ahead and they were going to run out of ammunition quickly. But they'd been through worse.

Sending out another mine, Garrus waved his hand and James let a grenade fly. It was a little of the mark and when it exploded the mine did not follow suit.

"Shit!" Garrus sent out an Overload but it didn't help. The mine was damaged and the Keepers soon closed the gap. Checking his gun, he cursed loudly when he saw he was half way through his current clip and only had one remaining.

"How are you on ammunition?" He signed above his head. Kasumi signed she was left with only two clips. James signed he was onto his shotgun and running low. The same went with Tali except
she was on her pistol. Deciding it was their only chance. He pulled out a small cylinder.

CT saw this and grabbed his hand and shook her head. He shrugged and waved a hand signaling them to fall in behind him. They knew what was coming and ducking behind a bit of rubble Garrus flipped the cap and hit the button. They were rocked forward as several explosions rocked the hallway. Smoke filled their visors and the explosions rang their ears. They heard no sounds save for the explosions.

Motioning to the corridor they ran, their feet barely touching the floor as they fired at any Keeper that was attempting to block their path. The explosions had done their job and the large brunt of the Keeper horde was busy trying to push their way through the piles of their dead brethren.

He pointed at the door and the squad ran past him. Kasumi and James helping Garrus keep covering fire while CT helped Tali to the tunnel near them. When he heard the faint sound of CT's voice Garrus and the others retreated up into the passage way. Once in, locked it behind them and they ran up. They didn't know where they were going, but it was all they could do. Finally able to hear, he noticed the heavy breathing of his crew as they ran until finally they came to a lift.

Stepping back he allowed Kasumi and Tali to hack into it and they boarded it. They remained silent throughout the trip until the doors opened into a large garden. And then Garrus felt something propel him several feet forward and send him tumbling to the floor. He was barely able to tuck in and avoid hitting his head but felt a foot in his stomach mere seconds later.

"YOU STUPID SON OF A BITCH! WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GET THOSE EXPLOSIVES!"

Hefting himself off the ground, Garrus saw James holding CT in a half-nelson. Shaking his head clear he told Kasumi and Tali to stay where they were while Urz took a defensive position in front of him, growling loudly as the woman screamed at him.

"YOU COULD HAVE COLLAPSED THE TUNNEL ON US!"

Dusting off the front of his armor, Garrus nodded at James who let the woman go. She was breathing loudly. Her body was shaking in anger her knees jerking as she fought the urge to attack him again. "We have a job to do unless you've forgotten that?"

"I haven't forgotten that, but I did what needed to be done. I set up a counter measure when I thought it was necessary and we came out alive so I suggest you thank me rather than complain about my saving your life. Unless you want me to send you back down that lift and break its motor so you have no choice but to deal with the Keepers."

He could see CT contemplating the severity of his threat. When she finally nodded she said, "Fine. But I'll be taking those files."

Kasumi chuckled and shook her head. "I'll mail it to Hackett and the others on my own time. You do not give me orders." She pointed at Urz. "I'd soon trust him with these files with than you."

CT looked at James who shook his head. "I know you're some hotshot with Hackett. But I don't know a damn thing about you or your service record so don't look at me to defend you."

She gave a hopeful look at Tali, but received a shaking head in response. "Fine. Do what you want. I'm heading back."

"How are you going to do that?" Garrus extended his arms and smirked. "We don't know where we're at so how are you going to head back?"
"Do you have any more of those explosives you stole from my stocks?"

"Why so you can collapse the roof down around us?"

The woman scoffed, but there was a hint of a smile on her lips. "Fair enough. Urz?"

The varren looked at her and bared his teeth.

"Think you can help me find out a way the Keepers get in here without the tunnels."

Urz shrunk back with his teeth bared, but when she pulled out a chunk of meat, Urz immediately relaxed and ran toward her.

"Well his loyalties are about as two sided as a politician."

Garrus snorted and stared after her while Kasumi came up to him and ran a hand along the back of his neck. He growled loudly and she stepped back hands raised. "Relax I was just going to check your implant."

"Don't bother. You'd know if there was a problem."

"Fair enough." She followed his gaze and rubbed her chin fondly as she sang. "OH JAAAAAMES."

Broken from a conversation with Tali. The marine turned to the master thief. "What is it, Locks?"

"Locks?"

Garrus grinned. "Your new nickname."

She stared at the turian for a moment. "I don't like it."

"Well you're stuck with it."

Groaning she stuck her hand out at the lieutenant. "Give it."

"Give what?"

He looked over his shoulder at CT who was following Urz into a small hole in the wall.

"Don't play coy with me, little boy. I know when somebody takes something that isn't their's now hand it over."

He felt Tali punch him and point at her friend. "Give it to her."

James chewed his lip and growled before stomping toward her, his hand digging into an ammo pouch and shoving something into Kasumi's hand. "Here."

"Not a bad job, little boy. But the truth is, she's too good for you to get the one up on." She examined the item James gave her. A small silvery disk. "And here I thought she'd make it difficult."

"What is it?"

Kasumi winked and hit a button. Immediately a series of documents popped up. "Let's see, military records, rather impressive was initially scoped out for black ops, but could not go due to personal
issues. High level IQ, exemplary skills in tactical theories. No wonder they kept her hidden and working logistics."

Garrus's eyes widened at that last word. "By the spirits he really did do this."

"Who did what?" Asked Tali and James in unison.

"Should I Garrus?"

He looked at the hole where they had yet to return from and nodded.

Kasumi scanned the files and pulled up a picture of CT sitting with her arms and legs wrapped around a sixteen year old with the same soft features, long red hair, and eyes as their recently excused squad mate. Their faces beaming at the camera that had taken the picture.

"Lieutenant Vega and Admiral Zorah. I give you Rear-Admiral Hannah Elizabeth Shepard."
Chapter 12

Chapter 11…probably not the strongest chapter but for some reason with the way I was going it felt right to do it the way I did. As for this chapter…mostly a plot device chapter in a way. A little muddled but again I had fun writing it.

By the way, Mark = Mercutio. Shepard's dead father. Just a heads up.

Chapter 12

They were back on Earth. Orders from above and the crew wasn't enjoying it. This time they'd been sent to a desert in southwest corner of a country what was once called, The United States. He'd read about it some, apparently CT was from this part of the planet and Garrus couldn't help but think of Thane as they trudged along in the Mako. James was in the drivers seat having the time of his life while Kasumi bounced nervously in her chair. Liara and Tali however looked positively ecstatic at the recklessness of James' driving. Garrus’ neck on the other hand had other opinions.

It had been a month since their mission into the tunnels. The information was vital enough that they had been relieved of any secondary journeys and Hackett had them doing reconnaissance and other side jobs for him. Though any following team was given strict orders on how to handle the Keepers after their report and the team was thankful that they didn't have to make a repeat journey.

They had spent the better part of three days hiking through ruins before finding a place where they could call for evac safely. When they had found a way out, Kasumi waited until their first nights rest to return the disk to its owner. Nobody knew what to say, James was all for confronting her, the same went for Garrus. But Tali and Kasumi were able to keep them calm. And CT, well she was CT, or Hannah as she was now known to them.

Garrus still couldn't wrap his head around it. It made perfect sense in hindsight, nearly everything did in that respect. And he could already understand the basics of the why, yet he wanted to confront her. But once they were back on the Crucible, he had been reassigned to scavenging duty again with James, while Tali, Liara, and Kasumi had spent their days working on their new project.

Which is why they were on this particular mission, to use the term lightly. Tali's information was yielding promising results. And the Mako was in charge of transporting some of the fruits of the engineers labor. Along with the three women. James and Garrus were supposed to be a security detail. Not that their three companions needed it.

"How much further is it? I think I'm growing blisters already." Kasumi asked as she rubbed her tailbone, her voice sounding like a child who needed to make use of the toilet.

"You think this is bad? You should have seen it when Shepard was in the drivers seat."

Kasumi's eyes widened in fear. "Shepard drove? And Liara you let her drive on Illium?"

The asari looked up from her work and arched an eyebrow. "That's precisely the reason I had her drive."

James laughed loudly from the front. "Lola, drive? What'd she do end up taking out a truck?"

"Almost, James." Responded Liara with a cool chuckle. "She ended up doing rather splendidly and no one got hurt save for the Spectre we were hunting. Though the Council was not pleased when we build them for the damage done to Azure."
They hit a bump and Kasumi let out a whimper of pain. "Watch it you oaf! I rather enjoy being able to feel my legs."

"Sorry about that. But, Azure…you actually went there?"

Tali's head turned the front and Garrus could see sweat beginning form on the back of his neck. "Yes, yes we did. Is there something you wish to know. I was only there for a short time, but I'm pretty sure I can give you a detailed account."

James shook his head. "Uh, no. That's fine, Sparks. I'll just keep my eyes on the road."

"What road? We're following a preset navigation route through a desert."

"Shut up, Scars."

Garrus leaned back into his seat and laughed. "Liara, you remember when she nearly drove us off a cliff on Noveria?"

The doctor sighed. "Unfortunately. I seem to recall quite a few geth shooting at us that day."

"Well if you had me they wouldn't have been much of a problem."

"And what could you do from the Mako?"

Tali glared at Liara. "I could have kept the shields from failing so myself and the mechanics wouldn't have had to spend so much time repairing this rig."

Liara nodded. "Fair enough, but we had the canon and machine gun and we spent the majority of the trip inside the Mako so your hacking abilities would have been a total waste."

Returning to her work, Tali began cursing under her breath. While Kasumi fidgeted in her seat. It pleased Garrus to see her in such a state. Usually she was like him, calm, collected, and a bit of a smart ass, and he liked that about her. So much so that when he noticed a special rock formation he pointed at James and used one of the hand signals they'd used in the Hammerhead.

James nodded and veered to the right a bit, lining up the Mako. Their friends were too busy with their work to notice what the two in the front were doing. Slowly, James built up their speed, again none of them noticed until just a few dozen meters out he slammed on the gas. All three of the women shouted at them while Urz slid to the back of the Mako and when they hit the edge they went sailing over the desert landscape.

Garrus felt his stomach drop while he laughed, James was howling in victory while Kasumi cursed at them, her feet trying to push her against the wall in a vain attempt to flee for safety. Tali and Liara attempted to scream at them, but laughter could be heard in their voices. When they landed, albeit fairly gently thanks to the thrusters on the bottom, Kasumi began cursing them in Japanese while Tali exhaled loudly.

"Damn it, Shep…I mean James! You're lucky the container didn't become dislodged from its trailer!"

"If you two do that again!" Liara's voice more amused than angry.

Urz barked loudly at them but quieted after a few moments.

"Just thought we'd try it for old times sake. Glad to see the old girl still has it." Garrus gave the wall
of the vehicle a gentle pat as they began rumbling along toward their destination. The air inside the
tank was ten degrees cooler after their little stunt.

After another three hours of driving, their destination was in sight. It was a large military
compound, it looked several decades old and Garrus had to appreciate the simplicity of it. He
remembered seeing older turian bases like the ones they were in during his short lived military
career, but just like those many of the human ones had become museums or supply depots as
opposed to long term defensive positions.

Still this place was unusually well secured. He noticed several snipers, three of them with Black
Widow rifles aimed at the tank. Several guards were equipped with Mattocks and Carnifex pistols.
Heavy duty equipment for taking out a target quick and easy. Garrus had become acquainted with
both guns and while he come to prefer his Vindicator and Valiant. He respected the craftsmanship
of the weapons and the skills of their handlers.

"I'm going to have to check the contents of the container. Please remain seated." The voice came
was female, for that he was certain. But he couldn't see the person or discern race thanks to the
noise the Mako was making. He heard the hydraulics on the door hiss open and the clamoring of
feet enter the tank. Followed by the groans of the squad.

"It's a pleasure to see all of you as well." Garrus put his face in his palm when he heard the woman
speak.

"Rear-Admiral, it is good to see you again."

"The same to you as well, Admiral Zorah. My apologies for the invasion, but I'm under strict orders
to confirm the contents of the container you have attached to the tank. You and Doctor T'Soni will
be the only ones necessary. The rest of you can remain in the tank." Urz gave a bark and she
laughed. "Fine you can come too. I doubt they want to smell what'll be coming out of you."

Garrus looked over his shoulder at the beast. "Traitor."

When the door shut, James leaned back and whistled loudly. "So this is what happened to her after
Hackett reassigned us."

"In charge of a derelict military base. Smells like what Urz has been brewing up for the past hour."

"That it does, Scars." James turned his head, "You think we'll get an honest answer this time?"

He shrugged. "We're post war James and trying to keep a solar system alive. I'd hate to say it but I
think we're about as close as we're going to get."

"I never figured you for someone who would just sit back and take it."

Garrus shook his head. "Right now I have to worry about keeping people fed and from killing each
other."

"I suppose you're right. But I'd still like to know what they've had us towing around for the past
two days."

Putting his feet on the dash, Garrus grunted. "I'm certain we'll find out soon enough." He pointed
out the window and saw Tali and the others walk past the gate with CT. When they were in far
enough, James was given the okay to pull in behind a jeep.

Following the vehicle they were brought into a giant warehouse. Where several soldiers and
scientists were eagerly awaiting them. After exiting, they were ordered get into the jeep. James protested, but stopped with a shake of Garrus' head. When they were seated the heard a series of hums and creeks as an engine started and the Mako and its cargo began to disappear beneath the ground.

"Hey! We had orders to take that thing back to the shipyard tomorrow and get reassigned."

"You have been reassigned Lieutenant Vega."

CT appeared with Liara and Kasumi.

"Where's Sparks?"

CT waved her hand. Her face was much older than Garrus remembered. Her red hair much grayer, but her clothes and attitude still told him to tread lightly.

"Admiral Zorah is being taken care of. She is on her way to the medical bay for sanitation before heading down into the labs."

"Sanitation? Does she have an infection?" James voice, for the first time in Garrus' memory, actually sounded scared.

"Noting of the sort, Lieutenant." He voice was a bit softer this time. "We are keeping the cargo in a clean room for now to begin some very delicate work. And with that synthetic limb of hers, we can't take any chances of any dirt or other contaminants destroying the work this facility has been doing."

"And what work is that, Rear-Admiral?"

She turned to Garrus with a cool smile on her lips. "Something you will find out about soon enough, on that you have my word. But for now you will be taken to your quarters along with Ms. Goto. Dr. T'Soni and I have many important matters to discuss."

"I've said it before and I'll say it again, Scars. This is bullshit!"

Garrus and James were sitting in the common room of their quarters along with Kasumi. They'd taken a brief tour and were once again feeling guilty about the luxurious nature of their surroundings. Once again they had been given private rooms, an abundance of food, a work station for weapons and armor, as well as full access to the extranet among other things. And while Kasumi had taken to the comfort rather easily, Garrus was going through his mission files James was pacing like trapped wolf. Kasumi was fiddling around with her omni-tool, the occasional curse slipping from her lips as the code she was no doubt trying to hack blocked her. "This security, wait a minute…"

Garrus turned his attention back to Vega and his ramblings. "You're going to tread a path in the floor if you don't stop that pacing."

"Fuck you, Scars. I thought you were all for going outside the system. But, I can see that was a lie. Probably like a good portion of those war stories you told me."

Chuckling, Garrus took a sip of his water. "I may have embellished a few things, what man doesn't, but I've also learned a bit of patience over the past few years. You do that when you grow up. And besides," he eyed Kasumi, "we have the best thief in the galaxy with us. I'm pretty sure we'll know everything there is to go on in this place within the hour."
James had a rebuttal prepared but the door hissed open and his anger was immediately forgotten as Tali removed her helmet revealing her covered, yet beaming face underneath. Her eyes bright with satisfaction.

"Glad to see you all aren't destroying the base."

"He was prepared to," said Kasumi pointedly as James stared at Tali. When he didn't move, she got up from her seat and planted her foot in his back shoving him forward. "Just hurry up and kiss her already. I have more important things to do than play matchmaker with you." she ten proceeded to storm out of the common area growling, "It's like watching a trashy old teenage romance.

Opening a file, Garrus began reading it to keep his eyes occupied while his visor played an old human song in his ear.

"You're okay?"

His eyes locked intently on his screen as the music played in his ear, Garrus remained blissfully unaware of what was happening and hoped it would be taken to James or Tali's room. He was thankfully spared such a moment of awkwardness as a bell was heard. When he looked up he could see James making a bee line for the door while Tali adjusted her shawl.

When she made eye contact with Garrus she immediately headed toward the hallway and looked through each door before entering the one Garrus recognized as James's.

"Hey, Scars."

Breaking free of his thoughts, Garrus turned to the door to see James standing head to shoulder with the admiral. Climbing to his feet he turned and began raising his arm.

"No salute, Vakarian. This is a short and informal visit. You are free to leave, Vega." She however did not reproach the lieutenant for his salute and remained quiet until the younger man was gone.

Looking around the room she nodded. "You are pleased with your arrangements?"

Garrus nodded, "Truth be told we're used to the bare minimum. This is just a little too comfortable for us."

She snorted but a small smirk was on her lips as she stared at the news feed. "Understandable. You view yourselves as simple soldiers, and yet a simple soldier would not have been able to do what you and the crew of the Normandy did. You deserve a bit more than the bare minimum and many are more than willing to take you up on the offer." She turned to him her face set like stone. "Just be sure you keep your humility about you and you'll be fine."

"Of course ma'am. And thank you for the hospitality. But if it's all the same to you, I'd rather be more up front and ask why the hell you had us reassigned here"

The corner of her mouth curled and she headed toward the door. "Civilian attire, Vakarian. Eleven P.M. topside. We have a bar set up there so we don't have drunken idiots destroying the equipment my people have been developing."

"If it's all the same to you, Admiral. I'd rather not."

"This is not a suggestion Vakarian." Her voice was now as cold as tray of water James had put in the freezer an hour ago. "You will be there or you will be put in the brig. Do you understand?"
He wanted to say no. But something told him she would follow through on her threat so he nodded. "Fine. But I'm bringing them," he pointed at the hallway, "with me."

"If it makes you feel safer, than you can go ahead and come loaded for bear."

She left without another word.

At ten-fifty-five, Garrus, Tali, James, Liara, and Kasumi entered the bar. It was filled with several people. Some playing poker, others were drinking at tables and laughing loudly, some were just sipping their drinks and watching the vid that was playing. Scanning the room he found CT sitting at the bar in military casuals. In her right hand was a cigarette and in her left a sifter of what looked like brandy. Her face occasionally broken by a laugh at the vid.

The group split from him, heading over to a nearby pool table. All except Liara who followed Garrus to the bar. She placed an order while Garrus sat at the bar next to CT who barely paid any attention to him while she tapped some excess ash off the tip of her cigarette. When Liara left with the drinks she raised her hand at the bartender who pulled out a bottle of turian brandy, a glass, and water and set them in front of Garrus while she downed the rest of her drink.

"Rough day, Admiral?"

She chuckled and waited for her glass to be refilled. "Not especially, Garrus. I've got a good crew, I'm alive. And we're showing signs of actual sustainable agriculture for all the non-humans inhabiting our system." Garrus found a hint of annoyance in her voice, but he couldn't blame her. "But we're surviving and things are looking up." She sipped gingerly at her drink. "You going to crack that bottle or am I wasting a couple of packs of smokes on you?"

Garrus pulled the water to him and poured it into the glass. He took a deep drink and heard her scoff. "It's dangerous to offer me a beverage, Admiral."

She drank a bit more and lit up another cigarette. After a long drag she pursed her lips and blew out a steady stream of smoke. "I know you didn't take your meds today, Garrus so you're safe to drink. And call me, Hannah."

"I'm not sure that's appropriate."

"Fuck protocol Garrus. You were important to my daughter and stood by her. You've earned the right to call me by my first name."

"Then what the hell was all that 'CT' business about? Call sign?"

She laughed again at the screen and ate a bit of stale popcorn, spitting out a seed in the process. "Your thief friend should have figured out that I was black ops with that device I allowed the lieutenant to steal."

Garrus decided to risk the drink and asked for shot glass and downed a shot of his own. "It said you were scouted for black ops but decided against it for personal reasons."

Hannah took a long drag and blew the smoke from her nose. "Well the truth is the call sign comes from the state I was born in." She turned to him and saw the confusion on his face. "Connecticut, I was born in Connecticut and it just kind of stuck throughout my military career."

Sipping at the brandy, Garrus nodded. "I've seen similar from my brief time in the turian military. But the black ops aspect still has me confused." She remained quiet at this statement. "I take it, Leela was the reason you left?"
"The reason I left, and the reason I went back."

She drained her glass again and filled it once more.

"No wonder she was vague about your responsibilities."

"She was vague because I made it vague to her. It was my own personal conviction to her that she think of me in a better light. I'd rather she idolized her father than me." There was a small hint of bitterness in her voice.

"What did your husband have to say about it? I'm sure he was a man who wouldn't like you to hide something like that from your child."

She chuckled. "Mark wanted me to share it with her, but I chose not to. I'd rather her only think of one of us as a killer. And he was a person who met his enemy face to face. Me? I was just a coward who did it without getting caught. Hell there were plenty of missions I wasn't even in the room. I just found a way to get them to take themselves out."

"There's no shame in what you did. You chose the life of a soldier and killed to protect your child and your people. As a turian you would be commended for such a thing."

"Says the failed soldier and C-sec officer who was only given respect after joining with the first human Spectre and saving the galaxy not once but three times." She held up two fingers before noticing her mistake and held up a third. "Probably the worst turian I've ever heard of."

He laughed and downed his second drink. "You wouldn't be the first one to call me that. Though Leela was pretty fond of saying it."

The admiral shook her head. "And here I thought Leela was just pulling my leg."

"No, ma'am. No leg pulling. And I don't regret one damn second of it."

She brought her drink to her lips and held it there for a moment before setting it down. "I thought you'd just randomly found those dog tags."

"It was a spare set she'd given to me before leaving me with EDI and the other troops to head into the Conduit while the Battle of London was happening."

She pushed the drink away and lit her third cigarette but didn't take a drag. "So how intimate were you two?"

"As intimate as one could get when fighting an enemy like the Reapers. To be honest I'm still an idiot with human mating, hell I'm still bad at it with turian females, but she...she was different."

His voice trailed off and Hannah laughed. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing is funny, Garrus. She had that ability. I think that's one reason you all came out of the shit storms you got thrown into."

"What's that, Hannah?"

"She had this odd ability to convince people they will succeed even if death was staring them in the face."

"Even those under her command on Akuze?"

Hannah downed her drink in response. "There's no way any one could have convinced the people
involved with that nightmare that they would come out alive."

"But she did."

"And she still had nightmares didn't she?"

Garrus remained silent for a moment before speaking. "Among nightmares of other things yes, she did. The nights when she didn't scream were some of the worst."

Hannah nodded. "Thank you for being there for her."

Garrus smiled and gave her a knowing look. "She was strong, Hannah." He pulled out the third journal and put it on the bar top. "Even with how many times I saw her break she remained strong."

The admiral picked up the journal and laughed at it. "This is Mark's influence. It has to be."

"She said he gave her the idea."

Putting the journal down she noticed the date. "I take it she started this around the time she was eighteen. When her career started."

"On the day that she said she found out you were keeping the calls from the Alliance from her. Said your husband coerced you into buying her some new books and a fancy dinner."

She laughed away a few tears. "I remember that night. It was a few weeks after her...." her voice trailed off and she handed the journal back to Garrus. "It's a subject best not discussed."

He watched her pour another drink and drain half of it in one go. He watched her for a minute. The joy was replaced by guilt and sadness, her hands were shaking terribly. Taking a chance he reached out and put his hand on hers. She looked at him in shock and he nodded.

"I know."

Hannah scoffed and ran a hand through her graying hair. She once again looked years older. "Of course you do. I don't think she could hide something like that from her crew."

"Well, she told us all individually. And nobody made any comment after finding out. I was one of the last to find out, possibly the last. I think she didn't want to scare me off or.."

"Or have her feel like a freak or like she was being used."

Garrus nodded. "I told her I didn't want to come off as a person with a fetish for humans when we first discussed it. I just wanted the same thing she did, to have a bit of happiness before our possible deaths."

"And after you found out?"

"I still didn't care. After making a total ass of myself I told her if she wanted me to leave that I would. At the moment I cared enough about her to not destroy the relationship I had with her. She was a mentor to me among other things and a cherished friend."

"And now?"

"And now," he repeated before smiling. "She said it herself. There is no Shepard without Vakarian. And the reverse is the same."
She squeezed his hand. "That's good to know."

"She deserved nothing less."

"On that you are right." She patted the scaled hand. "The hell that girl went through."

Garrus laughed. "She never thought of it that way. She knew she had life bad, but figured that there were those out there who had it worse and that she was needed to help make it better."

Hannah laughed. "Yeah, that girl was always empathetic. One of the many things she got from her father."

"I think she got a bit more from you than you realize."

She sipped at her brandy. "What do you think she got from me?"

Garrus took another shot of liquid courage. "Well, I can say with absolute certainty that she got being a leader from the two of you. But if you're any indication I have quite a few things to look forward to in the next thirty years."

The admiral chuckled. "Flattery, Vakarian?"

He shrugged. "Well it can't hurt. I figure she'd want me to play nice with you."

"Well it certainly bought you some points." She sipped at her points.

They sat in uncomfortable silence for a short while. Before Garrus asked, "Can I ask you a few questions."

She spat out another popcorn seed. "Shoot. I know you're good at that." She wiggled an eyebrow at him.

Garrus rubbed his forehead and chuckled. "Yeah, that I am. But I'm actually curious about a few things."

"Like what?" She was chewing on some more popcorn and chuckled again at the vid screen.

"What was she like? Before, I mean."

Picking at her teeth with her tongue, he could see her eyes dart back and forth between him and the screen. Garrus didn't keep his eyes off of her for a second and finally she broke. "What do you think she was like?"

"The only person I've ever known is her as a soldier. Anything else I've learned from these journals and those start with her just before she turned eighteen."

"Are you sure you want to know this?"

Garrus nodded. "At the moment all I have left are memories. So why not share the ones I have with one of the people who knew her best."

She drained half a bottle of water and sighed. "She was a kid. A good kid. Smart, kind, respectful. A bit of flirt with some of the older officers, she managed to get them into trouble a few times. I remember she had a bunch of the kids on one ship wrapped around her finger running drills like she saw me doing with some of the troops Mark and I were training. She was our kid." Garrus watched her closely, her eyes sad yet strangely happy. "She was the light of our lives. Even if one
of us came back from a mission that went south she always made us smile."

"That sounds a lot like her."

Hannah wiped a stray tear and pulled out a tiny projector and from it a picture of her daughter appeared. She was no older than seven dressed in ripped jeans and a tee-shirt. Her hair wildly uncombed and a series of bandages on her arms. Even then, before the surgeries and therapies all he could see was the woman he'd followed into battle. "She was always getting into trouble as well. I remember her always getting into stupid fights with other kids just because she spoke her mind to them. Though I guess it was because she always had her nose stuck in some book we'd given her or documentary. It didn't earn her many friends having such strong opinions. And not to mention the biotics among other things."

"Strong morals and convictions. Sounds like her. I bet it didn't make things easier when she got older."

She sipped carefully at her drink again. Her hands shaking once more. "Yeah. She started having certain feelings about herself. Saw a few videos and we took her to a few shrinks and they 'diagnosed' her."

Garrus laughed at the familiar hand gesture he'd seen Sparatus use a few times. "You make it sound like she had a disease."

"To some it still is. People like Traynor and Cortez are fine, but she had to keep it who and what she was at home. They thought it was a phase. But after awhile it all made sense. She only ever seemed happy when locked in our quarters or when we were off ship for leave. She was able to be who she was and dress and act in a way that made her feel complete. The sad thing is, that the only thing that was ever wrong with her was her chromosomes. Everything else was damn near perfect. But we still had to hide our daughter like some dirty little secret for over half a decade." She sipped again at the alcohol in front of her. "And then she turned fifteen."

Garrus noticed the change in her voice and poured her another drink. "She told me about those kids on the ship. How she ended up getting the crap kicked out of her and the parents started blaming her. About her and your husband meeting you with her wearing one of your dress uniforms."

"Proudest fucking moment of my life."

Garrus chuckled. "So I take it, it was all sunshine and bunnies, as Joker would put it?"

Hannah shrugged. "Not really, she still had problems but she was finally free to be who she was around people, though the transition with the shots made it a bit more difficult once certain things began to appear that were never there before." She gave an animated show of a chill running down her body. "Those were some of the more awkward moments of my life. But she needed me there and I was never going to abandon her. Not like my mother." She downed her drink again and smirked at Garrus whose eyes were still locked on her like the targeting mechanism of a fighter. "And eventually some kids on our final ship got to know her and she made friends and even started dating. Though she occasionally got into it with her friends because she wouldn't let them doll her up before dates."

"No dresses?"

The admiral looked like she was about to die at the comment. Her face was bright red from the laughter and after several moments she calmed down and shook her head. "No way. Dresses were a no fly zone with her. I tried to offer her one of mine for a date once. Let's just say she doesn't need
her biotics to send someone flying."

Nearly choking on his water, Garrus could only imagine what Leela had done when her mother had offered her the dress, and he decided it best not to tell Hannah about Kasumi actually getting her daughter into a dress. When they calmed down he swished the water I his glass and looked at the projection fondly. "I wouldn't have her any other way. I find the hoodie and jeans to be a rather attractive look for her. That and the sports bra and shorts."

Shuddering, the admiral kicked the turian gently. "Don't give me any sordid details on your love life with my daughter." When he feigned pain she chuckled. "She ever tell you about the time I caught her and the admiral's daughter?"

Garrus spat out his drink and stared at her. "An admiral's daughter? Now who's offering up sordid details."

Hannah winked and finished her latest drink. And Garrus' curiosity got the better of him. "What was her name?"

"Penny Benjamin." She stated without hesitation. "Our Leela was seventeen the Penny was almost nineteen. It was about six months before the final surgery." The meaning behind final was painfully obvious to the two of them. "Mark had a mission that was taking too long and I had finished early with mine. We were stationed on a small colony for awhile, Penny and Leela grew close, we knew of course and she was a good kid. Treated our Leela with respect and kindness. We both liked her." She poured another drink. "And when I came home I caught them in her bed. They were asleep, naked, and it didn't take much for me to figure out what had happened the night before."

Garrus had to take another drink to process the information and Hannah grinned devilishly. "It was not a fun conversation between the three of us. Considering the fact that they got into our liquor cabinet."

"Underage drinking and raging hormones, that usually spells disaster."

Hannah shifted uncomfortably. "Usually, but our Leela was never one to do things without considering the consequences. And I couldn't get too mad at her. I was the same age when I first slept with somebody and it wasn't like I could stop them not even being on the planet." Lighting up another cigarette she exhaled with a laugh. "She apologized and I could tell neither of them had malicious intent. I was more upset about the liquor than anything, it made some of those precautions completely useless. And well, I didn't want to see her hurt." She drank a bit more and said, "And she wasn't. Penny left along with her father, who never learned of the situation and they lost touch with one another shortly there after. And until you or Liara she never made mention of anyone she became involved with ever again."

The uncomfortable silence returned after that and Garrus watched the vid as well for a few minutes before changing the topic. "So why did you hide your identity from us. I had my suspicions about you, but why did you do it?"

"Would you have allowed me to come if I had told you who I was?"

Garrus shook his head. "I don't know if I would have. But it may have helped keep you from getting your ass handed to you by Jack."

She shrugged. "I remember that fight a little differently, but I see your point. I've just grown accustomed to hiding my identity for so long that it's become second nature."
"Noted. Just be sure to tell us the truth next time."

She smirked. "Noted."

Turning from the woman to the screen, he noticed the date on the bottom of the screen and the time. When he saw the admiral raising her fresh filled glass, he stopped her and pointed. She blinked a few times and her eyes widened when she finally took notice.

They waited until the time changed to quadruple zeros and the date switch to the eleventh. Hannah raised her glass over the hologram of her young daughter and smiled at it. "Happy birthday, sweetheart. My little Vanguard."

Garrus clinked his glass over the hologram and in the usual rumble of his voice said without his translator in slightly broken English. "Happy birthday, Leela."

Hannah's eyes widened in shock but she shared the drink with him and moved the hologram over to him. "Keep it. So that if you find her, she knows I'm still around."

He nodded and tapped a button until a picture of her in military garb appeared. Smiling warmly he looked at the mother of his mate and smiled as her mother lit another cigarette before pouring herself a tall glass of water.

Pouring a glass of his own, he scratched his chin. "Mind if I ask a few more questions?"

"Anything, Garrus."

Taking a drink of water he sighed as Hannah turned her attention back to the video screen.

"What's with her and the Jell-o wrestling?"

Water sprayed the bottles on the bar and pounded her chest coughing while Garrus heard James and the others laugh from the pool table at the sight of the admiral. Garrus noticed one of Tali's drones disappear and figured the engineer had been recording them for the past few minutes.

When she finally calmed down enough, the admiral grabbed both bottles of liquor and poured them both some more and said, "Liquor up, Garrus. Because we got a long road ahead of us."
Chapter 13

I thought it was gonna take a few days to figure out the chapter but a nice relaxing thirty minute thinking period and I figured it out today….soon my pretties…

Also REPOST OF THIS CHAPTER! The ending was crap so I decided to repost it…though much of the flaws were pointed out by a reader. She was right and it needed to be done!

Chapter 13

"Are you sure you're trained in how the proper use and care of this rifle?"

The soldier stared at Garrus, her face a deep crimson from the sun and chastising she was receiving from the turian. "I'm a soldier in the Alliance. And have been trained in the use of all standard equipment."

He snorted and flipped the Mattock around and laid it flat on her table. With ease he disassembled the exterior and pointed at the mechanisms. "That much is clear. This rifle is not standard issue. It originally was not meant to handle a thermal clip. And because of this," he pulled out a piece of the gun, "when you go to discharge your clip you'll effectively cause the gun to blow up in your face due to your faulty reinsertion."

Setting down the piece Garrus removed the parts and pushed the gun back in front of the soldier. "I'll walk you through it again."

"Yes, sir."

Two hours, and several corrections, Garrus was certain the girl would be able to field strip the gun with confidence. But he'd be checking in on her from time to time. After their arrival he and James had been designated to take proper command of the armory. And they had their work cut out for them. The armory was in total disarray and after three days of cleaning they had it completely organized and working like a well oiled machine and running routine inspections on the weapons and daily trainings on proper maintenance.

Many of the soldiers treated their assignment like it was a resort vacation. There was no enemy left to fight and they were guarding a base without knowing why. And Garrus understood their frame of mind, but he had first hand experience knowing the real state of what was going on. He knew that things weren't as peaceful as they seemed and it stirred something in him and James when he saw the carelessness of the people who weren't taking the job seriously.

To be fair, Hannah blamed some of that on herself. She was so focused with her work in the lower levels, of which only those working on the project knew the specifics of, and had paid dearly for not taking more direct control of the situation. And there was resistance at first when she announced the removal of those she'd left in charge of the squads.

That didn't go over too well with a certain number of people, primarily because they thought of the lieutenant and Garrus as merely elevated grunts. And Garrus agreed with them to a point. In the hand to hand, Garrus had a number of close calls while James ended up on his face a couple of times. But they got their point across and the dissenters begrudgingly fell into place. That still didn't stop them from occasionally making life a living hell for them on occasion.

Putting away his tools he checked the clock and looked tapped a claw against his forearm. It made a dull ticking sound as it hit his armor in rhythm with the old clock. He found the sound soothing.
He had grown up only with holographic displays but he'd found the old clock while cleaning up the armory and made it a project to keep himself busy when he worked nights. It'd taken awhile to modify it but he had to admit he'd grown fond of the little rosewood clock.

Finally after being nearly half an hour late, James showed up in light armor and a smug look on his face. Garrus knew what that meant and shook his head. He knew where the lieutenant had just come from and knew as certain Hannah would not have appreciated his distracting Tali from her work.

"Don't start with me, Scars." Garrus let out a deep grunt that made the lieutenant jump. "The fuck was that!"

Chuckling the turian patted the human on the shoulder and put a towel in his hands. "Don't worry about it, Vega. Just make sure you're on time tomorrow. I'd hate to see what the admiral would do to you if word got out about your little liaisons with Tali up in that little nest you two have made..

"How do you know I was even with her?"

Garrus pointed at his own neck as he headed toward the door, a knowing chuckle escaping his lips. "One of the nice things about not having lips like yours, I have to break skin to leave any sort of evidence."

Without a look back, Garrus headed into glowing twilight that was the desert evening. He'd come to enjoy the desert. The cold nights were a little unbearable, but the heat reminded him of home. Staring up at the sky, he glared at the giant crescent the explosion burnt into the sky. A permanent reminder of the war.

"Excuse me, Vakarian, sir."

He turned to see the female officer he'd been teaching earlier. "Sergeant Connor, what can I do for you?"

Connor adjusted her rifle and saluted. "My apologies sir, but Rear-Admiral Shepard has asked for you to join her in the conference room."

"I'm off duty for the day. Can't you get Vega or someone else to go?"

"I can't do that, sir. You're presence is mandatory and so is Lieutenant Vega's. They've placed Claudus in charge of the armory until you get back."

Garrus spat on the ground and grumbled. Claudus was competent and would keep everything under control, but something smelt wrong about this sudden meeting. Not to say that Hannah didn't share things with them, but an unscheduled meeting was an unusual call for her.

"Fine, Connor. Send word that I'll join them shortly." When she didn't move, Garrus rubbed a hand along the back of his neck. He'd need to hit the infirmary soon, but an unscheduled meeting was an unusual call for her.

"Lead the way."

After a ten minute walk, Garrus turned left to the conference room and stopped only when he heard Liara. "What's the problem, T'Soni?"

Liara was attempting to balance several data pads in her arms only to drop the majority of them on the floor. Bending down, Garrus picked them up and blinked rapidly at what he saw. "Liara what is all this?"
Snatching the pad from Garrus, the doctor put the pad back in her arms and smiled. "You'll find out soon enough. Follow me."

"The conference room…"

"Is in the lower levels."

Garrus remained stationary. "The lower levels? Liara what the hell is going on?"

The asari shook her head as a few soldiers walked past her. When they were gone she took a few steps backwards and whispered to Garrus. "Just follow me and you will know soon enough. We don't want to cause a panic."

Growling again he stood up and straightened his armor. "Fine, Liara. But this better be worth it."

"Trust me, Garrus. You'll find the outcome to be quite fulfilling."

"Somehow I doubt that, Liara."

She rolled her eyes and began walking down the hallway. "And I thought being the Shadow Broker made me a cynic."

Catching up with her he watched the passing of the soldiers and received the occasional frown from the soldiers who hadn't accepted his and James' new authority. "You know, Liara it's amazing that you lasted as long as you did with how often you blab about being the biggest information broker in the galaxy."

She laughed and gave him a knowing look. "Well it doesn't really matter since much of our communication with the rest of the galaxy has been cut off. And besides, much of my resources were diverted to the armada. Dextro and amino based crops, building supplies, eezo, the list goes on Garrus. I figure that if people know who I am, I may garner a few more favors after this project proves successful."

A chill shot down his spine. "You aren't planning on taking over Omega are you?"

Liara gave a thoughtful hum and looked up at the ceiling. "It is certainly a much more fortified position than my old ship was. However I'm not a fan of having to deal with so many gangs and Aria does have the upper hand in age and knowledge. But I'm sure I could figure something out."

Garrus increased the distance between the two of them by a few extra inches as they approached the end of a hallway. Taking the data pads against his will, Garrus watched as Liara activated her omni-tool and opened a hidden lift inside the wall.

"Hidden elevators? When has anything in our lives involving hidden elevators ever resulted in anything good?"

"Maybe this time will be different."

Faltering for a moment, Garrus stepped into the lift followed by Liara who used her omni-tool once more to shut the door.

"Security clearance code, please."


"Welcome Doctor T'Soni. Secondary party please state your identity."
Garrus looked to Liara who simply nodded. "Garrus Vakarian."

"Voice match confirmed. Please stick your hand out for D.N.A confirmation."

"D.N.A?"

"Yes, please insert your hand palm up for verification." A hole opened in the wall next to him.

His left hand paused above his right and he looked to Liara. "Is this really necessary?"

"Garrus you have your neck drained by a needle three times that size multiple times a month. This is just a little prick."

Growling he removed his glove and put his hand in the slot and after feeling the needle pierce his palm and a small spray of medi-gel, he put the glove back on and took some of the pads back. "I meant the need for my blood, not the use of the needle Liara."

"D.N.A sequence confirmed. Welcome Garrus Vakarian. Please enjoy your visit to the lower levels." interrupted the V.I. and the lift hummed to life.

"In a way it is necessary, Garrus. We've been working on this project for quite awhile and we've taken as many precautions as we can to ensure that it remained safe during the War."

About to speak, Garrus was interrupted by the opening of the lift and was greeted by James and Tali. The human not looking as amused as his counterpart.

"She give you the runaround as well?"

"To an extent."

"Yeah, same here." He turned his disgruntled visage to the engineer. "Are we waiting for anyone else?"

"Not that I'm aware of. The others have been here for a few hours and Hannah is only waiting on us."

Without another word, James waited for the women to lead the way and fell in behind them and next to Garrus. As they walked through the halls, they passed by several workers, some dressed in hazmat suits and others speaking in hushed voices or stopping their discussions all together when Garrus and James appeared.

"And the secrets just keep on building."

"If that's the way you're going to act, Lieutenant you can turn around and head back to Hackett and scavenging duty."

They stopped and they turned to the left to find Hannah sitting with her feet up on the conference table. In the room were Jack and Kaidan. Jack's hair even longer than before and Kaidan looking rather unkempt. But they were in much higher spirits than when Kaidan last saw them. Kaidan and Jack began to get up from their seats but Hannah stopped that.

"I didn't bring you down here for reunions."

"And yet you have a large portion of the Normandy crew standing before you in a government classified location. Which means, based on my experience, you're probably going to end up on a mission that will most likely kill us." The crew all stared at James who shrugged. "What the fuck
else would they bring us in for?" Jack began snickering while Kaidan shook his head. After a few moments the others gave their own little laughs and even Hannah had to crack a smile.

"Well, Lieutenant it seems that there is something rattling around in that skull of yours."

He glared at her. "I'll have no problem making your brain rattle. Now are you going to tell us what the fuck is going on?"

Jack choked on the water she was drinking and Hannah laughed. When she calmed down, she held up her hand. "Number one, yes I will be telling you what is going on. Number two, watch your tone with me, Vega. And number three," she lowered her fore and middle fingers and raised her pinky, "I have something that's a bit more effective than you at rattling my brain."

Jack burst into laughter at the joke but James had to be held back from bull rushing her. When he'd finally calmed down enough, Garrus decided it would be better for him to speak.

"Hannah, can you please refrain from destroying Vega's self esteem and just tell us why we've been stationed here?"

The admiral clicked her tongue and sighed. "You have earned the right to know what's been going on. Liara, do you have those documents in order?"

Setting the pads on the table, Liara went behind the admiral and coughed gently. "As you are well aware, this facility is a reconstructed military base from Earth's past. It was originally built during the second half of Earth's twentieth century. It's main purpose was to test out combative aircraft. But after the attack on the Citadel it was repurposed."

Using her omni-tool Liara brought dimmed the lights and brought up a projection. "This looks familiar to all of us correct?"

"That's the thing in London that Anderson and Shepard jumped into? The Conduit, right?"

Nodding at Vega, Liara changed the pages for them showing it standing along side two similar shaped objects. "Not only in London, James. But on Ilos, on the Citadel, and many other planets."

The Screen flickered to several planets. Palaven, Ilos, Earth, Mars, Rannoch, Eden Prime Tuchanka, the list grew larger and larger.

"These Conduits were placed on planets with high probability of creating and sustaining sentient life that could possibly reactivate the Citadel. They were either buried, left in remote places, or other places that were difficult to get to while not impossible. In a way it is almost similar to how the Protheans left us the beacons."

Garrus felt his mandibles twitch. "So what you're saying is that they planted them as a way for us to accidentally stumble across the Citadel if we got lucky. Their way of 'guiding' us as they called it."

"Precisely," responded Hannah who had remained seated. "But it's rather interesting. Don't you think. All of these conduits were set for one destination. And yet they are on multiple planets where many species that gained FTL flight and advanced military strength evolved."

The room was silent for a moment until Kaidan spoke. "So you're telling me, that we can network the with the other Conduits on the home planets of other species?"

Hannah winked at him and nodded. "That's precisely what we're saying, Major." Pointing to Liara she waited until the screen showed a Mass Relay. "As you are well aware, the Relays are
completely shot to shit. We've no real way of harnessing the power of turning one on for several more years. But, the Conduits we had a little bit of luck on cracking those buggers thanks to Tali and Kasumi."

"Oh come now, Shep. I was just lucky enough to find that bit of code you needed. You and that team of yours did all the real heavy lifting."

A familiar shimmer came from the corner of the dark room making both Jack and James nearly jump out of their skin. Kasumi just laughed while Garrus asked, "What do you mean by 'team'?"

Having the lights turned back on, Hannah sat at the table and spun around in the chair as she spoke. "When my daughter suggested Anderson for the position of Councilor she made one of the smartest moves I've ever seen her pull. I don't know if it was intentional but it was pretty damn smart." She stopped the chair and swayed side to side in it. "Once he was in power, Anderson contacted me and several other top end military people from around the galaxy. Salarian, human, turian, asari, it didn't matter but he found a way to get us together. There were plenty of people willing to believe that Sovereign wasn't a fabrication or a freak accident and we had some pretty sharp minds show up to begin strategizing against them." She stopped and looked at them, her eye dark. "The problem is that the Reapers came a few years too soon. We'd barely been able to figure out how to get the project running and then they hit. All our forces were focused on the battle."

"And you were in charge of this project to do what exactly? Network the Conduits to talk to one another?" It was Kaidan who spoke, and though it was question the major knew he'd hit the nail on the head.

"That's exactly right. The Conduits had a preset destination but we figured out we could reprogram them. Problem is we were just working on that bit of code cracking when the Reapers hit. And had we found the information we needed sooner."

"We could have transported troops in via the Conduits for shock and awe tactics."

She nodded, "Or emergency escapes without the use of ships."

Their was silence for a moment, them taking in the deaths of so many and having an alternate solution so close but be put on hold.

Finally Garrus spoke, "But if the Conduits are essentially smaller Mass Relays, how can we get them to work if we can't get the Mass Relays up and running?"

"Again it comes down to the code and the power supply." Snorted Hannah who was now fiddling with her lighter. "We have the codes which by some sheer amount of dumb luck we were able to translate, but the Mass Relays require more power than we could possibly imagine. However thanks to our engineers we found another way."

The lights in Garrus' head flipped on and he saw the realization dawn on a few other's faces. "The drive cores of the Reapers?"

"Bingo." She tapped her nose. "Thanks to our preliminary work it wasn't too hard to gather the necessary components from the Reapers to reactivate the Conduits after the destruction of the relays. Tali and her group were able to figure out the necessary power draw that would be required and well, let's just say, things have gotten interesting around here."

The she had previously been sitting in front of rose to reveal a large underground bunker with a conduit in it. It's central core was glowing brightly and connected to it were four large Reaper cores
all pulsing quietly.

"What the fuck?" were the words that came from Jack and James. Tali laughed and Garrus remained dumbfounded while Kaidan stared on unimpressed.

"This my friends is why you were brought here." She turned on her heels and stared at them. "This Conduit is powered by the cores of four Destroyer class Reapers. We believe after sending in drones that it is stable and is safe for the transport of organic life to do a test jump to Rannoch in hopes that we can begin fully networking with the other systems. While we may not be able to do mass traveling as we did with the ships, we can at least get people home and life back to normal."

Garrus stared at her. "Are you sure this is safe? You said you only tested it on drones."

"Drones and geth, Garrus." Tali limped forward and stood next to Hannah. "The geth that helped with the reactivation offered to make a couple of jumps. They recorded the journey and we are happy to report that Rannoch is doing well."

"But what about the use of the Cores? Isn't rather redundant since they were working already?"

Tali shook her head. "Not necessarily. We had the necessary information to activate this Conduit. Nobody else did and we could only get it started by the use of the Reaper drive cores, much like jumpstarting the battery of an old car here on Earth. Which, upon reactivation, it then sent out a signal to the other conduits which engaged their own emergency start up programs making them think a new cycle for harvesting had started, hence the need to send out a small squad to ensure nothing was wrong." James opened his mouth but she quickly added, "And incase you are wondering about the Relays, those have a different activation code than these and we would need enough power to turn one on before the others would begin their reactivation phase. And with the amount of dark energy those require it would take years."

They were silent for a few moments, absorbing Tali's information. When she felt enough time had passed, Hannah asked, "So, are you prepared for this mission?"

Rubbing his forehead, Garrus sighed at the joke she'd made while the others laughed at him. When he looked up he stared at everyone and asked. "What do you all think?"

Kaidan chuckled, "I'm already in charge of a team being sent to Mars. And Jack's got her own mission to where are you going again?"

The biotic kicked her feet up on the table and chuckled. "I'm taking my ass to Illium with some of my students. See if we can't scrounge up a little fun while we're there."

"What about your biotics?"

Both of them focused the dark energy into their fists. "Prototypes of course, but so far we haven't had any problems."

Garrus nodded at the two of them and laughed. "What the hell give me a team as well."

Hannah's stance stiffened momentarily but she nodded. "You have my thanks, all of you. Get to your rooms and rest. We'll begin mission prep tomorrow. Alenko you're gone in a week, then Jack the following day, and Garrus your team will be last if everything goes accordingly. You'll stay a week to ensure that nothing goes wrong and if you can you will help with Dismissed."

The team all left save for Garrus who stayed behind with the admiral.
"You're sure you want to do this Vakarian? I understand if you don't. You have responsibilities."

He grumbled at her. He'd expected something like this to happen in his life, but nothing had prepared him for the overbearing nature of a human woman. Especially the mother of the woman he'd chosen as his mate.

"I'm certain, Hannah. I'm sure they'll understand my leaving."

"You've only had them for a few weeks Garrus. They need you."

Crossing his arms he glared at her. "They're stronger than you think. And I thank you for helping me with the situation. But I wouldn't do this without taking all the variables into consideration. You know this, Hannah."

Nodding she walked over cupped his face in her hands. "You come back. Do you understand me? And I've already had the same talk with the others."

"You have my word."

Later that night, he was in the car he'd been issued driving away from the base. The moon was out, lighting up the large burn in the sky and despite what it reminded him of, he found a beauty in it.

The drive was uneventful and he soon pulled into a town several miles outside of the base. It was mostly prefab units but it was quiet and rather peaceful. Several of the military personnel lived in the town when off duty and he'd been given one of the prefab units by Hannah after going through the necessary paperwork.

It was necessary for the new change in his life. He couldn't stay on the base, it was unsuitable and to be honest he wanted to get away from people more than usual. As a sniper he was used to being alone, but being around the commoradory of the military so often was just too much for him to bear.

When he arrived at his unit, he entered his security code and was assaulted by the large form of Urz sleeping in the front entry way. The varren looked up at him and grunted before dozing back to sleep.

"Well, thanks for keeping watch on the place."

The varren snorted and rolled over, his back now facing Garrus.

The unit was quiet. Too quiet for an evening like this and when he entered the main living area he found Solana sitting at the dining table sipping a hot beverage while going over several data pads. She had been assigned the role of a teacher in the town. Helping older kids with advanced mathematics. When Garrus asked her why she wanted to stay on Earth than on the Crucible she simply said, "The children stranded here need me more than a research lab."

Walking up to her he gave her head a gentle nudge with his and asked, "How did things go today?"

Setting aside her data pads she returned the nudge. "As could be expected when teaching several teenagers theoretical physics when they would rather be outside lounging about." His mandibles twitched and she glared at him. "We really need to get back home or we'll end up losing what we have of ourselves."

Going into the kitchen he retrieved a drink and some cold leftovers and sat down at the table with her. They sat in silence for a moment when she asked, "Anything interesting happen on the base?"
Stopping mid bite and set down his fork. "Quite a bit happened actually."

Her eyes narrowed and her mouth twitched a little at hearing his voice. "What did you do this time?"

Garrus swallowed his latest bit of food and laughed. "What makes you think I did something?"

She pointed at his mandibles while hers flared. "Your mandibles twitch four times when you're hiding something from me. It's been that way since we were kids and don't you dare deny it."

Setting down his fork he leaned back and ran a claw gently along his scars. "I joined a mission."

She snorted. "That much is obvious."

He chortled at her and took another drink. "It's a mission that is supposed to send me outside the Sol system."

She dropped her data-pad and glared at him. "You're doing what? How is that even possible? Are you taking them?"

"Calm down and relax, Sol. I'm not taking them anywhere."

"So you're abandoning them?"

His throat let out a loud noise and her eyes widened. "I'm not abandoning anybody, Sol. I'm doing this so that we can do what you said. Get home."

"Really, Garrus? Get home? That'll take years and possibly longer than any of us have left to live with the current state we're in."

"Sol, can you just listen to me?"

"No, I'm not going to listen to you. You may have pulled of some miracle helping Mother during those last few months but don't think for one second…"

"Will you stop talking to me like I'm a child!" His voice rose so loud that even Urz came from his post at the front door to check on the situation. Waving the animal away, Garrus looked at his sister whose eyes were wide in shock at what he'd just done. He'd surprised even himself with the outburst. He only ever got this way with his father but given the tone she was taking with him, he didn't care that he'd talked to her in such a way.

Setting aside her data-pad she folded her hands and straightened herself up. And nodded to him, "Please enlighten me, Brother. Tell me why you have to leave so shortly after accepting such a responsibility. A responsibility you yourself accepted at the behest of a dying man."

Garrus rubbed his forehead and took a deep breath. It took almost an hour to explain. Between the conduits, the theories, and Solana's questions. He felt like he was a child again being interrogated by his father when he'd done something wrong as a kid. But never once did he break eye contact with her. She remained calm, poised, and like when he'd explained to his father about the Reapers asked questions only when necessary.

When he was finished he felt his mandibles twitch in annoyance at her patience. "So, are you going to yell at me for leaving them?"

Solana shook her head. "I'm not. I can't yell at you for what you're doing, are right in doing this. It's the only chance we have, Garrus and you're doing the very thing we were raised to believe. You are
willing to sacrifice yourself for the greater good.'

He laughed and took another drink of water. "Rather ironic. I'm actually being praised for doing something a normal turian would do."

Getting up from the table, Solana walked over and placed a hand on her brother's shoulder. "You aren't that bad of turian Garrus." When he growled she punched him gently in the jaw. "Listen to me, brother." He refused to look but she turned his head to him and her mandibles flared. "You have to take in two children who needed you. You warned people of the oncoming war and when they didn't listen you went to help people in need. You went on several missions to defend the galaxy. And while that may not mean much to the hierarchy you are a good turian."

"Thanks, Solana."

She laughed, got up from her chair, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "You will come back to them. And I'll watch them for you."

He let out a loud groan and ran a hand hand along his forehead. "Solana, don't they're my responsibility. And I've failed in that over the past couple of months. I can find someone at the base to help or maybe one of their friends parents."

She shook her head, their plates making a small grinding noise as the coarse metal ground together. "Whether you like it or not, I'm stuck with them. And you are doing the best you can, Garrus. And those kids know that you are trying. You are here when they wake up and are home most nights to spend time with them and give them the care and support they need."

"But, Sol I signed up without a thought to them. Why the hell did I do that?"

Solana simply shrugged and said, "Because maybe you still think you might be able to find her." When he said nothing she gave him one last kiss on the cheek and left.
Chapter 14

To be Whole Chapter 14
by *Mizutanitony

So again. Chapter 13..not my strongest chapter. LOTS of just mumbo jumbo that I had to insert at some point and I'm pretty sure it turned a lot of you off. TOTAL TONE WHIPLASH and I apologize. Also I was three thousand words into this chapter, scrapped it, and decided to umm well let's just have a Daddy Garrus chapter. Thanks RAVENJADEWOLFE seriously…spam her…she's the reason for this chapter being delayed! And it's going to be a set up for the next chapter. AND NOW ONTO DADDY GARRUS!

Chapter 14

He felt heavy, heavier than usual. Something was keeping him from moving. Opening his eyes he growled as the sun's rays nearly blinded him. He'd forgotten to dim the window again before going to sleep. Moving his arm he heard something scrape on his chest. Looking down he saw a little black dome breathing gently on his chest with a teddy bear clutched in it's owners arms. To his right, a mound of brown hair was staring at him from beneath the blankets. Rubbing his eyes he sighed. In the two months since they'd arrived almost every night the pair of them ended up in his bed at some point.

He remembered meeting their father for the first time. A human man named Reese. He was average for a human by what the doctors told him. He was a fairly decent engineer, above average skills in everything, a great helper but not a true visionary. He looked a lot like his son, tan skin, brown hair and green eyes. A kind smile on his face despite the excruciating amount of pain he was in due to the large amount of burns on his body.

"Burns from an explosion and a large amount of eezo. Docs are surprised I've lived this long." He told Garrus one night before one of the turian's procedures. "My wife's kill me for doing something so stupid. But, we were under attack and if I hadn't done it. Our kids would probably be frozen out there like those fucking Reapers."

Shifting in his seat, Garrus calmly asked. "IS there any word on your wife? Your little one, Ismene said she was with the turian military."

Reese hacked out a laugh and nodded. "Yeah, Aela. We met a couple of years ago. Bit of a whirlwind romance but happiest I've been in my life, Kevin too. His mom passed away giving birth to him but he loves her as much as I did."

"So, you got it confirmed?"

The human coughed louder and Garrus gave him some ice chips when he calmed. "Thanks, Vakarian, sir."

"Just call me Garrus."

"A little informal don't you think? You're a Normandy crew member. You guys saved a lot of our asses."

"We did no more than what was expected of us."

Reese wheezed loudly. "Yeah, maybe you're right. But to answer your question I got confirmation
of it three nights ago. Her body was found on one of your peoples colonies. Took out a Reaper base. What she saw in me I'll never know." Tears streamed down his cheeks. "And now my kids might not even have me around for much longer."

Garrus stared at him. He didn't know what to say as he'd never been in a situation like this. When the many started to cough again he called for a doctor but Reese shook his head and hit the button once more. His burned face settling as the pain killers kicked in.

"Do you have any family?" Garrus asked quietly.

Reese shook his head again. "None that'll take them if they're alive. Disowned me for marrying a turian. Asari they could understand but a turian? My dad was in the First Contact War, even now his wounds are still fresh. And her family was just as bad, they disowned her just as easily as my family."

Garrus was about to speak again when the kids came running in from their lessons and took over his attention. From that point on every spare minute he had he would find a way to spend with Reese and his children. And after a short time Reese asked Garrus for a favor he thought wouldn't be honored. But Garrus signed the paperwork the same as his friend.

When the inevitable happened, Garrus spent the day in the company of the two children. He was unsure of how to handle their reactions. Kevin sulking and not talking and Ismene broke into tears on a constant basis. If it wasn't for Liara, Solana, and even Jack he wouldn't have gotten through the day let alone the initial week after the prefab unit was prepared.

It was a trial each day Garrus had to learn something new. And Kevin was proving to be the biggest challenge. With Ismene he had a basis of comparison. She was turian born and her mother had instilled many of the core values in her and he could relate to her in some way. The human child was proving a challenge but Garrus felt like he was slowly beginning to figure him out.

That still didn't mean he enjoyed waking up almost every morning to the two children taking over his bed. Shifting quietly he noticed the journal on his chest move slightly. Lifting his right arm out from under the pillow Kevin's head was occupying and lifted it up and found the place he had fallen asleep too.

The mission was not a total success. Ramirez ended up getting injured. They're saying he might need a prosthetic. I also didn't come out unscathed. Four of my ribs are cracked and I got a dislocated shoulder thanks to a couple of mercs we didn't take care of. Bastards had missile launchers and I was too late in getting my biotics up so the barrier wasn't at full strength. But we came out with the intel we needed and nobody died. I had to put in a requisition for a new shotgun and aromas I broke the damn thing in the explosion and the knocked out my emergency life support functions. Dad and Mom'll never let me live that down but any day we can come out with everyone alive is a victory.

Scuttlebutt says that something big is about to happen and we're being placed in lockdown until the intel we grabbed has been decoded and we're back in fighting condition. Something tells me shit is about to hit the fan.

April 12th, 2175

Closing the journal, he placed it on his night stand and heard the familiar whimper of the little black creature on his chest. Reaching down he ran a claw across the back of her neck. She grunted in her sleep and he let out a low purr and the girl shifted on his chest. He ran a claw again, this time on a spot just beneath where her ear would be.
The girl giggled and looked up at him. Her mandibles twitching as she rubbed her eyes. "That was mean, Garrus."

He chuckled and gave her forehead a tap on the crest of her markings. "Well then maybe you shouldn't fall asleep on my chest." He reached out with a hand and began tickling the skin of her neck again and she began laughing.

From beneath the covers they heard a voice groan from under the covers. "Be quiet, it's too early."

Picking up her bear, Ismene brought it down on her brother's head. "Wake up, Kevin. It's time to get going."

The blankets lowered and the boys eyes appeared, narrowed at his sister and the bear. Her own eyes narrowed and her mandibles twitched as she raised the bear again.

"Don't do it."

Garrus watched in silence as the girl's hand wavered for a moment before dropping. The boy caught the bear by the scruff of the neck and wrenched it from her hand. In a flash he was out from under the covers. A blur of brown hair and blue pajamas. The turians eyes widened as she looked at Garrus. Her mandibles twitching slowly as if she were about to cry.

"Garrus!" She whined as she pointed to the door.

He shook his head. "You started it, you finish it."

She narrowed her gaze at him and huffed as she slid off the bed and toward the door. "KEVIN! GIVE ME BACK MY TEDDY OR I'M GONNA SMACK YOU!"

Out in the living room he could hear them running, no doubt Kevin using his size against her and his longer legs to keep ahead of her and way from her talons. Garrus kept them trimmed, but he still worried that in their wrestling matches the girl could still hurt him. Whether by her talons or her plates.

Letting out a loud grunt he got up from the bed and after a quick stop the restroom headed out into the living room on the way to the kitchen. The teddy bear lay on the ground forgotten next to his chair and all he could see was a twisting ball of blue and black on the ground as the kids grunted. Ismene may have been younger but she was only a few inches shorter than him. Her longer arms would have given her an advantage if she knew how to grapple properly, but at three she just wiggled around as her brother tried to pin her.

In the kitchen he pulled out some food and prepared it for them using specially marked items. He'd nearly mixed up Ismene and Kevin's' food once and after that fiasco he'd properly marked them to make sure it didn't happen again. The same went for everything else he had to prepare. Special containers for storage, writing on similar packages, labels. Everything had to be marked and he'd been doing a decent enough job of it, even if his cooking was lackluster the kids ate it happily.

When the food was just about ready he heard a voice say, "Ow!" And looked out the divider of the kitchen and eating area to see a little black curve bounce happily between the furniture a bear bouncing from behind it. Chuckling he balanced the dishes and set them on the table in their proper places. And watched Kevin appear rubbing an already red spot on his head.

Heading to the chalkboard he'd bought he ticked a mark under a column of wins for Ismene and laughed. "She's up on you by five matches now, Kevin."
grumbling he blew a raspberry at his sister and bit into his eggs. "She only wins more because she has such a hard head. If I had skin like hers I'd be winning most of the time."

Sticking her own tongue out and making a face at her brother, Ismene at her own food humming happily as the bear rested on her shoulders.

Garrus did not like the bear. He didn't know why but the stuffed animal bothered him. He'd never seen a bear save for in videos and while not as dangerous as some of the predators on Palaven but something was off about it. Maybe it was the smile or the red shirt, but the bear bothered him and he'd wished Ismene would leave it her room but when she was home she took it everywhere with her and Garrus was pretty sure the fight wasn't worth the headache.

"Garrus do you have to go to the base today?"

Looking up from the data pad he'd been reading about his mission specs he looked at Kevin and shook his head. "No, I have the day off with you two. Just like I have for the past two weeks since things are taking a little longer than we planned to get ready."

"Oh. So, can we go and do something?"

He nodded at the boy. "I don't see why not. Was there something you'd like to do?"

Ismene raised her hand and bounced. "My friend at school said there's a video with a talking fish looking for his son at the movies!"

Garrus felt his mandibles flutter. "A vid about a talking fish?"

The girls mandible stretched wide along with her hands in excitement. "Yeah! It takes place here on Earth and she said it has talking animals from this planet on it! She said it's really old but it's really fun!"

"Does it have sharks?"

The turians looked at him with curious eyes. "Sharks?"

Kevin nodded, "Yeah. They're these big things with razor sharp teeth and gills. They eat other fish and some of them have heads that look like hammers."

The little one shrugged, her plates reflecting in the sunlight. "I just want to see the fish."

"Sharks are fish, dummy."

Garrus flicked him in the ear and pointed at Ismene who pouted. "She doesn't know that so apologize." The boy's attitude had been rather volatile as of late and Garrus was having to keep him in check.

Rubbing his ear, Kevin checked his hand for blood and ate a bit of toast before looking at his sister. "Sorry, Ismene. But, yeah sharks area kind of fish."

Her mood seemed to lift and she smiled at him. "All right. But can we see it Garrus?"

Finishing the hot drink he'd brought out Garrus nodded. "Yes we can, but you know the drill before we leave."

The kids nodded and finished their breakfast and then did their dishes before marching into their shared bedroom. While he finished the rest of the breakfast dishes he heard the kids coordinating a
plan of attack on the mess that was their room. He figured he'd give them a half an hour before checking on them. If there was one thing he'd been drilling into them it was the concept of self reliance and the kids took care of themselves well enough so long as an adult was around.

Heading to the end of the hallway he said, "I'll be in my workshop. Do not let Urz out! I don't need him chasing after rabbits again. AND DO NOT UNLOCK THE FRONT DOOR!"

"OKAY!"

Exiting the backdoor he entered his workroom which was a small shed unit about thirty feet from the house. Entering his code he turned on the security feeds to the house. The major security problems were shown along with the kids room. Checking all of them he was satisfied to see the kids were continuing their cleaning and pulled out the weapons he planned on taking for the mission. He had his Valiant and Vindicator primed and ready. He even prepped one of the Black Widow's he'd salvaged from the Normandy wreck. The higher powered sniper rifle required some improvised parts but he was confident in his skills and after several test sessions on the firing range he was satisfied with his handiwork. Especially with the amount of frightened looks he received from the soldiers under his command at it's stopping power it displayed against the dilapidated Mako's they used for firing practice.

For the past few days he'd been contemplated the possibility of taking another weapon with him. It wasn't his first choice of a weapon. He preferred the range and accuracy of his rifles but something told him he would need this weapon. Giving the screens another look, he saw Kevin finishing up helping his sister get dressed he pulled out a lock box from the gun safe and set it on the workbench.

Sighing, he entered the code with shaking hands and heard it click. Opening it he saw the Paladin pistol Liara had found near the London conduit. He could tell from the markings who it belonged too. He'd done them himself for what good they did actually did. Pulling out the gun he checked it's sights and sighed. He'd be taking this gun along with them. Putting the pistol back he locked it and put everything back in the gun safe. Checking the screens he saw Ismene dressing her bear in a jacket and a hat and he gave a small shudder.

A few hours later he was sitting in one of the small cafes that had recently been built with Ismene and Kevin giggling at the scenes from the movie. He had actually enjoyed the film, it was not as bad as he thought it would be. He did find the parts where the little fish was trapped in the tank. He admired the perseverance of the father and the child.

As they sat in the warm afternoon air, Garrus sipped at his drink and felt rather content with his life at the moment. He took a moment and pulled off his read the names on his visor. Where there used to be the name Sidonis now read the name, "Shepard." He remembered when she'd stopped him from putting a bullet through the traitor's head. She'd saved him from slipping down the proverbial rabbit hole again. She'd done the same almost five years ago with Doctor Saleon. It was strange, he was the turian and yet she was the one who always remained in control and followed the chain of command. He hoped he'd been living up to the lessons she taught him.

He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he didn't even hear the kids speaking to him until Kevin threw an ice cube at him. It caught him off guard and the kids laughed at him. "I'm sorry, what was the problem you two?"

Hiding behind her bear, Ismene pointed at Garrus's face. "You look funny without your visor on."

Slipping it back on, the sharpshooter chuckled. "I guess it's a bit unusual. Are you two ready to head back?"
Ismene nodded while Kevin sipped at his soda quietly. "Is there a problem?"

The human boy shook his head and sucked at the liquid at the bottom. The straw making a strange gurgling noise. "Then why aren't you talking?"

Stopping his drinking, the boy pushed the glass away and sighed. "Because I was drinking."

His mandibles twitched at the comment and he ruffled the boys hair who ducked out from under his grasp. "Don't do that. I spent a lot of time working on it." He patted his hair down in an attempt to fix it.

"I apologize, Primarch Schneider. I did not realize we were attending a gala event this weekend."

Getting out of his chair, the boy made his way down the street in the direction of the house. Leaving a few chits for the drinks, Garrus took Ismene by the hand and followed the human. His head was at the ground and he was kicking at rocks while his sister chatted with Garrus. After ten minutes of hearing the child chatter away about what she liked on the movie. Her attention was grabbed by the sight of a familiar pair of blue tinged women.

"LIARA!" Shouted Ismene and she ran toward the asari.

Her attention drawn away from her partner. The doctor smiled and scooped the girl into her arms and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Kevin said nothing and trudged along slowly. Garrus keeping the slow pace with the boy much to the annoyance of the Matriarch who was in the company of the doctor.

"What kicked him in the quads?"

"Dad!"

"What? The kids got a stick further up his ass than your turian friend."

Liara rolled her eyes and shook her head. "What are you all up to?"

"We just got out of a vid and it was incredible!" The girl swung her arms so quick that Liara barely had a chance to dodge the plates on the girls knuckles.

"Well it must have been quite the showing." She gave Garrus a knowing smile and he looked at the ground with small cough.

"What about you two?" He asked as he kept his eyes on the boy who was digging his heel into the street. "Out enjoying the day together before sending me off world?"

Liara laughed and Aethyta shrugged. "Who knows, maybe I'll dust off my old fatigues and join you in a bout of stress relief."

Garrus could have sworn he saw Liara's face grow three shades of blue darker and he chuckled and raised his hands. "I appreciate the offer Aethyta but I think I'm going to spend tonight with the kids and a good book." The meaning of the phrase was not lost on Liara he eyed him knowingly.

Scratching his neck he steered the conversation back toward the food. "Though you're more than welcome to join us for dinner. I've actually become a somewhat decent cook. Though whether or not I can pull off asari cuisine has yet to be seen."

Liara couldn't help but laugh and smiled. "I'd enjoy that Garrus. Why not make it a bit of a group dinner. I'm certain James would love an excuse to get Tali away from the files she and Kasumi are trying to decode."

"I don't want you there."
The words came from Kevin who was now glaring at Liara though it was Aethyta who responded. "Excuse me you little punk? I know you just didn't talk to us that way?"

The boy stood his ground against the millennium old female and shouted "I did so! I don't want you there! I don't want any of you there! Not even Tali and James!" Before Aethyta could say anything he kicked her in the shin and ran off leaving the matriarch cursing while Garrus growled and looked at Liara who nodded. "Thanks." was all he said before sprinting after the boy.

For such a small kid, Kevin was awfully fast. If it wasn't for his height being able to cover so much ground he was certain he would have lost the kid but it didn't take long for him to catch up to the boy. Reaching out he grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and yanked him back a little too hard making the boy fall to the ground with a small scream. A few people came up to help Kevin but luckily they were soldiers from the base and left Garrus to it after confirming that every thing was okay.

Pulling the boy by the collar of his shirt next to the door of a store he allowed the boy to punch him as he screamed. "I don't want them at home! It's their fault!" Garrus took the blows, even the ones to the face with patience his father would have been proud of. Until the boy finally tired out and sobbed. "It's all their fault!"

Taking a few deep breaths, Garrus placed his hands on the boy's shoulders and asked calmly, "What's their fault?"

"It's their fault you won't be coming back!" The boy wiped the tears away as he sobbed. "It's just like when Mom left. She said she had to go on a mission and she'd be back soon but she never came back."

The boy choked back sobs and tried to keep the tears from flowing but he couldn't and they ran down his red cheeks. His eyes were puffy like he'd seen Shepard's get when the stress got to be too much for her. Feeling his mandibles twitch slowly Garrus gave the boys shoulder a gentle squeeze. "Kevin, that was different. We were at war and your mother left to protect you so you could be safe."

"But they attacked the ship and that was supposed to be safe and look what happened to Dad! He's gone and you had to take us in because nobody else wanted us because our family was a bunch of freaks."

Garrus was unsure of what to say but he took a deep breath and said. "Kevin if nobody wanted you then why did I promise your dad I would take you in."

The boy screwed up his face. "Because he was going to die and Mom told me you don't break promises made when someone is about to die. She said the spirits would never favor you and because you broke a sacred oath and a good person no matter if they're a turian or a human unless it is something that will cause great harm to the people."

That was something Garrus never expected to hear from the boy. The boy seemed to be all human and yet he'd just stated an odd mixture of human and turian beliefs. He finally felt like he was beginning to understand the boy.

"That may be true, Kevin. But how long did I spend time with you and your sister sitting by your dad's bedside? And on the days I was there and they let him leave his bed wasn't I with you? I
played cards with the three of you or pushing him for you in his wheelchair while you and your sister played?"

Kevin nodded but spat out. "You felt sorry for him."

Garrus wanted to slap him for that comment but took another deep breath and felt his patience return. "Maybe I did feel a bit of that but he became my friend because of what's happened in our lives. And I keep the oaths I make to my friends. And I was happy enough to take you in because I care about you and your sister."

Wiping his nose the boy mumbled. "Dad said you bonded with a human. Like he did with, Mom."

The turian smiled at him. "I did, and I made her a promise that I wasn't able to keep. And won't be able to keep for a long time. But until I can, I'm going to make sure that I keep my promises to you and your sister happy. I'm not your dad, but I'm your friend and I want to make sure you and her can live a good life. And that means leaving you every now and then. But I promise you, I will call you as often as I can and I will always come home."

He looked up, his eyes still red but the area around his eyes had decided to deflate a little. "Promise?"

Garrus put up his smallest finger. He'd seen the two of them do it a few times before. It was a human thing, but he knew it meant a great deal to them and if this helped the boy trust him some more than he was all for doing something so childish. The boy looked at the hand, fear and trepidation in his eyes but after a minute he locked fingers with Garrus and smiled before wrapping his arms around the turian's neck.

Shocked for a moment, Garrus slowly wrapped his arms around the human boy and felt a small purr gently leave his throat. After a moment, Garrus gently pushed the boy away and wiped away the final tears from his wards cheeks. "Are you feeling better or are you going to kick me just like you kicked Aethyta."

"I'm feeling better."

"Good, because I've had enough hitting for the day." Standing up he stuck out his hand and the boy took it.

As they began to walk back to the three women, the sun shining bright above them the turian looked down at the human and said, "You know you're going to have to apologize?"

Looking up at him with his brown eyes Kevin whined. "Do I have to?"

Chuckling Garrus nodded, "I'm afraid so. There was no reason for you to talk to them that way or kick her."

Huffing the boy said. "I guess you're right."

After a couple of minutes in silence the boy asked. "Garrus can I ask you a couple of questions?"

Garrus snapped his fingers mentally, the boy had prevented him from teasing him about already asking a question, but he nodded all the same. "What's on your mind?"

He looked down to see the boy chewing on his lip as he scratched his chin. After a minute he looked up with slightly red, innocent eyes and asked, "What's a 'quad?'"
Chapter 15

So it seems 14 was big hit. With how I rewrote the end to 13 and wrote 14...the fluidity is MUCH better I think. And I do have experience in raising kids. Been raising my niece for 5 years so yeah some of my experiences in that will be slipping into Garrus dealing with the kids. And we get a bit more Daddy Garrus before getting back into the swing of things. It's a short chapter though. Next one will require a little more thought.

Chapter 15

The air was knocked out of him. His body lurched forward as he gasped loudly at the sudden weight of the two children on his stomach. Coughing loudly he heard them laughing as he groaned a bit. He was having his first real nights sleep in the past couple of days. But he guessed it was due to him getting his procedure done before leaving on the mission. Solana and even James had taken over caring for the kids over the past couple of days while he recovered. Every now and then he was woken up by one of them bringing him something to eat or drink and comforting him while he ate in a daze. Despite the occasional noise of the kids fighting or playing he found it much more comfortable with their noise and occasional mess than the sterility of the hospital.

Yet, having a sudden eighty pounds dropped on your stomach unexpectedly had a way of ruining a peaceful slumber and a punishment was necessary. As the kids giggled he growled loudly and snatched them by the collars of their pajamas and pulled them to him and tickled them. They screamed loudly for help but none came.

"No one is going to help you. So you better give up." He chuckled as the kids attempted to run from him. He'd dulled his talons the night before but he was still careful with them. Especially Kevin after the last time he attempted this. Finally after a few minutes, the kids gave up and collapsed onto the bed breathing loudly and giggling as Garrus raised his arms cheering in victory.

Peeking her head around the corner, Solana shook her head at her brother's cheering. "Congratulations, Garrus. You have just saved the galaxy from a toddler and an elementary school student."

He gave her a chuckle. "Any day I can win against them in the morning is a good day. Though I take it you were the one who gave them the idea to ambush me while I was sleeping."

She raised her hands and shook her head. "I had no prior knowledge of the incident that just transpired. However, I did have my suspicions when they began whispering at the table. However, there is the matter of you two being punished if you do not clean up the mess you made at the table."

The kids looked at Garrus who narrowed his eyes and began reaching for them. They let out screams of protest and ran out of the bedroom with Solana hot on their heels. The clamoring of feet on the ground and the clanking of dishes told him the kids were in a hurry so he thought he'd best get prepared as well.

He was leaving that day and looking at the clock he found he only had two hours before the final briefing and he wanted to have one final talk with them. After cleaning himself he headed into the common area to find Kevin reading a data pad while Ismene was sitting on the couch while Solana touched up her markings.

"Glad to see they've been behaving for you."
Solana laughed as she finished the application of the paint. When it was done, Ismene bolted from the couch, her teddy bear clutched under her arm as she pulled on Garrus' shirt. "Did she do a good job?"

He bent down and took the girls face in his hands and looked over the markings. He watched as her mandibles twitched in anticipation and he gave her a smile. "Well, she didn't do as good a job as me, but I think you look just as beautiful as when I do them." Ismene giggled and rubbed the bottom of his chin with her head before heading down the hallway to get dressed.

"You're going to make her head as big as a Urz's." Mumbled Kevin from his spot on the couch. Since their talk, he'd become a bit more open with Garrus, but he retained his mouth. Still he couldn't help but notice the small twitch of a grin on the boys lips when he said it.

"At least she won't smell as bad."

From the corner, Garrus heard the varren grunt his disapproval at the comment while the boy laughed.

Walking over to him, Garrus looked at the data pad. "Something for school?"

The boy nodded, "Yep. The teacher wants us to have two pages on this subject by the Tuesday." He held up the data-pad and Garrus flipped through the series of pictures and words. "It's supposed to be about what life is like right now on Earth for us."

Sitting down on the couch, Garrus let the boy crawl into his lap and he pointed as he pointed at the pictures. "This is our house." He flipped through the pictures again and pointed at a picture that Garrus could only guess was their bedroom. He could see the small urn that contained Reese on a high shelf in the room. He let the boy flip through each picture and describe what they were and when he got to the last picture he saw a mass of people with two shorter ones holding hands with what could only be Garrus and a human woman still he felt the need to ask.

"Kevin who are these four."

The boy looked over his shoulder with an accusatory look and said. "That's us, Garrus. All of us and your friends from the Normandy."

Garrus laughed and pointed at the picture. "I meant who is the woman holding hands with Ismene and myself."

Rolling his eyes he got off the couch and ran to the cupboard and pulled out a small photo frame. "It's you and your mate, Commander Shepard. I mean that is her right?"

Taking the picture, Garrus smiled sadly at it. It was the only picture they had of the two of them together. They'd taken it on Rannoch shortly after they'd destroyed the Reaper. Shepard's face was covered in dirt and she had a few bruises showing up on her face her hair was a mess as it always was after a mission and it was blowing gently in the wind. Garrus was missing a few chunks of armor and had suffered some wounds as well. The could see the drying blood on his arms where a geth had gotten him before the virus upload. It wasn't the happiest moment in their lives, Legion had sacrificed himself and many innocent people had lost their lives. But like Tuchanka, despite the loss of life, they had a glimmer of hope to keep them going that made all the pain and suffering worth it.

"Are you okay, Garrus?" He looked up from the picture at the boy. Concern in his eyes as he pointed at his guardian. "You're crying? Did I do something wrong?"
Wiping the tears Garrus shook his head. "No, you didn't do anything wrong. I was just remembering."

"I can take her out if you want?"

"Why would you do that?"

The boy looked at him confused. "The picture made you sad. I don't want it to make you sad. So if you want me to I'll take her out of the picture."

His throat vibrated in laughter and he patted the boy on the head. "You keep her in. It'll make me even more sad if you take her out."

"Are you sure?" His voice was still uncertain but Garrus ruffled his hair.

"Yeah I'm sure. You took the time to put someone important to me in so why would I want you to do that?" Kevin's lips parted revealing his two freshly missing teeth. Garrus felt his mandible twitching in a smile. "Now go and get dressed. We have to leave soon."

The boy headed down the hallway his feet thundering in their usual rhythm. Leaning back into the couch he heard his sister laugh and growled at her.

"Don't growl at me, Garrus Vakarian. You're getting soft since you took those kids in."

There was a laughter in her voice, but Garrus acted like he didn't notice and stormed out of the house with a growl. "I'll be in my workshop." He slammed the door lightly for added effect and headed into his workshop. He went through his guns one final time. The Vindicator was in working order long with this sniper rifles. The pistol was the only one that he was concerned about. While he had faith in his skills, though sometimes faith wasn't enough and reality would rear its ugly head.

With a heavy sigh he laid the pistol on the gun table and equipped his armor. He hadn't needed to wear it for awhile, but he finally felt complete with its familiar weight on his shoulders. Sliding the guns into place, their clicking brought a feeling of serenity that even time with the kids couldn't bring. Holstering the pistol, he grabbed the case holding the Black Widow and after locking his workshop he entered the house to find Kevin dressed in a modified children's turian outfit. It was formal attire from what Garrus could see and from the markings meant that his mother was rather high on the meritocracy. The hat on the other hand was his Father's and he was grinning broadly while Ismene stood in a set of robes like the ones Solana would wear to formal functions as a child. Her bear was dressed up again as well, and for once Garrus didn't feel a cold sensation down his spine, but that didn't make him any less wary of the stuffed animal.

Solana was dressed less lavishly than the kids she was wearing her normal clothes those Garrus' nose did pick up a hint of something extra in the air.

Stopping in his tracks he gave them a curious look. "What is going on?"

Kevin snapped a salute and loudly declared. "Following your orders to get ready!"

Ismene copied her brother, though a little less accurately and the bear nearly fell out of her grasp but she didn't seem to mind since the smile never left her face as she shouted. "Yeah!"

Garrus scratched the back of his neck. He only imagined what the others would say when they caught sight of the kids decked out in such clothing. He could only imagine what James would say, even worse Jack, and then there was always Joker. Garrus felt lucky the pilot was off testing the
new ships.

Still he couldn't help but smile at the kids willingness to make him look good. Swinging the gun case over his shoulder he smirked at them and headed toward the door where Urz was waiting for them. When he opened the door the beast bolted for the car and the kids ran out into the sunlight smirks on their faces as they waved him forward.

As he watched them, the sunlight reflecting off of Ismene's plates and Kevin's smile beckoning him. He felt like things were finally beginning to turn around.
Chapter 16

Also I started a group on Deviantart under this name called Transgender-Shepards...all Shepards are welcome but seeing as how there are some people who've actually played the game with such a thought in mind I thought why not have a group based around it. Seeing as how...well Leela is the inspiration to it.

Chapter 16

He knew he shouldn't have felt optimistic about the mission. Every time he felt good about something it always ended on a sour note. From his time at C-Sec up until, he stopped himself from dwelling on that subject about that and instead forced himself to focus on the mission. Sure, they could have gone back through the conduit but after a heated discussion with the people in charge on the other end, they decided to forge ahead and see if there was any merit to the initial images the drones had sent a few days after their arrival.

They were over a week into the mission and only people that Garrus wasn't prepared to blast out of the Mako's canon were Doctor Chakwas, EDI, and Samara.

The Justicar had been the biggest surprise of the mission. Liara was staying behind to help Tali and Kasumi with maintaining the systems so Samara was coming along as back up. She looked as she always did. Pristine, deadly, and the only person who know the details of her survival were Hannah. And truth be told many of them were too scared to even ask including Garrus. And now she was off on a scouting mission with Urz and to find an available path through the mountains and their objective.

"So should we have taken a left or right at Albuquerque, Scars?"

Garrus shot a glance at James who was sitting on the hood of the Mako. With the turian's eyes on him, the human quieted down and went back to scraping the final bits of food out of the can he'd been eating from. Though usually on good terms with the human, Garrus was finding his patience wearing thin seeing as to how they had no idea what planet they were on or if they were walking into a death trap.

They supposed to have been transported to Thessia as it was one of the few council planets that had yet to receive an investigation party or any attempt at contacting what was on the other side of their conduit. So, the powers that be had sent out an investigation party and though preliminary reports had shown that the planet appeared to be safe. Though appearances could be deceiving and it was for this purpose that Garrus and his team been chosen to make contact with the people and had been given Samara as an ambassadorial aid.

The only problem was, something happened in the programming just before their jump and now they had no idea what planet they were on and after landing, they had stayed next to the conduit for orders while the drones they were given did a preliminary scan of their surroundings. It was four days until a drone came back with any sign of civilization.

When they first received the news, they activated the prototype Q.E.C that had been installed into the Mako and made the call to Hannah.

"And what's the structural integrity of the area like?" The admiral inquired after a deep inhalation from her latest cigarette her gaze locked on EDI.
"From what my processors have been able to make of the data, the buildings appear safe and possibly inhabited." Her voice was as calm and as calculating as ever.

"Inhabited? By what?" There was an uncharacteristic hint of worry in her voice.

Garrus leaned back in his chair and looked at EDI. She had procured a third body. This one was covered in synthetic flesh and made to look like she was what the humans called, "Asian." Her hair was jet black and her eyes the same color. When Garrus asked why she wasn't in her usual body she simply said, "For my own safety."

He had laughed at her response. But he had been silent as he listened to EDI A.I.’s response to the admirals inquiry.

"We are unsure, Rear-Admiral. The planet appears capable of supporting levo-based life forms. From preliminary testing of the local flora, with the right preparation we have discovered many possible food sources although it will take some time to figure out those methods. As for the buildings they look similar to Turian or possibly Salarian design; prefabricated for easy erection and transport. However there is one building that seems to be more permanent and our drones are unable to gain any form of access.

The admiral's brow furrowed in concentration, reminding Garrus of Shepard when she began planning a mission. He could only guess how many plans were going through the womans head. After a moment, she turned to the Turian. "Garrus? Any thoughts on what might be in there?"

Shaking his head he leaned forward,. "No clue. I've checked every record I was given of classified military operations from the Turian military and this one is not in any registration. Also, from what EDI says, this one isn't in Human, Salarian, or Asari. All we know is that we're in the Terminus systems and if there's any one with a ship near by. it's reason enough for alarm."

The admiral chewed on her lip and gave a heavy sigh after a few moments, "Very well, take every precaution and send multiple drones out feeding information back to EDI. " Turning to the A.I. she said, "That is your primary responsibility. I want that data scanned and any weaknesses made exploitable. If possible, try and see if it's transmitting any hidden frequencies. Garrus, you and the others are to get to whatever they picked up and investigate. I want a base camp set up two miles out within the best vantage point possible. No lights unless you are in the Mako upon your arrival and night time scouting missions only."

"Not a problem, Admiral. Hopefully you won't need to send a rescue party after us." Garrus’ mandibles twitched in a smile.

Hannah laughed at his comment but her voice was cold as she said, "Garrus, if you end up needing one. Don't even bother sending out the S.O.S."

That had been five days ago, making their total time on the mission nine days long. Two days longer than originally planned and by no means easier since they had been fighting their way through thick jungle and craggy cliffs since leaving their point of entry. While the Mako was great for open plains and hills, heavy forest proved to be another Achilles heel for the tank.

Thanks to her biotics and centuries of experience they figured Samara, along with taking Urz with her, had the best chance of scouting ahead for any possible signs of danger. The problem was, she had now been gone for two days and Garrus and she hadn't kept her promise to keep in constant contact. He knew she could take care of herself, but even if she had lived for two-thousand years two days without contact was never a good sign no matter what
Night fell and James was caught up in a game of cards with EDI. Her eyes were glowing as they processed the incoming data from the drones they had sent out. Though Garrus was certain she was possibly calculating the odds of her hand compared to James'.

Meanwhile, Garrus was caught up in a journal again.

Elysium was...there's no way to describe it. The Blitz has been the worst mission I've faced so far. My squad was lucky compared to the others I heard about. I took a few bullets and ended up in the hospital for a few days. They punctured a lung. My chest is just now starting to not hurt when I breathe. My hip ended up getting dislocated too. We lost a couple of people as well. Ramirez and Kilsa were taken out a couple of days before the end. We still haven't been able to recover their bodies. As the mission leader, I had to contact their families. If I get my own command, I don't think I'll ever get used to telling a parent their child is dead; but, it comes with the job and I'm thankful to have at least been able to know them.

I've been given leave before I receive my next orders and I'm discharged tomorrow. I think I'll just stay on the Citadel for awhile. Bask in the "peace" that is supposed to exist there. Complete bullshit if you ask me, but I heard from Mom and Dad that they'll try and meet me there. It'll be good to see them again. It's been two years since we saw each other without a vid chat and I'm pretty sure they're going to want to know what happened with Mike. They liked him but, he had other plans and other women. I think a night on the town is in order. Maybe find a bottle and a dancer to get lost in for a few hours.

As he prepared to turn the page, Garrus heard something rustle and heard the familiar clicking of guns. EDI made her way into the Mako to prep the cannons while Garrus and James equipped their helmets and activated their thermal imaging. Flecks of red and white could be seen in the darkness. Animals were skittering around hoping to get home and avoid the night predators. They had been lucky enough to avoid them and from what the drones had caught of them from the sky they figured it would take at least three Mako's to kill just one of the beasts.

It's amazing how much and how little a person could see through the scope of a rifle. But Garrus could see everything. His ears caught the sound of the animals in the trees and his eyes gauged the subtle rustling of the tree branches. Each time he moved he made the most minor adjustment to his stance in preparation for what was waiting on the other side of the trees. Raising his hand, he made a few gestures to James who signaled back that he was all clear on his side.

"EDI, anything on the scanners?" his gun moved in a gentle sweeping motion as he spoke.

"Yes, it seems we have a large life form heading our way. Shall I fire a warning shot?"

"Negative. EDI keep the guns prepped just in case and shut off all unnecessary lighting. If we got something coming at us, chances are they may have company not too far behind."

"I'm patched in and have the secondary guns on standby. I would advise not moving from your current positions. Also I recommend lowering your position by four inches James. If you do not, I will end up painting the trees a rather unsettling color of red."

"Jesus, I forgot how cold you are Circuits."

"I prefer the term, logical," EDI retorted. Though there was the hint of a laugh in her voice.

"Cut the chatter you two. James do what she says and stick to standard rounds. I don't want to give anything else out prowling tonight a reason to come after us."
"Roger that." Responded the human as he released the safety on his rifle.

"Garrus, I have finished prepping the Mako's guns and I am synched with the targeting system and am prepared to open fire on your command."

"Copy that, EDI."

They sat there, patiently, guns sweeping the perimeter. The only noise in Garrus' ears was the sound of the animals and the gentle whirring of the guns. Finally, out of the forest came a predominantly red blob and of red and other colors and without provocation, a loud bark came from the blob on the left. It separated from its partner as it bounded towards Garrus.

"Son of a bitch!" shouted the Turian as the lumbering form slammed him against the side of the Mako.

He could hear EDI laughing in his ear along with James while Urz attempted to lick him through the casing of his helmet. Turning off his infrared Garrus pushed the Varren off of him. The exterior lights shot back on bathing the Asari in a bright light and she removed her own helmet as Doctor Chakwas exited the Mako with her first aid kit.

"Well it's about time, Samara. You've had us worried to death." Came Karin's voice with a relieved sigh.

The Asari chuckled as the doctor began scanning her, "It was not my intention to go so long without communications. I was delayed and it took me some time to get myself back on the right path."

Tutting, the Human woman let out a happy sigh after her examination. "Well, save for your blood pressure being a little high due to lack of proper food, you seem in excellent condition. Come into the Mako. It shouldn't take long for me to prepare something for you to eat."

The Asari shook her head and gently patted the Human on the shoulder. "If it is all the same to you, Doctor Chakwas, I believe my meal can wait until we are on our way again and I've talked with Garrus."

"Fine," the doctor huffed and wandered back to the Mako muttering, "I'm sent on this mission to keep after your health and what do I get…." her voice trailed off in a series of complaints about the carelessness of soldiers.

When she was gone, Garrus pushed Urz away and climbed to his feet. "You really did have us worried. What the hell happened?"

Samara held her hands out and waved at something in the trees. As they watched the branches begin to rustle, all Garrus and James could do was swear as a familiar large, four legged green creature stepped into the tank's view.
"But you were supposed to be home already. You promised," pouted the small human face at the opposite end of the galaxy.

Garrus rubbed his temple as he watched Ismene and Kevin glare at him through the video connection on his visor. They'd stopped for a break in a nearby cave thanks to Garrus's vision beginning blur. EDI sat on a rock next to him, her eyes were glowing a deep blue as she ran the Q.E.C drive in her body while Chakwas ran a scan on him.

"I know I promised, but things aren't going according to plan. Remember when we talked before I left. I told you that I might not be able to make it home in time," he gently reminded them

Kevin's eyes narrowed at him for a moment before the boy walked away from the screen. He could hear a familiar voice in the background while Ismene held up her bear.

"Garrus, can you say goodnight to my teddy?"

He growled at the request. The face on the bear was bothering him again but it was important to the child. Taking a deep breath he let out a sigh. "Goodnight, Bear."

Ismene made the bear wave to the older Turian. "Goodnight!" she shouted, mandibles twitching happily; as she rushed off the screen.

From the front of the cave he could hear a laugh but paid it no mind as a human woman stepped into view. Her hair down around her shoulders and a tee-shirt with some odd logo of a triangle shooting a pyramid out adorned her chest.

"Are they behaving?" he asked cautiously. It wasn't that he didn't trust them, but at that age he and Solana got into more of their fair share of trouble on occasion. He was already seeing signs of similar issues in his future and was hoping to nip it in the bud as soon as possible.

"They've been rather well behaved today. Kevin got excellent marks on that project of his and Ismene is doing rather well with her schooling," she reported.

He heard the same amount of pride in her voice that she had when she talked about her daughter. He was thankful that she had agreed to take care of them when she had the time, especially when it came to Kevin.

Something told Garrus that the boy needed a bit more human interaction at home and with the members of the Normandy crew all leaving the planet, the only one he could turn to was Hannah. She had more than stepped up to the challenge.

"Garrus, did you hear me?"

Coming back from his thoughts, the Turian shook his head. "Sorry about that, Hannah. Can you repeat the question?"

She shook her head and lit up a cigarette. She exhaled it slowly from her nose and chuckled, "I was just making sure my report from James and Samara are accurate about your guides. I'm finding it a little hard to believe that we've been so lucky in our endeavors to get the galaxy back in order. It's
causing some unrest on the Citadel arms. Not to mention the attacks on the supply depots."

The Turian groaned loudly as something pierced the back of his neck. Turning around he saw Chakwas walking away with a needle containing a small amount of his blood to test for extra spinal fluids.

"Everything all right, Vakarian?"

He watched the admiral blow out another puff of smoke. Her eyes filled with professional concern.

"I'm fine, Hannah and yes the reports are accurate," his voice was little more than a growl but Chakwas wasn't paying any attention to him. Taking a deep breath he added, "Samara was lucky enough to find some survivors that have been living out of the compound we saw. The buildings that were discovered, the prefabs, were brought with them. The only one they didn't build was the building we can't access although they promised us a look inside once we arrived and got settled."

The cigarette twitched in her hand. She had grown quiet and ignored her cigarette. Her eyes flicked back and forth while her mouth moved silently. This he had never seen before and he knew that if she was ignoring a cigarette she was lost in deep thought.

Finally, after several minutes she took a deep drag and finished off what little remained.

"I'm going to trust your judgment, Vakarian. EDI, make sure you keep your communications line open with me and the Mako. I'm prepping an extraction team just in case," she ordered.

"Of course, Hannah," said EDI despite the lack of movement from her lips, "I have also taken the liberty of transmitting our findings to Liara and the others every two hours. I am also watching our current companions biometrics. They appear to be on the 'up and up', as your daughter once put it. However, after much research and experience I know that organics are capable of fooling many forms of interrogation."

"Just keep a close eye on them EDI. If possible, hack their communications."

The admiral had removed another cigarette from its pack and put in between her lips. At that moment they could hear the kids begin yelling about something making the admiral roll her eyes.

"You two have a good night and keep me posted. As for me," she cracked her knuckles, "I'm going to go and put a stop to whatever your two hellions are up to."

The feed cut and EDI's eyes reverted to their standard appearance while Garrus felt the back of his neck. He felt a small bump from where the needle had entered, but when he drew back his hand he saw no blood and stood up with a happy sigh. His balance was back and his head felt normal. He was lucky, but knew he'd end up having to take his usual rest in a few days.

He was prepared to ask EDI something when a voice from the front of the cave asked. "Tentative. Are you prepared to head back to the camp?" Garrus turned to see their guide who was making grooves in the dirt with its giant feet.

"We'll be heading out soon, Aki."

The elcor stopped moving her feet and nodded. "Appreciative. Thank you, Garrus. I recommend spending no longer than ten minutes more resting."

"Why ten minutes? I thought we weren't in any immediate danger?" Chakwas looked up from her omni-tool; eyes filled with worry.
She had never been the same since being abducted by the Collectors which was one of the reasons Shepard had opted for Doctor Michel instead of her old friend.

"We'll be fine, Doc. Aki here just needs to get back before the morning. We have shit that needs to get done and we've been gone for four days dealing with you people. Spirits knows what will happen to us if we aren't back by the time I told my lieutenant." The speaker took a swig from the canteen at her side and sighed, the earrings attached to her mandibles swinging gently in the early morning sunlight.

Garrus felt a flood of annoyance wash over his body, but he calmed it quickly as the female walked into view. Rixa, a Turian female, had no clan and very little concern for anyone else despite her responsibilities as head of security for the base camp they were heading to. She had plates like Ismene, charcoal black, but covered in chinks from where her recklessness had gotten her injured and both mandibles were home to dangling human earrings.

When she stepped back into the cave, Garrus felt his nostrils flare as she walked past Urz and kicked dirt at him. The varren hissed but she just laughed while Garrus let out an audible growl.

"Is there something you want to say to me, Vakarian?" she asked placing pistol in its holster and got into a defensive stance her blue eyes eager for a fight. "If so than say it with your fists because I've been itching to go a round or two with you"

"Worried. Rixa, please. I must remind you that we do not have enough medical supplies required for the level of injuries you can inflict on one another."

Taking a few breaths Garrus allowed himself to deflate and gave Aki a smile.

"Don't worry, Aki. She wouldn't be able to handle me anyway."

He gave a low chuckle as he walked by Rixa tapping her left knee with the butt of his Valiant. Her leg quaked momentarily before she regained her balance and growled at him for being able to spot the weakness in her stance.

"Joyful. You have my thanks Garrus. I recommend we begin heading back. It is nearly dawn."

Without another word the group packed up their gear and followed the two new additions to the group. Although he could appreciate Rixa's zest for life; Garrus definitely preferred Aki. His initial sight of the Elcor covered in a large amount of leaves shocked him, he'd grown to enjoy her company over the past few days. The Elcor reminded him a lot of Chakwas, that they were both doctors, but that there was a certain matronly air that enveloped them them; protective of those they grew close to. In the case of Rixa, Garrus could only assume the Elcor tolerated her due to a mutual necessity for survival.

They walked along for another hour in silence. EDI and Chakwas took the occasional moment to gather plant samples for study once they were back on Earth. Rixa and Aki were leading the way when the sound of a crashing tree forced Garrus to grab Chakwas to him; quickly attempting to find cover while EDI initiated her Decoy program.

As the hologram continued forward, Aki and Rixa simply stepped aside as the trees in front of them fell to the ground with a dull thud. Turning around, Rixa looked at the group and snorted loudly before bursting into laughter.

"Chastising. Rixa, do not laugh at them. They did not know about the security measures."

Getting out from behind his cover, Garrus felt his mandibles flaring as he shouted, "What the hell
do you think you're playing at?"

Rixa continued to laugh while Aki turned to explain.

"Sincerely. Our apologies, Garrus. You must understand that we had to keep our security measures secret until you arrived." The Elcor pawed the ground gingerly as she spoke.

He found it very difficult to keep calm with Rixa's laughter. The breathing techniques he'd learned from Thane two years ago to calm his nerves weren't working as they normally did. He felt what little control he had left leaving him when he saw what was making the noise appear.

It was an old model tank from Palaven. The name of the tank escaped him at the moment but it lumbered toward them slowly. Rixa looked genuinely happy to see it as she was bouncing on her feet and waving excitedly. It was most unsettling and infuriating at the same time.

"One of yours?" he growled as he put his sniper rifle in its holster.

The female turned to him, her mandibles twitching happily as she spoke, "You're damn right it is and I know who's in the driver's seat."

Garrus didn't even have time to get his next question out as the tank came to a stop just before crossing the barrier of trees and Rixa took off running for it. As she arrived a smaller figure stepped out of the door and she tackled it. There was a scream and the two were rolling in the grass until coming to a rest at the end of the tank; Rixa on top of the figure, their foreheads pressed together.

Trying to make sense of her sudden change in attitude, Garrus noticed another tank. A Tomkah, pull up behind them with several heavily armed Turians, a couple of humans and, to the shock of Garrus and company, a number of Drell with a number of them pointing their weapons at Garrus.

"Garrus? What is going on?" came a soft voice from behind him.

Turning around he found Chakwas, standing a few feet behind him looking worried while EDI did her best to keep Urz under control.

He opened his mouth to answer, but couldn't. A series of red dots had appeared on his chest and he raised his hands in surrender and shouted, "I think I got the answer pointing right at me Doc!"
Chapter 18

To be Whole Chapter 18

by *Mizutanitony

So chapter 18 of to be whole this is gonna be fun. Doing a repost because somehow the quotation marks went missing!
pairing Garrus/Femshep
Property is owned by bioware!

I've been watching the show "Spaced" so the humor in it is getting to me a little.

Chapter 18

"That's enough beauty sleep! Time to wake up and get to work you lazy sacks of shit!"

Garrus opened his eyes with a groan, praying that it had all been a dream, but his dream was instead a waking disappointment. Coughing loudly, he rolled out of his bunk and stood up with a loud groan as he watched the other people in his unit get out of their beds. At the entrance to their unit he could see Rixa standing there with a rifle cradled in one arm and a large steaming mug in her free hand. Mandibles twitching with amusement, she watched the rest of her squad grumble.

"Quit your bitching," shouted Rixa as she took another deep drink, "and get your asses ready by...HEY!"

The mug shattered as single shot rang out, followed by a multitude of clicks as the soldiers drew their sidearms; aiming at its origin. Loud chuckling came from the cot in the corner and they holstered their guns, grumbling louder.

"The hell's your problem? You want us to shoot you?" shouted a drell soldier, his pistol shaking violently.

The chuckling stopped as the owner rolled upright in his bunk and grunted loudly. His red eyes turned to the drell and spat a large amount of liquid on the floor.

"Try that with me and I'll be roasting your legs over a fire," he said growling and wiping the excess drool from his chin.

Pushing off his cot with a loud grunt, the krogan picked his shotgun up from its place on the floor.

"Where am I patrolling?"

"Relax Uruk," she replied, "You're heading out beyond the perimeter today."

"Does that mean I finally get to shoot something?" said the krogan chuckling loudly and squeezing the shotgun excitedly.

The eagerness in his voice made Garrus laugh which caught the krogan's attention.

"Something funny to you turian son of a bitch?"

Resting his gun hand on his pistol, Garrus chuckled, "You just remind me of a certain krogan I fought with. He had a certain...infantile attitude when it came to killing. Seemed more like
playtime than anything else."

Uruk roared and prepared to rush, only to be stopped by Rixa who let off a round of her own just past the plates on his head.

"That's enough, Uruk," she said coolly as she ejected the steaming thermal clip, "We've got enough shit to deal with today without you injuring the rookies."

The krogan sneered and poked Garrus in the chest with the muzzle of his shotgun, "You're lucky I recognize her strength or you'd be nothing but breakfast for your varren by now."

Garrus laughed and puffed himself up; mandibles twitching slowly with each breath, "Do that and I'm sure the damage he does to your face will make this," Garrus running a finger along the length of his scars, "look like a flesh wound."

The two of them locked eyes; each challenging the other until the krogan gave a small chuckle and headed toward the door.

"You've got a quad, I'll give you that Turian." Uruk turned and gave him a hungry smirk, "Just make sure I don't catch you alone after dark."

When he was gone, the air grew lighter and the other soldiers let out loud sighs of relief. Garrus put the Paladin back in its holster and felt a shove forward by a heavy hand on his back. Garrus turned and chuckled nervously at the drell next to him. Sunan, was trained as a regular soldier rather than the styles Thane employed during his life but still just as deadly.

He was friendly, approachable, and a great deal grayer than his old friend. Garrus would have been on friendlier terms with him, if it wasn't for one thing.

"Don't get too friendly, Sunan," Rixa approached the smaller male and rested her chin on top of the drell's head, "He's mine."

The drell laughed and ran a hand along the back of her fringe making the female purr.

"Only for one purpose, Pet," His voice was a low rumble that echoed her purr making him laugh, "for everything else: you belong to me."

"I'll be in the mess hall when you've decided to get your hormones in check," Garrus groaned in disgust as he headed back to his bunk and removed his rifles.

Stepping out into the sunlight, he blinked a few times to get his bearings. The rest of the compound was already up and moving. The night watch was coming in from their shifts and talking with their replacements while heading off to the mess hall for some breakfast. The civilians were going about their chores; some heading off to tend to the fields they'd been able to cultivate, others doing repairs to the machinery. A few kids were running around playing before their morning lessons.

He, EDI, and Chakwas had been shocked at what they had been brought into. The footage the drones had brought back did the compound no justice. What they thought was an abandoned compound was actually a flourishing colony that was kept hidden using large canopies along and minor vehicle use to keep their energy signatures hidden.

As he walked toward the mess hall, he saw a group of kids playing with a black and white ball he'd seen Kevin play with a few times on Earth when he was lucky enough to pick him up from school. Watching them, he couldn't help but shake his head at the advantage some of the human children had over their alien counterparts but that soon changed when a couple of asari began using their
biotics to their team's advantage.

Garrus was almost to the mess when a voice stopped him in his tracks.

"What's the problem this time?" Garrus asked, slightly annoyed. He hadn't eaten dinner last night and when he got hungry, he tended to become a bit more than charmingly disgruntled.

"You think you'd be a bit more appreciative of the male that decided to let you live," snorted a giant male turian.

His face was similar in coloring to Garrus' except with black markings striping each of his fringes and mandibles. On his back was a Scimitar shotgun, while in his hands he cradled his Revenant rifle like a mother feeding a newborn.

Antius was the last person Garrus wanted to see this morning. The turian was, for better or worse, the leader of the colony. A soldier of fortune, he'd made a name for himself running ops that even people like Hannah rarely survived. He was tough, experienced, and an ally worth having and an even worse enemy to have. It was no surprise that he'd decided to keep him, EDI, and Chakwas prisoner while waiting for a response from Earth.

To be fair to the older turian, Garrus respected him. He stuck by his principles and his small fleet had managed to keep the people they'd been hired to protect alive with limited resources. Though, like Aria, he was a business man. He wanted something in return as a gesture of good faith for allowing Garrus and the others to live and work in his colony while they waited for Hannah's response to Antius's request for supplies.

When they'd arrived at the base, many thought they might have been indoctrinated. The ships had to make emergency landings on the planet when the escort fleet they were a part of was attacked. As a result of the attack, they had to convert everything on the ships into tools of survival. Still, that didn't mean Garrus liked being used as a bargaining chip, but he figured this is what humans called karma, and it had come to bite him royally in the ass.

"Just spit it out, Antius. I'd like to get something in my stomach before dealing with your head of security for the next twelve hours," he snapped.

Laughing at the sniper's comfort, Antius bowed in deep mockery.

"Then by all means Councilor Vakarian, after you," the laugh in his throat was not unnoticed.

Suppressing the urge to slam his knee into his fellow turian's face, Garrus stomped past him; the laugh echoing in his ears. It was only a short walk to the mess hall. The sniper ordered his food and sat at the table, his fork tearing into the bits of food. The noise he was making earned him a few looks, but a quick glare had his objectors returning to their own meals. Hearing a chair scrape across the floor, Garrus looked up from his plate to see Antius watching him with accusing eyes.

Swallowing his latest mouthful, Garrus took a sip of water before growling, "What is it this time?"

Locking his fingers together, Antius rested his chin on the small shelf of digits and grumbled,

"Your friends still have not responded to our requests and it's making some of my men a little twitchy."

Taking another bite, Garrus sat up and chewed. The rhythmic motion of his jaws slowly grinding the food in his mouth was rather soothing.

He swallowed and let out a satisfied sigh, "What is it you want me to do about it? You've cut off
my communications with them and -"

"That's bullshit Vakarian," hissed the older male. This got the attention of a few of the off duty soldiers who took notice of the argument. With his peripheral vision, Garrus could see them getting out of their seats, he was prepared for a fight, but their movements were not lost to Antius.

"SIT DOWN!" snarled Antius. From the corner of his eye, Garrus could see the two drells, a human, and a batarian follow their boss' orders and return to their meal.

Turning his attention back to Garrus, Antius tried to keep his mandibles under control but their sporadic twitches did little to hide his frustration.

Taking a deep breath, Antius whispered, "Other than Aki and Rixa you and your Human doctor are the only people in this colony that know about your friend's real origins. I know for a fact that you used whatever is inside her to contact your friends on the other side of the conduit. If they have the supplies to send you here, than they have more than enough supplies to trade for your lives," he took a deep breath and Garrus heard fear lace the edge of the other male's voice as he whispered, "and I'm betting more than enough fire power to take on ours."

Garrus wished he could have given the older turian more credit on figuring out that much about Hannah and what was on the other side of the conduit, but he knew that anyone with half a brain could figure out even that much.

Sipping his water once again, Garrus let out a frustrated sigh, "I was trying not to rouse any suspicions, Antius."

His peripheral vision noticed several staring eyes. Ignoring them, he lowered his voice to match the other male's.

"If EDI had heard back she would have informed me. However," his voice became a low chuckle, "I wouldn't put it past Hannah to rally her troops due to your overly aggressive extortion tactics."

He could see Antius' eyes flick in thought. His mandibles twitched slowly for a few moments before standing up and growling.

"Tomorrow, 1200 hours. If I do not hear back, I send them a message that will make them respond."

He waved at the four soldiers that he snapped at earlier and the rhythmic stomping of their feet was the only noise inside the mess hall.

Feeling his appetite fade, Garrus drained his water just as Chakwas appeared from her night shift working in the hospital with Aki. After their arrival they had been allowed temporary access into the heavily fortified building. Antius and his crews had set up the ground level as a makeshift hospital. While not the cleanest place to perform emergency triage, it worked for their daily uses and the colony seemed quite pleased to have another doctor around that didn't require the use of a mech to help with even the most basic procedures.

Still, something about it gnawed at Garrus. Chakwas was far from her normally talkative self since her first night of work with Aki. He knew she took her oath of doctor/patient confidentiality, but there was something different about this, he was certain of it.

When she sat down in front of him, he gave her a warm twitch of his mandibles and she smiled back.
"Pleasant morning, wouldn't you say?"

He shrugged at her inquiry and said, "It would have been much better without Uruk threatening me again and the fact that Sunan is fine with Rixa attempting to steal my genetic material from me against my will."

Chakwas snorted into her food and wiped a bit of spit from her mouth making Garrus growl.

"I'm sorry Garrus," she apologized while choking back a bit of laughter, "you have to admit you are quite the catch."

Taking a bite of his now lukewarm meal, his teeth wrestled with the now rubbery bit of meat, but he swallowed it all the same, "She's not for me, Karin."

Sipping her tea, Chakwas let out a sigh, "That may be, Garrus but what about Kevin and Ismene?"

Garrus let out a deep breath, his mandibles flexing slowly.

"Are you suggesting that I simply choose someone just so that they can stay home and raise them while I do this?"

"I am suggesting no such thing, Garrus," snapped Karin, "but those kids need a little more than being shuffled between your friends and wondering what's going to happen to them if you don't come back."

"I know that Karin!" he growled loudly and pushed away from the table. "I don't need you or anyone else to tell me what to do with my kids."

The last thing he saw was Karin staring at him with her mouth slightly agape.

Out in the morning sun, Urz came rushing at him, a small stream of kids chasing him. Wondering what the problem was, Garrus saw that they had tied something to his tail. He couldn't help but laugh at the sight of Urz actually looking scared and when the beast cowered behind him, the children all came to a sudden stop several feet from the turian nervous looks on their faces.

"All right, who did it?" he demanded from them with a heavy tone.

There was a small murmur within their ranks and after a moment a drell child that looked no older than ten and a human girl stepped forward their eyes lowered to the ground.

"It was our fault, sir. We thought it'd be funny." said the drell, a girl from what he could tell due to the pitch of her voice.

Bending down, Garrus removed his knife and cut at the string that was wrapped around his varren's tail. After calming the creature, he glowered at them.

"Don't do it again. He's not a plaything. He's a former pit fighting champion and can be very dangerous if you handle him wrong."

The kids all mumbled an apology. Letting out a sigh, Garrus waved them away with an annoyed grunt, "Just get to class."

There was a stampede of retreating feet. He looked down at Urz whose tail was waving happily up at him. His mandibles twitched in a smile, "Come on, let's get this day over with."
Chapter 19

Chapter 19...huzzah...okay now off to reading you little scamps.

"You see anything?" the voice called up.

Garrus nearly fell from the branch he was perched on as Rixa's voice cut into his head. He was having another headache and the sudden high pitched shrill the female used served only to intensify it.

Taking a couple of breaths, he shook his head down at her.

"No, I don't, so please stop with the yelling," he bit out.

"Fuck you, Vakarian!" she snapped back, kicking the tree; the leaves rustling with each attack.

Gripping the branch tightly with his thighs, Garrus looked down at her and laughed, "Not until Aki gets rid of that scale itch Sunan was telling me about!"

Her foot stopped mid-kick as she glared up at him, "How do you know about that?"

"When you know how to be quiet you can learn a lot of things. So, if you would be so kind as to stay away from Urz, it would be much appreciated," he grunted as he prepared for his descent, nearly knocked from it by another powerful kick from Rixa; cursing obscenities that even Garrus was unfamiliar with.

Making sure his equipment was secure; he couldn't help but think that Antius had some sort of ulterior motive sending him out with Rixa.

Generally, the hunting duties were given to larger teams due to the size of the prey they were sent to catch. Garrus had seen a few of the animals on this planet and figured it was the Antius' idea of a sick joke.

Climbing down the tree, he landed with a soft thud on the ground and Urz came bounding up with a small bird-like creature clenched in his teeth. Its feet dangled lifelessly as the varren's head jerked in Garrus' direction symbolizing the creature had caught it for the turian.

"Good job, Urz," he praised giving the creature a fond pat on the head as he took the prize, "That's a very good job," he cooed making the beast growl contently.

"Oh spirits," Rixa groaned in disgust at the affection the varren was receiving. "Will you quit praising the fucking mongrel? All he did was catch a bird. We have more important things to get done and I want to be back by sun down."

Urz snapped at her but she paid him no mind and hit the ignition on her vehicle before heading further into the valley.

Giving Urz another pat on the head, Garrus set the bird inside the container on the back of his vehicle and starting his own engine and continued on to the next area.

The warm, muggy air felt good in his lungs as they rode through the field. The machines they were riding were modified recreational vehicles humans rode on Earth called "quads." When he'd first heard the word, he couldn't help his brain going to the most juvenile meaning of the word that he
knew.

To his surprise, Rixa had actually chastised him and explained the purpose behind the name. Apparently, some humans still used wheels on vehicles of this nature for what they called, "offroading," which involved them driving these machines through treacherous terrain in a recreational fashion. When he learned of this function, Garrus was thankful that the wheels had been removed and the machines were now operated by a small eezo core and propulsion system that he was more familiar with.

It quickly became apparent to Garrus that vehicles like this were responsible for Shepard's abysmal driving skills.

After an hour of riding, Rixa signaled for them to stop. Pulling up next to her, he waited for Urz to settle next to him. He opened his canteen for a drink before pouring some into Urz's mouth, the varren's tongue lapping loudly at the water.

"Why did you stop?" he asked, readjusting his helmet.

She remained silent for a moment, her head moving back and forth. Following her gaze, he scanned the horizon until she raised her hand and pointed at something in the distance.

"You think you can get a good shot from up there?"

Garrus knew the question was a challenge and laughed, "Get it in my sights and I'll drop it."

Ten minutes later, Garrus was resting comfortably on his stomach; Widow aimed at the valley. The communications channel was quiet save for Rixa's shallow breathing. He waited patiently, his own breathing in synch with hers as he waited for her signal. Finally, it came in the form of her shouting in his ears.

"GET READY VAKARIAN! WE GOT A BIG ONE!"

Releasing the safety he asked, "What's your location?"

She gave another loud laugh and screamed in delight before answering, "I'll be coming from the west and make sure you have..OH SHIT!"

There was a loud crashing sound and Garrus saw spotted her, a blood red streak atop a silver chariot.

"Get ready! It's about ten seconds behind me!"

"Roger that," he responded before activating his armor piercing rounds.

"Contact in five...four...three...two..." came Rixa's voice over the microphone, her breathing becoming louder and more haggard in his ear.

There was a crash as a huge horned creature appeared emerged from the tree line. Garrus took a deep breath and focusing down the barrel of his rifle; took aim. His finger barely had to squeeze the trigger before his shoulder jerked back from the recoil and the bullet ripped through the air.

The round was a little off from the vital spot he was told to aim for. Through the scope he noticed a spurt of blood erupt from the creature's neck. The creature bucked wildly making it a bit more difficult to locate the chink in the its armor, but he remained calm and waited for his target to present itself. When it finally appeared, his finger squeezed the trigger quickly sending two rounds
slicing through the air and into the small gaps of skin in the creature's neck. The creature stood up on its legs and let out a loud roar before crashing to the ground.

The cliff rattled from the creatures collapse sending birds flying from their nests as Rixa shouted into her comm-link.

"Holy shit! Nice going Vakarian. I'm going to have to call in a couple of transports to haul this thing back to the colony."

Garrus couldn't help but swell up with pride at her exclamation.

"Don't know what you were so worried about. I'm a professional," he boasted proudly.

"A professional what?" she asked with a slight befuddlement to her voice.

"Don't worry, about it," he responded with a laugh. "How long do you think you can feed the colony with that?" he asked while climbing down from the cliff.

"It should last the levo-based people about two or three months if it's been eating well enough. I'm not usually on hunting duty so we'll have to wait for the others to get here," she huffed, staring at the beast.

Climbing onto his hover vehicle, he kicked the engine to life and began driving toward his kill. He was lucky the cliff had hardly any roughage around it. Garrus hated driving these things. They had no control, no precision, and they handled worse than James piloting a Kodiak.

When he arrived at the kill he immediately turned off his olfactory filters. He had heard about the creatures from some of the colonists but nothing they said could have prepared him for what was in front of him. The creature was massive. Easily the size of what humans called an elephant, but from the pictures he'd seen of an elephant it did not have natural armor; nor did it sound like, "the ass end of a north bound cow," as he'd once heard Kaidan say.

The meaning was lost on him but if it smelt even remotely like this creature, Garrus was amazed that the colonists could stomach eating such an animal.

"By the spirits!" he exclaimed as he stepped away from the creature.

"Relax Vakarian, the smell doesn't take long to go away and we can leave once they come to butcher this thing," Rixa said, chuckling as she removed her knife.

She stuck the blade between the folds of the armor and cut out a small slab of meat; looking at it for a moment before activating her communicator, "Sunan? Get Marco on the line."

An hour later, Garrus was sitting on the back of his vehicle as the typical hunting squad arrived with a couple of tanks. His Valiant was resting on his lap; eyes still scanning the horizon like a hawk in search of scavengers.

"Well, well, well, it looks like you've hit the jackpot, Vakarian," growled Antius as he approached the carcass.

Sliding off of his ride, Garrus slung his Valiant over his shoulder and walked up to his kill.

"It would have gone down quicker if I hadn't missed that vital point."

"The one between the plates in the neck?" the mercenary asked, tapping his jugular.
"Yeah, it was much smaller than what your people told me," his voice thick with self-disappointment.

Antius gave a small shrug and adjusted his shotgun, "You aren't the only one who's missed that mark, son. Not to mention you've been suffering from some sort of mental issues?"

Garrus felt his mandibles twitch in annoyance. He hadn't told anyone about his attacks but he figured Rixa had opened her mouth to the older male after witnessing his attack on their way to the colony.

"Nothing serious, just the occasional headache," Garrus was not liking the direction the conversation was heading. "If you'll excuse me I –"

He was cut off by Antius' shotgun colliding with the side of his head. His vision blurred and he heard a loud ringing in his head as he staggered back. There was something that sounded like a shout, but he couldn't identify the owner. As he tried to regain his footing, Garrus saw dark shape speeding toward him. He was barely able to dodge it and countered with a kick to the owner's stomach.

Thankful that it was Antius, Garrus pulled forward and brought his elbow down on the male's head.

"What the hell is your problem?"

Antius shoved his elbow into Garrus' stomach before headbutting the younger turian and growled, "Gaining collateral."

Garrus staggered back and threw out a kick that was lucky enough to catch the other male in the chin.

"Collateral for what? That deal?"

He could hear Antius spit something on the ground before being kicked in the knee. Garrus heard something snap and howled in pain as he fell to the ground. He looked up and saw another blur of black only to feel the familiar shotgun collide with his head again.

The ringing was gone, but his vision was still shot. Reaching to his side, he pulled out his pistol and sat up. He took aim and let a series of rounds in the direction of a large blob. He was hoping to hear Antius scream in agony but was instead rewarded with a loud yelp of pain.

He'd only heard that yelp twice before; enough to know that he'd hit Urz. Cursing the spirits, he raised the gun again only to have it kicked from his hands. He could hear it clatter on the ground several feet away, but he was too focused on trying to figure out how to get the gun out of Antius' hands to worry about the location of the pistol.

"I do apologize, Vakarian," the regret in the merc leader's voice was almost as thick as the dead creatures hide, "I have the utmost respect for you and your crew; it's the only reason I'm keeping you alive."

Garrus let out a hacking laugh and spat out a bit of blood, "You have no idea who is on the other side of that portal, Antius."

Antius let out a palpable sigh, "No I do not, but they obviously value your life if they were willing to send those troops through the portal."
"Tasting the blood in his mouth, Garrus mixed it with some spit and sent the blue wad of phlegm at his captor.

"The only people who will walk away from this are the civilians. You have no idea what the woman leading them is willing to do to cover her ass."

"I'm willing to take my chances," Antius waved at someone off to the side, "Get the restraints and load him into my vehicle. The rest of you get back to the base, we'll leave the kill here. I want you all back their finishing the fortifications."

There was a series of confirmations on his orders. Garrus' vision was returning and he could see Rixa being drug away. Her body was limp, but he couldn't see any blood. Though he was uncertain of her condition, the fact that he didn't see her bleeding was a small relief. When he didn't see Urz he felt his stomach drop.

"Antius, might I have a last request should things go sour?"

The older turian let out a growl, "What is it?"

Scanning the field, Garrus found the limp form of his varren a few feet from his kill. He was prepared to ask for Antius to bury the creature but when he saw the creature's chest rising slowly, his mandibles twitched in excitement. He let out a low chuckle but his elation was short lived by the sound of the shotgun being loaded with a fresh thermal clip.

"Sorry Garrus. He's too much of a risk if someone decides to let him loose. It's best if I put him out of his misery." his ice-cold tone cooling the air.

When Antius' back was turned, Garrus tried to get up, but the injury to his knee and head kept him from getting any sort of equilibrium; kept him from coming to Urz's aid.

Garrus could only watch as Antius slowly marched toward the varren. He could see Urz's chest convulsing violently, the blood bubbling out of the wounds; staining the flesh. Garrus grit his teeth and gave one last push upward, only to be rewarded with a loud snap and collapsed with a dull thud.

He could see Antius point his gun at the varren and as his vision faded he heard the sound of gunshots.

When he regained consciousness, he greeted by the sound of medical equipment beeping and let out a loud groan. He was in the colony's hospital. His head throbbed like the bass in a night club and when he tried to move he winced as pain shot up his leg.

"Well I'm alive so I guess I can count that as a partial victory," his voice was even rougher than usual; feeling like razor blades as he spoke.

There was no window in his room. Everything was quiet, save for the beeping of medical equipment and the occasional passing of a medic or cough of a patient. The lack of wounded civilians and soldiers was a good sign, but if he knew anything about Hannah she would have minimized the amount of injuries to save on medical supplies.

Flexing his hand, he was thankful that he hadn't lost his fine motor controls and searched for a remote control; letting out a grunt of victory as he pressed a random button.

"Oh, that's the stuff," he exclaimed when he felt the pain-killer enter his system.

He let it settle in his system before hitting another button. This time he heard a small buzzing
sound and a familiar face rounded the corner into his room.

"OH THANK GOD!" exclaimed Karin Chakwas at the sight of him; hand covering her mouth

Garrus let out a raspy laugh before coughing from the lack of moisture in his throat, "Couldn't get me a drink could you, Doc?"

"Of course, Garrus," she laughed as she removed the hand from her mouth giving him her typical motherly smile before leaving him alone.

When she came back, she placed a few ice chips in his mouth.

"Haven't we done this before, Doc?" the cold water soothing the pain in his throat.

Chakwas let out a chuckle and put the cup down.

"That we have Garrus, but I don't mind," she reassured him.

He closed his eyes and lay back down. After a few minutes of silence, Garrus felt the urge to ask, "How many people has she killed?"

Chakwas nearly dropped her data pad in surprise.

"What do you mean?" she asked taken aback by the inquiry.

"Come on, Doc. I'm alive and I don't see Antius which means Hannah's already been here," he murmured, knowingly.

Eyes still closed, he heard the shuffling of feet as he waited for her to reply.

"Garrus…" her voice much lower, "…there's something you should know. Antius…he…" Karin's stammering was cut short by an all too familiar voice; a voice belonging to someone who was supposed to be dead.

"I took care of him for you, Garrus," the voice somberly declared.

The sniper felt his stomach drop, unable to believe what he was hearing.

What…no…

The pain in his head instantly dissipated at the sound of her voice and he shot up from the bed which was foolish. His stomach convulsed in protest and Chakwas was there to save the day. He was lucky that what came out made it into the bowl she provided him.

When she removed the bowl, he whispered his thanks but couldn't bring himself to raise his head.

Instead, he focused on his hands; they were actually trembling. The only time they did that was when he was having one of his attacks. He silently prayed to the Spirits that this was one of them or perhaps a hallucination or nightmare….this isn't real…

"This isn't real," he whispered; voice echoing his thoughts.

"Garrus, look at me," the voice requested soothingly.

He felt a hand on his arm, pleading for him to look up but he didn't dare look at it; afraid of what he might see.
"This isn't real," he whispered, beginning again; panic setting in that the injury in his head finally taken its toll, "This isn't real. This isn't real," he repeated, the edge of panic growing sharper, "THIS ISN'T REAL!" shaking his head, trying to reset himself to reality.

He snapped his head to the right and opened his eyes, hoping this was just a dream and that he would wake up. It wasn't and he wouldn't. Instead, he saw the all too familiar pair of red eyes; eyes that he spent so many hours lost in, locked with his own. Copper colored hair he'd ran his talons through so many times as she snored gently next to him. Her face, though newly scarred down the left side from cheek to neck, was just as beautiful as he remembered.

Raising a talon, he gently ran it along the scars. She waited quietly, blinking; the rise and fall of her chest with each breath were the only movements she made. His fingers were still shaking as he examined her. Her skin was just as soft as it had been when she kissed him goodbye before leaving him behind. He had so many things he wanted to say to her about everything; about what they'd gone through, about Ismene & Kevin, the rage he felt when she left him behind.

She sat there patiently as he tried to make sense of what was in front of him, but he couldn't. He couldn't bring himself to say anything. For the second time in his life, she was sitting in front of him, a specter of a dream that he had all but given up on.

He swallowed hard around the lump that had formed in his throat; pressing his palm against her flesh.

"Is it really you?" he asked softly.

Her lips parted a bit more, the scarred flesh of her neck stretching as she smiled.

"Yes, Garrus," she replied; pressing her forehead against his, "It's me."

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, "It's.....it's good to see you again," her voice choking, as the words passed her lips.

Garrus could not bring himself to say the same.
Chapter 20

Chapter 20 - you guys like 19? Huh? Huh? Huh? Were you happy? Because at the time I started writing this I was still waiting for the proofing so...yeah. Either way it took us 19 long chapters but hopefully the payout was worth it! Though as I write this, you all are probably more concerned about Urz at this point.

This chapter is going to need A LOT of work or it does. Especially when I'll be writing this character because...well I've technically never really wrote her! But here goes.

Chapter 20

"I always thought I'd be the one finding you in the hospital bed," he grumbled at her after a few minutes of silence.

She chuckled and pulled her head from his; opening her eyes to find his slowly scanning her while his hand ran along the scarred flesh, slowly going lower. When he reached the collar of her shirt she placed her hand over his and shook her head.

"Don't." she commanded softly.

When he tried to pull his hand free to see what was beneath the shirt, she activated her biotics and gently pushed his hands away.

"This isn't the time or the place, Garrus," she chastised him.

"Fair enough," he responded with a hint of disappointment and concern, "I was just curious to see how bad it was."

She stared him down; waiting until his hands were back on the bed before lowering her barrier. His mandibles twitched in agitation.

It pained her to push him away, but she couldn't risk him getting too close. If he saw her now...she didn't even want to think of what his reaction would be.

Instead, she took his hand in hers and gave it a squeeze hoping that he would return the gesture. When he did, she let out a loud sigh of relief.

"You killed him, didn't you?" he asked bluntly; changing the subject.

The question wasn't unexpected. Leela had figured that he would ask it as soon as he could.

"Yes, I did," she nodded without hesitation.

"And Urz?"

"He's..." she paused for a moment; figuring out how to break the news when the sound of a screaming medic caught their attention. The creature bounded into view a second later; wads of bandaging trailing behind him.

Leela was nearly knocked from her chair as the varren placed his front claws on the bed and tried to lick Garrus.

"As you can see he's just fine," laughed the commander as the varren turned and licked her in the
"Down boy!" she said, still laughing as she pulled him off the bed.

"Sit," she commanded and the creature dropped to the ground though his tail continued to thump rhythmically against the leg of her chair.

"Good varren," she cooed as she pulled a bit of dried meat from her pocket and put in his mouth. Instead of chewing, Urz jumped back up and put the meat in Garrus' lap; barking at the turian.

Garrus laughed and held the bit of dried meat up to the varren's mouth, "I can't eat this and you need your strength."

Urz whined and took the meat back and swallowed loudly before giving his owners each a lick on the face.

"You almost had me there," Garrus laughed as he watched Urz curl up on the ground and stare up at his owners.

Shepard shrugged and gave a small chuckle, "I was actually going to tell you that he was under observation. But as you can see, he's about as good at following orders as you are."

His mandibles twitched as he laughed and looked down at the varren. Gratitude filled his eyes as he said, "He's saved mine and the remainder of the crews' life a few times while we were on scavenging missions on the Citadel. We've grown rather fond of him."

Leela felt her heart leap into her chest at his words.

"They're okay?" she asked, sounding like Ismene when she was told she'd be getting a surprise.

She watched as he rubbed his forehead.

"Not all of them," he finally growled out.

"Tell me, Vakarian," her voice carrying the same weight as when she ordered the armada to open fire on the Reapers.

He shifted uncomfortably and looked at her, his blue eyes unsure of how to proceed.

Squeezing his hand harder she ordered once more for him to tell her what happened.

"Tell me, now," she growled back, squeezing his hand harder; ordering him to tell her what happened. She felt him try to pull away but her grip was ironclad; unwilling to let go until he told her.

Finally, his arm relaxed and he gave his own growl, "For the most part they are safe."

"For the most part? What do you mean 'for the most part'? They're either safe or they aren't Garrus."

She had to struggle to keep her voice down. If it wasn't for holding Garrus' hand, she was almost certain she would have been screaming at the top of her lungs.

She could hear the low rumble of his purr in her ears as he rested a hand on her cheek.
"It means we lost a few of our friends, Leela," he explained gently; trying to ease the blow.

Her heart clenched in her chest and she was barely able to choke out, "Who did we lose?"

His nostrils flared, but she didn't look away as he began the list. She listened quietly as she heard him tell her the details he knew: Jacob repelling an attack on the Crucible during the final siege, Miranda dying while serving with her fighter team, Javik's sacrifice, Tali losing her leg, and Joker's injuries that left him bed ridden for several months.

His voice continued to drone on as he if he was checking names off of a list.

"ENOUGH!" she screamed, unable to take the casual tone of his voice any longer.

Garrus grew quiet and she felt Urz press his snout against her arm.

"How can you be so casual with about this? They were our friends, not names on a list," she choked out, tasting the salt of her tears.

She tried to choke back her sobs but couldn't. Feeling his talons make their way through her matted hair to scratch the skin beneath, her composure began to return but she couldn't stop the tears from streaming down her cheeks as he spoke.

"I was in London, Leela," he began evenly; "I was there when they began finding the bodies. I helped bury some of them. I saw the faces of people we helped," his voice becoming rougher; cracking under the weight of the words, "While you've been here, I was back on Earth and the Citadel ensuring that people were able to survive. I can talk about them like that because I've seen the results and it's one of the few ways I can even keep sane," he finally ground out tersely; the brutal reality behind his words clear.

"So, that's what this comes down to?" she gasped out softly between sobs, "You think I stayed here choice, don't you? Is that what you're trying to say?" she finished spitting out the question; a coldness spreading in her chest, realizing what the answer could imply.

He turned his head away, confirming her suspicion; feeling the coldness wrap around her heart.

"I didn't mean it like that," he responded, his usual timber sounding more like a child who'd just been caught in a lie.

"Don't bullshit me Garrus. You never say anything without meaning it," she snapped; the cold turning to anger, but the hurt, the hurt drowned it all out.

She could feel her fingernails digging into the palms of her hands.

"You think I liked sitting here not knowing what was going on? You think I enjoy having to relive every single day the decision I had to make on the Crucible? Of thinking that I led all those people to their deaths and thinking that I was that I was going to spend the rest of my life stuck on this God forsaken fucking planet?" she spewed angrily.

She could see the discomfort in his eyes.

"I've spent three FUCKING years of my life cut off from everything, Garrus. Two," she reached out and sharply turned his face to hers; holding up her scarred fingers, "of which I was clinically dead. This past year? I spent six months in the bed you're sleeping in while Aki and the other medics patched me up," she ground out hoarsely through clenched teeth.
"Did they even know who you were?" he asked quietly, resting his hand in hers; gently calling for a temporary truce.

"Antius knew," she sighed squeezing his suede like hand; silently giving into the truce, "I was supposed to be a bargaining chip."

"You mean he was going to attempt to strike a deal with the Reapers?" asked Garrus, his voice a mix of shock and amusement.

"Apparently he didn't get the memo that the Reapers didn't make deals," remarked Shepard with a grunt of disgust.

They both shared a chuckle before falling into an uncomfortable silence, neither one sure of how to proceed with the conversation. The gentle droning of medical equipment and the hushed chatter of the medics the only noise.

Finally mustering up the courage to continue, Shepard opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by a sudden commotion at the front door to the hospital. She could hear muffled voices from outside the front doors and climbed to her feet, only to be frozen in her tracks when she heard the doors burst open and a chaotic orchestra of voices flood in.

"Admiral, please!" pleaded one of the medics, "This is a medical facility and your presence is causing deal of stress to our patients."

"I DON'T CARE IF IT'S A FUNERAL HOME!" snapped the intruder, "YOU FIND THE COMMANDER AND YOU GET HER OUT HERE RIGHT NOW!"

OH SHIT!

It felt like somebody threw a bucket of ice down the back of her shirt. Her eyes widened at the sound of the voice. Instinct taking over, she immediately tried to make a break for it but something kept her from making her get away. Turning in frustration, she saw Garrus had caught her by the arm; keeping her from making a strategic withdrawal.

"Let me go, Garrus!" she hissed frantically; trying to separate herself from the turian, "This isn't funny. My life is in danger."

The turian shook his head, mandibles twitching in excitement as he laughed, "Sorry, Shepard but I think you need to face this."

She pulled on his grip, cursing at him.

"Goddamn it Garrus! Let me go!" When he didn't, she growled and activated her biotics; instantly separating his vice like grip from her arm.

"I'll be back later," she whispered hurriedly; praying that she had enough time make her escape. She was wrong.

"You aren't going anywhere, Commander," the admiral growled at her back.

Shepard's eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, while Garrus chuckled in his bed. She glared daggers at him; imagining all the different ways she could kill him for delaying her escape.

Letting out a groan like a teenager caught sneaking in after curfew; she straightened her clothes
before turning around, bracing herself for what was to come.

The sudden stinging her face received was expected but didn't make it hurt any less. She wasn't going give her assailant the satisfaction of seeing her in pain.

Instead, she stood up straighter snapping her heels together, and saluted the admiral.

"It's good to see you too, Mom."
Chapter 21

So now onward to 21...yeah...onward...that's that. Lots of swearing lately...huh...

Chapter 21

Shepard hadn't felt this sick since that night when she was seventeen. Her mother even had the same scowl on her face. It was amazing, here she was almost thirty-four years old and she felt like a kid waiting to be punished. The room her mother had brought them too reeked of tobacco and in a strange way it was rather comforting.

She remembered when she was a kid sitting with Hannah in the lounges of the ships they'd been stationed on. Every time her mother came back from a mission, they'd eat, they'd play games, and after that they'd head to the lounge to watch the stars shoot pass them as they flew. She would always fall asleep in her mother's lap and though Hannah never smoked around her daughter, the lingering scent of the leaf was always on her.

This interrogation wasn't what she expected. Instead of Hackett, the Council, or any other person with political clout, she was sitting with her mother in an empty dining hall. The silence was thick enough to cut with a knife as the commander waited in anxious silence; the scent of tobacco all but welcoming.

"So," her mother began lighting another cigarette. Shutting down her omni-tool she flicked a bit of ash into the tray and leaned back in her chair, eyes narrowing on her daughter.

"So what?" asked the commander, the hair on the back of her neck standing up at her mother's tone. It was the same tone she'd heard that morning when she was seventeen. There was a weight to the question. A knowing weight, but just how much knowledge was in her mother's head was a mystery and Shepard decided to play it safe.

The admiral's nostrils flared as a steady stream of smoke billowed around her head. Her red eyes were glowing in the dim light giving her a demon like appearance.

"Don't play stupid with me, Commander," her voice, a growling roar in the empty hall and Shepard felt a cold sweat begin to accompany the standing hairs on the back of her neck.

"I have eye witness accounts and testimony from Antius' men that you were well aware of who was in this colony from the moment they made contact with the away team," she bit out, exacting each word with a violent tap of her finger.

Relaxing slightly, to show that she had nothing to hide, Leela calmly stated, "I was moved from my quarters into a small holding cell when Rixa and Aki first made contact with Samara."

Her mother made no movement at the answer, telling the commander it was safe to continue.

"Samara had told them who she was and what she was doing on this planet. Rixa immediately reported it back to Antius," she paused for a moment to gauge her mother's reaction but the only movement the admiral made was to dispose of her smoldering cigarette and light up a new one.

When it was apparent she wasn't going to get one, she continued, "Upon receiving this news I was removed from my duties in the mess hall and locked into the previously mentioned holding cell by
a couple of Antius' men biding my time and gathering intel with each changing of the guard."

Hannah's eyes flickered momentarily.

"What information did you obtain, Commander?" she asked, her tone cold and even; unconcerned that her daughter had been held prisoner.

Coughing loudly, the commander straightened in her seat before continuing.

"It was there that I learned that several of Antius' guards were concerned about the wellbeing of the colony," her voice, although steady and strong, held a slight quiver, "Many of them held a grudge against him for using so many medical supplies to fix my injuries. Others were concerned that he was slowly becoming paranoid about the possibility of a Reaper attack."

The admiral chewed on her lower at this little tidbit, a sign of her taking in a new portion of the equation. "I had heard about this from Garrus' reports." She took another slow drag of her cigarette before asking, "But I'm also concerned as to why he decided to save you?"

"Nearly a year ago," began the commander, her voice shaking slightly as the memories flooded her mind. "I made the decision that ended the war. I was caught..." she stumbled; the memory of the final gunshot ringing in her ears "I was caught in the explosion inside the Crucible," she continued as the memories continued to flash.

The admiral's eyes widened slightly at the break in her daughter's voice, but she made no move to help her though her hand twitched as she fought the urge. The concern in her mother's eyes gave Leela the strength to continue.

"I was...badly injured, "she gasped as the scars on her face and chest began to burn. "I was... found by...Keeper," letting out a loud gasp out as the image of the green creature dragging her through the burning wreckage flashed into her head. The memory was so vividly real; she felt the smoke fill her lungs setting them on fire. It was getting harder and harder to breathe, her vision blurred. She could hear explosions and feel the ground scraping her forearms as the Keeper continued to pull her away from the Crucible. She began to whispered a prayer her father had taught her when she was young; her voice a ragged series of coughs and before she could finish. She felt one final explosion before the world went black….

"Leela. Leela please wake up," the voice called through the blackness.

Her mind raced and sudden pain shot through her body as she attempted to open her eyes.

"Mom?" she asked, her throat felt dry and burned as she spoke. "Why am I on the floor?"

"You passed out." stated an all too familiar, yet slightly annoyed voice.

"Doctor Chakwas?" she asked her voice raspy and confused.

"Who else would it be, Commander?" the doctor retorted, chuckling; her footsteps growing closer. "Your mother called me as soon as you hit the floor. You've been out for about twenty minutes in case you were wondering."

Pushing herself up, the younger Shepard clutch her head as a searing pain shot through it.

"Did I hit my head?" she asked with a wince, her other hand massaging her throat hoping to would reduce the burning sensation.
"No you did not," replied the doctor, "for which I am eternally grateful. I've had enough time keeping Garrus from taking one too many to the head without having to worry about you all over again."

There was a hint of laughter in the doctor's voice and the commander chuckled.

"Thanks a lot, Doc. I'll be sure to keep that in mind the next time you decide to risk our lives by getting drunk in the med bay," Leela retorted.

There was an irritated grunt from behind her and the doctor gave a nervous laugh and quickly gathered her supplies. "Well then it seems that the commander is not having any memory problems, so I'll be leaving you two alone now."

"Are you okay?" she asked; returning her attention to her daughter and resting a hand reassuringly on her back.

Waiting for Chakwas to leave, Leela nodded, "Yeah," she croaked out, her throat still burning, "I could do with a drink though."

A canteen instantly appeared and she gave a dry laugh.

"Always prepared," she smiled as she downed the contents washing away the burning in her throat.

"Well it's a mother's duty to be prepared for any kind of emergency," she laughed even though Leela could see the concern still in her mother's eyes.

The gaze was making the commander uncomfortable and removing her lips from canteen asked, "Is everything okay?"

Without hesitation, the admiral's arms pulled her daughter against her body; squeezing her, terrified to let go. Her body racked with sobs, soaking through the thin fabric of her daughter's shirt.

"It's okay, Mom," Leela whispered gently as she freed her arms from her mother's tight embrace and pulled her close.

Hannah shook her head and sobbed, "No it's not."

Lifting her head, she pressed it to her daughter's and sniffed, "The first time I see you in years and the only thing I can do is slap you."

Shepard hadn't seen her mother in such a state since her father's death. Leela was the only person who'd seen her mother this weak and it scared her every time. Her parents were the source of her strength and the remainder of that strength was crumbling before her.

"Why didn't you come back to me?" Hannah pleaded.

Leela felt her own tears rising as she wiped away her mother's.

"I'm sorry. But, it..." she let out a loud breath, "it just wasn't possible."

Nodding the admiral separated from her daughter and smoothed her child's hair like she had when she was younger and smiled at her.

"I know sweetheart," the admiral planted a wet kiss on the woman's head and gave her another hug, "It's just hard to believe that you're still alive."
Feeling her lips curl upwards, Shepard laughed, "Well I did have you and Dad to show me the importance of staying strong and coming home to the people you love."

The admiral sniffed loudly and laughed. "I'm not sure how much of a help I was seeing as how I always fussed over you."

The commander gave her mother a gentle punch in the arm.

"You give yourself too little credit. I've read some of your files. I don't know everything, but I know that while Dad may have given me my training, I got my brains from you."

"Flattery, my only weakness." smiled the admiral as she pressed her forehead to her daughter's.

"Well it's true." said her daughter with the same grin, "How the hell else would I have been able to keep sane while running those ships?"

Hannah laughed loudly and wiped a tear from her eye, "I've read your reports. You did have your hands full. Especially with Jack, she's a lively one."

Shepard's eyes widened with fear at the thought of what happened when her mother and Jack met for the first time. "You've met Jack?"

"I've kicked her ass, young lady." boasted the admiral with a flex of her arms.

Covering her mouth with her fist to cover her laughter, Leela asked, "How the hell did that happen?"

Leela listened in silence as Hannah told her stories of how she'd traveled with Garrus and her crew on scavenging. Shepard felt her heart sink again, being told for the first time how much she'd missed. While she'd been on an operating table, her friends and mother had spent their days cleaning up her mess and searching for survivors.

Her guilt; however, was overridden by shock when her mother explained how the arrival of Garrus and the others at the colony was not part of the original plan.

"So, you're saying that Garrus and the others coming here was a fluke?" her daughter asked breathlessly; surprised.

"Possibly," responded Hannah rather nonchalantly, "We're unsure of the details but I'm not arguing with the results," she squeezed her daughter closer to her. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Shepard nodded, "I'm alive, Mom. I've found you and I know that I didn't fuck everything up, so I'd say I'm doing pretty well."

"I don't think that little episode you just had would be filed under the category of 'pretty well'," her mother scolded.

"Well if you'd like, next time you have questions I can find a way to reprogram this and you can go sifting through my memories," Leela reached into her pants and pulled out a small device.

The admiral took the item and examined it; silver, rectangular with a small blue core.

"What is it?" asked the older woman as she gently ran her hands along its smooth body looking for any possible way to open the device for study.

"It's called an 'echo shard'," responded the commander, a small hint of contempt in her voice as she
glared at the small device, "It allowed the prothean people to store their memories so others may
learn from their experiences."

"I take it you can use it because of that 'cipher' thing you told me about?" guessed the admiral, her
voice thick with fascination that such a tiny object could possess such power.

"Yeah, it was given to me by Javik, the Prothean that fought beside us," she said taking the item
from her mother, her fingers trembling as she stared at it, "I've seen a lot of things from the last
Cycle - painful things," she said her voice filling with anger remembering all the death the Reapers
had caused.

"It activated when I asked you about how you lived, didn't it?" interrupted Hannah, trying to steer
her daughter away from the memories of the war.

"Yeah," she spat as she put the item back into her pocket, "The fucking thing is only good for
reminding me of how much of a failure I am."

A loud thwack echoed throughout the dining hall as Hannah's hand made contact with the back of
her daughter's head.

"The fuck did you do that for?!" snapped the younger woman rubbing the now stinging flesh under
her matted hair.

The admiral gave her another smack earning another curse from her child before snorting, "Why
the hell would you say you're a failure?!"

Her voice was heavy with pride for the first time since they met and Leela could see some of her
mother's strength returning.

"That's not what Garrus seems to think," the commander chuckled, giving a lazy shrug and
slouching.

A deep rumbling emanated from her mother's chest as she growled, "What did he say to you?"

The hairs on the back of the commander's neck stood up once more at the threat in her mother's
voice.

"He didn't say anything, Mom - except what I wanted him to say."

"What happened?" the fury in her mother's eyes slowly shifting to concern.

"I blew up at him when all he did was give me the information I asked for," the commander sighed,
rubbing her temple.

"What information was that?" Hannah asked cautiously.

"Our friends...and Earth," muttered Leela, her face contorted in pain; scratching the back of her
neck.

"And somehow this translated into you being a failure?" inquired the admiral, the confusion on her
face growing as she attempted to understand her daughter's logic.

"I don't know," sighed the commander running a hand along her face as she spoke.

"Well then how did he make you feel that way if all he did was give you information?"
"I don't know!" Her frustration boiling over, the younger woman snapped, "Why don't you go and ask him yourself since you seem to like him so much. Hell, why don't you just take my place! That way he won't have to guilt trip me into feeling like a bigger piece of shit than I already do!"

The admiral's left hand flew again. This time Shepard was prepared for it and dodged the blow only to have her mother's right hand make contact with her face with a small pop.

"What the fuck was that for?" howled Leela as she felt the sting on her cheek.

"Because you're acting like a god damn child!" snapped Hannah, nostrils flaring.

"I'm not acting..." the commander meekly said, taken aback by her mother's response.

"Bullshit!" snapped Hannah, "You are acting like a child thinking that just because you weren't there on Earth, he doesn't care about you anymore."

"Yeah? How do you even know that he cares about me?" snorted Leela in disbelief.

"You know about the injury he took to the head?" asked the admiral rapping her knuckles against her graying hair. "The one responsible for him being knocked out for a few days and that requires him to have excess fluids drained every couple of weeks?"

Leela nodded, "Yeah, Chakwas said he nearly died from it," taking a deep breath, she added, "She said he saved some soldiers life and had a couple hundred pounds of concrete land on him. It was a miracle he survived."

Her heart clenched in her chest at the mere thought of Garrus dying, but her mother made no comment on her reaction.

A devilish smirk crossed the admiral's lips.

"Well, then you also know that they had to keep him on heavy medication until the swelling went down," she winked at her daughter; chuckling brazenly, "Let's just say your boyfriend is rather handsy when he's under the influence of hospital grade drugs."

A jolt of electricity shot up the commander's spine at the seductive sound of her mother's voice.

"What did you do?" gasped the commander as the tightness in her chest loosened. She could feel the blood pounding in her ears as her heart raced at the possibility of what her mother might have done to the turian sniper.

The admiral chuckled at the panic in her daughter's voice and winked.

"I didn't do anything. Your," she poked her daughter hard in the chest, "boyfriend was the one hitting on me," her finger pressed against her chest as her smile grew.

"Oh Jesus," groaned the commander as nausea overcoming her as her mind raced at the possible events that transpired between her mother and boyfriend.

"Oh what's crawled up your ass?" the admiral chuckled as she leaned back in her chair; a smug, knowing smile on her face, "He was the one who started it; telling me about how nice my hair smelled."

"I'm not hearing this," whispered the commander as she shook her head in an attempt to block out her mother's voice.
"And about how he wanted to take me to a tropical beach when he got out of the hospital," continued the admiral, her voice filled with glee at the sight of her daughter's discomfort.

"I think I'm going to be sick," retched the younger woman as her mother continued.

The admiral laughed and snapped her fingers suddenly remembering the best part.

"Oh! He also mentioned about wanting to lick lime jell-o off my..."

"Okay, I've had enough of this." said the commander, her voice heavy with disgust.

She proceeded to get out of her chair only to be forced back down into it. A small twinge of pain shot up her tail bone the moment her butt hit the seat.

The commander's eyes remained locked on the door in the far corner of the room. Her mother's hand held hers tightly, but slightly loose enough to let the commander know she was free to leave if she wanted.

"Leela, will you look at me?"

"What?" she turned in her chair with a sigh.

"He does love you, Leela. More than anything."

"When did he tell you this?" snapped the commander not believing her mother's words, "When he was drugged up?"

"Not exactly drugged," admitted the admiral with a sheepish grin, "We had drinks one night after that mission into the tunnels and ended up having a little heart to heart about you."

"And?" she was not amused that her mother had gotten drunk with her boyfriend.

"And what, young lady? We talked, shared a few drinks, and he told me everything: your adventures, the time you spent together before the Omega Relay," her voice lowered, "and he told me how you kept him from going down a very dark path."

Her daughter made a comment about that and settled back in her seat but there was something else that her mother wasn't telling her.

"Mom, what else did he tell you?" she asked through gritted teeth, her fingernails digging into her mother's hand.

Her mother made no sign that she felt pain; instead Leela saw a familiar look on her mother's face. It was the look that told her that her mother and Garrus had had 'the discussion'.

"OH MY GOD!" Leela exclaimed, her eyes widening in shock "YOU TALKED ABOUT THAT!?"

Hannah raised her hand and placed a reassuring hand on Leela's shoulder.

"To be fair I kind of brought it up."

"How do you kind of bring up the fact that I had," her hands waved over the front of her body, "that done to me?"

"I stopped before I said anything. You know how I get after I have a few sifters of brandy," the
admiral sighed and whispered something about needing another pack of cigarettes.

"Of course, blame it on the booze," muttered the commander remembering her twenty-fifth birthday. She had written apologies to some of her senior officers that had shown up along with the months of jokes from some of her male squad members.

"Shut up," laughed Hannah, "it was my fault and he told me everything. He told me how you made him the last one to know because you were afraid he'd leave or abandon you."

"He should have forgotten about me," muttered the commander, suddenly regretting her decision to stay.

"He couldn't sweetheart," said the admiral softly, "The thought of finding you is one of the few reasons he is still alive."

"How could I be a reason he's still alive if everyone thought I was dead?" huffed the commander in annoyance.

She could see the frustration begin to appear in her mother's eyes, but once again Hannah took a deep breath to center herself.

Her composure returning, Hannah simply said, "He found your journals."

Leela felt her brain go numb with this revelation.

"He found my journals?" her voice quivering as the question fell from her lips.

"Yeah, those journals your father told you to write," confirmed her mother, "Every night I was with him he read your journals. They were the only things that kept him going," she continued with a deep breath, "but one night after a few days of not reading he got about as low as he could get and we had to stop him from...well..."

The look of discomfort on her mother's face told Leela everything she needed to know. She felt the urge to run back to the medical wing and beat the shit out of the turian for even contemplating such a ludicrous notion.

"Stupid bastard," sniffed the commander; pushing back more tears, "what the hell was he thinking?"

"I can only guess, Leela," said her mother, her strong arms wrapping around her daughter reassuringly, "But I can tell you that he just needs some time."

Shepard nodded, a sad sigh escaping her lips, "Yeah, you're right." giving a short laugh; she said, "I can do that. I mean hell, they always say third time's the charm."

The dining hall echoed with the women's laughter at the commander's comment. It was a pleasant laugh, filled with warmth; melting away the sadness that had filled the dining hall during their conversation. When they finally calmed down, Hannah gave her daughter another squeeze.

"So, what do you plan on doing?" asked the admiral as she lit up another cigarette and exhaled a puff of smoke, "You going to sit here and hide like a little coward or are you going to come back to Earth and see what's happened?"

Leela's elbow jerked; making contact with her mother's ribs. The sound of the admiral choking on her recent inhalation brought a smile to the commander's face and a death stare from her mother.
Smiling innocently, the younger woman shrugged, "It slipped."

"Uh huh," smirked the admiral, her eyes zeroing on her daughter's arms as she put the cigarette back between her lips, "Still doesn't answer my question." she said, taking another drag.

Snatching the butt from her mother's mouth, Shepard took a short drag of her own before handing it back to her mother. The tobacco tasted just as bad as it had the other couple of times she'd smoked, but she needed something to occupy herself.

After a couple of more passes of the cigarette, Leela flicked the butt away and exhaled the last bit of smoke from her nostrils and asked, "What do you think I should do?"

Leaning back on her hands, Hannah looked clicked her tongue a couple of times before saying, "I think you should come back."

Shepard chuckled at the comment.

"Of course you do," she said with a grunt as she stretched her arms, popping her elbows, "So you can turn me into Hackett and the Council right?"

Hannah simply shook her head at the question.

"Nothing like that," she said, reaching out and brushing a stray bit of hair from her daughter's face; exposing the scars beneath the red strands.

The feeling of her mother's hand running through her hair made her feel like she was six years old again. Warmth spread through the commander's body as she asked, "Then why do you want me to come back?"

"I think," she began as she rested her hand on the back of her daughter's head, "you want to come back; that you need to come back."

Shepard laughed loudly at the accuracy of her mother's answer.

"You're right. You always are," she conceded with a defeated sigh and nodded.

"Of course I'm always right," scoffed the admiral in mock offense, "I'm your mother."

Pulling her knees to her chest, Leela rested her cheek on them as she asked her mother, "You think I can stay with you for a while?"

Her mother's arms wrapped gently around her and she felt lips press against her hair.

"Of course you can." chuckled the admiral. "Why the hell else would I have a spare bedroom added to my quarters?"
Chapter 22

Okay guys, remember that this one won't have the picture attached to that. Decided to split the chapter up!

Chapter 22

Fear was a stench Garrus had become accustomed to.

He'd smelt it on Feros when helping the colonists, in the labs on Noveria, from his men on Menae and all throughout the war with the Reapers. But never had he smelt fear as powerful as what was emanating from his former commander in the back of the Kodiak as they made their way to the conduit.

Garrus couldn't blame her. She was finally heading home. Home to a planet that had been left in ruins by a sentient group of bio-mechanical machines hell bent on laying waste to the entire galaxy almost a year prior.

It was the reason Garrus had decided to stay behind after Chakwas had cleared him fit to leave to head back to the Kevin and Ismene. Though when word reached Hannah's ears about his decision, she signed him up for instructing the colonists in the use of the weapons the galactic leaders would be sending, under the stipulation that he work with Rixa. While hesitant to work with the female, after a couple of days Garrus actually came to enjoy working with the security chief. Rixa had suffered minor injuries since Leela had taken care of Antius before could give his men the order to dispose of the female.

Still that didn't stop her pheromones from assaulting Garrus' nostrils with her lust for him. He was extremely thankful for all parties involved she did her best to keep her urges in check. Granted, Hannah's constant presence during training sessions put a damper on the female's attempts at expressing her gratitude to Garrus and Leela. The last an offer to allow Garrus to sire a child with her if both parties consented.

The message was deleted immediately after reading.

Leela had taken to remaining out of the lime light. Hannah had sent her report to Hackett after her daughter's collapse and they all agreed that keeping the commander's survival a secret for a while was the best course of action. This was sort of a mixed blessing for the turian.

Garrus hadn't spoken to the commander since her mother had taken her from the medical quarters the day he'd woken up from his fight with Antius. He didn't know if Hannah was keeping them apart on purpose, but Garrus couldn't help but be thankful to the woman if she was responsible for keeping him away from her daughter. He was ashamed at how poorly he'd handled himself. He had been selfish in his actions, concerned only with how he had been feeling. Garrus could barely stomach it. He'd acted like his father, concerned with only his side of the story and not hers.

He just hoped her arrival on Earth wouldn't keep him from getting the chance to apologize.

"Thirty seconds until contact with the conduit," crackled Steve's voice over the intercom.

Unsurprisingly, the lieutenant was brought on the mission at the admiral's request. She reasoned that, save for Joker, Steve was the best pilot she had at her disposal and she wasn't taking any unnecessary risks. Though the look on his face after the older Shepard had taken him aside meant that the lieutenant was well aware of the fate that awaited him if he opened his mouth to anyone
about who they were bringing back.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," responded the admiral apathetically as she shut off her data pad.

Garrus could hear the anticipation in the woman's voice. Hannah was just as nervous for her
daughter as he was. But where the mother kept up the facade of being collected; Leela looked as if
she was going to jump out the hatch of the shuttle.

"How you holding up, Kiddo?" asked Hannah settling next to her daughter, her hand resting gently
on her child's shoulder.

The commander let out a deep breath and looked at her hands; they were shaking violently.

"What do you think?" asked the commander, sounding like she was about to hurl her breakfast on
the shuttle floor.

It took a moment for him to realize she was talking to him. When he did, Garrus straightened up
and flexed his mandibles in an encouraging grin.

"You'll be fine." said Garrus, hoping his voice brought some comfort to her.

Leela gave him a weak smile and nodded at her mother. "Give the order."

"You are stronger than this." is what he wanted to say, yet the words refused to form.

Kevin had more courage than he had at this moment. That thought made him angrier than
anything. What kind of turian was he, if he was unable to comfort the woman he had chosen to
spend his life with?

The only answer that made sense was that he didn't know where he stood with the woman. They
hadn't had enough time to discuss their relationship and he knew that her arrival on Earth would
spread like wildfire. Even with Leela staying in her mother's quarters in the underground base,
people's mouths would always move, meaning that word would get out much sooner than they
would anticipate. That simply meant finding enough time to have a private chat with her would be
difficult at best.

"Contact with the conduit," announced the lieutenant over the intercom.

The shuttle lurched briefly followed by Steve casually saying, "Preparing to land." mere seconds
later.

Shepard's quaking hands went to her hood and pulled the fabric up over her matted hair the
moment the ship hit the hangar floor.

Leela was the first to stand up but her mother and Chakwas were the first to reach the door.

Taking his place behind the woman he hoped was still his mate; Garrus could see her shoulders
shaking and raised his own unsteady hand. The stench of her fear and her haggard breaths were
making him nervous. Still he fought through his apprehension and placed his hand on her shoulder.
After a moment he felt her calm and his heart leapt.

Even if he couldn't change the past, her accepting his touch gave him hope for their future.

"Lieutenant, how many people are in the main hangar?" inquired the admiral as she adjusted her
pack.
"Sensors are showing only ten people outside, Admiral," Steve reported from the pilot's door.

The pilot sounded as nervous as Shepard looked. When his eye met Shepard's, he gave her a reassuring smile and walked to the hatch.

"Looks like Hackett was able to convince the Council to empty the hangar for the night."

Approaching the hatch, the pilot let his hand rest above the keypad and gave his commander a nervous smile.

"Are you ready?" he asked his forefinger hovering above the first key.

Garrus could feel her muscles tighten beneath his hand.

"If you don't want to, we can turn around and head back to the colony," her mother's voice came from the front of the line.

It was clear by the sound of her voice the mother was just as nervous as the daughter. A few moments of silence passed as they waited for the commander's decision. It may not have been on the scale of choosing the fate of the galaxy, but to the commander it may as well have been.

"Open the doors, Steve." ordered the commander her voice as unsteady as her shoulders.

When the lock beeped, Leela's breath caught in her chest as the door hissed open. She waited, her body shaking despite the strong hand on her shoulder as the door dropped slowly; the lights from the bay flooding the dim shuttle. Shepard's head dropped; her hands reaching up to tighten the hood, blocking both the bright lights and hiding her face from the people waiting to greet them. When the dull thud of the door finally hit the ground, she was rocketed forward as Urz bolted out the door barking happily.

Familiar laughter filled her ears as each of the people waiting greeted the varren fondly. Peeking between the bodies that hid her from view, she saw her friends trying to get the attention of the varren as he darted between their legs playfully.

The only person not moving was Admiral Hackett staring at the shuttle; nervous anticipation etched into his haggard features.

Her muscles stopped shaking and she adjusted her posture into the familiar Alliance stance. She felt Garrus' hand leave her shoulder as she made her way through the hatch. The sound of her footsteps clanging on the hatch door was the only sound she could hear. She felt like a ship on autopilot. As she moved closer to them, the Normandy's crew shifted their attention from Urz to the small figure in a black hoodie.

Their voices and laughter quieted as she pulled the hood off her head.

Scratching the back of her neck, she looked up at the admiral; straightening, saluted him.

"Commander Shepard reporting in, Admiral," she said stiffly.

The crew's eyes locked on the two humans, their feet scraping along the floor as they backed away slowly. Hackett's mouth moved around a bit as if he was looking for something to say. His fingers drummed against his hands; lips twitching in agitation. Finally, after letting her suffer under the tense stance for a moment, Hackett raised his arm and saluted her.

"At ease, Commander."
When she relaxed into the accepted stance, Hackett took a few moments to look her over before rewarding her with a rare smile.

"Anything to report?" he asked his voice uncharacteristically warm.

Without hesitation, her hand flew to her pocket and after fishing for a moment she gave out a small, "Ah ha," before shoving her fist at the grizzled man.

"Please get these to Kahlee Sanders if she's still alive," she said, her voice as heavy as the tags in her hand.

"At once, Commander." was all he said before snapping a salute and turning toward the door.

The crew began to move toward her; their voices rising in greeting only to be silenced once more by Hackett shouting, "OH! And Commander?"

"Yes, sir?" she asked returning to attention.

Hackett snapped another salute, his eyes shining brightly and another rare smile on his lips.

"Welcome home!"

Leela couldn't help but return the smile as she gave him another short salute, "Thank you, sir!"

When he was gone, Shepard opened her mouth to greet her crew, only to be grabbed by a familiar pair of tattooed arms pulling her into a headlock; cutting off her air supply.

"YOU LITTLE CUNT!" shouted the biotic grinding her fist into the commander's hair.

"WHERE THE FUCK DO YOU GET OFF BAILING ON US LIKE THAT?!"

Shepard could only gasp and flail her arms in response; the thin arm tightening around her neck turning her face a bright shade of red. Grunt and Wrex fell to the floor laughing loudly at the human's misery. She should have known better than to count on them for help. Samara simply sat on the ground in mock meditation, a small smirk on her lips. Joker, Tali, and James began discussing Joker's recent test mission while waiting for the Jack to finish; ignoring Leela's choked pleas for help.

Only Kaidan and Liara made an attempt to coax the commander from the former criminal's embrace. Jack ignored them; dragging the vanguard around the hangar bay shouting obscenities at her for staying gone for so long.

Shepard was able to choke out the occasional audible answer but it wasn't good enough for the biotic and only served to reinforce Jack's punishment. The ground blurred beneath Leela's feet as she was drug along. Jack had gotten a lot stronger in the past year with her biotics on the fritz. Shepard couldn't hope to break away without some sort of god like intervention.

That intervention came in the form of a gunshot followed by Hannah's shouting, "That's enough, Jack! Let my daughter go and maybe I won't have to embarrass you in front of all your little friends."

Jack froze in her tracks and turned the commander loose; ignoring Leela's desperate gasping. She threw her jacket onto Leela and challenged the Admiral.

"Bring it on, you old bitch! Last time I checked, I was up three fights on your wrinkly old ass!"
Rubbing her neck, Shepard coughed loudly as a couple of pairs of hands lifted her off the ground.

"That went better than expected," laughed Liara once Shepard was on her feet.

Leela gave continued to massage her throat and gave a choked laugh, "Well, at least they're getting along."

She dared a glance at the sound of fists colliding with flesh and felt her stomach drop in time to see a splash of red fly from Jack's mouth; freshly introduced to her mother's infamous right cross. She prayed that her first night on Earth wouldn't end with a trip to the medical wing.

"Be thankful your mother isn't a biotic," grumbled Kaidan over the cheers of Wrex, Grunt, and James.

Leela could only nod at the comment as she watched the display of violence in front of her. Though she was surrounded by friends, she felt like something was missing. It was only when she took her eyes off the fight that she noticed a certain turian gunnery officer had made a silent escape.
Chapter 23

To be Whole Chapter 23 by *Mizutanitony

THIS IS THE CHAPTER THE ART TRADE IS FOR! MWAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.

Chapter 23

As the welcoming party for the commander ran its course, Garrus stepped out of his shower and let out a satisfied sigh. Grabbing the beer he’d opened before, he drained it with little effort, gave a low burp, and stepped through the opened door to his bedroom. He had to move carefully as some of the kids’ toys had ended up in his bedroom while he was away. It didn't surprise him that this had happened. Nor did it surprise him to find that the house was a bit of a mess as well.

His sister had contacted him while they were finishing up on the colony to tell him about taking the kids to the Crucible to see some of their friends for the weekend. Garrus had more than happily agreed though he wished she’d bothered to make the kids clean up before they’d left. But with the way things had been going, he was thankful for the extra time alone. He needed to get his head on straight before dealing with the kids again.

He’d missed them terribly, that much was certain, and since EDI left the colony after the first delivery he’d had no contact with them due to the lack of the QEC array. He decided that being home before them would make a good surprise even if one of the first things he’d have to do was help Ismene pick out a new outfit for her teddy bear. He shuddered at the thought; deciding he’d best get some more alcohol in his system to drive it from his mind.

Heading to his dresser, Garrus pulled out the pair of pajama bottoms Solana had bought for him on one of her trips to one of the larger human cities a couple of months prior. When she'd first given them to him, he thought she was insane and told her as much. However, a couple of nights later he put them on after realizing he had no clean clothing and found them to be quite comfortable. Solana had the garment cut a little loose for him and after a few days he officially dubbed the plaid patterned garment what humans also called, his "lazy pants". Tonight was definitely a night where he felt like being lazy.

Heading to the kitchen he removed three more beers from the refrigerator. The first opened with a satisfying hiss and he drained half of it in a couple of chugs. Wiping a small bit of dribble from his chin, he noticed the time for the first time since he’d bailed on the reunion with the other members of the Normandy crew. It was after three and he half expected a call from the base about the crew getting out of control. Thankfully, his expectations hadn't been met and he decided he'd finish up a couple of reports along with his beers.

Half-way through his second report a sharp knock came from the door. Picking up his final beer, Garrus headed to the door; his mind going through the security measures he had in place should his visitor prove to be unfriendly. When he arrived at the door, he punched in the code for the hidden compartment in the wall and pulled out the Carnifex he kept hidden. He set his beer down on the end table next to the door and cocked the pistol.

"It's three o'clock in the morning and I'm armed so unless you want end up a carcass full of holes, I suggest you leave," his voice as honest as it was threatening.

A familiar bark came from outside the door and he let out sigh of relief; thanking the spirits for freeing him of the responsibility of having to report why he'd been forced to shoot a civilian.
Sliding open the door, Garrus opened his mouth only to have his words turn into a loud grunt of annoyance as the beast scrambled past him and onto his large bed in the living room. Rubbing the back of his head, Garrus pulled himself away from the wall. His mandibles flared angrily at the sight of the varren curling up on his bed and falling asleep immediately.

"Looks like we've discovered who the real master of the house is," laughed a familiar voice from the bottom of the steps that led to the front door.

"You don't know the half of it," growled the turian as he set the gun back in its compartment.

The commander made no acknowledgment of the activity and stayed where she was waiting patiently for the turian to make his move.

"What are you doing here, Leela?" his mandibles twitching slowly to accompany the annoyance in his voice as his eyes rested on the commander for the first time, "You're supposed to be staying out of sight."

"Just thought I'd see it for myself," she sighed; shrugging absentmindedly, looking up at the night sky as the moonlight shimmered off her copper colored hair.

"It's amazing isn't it?" she asked, her voice sounding truly happy for the first time since they'd been reunited.

"Yeah...it's definitely something." his voice was barely more than a whisper as he took in the sight of her skin shining under the dim glow of the desert moon.

When she finally took notice of his gaze, she flashed him a quick grin.

"So are you going to invite me in or are you going to let me freeze to death?" she asked, chattering her teeth in exaggeration.

Garrus felt his mandibles twitch as he pondered the concept of letting her in. Finally, after a few moments of uncomfortable silence he conceded and stepped to the side making room for her to enter.

"Fine," he mumbled in defeat, "but only for a little bit. I have some reports I need to finish" This is a mistake.

"Much obliged," she laughed making her way up the stairs to the front door.

He noticed a familiar mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Aren't you going to finish getting dressed?" she asked gently rubbing her hand along his chest plates as she walked through the door.

His mandibles fluttered at her touch, the soft fingers sending a warm feeling through his chest.

"I wasn't expecting company," he replied trying to keep his composure.

"Seems you don't get a lot of company," commented the human as she stepped cautiously into the living room.

He watched her closely, taking notice of the slight limp in her step for the first time. Probably a result of their makeshift repairs to her implants.
"Since when did you have a fascination with teddy bears?" asked the human interrupting his thoughts.

Taken aback by the question, his head snapped toward the voice; cursing himself for not noticing Ismene had left her tuxedo clad teddy bear on the dining room table.

"I can't remember," he replied hastily, hoping that she would lose interest in the animal, "Just put it down and I'll give you a ride back to the base before your mother finds out you're missing."

"Not until you tell me where you got the bear, Garrus," she snickered, hiding the bear behind her back.

"Leela, I'm serious." his voice a little higher than normal; praying that she wouldn't catch the change.

His prayer went unanswered when he saw an all too familiar devilish grin spread across her face, his blood froze. She knew how important the bear was, and that she wouldn't stop until he broke.

"You have to catch me first," she teased before rushing toward the kitchen door and toward the... An alarm went off in his head and he knew that he had to stop her before she reached the back rooms. Cutting through the living room, he thanked the spirits for making his legs longer. He made it with very little effort barely stopping her with a swift yank of the hood.

"Shit," cursed the commander as the turian pulled her from the entrance to the hall. His mandibles twitched happily at the shocked look on her face as he pressed her back to the wall; his chest resting gently against hers.

"You know," he said, his voice almost playful as he tapped his talon against her nose, "it's not nice to take things that don't belong to you."

Sticking her tongue out, the commander danced the bear in front of him. "All you had to do was tell me where he came from and this wouldn't have happened."

Garrus shook uncomfortably at the sight of the bear dancing in front of him. "Put the bear down." he snorted.

"Not until you tell me where it came from," replied Leela, tapping the bear's face against his chest; the plastic nose making little clacking noises with each hit.

Garrus opened his mouth to answer but he stopped himself. The moment had come. The moment he had been preparing for since he'd discovered she was alive and now that it had come, he felt his tongue twist into the shape of a pretzel. His mind raced as he tried to regain his composure. He could feel his mandibles opening and closing, like a human's mouth did when they couldn't find an answer. When he finally did come up with one, he was silenced once more by a question he hadn't expected her to ask.

"Is there somebody else?" Her voice was as soft and apprehensive.

The question blindsided him and confusion swept through him; certain that he'd misheard her.

"What are you talking about?" he asked hoping to regain some sense of lucidity.

She ran her fingers along the fringe of his neck as she spoke, "The way you were acting with the bear. You only act that way with something if it's something someone like..." her voice trailed off.
He knew what she was about to say. It was only natural for her to be curious of his activities while they were apart. Judging by her question, he trusted his instincts that she had remained faithful and she deserved to hear the truth. His mandibles opened slowly as he tried to find an appropriate response to her inquiry. In a sense there was someone else, two of them to be precise but this situation required a great amount of tact lest he risk losing her again. Shaking his head, Garrus used his placed his thumb and forefinger on her chin and gave her a reassuring flicker of his mandibles.

"No Leela there's...unf..." her lips were on his before he could finish his sentence.

Within seconds of their kiss, Garrus could feel her right arm sneaking its way around his neck. Her calloused fingers massaging the sensitive skin beneath his fringe while her left hand massaged its way down his chest; the destination all too clear to the pair. Her scent was as intoxicating as the feeling of her soft flesh against his hard plates. Her soft lips against the cool malleable metal that made up his own sent jolts of electricity through his brain, his mind slowly becoming clouded.

Against his better judgment, his hands begin to snake their way around her back; squeezing the soft globes of flesh that he'd grown to love. It didn't take long before she was moaning into his lips while her hips began rubbing against his thigh. The little devil in his head knew what she wanted, not one to disappoint, he slowly began rubbing his thigh against the warmth between her legs. She let out a small hiss at the contact, her voice becoming more a series of lustful moans than coherent words; the message clear as a bell to the sniper. Continuing his gentle kisses along her soft flesh, he continued his ministrations against her groin. Her soft moans filled his ears, his blood boiled and he felt an all too familiar shift in his lower plates. It wasn't until her thigh ran the fabric of his pants against the tip of his exposed member, that he finally regained some sense of clarity. Breaking the kiss, Garrus breathed in her scent heavily before opening his eyes.

He instantly regretted his decision.

The first thing he saw was the state of her hair. It was matted and sticking to her forehead from the sweat. Her lips were puffy and her cheeks flushed with desire. The sight of her in such a state was almost too much for him to bear and he began trying to figure out a way to fight the urge to claim her right there. Finally, after a few moments his mind cleared enough for him to attempt to converse with her. The effort made all the more difficult.

"Leela...we can't..." he panted as her lips made their way down his neck stopping long enough to tease the sensitive nerves she'd discovered during those few moments of privacy together back on the Normandy.

When her dull teeth bit into the flesh of his neck, Garrus felt himself beginning to lose control all over again. He could feel himself beginning to lose the battle. The caress of her fingers on the sensitive flesh between the small crevices in his carapace he knew he'd have to take a more direct approach in controlling his urges.

"What's the problem?" panted Leela as she gently nibbled at the small bit of exposed flesh at the base of his neck ring.

He felt her left hand getting dangerously close to the waist of his pants as he finally became aware just how tight they had become. His options growing thinner by the second and he knew of only one thing that could stop him. Regaining what little sense he could, the turian shifted his tongue between his teeth and bit down. He tasted a bit of blood, but the jolt of electricity was enough for his brain to clear and create what distance he could from the human. Letting out a sigh of relief, the turian enveloped her scarred fingers and kissed them.

When he pulled back, he could barely tolerate the pained look in her eyes. The red irises couldn't
hide the thoughts that were speeding through her mind, yet he could tell that she wanted to hear his words as much as he wanted to say them. Swallowing heavily, he rested his forehead against hers, his plates warming against her soft skin as her fingers gently ran along his chest.

"Before you say anything, I want you to know something," his voice was steady and even which shocked him slightly but the sorrow in her eyes did little to help him retain his courage.

Taking a deep breath, he twitched his mandibles hoping she'd see them as a sign of comfort before saying, "There is no one else."

Both their hands steadied, when the words left his mouth and he continued his courage growing again, "I want this just as much as you but to do it here, at this moment..." he paused and shook his head letting out a defeated sigh, "It wouldn't be right, Leela."

"Why is that?" she asked; the heartbroken tone of her voice made its way into his chest like a dagger, sapping what little courage he had managed to regain. He prayed silently to the spirits for to grant him the courage to tell her the truth.

The uncomfortable silence between them returned like an unwanted house guest.

Moments passed like hours as they stood there in the dim entry way; his hands trying desperately to hold onto hers as he finally gathered the strength to tell her only to be interrupted by the sound of the front door opening followed by the sound of a child's voice.

"But I want to stay up and see if he comes home," yawned a familiar six year old human dressed in red pajamas, his hands trying desperately to rub the sleep from his eyes.

They were five steps past the door when they noticed the two soldiers. The female's eyes widened in shock, as her mandibles fluttered in embarrassment. The large lump on her chest continued to sleep peacefully while the boy stared at them in shock for a few moments before raising his arms and with a mirthful grin shouted, "GARRUS!"

Shit, thought the turian as he felt the boy's body collide with his before having the air squeezed out of him. Garrus offered up a small prayer of thanks that his pants had decided to return to their original state before the child had entered the room.

"You're back!" the child exclaimed, turning to the turian female that had opened the door for him, "See Solana! I told you he'd be home before us."

Closing his eyes in frustration, Garrus prayed that this was all a dream, only shattering when he heard the child speak to the commander.

"Excuse me, Miss." asked Kevin, his tone uncharacteristically polite, a sure sign that he was more tired than the energy he had just exerted made him out to be, "but, who are you?"

Without missing a beat, Leela dropped down to the boy's level and stuck out her hand.

"I'm Leela and I'm a friend of Garrus'," a surprisingly warm, genuine smile spread across her lips as she asked, "What's yours?"

Kevin took her hand and shook it firmly; a tired grin showing off yet another batch of freshly lost teeth.

"I'm Kevin Schneider."
"It's a pleasure to meet you, Kevin," replied the commander returning the shake, "and might I say that is a very impressive hand shake for a kid your age," she added sincerely; feeling the boys grip.

Laughing haughtily, the boy pointed up at Garrus, "He taught me."

Garrus' mandibles flickered in embarrassment at the boy's acknowledgment but he laughed all the same when Leela gave him an astonished look.

"Did you really?" she asked with genuine surprise.

"Yes, I did." he reached down and attempted to ruffle the boys hair; receiving the child's customary dodge.

The boy stuck his tongue out at him and Garrus did the same making the boy recoil a bit at the sight of the protruding muscle. Laughing at the child's disgust, the turian pointed at the hall.

"Go and brush your teeth and I'll be in get you settled shortly."

The boy let out a loud huff before stomping off around the corner.

"Solana, do you mind helping them while I finish up out here?" he asked apologetically.

The female gave her brother a knowing wink and smile.

"It's not a problem Garrus," she said, her flitting mandibles betraying her attempt to hide her amusement at her brother's current predicament.

"Commander," she said before bowing her head lightly in greeting to her brother's mate, "I apologize our first meeting wasn't under better circumstances but it is a pleasure to finally meet you."

"The feeling is mutual, Solana." replied the commander happily with the same bow of her head, "Maybe one night you can join me for drinks on the base?"

"I would like that," chuckled the teacher as Kevin called for her help finding a clean set of pajamas. The female's mandibles twitched and she let out a sigh, "If you'll excuse me, there's a six year old that seems to need reminding of how to get himself ready for bed."

"Give her to me." requested Garrus, catching Leela off guard.

Solana's mandibles flickered happily at her brother's request and she was more than happy to hand over the child.

The child made no noise save for a small grunt of annoyance as she was placed in Garrus' arms.

As he pressed his forehead against the child's, Leela heard a gentle hum escape from her lover's throat and watched as the child subconsciously returned the gesture. The child's own purr mixed with her guardian's. The room was quiet, save for the gentle melody emanating from the two turians until finally Garrus handed the child back to his sister, put the bear in her arms, and sent her off with one final kiss.

Leela watched in silent amazement at the parental tenderness of her lover had shown the child and everything fell into place. His hesitation to let her in, and his reluctance to pursue any sort of physical intimacy with her.

She remained silent as Solana disappeared into the hallway the awkward silence returned, routinely
broken by the ticking of one of Garrus' antique clocks.

"So..." began Leela once they heard the door to the kids' room close.

Her hand was at her temple massaging the bit of flesh; a pained expression on her face similar to the one Liara got when he saw her trying to make sense of the stories Javik told her about the Prothean Empire.

"You went and..." she grunted out like she had just been tackled by Grunt during a sparring match.

"Yeah..." interrupted Garrus nervously absentmindedly falling into the habit of scratching his facial scars.

"They're...yeah..." were the only words he was able to form.

Garrus figured that something like this would happen. For the first time he actually felt guilty for taking the kids in and he knew why she was upset. Like many things involving their life, this situation boiled down to the Reapers and one stupid comment he made before they had what they once thought would be their final goodbye.

"Leela I'm..." he said hoping to explain himself before she did something drastic.

"I should go," she said cutting off the turian before he could finish.

Her voice was dry, cracking like the afternoon desert dirt. She turned on her heel and left without another word. Garrus was prepared to run after her; his legs already moving toward the door. It wasn't until he heard the sound of tires pulling away from the house that he felt a familiar cold emptiness in his chest once more.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Garrus and Ismene talk about her progress in school before meeting up with an old friend.

Okay before you rag on me, it's almost the 23rd century in these games. I was watching Star Trek TNG and they got nine year olds taking Calculus. I think what Ismene has on her test is well within reason. Though truth be told, I think this is a little basic even for fifth grade level.

Not going to lie though with the mental state I've been in, I probably did more harm than good with this thing, but I don't know guys I was trying to keep myself occupied.

*holds up a glass of vodka* Nostrovia.
holds up Sake* Kampai
holds up wine* L'chaim

so here you go...enjoy the chapter while I enjoy my booze.

Story: To Be Whole
Author: Mizutanitony
Game: Mass Effect
Pairing: Garrus/Femshep

Chapter 24

Ismene was nervous.

She had been asked to stay behind after class by the teacher and she didn't know why. The teacher had said so and gave said he'd tell Garrus about how well she'd been acting with the other kids. She wanted to ask the teacher but he was busy with some of his paperwork. He was a salarian and Ismene liked him a lot. He never yelled and was always patient with their questions; but today he refused to answer her question on why she had to take another test while waiting for Garrus to come pick her up.

Ismene was becoming worried, Garrus was never late to pick her and Kevin up from school when he was able to, he was always waiting for them right on time because he when Kevin would get her from class he'd be waiting outside the school waiting for them; today was different. Looking up from her test, Ismene glanced at the clock and exhaled loudly when she saw that he was almost an hour late and returned to the test Professor Aetu had given her.

Grandpa’s hobby was making birdhouses. He always said, “A man has to keep busy to stay out of trouble.” Leigh wasn’t sure how much trouble Grandpa could get into anyway, since he was such a nice guy, but she tried to listen to his advice. Besides, she liked to help him on his birdhouses.
Grandpa’s shop was full of well-oiled and carefully-kept tools. Whenever he used something, he put it back in exactly the right place. He had rules about how he treated his tools, because he hated buying something new if the old one still worked. He also made sure to clean up his messes each time he worked on something.

It wasn’t too fun cleaning up, but it was nice to watch him cut boards to exact lengths. It was nice to see the drill put in holes for screws to go in cleanly. It was like being a doctor, but with wood. The best part of building was seeing all the pieces come together in the final form. Yet, even then it wasn’t done.

The last steps always included lacquer or paint, to help protect Grandpa’s hard work from the weather. His birdhouses lasted for years. If he didn’t coat them properly, the sun and rain would turn the wood grey and weak in a short period of time. No, he always made sure to do things right. Even if he put rocks or other cute decorations on them, it was done right and made to last.

Grandpa was a hard worker, but he was also smart and generous. He let Leigh keep the birdhouses sometimes, but only if he got to help hang it up or set the post for it. It had to be done just right, after all.

The birdhouses were a great way to learn about woodworking, hard work, taking care of what you have, and about birds. The absolute best thing about building birdhouses was that Leigh spent some time with Grandpa.

Scratching her head, Ismene continued to work on the test when a sharp knock echoed from the door. Raising her head, she let out a loud squeak of excitement when she saw Garrus standing outside the door.

“Come in.” beckoned Professor Aetu without looking up from his desk.

Stepping into the room Garrus gave Ismene a small flick of his mandibles before turning his attention to the teacher.

“I apologize for my being late,” Ismene could hear the discomfort in Garrus’ voice as he spoke, remembering how frustrated her dad would get when his bosses called. “There was an issue with a weapons shipment.”

Ismene watched as the teacher got up from his desk to shake Garrus' hand.

“It's my fault, Officer Vakarian. I shouldn't have called for you to come to such an important meeting at the last minute.”

Ismene was too focused on her test to pay much attention, but what little she was able to pick up of their conversation it had something to do with the test she was taking. After a few more moments, Ismene let out a satisfied sigh and removed herself from her seat. Walking over to the adults, she let out a low cough bringing a stop to the adult's conversation.

“Yes, Ismene?” asked Aetu, looking down at her with a warm smile.

“I finished my test.” responded Ismene meekly holding her datapad up.
“Thank you, Ismene.” Taking the test, Aetu gestured to a seat in the corner saying, “Please make yourself comfortable Officer Vakarian.

Her spirits lifting, Ismene ran to the corner and pulled one of the large office chairs in front of the teachers desk and rolled it in front of the teachers desk.

“Sit please.” she ordered with an exaggerated sweetness telling Garrus she wanted to get the discussion over with as quickly as possible.

Taking the offered chair, Garrus allowed the child to climb into his lap.

“You said you had something important about Ismene we needed to discuss?”

“An extremely important matter, Officer Vakarian. Of that I am certain.” He set down his datapad and removed another from his desk and gave a nod at Ismene. “Though I would prefer that Ismene would occupy herself while we have this discussion.”

“If you didn't want her to hear this,” snapped Garrus, a deep rumble growing in his chest, “why didn't you wait until after I had put her to bed or schedule it when I could find someone to watch her?”

“That is a valid point and I apologize once again for the inconvenience.” replied the teacher, his voice steady showing no fear at the Garrus’ attempt to intimidate him. “I shall remember that for future reference, however,” he handed Garrus the datapad he recently removed from his desk, “I believe stored on these datapads is worth the inconvenience.

An hour later, Ismene was standing in the hallway her face buried in Garrus' leg as he finished talking to Aetu about setting up a few more tests for Ismene to take. Garrus had looked mad when the teacher had made the suggestion. She felt his chest rumbling like her mothers had when she was mad about something and she didn't want him to be mad at her. She loved Garrus, she missed her parents but Garrus was a good person and he loved her and Kevin even if he never said it, she knew. Except now she was certain she'd done something that would make him not love her.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention.” said Garrus as he gripped the teachers hand, “I'll be sure to look into the matter after this weekend.”

“That is all I ask of you Officer Vakarian.” smiled the teacher returning the handshake. “Ismene is a wonderful child and I just want to see her succeed.”

Gently tugging on the child's arm Garrus jerked his head at the teacher and clicked his throat. “Say goodbye to your teacher.”

Garrus watched as Ismene turned away and whispered something under her breath.

“Ismene, you know better.” reprimanded Garrus his voice elevating as he raised his

“See you on Tuesday, Professor Aetu.” the child mumbled barely looking at the teacher.

Bending down, Aetu gave her his usual warm smile and patted her head. “Have fun over the next few cycles and try not to dwell on what you heard us talk about. I promise you that we will find a way to get through this.”

With that they left the school and went to their vehicle where Garrus secured the child into her seat. As she let herself get strapped in, Ismene couldn't help but ask, “Am I in trouble?

“Why do you think you're in trouble? Did you do something wrong in school that the teacher didn't
“Tell me about?” he asked, his voice growing sterner with each word.

“No,” she replied with an anxious flit of her mandibles at his interrogation, “I didn't do anything wrong, but you looked mad when Professor Aetu was talking and I don't want you to be mad at me; because if you get mad at me then you might send me away.” her words blending together in a rush.

Disheartened by her words, Garrus took a few moments to collect himself. “I'm not mad,” He said a deep breath and gently stroked the spot at the base of her neck, feeling her relax at his touch. “I'm not mad at you for anything and I'm not sending you or your brother anywhere. I'm just a little worried about what the teacher told.”

“Are you sure?” doubt still lingering in her voice.

“I'm sure, Ismene.” replied Garrus with a deep purr. “You and your brother aren't going anywhere.”

“Good,” she purred back.

“So do you feel a bit better?” inquired Garrus after he was certain she'd calmed down.

“A little bit.” she replied apprehensively. “Are you sure you aren't mad at me?”

“I'm not 'mad' at you about anything Ismene.” sighed Garrus frustration echoing in his voice. “I was upset.”

“What's the difference?” inquired the child innocently gripping the datapad he kept in her seat.

“Mad is a lot like being angry.” replied Garrus after ruminating over how best to proceed with his explanation. “ It means you're feeling mean or you want to lash out and hurt someone, or breaksomething”

“Then what's 'upset'?” asked Ismene, eyes bright with curiosity.

“Well,” began Garrus scratching his chin searching for the right words. “Upset can mean you're mad, but in this instance it's more like being sad. Not the kind of sad you see humans get when they cry, but sad like you feel helpless about not being able to control the situation.”

“Like you were the morning after that lady left?” asked the child as she began doodling on the pad.

“Yeah, something like that.” Doing a mental double take at the remark; stunned that she was able to come to such a conclusion.

“I said something bad, didn't I?” remarked Ismene after a few moments of tense silence.

Leaning in close, Garrus rubbed one of his mandibles against hers making the child giggle. Laughing back he rested his head on hers and said, “You didn't say anything wrong, Ismene. You were just curious and there's nothing wrong with asking questions about things you don't understand.”

“Okay.” purred the child rubbing back before asking, “Does that mean we can go to the toy store now?”

Garrus let out a loud groan. He'd been fighting a headache for the past couple of days, which meant he would have to get someone to watch the Ismene. The thought of being in a store with a bunch of screaming children exacerbated his the pain even further.
“I don’t know if we can do it...”
“But you promised, Garrus!” pouted the child, arms crossing and a low whine emanating from her throat.

“I know.” groaned Garrus doing his best to avoid the doe eyed look she was giving him though the battle was lost before it had even begun.

“All right,” feeling nothing but contempt for himself at losing a battle of wills to a four year old. “We’ll go.”

If he had been made of glass, Garrus was sure he would have shattered from the child's scream.

Twenty minutes later, Garrus was standing in what was a combination of a toy store and play center; head pounding from the howls of playing children. When it finally became too much he pulled out his pill bottle and downed a couple tablets.

“Mind if I get one of those?” asked a familiar voice.

“Joker, how have you been?” chuckled Garrus when he took notice of the approaching human.

“I’ve been better.” he sighed setting down his bag of purchases and set his crutch against the wall. “We’re about ready to approve one of those new drives.” He said with an exaggerated groan and rubbed the base of his spine. “Which is good news for me since I just pulled a twelve day round trip to Rannoch.”

“Twelve days?” whistled Garrus in surprise. “You must have been pushing the new drive cores to their limit?”

“Well, you know how these fingers are magic when piloting a ship.” laughed the pilot, wiggling his fingers.

“Joker,” laughed Garrus shaking his head. “I don't need to know about how good you are at fingering a ship.”

As they laughed, Joker took notice of a female clerk giving them a disgusted look and shouted, “It's okay ma'am! The ship he's talking about is my girlfriend!”

The look of horror the woman gave them only served to fuel their laughter.

After a few more moments Garrus was able to calm himself down enough to ask, “What the hell is wrong with you?”

“I just never get tired of seeing people's reactions.” sniggered Joker breaking what little self control Garrus was able to regain.

“What's so funny?” panted Ismene, interrupting the chortling pair.

“Nothing, Small Fry.” replied Joker, wiping a stray tear. When he'd finally calmed down enough, Joker crouched down and began examining the clothes Ismene had selected “These look to be a little small for you.” remarked Joker. “You expecting to get a new brother or sister?” he asked winking at Garrus who snorted in reply.

“No,” giggled Ismene with a flutter of her mandibles, “these are for Teddy, Uncle Joker.”
“Such a shame.” tsked the pilot hearing Garrus’ irritated grumble.

Letting the turian stew over the joke, Joker pulled a tiny pair of shorts and a tee-shirt and held it up to his chest.

“So what do you think? Think Aunt EDI would like it?”

“Those are too little for you.” giggled Ismene covering her face.

“Really?” asked Joker looking at the outfit. Taking his hat off he pulled the shirt off the hanger, stretching it as much as he could over the back of his head without ripping it. “I think it's just the right size.”

Ismene nearly dropped the pile of clothes from laughing so hard. Unable to hold back a chuckle, Garrus stepped away from the wall and began inspecting the clothes the girl picked out.

“Ismene.” Garrus lightly scolded when he reached the final outfit. “How many did I say you could get?”

The child backed away clutching the outfits tight to her chest. “You said three,” she counted out the outfits and held them up. “See? I only got three. Do they cost too much? I can just get one or two if they're too much.”

Shaking his head, Garrus took the clothes and pointed at the racks. “Go pick out two more.”

A loud trill erupted from the child; her arms wrapped around his waist before running away.

“Never took you for one to spoil the kids.” Chuckled Joker as he watched the child head toward the clothing racks. “Or is it because she shares more similarities with you than your other one?”

“That has nothing to do with it.” Hissed Garrus defensively; hands tightening around the clothes frustrated at Joker's insinuation that he was giving Ismene preferential treatment because she was Turian.

Joker could tell that he had crossed a line.

“Sorry,” he apologized lowering his hat around his eyes, “That was low, even for me.”

“Yeah it was,” Garrus said, reluctantly accepting the apology.

They remained silent for a few moments as Garrus tried to collect himself Joker tried to find the right words to make up for his insensitivity.

“Garrus, I didn't mean that.” said Joker trying to pull his cap down even further.

“You were only saying what people are already thinking,” responded Garrus, shaking his head.

“Doesn't mean it needed to be said.”

“I'm fine, Joker,” said Garrus, clapping his friend on the shoulder. “You shot straight with me and I respect that.”


“You've always been soft, Joker.” chuckled Garrus giving Joker a gentle shove.

With an embellished hiss, Joker shoved back, “Speak for yourself crab boy.”
“Crab?” asked the turian with a threatening click of his talons. “Don't push me, Moreau.”

“OKAY! YOU WIN!” grimaced the human stepping back; hands raised in defeat.

“Damn right, I did.” laughed Garrus triumphantly.

“So, what's with spoiling her today? Usually you hate that bear.” laughed Joker as he watched Ismene dart in and out of the racks.

“I do hate the damn thing.” grunted Garrus while Joker laughed at the remark. “But, she's been having a tough time lately, so I thought she would enjoy a little spoiling.”

“Both of them have had a tough time, Vakarian.” “Still, they've come a long way since you took them in.”

Garrus exhaled heavily his mandibles giving one quick twitch. “Well from what her teacher said, it hasn't been enough.”

Watching as Ismene talked with a couple of her school friends, Joker asked, “What the hell is that supposed to mean? Are they saying she's a bad kid?”

“No, he's not saying that.” shaking his head in reply.

Before he could expand on the subject Ismene bolted from the racks, a small bundle of clothes wrapped in her fist.

“Garrus!” She shouted colliding with his legs knocking him off balance against the wall. “I found two more!”

“All right,” laughed Garrus patting her head and taking the clothes; her happiness wiping the conversation he'd had with the teacher from his mind. “Now how about we go pay for these and get something to eat?”

“Can Uncle Joker come over?” Pouted the child, tears welling in her eyes.

Giving Garrus a wink, Joker made a motion as if deleting something from his omni-tool. “Well what do you know,” exclaimed the pilot, “it looks like my schedule just cleared.”

Ismene became so excited that before Garrus could stop her, she tumbled from his arms, only to be caught by Joker at the last possible second.

A few hours later, Garrus and Joker, who was nursing a reset shoulder courtesy of the shopping centers first aid station, were sitting on the deck of Garrus' prefab unit. The sun was setting and the two were watching Ismene run around with the bear, now dressed in its new overalls and straw hat; Urz chasing after them barking loudly.

Joker laughed sipping at his beer, while Garrus watched in contented silence while Ismene
attempted to climb on the varren's back to no avail.

“So,” grunted Joker continuing their earlier conversation, “about what you and her teacher said.”

“Yeah, that.” grumbled Garrus taking a sip of his water his eyes still locked on Ismene as she now attempted to have the bear sit on Urz's back. “The teacher wants her to get tested.”

“Tested for what?” Sputtered the pilot; beer dripping down his chin.

“Dyslexia.” simply Garrus his eyes darting back and forth across the yard, keeping an eye out for anything that could climb over the fence.

“No shit?” exclaimed Joker watching Ismene successfully lead Urz across the yard, one hand keeping the bear now situated on the varren's neck. “Why does he think she needs to get tested?”

“She's having trouble with her language exercises.” lamented Garrus, remembering the datapad the teacher had showed him earlier.

“Did he even take into account what's happened over the past year or the fact that she's five?” asked Joker, turning his attention to Ismene.

“He has,” grumbled Garrus setting his drink down on the deck. “but from what the teacher said all the other kids are fine when left alone. Ismene on the other hand...” his voice trailed off as he pinched the bridge of his nose with his left hand.

“That sucks, Garrus.” apologized Joker

“Sucks doesn't even begin to describe it, Joker.” Suddenly as if on cue, Garrus' right hand began to shake violently; knocking his glass over and causing it to roll off the edge of the deck and shatter.

“Are you okay, Garrus?” asked Ismene running up; the bear flopping on her shoulders.

“He's fine, sweetie.” answered Joker, shooting Garrus a scathing look, “Just stay there while I get this cleaned up.”

Garrus hid his hand while Joker cleaned up the mess.

Once she was given permission to approach, Ismene onto the deck and nuzzled the older turian. “Is it your injury?”

Nuzzling back, Garrus nodded. “Yeah, but it's all better now. See?” he held out his non-shaking hand.

“Now go inside and pick out a couple of vids for us to watch.”

“Okay.” replied the child skeptically before turning her attention to Joker. “Uncle Joker, are you going to stay?”

Giving her an affectionate pat on the head Joker nodded. “Yeah, I can stay. Aunt EDI's outta town anyway so I think I can stay the night.”

Giving both adults a quick hug, Ismene disappeared into the house with Urz.

“That's pretty fucking low; lying to her like that, Garrus.” hissed the pilot after shutting the door.

“I didn't lie, Joker.” Garrus held up his right hand which was now shaking considerably less. “It's
already starting to pass.”

“Don't bullshit me, Garrus.” scoffed Joker eying the hand. “You're going in for treatment on Monday once Doctor Chakwas has come back.”

“I don't have...”

“I'll watch her,” interrupted Joker with a wave of his hand. “I don't have to leave on my next mission to Tuchanka for a week so I can watch the kids while you get yourself fixed up.”

“What's on Tuchanka?” asked Garrus with a loud grunt as he stood up.

“You don't know?” said the pilot, his eyebrow arching.

“Apparently not since I had to ask you.” grumbled Garrus opening the back door and heading into the kitchen.

Scratching the back of his neck, Joker let out an agitated groan, “I have to pick her up from Tuchanka.”

Garrus' hand stopped at the handle to the cabinet where he kept the snack foods. He took a moment to process the statement before gathering some items before pulling a bowl from another cabinet.

“So?” huffed the turian pouring some chips into the bowl “She's a grown woman, Joker. She can make her own decisions.”

“Yeah, but...” began Joker taking the bowl filled with levo-friendly chips.

“But, nothing.” said Garrus pulling some drinks from the fridge.

“Garrus it's been almost two mon...”

“She's the one who walked out the door, Joker not me.” snapped Garrus, gathering the drinks and a couple of snacks off the counter. “And she's more than welcome to walk back in it when she's ready to talk about it.

“Garrus.”

“I don't want to talk about it right now, Joker.” hissed Garrus, exiting the kitchen. “I have more important things to worry about right now, and if you don't want to go home to a cold bed, I suggest you drop the matter. Deal?”

“All right, deal.” conceded Joker. “Just thought you'd like to see if you could get the time to come along since the conduits are being shut down for maintenance.”

“Joker, what did I just say?” sighed the turian setting the drinks down on the coffee table and handing a bottle of water to Ismene who was curled up on the couch.

“Thank you.” said the child opening the bottle and taking a sip; eyes never leaving the screen as Garrus placed her in his lap.

“Sorry.” huffed the pilot as he grabbed a bottled water off the diFollowing suit, Joker picked a drink up and settled on the couch next to his friend.

“Thank you.” laughed Garrus in relief. “Glad to see we could finally come to an agreement.”
When he was sure Ismene wasn't looking, Joker reached out and tapped Garrus on the shoulder.

Garrus turned his head only to be greeted with a middle finger extended in rebuttal.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

A small glimpse into what's going on with Leela while she's away from Garrus.

So I'm going to try and write again...here we go.

It's been awhile since I've written anything so...bear with me guys okay. The next few chapters are Leela centric so, I'm taking my time with it. I'm sorry if this isn't ideal...but I got a lot of things going on guys so hopefully you can be patient with me.

Chapter 25

“I still don't understand why we need the female here? It's bad enough that we have slagging turians and salarians here with us.”

Leela looked up from her data pad at the krogan sitting across from her. It had been a week since her arrival on Tuchanka. She was more than willing to do what was necessary to finish the negotiations the Council members had requested she sit in on. When she arrived, she found Wrex more than willing to sit down and discuss the expansion of Krogan territory rationally while other clan leaders were more expressive in their desires to start their own colonies. Hence why she was so glad the Krogan in front of her was the last one she'd be dealing with before heading back to Earth.

“What does my being a female have to do with anything Agni?” inquired Leela setting the pad aside. She was seated to the right of Wrex who was at the head of the table with Grunt on her right, the younger krogan glaring daggers at Agni for talking to her in such a manner. She appreciated the gesture from her comrade, but it was unnecessary. She'd encountered this problem before when dealing with other clan leaders and had expected as much from them so she let it go.

“In my opinion,” replied the krogan with a heavy grumble, “it's of little consequence. However,” he pointed at the Wrex, Grunt, and a few other clan leaders who had decided that Wrex was choosing the best path for their people, “this is a matter between Krogan and our former enemies. Not humans.”
“I beg to differ, Agni,” growled Wrex, his gaze narrowing on the other clan leader. “All of us here have found these proceedings to be quite necessary if our people are to survive.”

“Oh course you would,” snorted Agni his eyes darting between Leela and his opponent, “You and that little tank-bred have been their pets for so long...”

“WE ARE NOT PETS!” roared Grunt rising to his feet; nostrils flared.

Around her Leela could hear the low, worried whispers of the salarians and the deep flanging rumble of the turians’ throat registers. Wrex and the other clan representatives remained quiet and to many they would appear rather stoic in their gestures. Leela knew better of course. Years of fighting with them had given her a deeper knowledge when she saw a slight adjustment in Wrex’s posture and knew what he was thinking. While the other members of this small council were concerned about having to take military action, she knew Wrex was thinking about what he’d have to do to appease the other clans should Grunt lose his cool. They were sitting on Krogan sacred ground where only once in recent memory had a Krogan dared attempt to shed the blood of a fellow warrior only to have his own blood spilt by the one he sought to kill.

Still, Grunt’s youth and inexperience showed and while it was only conjecture, Leela knew from a few of her intelligence officers that Agni would attempt to bait Grunt, hoping that his hotheadedness and youth would override any sense the younger Krogan had in his head. Should the plan work, then Agni could make any request of Wrex that could suit his needs.

“Grunt,” snapped Wrex, “Sit down! NOW!”

Wrex’s voice echoed throughout the hall, but Grunt remained standing, too stunned at what he had just heard. His clan leader was telling him to stand down from an enemy; one he knew could be a likely threat. Turning his attention away from Agni, he gave a pleading look to Shepard.

“Battle Master,” protested Grunt, “He's insulted you and our clan. He needs to be reminded of his place.”

“He will be reminded, Grunt.” replied Leela with a reassuring smile. “He knows that he is in no place to make any demands of us or the Council.” She could see the confusion still swimming in Grunt’s eyes and added, “He is simply trying to goad you into attacking him so he can gain some amount of leverage in the negotiations.” She turned her attention back to Agni and chuckled, “Isn't that right?”
“What makes you so sure that I hold so little power?” spat the krogan; slamming his fist down on the table. “I'm the leader of the Brodasi Clan and we are....”

“You're the leader of a tiny clan with nothing to offer.” finished Wrex, laughing along with his allies.

“AND WHOSE FAULT IS THAT!?” roared Agni slamming his other fist down even harder on the table.

“The Reapers.” retorted Leela, indifferent to the ripple of distress.

“Rear-Admiral,” cautioned a familiar voice, “you would be wise to watch how far you dig this hole.”

“I appreciate your concern Primarch.” laughed Leela with a courteous nod to Victus before turning her attention back to Agni; eyes narrowed and teeth clenched, “but he needs to be reminded of who he is dealing with.”

“Do not try to threaten me, Human.” scoffed Agni pulling a data pad from beneath the table. “I have seen the medical reports. You have denied much of the reconstructive surgery recommended for you to return to active combat and your biotics aren't as powerful as they once were.” His lip curled in a derisive grin, “You are no more of a threat to me than a child with a toy gun.”

“Can I see that medical report?” asked Leela extending her hand. Agni tossed it to her and with a gentle application of her biotics, the pad floated into her hand and she read it quietly to herself before laughing, “This medical report is from when Doctor Chakwas first found me on the colony I was held captive on.”

She handed it to Wrex who looked it over and laughed along with her.

“What's that have to do with anything? The reports are accurate.” snapped Agni his frustration slowly getting the better of him.

“In one sense they are Agni,” chuckled Leela twirling the data pad on her middle finger, “I have refused full reconstructive surgery on my cybernetics which will keep me from fighting on the front lines. But my biotics,” she activated a small field around the data pad, obliterating it, “are as
strong as ever and I can safely say that you are about as much a threat to me as an ant is to a boot.”

His eyes locked on the biotic field containing the dust, Agni let out low chuckle at the tiny human in front of him, “Prove it.”

“Name the time and the place, Agni.” agreed Leela allowing a quick flare of her biotics. “But, let me just tell you one thing,” she snarled as she stood up, a biotic field pulsing around her body, “Choose your next words carefully; because whatever little scheme you have rattling around in that,” she pointed at his head and smirked, “hollow shell you call a head, will fail and your clan will suffer the consequences of your actions.”

“My clan will die before they agree to your terms.” hissed Agni; a familiar blue glow beginning to pulse around him.

“Agni if you would just listen to our terms you will see that...” announced Victus, his flange growing louder betraying the steady tone of his voice.

“Hold your threats, Turian...” began Agni as his biotics began to shake the table.

“We are not threatening,” interjected Major Kirrahe from his position next to Victus. “A threat implies that we may not act. However, should you choose to follow through with whatever plans you have with your people...”

“I will personally oversee the end of your plans myself, Agni.” confirmed Wrex without missing a beat.

This revelation did little to calm the fury they could see boiling inside Agni. It didn't take long for that anger to explode out of Agni in a biotic rush. His powers flaring, Agni shot forward toward Wrex, a primal roar echoing off the walls of the ancient cavern. In that moment, instinct overtook reason and Leela shot forward with her own biotics, her tiny frame slamming into the massive eight-hundred pound mountain of muscle. Luck was on her side as she sent herself and Agni past Wrex. She felt her body slam into the ground and heard the loud thud of Agni’s body land only a few feet away. Pushing herself up, she let out a small painful groan as she turned to see Agni clutching his stomach; retching loudly as he tried to get to his feet.

“Are you all right, Shepard?” asked Grunt appearing above the shaken human; his toothy grin scrunching the scales around his bright blue eyes.
Nodding, Leela took the hand her former disciple offered her. She felt herself being lifted effortlessly and a little too quickly. Her head spun as she felt her knees buckle and reached out for Grunt who caught her; asking if she was able to stand. Taking a few breaths she nodded and straightened up.

“Yeah,” she exhaled loudly. “Just a little winded. Damn implants are still taking their toll on me.”

“That's a shame,” chuckled Grunt jerking his head back toward Agni, “I would have loved to see what would happen if you were at full power.”

Looking past the mound that was Grunt, Leela watched as Agni was escorted from the meeting hall, his face shadowed in defeat.

“He'd probably be dead,” she said simply.

“As he damn well should be.” sneered Grunt; his tongue brushed along the front of his teeth at the mere thought of Agni's death.

“Why does he deserve death?” asked Leela turning her attention back to Grunt. “He was doing what he thought was best for his clan, isn't that what the Krogan have done for several generations?”

“We can't afford to have any weak links.” snorted Grunt at Shepard's comment.

“So he deserves death?” Leela's eyes locked with Grunt's steely gaze.

“His actions would have made our people weak.” contested Grunt, “You heard Kirrahe, anything that goes against the plans that we have set deserves to be annihilated!”

“Do you remember what Wrex said?” reproached Leela, straightening herself a little more.

“He said that he would deal with the dissension.”
“And did you hear Wrex say in what manner he would deal with them?” retorted Leela. After a moment Grunt shook his head. “Then what makes you think that death was in any way a part of our plans?”

She watched as the remaining hope for battle in his eyes flicker.

“You, Shepard.”

“Me?” Leela asked surprised, “Grunt, when have I ever given you the impression that I would kill because someone had a different opinion?”

“You're a soldier.” he answered promptly. “You chose the life of a soldier; to kill in order to fight for something.” His frustration was beginning to overtake him, his voice slowly rising. “You led us into battle. You united a galaxy to fight against the Reapers in order for us to survive, hell you sacrificed Mordin to allow the entire Krogan race to flourish.” His voice was growing steadily faster as the words tumbled from his mouth. “You, yourself have shown that the sacrifice of a few is forgivable for the majority to live. That is the duty of a soldier; to kill to maintain the peace of your people. That was why you joined the Alliance isn't it? To extinguish those perceived to be a threat? And now you tell me, as my Battle Master, that this is no longer the case?! Why is this situation any different? Why shouldn't we make an example of them!?”

“Because Grunt,” hissed Leela; her biotics flared out of instinct knocking Grunt back. “We are better than that.”

Grunt let out a growl but said nothing, she knew he wouldn't. Even with an entire company under his command, Shepard was still his Battle Master and when she spoke he would always listen.

“Yes, as a soldier I have killed for the sake of peace. I led us to war, I asked people to lay down their lives and have even lost mine in the process. BUT,” she added quickly, cutting off any chance for him to argue. “You have seen how I operate Grunt, and you know that if there is a way to avoid bloodshed I will do whatever I can to do so.”

“Agni,” she said, her finger snapping at the door, “was trying to make his life better for his people. The Krogan are still divided Grunt despite the victory against the Reapers. There is still too much bad blood between the clans. That is the purpose of these meetings, to find a way to dissolve those grudges. If we continue to kill them, just because they disagree then what hope do your people have of ever becoming more than just pawns to be used during another crisis?”

She watched Grunt; his large eyes flicking between her and the wall behind her trying to hide what
was going on inside him. She knew that look, the struggle that was going on inside him. It was the same look he had when he was trying to make sense of what had been building up inside him when they were fighting the Collectors.

The battle between his blood and his mind.

After several tense minutes she watched as his eyes calm; the eagerness for blood slowly ebbing away as he nodded in concession. "You are right, Shepard," he lamented, avoiding her gaze. "His death would serve no purpose."

"Grunt," replied Leela acknowledging his concession, "I'm not denying that you make an excellent argument. You're right in saying that this peace is worth fighting for. As someone who has fought beside me and led people into combat you have every right to say those things."

"But?" asked Grunt, knowing that everything she had said before would mean nothing in a matter of moments.

"But," she answered wearily, "I think for now, at least for the rest of my life time, we're doomed to obscurity."

"I don't like the thought of that, Shepard." snorted Grunt after a few more moments’ palpable silence. "I don't like it one damn bit."

"You don't like the thought of having to fight without me saving your ass all the time?" she laughed, poking him in the ribs with her elbow.

Grunt's head snapped around; lip curled and eyes burning at her. "I've saved your life more times than I can count."

"You've saved my life more than four times?" Grunt's lip twitched violently as a loud growl thundered from his chest as she smiled inwardly at the familiar fire returning to his eyes. "Did I hit a nerve, Grunt? I'm surprised you'd let the words of a small delicate human like me get you so upset."

"Don't toy with me, Shepard." scoffed Grunt spitting a large wad of saliva on the ground. "Agni may think he could have taken you, but I know for a fact you've had some of your implants fixed
and even without them,” his lip curled in a smug smirk, “you're about as delicate as the ass end of a thresher maw.”

“You really think you can go toe to toe with me?” challenged Leela shoving Grunt's shoulder.

“Name the time and place, Human.” accepted Grunt, the fire in his eyes growing brighter at the chance to fight his Battle Master.

“Twenty-one hundred hours at the bar followed by the training hall at twenty-two hundred.” replied Shepard after a couple of moments thought before adding, “If we're able to walk of course.”

Grunt stared at her for a moment. She could see the wheels in his mind turning as he processed what she had just said.

Finally after a moment, the Krogan slammed his fists together and chortled, “Wouldn't miss it, Shepard.”
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Just Leela hanging out and getting into a fight.

So it looks like you guys have enjoyed 25, that's good. Sorry the next few chapters will be short but again, I'm working with newer stuff, primarily about Leela but I'm just trying to figure her out a little more that's all. And I apparently fell into some very old, and very bad habits when writing this one….hence it took much longer to edit. *sighs* and I’m certain a couple of people heard about it as well. not my best chapter

So...here ya go guys.

Chapter 26

There are few places in her life Leela had ever felt truly safe. If pressed she had no trouble telling anyone that she would always felt safest in her bed. Whether it was her lumpy one aboard the Normandy, or the one in her mother's quarters, she never had trouble falling asleep. Whether it was alone during a firefight or curled up next to Garrus, when she fell asleep she always felt safe.

It was when she was asleep that things went to hell, when she became vulnerable.

When she was asleep she couldn't fight them; the memories that would come flooding back. Her childhood, Akuze, the Blitz, Sovereign; every night she would be haunted by these memories. Some nights she would wake up in a cold sweat, gasping for breath. Other nights, she would find herself buried in her mother's chest, her face stained with tears. Then, there were the nights she'd wake up shouting for him only to remember she was alone with only Boo, her hamster, for company.

Last night had been such a night. She'd come home, showered, and gone to bed just as she had every night. This time hoping that she'd get a good night’s sleep, but it never came. It ended up as it normally did. Her nose filled with the smell of rotting flesh, and her ears echoed with the sounds of people's screams as enemy forces lay waste to them. It was only thanks to the blaring sound of her alarm that she was saved from having to see their faces pleading for her to save them.
Her eyes snapped open and immediately began scanning the room for any sign of intrusion. Reaching over, she shut off her alarm and let out a sigh of relief when she heard nothing but the sound of Boo's wheel squeaking. Satisfied with the conditions her room, she opened up her omni-tool and flipped to her itinerary, finding it empty for the first time since she'd come back from Tuchanka. It had been an interesting trip to say the least, and more trouble than she thought it would be the moment she'd set foot on the newly re-commissioned Nairobi.

Though she'd never officially seen combat, the Nairobi had been found limping near the outer edge of the Sol system nearly six months prior to picking up her most recent passengers up from Tuchanka. Most of her initial crew had survived despite the ship being barely intact. Her weapons had been destroyed and her plating was barely intact. When the ship was found, her crew had gone into temporary stasis to conserve power and oxygen. After they had been woken up, the crew gave their reports about how they had been attacked by a Reaper only to be saved by a red blast of energy.

Once they'd been debriefed, much of the crew had immediately signed up for the task of getting the Nairobi back in fighting shape. Though a little unnecessary, the ship had been retrofitted with the latest equipment thanks to the Council's idea of using the ship as it's newest diplomatic vessel. What would originally have taken almost a year, took only a few months thanks to the zeal expressed by not only the ship's crew but the engineers assigned to it as well. Asari had supplied the luxuries of Thessia and Illium for visitors’ quarters. Salarrians, Geth, and Quarians offered up tactical instruments and medical equipment. Humans, Turians, and even Krogan offered their help in supplying armaments and defensive equipment. When she was finished, the Nairobi had changed as much on the inside as the people who had worked on her; Brought together by a common cause to help stabilize the peace that had been so hard fought.

From an outsider's perspective, things looked calm, almost serene. Several species coinciding with one another; Krogan delegates were rubbing elbows casually with turians and salarians, joking about what they would do once they got off ship. Asari and humans were discussing the latest news to come in from the outer systems and what they were doing to help in getting them the supplies they needed. Though the peace and unity was strong, it was just as fragile though nearly shattered thanks to the antics of two of the admiral's closest friends.

Since they'd landed on Tuchanka, Kasumi and Liara had been at one another’s throats. Neither of them said why, but Leela had her suspicions. Her main theory revolved around Liara jealous that Leela had brought Kasumi along on such a delicate mission. Given the thief’s past, Leela could see the problem. Kasumi wasn't necessarily known for being the most loyal person as her loyalty was bought more often than not. Yet, despite Liara's urging to leave Kasumi on Earth, Leela had brought the thief anyway and her trust was well placed.

Kasumi had proven herself more useful than Liara on several occasions thanks to her years of working solo. She was quiet, fast, efficient, and didn't require a team or several steps to achieve her goals. This made her the ideal candidate for gathering the intel needed to strong arm the agreements that Wrex and several of his allies were traveling to the Citadel to present to the Council.

When Leela had explained this to Liara, the asari had taken it as an attack on her character and stormed off in a huff toward her quarters. For several days during the trip, Leela had tried to talk with her friend to explain her reasoning only to be met with silence. One time, Leela had tried using voice altering software she'd gotten from Kasumi. This turned out to be a bad idea as Leela had ended up in a pile on the floor while Liara locked herself in her quarters for the remainder of the trip.
The one time she did leave her room Liara’s temper got the better of her and nearly started a war.

Leela had just loaded up her third plate of one of her favorite meals; a dish consisting of fried chicken, chili sauce mixed with onions and cream of mushroom soup, and a huge pile of rice. She had been certain this wasn't part of the standard menu since there was only one person who knew how to cook this meal. It sent a warm, familiar feeling through her as she took in the scent of the spices. Picking up her knife and fork, she began cutting into the large thigh. She had barely put the meat into her mouth when she heard the ruckus.

Letting out a loud sigh, Leela set down her utensils expecting to see a krogan fist fight and instead was met with the sight of Liara standing over Kasumi; teeth bared and biotics flaring. All around them were krogan shouting for them to take their fight to the sparring mat that the soldiers used down in the cargo bay. Sighing, Leela wiped her mouth and tossed her napkin down on the table and headed over to where her friends were.

“All right you two,” sighed Leela, hoping to quell the violence that permeated the air, “you've both had enough fun for the evening.”

“I don't think what I have in mind for her could be considered fun, Shepard,” seethed Liara, her eyes following the movements of the now recovered thief.

“Liara,” whispered Leela taking a step closer to her, “I would strongly advise you to not go through with whatever you have planned for her.”

“Don't you dare think you can tell me what to do Shepard,” hissed Liara sounding a little too much like Benezia for Leela's taste. “You are not in command of this vessel and I am not a member of your crew; which means you have no power over me.”

“You're right,” confirmed Leela as she waved to a couple of C-Sec officers that had been watching them. “But they are here to keep the peace and since I'm still a Council Spectre who can speak on their behalf, I am confining you to your quarters for the remainder of our journey.”

“You wouldn't dare!.” growled Liara, her biotics flaring only to have them quelled by the sound of guns powering up.

“I am, Liara.” replied Leela, her voice matching Liara's. “And if you think the Reapers got on my bad side; just wait until you see what happens to those who betray me.”

“I'm not betraying you, Shepard.” answered Liara, her voice softening, almost pleading with her former love.

“Then go with them.” requested Leela, her fingers softly brushing against Liara's. “Please.”

After a few moments of silence, Liara gave a curt nod and left with the guard; head hanging as she entered the lift. When she was gone, the crowd dispersed and Leela turned toward her table, ready to finish her dinner which she was certain was stone cold by now.

“Thanks for running interference Shep,” chuckled a voice from behind her.

“Don't worry about it,” exhaled Leela, her hands shaking from the small rush of adrenaline still coursing through her veins. “I was just doing what needed to be done.”

“That's our Shep,” laughed Kasumi clapping her friend on the shoulder. “You sure you're okay?” inquired the thief noticing the shaking in Shepard's shoulder's.
“Adrenaline,” grunted Leela, before taking a deep breath to calm her nerves. “Always happens when I think there's going to be a fight.”

“I think it's more than that,” smirked Kasumi tapping her nose.

“You're good at your job, Kasumi,” chuckled Leela, stuffing her hands in her pockets. “But this is dangerous ground you're stepping into.”

“Don't worry about me, Shep.” laughed Kasumi with a small bow, “I know when to mind my own business. Although,” continued the thief pulling a flask from her belt, “I also know when it's time to let loose.”

“Thanks Kasumi,” smiled Leela with a quick glance at the flask, “but I'm trying to cut back.”

“Fair enough,” sighed the thief turning on her heel as she shook the flask above her head, “you know where to find me if you change your mind.”

When her friend was gone, Leela sauntered back to her table only to find her food as hot as it was when she'd received it. Glancing around she found no one paying attention to her table and simply shrugged as she sat down, digging in again as she took in her surroundings. Despite everything that had happened before the war, Leela felt good about the geth functional again. It wasn't as strange a sight as she'd originally thought it would be; seeing them up and interacting with everyone. Whenever she looked at one, she was reminded of Legion and the sacrifice that he made.

With EDI, it was different. She saw no body, heard nothing about her, and no one mentioned her. Every time she saw a picture of the Normandy, one of the first things she'd think about was her friend.

She remembered how she'd explained humanity and life to EDI; about how she could find a way to be happy with Joker, the way that humans ate, the ability to tell a joke, or in some cases why humans seemed attracted to the members of the other alien species, particularly the specifics of her and Garrus. The conversations were endless, which made pulling the trigger that much more painful.

The fact that with a single finger, she'd once again ended the lives of innocents. Her thoughts drifted to the moments before the she made that final decision. The one that had changed things forever as everyone knew it. She hated that presumptuous, narrow minded, logic driven, condescending quasi-childlike thing with every fiber of her being. What the fuck gave them the right to dictate who should live and who should die?! That wasn't a decision for anyone, never mind any species, to make. It was then that she already knew what her decision was. It was simple but required a small amount of relative sacrifice. In the end, she survived; they survived and thrived in spite of it.

“But we showed you, didn't we you little fuck?” whispered Leela into the darkness of her room, a small smile spreading across her face before quickly disappearing; knowing that getting her hopes up could probably do more harm than good.

If there was one thing she could agree with the Catalyst on, it was that to be an organic meant that destruction was how they thrived. Leela was a living example of that. Her hands were no cleaner than the next soldier's; even dirtier considering the decisions that had been placed before her. But she had had faith in her choice, and she was certain that even though things were bad now, they would get better.
She rested her head against the pillows, momentarily content with the way things were going. During her work with the Council after her return, she had seen the damage that had been wrought on several planets and. The amount of lives that were still in the process of recovering from the war. It'd take decades to repair the damage; maybe even longer and while her position was more symbolic than anything, the power it granted her gave her the ability to help those in need when she could as fast as she could.

“Shit.” she groaned rubbing the final bits of sleep from her eyes.

Her thoughts were now plagued by the most recent reports of her supply shipments not arriving on time. Deciding it best to contact the captain of the latest ship she'd commissioned, Leela started to sit up only to be slammed back into the mattress by a bony fist. Coughing loudly, Leela turned on her head to see a large black blob that wasn't there when she went to bed. Covering her eyes, she reached over and turned on her lamp. After letting her eyes adjust, she let out a loud groan and palmed her forehead when she saw what lay next to her. On the bed, resting on top of the covers with her hair sprawled out all over her like a second pillow, was a lightly snoring, tattooed, scarred, and incredibly naked Jack.

“Oh what the fu...” Leela started.

“Shut the fuck up, Shaun,” muttered the dozing Jack absently wiping a bit of drool from her chin.

Shaun? thought Leela her interest piqued.

“Hey, Jack,” whispered Leela scooting a bit closer; tracing her finger along her friend’s spine, “Time to wake up.”

“Go away,” growled the biotic sleepily.

“Or what?” cooed Leela as she draped her arm over her friend's body.

“Or I'll...HOLY FUCK!” screamed Jack as her eyes took in Leela for the first time. “SHEPARD, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY BED?!”

“Me?” retorted Leela, separating from her friend and hitting her in the face with a pillow. “What the hell are you doing in my bed?”

“Your bed?!” snapped Jack, kicking at Leela only to fall off the bed instead and land with a loud thud. “What the hell happened to my wall?”

“Told you,” laughed Leela as she watched her sheet's twist in the dim light of her lamp.

“Oh fuck you,” snarled Jack from the floor as she tried to unwind her way out of the sheets.

“I thought that was Shaun’s job?” jabbed Leela watching as her friend finally managed to free herself from her linen prison.

“What are you talking about?” barked Jack pulling her underwear back on.

“You kept mentioning some guy named, Shaun.” answered Leela, thumbing through one of her books she had grabbed off the nightstand next to her.

“He's no one.” said Jack, a little too hastily to be true.

“Right,” laughed Leela only to receive a biotic blast to the side of the head. “What the fuck?!”
“Oh quit your bitching,” snorted Jack zipping up her pants. “I've seen you take worse and....”

The biotic's words suddenly turned to hoarse gasps as Leela's arms wrapped around her throat.

“You're goddamn right I've taken worse,” laughed Leela in her friend's ears. “You've gotten soft, Jack.”

“No I haven't, Shepard.” gasped Jack solidly planting her elbow into her friend's stomach loosening her Leela’s grip on her throat.

“That was sneaky,” Leela inhaled sharply, stumbling backward.

“I wasn't aware this fight had any rules,” smirked Jack throwing a punch at her friend.

“Just the way I like it,” grunted Leela, grabbing her friend's hand in her arm; the momentum of Jack's punch giving Leela the leverage she needed to toss her friend over her shoulder.

“Not today.” laughed Jack as she twisted in the mid-air, wrenching her arm from Leela's grip before slamming her biotically padded heel hitting the commander in the head.

A jolt of pain shot through Leela's head, but did little to dizzy her thanks to the implanted metal plate in her head courtesy of Cerberus.

“You gotta be shitting me!.” growled Jack in surprise when Leela rebounded virtually unfazed.

“Metal plates, dumb ass.” sneered Leela pointing to her head only seconds before she felt the wind knocked out of her when Jack's foot collided with her solar plexus.

“More reason to knock you on your ass with all those Cerberus parts still in you,” jeered Jack as her elbow rammed into Leela's lower jaw. Suddenly, she felt the all too familiar sensation of a quickly created biotic barrier deflect her blow.

“What the fuck?” barked Jack as she felt her elbow bounce back harmlessly.

“Fist fight,” smirked Leela as her fist met Jacks face, splitting her lip, “so anything goes.”

“You’re not playing by the rules?” laughed Jack catching Leela off guard with an all too familiar right cross, “Sexy.”

“You're so sweet,” grinned Leela as she spat out a bit of blood before countering with a left hook to her friend’s jaw.

“You bitch!” snarled Jack wiping the blood from her lip.

“Again with compliments,” laughed Leela; her arm cocked back in preparation for the final blow.

“What the fuck is going on in here?!?” demanded an all too familiar voice.

Eyes growing wide and simultaneously mouthing ‘Oh shit’; they both dropped their arms and turned to look at the doorway. Standing with a cocked hip and arms folded, Hannah glared daggers at the younger women waiting for an explanation.

“She started it.” answered Jack pointing an accusatory finger at Leela.

“Bullshit!” snapped Leela; her fingers instinctively forming a fist. “You're the one who threw the first blow!”
“Well you're the one who kicked me out of the bed!” countered Jack; her biotics flaring out of instinct.

“Your ass shouldn't have been in my bed anyway you delinquent!”

“BOTH OF YOU SHUT UP!” shouted Hannah stopping the argument. “You!” she said pointing at the tattooed biotic, “My bathroom, showered, and dressed in ten.”

“But...” began Jack.

“NOW JACK!!” barked Hannah pointing at the door.

Without a word, the biotic shoved her way past Leela and kept her eyes on the floor as she passed Hannah.

“Your...”

“Shut up, Leela,” growled Hannah, her red eyes boring into her daughter, “just shut up and get your ass ready. Breakfast will be ready in fifteen.”

Half an hour later, Leela was sitting at the table poking absent mindedly at her pancakes while her mother went over paper work and Jack played with her mother's six month old tuxedo kitten, Buster. Buster had other ideas and kept wandering to walk all over Hannah’s work. Finally Hannah gave up, setting her work aside and the two women began to play and talk about the small feline. As her mother and Jack talked, Leela's mind drifted back toward the shower.

The water had been a godsend and helped to dull the lumps and bruises that were beginning to form on her body. They were minor annoyances compared to the other thing that had been taken from her that morning besides sleeping in. The shower had lately become one of the few safe havens she'd had to think privately about certain things. Those thoughts allowed her to forget about reality for a while and just concentrate on not only the person that she wanted, needed.

“Leela?” interrupted Hannah in the same voice she had used when she interrupted Leela during a rather private moment in the shower, “I asked you a question.”

“What?!” snipped Leela, prodding her pancake violently with her fork.

“I said 'what plans do you have for today?’” repeated her mother, returning her attention to her own pancakes.

Shifting in her seat, Leela took a bite of her pancake before answering, “All my meetings were canceled and Kaidan's gone on a trip with his mother so I'll probably just request a truck and head into town for awhile.”

“Sounds like a plan,” her mother said with a smile. “What about you, Jack?”

“I got nothing going on today,” laughed the biotic as the kitten licked at her syrup covered finger. “So, I thought I’d just wing it.”

“Why don't you two hang out?” recommended Hannah over the rim of her mug. “See if you two can't get rid of all that excess energy into something more constructive than turning each other into bloody pulps.”

“How do you suggest we do that?” scoffed Leela glowering at Jack who paid her no attention.
“I don’t know,” replied her mother through a piece of melon she’d gotten from the bowl on the table. “Maybe hit the shooting range or...”

“Oh that’s smart,” snorted Leela, her old injury making her nose whistle loudly. “We get into a fist fight and you want us to go to a place where we shoot things.”

“Watch your tone,” warned Hannah, her eyes narrowing at her daughter.

“Yeah, Leela.” snickered Jack as Buster tried to climb up onto her shoulder. “Watch your tone.”

“Fuck you.” muttered Leela, removing herself from the table and placing her dishes in the sink.

“I thought that was Garrus’ job?” asked Jack shooting a knowing look at Leela. “Or have you resorted to a vibrating means of satisfying yourself?”

“It may vibrate but it packs more of a punch than your bony little fist,” countered Leela grabbing her canteen from the fridge.

“Yeah well, at least I didn't have to rely on shots to grow my tits,” laughed Jack; still playing with the kitten; unaware that Leela had picked up her plate.

Suddenly, she grunted and gasped sharply as she felt the slimy, sticky, half-eaten pile of fried, syrup soaked starch slam into her chest.

“What the fuck was that for?!?”

“Leela! What the hell is the matter with you” demanded Hannah, doing her best to hide her oncoming smile while Jack shot a venomous look at her former commander

“I just thought she could use a little help,” replied Leela as she chewed happily on a piece of melon

“The fuck do you mean help,” snapped Jack trying her best to pull the pancakes away from her chest.

“Well you see, Jack.” began Leela walking up behind her friend and pulling her into a tight hug; the syrup and pancakes soaking into their skin. “While I may have had to get shots to grow mine, they’re still bigger than yours Bisquick Tits.”
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

more into leela's head space

reunion chapter coming VERY soon.

September 17th 2187

To: Rear-Admiral Leela Shepard

Subject: In celebration of the upcoming anniversary of the war.

Rear-Admiral,

It has come to my attention that while your orders have forced you to remain out of the public eye.

While my staff and I respect your wishes, we however thought it might be in your interests to join us in the final moments of filming a movie about the horrors of the past several months.

We think that this would be an excellent opportunity for you to return to the public eye and to bring awareness to your valiant efforts in destroying the Reapers.

Enclosed in this email is the screenplay to the movie and while you only have a few lines toward the end, we hope that you can offer your expert opinion to the reality we hope to bring to the screen.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Duresh Knikto

Director

"Where the hell do they come up with this schlock," gagged Leela as she reached the last page of the script.

"What did they send you this time?" inquired Liara as she sent off her latest orders to Feron.

"This…this…," choking on her words, Leela handed her data pad over to the asari and rested her head on the table before covering it with her arms.

"It can't be that bad," mused Liara with a raised eyebrow.

"Just read it," commanded Leela, not caring if her attempt to hide earned her strange looks from the other patrons.

As the anticipation of Liara's reaction began to eat away at her, Leela's ears picked up what sounded like stifled mews. Raising her head cautiously, Leela watched as tears streamed down
"Oh shut up!" snapped Leela snatching the data pad back and sent a quick reply to the director declining her cameo.

"I can't help it," snorted Liara covering her mouth, "this is just too hysterical."

"You wouldn't be laughing if someone had sent you something like this," barked Leela, practically throwing the data pad into her bag.

"I most certainly would," snickered Liara before taking a sip of water. "This one thinks that you should enkindle me or or..."

"I KNOW WHAT IT SAYS," ejaculated Leela, shooting up from her seat. When she became aware of the crowd's eyes bore into her, Leela returned to her own seat; her face and ears burning scarlet with embarrassment.

"I just don't know where the hell they find the inspiration for this crap."

"I believe the inspiration for it is sitting at this very table," smiled Liara with a reassuring pat on her friend's hand.

"More like lack of inspiration," snorted Leela, her nose whistling loudly.

"Shepard," Liara sighed frustrated with her friend, her trademark smirk gracing her lips at the sound, "it's really not that bad."

"It's a bit part in a piece of shit movie," hissed Leela drawing the gaze of several other patrons who had been pointing at her, only to hurriedly return to their meals after getting caught.

"And what?" smirked Liara after taking a bite of her salad, "You're afraid that everyone will find out you're as bad an actress as you are a dancer?"

"That's not the point Liara," snorted Leela, turning her attention back to her soda.

"Then elaborate on exactly what point you are trying to make?"

"It's demeaning to everything we fought for!" exclaimed Leela after draining her soda.

"I get that," chided Liara growing impatient with her friend.

"Then why are you defending this piece of shit?" inquired Leela, jabbing her finger down at her bag.

"Because I understand the importance of what they are trying to do, Leela." barked Liara finally fed up with her friend's attitude.

The use of her name catching her completely off guard, Leela couldn't muster up the words to defend herself as Liara began listing off her reasons behind her defense.

"I know you have been kept in the dark about many things over the past few years," sighed Liara after taking a deep breath, "but you aren't the only one who has been affected. We all have had to deal with the aftermath and for some of us, a distraction like this is needed. Yes, it's reprehensible and yes, it is a complete mockery of the sacrifices people have made. But it is not our position to judge those who wish to spend a few hours forgetting the events of the past year."
If there was one thing Liara was good at, it was putting Leela in a corner and she never wasted the opportunity to when it came to arguments like the one they were having. Those had become somewhat frequent since Leela had returned and she was becoming weary of being on the losing end. It wasn't that she wasn't sensitive to what other people were going through; she was reliving those horrors nightly, which was why she couldn't bring herself to agree to appear in the movie even if it did provide people with a few hours of escape.

Leela contemplated how to continue their conversation but suddenly noticed the change in her friend's countenance that she had missed moments earlier, too consumed by their debate over her movie cameo. [TM1] [TM2] Turning her attention to her friend's face, Leela watched as the asari's sapphire blue eyes slowly begin to lose their gentle light as they scanned her omni-tool. While the subtle air of confidence her friend exuded slowly dissolved into a gentle river of tears.

"Liara," began Leela reaching out to take her friend by the hand, "what's happened?"

"I need to leave," whispered Liara almost too quiet for even Leela's enhanced hearing to pick up.

"Liara will you talk to me," begged Leela as her friend began collecting her things.

"I can't," grunted Liara, the silent tears carving a gentle path down her cheeks, "not right now."

Grabbing her own things, Leela took only a second to pay their bill and followed her friend out the door and into the afternoon crowd. It took a couple of gentle shoves to make their way to the side walk and after several attempts they were able to hail a cab. Prepared to join her friend, Leela was left frozen in shock when Liara told her she couldn't come. Alarmed at her friend's sudden secrecy, Leela was barely able to utter a syllable before Liara cut her off.

"Don't ask me, Shepard," begged Liara, her voice cracking like glass. When Leela nodded, some semblance of returned to the asari's eyes and after a gentle kiss on the cheek entered her cab and disappeared.

It took several minutes for Leela to recover from what she had just experienced. It wasn't the first time she had been told something like this from Liara, it was still a punch to the stomach. She knew that this would eventually happen, her friends not needing her, but she always thought they could at least confide in her. She had hoped that after all their conversations her friends knew at least that they could trust her and yet after what she had just been privy to seemed to have shattered that reality.

I guess there are secrets that must be kept from Shepard, she thought to herself as she pulled her hat out of her bag.

Letting her hair down, Leela slipped the cap on and just as an elcor, volus, and asari came walking up to her. As they approached her, Leela caught the tail end of their conversation. Apparently their company had seen a massive surge in profits thanks to their acquiring some old abandoned mechs. Supposedly the mechs had been programmed with mining equipment that was exclusive to Omega's mining facilities. The find had earned them quite a few favors from Aria who had recently arrived on the station and was all too eager to begin reasserting her power in that system. As they passed Leela, she could see the asari give her a cautious glance before hurrying her business partners along.

"Must be the scars," chuckled Leela as she began to make her way through the busy sidewalk.

Wiping the experience from her mind, Leela pulled her cap low over her eyes. She couldn't help but absorb everything she was hearing. Around her people were talking about family members that
they had reunited with, home worlds that were being rebuilt, and business recovering. Every voice
from a member of a different species and while she heard the occasional fight over who had done
more during the war, it usually ended in the opponents laughing with one another.

Some of the stories even had Leela in fits of silent laughter as she walked by their tellers. While
most had nothing to do with her, some she couldn't help but become interested in. Especially those
that involved people she guessed were based on some individuals she'd fought with.

"Bullshit." Leela heard a human female of African descent, dressed in Alliance fatigues, snort into
a mug of beer as she passed by a restaurant with outside seating. "One old man armed with only an
M7 Avenger, a sniper rifle, and some grenades took out an entire Reaper squad comprised of
Brutes and Marauders?"

"I swear it by my ancestors!" exclaimed the krogan named Lo defensively, slamming his fist on the
table and causing the dishes to clatter. "The old man swung took them all out without a scratch! It
was the most glorious thing I had ever seen."

"Now, now," coaxed a turian female patting the Lo gently on the head as his eyes began to grow
misty from the memory, "I'm sure you will be just as brave and strong when you grow older."

"Go choke on a quad, Deia," snapped Lo picking up what looked like a leg of varren meat. "It's no
less unbelievable than your story about that...what was that word she used Bahati?"

"I think it translated for me as 'blue skinned Valkyrie in blood red armor," snickered the human,
causing the turian's mandibles to flutter sheepishly at the words.

"I just meant that...," stammered Deia as she fidgeted with the lip of her glass.

"It's okay, dear," Bahati chuckled as she patted Deia's hand and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.
"I understand the appeal."

Hearing the stories brought a swelling of pride to Leela's heart, followed by a sudden and painful
hollowness in her chest at the sight of the trio's affection. Deciding it best not to continue listening
in on their conversation, Leela pushed her way through the crowd, hoping to avoid more of the
ambient conversations. It was still a difficult thing to do though thanks to the upgrades Cerberus
had given her. Even with most of her major implants barely up to the level she had during the war,
the ones that enhanced her hearing were working at peak efficiency much to Leela's chagrin.
Normally she wouldn't mind this but at this moment she wished that she could shut them off, if
only to relieve the pain in her chest.

As she stumbled through the crowd, Leela thought she was in the clear when she caught sight of
the jeep she'd borrowed from the base. Finally feeling some sense of relief in sight, Leela pushed
her way past a group of people only to run nose first into what felt like a mountain.

"Sorry about that," she apologized to the obstruction.

"Don't worry about it," replied the mountain with an all too familiar rumble.

"You have got to be shitting me," said Leela, hoping that she could bypass this conversation
altogether.

"Nope," chortled the krogan, punching his former C.O. in the arm.

"Ow," complained Leela rubbing her shoulder. "Watch it Grunt. My shoulder is still messed up
after our little adventure."
"Seriously," snorted the tank-bred incredulously. "I actually made you unable to take a punch?"

"Yes," hissed Leela rolling her shoulder. "It's not every day I end up in a sumo match with an eight hundred pound krogan."

"Seven-forty-five," corrected Grunt puffing out his chest, "and it's all muscle save for my hump."

"Calm down Grunt," resonated a much calmer voice from behind the young krogan. "You'll have ample time to prove your strength in the coming years."

"Bakara?"

"Greetings, Shepard," laughed the shaman as she adjusted a lumpy blanket in her arms, "it has been a while."

"I'll say," replied Leela, stepping toward her friend and placing a hand on her shoulder. "How have you been?"

It was at that moment the parcel in Bakara's arms began to shift and a large scaly head with bright yellow eyes with what looked like a freshly grown set of teeth peeked out at her and let out a low whine.

"Does that answer your question?" Bakara chuckled handing the blanket her child was wrapped in, to Grunt.

"Which one is this?" inquired Leela as the child clambered up her mother's chest to hold onto her neck.

"This is Niana," explained Bakara patting the child's back.

"Really?" gasped Leela in surprise at the young krogan who was rubbing her eyes. "She's grown a hell of a lot."

"Krogans do that," huffed Grunt casting a wary glance at the child.

"Well she's beginning to look more and more like her mother," said Leela admiringly. "Hi, Nini. Do you remember me?"

Blinking the sleep from her eyes, Niana tilted her head staring at Leela for a few moments before pointing her finger at the human and with a huge smile shouted, "Aun!"

"Don't get your hopes up," snorted Grunt, his voice laden in jealousy. "She'll forget you as soon as we leave."

"Won't," Niana sneered sticking her tongue out at Grunt before jabbing a finger in his direction.

"Grunt," she said with absolute certainty before turning to Leela. "Aun."

"Very good," laughed Bakara as she extended her arms to Leela. "Would you like to go to her?"

"No," answered Niana, rebuking the offer and turning back to her mother.

"She's a little difficult after waking up from a nap," explained Bakara allowing the child to rest comfortably against her. "I think it might be best if we found a place less…populated to let her wake up in."
"I think both of us could use a break," Leela sighed casting a glance at the crowds who were busy in the streets. Rubbing her ear in hopes of drowning out the ambient noise, she turned back to the child and with a smile asked, "What do you say, Nini? Want to have some fun?"

"Fun!" confirmed the child, raising her arms so quickly that she caught the underside of her mother's chin.

"All right," laughed Leela, taking the child from Bakara who was muttering curses under her breath as she rubbed, "I know just the place for you to get into trouble."

Twenty minutes later, Leela's ears were filled with only the sounds of the blowing wind, twittering of birds, and only a few people as she and Bakara walked a small concrete path in a nearby park. While wandering the path, they kept their eyes on a large tree where Niana, who after much whining, was able to convince Grunt to play with her. He begged and pleaded for Bakara to spare him, but the child wouldn't hear of it leaving Grunt to defend himself from clumps of dirt being shoved in his armor instead of bullets.

"She's certainly grown faster than I thought she would," commented Leela as they caught sight of Niana abandoning her attempt to shove at Grunt in favor of some of the rocks surrounding the tree.

"Tuchanka is a fierce planet," explained Bakara watching her daughter with keen interest, "If we didn't develop quickly, we'd have died off long ago."

Remaining silent, the females continued to watch as Niana piled the rocks into what appeared to be small towers. Watching with keen interest, they heard Grunt ask what she was doing only to be told to wait patiently as Niana continued to build her small stone structures. When they were completed, she waved down to Bakara and Leela before turning to Grunt who simply looked at her perplexed, as if asking that was all she was doing. Shaking her head, the child turned back to her creation and began roaring at the top of her lungs as she demolished the recently constructed city.

"Well…..," coughed Bakara as Leela laughed quietly to herself, "I believe it's safe to say the same can't be said for our mental development."

"I think she's developing just fine," said Leela as the hollowness in her chest slowly began to dissipate.

"They are in capable hands," answered Bakara, her voice as heavy as it was when they had discussed the Genophage. "Niana was our first hatched female and by custom it is my job to personally raise her. The same goes for Wrex and mine's first born male."

"Will you ever get to see the other children?" inquired Leela, concerned for her friend's well-being as she was about the state of the children.

"I will," stated Bakara with a happy sigh. "I may not personally raise them, but I will see them and teach them as often as I can."

"Then who will take care….."

"I said they are taken care of," interrupted Bakara, her voice nearly overshadowed by the growl emanating from her throat. "Our other children, and those born to the other females, will be raised by their mothers and older males and females who cannot bear children."

"I'm sorry," replied Leela taken aback by the sudden change in the mood. "I didn't mean to upset you. I'm just concerned."
"Your concern is appreciated," Bakara sighed, her voice growing calmer with each word. "But this is our way and it has worked for us for centuries. Our children will learn the wisdom of their elders and what it means to be Krogan before stepping into their roles as the new leaders of our people."

"You sure the galaxy is ready for you?" commented Leela noticing Niana and Grunt continuing the cycle of building and destroying small stone cities, much to the annoyance of several other park patrons.

"Wrex and the other leaders, myself included, have made a deal with the Council," grunted Bakara as her eyes narrowed on a human woman who practically dragged her children away from Grunt and Niana's play area, despite the fact that Niana was finally beginning to become bored with their game.

"What kind of deal?" asked Leela through gritted teeth, holding back the urge to give the mother a piece of her mind.

"A limitation on pregnancies," Bakara said rather flatly.

"Really?!" exclaimed Leela, shocked that Wrex and the leaders would agree to such a thing.

"Yes," answered Bakara rather curtly, beginning to walk toward her daughter and Grunt who were now playing with the small bag of toys Bakara had given them before separating from them.

"And what do you and the other females think about such a restriction being placed on you?" asked Leela falling into step next to her friend.

"It was our suggestion," stated Bakara without pause.

"Really?" asked Leela in disbelief. "From what Wrex was telling me when I saw him on the Citadel last week, you were practically throwing them at him."

"Wrex is as full of hot air as he is empty of genetic material," Bakara chuckled as she watched Niana settle into Grunt's lap. "In truth I did send several females to him, but only the ones that I knew would bear him strong children. As the leader of the clan that fought hardest against the Genophage, he has the responsibility to begin repopulating our species."

"But what about the rest of the eggs? If you lay as many as you are capable of….

"We have control over the amount of eggs we are capable of laying," answered Bakara exhaustedly. "And even if I lay what I am capable of, the fact of them all surviving to maturity is slim given our limited resources at this time. So we settled on fifty children per female, per decade as a compromise."

"Only fifty," said Leela attempting to sound impressed.

"It is a solid number," replied Bakara, her eyes shining as they settled on her daughter who was now listening intently at the story that Grunt was telling her rather animatedly. "Large enough for us to grow our numbers and ensure our survival, while remaining small enough so as not to strain the natural resources on the planets we will colonize once they have been agreed on."

"The wisdom of the females," remarked Leela with a knowing smirk.

"Did you have any doubt of our ability to control our males?" said Bakara with a slight edge to her voice.
"Not in the slightest," answered Leela with a smile and wave of her hand. "It's a smart decision and I'm certain it will help the Council in ensuring you and your people will survive."

"We are survivors, Shepard," pronounced Bakara before casting a concerned look at her human companion. "However, I sense that your comment about our recovery is not just a compliment towards my people."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Leela huffed with a dubious glance at the shaman.

"Don't hide it from me Shepard," grunted Bakara casting a piercing stare at the human. "You're not as good at hiding your pain as you think."

"What pain?"

Reaching out, Bakara placed a hand on her friend's shoulder despite the initial jolt from Leela's barrier; she let her hand rest and said, "The pain of fading into obscurity."

"Grunt told you about that?" exhaled Leela, her barrier dropping and allowing weight of her friend's hand to rest on her shoulder.

"He did," said Bakara with a short nod. "It shook him rather violently to hear his Battle-Master speak in such a defeated way."

"I wasn't trying to scare him," lamented Leela watching as Grunt began to wrestle with Niana, "I was trying to explain to him that there are times when a warrior will not be needed to fight."

"A good lesson," said Bakara without a hint of derision, "and a lesson someone, especially a krogan, needs to learn."

"Then why bring it up?" snorted Leela, the whistling from her nose attracting the attention of a nearby stray cat. "If it is my job to teach him these lessons, then what business is it of yours in how I guide him through them?"

"I have no doubt in your ability to teach him what he needs to know, Shepard," retorted Bakara, her hand releasing from Leela's shoulder and quickening her pace.

Leela stared at the back of her friend, hoping to see her face, but instead she just heard Bakara ask, "I'm just wondering if it is wise for you to be teaching him these lessons; since you, yourself, are digging the wrong way for yours."
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Leela continues to figure out life with the help of Solana, Kahlee Sanders, and a voice from her past.

Games » Mass Effect » To Be Whole
Author: mizutanitony
Rated: M - English - Romance/General - Reviews: 38 - Published: 05-01-12 - Updated: 07-04-13
id:8075794
Here we go again!

Story: To Be Whole

Game Mass Effect

Pairing: FemShep and Garrus Vakarian

Rating: M

Other than the original characters I have created nothing belongs to me but rather EA and Bioware.

Also…as my story took place BEFORE the Extended Cut, Citadel, and Leviathan so I'm going to be playing around with a lot of stuff. So…yeah…

Chapter 28

The hotel room Leela had been set up in was by no means lavish. While it had a small kitchenette and a large bed, whoever had set her up in the room had for the most part followed her requests. The hotel was out of the way; hidden in a small section of the Xi ward of the arm. As she looked out the window of her room, she couldn't help but smile while several air cars and supply shuttles flew by the large vid screen located outside flashing advertisements, snorting derisively as the final advert flashed before restarting the cycle.

Blasto: The Rebuilding

With special appearance by Rear-Admiral LeelaShepard.

Portions of the proceeds will be donated to the Citadel War Orphans Charity.

"The cycle restarted again didn't it?" laughed someone from the corner of the room.

"How can you tell?" grunted Leela absently sipping at her tea before hissing, "Son of a bitch!"

"Didn't your mother ever teach you to blow on your tea before drinking it," teased the voice.

"Oh shut up, Liara," growled Leela; shutting the blinds before returning to her seat.

"And here I thought my stories had put you in a better mood," taunted the asari as Leela reappearing on the vid-com with a large smile on her face.
"I refuse to believe that Aethyta was found streaking outside the temple of Athem," laughed Leela as she sipped at her tea while going over the latest reports for colonist resettlements.

"She did," giggled Liara as she set aside her data-pad before picking up another, "earned her three days in a cell despite my connections within the government."

"What happened when it came time for her to be released?" probed Leela, her smile growing by the second in anticipation.

"Just what are you insinuating," asked Liara; her voice hesitant and her eyes evasive.

"You don't really expect me to believe that Aethyta just sat in that cell for three days without causing some sort of trouble?" answered Leela, watching Liara's shoulders hoping they would go slack as they normally did when she felt pressured. When she saw her moment to strike, a familiar webbed hand appeared on the Liara's shoulder causing them to rise instead and Leela knew her victory had been squelched.

"Hello, Admiral," said the drell sticking his head in view of the camera. "Enjoying your vacation?"

"What vacation?" snorted Leela, casually making her middle finger known to him while Liara's attention remained focused on her work.

"I'm sorry Shepard, but I will have to pass," laughed Feron, his grip tightening on Liara's shoulder.

"I figured you would," replied Leela with a nod in Liara's direction, commenting on the Broker's industrious ignorance of their conversation. "Still doesn't mean you can't find guidance with one who's danced that particular tango on more than one occasion."

"I'm fine for now," smiled Feron as he turned his gaze to Liara who was still completely oblivious to their conversation. "You have any notes on how to deal with someone who has chronic work issues?"

"Notes on what?" interrupted Liara casting a confused look between her ex and current lover.

"Nothing my dear," Feron chuckled before giving Liara a quick kiss on the top of her head. "I'll go check on your father; make sure she's following the doctor's orders. Talk to you later, Shepard."

"See you, Feron," replied Leela, her eyes grinning at Liara who was failing miserably at her attempt to hide her embarrassment.

"So…," began Leela setting aside her data pad as she drummed her fingers expectantly.

"So what?" huffed Liara as she picked up yet another data-pad.

"Am I really going to have to go rooting around Thessian police stations for information on your dad's arrest?"

"Quite possibly," grunted Liara, a small twitch in the corner of her mouth betraying the severity in her voice. "But I've hidden those files in my own private servers. So you're going to be rooting for quite a long time."

"A few well known sites that you happen to own?" scrutinized Leela as she refilled her mug once more.

"I will neither confirm nor deny your accusation," countered Liara, setting down her most recent
pad and taking a sip from her own mug. After setting it down with a satisfied sigh, she turned her attention back to Leela, "How're you holding up?"

"Shouldn't I be asking you that?" asked Leela, returning her attention to the closed curtains.

"My father is fine," answered Liara half-heartedly. "But the Goddess help her if she decides to skip taking her medication."

"Are you going to flay her alive if she doesn't?" quipped Leela, before taking another calming sip of her berry-flavored tea.

"Please Shepard," scoffed Liara, "I would be sent through a window before I could even execute a barrier."

"Would you be sent through by a biotic push in the shape of her head," teased the admiral.

"I'd expect nothing less from her," chuckled Liara. "But I believe that's a conversation for another day. Tell Solana I said hello."

Before Leela could ask what she meant, the screen went blank followed by knock at her door. Tossing her data pad on the bed, Leela walked over to the door and asked who it was.

"It's Solana."

Rolling her eyes, Leela checked the spyhole to see Solana standing in the hallway dressed in her cloak. "Jesus, I hate it when she does that," she grumbled.

"Does what?" inquired the turian stepping into the room and removing her hood.

"I was just got off the vid-com with Liara," Leela sighed closing the door.

"Ah," chuckled Solana running a talon along a small table just inside the door, "she was spying on you again."

"She spies on all of us," Leela replied with a dismissive wave of her hand. "It's annoying."

"I don't know about that," said Solana, her mandibles fluttering in a familiar manner. "I think it'd be rather enticing to have the knowledge she does at my fingertips."

"How is that young sergeant by the way?" Leela quipped.

"What sergeant?" stammered Solana while barely able to keep herself from carving out a chunk of the table.

"Not so funny now, is it?" snorted Leela when she heard the anxiousness in the turian's voice, "but if you're up to it, I'd be willing to forget about it if you spring for lunch."

"Only if you keep your mouth shut to my brother," bartered Solana, hoping that she hadn't upset her friend.

"Not that difficult," snipped Leela as she removed her baggy tee-shirt, "I've only caught glimpses of him since the night I came back and he hasn't made any attempt to contact me."

"Fair enough," sighed Solana as she averted her gaze from the sight of her friend's scarred torso. "I was only having some fun.
"Yeah well, it's my own fault," grumbled Leela as she began pulling on a pair of jeans, "I broke the rule first." Tightening her belt, Leela pulled her hair back and let out a loud sigh, "So how about I cover dinner if you cover lunch?"

"How is that fair?" replied Solana finally making eye contact with the human. "I'm not the one who broke the rule about not talking about our love lives."

"I'm willing to pay for whatever you want to eat," she offered. There was a small twitch in Solana's mandibles and Leela knew that she was forgiven. "I take it you're on board then?"

"Quite," chuckled Solana as she watched Leela strap on her boots, "but if you think feeding a biotic is a costly venture. Just wait until you've seen me go all out."

"Is that a challenge?" teased Leela as they made their way out the door.

"Is it time for dinner?"

"No."

"Then you're just going to have to wait."

The wait wasn't a boring one. Solana made for good company and was a great deal funnier than her brother, though Leela's preferred Garrus' unintentional blunders to Solana's more calculated stories. Still, Solana helped the time fly and after their lunch they perused the shopping district of the Kira Ward browsing through the shops while their stomachs settled.

Even though she had been a teacher on Earth, Solana returned to Palaven to pick up where she'd left off before the Reapers attacked. That meant retaking her post within the government as a senator and began with the same reconstruction efforts that Leela had spearheaded when she returned. It was on her visit to Palaven, just after Tuchanka, that the two had begun communicating. The turian home world was still under heavy reconstruction, but in true turian fashion they were progressing at a faster pace than most of the species in the galaxy. While the procurement of supplies was slow, the turians showed no signs of fatigue.

That is until Joker had made a supply run to Thessia in record time; that's when the wolves decided to bare their fangs.

When word reached the other species of what Joker had done, they all began crying for supply shuttles to be fitted with the new drive cores. That's where Leela and others like her began to feel the weight of their responsibilities. Every hour since Joker's story had broken, Leela was receiving several dozen emails from merchants, politicians, and even people like Aria for help with resupplying their systems. She did the best she could with laying out the delivery schedules and supply drops, but it never seemed enough for them. Finally, the Council members saw fit to designate people to work with different sectors of the galaxy. Leela, thanks to her service record, had been offered any position of her choosing but instead she allowed herself to be randomly assigned just like everyone else.

However, she was a bit skeptical about being chosen as the main liaison between the Alliance and Heirarchy in addition to the krogan. With her new position she was also given a staff, which meant that she could spend more time with her respective counterparts. Her krogan counterpart went by the name Slig and was from Clan Jorgal. Rather cantankerous, Slig was ready to spend the rest of his years drinking ryncol and betting on varren fights. But Jorgal's alliance with Clan Urdnot, along with Slig's unnatural affinity as a logistics specialist, had him spending his twilight years pouring over security details for supply runs and maintaining accurate delivery logs. Still that didn't keep
Slig from slacking off occasionally forcing Leela to deal with his assistants.

Thankfully, her encounters with Solana turned out to be less strenuous. Whether or not that was due to turian efficiency, Solana's knowledge of her and Garrus' relationship, or a mixture of both, there was never an issue between them. While their relationship began as professionally courteous, over time they both began to drop their guard. Solana was first; reminding Leela of their promise to get a drink during a dinner meeting after her fiasco of a reunion with Garrus. Before they went out, Leela made sure her companion was clear that while she was free to drink like a fish, she would be avoiding it like the plague.

"Drink like a fish?" Solana had asked upon hearing the phrase. "Isn't that a bit redundant? Fish are constantly....oooooohhhhh."

"Hence the term Solana," laughed Leela when she saw the realization in the turian's eyes.

"I like it," hummed the senator with a short laugh.

"It's a bit silly, I'll agree," chimed in Leela reaching for the salt. "Still it serves its purpose."

"Works better than that phrase, what was it, 'drunk in a trunk'?"

Leela began coughing loudly; pounding on her chest, as a bit of bread became lodged in her throat. When it finally cleared she shook her head and with tears in her eyes laughed, "Its 'drunk as a skunk.'"

Raising her glass in celebration, Solana announced, "Well I'm certain we'll both smell as bad as one by the end of the night."

The sad thing about Solana's declaration was that she was rather close in predicting how bad they would smell. In truth, they ended up smelling like slightly molded cheese. This was mostly because Solana turned out to be a worse dancer than Leela was; especially while drunk and it fell to Leela to watch out for her. While she was well aware of the turian philosophy of being able to do what one wishes so long as you held yourself responsible, Leela was certain the sight of an important senator dancing around a bar with her robes falling off would not go over well with her superiors. So, as was expected of her station, Leela became the older woman's babysitter while she drank her way through three bottles of brandy. Still, in spite of Solana's less than civilized actions when inebriated, Leela found the turian to be pleasant company and over the past couple of months their relationship had grown to the point where they could talk about almost anything.

Certain topics, like relationships, were taboo between them. Not out of any kind of malice, but that it was just too painful. So they avoided it and discussed other things, like what school had been like and their service in the military prior to the war. Recently their conversations took a turn towards their extracurricular activities and why Leela found herself standing in a human sporting goods store in the middle of the Kira Wards that she hadn't been in for years. Not since her father had brought her to buy her mitt back when she was a teenager.

"Remind me again why you humans play a sport that involves you hitting a ball with a stick?" Solana asked admiring a wooden baseball bat.

"That depends on who you ask," Leela replied while sifting through a series of small bottles. "For some it's a love of the game, others it's for exercise or bonding with family members. There are a whole slew of reasons."

"What were your reasons?" inquired the senator as she moved from the bat over to the apparel.
"Me?" she asked when she found the bottle she was looking for. "I suppose for me it was a mix of the bonding and exercise."

"Bonding with who?" asked Solana, a small chuckle escaping her throat as she picked up a jock strap.

"My father for one," snorted Leela as she watched the turian's curiosity slowly turn into a mild obsession.

Ignoring the snort, Solana turned, the jock strap still held between her fore and thumb talons, she asked, "Not to break topic, but why exactly do your males need to wear these?"

"There's a few reasons," snickered Leela taking the bit of fabric from the turian and setting it back on the rack. "The most common however is to protect their genitals with a small shell we call a cup."

"A cup," repeated Solana only to have her confusion answered by Leela holding one up for her to see.

"OH!" she exclaimed upon seeing its shape. "Named so because in a way…"

"Yeah," interrupted Leela hoping to avoid this aspect of the conversation.

"Simple yet practical," commented Solana "seems almost turian."

"Turian doesn't even begin to describe it," grunted Leela as she walked up to the counter.

"It seems my inquiry has hit upon a sore subject," remarked Solana as she watched the asari behind the counter realize just who was in the store. "It sounds like you have personal experience in dealing with that particular equipment."

"You could say that," muttered the human handing over a chit.

"Intriguing," hummed Solana as the asari began processing her payment. "I assume that's because like your males, you don't have plating around that area of the body?"

"Something like that," deflected Leela as she confirmed her identity for the clerk.

Solana knew that Leela was hiding something but chose not to press the situation. Ever since she'd begun dealing with the human female, there was something Solana couldn't quite figure out. It was an unusual situation for her to be in since most of her experiences with humans had been with children and they were easy enough to read. The adults were different. There were several indicators that told the senator her friend was hiding something, but as to what, she couldn't guess nor would she press for the answer.

"That was a rather interesting experience," sighed the turian as they made their way through the crowd. "I never knew shops like that existed on the Citadel."

"I didn't even realize that the shop had been rebuilt," huffed Leela as she turned back to look at the sign above the door.

"You've been in there before," asked Solana hearing the longing in Leela's voice.

"Several times," she replied. "My parents were stationed here after I got into a fight on the last ship they served on together."
"What was the fight about?" probed Solana gently.

"A couple of kids didn't like the fact that I was on the ship," answered Leela with a smirk. "So they jumped me and we got into a huge fight. I ended up with a busted nose, a concussion, and a couple of cracked ribs. My parents were forced to take leave while the Alliance made a formal inquiry against my father."

"What did your father do that required a formal inquiry and being relieved of active duty?" While she did not know much about the inner workings of the Alliance, Solana knew that if a person ended up stationed on the Citadel it wasn't a good thing.

"He kicked the ship's psychiatrist so hard, it caused spinal damage," snorted Leela as she remembered hearing the man's screams.

"He kicked a ship's mental health officer?" asked Solana in disbelief.

"Yeah," confirmed Leela with a light nod. "The guy was a major and my dad hadn't made commander yet. Not that it mattered, it was still insubordination, but they chalked it up to fatigue and after some counseling he returned to duty."

"What did your father do that warranted…."

"Hold on a second," interjected Leela as her omni-tool began ringing. "I've been waiting for this call. Hello, Kahlee?"

There was only one person with that name Solana knew Leela would speak to with such familiarity. While she only had a few dealings with the woman, Solana was well aware of Leela's trust in the Doctor and that was good enough for her. Still, it irked the senator that the woman had called in the middle of their leave and Solana was literally biting her tongue when Leela returned to ask if they could make a stop at Silversun Strip.

"For what?"

"Okay, lose the attitude," Leela warned hearing the growl in Solana's throat. "Kahlee said she wants to check my implant and there's something she needs to talk to me about."

"In Silversun Strip?" Solana had only been to that area of the Citadel a handful of times, but she knew that it wasn't a place one would go for an implant diagnostic.

"Kahlee gave me her address and said that we can visit for a while before we head out to dinner," Leela said reassuringly. "Besides they have the casino and other places we can hit to burn off lunch beforehand."

"Very well," replied Solana with a frustrated twitch of her mandibles. "I suppose we can visit the good doctor before I drain your bank account."

Thirty minutes later, Leela was resting on a very large and luxurious recliner while Solana sat on a rather comfortable looking couch watching a vid on a large view screen in front of a roaring fire. Kahlee was making the necessary modifications to Leela's implant. It had been the fourth time in just as many months that Leela had been in for an inspection. Between her cybernetics acting up and her biotics constantly burning out her amp during training, Leela felt more like an old broken down car than a soldier. Her joints were still sore from the training she had with Samara when she made a brief visit to Thessia about obtaining a larger eezo shipment. It had been a short sparring session but intense despite its briefness.
"Are you certain Samara took it easy on you?" asked Kahlee as she pulled out one of her tools.

"As safe as you can get when sparring with a justicar," yawned Leela as she flipped the page of an old dog eared book.

"Yeah well, you no more training like that for at least another month," ordered Kahlee as she made yet another calibration. "If you don't, I'm going to shut your implant off and you can do things the old fashioned way until I we can get you fitted with that new model next month."

"But I don't wanna," whined Leela; a huge grin plastered on her face.

"How old are you again?" chided Kahlee with a flick to the admiral's ear.

"Old enough," retorted the admiral as she felt a familiar warmth spread throughout her body. "I good?"

"For now," Kahlee sighed shutting off her tools, "but I'm serious about the strenuous work outs, Leela. You have to go easy on them since you haven't upgraded your cybernetics."

"Okay, okay," she groaned wanting the doctor to quit chastising her. "I will stick to the PT regiment I had when training to be a vanguard if that's okay with you."

"So long as you stay away from the hand to hand and biotics I will allow it," replied the doctor as she typed something into a datapad. "And I've made it known to pretty much every doctor who is qualified to examine you about the restrictions on your physical activities."

"Does that include masturbation?" asked Leela hoping to catch the doctor off guard.

Without batting an eyelash, Kahlee continued to make notes on her datapad as she said evenly, "Well seeing as how your blood pressure and everything is within normal ranges, I'd say whatever you're doing in your alone time is working. So feel free to go to town." Looking up from her pad, Kahlee gave Leela a casual smile and added, "Just be sure to stretch if you wish to try any awkward techniques the extranet might recommend."

"And that is why I love having you as my biotics specialist," proclaimed Leela as she marked her place in the book. "But seeing as how you're done with my check up, you think we can get onto the other portion of this little rendezvous?"

Leela watched as Kahlee's hand stopped mere centimeters above her pad. There was tenseness in her that Leela hadn't seen since she first met her at Grissom. Other than that, Kahlee had always maintained a relaxed, yet authoritative demeanor. This time though, whatever relaxed or optimistic feelings Kahlee may have had melted away, leaving only a cold emptiness in her eyes.

"Kahlee," asked Leela as she climbed out of her chair. "You okay?"

"Not particularly," sighed the doctor, setting down the pad, "but I think this is a conversation we need to have in private."

"Okay," answered Leela before turning to Solana. "Solana, Kahlee and I are going to talk in private for a moment." The senator just raised one of her hands, in acknowledgement. Turning back to the doctor, Leela extended her hand, "Lead the way."

It was only a short distance from the living room to what Leela figured was the main bedroom given the weapon's bench in the closet and a rather large looking bath. Leela saw pictures of friends and family all over the place; pictures of Kahlee at school and military postings she
expected to see, but the sight of Anderson was not one of them. Many of the people she didn't know as they came from Anderson's childhood, but the ones she did recognize made her smile. Pictures of him and her dad after they'd graduated from training in a tattoo parlor, her parents and him on their wedding day, and several of him with her family when he was able to visit them as she was growing up.

"That one was his favorite," Kahlee's said softly as Leela ran a finger along the frame of a picture of her and Anderson when she was six when he'd returned from the war. In it, she was curled up in his arms, dressed in a pair of blue pajamas with a giant red circle with a black cougar head on the shirt. He was dressed in a pair of jeans and a ratty old tee-shirt. His bare feet were dangling over the foot rest while her mother watched them in the background; her face the very essence of serenity.

"I forgot that these pictures even existed," she choked wiping a tear from her eye. "My mom and I don't really feel much of a need to look at them."

"Understandable," said Kahlee, a gentle smile on her lips. "He always did say that you were more like your mom than you wanted to believe."

"Oh I know I am," laughed Leela wiping another tear away, "It's why we butt heads so often."

"Just goes to show how much you two love each other," smiled Kahlee, patting Leela gently on the cheek. "David did always say he wanted a kid like you."

"Somehow I doubt that," retorted the admiral with a small chuckle. "Did he ever tell you how much trouble I got in?"

"Plenty of times," laughed Kahlee as she took a step back. "It doesn't mean that he didn't love you, though he did regret having to distance himself as much as he did when you joined the military."

"It wasn't that big of a deal," replied Leela, looking at the picture of her and Anderson after she'd graduated boot camp. Both of them were smiling at the camera as her dad photo bombed them, making stupid faces. "I had to do the same with my parents."

"Still doesn't mean he didn't regret having to keep his distance," Kahlee sighed as she picked up a picture of the pair of them on vacation decades prior. "He came to regret a lot of things."

"He thought about you," said Leela sitting down on the bed, followed by Kahlee, "right up to the end you were on his mind."

"I know," she said reaching into her shirt and pulling out the bloodstained dog tags as tears rolled down her cheeks. "Thank you for bringing these to me."

"It's what he wanted," sniffled Leela as she wrapped an arm around the doctor's shoulder. "He deserved better."

"He had you with him," Kahlee choked as Leela's hand squeezed her shoulder. "I think that was good enough for him. But now," she sighed looking around at the large bedroom, "I can't even stand to stay in this apartment anymore."

"Do you have anywhere else to go?" inquired Leela, trying desperately to keep her voice from breaking.

"I have a place on the Presidium," gasped Kahlee as her tears fell onto the picture. "But I just couldn't leave here without doing one last thing."
"What do you mean?"

Standing up, Kahlee pulled something out of her back pocket and placed it in Leela's hands. "He left this for you," was all she said before heading toward the door, leaving Leela alone.

There was no sound in the room, save for the creaking of the bed. In her hand, Leela could feel the small chip. It felt like the weight of the sun in her grasp and it was all she could do to keep from dropping it on the floor. Finally, she wandered over to the dresser under the vid screen and found the small player. Slipping it into the device, she returned to the bed and activated it with her omni-tool. It took several moments for the video to begin, but when it did Leela felt like she'd punched in the stomach.

Up on the giant screen was the image of David Anderson, sitting in the very spot Solana was currently occupying. From the time stamp in the corner, Leela could see that it was recorded only a month after she had been taken into custody. While he still appeared clean cut and the picture of health, she could see the strain had already begun to take hold by the bags under his eyes.

"So," he sighed rubbing his temple, "I don't even really know where to begin. Right now, I'm here in my apartment thinking of what to say while you.....," his voice trailed off and he stood up and began to pace around the room, sipping at his mug before continuing. "By now, if you're watching this, I can only guess that you've seen the time stamp in the corner and have figured out that you're still in custody. And I just want you to know that whatever anyone says about why you did what you did, I know you had no other choice. You can say that I'm being biased, but I've known you your entire life Leela, and I know you wouldn't have done that if you had no other choice."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Uncle David," whispered Leela as the man took his seat once more.

"With that out of the way, I can finally move onto the real reason I'm recording this damn thing." He rubbed his face with his let out another heavy sigh. "I guess you could say I'm doing this because I feel like something big is about to happen. Even if your reports are wrong about the Reapers arrival, I can't shake this feeling something bad is going to happen and I feel that if I don't say these things now I never will get the chance. So here it goes."

Leela watched, her hands shaking, as he resituated himself and somehow locked his eyes with hers.

"Right now, I bet you're wondering why I bothered even making this vid and why I asked Kahlee to contact you. Well to be perfectly honest, it's because I don't know if I'm going to live long enough to see you fulfill whatever the universe has planned for you. But I know that you will meet it head on and give the bastards one hell of a fight." The both chuckled at his comment before he continued, "Honestly though, the other reason I'm doing this video is because I want to apologize for what's gone on over the past several years." Reaching down, he took another sip of his drink before continuing. "I can still remember the day your dad got news about your mother giving birth to you. We were coming back from a training mission and we were still about three days away from Earth. All of us were dead tired and wanted nothing more than to relax and watch a couple of vids when out of nowhere there was this scream coming from the crew quarters."

Leela watched as his eyes drifted in remembrance.

"When we heard it, I and a few other members of our squad, bolted toward our bunks, not giving a damn who we knocked over. It was only a short run, but we were all winded when we arrived; worried that something had happened only to find out that the scream came from your dad. He was jumping up and down, stark naked while your mother laughed," giving an exaggerated shiver.
before continuing. "Now, you know there's very little privacy onboard a star ship, so what I saw wasn't extraordinary. But the sight of a naked seven foot tall man bouncing up and down screaming at the top of his lungs was something none of us were prepared to see. Still, none of us could really blame him for acting the way he did. Ever since your mother found out she was pregnant with you, they had been worried given that humanity knew practically nothing about biotics. Your parents were worried as to whether or not you would live. But you did and from the video I saw, you came into this world screaming your little head off" giving a short laugh as he took another drink. "I can still remember the look on your dad's face the first time he held you. We hadn't even been on the ground an hour before he raced us off towards your aunt's house. You were so small in his hands and he was shaking so badly that I thought you were going to wake up screaming. His eyes were red; tears rushing down his face as he looked watched you. I'd never seen your dad so happy or your mother for that matter. I can still remember her standing next to him, her hair longer since she'd left the service. I even remember the bags she had under her eyes because you barely slept through a night for that first year. But you could tell she was just as happy as he was. And then…"

He stopped for a moment, his eyes slowly shutting as he rested a knuckle against his lips. His chest rising and falling gently as a glistening line traced itself down his face as Leela began to feel one make its way down hers. "And then he handed you to me. At first I tried to decline. I was so afraid I'd drop you, but your mother sat me down on the couch and handed you to me." His eyes opened and he turned his gaze back toward her. "You woke up when she put you in my arms, your little red eyes barely able to look at me, but you did and that's when your dad asked me if I'd be your godfather."

"All I could do was nod," he said after a moment of silence. "I'd been asked before and had accepted, but what you have to understand is that the things your parents and I went through together, were more intense and personal than anything I'd experienced with anyone else in my life. Of course I wouldn't deny them their request. I'd trusted them with my life and me with theirs. We were bound not only by our oath to the Alliance but also by the blood we had shed together and the friendship we forged. Your parents were and are the same as blood to me as are you."

Leela knew that the severity in his voice to be a sign of sincerity and it made her smile when she heard what came next.

"You're my goddaughter, even if you weren't born that way you will always be my goddaughter. I know at first I wasn't the most receptive of that fact in the beginning. I was like your parents, lost; trying to figure out how best to handle your transition. I stumbled a few times, called you by your birth name and used the improper pronouns constantly for the first couple of years. It was a difficult transition for all of us and I'm sorry for whatever pain I caused. I love you as my own and I'm proud to be your Uncle David." By the time he said this, rivers were pouring from both their eyes. "You were a blessing in not only your parents' lives but mine as well. I hope you can forgive me for not being there as much as I should have been. The military isn't exactly forgiving with things like nepotism and I know how much your being an N7 meant to you. It's a poor excuse for staying out of contact, but I hope this at least lets you know that you were never far from my thoughts and that I love you and that I am proud of you."

"I love you too, Uncle David," were the only words that came before silence fell once more.

As she sat alone in the silence, Leela was about to turn off the video when David began to move once more. She watched as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a navy blue handkerchief, and wiped his eyes before continuing.

"Now that that's out of the way," he laughed, which earned one from Leela in return, "I bet you
want to know why I had Kahlee, or whomever you got this from, had you come to my apartment. Well, that's simple, in that if you're watching this I'm no longer in the land of the living and save for whatever items Kahlee wants, this apartment is yours."

"Uncle David…"

"Don't argue with me young lady," he chastised wagging a finger as if he heard her. "I know all about you and Garrus and the success rate of a relationship like that. I want you to know that you both have my blessing and that I wish you the best of luck." A warm smile spread across his lips as he relaxed into the chair, his hands resting on his stomach as his eyes once again found hers. "I love you, Leela."

"I love you too, Uncle David."

With those final words the screen went black, leaving her alone in the room with only her thoughts to keep her company. It took a while, but eventually she found her way downstairs. When she looked at the clock, she was surprised to find that she had been up in the room for nearly three hours. The vid screen was still on, this time it was a news report, but other than that the room was empty. Her entire head was hurting, her eyes raw from her tears despite her attempts to wash up. Heading into the kitchen, she found no sign of Solana. Letting out a loud sigh, Leela opened the fridge and pulled out a soda and popped the cap just as the door opened. Stepping out into the hallway, she turned to see Solana walking in with two large bags in both hands, the scent of food wafting toward her.

"Hey," said Leela as she took a swig of soda. "Need some help with those?"

Shaking her head, Solana walked past her and set the bags on the counter with a small grunt. "You feeling all right?" she asked as she began unloading cartons of takeout.

"I'm fine," Leela sighed poking through the boxes, "just had something heavy to deal with. Did Khalee leave?"

"She left about an hour after she left you alone up there. Said she'd be back for some of her things tomorrow."

"Oh," whispered Leela as she opened one of the boxes to find it containing a dextro meat based side dish. "Sorry about our plans."

"It's not that big of a deal," Solana said lightly as she took a bit of meat from the box Leela had opened. "I told the restaurant to charge your account, a fully stocked kitchen, and an insanely large vid screen to order pay per view movies on. I figured it's as good as any night out given the condition you're in."

"Thanks," replied Leela with a tired smile.

Pulling out a bottle of purified water from the fridge, Solana held it up and clinked it to Leela's soda can and said with a gentle purr, "That's what family's for."
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Leela moves into her new apartment with the help of her friends and mother.

We also get a bit of James torture and learn more about just how weird the Shepard family got on occasion.

Okay, 29…let's have a bit of fun

Game: Mass Effect

Rating: M for language, occasional violence, and soon to be sexual content

Pairing: FemShep and Garrus

Mass Effect and all its characters are owned by Bioware and EA. Save for the original characters, them's mine.

Also in this chapter as Citadel or Leviathan weren't released at the time I began writing this story...I'm taking liberties with some aspects.

As for 30...that's almost done and trust me...they're in the same room.

Chapter 29

Silversun Strip was not Leela's favorite place on the Citadel.

It was bright, loud, and every time she left her apartment building she nearly tripped over some tourist. While Leela wasn't one to tell anyone how to enjoy themselves, she was growing tired of having to force her way through the cluster of people gathered near the entrance of her building every five minutes. Why anyone would put a transport directly in front of an apartment building was beyond her, but it was only a minor grievance.

All in all, Leela was slowly growing accustomed to her new home. It wasn't the Normandy, but the truth was that she felt at peace since she'd returned. Granted it was difficult having to leave Earth after fighting so hard to protect it; but she knew she couldn't stay at her mother's forever. There were times when she woke up in a cold sweat from the nightmares hoping to feel her mother holding her hand; instead she found the comfort of Boo, her hamster, curled up next to her. While the company of the hamster couldn't compare to having someone talk her through her nightmares, the feeling of the little guy crawling into her lap helped more than she could ever express.

But at her current juncture, Leela's mind wasn't filled with how best she could thank a hamster for helping her through sleepless nights. No, Leela's mind was focused solely on the task of making her way up to her apartment with the latest box laden trolley she'd brought over from the transport. It was the last bit of her personal effects that she was moving in and she was thankful to nearly be finished. That is until the lift jerked to a stop, causing one of the boxes to fall.

"Why did you extend your hand," asked the Asian woman dressed in a science officer uniform who
occupied the lift with her.

"I was trying to use my biotics," Leela sighed as she picked up the box, "but as you can see they don't work."

"Oh," replied the woman with a slight nod, "That makes sense given that in our last conversation you told me Kahlee deactivated them." A smile spread across the woman's lips as she watched Leela place the box back onto the pile. "If you require some assistance, I would be more than happy to assist with stabilizing the boxes on the next trip now that we know of the malfunction in the lift's inertial dampeners."

"Thanks EDI," smiled Leela as she and EDI exited the lift.

"OF course, Shepard," replied EDI with a smug satisfaction.

Though they were on friendly terms now, Leela had avoided Joker and EDI for the longest time since she'd been brought back. Even when she knew that they were both on the ship she had taken back to Earth, she had made the conscious decision to remain in her quarters so as to not look them in the eye. Everywhere she went, she knew what people were thinking; what she had done to destroy the Reapers, their troops, and almost every other synthetic life form in the galaxy. Even more disconcerting was the fact that if the Geth and EDI were able to come online, what did that mean for the Reapers and their troops?

Everyone wanted answers and the truth was that Leela really had none to give. Partially because she didn't know the long term effects over her decision. The second being that she didn't want to answer them because if she did, it would mean having to tell Joker and EDI the truth about how she had chosen organic life over synthetic. She knew they would tell her that they understood and supported her decision, but it was the look in their eyes she feared not their words. Even in a galaxy as large as the Milky Way, fate had a funny way of making you deal with situations you'd rather avoid.

One night, while she was relaxing in a bar on Palaven, Leela was approached by the same female who was escorting her through the hallway towards her new apartment. At first she didn't know what to think. She had never seen the woman before but that wasn't the only thing that troubled her. There was a familiar stiffness to her walk that Leela couldn't quite place. Her black hair was tied into a simple braid that went to her shoulders and while familiar, her face was just as confusing as her walk. That's when she saw it, that familiar glow she'd stared into so many times the year prior. Her mind screamed for her to run, but instead she watched as EDI sat across from her and smiled.

"Hello, Shepard," she said as her fingers laced together. "It is good to see you are recovering from your injuries."

After that, they talked for several hours. Leela catching up on what had happened to EDI and the others after the explosion and EDI asking Leela what it had been like in captivity. It was nothing short of astonishing to Leela how much had happened to them before they found her; EDI's reactivation, Joker and Tali's work with other engineers to help build the new ships and James and Tali pairing off. Then there was EDI's decision to use a body like the one she was currently occupying.

"Like Dr. Eva, I have decided that the occasional use of an infiltration unit will make my visits to outlying colonies a bit easier for those who are not yet used to being around synthetics," EDI explained.

Like most of EDI's calculations, Leela had a hard time disagreeing with her. Still, the biggest shock
Leela listened to was EDI's story of how Garrus had become the guardian of the two children she had met. When she had seen him, all Leela knew about was his accident and that it made it difficult to perform his duties. She knew about his need to go in for surgery every few weeks and that he occasionally suffered from tremors and the like, but never once did anyone ever mention Reese or the kids.

"I met Reese a few times," said EDI as Leela stared at the small candle on the table. "He was, as you humans say, a good man. Though my experience with child rearing is limited, it is my belief that based on popular conceptions; Reese was the ideal father despite the circumstances dealt him."

"Did Garrus ever tell you why he took them in?" Leela asked, her eyes not leaving the flame. "Anything about previous conversations or plans?"

EDI shook her head. "No," she had said, "Reese was his friend and he grew to care for him and the children. He wanted to honor his friend's last wish."

That revelation had made Leela smile as it meant that Garrus didn't do it because of her, but because he wanted to. After that, it was Leela's turn to confess and she didn't scrimp on the details. She told EDI everything about what had happened and what she had done; the decision that had been placed before her and for the first time EDI didn't have an immediate response. Instead, her friend sat there in silent contemplation; a blank stare in her eyes as they remained locked with her former commander's. Leela was ready for anything since she knew that EDI had grown much in terms of expressing herself. Finally, EDI's eyes softened. She placed a hand on Leela's and simply nodded. No words of forgiveness, anger, or the turning over a table; just a reassuring look and a simple touch saying that EDI understood.

Joker on the other hand was another story. Leela had gotten the response she expected. Joker, in turn, received a broken wrist and dislocated shoulder after throwing a plate at the wall. EDI, once again, was the voice of reason between them as Leela and Joker argued over the reasons why she had made her decision. Joker simply chalked it up to her being a hypocrite. She partially agreed with him but in the heat of the moment told him something she had neglected to tell EDI.

"In case you're wondering," she shouted as Joker shuffled back and forth in the living room, hissing loudly as he held his arm close to his stomach, "no matter what decision I made Joker, I was supposed to die."

"What?!" gasped the pilot, his attention turning from his injuries to his former commanding officer, "what do you mean you were supposed to die?"

"It's exactly the way I said it, Moreau," snorted Leela as she stomped toward him. "That decision I made was supposed to wipe out all synthetic life."

"But you're not..."

"You've seen the amount of work Cerberus did to me Joker," explained Leela holding up her hand. "You know how much of me is synthetic. The implants in my skeleton, my muscles, and what was used to repair the neural pathways in my brain on top of vital organs. Even if the fire hadn't killed me, the resulting explosion would have and it should have. So don't you ever think that what I did was because I didn't care about EDI and the geth. And until you've had to play God, I suggest you keep your mouth shut."

It was a week before Joker called her. His arm in a sling and his hat was off, which was a surprise. But Leela knew why he did it, he wanted her to see his eyes when he apologized but she beat him to it.
"I am sorry for what I said Joker," she said, "You were right in that my decision was a bit
hypocritical, but I stand by my decision. You may not agree with it, but I hope that you can
understand why I did it."

"I know that Shepard," he sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "Honestly I don't know if I could
have done what you did. I mean, all of us kept pushing you to fight and telling you how you were
the only one who could end the war and you did." He shook his head. "It's just that we were all
prepared to lose everything and we almost did. I lost my dad and my sister. You lost an entire year
of your life being operated on and held prisoner…again!" They both shared an uneasy laugh, the
tension dissipating with each chuckle.

"That may be," she said once they had calmed down. "But I'm back and you're stuck with me for a
several more decades."

"Just promise me you won't blow up the galaxy again," he laughed as he slid his cap back on.

"No promises," she said softly.

"What?" asked Joker as he pulled a couple of books from a box and slid them into one of the
bookshelves Leela had installed in the office.

"Huh?" she blinked, suddenly aware that she had replied aloud to their conversation from a few
hours ago.

"You said something about no promises," replied Joker as he tossed the now empty box into the
small pile that had formed to the right of the office door.

"It's nothing," she said quickly. "Do you think you can try and keep the mess to a minimum?" she
asked instead, hoping to avoid the potentially uncomfortable conversation.

"Highly unlikely Shepard," chimed in Tali from the desk in the corner. "Joker treats wherever he's
sitting as his own personal space."

"Oh please," scoffed the pilot as he returned to shelving books. "It's not like you're the epitome of
keeping a clean workspace."

"What's that supposed to mean?" gasped Tali in mock offense as she shut off the monitor, "I'll have
you know I kept the Normandy's drive core cleaner than…"

"Yeah and I've seen how disgusting your workbench can get," laughed Joker before dodging a
wadded up chunk of paper.

"You try keeping a workspace clean with Ken around," huffed the quarian as she opened the casing
around Leela's console.

"Oh sure blame it on the ginger," chuckled Leela as she finished unloading the trolley. "As if we
didn't have enough reasons for people to not want to be around us."

"I don't get what a root has to do with people not wanting to be around you," Tali gave a loud snort
as she looked to Leela for an explanation.

"I'll explain it to you later Tali," grunted Joker as he kicked aside yet another empty box. "How
many more of these things do you have?!"

"Those are the last six boxes," shouted Leela as she retreated into the living room before Joker's
barrage of swearing filled the room.

It had only been a couple of weeks since she and Solana had met up with Kahlee. At first, Leela had tried to tell Kahlee that there was no reason for her to leave but the doctor responded by simply handing her a datapad with all the information saying that the apartment was officially Leela's. Once word got out, those who were available, signed up to help her move out of her mother's place.

When she got the news that Tali and James would be arriving to help, Leela was ecstatic as she had barely spoken with Tali since the night she came back. While she kept in regular contact with most of the other members of her squad, Tali's work rebuilding Rannoch along with her research into alternative transport methods kept her busy. But once Leela had asked for some help, Tali handed off what work she could to her associates and caught the earliest Conduit transport she could.

Tali's arrival brought a much needed sense of joy into Leela's life. While she loved all of her friends, there was something about Tali's energy that always seemed to not only brighten her mood but the apartment's as well. For the past couple of weeks the trio, along with Hannah, Joker, and EDI, had slowly been moving things from her mother's quarters to hers. It was easy to move those things since most of them were objects Leela had bought after coming back. But it wasn't until Leela saw how many of her possessions her crew had salvaged from the Normandy's wreck, on top of the clutter that her mother had managed to save over the years.

It was a surreal experience to see that so many of her family's belongings had survived. Clothes from when she was a kid, old uniforms of her parents', several boxes of books, medals, and photo albums. Leela had to suppress the urge to rifle through all of it; the chance to remember a time when the fate of the galaxy hadn't rested on her shoulders. So along with Tali, James, and her mother, they loaded up a truck with the things she figured she would find a use for in addition to a few sentimental items and began moving them to her new apartment. EDI and Joker hadn't joined in immediately due to work. But once they did, the moving went a lot smoother with a pilot on call since Steve was taking courses on how to handle the new drive cores. Every time they stopped for the day, Joker would hop onto his omni-tool to give Steve tips on handling the fighters and ships he was training with.

Leela was glad to see that her friends had gotten on with their lives. Each had found their own calling in the aftermath of the war or had returned to the ones before. Samara and Zaeed were still traveling the galaxy doing what they did best. EDI and Joker had their life together, as well as James and Tali.

As she stood there in her apartment, listening to her friends as they continued to unpack her things. She wasn't worried about their rifling. She had been honest with them about a lot of things and trusted them with their work. They were her family and she had been a fool to ever think that they'd left her alone. But even the mighty Shepard proved to be as fallible as any human that day when she exited the kitchen with a box that was supposed to have been taken up to her room. Heading toward the stairs she was surprised to see Samantha Traynor doubled over in laughter. Walking in, Leela was prepared to ask what was so funny when she saw her mother standing in front of the vid screen with an ear length purple wig on her head, a small black mask on her face, and her hands spinning a pair of plastic katanas.

"What the hell are you doing?!!" Leela gaped. Immediately Hannah stopped her display, the innocent look on her face not fooling anyone.

"I'm just showing Sam here some of your toys from when you were a kid," smiled the older Shepard as she cast a hopeful look at her daughter's assistant. "Right, Sam?"

"Not in the slightest," giggled Sam as she pulled a cape out of the box in front of her. "Your mother
and I were trying to figure out what was in these boxes and she couldn't help but play dress up."
The satisfied smirk on the former specialists face earned her the elder Shepard's patented death glare. "Though I must admit I didn't know your family was into such activities."

"If my dad were alive you could blame him," smirked Leela as she watched her mother begin to struggle with the strap of the mask. "He and his siblings used to do this stuff when they were kids."

"Fascinating," said Sam as she pulled out a small crown from the box, "and he got you into it as well."

"He got her into everything he was interested in," answered Hannah with a frustrated growl as she began fiddling with the knot she'd tied. "I forgot how much I hated wearing these damn things."

"I think it suits you," came a familiar laugh from behind Leela. "Kind of a psychotic gothic look."

"Fuck you, James," snapped Hannah giving up on the knot. "I wish I could ask your father for his trick at untying these damn things."

"Why don't you ask your daughter," suggested James as he slipped behind the bar and began pouring himself a drink. "Judging from that box of rope I found I your daughter's room I'm sure she could give you a few tips."

"Don't flatter yourself Vega," spat Leela as she sat down on the couch next to Sam and began rummaging through another box filled with old costume supplies.

"What's the matter? Afraid to let mommy know about your other interests?"

"Seriously James?" scoffed Hannah as she joined her daughter's spelunking endeavor. "Who do you think gave her the rope?"

Whisky erupted from James' mouth like a burst faucet and he sputtered, "What?!" All three women burst into laughter at James' reaction. "You better be joking."

"I don't think she is," said Sam as she pulled out a red object with a golden tassel. "Is this what I think it is?"

"What do you think it is?" asked Leela as she pulled out an oversized crown and handed it to her mother while Sam let out a small squeal of excitement before slipping on the fez. "Remember when Uncle David won that bet and Dad had to wear this?"

"Oh yes," grinned Hannah devilishly as she slid it on her head. "I'm surprised your aunt had enough fabric to make that for him."

"Make what?" asked James, perturbed that he was now being ignored.

"Open that box right over there," answered Leela, her nose whistling in anticipation.

Apprehensive at what was awaiting him in the box, James walked over and stared at it for a moment before stepping back and glared at Leela. "Yeah, fuck you."

"Jesus Christ," sighed Hannah pushing herself off the couch, the crown sliding down around her forehead. Reaching into her back pocket, Hannah pulled out her utility knife and sliced through the tape. "There you go, ya pussy."

"Piss off," growled James as he took a step toward the box.
"What was that Lieutenant?" barked Hannah as she turned on her heel.

"Piss off, Ma'am," shot back James, placing his hands on the box.

"Good boy," said Hannah with a smirk. "Now look in the box."

"I honestly don't know what the big deal is." James shook his head that there was something in the box that required so much build up. When he opened it however, his knees buckled and he fell to the floor, eyes wide with disbelief as the word, "no," fell from his lips.

"No, what?" asked Leela, her nose whistling as she tried to hide her laughter.

James head began to shake as he replied, "There's no way in hell, that Mercutio Shepard would ever allow himself to wear that thing."

"Believe it, James," chuckled Hannah as she pulled out a large oversized pink princess dress from the box and handed it to the lieutenant. "My husband wore this one year."

"Why?" he whispered; shooting looks between Leela and her mother. "Why would you do that to him?"

"He lost a bet to Uncle David," laughed Leela as she projected the image of her father on the oversized vid screen.

Turning his head, James' jaw dropped and his eyes grew to the size of saucers at the sight of Leela at the age of ten dressed up in a pair of overalls, boots, a green hat and boots while Hannah was dressed in the same outfit, but wearing red instead of green. Bushy black mustaches adorned their faces along with broad smiles while the giant between them had a pleading look hidden behind the dyed golden locks.

"What in the world is that?" a voice said from the living room entrance.

"It appears to be the Shepard family dressed as characters from a popular late twentieth century video game. Shepard's father is dressed as the princess that the two characters she and her mother are dressed as are supposed to save," answered another voice.

"That is one ugly princess," said a male voice before stepping behind the bar. "Is James going to be okay?"

"He'll be fine," sighed Leela adjusting her cap while tossing her feet up on the table. "It ain't the first Shepard with a male chromosome pair he's seen dressed in women's clothing."

"But…he…you…," stammered James. While unable to form a cogent sentence, the fact he was speaking meant they didn't need to call a doctor.

"Come on girl," teased Leela clapping her hands on her thighs. "Where's Timmy this time?"

"Who's Timmy?" asked everyone but EDI and the Shepards.

"The Timmy she is referring to is from an old human program in which……"

"Uhhh…EDI, sweetheart," interrupted Joker as he removed himself from the bar and walked over to her, "I don't think an explanation is needed right now."

"I am only trying to be helpful," explained EDI doing her best to sound hurt.
"And it's very much appreciated," replied Joker giving her a kiss on the cheek, "but sometimes it's best to just let the moment pass."

"Very well," sighed EDI as best as she could, "I will make the attempt to not answer every question you have about one of Shepard's or Hannah's esoteric comments. But if I may inquire, why are you currently viewing a picture of, if you can pardon my being technical, you, your mother and father engaged in the act of cross-dressing?"

"Because James was being a Nosy Nelly," stated Sam as she adjusted her fez, "and also it's just fun to tease him and shatter all his preconceived notions of what extracurricular activities his idols engaged in."

"So you are humoring yourselves by engaging in schadenfreude?" asked EDI with genuine interest.

"Is there any other way?" proposed Leela with an air of victorious satisfaction.

"When it comes to James, there isn't," agreed Tali before walking over to her boyfriend and helping him off the floor. "Come on James, it's not that bad. When he was to his feet, Tali placed a calming hand on his cheek and asked, "You going to be okay?"

"Yeah," he replied, still shaken from his ordeal. "Just wasn't expecting that."

"Trust me James," chuckled Hannah as she set the crown on the table next to her, "if you think this is bad, you don't want to see what's in my private books."

"No you do not," agreed Leela; shuddering at the memory of what she'd seen in one of her parents' private books.

"After what I just saw, I think I'm set for a while," sighed James before heading back to the bar. "I can't believe that Anderson was able to talk him into wearing that."

"It was a constant thing between them, always figuring out who could come up with the most ridiculous wager for one of their stupid bets," A soft smile spread across Hannah's lips, "This one though one though was one of the least outrageous. But it was fun to listen to Leela explain to everyone just what we were."

"It was even better when I got dad to let us act like we were rescuing him," snorted Leela as she shut off the picture.

"Is there video?" asked Sam, her body rocking the couch with her bouncing. "Please tell me there's video!"

"What if we were to make our own videos?" Everyone turned to look at EDI who simply looked back at them and shrugged. "Is that not a standard ritual for organic humanoid life forms? To record moments like the ones we were laughing at James for being bothered by?"

Joker leaned in and kissed EDI on the cheek and pulled her close, "Have I ever told you how much I love you?"

"Constantly," replied EDI, sounding embarrassed as her hand slipped around Joker's waist.

Everyone turned to Leela who was failing at hiding beneath her cap.

"Oh Leela," began Hannah in a sing song manner, "we're waiting."
"Waiting for what?" she growled back at her mother.

"Oh don't act like you didn't hear me," sighed Hannah pulling her daughter close. "You know that we're simply asking your permission to violate your home by dressing up in silly costumes and getting drunk for a single evening."

Lifting her hat, Leela cast her eyes on her mother whose face was lit up like a Christmas tree and turned to her friends. Sam's face had contorted into an odd sort of pleading but excited smile. Joker simply winked and smiled while EDI watched expectantly. James, who now seemed completely recovered, had a vengeful glint in his eye while Tali seemed just as excited as Sam about the prospect of a costume party.

So with a defeated sigh, Leela sunk into the couch just a bit further in hopes that it would swallow her whole as she said, "Fine. You win."
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Finally a conversation is had between our two main characters for the first time since Leela's been found. Intimate and many things are discussed.

Title: To Be Whole

Author: Mizutanitony

Game: Mass Effect

Rating: M

Pairing: Garrus/FemShep

Disclaimer: Owned by Bioware and EA not me!

Chapter 30

"All right everyone that's enough for today. Give your rifles to the armory chief and we will finalize your certification tomorrow."

Garrus watched as each of the soldiers handed over their sniper rifles before leaving the shooting range. When they were gone, he helped with the maintenance of the weapons and before securing them in the locker. He was all set to follow the chief when he decided to remove his old Mantis from the weapons' locker and grabbed a large stack of thermal clips. Approaching the firing range, Garrus loaded a clip into the rifle and started the targeting sequence he'd just put the soldiers through. It was a fairly standard sequence that he had engaged; fifty targets set to appear at varying distances and times. Sometimes they would appear at four hundred yards one at a time and other times two or three at a time, popping up while he was still reloading.

Garrus relished in the feeling; the pressure of having so little time to pick a priority target. Should he fire at the one furthest away or take out the one closest to him. As he fired off the rounds, he began to see them, the enemies approaching. The one in the back was equipped with a missile launcher; she was the first to go. The one in the front; a salarian with a Predator was taken down shortly after he took out turian and a vorcha, each armed with Revenants. Krogans, husks, marauders, batarians, one after the other approached him in small waves until finally during the last moments of the simulation he felt it. The dull throbbing in his head, his vision blurring as a scion approached. Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes momentarily before opening them and letting his final round fly.

"Simulation complete," reported the voice over the loud speaker. "Score for this session is ninety-eight percent."

"Shit," growled Garrus as he picked up the spent cartridges.

Tossing them into the maintenance bin, Garrus pulled his gun case from the weapons' locker and set his rifle into it. Slamming the lid down, he latched it shut before pulling out his pill bottle. He
could hear the capsules rattle inside the container as the tremor started on cue following the now familiar ache in his head. Cursing he waited until the shaking calmed down enough to pour out one of the pills. Downing it with a quick gulp of water, Garrus grabbed his gun case and exited the firing range. He took a deep, relaxing breath of the warm Palaven evening. It felt good for him to finally be home after so long. While Earth definitely had its perks with the Citadel nearby and that he had made a home there with the kids, finally getting back to where he had been born seemed to rejuvenate him somehow.

He climbed into the air-car with the driver that had been supplied for him by the Hierarchy. As they flew over the buildings, he couldn't help but feel elated at the progress that had been made despite his lack of direct involvement. Since contact between the planets had been made, Garrus had spent most of his time training military recruits for lack of high ranking officers. The job was a bit easier than he thought it would be. Most of the recruits were young and eager to get into action, but easier to control due to his reputation. All of them were attentive and cooperative, though Garrus wished that they would at least argue with him once or twice. It was the most frustrating thing about this entire assignment; the fact that they were too cooperative. It was unsettling and Garrus knew that with the time he had been given, he'd be unable to break them of this habit. He was merely their arms instructor and soon they'd be sent out for survival training which is why he was worried. While he knew that obedience had its place, unless they could learn to adapt to one another without a commanding officer, their chances in the career were slim.

"Well after tomorrow they're no longer my responsibility," he told himself as the driver turned toward the hotel.

"Rough day, sir?" inquired the driver, glancing at Garrus through the review mirror.

"More like a rough future," sighed Garrus as the driver came to a stop in front of the hotel.

"I'd say the future is actually looking a bit brighter," said the driver rather happily.

"I'm glad it's looking that way for you," muttered Garrus as he opened the car door followed by the driver.

"Truthfully," began the driver as she opened the trunk for Garrus, "if it wasn't for you and your friends, I don't think I'd be thinking this way at all." Garrus cast the driver an incredulous look and then looked down to see her hand extended. "Thanks."

Taking the drivers hand, Garrus shook it briefly before heading into the hotel and up to his rooms. If Garrus had been alone, he'd have preferred to stay in the barracks, but he wasn't. Instead, the people who had hired him put him up in a hotel for the few weeks he'd been stationed on Palaven. It wasn't the nicest hotel on the planet, many of those were still under repair, but Garrus didn't care. It was comfortable enough as he was given his own room with a king sized bed along with an adjoining room for his guests.

Entering the code he had been given for the electronic lock, Garrus was a bit concerned to find that both his room and the adjoining one were both deathly silent. Setting his gun on the upper rack of his closet, Garrus quietly made his way toward the door joining the two rooms. Checking his corners, the bathroom, and under the bed as he went, he couldn't help but feel like something was wrong. Things weren't normally this quiet when he came back. Usually he could hear laughter or the sounds of people talking, but now he had an unsettling feeling in his stomach.

Approaching the door to the adjoining room, Garrus unlocked it and wasn't surprised to find the room in a bit of a mess. The beds were clean and wherever there wasn't clothing or a few small knick knacks, the floor was spotless. But nowhere in the room were the people he'd brought with
him. The feeling in his stomach growing heavier, Garrus finally decided to activate his omni-tool. As he brought up the number, he heard the door open and the sound of the kids arguing.

"I wasn't scared!"

"Yes you were! You looked like you were about to pee your pants!"

"Will you two just give a rest already?" grumbled Jack as she set a couple of bags next to the door.

"Rough day?" asked Garrus after shutting of his omni-tool.

"You wouldn't fu….," Jack looked down at the kids who were looking up at her curiously. "It wasn't that bad," she said after a moment's silence.

"You sure?" asked Garrus with a knowing nod at the bags. "Seems that they may have talked you into a few things."

"Nothing I couldn't handle," snapped Jack as she pointed to the bathroom. "Oy, Little Man. Go get out of that thing so we can go get some dinner."

"Why?" inquired the young boy as he looked down at the protective garment hidden beneath his clothes, "I like wearing it."

"Because we're indoors you little smart aleck and you don't need it."

"Well then why aren't you getting out of yours, Aunt Jack?" retorted Kevin with a smug smirk. "You don't need to be wearing yours anymore, so why are you still wearing it?"

"Just go and get ready for dinner, Kevin," sighed Garrus with an annoyed twitch of his mandibles.

"Yes, Sir, Captain Tight-Pants," replied the human boy with a sharp salute followed by a stomping goose step toward the bathroom.

"Captain Tight-Pants", snorted Jack once the bathroom door shut. "The hell you letting these kids watch Garrus?"

"You're not supposed to say that," remarked Ismene with a chastising glare at her aunt. "That's a bad word and you can get in trouble for saying it."

Jerking her head at the girl, Jack gave Garrus her, Is she fucking serious, look.

"Yeah she's serious," said Garrus with a small snort. "So please watch the language in front of the kids or I'll have Ismene put you in timeout. Right, Ismene."

"Uh-huh," answered Ismene somewhat distractedly.

"And as for your comment," said Garrus after shoving Jack gently, "Hannah sent me a hard drive with a bunch of old Earth shows and movies on them."

"What the fu….," her voice trailed off as she caught Garrus' eye and received a cautionary grunt come from Ismene. Chewing on her lip for a moment the biotic then went on to ask, "What kind of junk are you letting them watch? Are they those old Earth vids Shepard used to make us watch during down time? Because if you don't remember they were pretty bad."

"They're better than those Blasto movies you and Uncle Joker watch all the time," huffed Ismene looking up from her drawing pad. "At least we get to watch time travelers and stuff."
"Some of them are pretty good," agreed Garrus with a defeated sigh.

"I'll believe it when I see it," retorted Jack just as the door to the bathroom opened.

"Then stay the night," said Kevin as he walked over to the dresser in nothing but his underwear; his protective suit slung over his shoulder. "We can watch some of them after dinner."

"We'll see, Little Man," Jack snickered at the boy's complete lack of shame. "But I gotta go get dressed so I'll see you in twenty?"

"Twenty," confirmed Garrus. When she was gone he helped the kids finish getting ready and after a quick shower, he changed before heading down to the restaurant of the hotel. When they arrived, they were led to their table and placed a drink and appetizer order before going into a conversation about what the kids had gotten up to with Jack.

Since they were on a long break from school, Garrus brought the kids with him for the duration of his assignment. While Garrus was working with the recruits, the kids spent most of their days in a childcare facility. Despite them being on Palaven, the facility had several kids from other species for them to play with and they seemed to enjoy the teachers at the facility well enough. For the past few days, the kids had been spending their time with Jack who was on Palaven checking on a few of her old students who had been sent to help with reconstruction.

Garrus couldn't help but laugh at the biotic when he first saw her wearing the standard radiation outfit human civilians wore. It wasn't the first time Garrus had seen an outfit so ridiculous, but the sight of Jack wearing a skin tight protective cat suit beneath her typical clothing was something he couldn't help but laugh at. It had earned him a punch to the stomach, but he was still happy to see her. Between his military jobs and raising the kids, Garrus had been kept out of the loop about what was going on with his friends save for a few emails.

The kids were even happier than he was; almost tackling her the first time they saw her when Garrus brought her by one night to catch a vid with them. Since then, she'd been hanging around them a bit more and even watching the kids for Garrus occasionally. Though, in all honesty, there were a few nights Garrus had to explain why the kids shouldn't use the words Jack let slip until they were older. Still, the biotic made the trip a bit more bearable for the kids as they had barely seen their aunts and uncles over the past couple of months. Yet again, as he listened to Ismene and Kevin went on about what they had done for the day, Garrus felt his gut clench once more.

They had just finished their first round of drinks and the appetizers had just arrived, when he noticed that Jack was nearly fifteen minutes late. While Jack wasn't normally the most punctual member of the Normandy crew, this level of tardiness was strange even for the ex-convict. As Kevin and Ismene began digging into the appetizers, Garrus kept his eyes focused on the patrons of the restaurant.

The restaurant hadn't been particularly full when they'd arrived, but he'd been counting ever since they sat down. Now he counted twenty new patrons sitting in the restaurant. Most of them were turian, accompanied by a few asari, humans, and even a couple quarians but still he couldn't find Jack. Taking a moment to send her a quick text, Garrus picked up a bit of the meat appetizer he'd ordered for him and Ismene; letting out a contented purr once the spice hit his tongue.

"That's a funny noise," laughed Kevin as he popped a small bit of cheese covered potato into his mouth.

"You think so?" Garrus chuckled as he made the noise again; eliciting another laugh from the human boy, while Ismene continued to chomp happily on her latest bit of meat.
"Why do you make that noise?"

"Because he likes the food," explained Ismene rolling her eyes at her brother. "I make it all the time whenever Garrus makes yummy food."

"What do you mean 'when'?" Garrus huffed, casting a dubious glance at the girl. "I thought you liked my cooking?"

"You don't always make good food," answered Ismene, followed by a low, choppy vibration that only Garrus could pick up.

"I don't burn it that often," said Garrus with a snort.

"Did you two do sub-vocals again?" whined Kevin, crossing his arms in a huff. "You promised you wouldn't do that around me."

"Sorry Kevin," apologized Ismene, her eyes flicking toward her brother. "It wasn't on purpose."

"Yeah right," pouted the boy, "I bet you guys do it all the time."

"Sometimes," corrected Garrus, taking in another piece of meat, "but it's not always on purpose you know that."

"I know," sighed the boy as he poked at the food on the tiny plate in front of him, "I just feel left out when you do it."

"We don't say mean things," said Ismene trying her best to sound reassuring. "We just add some stuff."

"What kind of stuff?" asked Kevin, his voice softening; his eyes still holding a calculating suspicion.

"Just extra comments that we sometimes forget to vocalize." Garrus took a deep sip of water. "Like take this situation you're pouting over. All she did was comment that I burn the things I cook, nothing more Kevin."

The boy looked between the two of them, his eyebrows still furrowed and arms still crossed. It took a few minutes but finally the frustration ebbed away and Kevin apologized.

"Don't worry about it," replied Garrus with a gentle twitch of his mandibles. "Just remember that I will never talk about you in such a manner."

"Okay," sighed the boy, but Garrus could tell by Kevin's tone that he was still reticent to believe him.

Resigning to the fact that this argument was just going to be nothing more than an unceasing attempt to reassure the boy, Garrus attempted to change it toward their return to Earth when a loud cackle echoed through the restaurant. At once all three of them looked toward the sound, Ismene and Kevin both turned in their chairs; excited at the prospect of Jack rejoining them. Garrus felt like he was going to be sick. As if feeling Garrus' sudden discomfort, Kevin's face dropped and he returned to poking at his food while Ismene kept casting furtive glances in the direction of the women; a dull thrumming emanating from her.

Stop that, ordered Garrus, hoping that none of the other turians in the restaurant could hear their sub-vocals.
I don't want her around, replied Ismene as the two women got closer to their table.

That is not your decision to make, Ismene. I will handle it.

Garrus received no response from the child. As Ismene returned to her food, he leaned back in his chair. As Jack and Leela grew closer, a warm feeling spread throughout his body as he watched her. While he had only caught glimpses of her when she was on base, Garrus could tell that she was hurting. Not in any physical sense, he already knew about the issues with her implants. She'd been having them ever since Cerberus had rebuilt her, despite the absence of rejection. It was mostly in the way she moved and carried herself. The slump of her shoulders and the shuffling in her step told him just how much she was hurting. Hurting because of what had happened between them.

The look in her eyes when she left would haunt him forever. All of the happiness and joy she felt only moments before evaporating in that brief instant. It wasn't how Garrus wanted her to find out about what had happened while she was away. He thought he'd have more time to prepare her, for them to get reacquainted first. Fate, however, had other plans and Garrus had allowed himself to fall prey to them. He wanted to talk to her, be with her, or at least have a drink together, but his life kept getting in the way. Whether it was his work or things with the kids, he never found the time to contact her. His email was filled with half written messages and every time he tried to call her he was forced to hang up before completing the connection.

If she had done the same, he didn't know. Hannah and Solana kept the specifics of what was going on with her to a minimum but he could tell that, despite all that had happened, the past several months had been good to her. Her face was fuller and healthier. The limp she suffered from wasn't nearly as pronounced but still evident. It was most likely the reason for wearing tennis shoes with the business outfit she had on.

Despite Kasumi's stories of what had happened during their mission against Hock, no one but the thief and those at the party had seen the outfit Leela wore that day. Only rumors of what she had worn existed and Garrus had always been curious himself, but the sight of her in her typical garb was always more than enough for him. Today was different, he didn't know why but the sight of her dressed in a pair of black women's dress slacks accompanied by a long sleeved burgundy business jacket and a simple white shirt underneath that suited her perfectly. His eyes drifted from her hair to her jacket. They matched so perfectly that Garrus couldn't tell where her hair ended and her jacket began.

He hated what her hair did to him, whether it was covered in grime from a battle or plastered with sweat he couldn't help but run his fingers through it. Today was no different as instead of her usual ponytail she wore it down just past her shoulders. There was a slight curl and bounce to it, as if she had been to what humans called "a stylist." The look suited her but he preferred the ponytail as it gave him a chance to undo the band she used to keep it pulled back, allowing him those few extra seconds to touch her. Still he couldn't help shake the feeling that something was wrong when she and Jack, who had returned to wearing her trade-mark jacket over a long sleeved shirt, approached the table.

"Hey guys." Jack placed a hand one Leela's shoulder and smiled at the kids. "Sorry I'm late. I take it you...."

"We know who she is," spat Ismene before glaring at Leela as Kevin poked at the food on his plate.

"Ismene," warned Garrus as with a small cough.

"It's fine Garrus," said Leela with a nervous laugh, "I didn't expect a warm welcome."
"Don't you even think about saying that aloud young lady," threatened Garrus with a low growl as he heard an insult escape the child's secondary vocals, "or you will regret it later tonight." Ismene looked at him then back at Leela. "What did we just talk about? If you have something to say then you'd better vocalize it so that everyone can hear." Ismene simply let out a loud snort and pushed her plate away; her green eyes blazing.

"Well I can see that I've bothered you guys enough for one evening," coughed Leela casting a look at the now downcast table. "It was good to see you Jack and you as well Garrus." She tucked a bit of hair behind her left ear revealing the large burn scars. "If it's all right with you maybe…"

"What are you doing later?" he interrupted, seizing the opportunity before it passed.

Time at the table seemed to stop as all eyes were suddenly focused on Garrus.

A sudden rush of color flooded Leela's face as she answered, "Ummm… nothing at the moment. I mean I've got a dinner meeting with a medical supplier right now but it shouldn't take more than a couple of hours."

"Okay," said Garrus, his voice warming. "If you want, maybe we can get a drink afterwards?"

"Sure," mumbled Leela after shooting a quick glare at Jack who was doing her damndest not to laugh at her former commander's awkwardness.

"Good," confirmed Garrus, casting the same look at Jack who sneered back at him, "I'll see you at the hotel bar in a couple of hours then."

When she was gone, laughter burst from Jack who, despite being in the presence of children, snorted, "You two are a couple of fucking dorks!"

Despite the occasional jibe from Jack and grunt from the kids, Garrus couldn't help but feel hopeful about his chances throughout the rest of dinner. Sure there was no guarantee that anything would be resolved, but he refused to let his hopes sour, even as he fought with Ismene and Kevin while getting them ready for bed.

"Why do you have to go?" whined Kevin as Garrus helped him into a tee-shirt. "I thought…"

"You thought what?" inquired Garrus, curious as to what the boy was getting at.

"We thought you didn't want to be around her," huffed Ismene as she climbed under her covers.

"Did you ever hear me say that?" he said casting both of them a suspicious glance.

"No," both children replied as Jack exited their bathroom dressed in an oversized tee-shirt.

"Then…"

"Just go already," grumbled Jack as she let her hair down.

"Jack I…"

"I'll talk to them for you," she interrupted with a stamp of her foot, "just get down there before I slam you through the floors."

With those subtle words of encouragement, Garrus left the kids and headed down into the bar that was connected to the restaurant. Grabbing a table in the corner, he ordered water and downed another pill just as Leela walked in the door. She looked a little more haggard than when he first
saw her. There was a hint of exhaustion in her eyes, but he could tell she had gotten what she
needed out of her contact. When she looked at him, he saw some of that satisfaction turn into
trepidation but her smile was just as loving as he remembered. Joining him, she set her data-pad
down and ordered a soda from the asari waitress who asked Garrus if he'd like something stronger
than water.

"Just a large juice, please."

The waitress snorted at his request but she returned promptly with their order before swishing off
to more prosperous tables.

"Think we should stiff her on the tip?" asked Garrus after a hearty sip of his juice.

"I don't think that'd be a good idea," chuckled Leela as she sipped at her soda. "I took a job one
summer working as a dishwasher and believe me when I say pissing off food handlers is a bad
idea."

"That's sound advice," he agreed with a low chuckle before setting his drink aside. "Thanks for
coming."

"Were you expecting me not to?" inquired Leela as she pulled the cherry out of her soda.

"Given how things went the last time we got together," he began, his eyes focused on his talon that
was gently scratching the table, "I figured you would have recommended we hold off on meeting."

"If it makes you feel any better, I thought you would have told me to piss off," answered Leela
setting aside her soda.

"Really," commented Garrus with a shake of his head, "piss off?"

"Would you rather I say I thought you'd tell me to go fuck myself," quipped Leela tossing the
cherry stem at him.

"Based upon how much time Jack told me you spent in the bathroom while living with your
mother…." Garrus' voice trailed off into a throaty laugh when he saw Leela's face go from its usual
tan to almost the same shade as her hair.

"That little.....," spat Leela as her hand slowly turned into a fist. "What did she tell you?"

"Nothing too graphic," replied the turian offhandedly.

"You're lying," accused Leela, the fire he was used to seeing in them slowly building.

"Prove it," prodded Garrus, his eyes locking with hers.

She raised her hand and gently tapped his right mandible before saying, "They twitch three times
when you lie."

"Damn it," he sighed with a flail of his hand, "I thought I'd gotten that under control."

"You've never had control over that Garrus," quipped Leela as she took another sip of her soda,
"trust me."

"So you were humoring me all those times I surprised you?" he asked with mock offense.

"Not all the time," she laughed as she remembered the time Garrus had lied about getting help from
James when he brought her dinner one night. "Just when it was obvious."

"Well thank you for sparing my ego," replied Garrus as he drained his juice.

"Please Garrus," scoffed Leela waving down the waitress, "I don't think there's anything that could damage your ego."

"Well, if there's an expert on just how thick my skin is, it'd be you."

"Good god," Leela chortled as she chewed on an ice cube as Garrus gave her a knowing wink, "you really have very little shame."

"Naw, just good old fashion turian honesty."

"Well then Mr. Honesty," jabbed Leela waving down the waitress for a refill, "what exactly did Jack tell you about my time in the bathroom?"

Placing an order for another juice, Garrus waited until she was gone to say, "Well I know for a fact that it doesn't normally take you half an hour to take a shower unless...."

"Unless what?" teased Leela with a wiggle of her eyebrows.

Garrus had an answer resting on the tip of his tongue when the waitress reappeared. As she set down their drinks, he could swear he caught a glimmer of frustration in her eyes as she headed to check on the only other three patrons in the bar. Deciding to leave her a decent tip, Garrus returned his attention to Leela hoping to continue their conversation, but the look in her eyes as she thumbed condensation off her glass told him that the mood had lost its playful air and returned to its original, more vexatious tone.

"So," he said after an excruciating couple minutes of strained silence, "how'd that meeting go?"

Leela gave a shrug before sighing, "It went all right. But I feel like an idiot for having dressed like this."

"I think you look good," blurted Garrus absentmindedly.

"Thanks," she said returning the comment with a smile and a small laugh, "but after what I just went through, I'd have been better off not wearing this."

"Did the contact find what you're wearing offensive?" he inquired with a practiced incredulity.

"Not in the least," she answered giving him a knowing look that she knew he was reverting to his old C-Sec habits. "In fact he seemed rather amused by it."

"Krogan," he asked as she shook her head, "STG? Commando? Quarian? Volus?"

"No to all of them," she laughed as she chewed on yet another cherry before tossing the stem on the table.

"Human then," asked Garrus seeing as how there were only a few other species left on his list.

"Very much so," she replied her eyes refusing to meet Garrus'.

"I see," grunted the turian, allowing the urge to posture to take over.

"It's not like that Garrus," she chuckled, fully aware of his tone. Hearing an agitated grunt, she
finally made eye contact. "If you really want to know," she snapped causing him to jump in his seat a little. "He's," her voice grew softer, "he's a friend…from…from before."

"Oh," he said in a voice no more than a whisper even in the quiet of the bar.

"Yeah," she sighed her eyes dropping again. "I met him when my parents first brought me to the Citadel when I was almost seventeen. I …uhhh," a small laugh escaped her lips, "I was a bit of a jerk to him when we first met."

"From what you've told me about that time I'm not surprised." They both laughed at this relieving only a minuitia of the tension between them. "But why dress up for the occasion if you knew it was an old friend?"

"I didn't," answered Leela, her face suddenly flushing. "I thought it was going to be some hard ass business asshole. Figured I'd dress the part and everything but when I arrived at the table," she gave a deep sigh and shrugged, "there was Neil sitting at the table looking over a data-pad."

"What happened then?" Garrus pressed, albeit cautiously but heavily intrigued.

"Well," she sighed, leaning back and drumming her fingers along the table, "after a moment of me standing there, dumbfounded that he was the contact I was supposed to meet, he looked up, gave me a once over, and then burst out laughing before getting up to hug me."

"Seems a bit rude in my opinion," muttered Garrus taking a sip of his juice.

"It's just the way Neil is," she exhaled as the waitress came by to check if they needed new drinks, "he's not good at controlling himself and tends to act before thinking. But," she continued, her voice slowly turning from disappointed to genuinely happy, "it was good to see him after so long." There was a moment of silence before she quietly added, "He was the first real friend I had after everything started; the first person other than my family who didn't make me feel like I was alone."

Watching her closely, Garrus could see a small tear form in her eye and despite feeling his hand begin to shake; he reached over and held hers. It took a moment for the gesture to register, but when it did, he saw the tears begin to fall. His eyes drifted to her right hand and he watched as she fought the urge to wipe her tears. Pulling a napkin from the dispenser, he gently dabbed at the tiny drops as her hand tightened around his.

"I'm sorry," she choked when she finally regained some semblance of control.

"Don't be," he whispered as he wiped away her tears. From the corner of his eye he noticed the waitress and very politely asked for the check earning a protest from Leela. "I think it's better if we leave."

"Why," she spat wiping at her tears, "because I'm crying?"

"Not only that," replied Garrus as he tilted his head toward the other patrons, "but also because it looks like what little privacy we had is about to disappear." Garrus watched as she cautiously glanced around the bar and heard a curse fall from her lips just as the waitress arrived. "She doesn't mean you," he apologized as he activated his omni-tool to pay the check; forcing himself to let go of her.

"Thank you for stopping in this evening," the asari said, her cold glare focused on Garrus after she saw the condition Leela was in. Deciding that the fight wasn't worth it, he turned his attention back to his mate. Instead of taking her hand again, he let it rest next to hers unsure of what to do until finally he felt hers on top of his. Looking down he saw the hint of scarring underneath the wrist of
her jacket, but instead of asking her about it, he turned his hand and did his best to intertwine his fingers with hers.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked giving her hand a reassuring squeeze.

"Yeah," she sighed and began to get up, her hand gripping his as tightly as he was hers.

Instead of heading up toward the elevator, Leela led him through the hotel lobby and onto the street. Once her feet hit concrete, she let out a heavy sigh of relief and stared up at the night sky. Even though her eyes ached and her head hurt slightly from her outburst, she felt calm despite the chaos of the reconstruction around her. Turning to her right, she felt her face flush when she saw the look Garrus was giving her.

"What?" she asked feeling the warmth spread from her face down to her fingers.

"I missed you," he said softly, moving his head a bit closer.

"Really?" she asked, letting go of his hand and began heading toward the nearest tourist tunnel.

"Why wouldn't I?" he inquired, knowing that she was playing the game he did only twenty minutes prior.

"Well," she hummed turning around and walking backwards as she spoke, "considering the fact that it took you nearly eight months to ask me out, I'd say you didn't miss me that much."

"That isn't fair," he growled as they passed by a group of turian construction workers heading home for the evening, "you are the one who walked out the…"

"I was kidding Garrus," she sighed walking forward and taking his hand back into hers with some difficulty. "I know you had more important things on your mind."

It didn't take much for him to figure out that she was referring to were the kids. Leading her toward the tunnel, he asked which way they should go. When she told him, they headed down the left tunnel and asked, "Other than the fact that I took them in, what else do you know about them?"

"Honestly?" Her voice was hesitant as they made their way down the tunnel.

"Of course," he said without hesitation.

"EDI told me everything,"

"Oh," Garrus grunted, as he squeezed her hand a bit tighter.

"Oh is right," she said with a nervous chuckle.

"So you know all about…"

"Reese?" she asked; a hint of mirth in her voice. "I know as much as you told her."

"Which was?" he asked hoping that EDI hadn't thrown in her own analysis of his and Reese's friendship.

"That you met him and the kids after you headed to the Crucible for treatment for your head injury. You made friends with him and the kids." She moved in a bit closer and rested her head on his shoulder as they walked past a group of asari, salarians, and humans who were fervently discussing their next steps at repairing the infrastructure of the capital. "That despite whatever the doctors did,
his condition continued to deteriorate and that shortly before he died, he made you legal guardian of the kids."

"Are you okay with that?" he asked as his nerves took over and the faint taste of dinner hit the back of his tongue when she didn't respond. He knew it was stupid for him to expect an answer right away. In fact, he expected her to say nothing.

"Was any part of our conversation before I left you behind a factor," her question, contradicting all of his expectations.

"A little bit," he said after a moment of quiet thought.

"I'm glad you took them in," she said without the slightest hint of indignation.

"Yeah?"

She turned and looked up at him, her eyes were still slightly red and puffy but he could see the honesty in them as she nodded.

"Yeah," she said before kissing on him on the cheek, "but I could do without the cold shoulder the next time I see them."

"I don't know if that'll happen," he laughed before asking which direction for them to take. As they continued straight, Garrus added, "Though I will have a talk with them about how they treated you."

"It'd be very much appreciated," she added with a gentle laugh. "Just don't be too hard on them, they've been through a lot this past year."

"True," he sighed as they reached the end of the tunnel, "but so have all of us."

Garrus' tone told Leela that he was referring to not only the kids but the rest of the crew, and he was right. Since she had come back, Leela had heard the stories of her entire crew and their adventures while she had been gone. About how Garrus had led them on missions through the ruins of the Citadel, the discovery of the Conduit codes, and how everyone had chosen their own paths after she had come back. Liara spent time on Thessia setting up supply chains while Tali and James spent quite a bit of time helping with Rannoch. The fact that those two had gotten together after the war was still something she couldn't quite wrap her head around, but she was happy for them all the same. Every time she talked with her friends though, it reminded her of how much she had missed over the past four years and how some considered her lucky for not having seen the original devastation. It was apparent to her all the same when she looked into the eyes of the people she worked with and of her friends including Garrus.

"I'm sorry," she said as they stepped out onto the street, her grip tightening. "I shouldn't have ran. It wasn't fair to you."

"You have nothing to apologize for," he said, letting go of her hand and wrapping his arm around her waist. "I had plenty of time to prepare you but," he took a deep breath shook his head, "we both dropped the ball on this one."

"I'll say," she replied earning herself a laugh before looking up at him and for the first time, feeling some semblance of normalcy return to their lives.

Feeling her eyes on him, Garrus turned his head and gave her a smile with a flick of his mandibles; placing his lips to her forehead. The scent of strawberry flooded his nostrils and he couldn't help
It was a beautiful day, but purr as he felt her hand rest on his chest. As they stood there, he felt the eyes of others on the street on them; the sight of two Normandy crew members embracing one another just outside the entrance to a restaurant. He was certain that many of them had taken pictures, possibly even video, and if Leela was aware she didn't object to it. That alone made it all worth it.

That is until a disgruntled group of soldiers exited the tunnel and rudely asked them to move. They did, as the small bit of discourtesy was nothing compared to the contentment they were feeling. When they were gone, Garrus pulled Leela back toward him and they continued their walk through the city discussing the events of the past several months. As much as Garrus wanted to know about what happened to her after she had activated the Crucible, there seemed to be an unspoken agreement between them that they would discuss it when they felt it was time. Instead, Leela kept the conversation focused on Garrus and what it was like raising Kevin and Ismene. In his defense, he said that it wasn't as difficult as he thought it would be. Though after a year, he now had a new found respect for his father. He explained how, even after over a year of knowing the kids, he still hadn't figured them out along with other things. Things like dealing with Kevin's attitude, Ismene's Dyslexia, setting aside times for meetings with teachers, play dates, homework and learning to cook.

"There are some days when I think the war was simpler than a third of the things I have to do on a daily basis," he grumbled as she laughed, her nose whistling beside him.

"Well if it's any consolation, everyone thinks you're doing great with them," she said giving him a reassuring nudge with her elbow. "Besides from what EDI told me, Chakwas said you grew pretty fond of them early on."

"If I wasn't, I wouldn't have taken them in."

"That's not what I meant," she laughed, breaking from his side and stepping in front of him, halting their progress. "What I meant to say was," she took his hands in hers and looked up at him, "EDI said that you told Chakwas that they were your kids after having them only a couple of months."

"Well, I...uh...," he stammered, thinking that she was trying to rile him up. But when he looked into her eyes, he saw that she thought she was telling the truth and he couldn't argue since he didn't know. "If I did, it didn't register," he explained as he pulled her back to him, arm around her waist so they could continue their walk.

"Just means you love them," she sighed now wrapping her arm around his waist in return. "And to be honest, I couldn't think of anyone better to take care of them." He said nothing at her comment; instead he just tightened his grip around her. They continued their walk for a little while longer until finally Leela said that they were only a block away from her hotel.

"I guess I should be getting back," he lamented, his grip tightening even more.

"Walk me?" she asked; her voice as heavy as his. Nodding, he let her lead the way and when they arrived he couldn't help but exclaim at the overly posh design of the hotel. From the artwork and luxuriousness, not to mention the large number of asari employees, the hotel wasn't turian by design.

"Yeah," she sighed as they stepped through the door into the lobby, "apparently the higher ups thought my original reservations weren't up to their standards."

"Well," coughed Garrus as they stepped into the lift, "maybe they thought you would need to impress your...OW!"
"Not funny Garrus," she growled as she retracted her elbow from his stomach. Garrus wanted to say that he was joking, but it was drowned out by his coughing. Stumbling, he caught his breath just as they stopped outside her door. He watched as her hand paused above the fingerprint lock. The strain creeping to her muscles as he saw an all too familiar hesitance return to her eyes as she fought to face him. Deciding to relieve the tension, Garrus stepped forward and rested his chest against her back before wrapping his arms around her stomach.

"It's okay," he whispered resting his chin on top of her forehead, "we have plenty of time."

"Take things slow," she replied, her voice low and almost drowned out by the deep vibration emanating from his chest.

"Yeah," he said as she relaxed into his body. "One step at a time."

"One step at a time," she repeated as she turned around, her head nudging against his chin as she did. He let out a small purr as she did this, making her laugh before moving her hands around his neck and pulling him down to her. The coolness of his plates against her skin mixed with the vibrations from his chest; sent the tension running from her body. Out of instinct she leaned up, her lips found his and she felt his press back against hers. She didn't know how much time had passed; she only knew that while they were connected, for that brief moment nothing else mattered. As with all things that made one feel like all was right in the world, it was just that, brief; leaving you feel less than satisfied when it ended. When they broke apart, she felt Garrus' forehead once again as the contented purr transformed into slow disappointed moan.

"Hey," she whispered when she picked up on his frustration, "it's like you said, we have plenty of time and we both know you need to get back."

"I know," he said with a disappointed chuckle, "responsibilities."

"You love it," she smiled placing another gentle kiss on his lips. "You'd go crazy if they weren't around."

"Maybe," he teased giving her a quick kiss of his own.

"Tell you what," she said after they broke apart once more, "I'm having a party at my new place in a couple weeks. Not my idea," she added when she noticed a curious twitch of his mandibles, "it was my mother's and everyone else's. But most of the crew, the core group really, is going to be there along with a few new people."

"And you want me to bring the kids into your den of debauchery," he teased causing both of them to laugh.

"There'll be other kids there," she explained after giving him a gentle nudge with her chin. "There's a room on the ground floor that we'll prepare for them. Plus with the crew being there, I figured it'd be a pretty safe place for them to run around and have some fun."

"I couldn't think of a safer place," he laughed thinking about the prospect of everyone having to watch their language because of the kids. "And I'm pretty sure the kids would enjoy bothering their aunts and uncles."

"Good."
Leaning down, Garrus placed his lips on hers once more, feeling her smile against his. Rubbing his forehead against hers afterwards he asked, "Do you need me to bring anything besides the brats?"

"No," she answered with a gentle shake of her head. "But," she added after a moment's hesitation, "I'm going to have to give you my aunt's contact information."

"Your, Aunt Rose?" he asked. As the only aunt of Leela's that was ever mentioned, Garrus wondered why he would need to talk to her considering they had never met.

"Yeah, my Aunt Rose," she repeated, a mischievous glint in her eye.

"What does your aunt have to do with the party?" Garrus was growing more nervous by the second as he only knew Rose from the stories Leela had told him.

"Well," began Leela with an uneasy laugh, "uhhh the others, meaning my mom, James, EDI, Joker, Sam, and Tali decided that there needed to be a kind of gimmick for the party."

"What kind of gimmick?" Garrus was beginning to think that she was baiting him.

"Don't give me that look!" Leela gave him a gentle slap on the shoulder before placing a gentle kiss on his lips. "If it makes you feel any better, we're all going to look like a bunch of idiots; that's what parties are for."

"But what about the kids? Do they need to see your aunt as well?"

She could see the nervousness fill Garrus' eyes as the words fell from his lips.

"You're worried that they're going to treat her the way they treated me?"

"A little bit," he said, his voice still heavy with worry. "I mean Kevin kicked Aethyta in the shin all because he didn't want her and Liara to come around. Now you want me to take them to meet your aunt after the way they treated you tonight?"

"Garrus?"

"Yeah?"

Leela intertwined her fingers and rested her back against the door; placing the tips of her forefingers to her lips as she asked, "Do you not remember who my aunt's older sister is?"

"Fair point," he said without any resistance.

"Are you going to stop worrying now?" her voice was playful, but he could hear the concern hidden behind the laughter.

"I'll never stop worrying when it comes to you." Leaning in, Garrus placed one more kiss on her lips before giving her one last nudge on the forehead.

"I'm glad," she whispered, returning the gesture. Pulling away he watched as she turned, her hand resting momentarily on the lock. When it opened she turned around and gave him a smile before asking, "See you soon?"

"As soon as my head hits the pillow."
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Leela and Garrus have some personal time together for the first time since their reunion. It's not much in the way of privacy but things are going well enough.

Title: To Be Whole

Author: Mizutanitony

Game: Mass Effect

Rating: M

Pairing: Garrus/FemShep

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Chapter 31

Normalcy was a feeling Garrus thought he would never get used to considering that the past six years of his life had been a never ending fight. That's not to say that his days were anything but normal given his line of work. He still had to take several missions off world. Most of them involved protecting trade routes for ships or working security for new Conduit bases. There was also the odd task of training soldiers to, for lack of a better word, replace him when he was finally ready to pass the torch. But overall, Garrus had grown used to it knowing where he'd be going and that there was always a good chance to come back. In hindsight, he figured that was one of the reasons he'd joined C-Sec, it was the closest thing to normal he'd ever get. It was the best chance for him to prove that he could be a good turian; fit in and be what everyone wanted him to be.

But now, after several years of an intergalactic war that nearly wiped out all known life, Garrus was sure he'd found his place. Maybe it wasn't what he always wanted it to be, but it was something that he could find solace and purpose in. In some ways he resented it, mostly because of the wedge that it drove between him and his family, splintering his already fragile relationships with his father and sister. Still, he couldn't deny what it had given him; friends, a home and the three people sitting at the small café table with him trying to figure out what to say to one another.

Over the past few weeks since their reunion, Garrus and Leela hadn't had much face to face time outside of their consoles. With her responsibilities helping with the reconstruction and his responsibilities toward the kids or any jobs he was sent on usually kept them from meeting up. But there were days when they were able to talk at length. Sometimes after he fed the kids and put them to bed or other times he was lucky enough that the Hannah or one of the others had the time to take them off his hands. He was thankful for those nights as it spared him and the kids of having to live through the trauma of him literally being caught with his pants down.

Instead, he was dealing with the albatross of figuring out a way to get three of the most important people in his life to strike up a conversation. Reaching across the table, he grabbed one of the spice containers and added a bit to the meat on his plate. Slicing into it, he watched in a somewhat
amused silence as Leela cast a glance at Kevin and Ismene who were going over something on a datapad. When she caught his eye, Garrus gave his head a sharp jerk in their direction. In turn, she tucked a bit of hair behind her ear and shook her head slightly.

Garrus gave a small cough after swallowing a bit of his meal and asked, "What are you two working on over there?"

The kids both looked up at him. Kevin gave Ismene a permissive nod, before the girl said, "He's helping me with my homework."

"Which class?" asked Garrus taking another bite of his meal.

"It's not school work," explained Ismene handing the pad over to Garrus. "It's things that my tutor gave me to work on until my next session."

"Can I ask what kind of tutor?"

The look on Ismene's face was one of extreme indignation. Garrus could see the apprehension in Leela's eyes at the child's piercing gaze along with the low growl. It was a look he was all too familiar with and he let out a loud cough; shaking of his head slightly in Leela's direction. Leela gave Garrus a slight nod before apologizing to Ismene for intruding.

"It's fine," huffed the child setting aside her pad. "I don't read very well because the letters get all jumbled up. I was diagnosed with Dyslexia." Her mispronunciation earning a polite chuckle from Leela.

Even though it was forced, Garrus couldn't help but feel some sense of pride that Ismene was making an effort to be courteous; especially since it was a topic that she didn't like talking about with strangers.

"I see," said Leela with an encouraging smile. "Is it helping?"

"Yes," replied Ismene rather curtly. "But I'm still behind the rest of my class."

"We all fall a little behind sometimes. What matters is that we don't give up."

"Do you have anything you don't like people knowing about?" Kevin spoke up, finally turning his focus from his sandwich to the conversation.

"Leela, I don't think -," the turian's voice turning into a strangled yelp as he felt the heel of Leela's boot slam down on his foot.

"Yes I do," Leela chuckled, interrupting Garrus' attempt to steer the conversation away from embarrassing secrets.

"It's fine, Garrus," she told him; smile shifting from encouraging to threatening seamlessly.

"Okay," squeaked Garrus as her heel continued to dig into his foot.

"What is it?" asked both kids completely oblivious to Garrus' pain.

"Well," whispered Leela leaning in and tapping her nose, "you see this curve on the bridge of my nose?"

"Yeah," replied both kids, eyes widened in wonder.
"If I do this," she continued closing her right nostril, "and blow really hard..." She took a deep breath and just as she released the air through her nose. A loud, deep whistling noise filled the café drawing the attention of several patrons and scaring one of the servers. Both kids broke into laughter while Garrus shook his head in amusement. Leela felt her cheeks grow warm with embarrassment as the kids asked for her to do it again.

"Sorry kids," she chuckled as they groaned their disappointment. "It's supposed to be an embarrassing secret, remember?"

"Fine," huffed Ismene handing her tablet to Garrus. "Minol said you have to look this over."

"Doing homework on your day off, Garrus? And I thought I was in need of a drink," Steve appeared behind the kids with a bag in hand and a smile on his face.

"Hi, Uncle Steve," chimed both kids as they hugged him.

"Afternoon you two," he replied with a kiss to both their heads. "Shepard."

"How's it going, Steve?" asked Leela finishing the rest of her water.

"Not bad," he answered setting the bag down on the floor. "Was finally able to step away from the ship yard. My new ship should be ready in a few weeks and her maiden voyage will be to Thessia from Palaven."

"What's the goal?" asked Garrus offhandedly as he marked off a few mistakes from Ismene's homework.

"Two days."

"Trying to give Joker a run for his money?" Leela laughed as she poured another glass of water and handed it to her former shuttle pilot.

"More like he's pushing us," countered Steve before taking a drink. "He said Tali and her team have been working on the cooling problems to see if we can get more power out of the new drive cores."

"Who's going to be your engineers?" inquired Leela making no attempt to hide her concern.

"Vendir and Marston," hummed Steve after another deep drink.

"Are they any good?" she asked, unfamiliar with the names.

"Vendir is...stop that Ismene," chuckled Steve as Ismene began to poke him gently in the ribs. "Vendir is a Salarian engineer, top of his class while Martin is....dang it Kevin," he laughed again as the boy began to copy his sister. "Both of you stop it before I take your presents back."

Both kids' hands immediately disappeared beneath the table, expectant looks on their faces as they waited for the adults to finish.

"Now, as I was saying," continued Steve, his remaining eye quickly darting between the two children, "we'll be testing a new upgrade to the cooling system; see if we can't shave a few days travel off. But considering that it's a test run, I think it's going to take us at least a couple weeks."

"Uncle Steve," piped up Kevin as his foot gently rustled the bag.

"Fine," sighed the pilot with a mischievous glint in his eye. "But after we get outside. You two
"Take them," said Garrus with an encouraging chuckle, then adding, "Ismene we'll fix this later on tonight."

The child made only the faintest of acknowledgements to Garrus as she was led out of the restaurant by both Kevin and Steve. When they were gone, Garrus slipped Ismene's pad into his pouch and immediately found Leela's hand. Her fingers wasted no time interlocking with his. Turning, she placed her lips on his, coaxing a small purr from his throat as she responded with a husky moan of her own. Her tongue snuck into his mouth, gently brushing the tip of his. He gently sucked on hers; guiding her tongue away from the tips of his teeth. They were lost in the moment, hearts racing; their mouths and necks battling for control until it was interrupted by the terse cough of a salarian waiter.

"Are you two finished?" he asked not even attempting to hide his disdain at their lack of tact.

"Yes," muttered Leela as she tossed an extra chit on the table and gathering her things. "Sorry about that."

Garrus made no remark and gathered his things as well before taking Leela by the hand; practically dragging her from the restaurant. Outside, the streets were lively with the shop owners of the city finishing up their work for the day so the night life could begin.

As a jungle planet with several beaches, Nevos was a prime tourist spot. It was one of the few planets to escape any major collateral damage, all thanks to lush plant life. Because of the jungles dense foliage, many of the citizens escaped into it and waged guerilla warfare against their would-be destructors. Though they were able to survive, like every other planet the Reapers hit, the destruction was still evident. Reaper carcasses still littered the beaches and jungles. Every day bodies were still being found and identified while Reaper carcasses were burnt or salvaged depending on their classification. It was a grotesque sight, but like every other place they had seen, people were finding some scrap of happiness despite the desolation.

"Oh, that is not good. STEVE!"

Leela turned her attention to where Garrus was looking. Her attention now pulled away from the sight of several ships stripping a transport class Reaper of its shielding. Several feet away, Steve was running away from the kids who were both wielding dual water pistols. Shaking her head, Leela stuck her ball cap back on and headed toward Garrus who was now dodging streams of water as he tried to get the guns away from the kids.

"I told you no, Steve," scolded Garrus as he snatched one gun from each child.

"Oh come on, Garrus," teased the human as he dodged yet another shot from Ismene. "I thought you'd want them to learn how to handle a gun?"

"In a controlled environment," countered Garrus taking the final two guns away from the kids, though like Steve, there was evidence he had been assaulted by the liquid bullets. "Give me the bag," he ordered as the kids whined for their toys.

"Sorry kids, but he over rules me" apologized the pilot as he handed the bag over to Garrus. "I was just trying to have some fun with them."

"Later," offered Garrus in a low whisper.

As Garrus turned his attention to the kids, Steve walked over to Leela and asked, "How're you holding up?"

"A bit better," she sighed as she and Steve fell in step behind Garrus and the kids. "You?"

"Occasional pain in the socket and bad dreams," sighed Steve as he rubbed the side of his eyepatch.

"You going to get that implant Chakwas recommended?"

"No," answered Steve with a grin. "I've gotten used to flying without it."

"And the fact that your obscure sense of depth perception may likely end up with you crashing a ship?"

"Piss off," laughed Steve with a playful shove. "You know I'm way too good a pilot to let a lost eye keep me from flying."

"Well being the pilot of a ship is a lot different from a being the pilot of a fighter and a shuttle."

"Almost like a field commander attempting to fly a shuttle for the first time?"

"Oh fuck you," bit Leela shoving Steve back. "One time I accidentally shut off the inertial dampeners and you all won't let me forget it."

"It's even more memorable than your dancing," Steve had to be careful not to step into traffic as he dodged a punch from Shepard; wrapping his arm around her shoulder and she around his waist. "Glad to see you're getting back to your old self, Shepard."

"It feels good to be back."

They're walk continued for a while and Steve took over for Garrus so that he could spend time with Leela. Not much was said between them, they just held hands and tried to remain as close as possible to each other. Occasionally, Leela would answer a cautious question posed by one of the kids. Outside of the few questions though, the kids paid her no mind, but she was thankful for the acknowledgement. Finally though, they arrived at their destination.

As a resort town, the main city of the colony was littered with large asari type housing. Sweeping arches and angles forming large domiciles that were used as luxury hotels. Smaller buildings followed a similar, albeit simpler motif, a clear indicator of their owners' status. But their destination was neither of these types of buildings. No, theirs was a large manor style asari house. Three stories high, the house followed the similar style of the hotels, but with a much more tasteful aspect to it. Each curve served a purpose to accentuate the majesty of the home it was attached to. Large windows littered the roof and the walls let natural sunlight flow into the house. Just inside the gate was a large garden with a fountain covered in a thin layer of ivy.

"I thought you said we were heading to a shop," asked Steve in disbelief. "This looks more like a freaking security compound."

"Trust me," laughed Leela as she rung the bell to the house, "it's a shop...on top of being an overly lavish manor."

"Doesn't your mom have a lot of money?" inquired Steve as they waited for someone to respond.
"Why," asked Leela as she rung the bell again.

"No reason," sighed Steve, his jealousy all too apparent.

"My mom is frugal as shit which is why she has a lot of money," replied Leela just as a hint of static came through the intercom.

"J'Kajni Couture," stated a bored feminine voice, "do you have an appointment?"

"Are you really that bored in there, Janary?"

"By the Goddess," gasped the voice, "Leela?"

"Yeah it's me, kid," laughed Leela turning to her friends. "Open up the gate will ya?"

There was a low hum and the gate creaked open allowing them entrance. Taking her place next to Garrus, Leela let the kids take the lead with Steve as they entered the garden. It had been years since Leela had been to her aunt's home; not since two years before she'd joined Anderson on the Normandy. Even after so many years, it was evident as to what parts of the house were new and what had remained of the old one.

"Just like a Shepard," she heard Garrus whisper as he scanned the surroundings.

"What do you mean?" asked Leela as she watched the kids point out fish to Steve in the fountain pond.

"You can't help but keep reminders of the past," he chuckled running a hand along a repaired pillar.

Before Leela could respond, the front door to the house slid out and a streak of blue flashed in Garrus' peripheral vision knocking hi mate to the floor. Turning his head he saw a young asari squeezing the human as the three dogs barked their way past Garrus.

"Jesus, Janary," laughed Leela as she squeezed a young asari to her chest. "It's good to see you too."

"Who's this?" asked Garrus, his curiosity genuine as he brushed his way past the dogs.

"I'm sorry," laughed Leela as she finally was able to climb to her feet. Pulling the young asari close to her, Leela planted a gentle kiss on the top of the girl's head and happily stated, "This is my cousin, Janary J'Kajni."

"Cousin," blinked Garrus as he scanned both the girl and Leela. "Who is her…?"

"It's quite simple, Mr. Vakarian," came a stern voice from the entrance to the house.

Following the two women's gaze, Garrus saw a rather shapely woman standing in the doorway to the house. Her hair was done back in a tight bun; wrist covered in a band with several silvery needles sticking out of it. She was dressed in a simple outfit of suit pants and a long sleeved button up shirt, clearly of the same style Leela wore when she and Garrus had drinks. She had the same striking red hair and eyes as Leela and Hannah and like Hannah it was flecked with gray. If it wasn't for her being hunched over from her forearm crutches, Garrus would have taken her for Hannah's slightly shapelier twin.

"Dad," sighed Janary stepping away from her cousin to help her father make her way slowly down the steps, "there's no need to be rude."

"Oh hush," snapped the woman with a playful slap to her daughter's wrist, "I am not being rude, I
am being honest." Making her the last few steps over to Garrus on her own, Rose removed her hand from her brace and stuck it out, "I am Rose J'Kajni, Janary's father, Leela's aunt and the one who will be making your life hell for the next couple of hours."

Looking over his shoulder, Garrus cast wary glance at his mate who nodded encouragingly.

Taking her hand, Garrus shook it briefly and said, "Garrus Vakarian, and those three over there are Steve, Kevin, and Ismene."

"Yes, yes," tutted Rose with a wave of her hand. "My sister already sent your basic information and I've already begun work on your outfits." Turning around, she began to slowly make her way toward the door with the dogs hot on her heels. "Janary bring them to my work space please. I will be with you shortly, your mother is on hold."

When she was gone, Janary led the group into the house and as they made their way in Garrus couldn't help but whisper, "That's one hell of a family resemblance."

"You ain't seen nothing yet," Leela retorted.
Garrus was taken aback by the stark contrast the interior of the house to the front lawn. While the exterior was a lavish garden; complete with fish pond and several exotic plants, the foyer to the house was quite plain. Aside from a few rather expensive looking antiques, the house seemed rather mundane upon initial inspection. Still that didn't mean he was going to allow the kids to do as they pleased and he made sure that they held Steve's hand as they followed Janary.

"This is not what I expected," commented Garrus as they passed by yet another glass case housing what looked like even more antiques.

"And just what were you expecting Mr. Vakarian?" asked Janary as they made their way up a flight of stairs.

"Well I was expecting something a bit more….lavish."

He heard Leela laugh next to her cousin as the asari sighed.

"I take it that's because of your previous dealings with asari?" she retorted with a hint of annoyance in her voice as they came to the second floor and began making their way down a long hallway.

"Well," coughed Garrus as he began to hear an all too familiar essence of Hannah in the girl's voice, "based on what Leela told me about your mother and father, I assumed there would be a few more luxury items lying about."

"I assume that's because my cousin told you that my parents conduct a large amount of business from our home?"

There was no mistaking that all too familiar scolding tone that not only Hannah and Leela were masters of, but apparently Rose and Janary as well.

"I didn't mean to offend you," stammered Garrus rubbing the back of his neck.
"It is a fool who keeps things like my mother's merchandise locked away in their homes," snapped Janary as the stopped in front of a door. "My mother didn't become the antiquities dealer she is today by keeping her merchandise obviously accessible," she glared at Garrus who recoiled. "I'm certain your comments are based on not only the size of our home but the cases you've seen in the hallways?"

"Uhhh…" Garrus cast a pleading glance Leela who shook her head. "Yes," he added once he realized this fight was his own.

"They're worthless, Mr. Vakarian," barked Janary upon catching the shift in Garrus' gaze. "Worthless replicas we keep so that my mother can at least give her clients an idea of what they are purchasing. However everything you see in here," she opened the door to reveal a large work shop that took up at least half the second floor of the house, "is one hundred percent original."

As they stepped into the room, everyone but Leela let out low whistles or hums of appreciation at Rose's workspace. While the rest of the house was furnished rather plainly, it was clear that Rose and her mate spent whatever they could to get the best equipment possible for their work. Although his knowledge of fashion was extremely limited, Garrus was quite familiar with some of the outfits he saw on some of the turian mannequins. He had seen his mother and Solana wear robes made of similar fabrics when he was younger and was even forced to wear a few when it came to special occasions. The other materials he was unfamiliar with; some coarse others fine, while some seemed to be as thin as paper. From what he could tell, she kept the cheaper fabrics on the ground floor while the more expensive ones remained on the second level.

"Wow!" exclaimed Ismene as she dragged Steve through the door and toward a set of turian ceremonial robes.

"Easy, Ismene," laughed Steve as she stared longingly at the robes. "You got quite a while before you need to wear something like that. Right, Garrus?"

"At least twenty years," sighed the turian as he entered the work space. "Those are bonding robes and she's much too young to be wanting a set."

"Oh," pouted Ismene as she gently ran a claw along the fabric. "They're still beautiful. Right, Uncle Steve?"

"They are rather nice," said Steve with a shrug. "Fashion's never been my strong suit sweetie."

"I want this," shouted Kevin as he stood next to a mannequin wearing a half-finished tuxedo. "Then I can be like that guy who drives all those sports cars."

"Which 'guy,' might that be?" asked Rose making everyone in the room jump. "You, young lady," she said with wave of one of her crutches after pushing her way past Garrus and Leela, "I suggest you let that go. Lest you want Garrus to pay a year's salary for it."

Ismene's hand snapped away from robes and returned to Steve's.

"Sorry," she muttered, eyes downcast as her uncle led her to the middle of the room.

"Is it ripped?" inquired Rose taking a seat in a large cushiony chair.

"No," whimpered Ismene, her face buried into Steve's side.

"Then no harm done." Her frown slowly melted into a smile as she returned her attention to Ismene, "Now, your name is Ismene? Right?"
"Yes," she nodded, a green eye peering out from Steve's side.

"And I believe you have a little friend in your backpack?" Roses eyes shifted from Ismene's to the backpack.

Ismene shifted around Steve's back and clung even tighter to his pant legs and shook her head. "No, I don't."

"Ismene," warned Garrus. "Don't lie."

Stepping out from behind Steve, Ismene slung her backpack off her shoulder and pulled out her teddy bear who was dressed in a pair of suspenders and farmer's hat.

"His name is Teddy and he was a gift from my daddy and mommy."

"He's a very handsome bear," chuckled Rose as she looked over the bear. Her eyes investigating every square inch of the stuffed creature with practiced analysis. "The fabric is cheap," she muttered as she ran her hands along it, "but it was well cut and sewn. Did you buy this in a store?"

"Yes," Ismene whispered, nodding shyly.

"Speak up child," ordered Rose, setting the bear in her lap.

"Yes," answered Ismene with a much more confident, if slightly timid, tone. "Garrus takes me to a store to buy them since we can't make them at home."

"We shall have to remedy that," smiled Rose as she handed the bear back to the child. "Janary?"

"Yes, Dad?"

"Please take Kevin and Ismene to the kid's room across the hall. Lieutenant Cortez?"

"Ma'am," replied Steve out of reflex.

"Can you please escort them? It may seem a bit unusual but your outfit is being stored in the connecting room. Don't worry," she laughed when she saw the look on Steve's face, "you will have complete privacy."

"That's fine," answered Steve over the shouts of the children as they pulled him out of the room to follow Janary.

"Leela, can you please go with your cousin?"

"Why?" asked Leela, her head snapping away from a dress that was being fitted for what looked like an asari matriarch.

"Just do what I say, young lady."

"Fine," huffed the younger woman before crossing the room. "You going to be okay?" she asked Garrus as the others left the room.

"I think so," chuckled Garrus placing a gentle kiss on her forehead. When they parted he cast a wary eye to Rose who had returned her attention to her desk and whispered, "If she's as much of your mother like I think she is, I should be fine."

"Alright," whispered Leela. She gave him a quick kiss before saying to her aunt, "Auntie, I'll talk to
"Yes, yes," sighed the woman as she pulled out the necessary supplies from one of her disheveled drawers. "Just shut the door on the way out and don't wake the baby."

"I'm sorry?" gasped Leela in shock.

"I thought your mother told you about that," muttered Rose. "Just go and talk to Janary about it. I'm already behind schedule with your friend's orders and my assistants still need the latest amounts for our next donation to your supply efforts."

"Okay," answered Leela without a second glance at either Rose or Garrus. The last thing they heard before the door shut was Leela calling to her cousin, "Janary! Would you mind telling me what your dad meant by 'don't wake the baby'?"

When the door sealed, Garrus let out a low chuckle which was promptly silenced by Rose banging one of her crutches.

"Step over there if you would."

Following the direction of where the woman's free hand was pointing, Garrus walked over to a small pedestal and turned to Rose who was slowly rolling her way over to him.

"I take it I'm supposed to stand on this?"

"What the hell else would I use it for?" snipped Rose as she came to a stop.

Garrus gave a shrug and stepped onto the small wooden block and waited patiently for Rose to begin her work.

"So," began Rose as she pulled out a roll of tailoring tape, "aren't you going to ask me about my daughter or my relationship with Leela?"

"Umm…..," answered Garrus nervously, "I don't really know how to respond to that."

"Oh please," snorted Rose as she measured the length of Garrus' legs, "I saw the look on your face when I mentioned that I was Janary's father. As one so accustomed to hearing that phrase in regards to asari culture and being aware of my niece's predicament, I'm betting one specific thought went through your head when I said I was Janary's father."

"It had gone through my mind," grunted Garrus as Rose shoved her hand between his legs and unceremoniously began measuring his inseam.

"Then why don't you ask me if I have more in common with my niece than blood relations?" asked Rose as she told the measurements to her data pad before sliding around to his back.

"Because I was a bit more curious as to why you need crutches," he confessed. It was the truth as the only other person Garrus had ever seen using crutches in the manner she did, was Joker.

"I figured as much," sighed Rose as she struggled to get to her feet. As she did, the chair moved slightly. If it wasn't for Garrus catching her, she would have fallen to the floor along with the majority of her measuring tools.

"Thanks," she gasped after climbing back into her chair.

"Don't," she grunted as Garrus began picking up the supplies.
"It's not a problem," he answered as he placed the supplies back into the small bin she had sitting in her lap. When he was done, he returned to his post before asking, "Do you want me to stand or should I sit?"

"Remain standing," she chuckled as she climbed out of her seat. As she struggled to keep her balance, Rose slowly went about her work and sighed, "As you can see I have a bit of a problem walking."

"I would consider that to be more than 'a bit of a problem,'" commented Garrus as Rose began measuring his torso.

"It's congenital," grunted Rose as she scooted carefully around Garrus. Handing him one end of the measuring tape, Rose wrapped it around Garrus' torso and relayed the information before moving around his back. "My condition makes moving around difficult hence the need for my crutches."

"Do you have fragile bones?" asked Garrus as Rose began measuring the width of his shoulders.

"Yes and no," replied Rose before making another vocal note about Garrus' measurements. "I have a spinal condition called Spina bifida."

"What exactly does that mean?" asked Garrus as Rose moved to measuring his arm.

"It depends," she sighed before moving to his other arm. "My particular version of this condition is rather deadly. If I had been born a century ago, I would have suffered from immune deficiencies and would have either ended up an invalid or died."

"But instead it only affects your ability to walk?"

"You mean along with the chronic back pain and the occasional bout of falling on my face?" laughed Rose along with Garrus. "But it didn't keep stop me from finding a wife, starting a successful business, and having two lovely daughters."

"Then it's you and your bondmate I have to thank for exposing Leela to such relationships."

"Leela would have fallen for you regardless of meeting my bondmate." There was a gentleness in her voice that Garrus was only used to hearing when Hannah was reminiscing. "But I do like to think that I had hand in it."

"Just like your sister," laughed Garrus along with Rose.

"Believe it or not, Hannah is a better mother than she gives herself credit for." Rose's eyes darkened slightly as she added, "Not that she had much of an example to draw inspiration from."

"What about your bondmate?" asked Garrus, hoping to change the topic as quickly as possible, "Does she have any experience with children or is Janary your first?"

"Janary is the first for both of us," said Rose as she pushed herself back toward her workbench and began filtering out fabrics. "It's why my sister got me this necklace back when she was born."

"I see," hummed Garrus taking a look at the large stone pendant attached to the chain. "If you don't mind my asking, since you brought it up, do you and Leela share other similarities beyond being related to Hannah?" Garrus watched as Rose's head fell to the desk as loud, rolling laughter escaped from her stomach and her fist pounded against the table.

"No," Rose wheezed.
"I don't understand what's so funny?"

Sitting back in her chair, Rose wiped away a few tears as she choked out, "I didn't think you'd have the tenacity to ask the question." Lingering laughter escaped from her belly as she said, "No. My niece's proclivity is her own." Her laugh turned into a gentle sigh, "But I am proud of the short time I had to raise her back during Shanxi."

"She speaks fondly of you," said Garrus with a happy twitch of his mandibles.

"I would hope so," chuckled Rose meeting his gaze. "She was an excellent baby."

A gentle silence grew between them. Both of them trying to figure out how best to continue the conversation. Finally, deciding to get back to the reason for his visit, Garrus asked, "So, what kind of costume did you have planned for me?"

"Smart move, Vakarian." Rose removed a few bits of fabric from her pile and tossed them to Garrus. "I've already began working on your costume, but my sister's notes can only tell me so much. From my measurements I've already figured that I cut everything a bit short. You're a bit bigger than I thought you'd be." Her eyes scanned him, taking an extra second just below his waistline.

"Ah," coughed the turian, feeling the blood rush to his face. Scanning the room, Garrus grabbed a spare chair and sat down across from his host, a glint of disappointment in her eyes. "Would you mind explaining it to me?"

"Oh it needs no explanation, Garrus," the woman chuckled as she handed him a pad with some pictures of the costume on it. "I found the design on the extranet. It's a couple hundred years old, but with a few modifications to it, I think you'd look rather dashing."

"By the spirits," laughed Garrus as when he finally absorbed just what it was Rose had prepared for him. "Please tell me that you aren't going with a theme?"

"Why do you think I sent Janary to the space where I keep the fabrics for children's clothing?" said Rose with a victorious smirk. "She's double checking how well they fit and…"

They were interrupted by a loud crash followed by the shouts of children and Janary shrieking while Leela could be heard attempting to quiet a crying baby. Clambering to her feet, Rose reached for her crutches; a string of curses slipping past her lips while Garrus fell in step behind her. When they reached the door they found Steve in a heap on the floor. He was dressed in a green and black outfit; a green eye patch clinging to his face and an emerald green ring on one finger. Next to him was Kevin in a tweed Jacket, brown hat, and a long flowing scarf. Ismene was in a corner crying; her teddy bear now dressed in a suit and trench coat, held tightly against her costume of blue armor.

"What in the hell happened out here?!" exclaimed Rose; eyes darting between the three adults and children.

"It was my fault," grunted Steve as he climbed to his feet. "The kids wanted to see if the ring could make me fly and I thought….well with the help of Janary, that maybe I could give them a bit of a show."

Rose shuffled over to Leela who hurriedly handled her baby cousin to Janary and hissed loudly as Rose whacked her on the head with her cane.

"You know, Janary's control isn't all that great," Rose hissed as she thumped her niece once more
on the head. "Why didn't you take control of the situation?"

"I'm under doctor's orders not to use my biotics," whispered Leela sounding like Ismene when Rose had caught her fondling the robe. "I thought she could handle levitating Steve for a few seconds."

"And what if she had lost control and sent him flying over the bannister, or into one of the cabinets, or even worse one of the children?"

"Rose," interrupted Steve as he made his way over to the woman, "as I said it was my fault and - OW!"

There was a hollow ringing as Roses crutch struck Steve. Two on the top of his head and two to his left arm; each one making him yelp in pain as she growled, "That's for coming up with such a stupid idea." She hit him once more in the shin before adding, "And that's for using my first name without permission."

As Leela and Steve took to nursing their wounds, Rose turned to her daughters and shuffled toward them asking, "Is Layet okay?"

"Dada," squealed the baby as she reached out for her father. Except for the remains of her tears on her cheeks, the child seemed to be no worse for wear.

"She's fine," said Janary reassuringly as her father leaned in to kiss her little sister.

"Good," sighed Rose rubbing her nose against the baby's.

When she separated from the baby, her palm connected with the back of Janary's head. She said nothing; the disappointment in her eyes was enough for her point to come across. Turning around, she walked toward Kevin and Ismene. Both of them looked terrified at what the woman would do to them because of their involvement. No punishment came; instead they were both given reassuring hugs from the woman who proceeded to ask how they liked their costumes.

"I really like the jacket," said Kevin a bit nervously, "but the scarf is a bit scratchy."

"I'll make sure to get that taken care of before sending it home with you," chuckled Rose as she attempted to ruffle Kevin's hair as he ducked away from her. "What about you Ismene? Do you like outfit I made for your bear and your armor?"

"Very much, Miss Rose," whispered Ismene whose eyes, like Leela's, were still locked on the floor.

"You can call me, Auntie," replied the woman, her hand gently stroking Ismene's head. "Is there anything you want me to fix or don't like?"

"It's a little tight in the pants," answered the girl, her voice much more confident as her eyes met Rose's. "It was really hard to get into."

"Then I will get to work on it as soon as I can." Her eyes hardened as they turned to Steve who was checking to see if a welt had formed where Rose had struck him. "And what about you? Anything I can do for the stunt pilot? Perhaps I can add in a helmet so you don't kill yourself the next time you have a boneheaded idea?"

"No ma'am," answered Steve, his words as wounded as his pride. "It's a perfect fit."

"Good," snorted Rose, "feel free to take it with you." She then turned her attention to Garrus.
"Well, now that the excitement has happened for the evening, is there anything else you'd like to ask of me before I return to my workshop?"

"No," chuckled Garrus as he watched his mate avoid his gaze. "I think we'll be heading out for the evening."

"I think I'll...."

"You'll do no such thing," threatened Rose upon hearing her niece's voice. "You'll be staying here with me for the evening." The fire in her eyes returned as she looked at her niece, "I haven't even begun to work on your outfit and it is going to take much longer than I thought to get finished after that that fiasco involving your friends Jack and Samara."

"What if I have to...?"

"It won't interfere with your work," snipped Rose. "I have plenty of ways for you to keep in contact with your people and I've already sent out my messages with them as to who they should correspond with if I become distracted. But there are a few choice words I need to have with you."

"Of course," agreed Leela without much of a fight. "Would you mind if I saw them out?"

"Why would I mind?" scoffed Rose as she headed back toward her office. "So long as you keep your hormones in check and make it short, go right ahead. You're a grown woman."

"A grown woman who has been made to feel like a child," muttered Leela as the door to her aunt's workshop closed.

"Ah it's not that bad," laughed Steve as he rubbed the part of his arm where Rose had struck him. "You mind waiting for us to get changed?"

"Go ahead," sighed Leela as she sat down on the chair that Steve had used. "I'm not going anywhere."

When they were gone, Leela glanced up at Garrus and asked, "So, you two have fun?"

"As much as could be expected," laughed Garrus taking a spot on the wall next to Leela. "Though her estimate on how long this would take was drastically overstated."

"Yeah, well at least you got to hear a bunch of embarrassing stories about me."

"I didn't get to hear any."

The look of shock on Leela's face coerced an amused flutter from his mandibles.

"Seriously," she asked in disbelief.

"Quite, he replied; mandibles twitching once more. "We talked more about her than we did you."

"Thank God," exhaled the woman as she felt Garrus' hand on her shoulder. "Here's hoping she takes it easy on me."

"I highly doubt that," answered Garrus with a knowing laugh.

"What do you know?" growled Leela, knowing full well what the laugh meant.

"In all honesty? Nothing."
"I don't believe you."

Leaning down, Garrus kissed his mate and said, "In truth I don't know what she has planned for you. But if I did, what would you do if it was something embarrassing?"

"Something embarrassing?" asked Leela tapping her lips once more.

Obliging her request, Garrus gave her one more kiss before saying, "You know it."

Leela took a moment to ponder his question before saying with a small chuckle, "In a metaphorical sense? I'd probably kill her."

Two weeks later, Leela was in her bedroom on a dressing pedestal as her aunt helped her get into her costume for the party. Her eyes focused on the woman as she shuffled around her and whispered, "You are so dead, Auntie."
Chapter 33 Part 1

Chapter Summary

So there's a reason this one is a part 1. The original writing of it was 13,000 words or so but that was too long so we're splitting it into two parts. This one however is just under 7100 words.

In this part as you can see costumes are involved. So how this worked was a long while back I had the idea for Leela to show up and they would have a big celebration and a party....and then Citadel came out a few months later so I wanted to change it up a bit and decided on a costume party in which everyone dresses up as characters from some of Leela's favorite things. It's a fun chapter with lots of laughs and my editor, :iconillusionsfire76: did a bang up job with this and part 2. Enjoy guys and let's play a little game of trying to figure out who is dressed as what...though the people in the preview are to not be guessed.

Title cared done by :iconmistiqarts:

Title: To Be Whole
Author: Mizutanitony
Game: Mass Effect
Rating: M
Pairing: Garrus/FemShep
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Chapter 33

"You wouldn't be the first to tell me that," Rose said as she pulled the needle from her mouth and began sewing in one last detail. "Though I admit I thought you could appreciate the irony of the outfit I picked for you."

"I would if it wasn't for the fact that you turned something threatening into a joke," huffed Leah as she swished the bottom of her costume. "Seriously, what the hell were you thinking?"

"I was thinking," grunted Rose disgusted at her niece's complaints, "that the bottom of that particular cybernetic-organism's design only works as a dress, hence the reasoning behind my concept."

"Well why not make it into armor?" inquired Leela staring at her reflection in disgust, "or make me an outfit similar to Kevin's?"

"Because," groaned Rose disgusted at her niece's complaints, "that would just be silly and redundant." Rose approached her niece and twirled her finger saying, "Turn around for me please."
"If you think I'm going to twirl…"

"Just turn Leela," sighed Rose pinching the bridge of her nose.

Hiking up her dress a bit, Leela turned slowly; her feet stomping loudly on the dresser's stool while her aunt groaned in frustration. She felt like a fool. If the fact that she was wearing a yellow and black dress that made her look like a bee wasn't bad enough, the giant balls around the bottom made it look like she was covered in dandelion spores. Facing her aunt again, she pulled at the elbow length gloves and asked, "You satisfied?"

There was a flash from the corner. Both women turned to see Hannah dressed in a dark skirt with a purple cape, black mask, purple wig, two fake swords on her back, and black shirt emblazoned with a purple "HG," on the chest. A toothy grin on her face and manic glint in her eyes completed her outfit/ensemble.

"That is precious," laughed Hannah as she tapped a few buttons on her omni-tool. "Rosey you really out did yourself this time."

"Thank you," replied the younger woman as her sister wrapped an arm around her shoulder. "Though, I did just realize the length of the gloves is a bit superfluous."

"Well it's too late now," laughed Hannah as she squeezed her sister. "The first guests are here and they've already gotten into some of the booze."

"First guests," stammered Leah, her eyes widening in revelation. "Which ones?"

*Please not Jack and Joker. Please not Jack and Joker.*

"Your friend Samara, that merc Zaeed, and I believe your engineers Ken and Gabby."

"Thank God," sighed Leela, her hand resting on her pounding heart. "Wait? You said they got into the booze?"

"Well so far it's only Zaeed," chuckled Hannah as she tilted her head toward the door. "So I'd go and check on him before he gets drunk and the party really starts."

"Fine," snorted Leela as she hopped off the stool. "Auntie, do you need help downstairs?"

"Don't worry about me," said her aunt with a dismissive wave of her hand. "My sister is here and she's more than capable."

"But…"

"Leela quit stalling!" barked Rose and Hannah in unison.

"Seriously," groaned Hannah rubbing her temple, "you're making this a bigger deal than it needs to be. Remember that quote you always had on your console as a kid? About never forgetting what you are and wearing it like armor?"

"Yes," grumbled Leela in defeat. She gave a heavy sigh and hiked up the front of her outfit a bit as she made her way cautiously out the door to the top landing.

"Oh my God," exclaimed a Scottish voice from the base of the stairs.

Leela immediately wanted to run back into her room but her mother and aunt had shut the door behind her, forcing the rear-admiral to face her crew mates.
"Same to you Ken," huffed Leela when she noticed Ken's neatly cropped hair and shaved face.

He was dressed in a beige suit in the fashion of Prohibition Era America. She had to say he looked good and even better if it wasn't for the sandwich style chalkboard draped over his chest. The words "Heads," and "Tails," were handwritten on it with several tally marks under both.

"Aye," chuckled the engineer as he looked his former commander over. "Not a bad look, Shepard. I especially love the little hat. Does it light up when you get one of your crazy ideas?"

"Ken," groaned Gabby as she appeared next to Ken in a similar suit with a knee length skirt and her hair up in a bun. She had a large plate with a silver coin in the center. There was a disgruntled look on her face that Leela couldn't tell whether it was part of the costume or frustration with her boyfriend.

"Yes, my dear," asked Ken turning to face her, a satisfied smirk on his face until Gabby's jabbed him between the chalkboards. "Understood," he coughed while trying to hide the sickly green his face was turning.

"I think you look great, Shepard."

"Thanks, Gabby," replied Leela feeling her face flush.

"You really should dress like this more often. You look lovely."

"I'm not really sure about that," laughed Leela nervously as her right arm began to absently stroke the scars on her left.

"Don't think like that," interrupted Gabby taking Leela by the hand and heading toward the bar. "I mean, how else are you going to stand in front of all those people in six months if you aren't comfortable wearing an outfit like this?"

"Outfit like what? And what's going on in six months?" Leela's head was spinning as Gabby poured her a drink. It wasn't until Leela noticed the ring on Gabby's left finger that she understood the meaning behind her words.

"Oh no. No, no, no, no," Leela objected, setting down her glass and stepping away from her friend. "Gabby I'm honored but I'm not sure you want me up there."

"Oh quit being such a coward," said a gruff voice behind her.

Turning, Leela saw Zaeed sitting on the couch with a cigar between his lips, dressed in a set of civilian attire with two pistols strapped to his left leg. He was looking a lot better than Leela had last heard, though his face was covered in several new scars. Aside from that, he looked the same as always.

"I'm not being a coward," countered Leela as she cast a glare at the merc.

"Then just shut up and accept the offer," spat Zaeed as he wandered around the bar to refill his scotch. "I mean look at me." He stepped back, arms open. "I'm sitting here in an apartment with windows that someone could blow my head off through without a single problem and you don't see me pissin' an moanin' about it."

"You're complaining about it now," interjected Gabby as she filled a glass for herself.

"No one's talking to you, girlie," barked the merc with a hidden softness.
"But you're talking about a situation that deals with me," bit back Gabby, her chest puffing up.

"All right, break it up," ordered Leela. "Gabby you go back to the living room. Zaeed," the merc's good eye focused on her over the brim of his glass, "you stay here and enjoy getting pickled."

"Now that's an order I can follow," laughed the old man, taking the bottle of scotch with him back to the couch. "Let me know when some of the more interesting guests arrive."

"Pompous ass," muttered Gabby as she headed into the kitchen. "I swear I don't know how I put up with....."

"KNEEL!" shouted a voice from the front door scaring Gabby behind the counter and shaking Samara from her meditations as Ken dove behind the couch.

Turning in the direction of the noise, Leela used her biotics pulling large cast iron skillet into her hand just in time to keep a giant red varren from attacking her face. As she tried to wrestle the pan from the varren, Leela looked up to see Jack standing in the doorway with tears in her eyes laughing at what Leela hoped was her current predicament.

"What the hell is this thing?" grunted Leela as she finally wrested the pan from the varren's jaws. It sat and looked up at her expectantly, as if waiting for her to throw the pan. Not wanting to disappoint it, Leela chucked it at Jack who merely extended her golden staff, acting like she used the power of the scepter to stop it mid-flight. Dropping it into her hand, Jack held out the pan and clicked her tongue.

"This is Eezo," stated Jack as she tossed the pan to the side and began to rub the varren's jaw. "My new precious badass biotic. Aren't you boy?"

"I see," muttered Leela as Ken and Gabby came out of their hiding places. "How is a varren biotic?"

"Got him on Thessia," sighed Jack as she adjusted the large golden horns on her head. "Some asshole abandoned during the war and I took him in. You should have seen him when I first got him, had to work my ass off just to get him to even eat the food I left for him."

"A prickly, unapproachable biotic that's turned into a bit of a softie," chuckled Leela as she looked at Jack. "That sounds familiar."

"Fuck you," laughed Jack with a playful punch to Leela's arm. "Hey Samara," shouted Jack at the asari, "looking badass in that armor."

"Thank you, Jack," answered the justicar from her position in front of the window. "I must say you humans did wear a superfluous amount of armor in your ancient days."

"We still dress the same," commented Leela as Jack traded her staff with Samara's sword, "it's just a different material."

"True," hummed Samara as she took her sword back, "but I do rather enjoy the romanticism of the lady knight I am dressed as." There was a gentleness in her voice as she spoke of the woman, "Such a hopeful woman. Trying to remain honorable and do the right thing in a world of hypocrisy and violence. It reminds me of my own oaths."

"And the futility in trying to remain that way," barked Zaeed as he stumbled toward Samara. "Seriously sweetheart, why don't you give up the whole honorable warrior thing? I've got ways we
can really put your...YEOW!"

Zaeed's arm was twisted around his back by a familiar blue glow. With a gentle push, Samara sent him and his drink spilling to the floor in front of Hannah who was bringing out a large tray of crudité.

"I was wondering when the first mess would happen," tsked the woman as she set the tray on the coffee table. "It's such a shame that the quality of men has fallen to embarrassing levels."

"Meet me on the battlefield and I'll show you where I really stand." Leela laughed while Ken and Gabby cautiously stepped away from the pair.

"Sorry sweetheart," mocked Hannah, using Zaeed's own accent against him along with a firm slap on his ass, "but the only man who's ever been able to handle me is resting in an urn on that shelf over there."

"Can't even give the guy a bit of hope, Admiral?" asked James entering dressed in a familiar luchador mask, black tank top, black pants, and a series of tubes all along his body. Under his brawny arms were large kegs. In his hands were twenty-four packs of beer and soda.

"Christ, you Shepard women and….HOLY SHIT!"

The beverages fell out of his arms, only to be caught by Samara, as one hand flew to his stomach while the other pointed between Leela and Jack.

"The fuck are you laughing at?" snapped Jack.

"You!" he shouted between bouts of laughter, "The two of you! The horns and Shepard…HAHAHAHA…th….that dress! You look like a walking plunger!"

"EXCUSE ME!?"

"WHAT THE FUCK'S WRONG WITH MY HORNS?!"

Both women were immediately upon the newly promoted Commander. Leela taking his chest as Jack went for his legs. The three of them fell to the ground in a tangled mass, both women cursing loudly. James' laughter slowly morphed into screams of pain as both women landed blow after blow against his massive frame.

"Juvenile," was Samara's response to the sudden outbreak of violence before enlisting Ken to help her with the drinks. While they stored the supplies, Gabby and Hannah were content recording the mayhem when Steve and Tali entered, skirting around the edge of the violence. Steve was still dressed in the emerald green and black outfit, complete with a new matching eye patch. Tali was dressed in a purple spandex suit with cat ears and a whip attached to her hip. While she her face didn't show it, Leela could tell the quarian was feeling stressed.

"Please don't break that tubing," sighed Tali as she set a large bag of groceries on the island next to James' beer. "I need to take it with me in a couple of days and I don't need it broken."

"What the hell did you say him yet?"

"He said he's coming with Sam, but they're delayed because was something wrong with his costume."

"I see," replied Hannah as she swirled her beer before kissing her daughter on the cheek. "The
night's still young."

"Thanks," said Leela with a smile.

After their brief talk, Leela joined EDI, Joker, Kaidan, Tali, and her mother in the bar to play a
game of cards. Ever since Leela had played against Ken, Gabby, and Tali she'd developed a love
for poker and was doing a fairly good job of holding her own. Tali, on the other hand, was having a
difficult time now that she didn't have her helmet to hide behind, but she was still doing better than
Joker.

"I'll take two," said the pilot as he tossed two cards past the two little toy dinosaurs he'd brought
with him. After receiving his new cards, he adjusted his Hawaiian shirt and looked to EDI whose
face was like stone.

"EDI, you going to throw anything away?"

Adjusting her brown coat, Edi's hand hovered above her cards before throwing one away. When
she retrieved her new one, Leela was certain she could see anger flash in her eyes before running
her hand through her silver curls.

"Nothing good, eh?" chuckled Joker as he fiddled with her replica of a Winchester 1892.

"I believe I can work with this," she sighed as she rearranged her cards. "Just keep your eyes on
your own cards, Jeff."

"Touchy," chuckled Joker as he leaned in to give her a peck on her cheek, running a hand along the
back of her brown coat.

"That is not going to work, Jeff," countered EDI with a gentle push before readjusting her vest and
jacket.

"Oh come on," pleaded the pilot as he brushed a bit EDI's curled hair behind her ear.

"What about you, Shepard?" asked Kaidan while EDI and Joker continued their lover's quarrel.

"I'm out," Leela sighed dejectedly, tossing her cards away. She continued to watch them play but
missed the result of the hand when she heard an argument erupt in the living room. Excusing
herself, she grumbled and rounded the corner into the living room to find Grunt, Zaeed, and
Hannah laughing while Ken and Gabby mingled with Dr. Michel. "What's going on here?" she
asked but unsurprised when she found Samara sitting calmly on the couch, staring up at a seething
Wrex.

"Really, Wrex?" groaned Leela when she Wrex floating several inches off the ground.

"It's not my fault!" growled Wrex as he tried to wrestle his way free. "She insulted my clan and our
expansion efforts."

"I did not," retorted Samara with just the slightest hint of contempt. "All I said was that you should
be careful with how quickly you want to expand."

"I told you already that we have a plan," barked Wrex as he tried to create a counter barrier.

"I seriously doubt that you and your people have come up with a cohesive enough plan to ensure
long term colonization efforts."
"Samara," groaned Leela at the argument. "I personally mediated all the meetings and sent them off to the Council's legal specialists. The plan is solid, so can you please release the field?"

"Very well," sighed the asari. The field dissipated, followed by a loud bang and the floor shook as over eight-hundred pounds of krogan landed in a heap.

"Damn it," growled Wrex as he tried to climb off his hump. "Will somebody help me up off this damn floor?!"

Everyone who witnessed the scene was laughing too hard, so the only one left to help the krogan to his feet was the woman who dropped him. When he was finally standing as straight as he could, his breath reeking of ryncol, Wrex muttered his gratitude before stumbling around the corner and into the bar for more ryncol. The entire group continued to laugh until they heard the door chime. Failing to quiet them down, Leela headed toward the door and opened it to find Feron standing there wearing green cape, white paints, and a brown leather chest plate. Next to him, Liara was dressed in a pair of fake glasses, what looked like purple wig, a helmet with a large metallic earpiece on the right side, a blue undershirt with orange top, boots, and a pair of black shorts. While the asari had a huge grin plastered on her face, Feron looked completely disgruntled.

"Was my presence really necessary?" asked Feron when he saw the twisted smile appear on Leela's face.

"Yes, it was," answered Liara gesturing toward her former lover. "It's a welcome back party for her as well as a way for us all to reconnect as a group."

"But I'm not a core group member," argued Feron as Leela let them in. "Your friends don't even really know who I am."

"Hence, why your presence is mandatory," laughed Liara linking her arm with his. "Sorry we're late Shepard. Someone was being difficult about their costume."

"Only because this costume is racially insensitive!"

"Oh it is not," argued Liara after greeting the others.

"Liara, I am dressed up as a character who goes by the name, 'Frog'...."

"Which is an amphibian," deflected Liara with a gentle kiss to his lips. "Your species is reptilian."

"Most people can't tell the difference."

"I can," whispered Liara giving him another kiss.

"Do you two want to borrow the guest room upstairs?" inquired Leela rolling her eyes. "Seriously, if you need fifteen minutes I'm sure we can spare it for that long."

"Don't listen to her," snickered Jack as she wrapped an arm around Leela's shoulder. "She's just jealous because she's the only one who hasn't been getting any lately." Leela's elbow found Jack's gut but the biotic merely grunted. "Don't hate me because I'm right."

"Piss off," growled Leela attempting to elbow her friend again only to be foiled as the door chimed again. "You got lucky," she warned as she went to answer the door.

"Unlike you," laughed Jack as she took Liara and Feron into the kitchen to get them started on drinks and food.
Taking a moment to make sure that Wrex and the others hadn't destroyed anything, Leela adjusted her gloves and opened the door. She let out a loud yelp as a giant aluminum covered varren bounded through the door.

"What the hell?" was all she could say as two small bodies bolted through the entrance. One was dressed in a frock coat, patched pants, a large scarf, and a fedora. The other in blue armor carrying a teddy bear garbed in a trench coat and a three-piece suit.

"Urz get back here!" shouted the boy with what looked like a couple of small satellite dishes in his hands. "We have to put your dishes back on!"

"He's not listening," shouted the little cannon ball of blue.

Catching her breath, Leela turned to if Garrus was in the hall. Instead she was nearly blinded by a whirring blinding green light in Sam's right hand.

"Sorry about that, Shepard," coughed the specialist, pocketing the device in the interior of her tweed jacket before adjusting her bow-tie and fez. "I didn't hit you did I?"

"No," answered Leela with a smile. "Barely missed my eye, but no harm done."

"Good to hear," chuckled Sam as she rubbed her hands together. "I see that everyone else is here."

"Save for Kasumi," added Leela with a content sigh. "But, God knows what she's up to."

There was the sound of a struggle just outside the door. A moment later, Kasumi appeared garbed in black spandex, white gloves and boots, with a white wig and a black cat burglar mask; pulling a reluctant Garrus in through the door.

"HOLY SHIT!" blurted James and Jack when they saw Garrus.

Most of the others remained oblivious to what was going on since Jack decided to turn the music up. However, those that did see his costume were in fits of silent laughter. Leela had to admit that it was rather amusing to see Garrus dressed in a blue and white coat, white undershirt, and a top hat that read "Police Box," on it. She felt good about not being the only one that felt uncomfortable. While James and Jack continued to laugh, the others merely shouted their greetings. After shutting the door, Leela took Garrus' hand and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek.

"Hey," he said after recovering from his embarrassment.

"Hey yourself," chuckled Leela as she took in the sight of her boyfriend. "That's definitely an interesting costume."

"Says the woman who is dressed up as cyber-organic organism that was hell bent on destroying all organic life."

"Well at least one of us finds this costume amusing," fumed Leela as tugging at the bottom half of the dress. "I swear to god that woman and my mother are hell bent on making sure every party I attend something embarrassing happens to me."

"At least this time your mother isn't trying to tell people that your biotics are the result of her and your father using a certain toy that had a faulty eezo core."

"Screw you." Leela slapped Garrus' arm and pulled him into the kitchen.
"Buy me dinner first," quipped Garrus with a chuckle as Leela pulled bottled waters from the fridge. Taking one Garrus said hello to Ken who had abandoned his chalkboard in favor of a drinking contest with Steve and James.

"Holding up okay?" asked Leela as she slid a bottle of water toward the engineer.

"Fantastic," slurred Ken taking the bottle and heading toward the stairs. "I'll be back up in a minute ya boggin bawbags." She could hear James' and Steve's insults, to which he replied, "Wait till I get back, th..then I can…ughwhen did I eat sushi?"

As he stomped up the stairs, Leela and Garrus burst into laughter as Samara wandered in with an empty tray. She set it in the sink and pulled out a bottle of asari wine and a several glasses.

"Well that's a rather intense outfit," chuckled the turian as he sipped at his water.

"No less than yours," teased Samara filling her glass and pointed at her head.

"I think it makes me look rather dashing," said Garrus puffing up his chest. "And besides it makes an interesting noise." Garrus pressed a button hidden on the brim of his hat that made the light on top brighten and a familiar grinding noise echo throughout the kitchen.

"It sounds like a varren with a lung infection," commented Samara before turning to Leela. "I hope your duties as hostess aren't interfering with your ability to enjoy yourself?"

"I'm used to it, Samara," answered Leela reassuringly. "I'm just glad you were able to come."

"I am glad I could come," smiled Samara taking the human's hand. "It's been too long since we've all been together. Garrus," she nodded politely and exited calling to Hannah, Sam, and Liara that she had their drinks.

When she was gone, Garrus reached out and took Leela's hand. Her eyes turned to his and their faces grew closer; the gap between them shortening. He could feel her warm breath against his lips and for the briefest moment the party didn't exist as their lips connected. Until there was a loud scream from a child that jerked the two adults apart. The pair turned to see Kevin at the edge of the island with a red and silver version of Sam's toy buzzing at them.

"Kevin," growled Garrus his eyes narrowing on the boy. "What, in the name of the spirits, are you doing?"

"I'm protecting you," said the boy unabashedly. "She was attempting to repair herself!"

"What do you mean?" asked Garrus confused at the boy's explanation.

"Well, if she makes physical contact with you," began the boy stuffing the device into his jacket, "then she'll steal your genetic material in order to repair herself." Garrus' mandibles fluttered rapidly while Leela's face turned a bright shade of pink. Despite their looks of discomfort Kevin added, "And since you're my closest friend, it's my job to protect you from her stealing your genetic material."

"That's….that's nice Kevin," whispered Garrus while Leela buried her face in her arms. "Why don't you go and play with your sister and your aunts and uncles for a bit?"

"Okay," said the boy with a defeated sigh.

When he was gone, Garrus couldn't help but watch as his mate laughed silently, tears rolling down
her cheeks. Not finding the situation all that funny, Garrus decided to pour himself a bourbon and sipped at it while Leela continued with her silent fit of laughter. As she did, the crew members cast quizzical looks to Garrus who merely waved them off until Kaidan came in.

"What the hell happened to her?"

Pouring himself another drink, Garrus shrugged, "She's just in another one of her fits."

"Uh huh," grunted Kaidan as he pulled out a couple of beers from the fridge.

"What's that supposed to mean?" snorted Garrus as he sipped at his drink.

"Nothing," shrugged Kaidan kicking the door shut. "Just thought you might want some tips in case you forgot how to keep her from stealing your genetic material."

"Oh shut up, Westley," growled Garrus tossing an unopened bag of chips at his friend.

Bowing just in time to dodge the bag, Kaidan smirked, "As you wish."

As time went by, the party continued in a rather calm fashion. The crew continued with their chatter. Leela, Liara, Kaidan, and James all got into an argument about the advantages of biotics. Feron meanwhile got into a heated conversation with Hannah about her intelligence gathering tactics. Joker and Steve got into it about how Steve should handle the ship he'd be flying out on in the next couple of days. Garrus even had a lengthy chat about how he and Zaeed could fortify the apartment but was shot down when Leela heard them discussing how to electrify her jacuzzi and turn her appliances into low yield explosive traps. While he wasn't privy to the specifics of the conversation, Garrus caught bits and pieces of Tali, Edi, and Sam discussing the human's preferences in partners. There was a small scare as Zaeed and Wrex began hunting for something in the bar, but Hannah put a stop to it rather quickly earning her the disdain of the human mercenary.

Garrus was surprised when Kevin and Ismene came tearing out of the downstairs room. It caused a bit of alarm, as Ismene had broken up a rather intimate conversation between him and Leela to escape her brother after stealing his toy. Garrus had tried to calm them down but it was Leela who actually succeeded. It was quite surprising since she even got them to sit still during the group picture they had taken shortly after, but he suspected Hannah had a part in that. However, once that was done the kids all returned to the room with Rose and the adults continued on with their usual shenanigans.

Still, he was having fun and even laughed when he heard Leela shouting at Kasumi about going through her personal effects. Looking over the railing of his perch, Garrus snorted at the sight of his mate chasing after the thief. It took him a moment to recognize what she had in her hands, but when he did he couldn't help but laugh. He was certain that Glyph was recording the scene of the thief streaking through the apartment, boxers flailing over her head.

"JOKER! YOU OWE ME A THOUSAND CREDITS!" she shrieked.

The entire apartment burst into laughter at the spectacle. It only stopped when James caught the thief by the wrist and wrenched the underwear away from her; tossing it back to Shepard.

"Why does everyone have to spoil my fun?" Kasumi huffed as she pulled her arm away from James.

Jack had other plans and decided to start a game of keep away by snatching the boxers from Leela and tossing them to Steve. Groaning at their juvenile antics, Garrus felt a dizzy spell coming on and
decided to rest in the sitting area outside the upstairs bedrooms. Taking his hat off, he opened his bottled water foregoing any more alcohol for the evening and took a deep drink. As he relaxed into the couch, the sounds of the party became muffled by the walls. Closing his eyes, Garrus began to feel his light headedness fade. Behind him, he heard the soft tapping of shoes and opened his eyes to see an inebriated Sam stumbling toward him.

"Hey," said the engineer as she approached the couch.

"How you holding up Sam?" inquired Garrus as she rested on the couch next to him. The scent of alcohol was strong on her breath, but the goofy grin on her face told him all he needed to know.

"I'm doing great," sighed Sam as she rested her head on her fist. "How're you doing?"

"I'm having fun," chuckled Garrus at the slight slur in her voice. "Passing on the booze for the night though."

"That's a good idea," said Sam with a light yawn. "We can't have you drunk."

"No we can't," said Garrus with a nod. "Because then I couldn't protect you if something happened."

"You're so sweet," smiled Sam with a gentle pat on her friend's knee. "Just what I'd expect from my Tardis. You are my Tardis, right?"

"Yes, Sam," chuckled Garrus patting her hand, "I'm your Tardis."

"Oh good," sighed Sam as she rested her head on his shoulder. "That makes me happy."

Letting her rest her head on his shoulder, Garrus and Sam relished the quiet of the upstairs while the others began shouting over the thump of the music downstairs. As the dull thump of the bass pounded against the floor, Sam shifted from her spot and asked, "Hey, Garrus?"

"Yeah, Sam?"

"Do you mind if I ask you something?"

"I've never had a problem with you asking me things," chuckled Garrus. "What do you want to ask me?"

"Okay," sighed the human before letting out a yawn, "promise me you won't think I'm weird in asking this."

"All right," said Garrus with a throaty laugh. "I promise not to think you're weirder than I already think."

"Good," grunted Sam as she moved away from Garrus' shoulder. After composing herself, Sam locked eyes with Garrus and said, "so, we're in agreement that right now I'm The Doctor and you're the Tardis, right?"

"I'd say that's a fair deduction," Garrus laughed as he pointed to their costumes.

"That's good news," said Sam with a slight burp. "And that means that you have to follow my orders."

"In a way," replied Garrus, unsure of where exactly this conversation was going.
"Excellent because there's always something I've been wondering since I saw an episode when I was a kid," began Sam rocking slightly in the chair. "Something I've wondered if I could make it possible when I found someone to take home."

"What is it that you've been wondering about?" inquired Garrus; curiosity getting the better of him.

"Well, I've always wondered if you're willing to open your doors at the snap of my fingers. Does that mean, since you're wearing pants, if I snapped my fingers that your pants would fall to the floor?"

"Excuse me?!" gasped Garrus with a flutter of his mandibles.

Before Sam could explain or elaborate, Tali came up the stairs. Her black whip had somehow become tied around her waist and her purple cathood was beginning to lose its luster.

"Tali," exclaimed Garrus, thankful for being spared having to listen to Sam's explanation. "What's up?"

"Shepard needs to see you downstairs in her office," grumbled the engineer who noticed the now pouting Sam. "What's the matter with Sam?"

"She just needs some company," said Garrus as he rushed down the opposite set of stairs to avoid an even more awkward conversation.

Reaching to the bottom of the stairs, Garrus was surprised to see how many of the crew were dancing, but he was not surprised to see that Leela wasn't among them. Asking where she was, Garrus was told by a dancing Hannah and Steve that she had headed into her office. Finding her office, Garrus wasn't surprised to see that the dress Rose had made carefully hanging on the wall and Leela in a pair of sweats and a tank top.

"Hey," he said walking toward her desk.

"Hey," she smiled up at him setting aside her data-pad.

"Everything okay?"

He pulled a spare chair toward the desk and sat down next to her.

"Yeah," she sighed rubbing her neck, "I just had to get out of that dress."

"I can appreciate that," chuckled the sniper as he pulled his hat off. "But, unlike you, my costume is pretty comfortable."

"Well bully to you," laughed Leela before receiving a kiss from her lover. She let out a soft moan as his lips touched hers and when they parted she rested his forehead against his. "Are you having fun?"

"Well, save for Kevin's interruption earlier and that whole fiasco involving Ismene stealing his toy," Garrus gave a bit of a shrug, "Yeah I'm having a pretty good time."

"Good," she sighed standing up and twisting a bit, "I was afraid they'd cause trouble."

Climbing to his feet, Garrus ran one of his thumbs along her cheek and chuckled, "We had a long talk before coming up here. They may not like you that much, but they're getting used to you."

"Oh, goody."
They both shared a laugh and Garrus took her hands in his.

"Are you having a good time?"

"Yeah," sighed Leela rubbing her neck. "I'm just…." Before she could finish, she saw a small flash of green light from the door. Then she saw a green and gold clad hand glowing blue and a familiar purple drone flashing briefly before disappearing. She was prepared to yell at them when she noticed the flutter of Garrus' mandibles and the slight heaving of his chest. She watched his head jerk down momentarily and she had to struggle to hide her laughter at the sight of his pants around his ankles.

"I can't believe she did that," commented Garrus as he tried to recompose himself.

"Well it could be worse," laughed before giving him a kiss and heading toward the door.

"Where are you going?" he asked as he bent down to pick up his pants.

"I'm going to go and have a friendly chat with a doctor, a trickster, and a thief." There was a silent fury in Leela's voice that betrayed the smile on her face. "When I'm done, I'm going to gather up those sober enough to stand but drunk enough not to drive and toss their asses into a couple of cabs.

"Why cabs?" he asked as he fastened the pants.

"Because after this little stunt, if any of them get on my nerves any more they may end up leaving in an ambulance."
Chapter 33 Part 2

Chapter Summary

So this was the other reason why Chapter 33 took so long and the reason why it has a strict Mature rating. We get to see a bit more of what Garrus and Leela are like in the bedroom after "Go Ahead," as they're more familiar with one another's bodies. We also have a little more insight into Leela and some things you all don't know about. MWAHAHAHAHAH

Again my awesome beta :iconillusionsfire76: helped work out a few kinks and issues.

Title: To Be Whole
Author: Mizutanitony
Game: Mass Effect
Rating: M
Pairing: Garrus/FemShep
Disclaimer: Owned by Bioware and EA not me!

Chapter 33 Part 2

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When things had finally quieted down, Leela decided to finish off her night with a nice long shower. The rhythmic pounding of the water against her neck and shoulders sent relaxing shivers down her spine. While a few people required a place on the floor, two of which were Grunt and Wrex, Leela was able to get the rest of them out with no trouble. Jack decided to stay behind at the request of Ismene and Kevin and Kasumi had smartly ducked out early for fear of retribution. Still, Leela had to admit the party was a success. It wasn’t the wild one she had imagined, but it was good to reconnect with everyone again. She was just thankful that no major incidents had happened. Shutting off the water, she grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her waist and stepped out into her room. She was prepared to dress in her pajamas when she heard a knock on her bedroom door.

“Who is it?” she called as she began running a brush through her hair.

“It’s Garrus,” said the voice on the other side of the door.

“Prove it,” she ordered with a silent laugh.

“How?” he inquired sounding frustrated and tired.

“Tell me something only you would know,” she demanded after a moment’s thought. After a
minute her omni-tool beeped with, “You stole Ismene’s teddy bear,” across her screen.

“Come in,” she said with a laugh. Her door hissed open to reveal Garrus in nothing more than a pair of blue pajama bottoms. “Hello, sexy.”

“Evening,” grumbled Garrus as he shuffled stiffly through the door.

“What’s the matter?” she asked noticing his demeanor.

“Wrex’s snoring, Grunt’s drunken ramblings in the bathroom, the kids, Rose, and Jack. You name it and it’s making going to the bathroom and getting some sleep a pain.”

“I see,” hummed Leela as she applied a bit of lotion to her scars. “My bathroom’s free if you want.”

“Thanks,” grunted Garrus and he made a b-line toward the bathroom.

Leela shook her head at his reaction, a deep laugh forming in her stomach as she waited for him to come out. When the door finally opened she couldn’t help but ask, “Feeling better?”

“Much,” Garrus rumbled as his arms wrapped around her waist.

“You remember to wash your hands?”

“Please, Shepard,” he whispered, his breath hot against her wet hair, “what do you take me for?”

“An occasionally forgetful boyfriend,” she teased as he moved his hand inside the crease of her towel. She gave a slight shiver as his leathery skin came to rest on her scars.

“How can I make it up to you?” he growled, his claw making small circles against her flesh.

“That depends,” she gasped as she felt his teeth scrape against her shoulder, “what do you think is appropriate compensation?”

“You know I don’t concern myself with what’s appropriate,” teased Garrus as his hand snuck its way up her abdomen. When it came to her breast, his fingers took their time tracing their way across her skin. He could feel the small bumps form on her skin. He kissed the back of her neck, causing more of the tiny bumps to form. Coming to her nipple, he circled her areola. It peaked against his touch, as if trying to protect the small bud in the middle, it didn’t work. Instead, he gently scratched his way across the taut terrain and found his target and carefully he ran a talon across the tip of her nipple. She pressed back against him, her breath hot against the hand tracing gentle lines across her chin. She was trying her best to keep from moaning out, but he knew just what to do. Sliding his thumb along the outside of her nipple, Garrus wasted no time in giving it a firm pinch. The effect was immediate as a strangled whimper escaped her throat.

“That’s not fair,” she whimpered once she caught her breath.

“I didn’t realize there were rules,” he purred as he rolled her nipple again in his fingers while his free hand began to gently stroke her hip.

“Liar,” she groaned as she felt his thumb slowly creep toward her inner thigh. “We’re breaking one right now.”

“Don’t worry,” he whispered, his hot breath sending shivers down her spine, “I’ll explain it if they ask.”

“Okay,” she whimpered as he bit gently into her neck. “You’re mean.”
“Look who’s talking,” he chuckled as he moved his right hand to the top of her entrance. The contrast of her soft hairs against his leathery flesh elicited a deep purr from the turian and he couldn’t help but tease her a bit more. As she begged him to go lower, Garrus instead moved to her inner thigh, his longer fingers scratching gently along her delicate flesh and she gently began to grind against his thumb.

“See?” chuckled Garrus as she pressed against his thumb, “You’re only concerned with your own pleasure.” He moved his thumb upwards and gently flicked at her exposed nub making her gasp. “That’s very selfish of you.”

“Sorry,” she whimpered as he continued his gentle ministrations. The feel of his rough flesh on her inner thigh was causing her legs to give way. She had missed this, his touch, knowing the most sensitive parts of her body. The gentle flick of his claw across her clit as he massaged her legs had her knees shaking. The caress of his hands along her scarred breast had her chest heaving as she pressed back into him for support. The purr in his chest and his teasing made her knees buckle. It took everything she had to keep herself standing but once she felt the slightest tip of his finger inside her, she crumpled to the floor with Garrus right behind her.

“You’re not funny,” she groaned as she heard his laugh mix with his purr.

Removing his hand from beneath the towel, Garrus brought his hand toward Leela’s face and ran his claw gracefully across her chin.

“You feel that?” he asked as he traced a path along the delicate length of her neck and collarbone.

“Yeah,” moaned Leela, her voice quivering at the smoothness of his claw.

“And this,” he asked running the back of his hand along the scars of her left cheek.

“You had them…”

“I did,” he interrupted as flicked a claw across her clit, making her shiver against his chest. “It’s another reason why I was late.”

“I see,” she sighed as he kissed her jaw line and nipped her neck, “always prepared.”

“Always,” purred Garrus his forefinger began teasing her entrance.

He felt her relax against him; body molding to his as he caressed her. His finger dipped inside her, making her to moan. Running his hand beneath the towel again, Garrus slowly massaged the scarred flesh of her breast, rolling her nipple between his fingers causing flesh to prickle once more. Resting his chin on her shoulder, Garrus watched as her mouth slowly opened, strangled gasps escaping as his finger gently massaged her core. She tightened around him, her eyes slowly fluttering shut. Pausing for a moment, Garrus slowly stood and with minor difficulty Leela did as well.

“What are…”

“Shhh…,” shushed the turian as he began walking forward. She nodded and blindly followed his lead, walking in step with him.

Slowly, he led her toward the large mirror that was stationed next to her bed. Pulling his hand away from her breast, Garrus chuckled at the disappointed groan that escaped his lover’s throat and kissed the small lump in the center. Garrus slowly ran his finger along the fold she used to keep her towel up and wasn’t surprised when her eyes snapped open.
“No,” she pleaded softly, burying her face in his neck when she noticed what he’d done. “I don’t want you …”

“Leela,” argued Garrus with a gentle growl. Her grip relaxed and he was able to slowly begin undoing the fold. She closed her eyes as the towel began to loosen; a tear making its way down her cheek. He wiped it away with the towel before tossing it to the floor. “Open your eyes for me.”

Slowly her eyes opened, her body relaxing again as they both took in the sight of her reflection. It was the first time that Garrus could finally see the extent of the damage. She had always been so careful to hide as much of it as she could. From the scarring of her left cheek to the large burn scars covering the majority of her chest and the upper portions of her legs.

“Don’t ever hide from me,” he whispered his finger beginning to move along her flesh. “You don’t ever need to hide from me.”

“This isn’t how…”

“You’re beautiful,” he said. He saw her face flush and felt his mandibles twitch at her response. “Don’t be embarrassed.” His voice was husky and he could feel her shiver again at the warmth of his breath on her ear. “I’m not ashamed,” he said tracing the outer patterns of the burn on the left side of her face.

“I’ve seen them before and they’ve never bothered me,” he continued as his hand moved along her torso, fondling the small mounds of flesh and massaging her stomach. “They tell your story Leela, and it’s a story I never want to stop reading.”

His hand came to rest on her chin and with his thumb; he turned her to look in his eyes. His heart nearly skipped a beat when he saw the desire in them. It was a look he’d become quite familiar with over the past couple years. Yet instead of the ache that he saw in the mirror, he could only see the love she felt for him reflected in her gaze. Unable to resist, he pressed his lips to hers; feeling her lips suck on his tongue making his purr grow even louder. When they parted, he saw something from the corner of his eye that made him chuckle.

“What is it?” she asked, her voice weak but still curious.

“Look in the mirror.” When she turned her head he saw a small smile grace her lips and he kissed her again. “See that?” he asked nuzzling her cheek, “the scars on our faces line up.”

“Yeah,” she answered with a small hum, “that’s really something.”

“Glad you agree,” he purred as he rubbed her inner thigh. “So please,” he asked while his teeth grazed her jaw, “stop hiding from me.”

“Okay,” she whispered leaning back and kissing the scars on his cheek before hissing as he reinserted his finger. “I’m…”

“Don’t be,” he said with a kiss to her jaw. Slowly he began to thrust his finger inside her; the muscles clamping down on the digit as she ground back against him. He could taste the sweat on the back of her neck. Moving the hair aside, he licked along the length of her neck finally causing her knees to buckle. Catching her, he fell to the ground with her, pulling her into his lap.

“Garrus,” she yelped at the sudden intrusion. “You’re too…”

“Sorry,” he whispered; partially removing his finger.
He watched her in the mirror, the rise and fall of her chest, the way her tongue licked at her lips before he reinserted his finger. Her hips arched and he felt himself go deeper inside her. More cautious of his actions, he pulled out a bit as she thrust against his finger wanting him inside her. Instead he denied her this pleasure, occasionally pulling his finger out to gently pinch her clit drawing a pleading whine from her.

“You’re ready,” he growled as he nuzzled her neck.

Sweat glistened down her neck, plastering her long hair against her scalp and back. Brushing aside her hair with his other hand, he found the claw marks from the first night together. He bit down, releasing small drops of blood. She protested but he silenced her by whispering that he had Chakwas prepare their counter measures in case of an emergency. She agreed with a limp nod, her breath was labored. He could tell that she was ready. The way she pushed against his hand, grinding against what bit of palm she could make contact with. The way she tried to hide her excitement as she forced her breathing through her mouth silenced only when he kissed her. Finally he heard it, the strangled moan that always told him when she was about to climax. It didn’t take much; just a gentle pinch and he felt her body piston. He watched as pleasure coursed through her as he kissed her; muffling her moans and knuckles whitening as her fists clenched. Slowly her body fell back into his, her breathing relaxing as she placed gentle kisses along his jaw and neck earning her an appreciative purr.

“I take it you enjoyed that,” chuckled Garrus as he ran his fingers along her stomach and thighs. He received only a nod as she curled against his chest and straddled him. “I guess I’m supposed to carry you to the bed now?”

He received another nod and lightly nipped at her neck. Normally, she remained silent to tease Garrus but his instinct told him that he had gone above and beyond this time. It was only when he did a truly exceptional job that he made her too embarrassed to speak. Sliding them along the floor, Garrus felt Leela’s chest rock against his as she laughed, a series of short whistles escaping her nose.

“Keep it up,” growled Garrus as he began to slide up the side of the bed. She gave him a tempting look as he settled them on the bed; her straddling his left leg as she rubbed her forehead against his. He laughed and returned the gesture before placing a series of gentle kisses along her collarbone. “It’s not going to work,” he teased his hand returning to her inner thigh. “I know what happened.”

He heard a strangled gasp escape her throat followed by a short deeper laugh.

“You’re such a pervert,” she whispered in a voice only known to a select few.

“Only for you,” he replied nipping at her jaw. He watched her cheeks flush and pulled her into a kiss. “You don’t need to be embarrassed,” he purred as he kissed her cheek.

“I’m not,” she replied kissing him. “It’s just weird knowing that hearing this…” she gulped loudly, but her voice refused to return to its usual pitch. Instead of feeling embarrassed, she felt her heart melt at the sound of his purr when hearing what they called her, “secret voice.”

“As long as it’s just for me,” purred Garrus as her lips sucked on his neck.

“Only for you,” she whispered, the sound of her deeper register drawing a throaty growl from her lover.

“Good,” he groaned as she gently sucked on his mandible.
To others, it would seem strange that he enjoyed his mate’s “secret voice”. While he only ever viewed her as Leela, he loved the voice that he would always deem her true voice. The sound of this hidden voice, the one that she had worked so hard to hide always excited him.

The first time he had ever heard it was after Rannoch. It had been a tougher battle than they anticipated. It was emotionally difficult losing Legion right on the heels of Mordin and Thane. While they had gained much over those few days, the impact of their deaths had finally taken its toll. It had been unintentional, Garrus had only gone to comfort her; instead they had ended up naked and clawing at each other and the sheets. When she had climaxed, it was unlike anything he’d ever heard from her. It took a moment for him to process it. When he asked her about it, she had hid in the bathroom. It took him a few minutes of gentle coercion to get her to open the door. When she did, he asked what had happened and when she spoke it was something that he’d never heard from any human.

It was a strange mix of feminine and masculine. Her voice had always had a deeper timbre than most of the females he’d come across, something he attuned to her military training, but this voice told him so much more. It was like a turian voice; two different versions of Leela speaking at once, the shy insecure boy that she had once been and the woman she had become. He asked her to explain it to him, how she controlled the muscles in her throat. She did as requested and buried her face in her arm when she saw the reaction it had on his lower plates. He ignored it and crawled toward her, his form pushing her to the shower floor. She had protested, but it fell on deaf ears as Garrus had only one thought on his mind.

“Only for me,” he had growled when he felt the deeper vibrations of her laugh echo through his body; bringing him back to reality.

“I’m only yours,” she whispered, her voice deep but gentle; eyes brimming with delight as he shifted uncomfortably beneath her. “Something wrong?” she asked as her hand traced its way down his chest, her fingers finding the little chinks in his plating that led her to his sensitive spots.

“No,” he replied though the slight spike in his flange told her otherwise.

“Liar,” Leela smirked as she ran a finger along his fringe. As she ran her hand along it, she let her index finger slip beneath the plates on his head. When she found the bit of flesh she was looking for, all it took was a little bit of pressure to start his mandibles quivering.

“Am…not…,” he gasped she sucked once more on his mandible.

“They’re twitching.”

A soft growled passed her lips as her hand came to rest on the hem of his pants.

“It’s only because…,” he gulped loudly as her hand slipped inside his pants; her finger brushing at the sensitive skin of his sheath. He felt his mandibles twitch violently and he couldn’t help but graze his teeth along her neck.

“Because what?” she teased, running a finger along the outside of his sheath.

She could feel his heat on the plates and probed gently to find him waiting for her. She heard a gentle growl as she touched him, but paid it no mind as it was merely posturing. Her nail scraped along the ridge of his tip, causing him to bite down once more on her neck. She endured the pain but couldn’t hide her discomfort once she decided to run her nail along the slit in his tip.

“Gently,” she ordered when she felt him bite down a bit harder than normal. “Good boy,” she
cooed as she slipped another finger inside, stroking the underside of his shaft.

Leela felt him grow with each touch, her hand curling around his shaft when she felt it against her palm. She moved her hand cautiously along it, applying more and more pressure as she approached his tip. Her hand grew slick as she stroked him, his natural lubrication easing her journey along the familiar ridges and gentle curve of his cock. Occasionally, she could feel his tip twitch as she reached the base of his head, his pre-cum dripping along the side of her hand.

“Leela,” he groaned with a thrust into her hand. She could feel his nails dig into her back followed by a lick at the wounds he’d caused.

“No,” she whispered, denying him release.

She heard a whimper escape his throat and his head bury itself in her neck, but he said nothing else. She encompassed the tip of his cock with her palm, her fingers curling around the rim of the head. Slowly she began to massage it with her palm, his warmth slowly spreading across it.

“See?” she whispered into his neck as another twitch caused more warmth to lubricate her hand. “I’m not just concerned with my own pleasure.”

“I’m sorry,” whimpered Garrus at the light torturous stroking of his cock. “I didn’t mean…”

“You meant it,” she growled, the depth of her voice causing his jaw to tremble. Wrapping her hand tighter around his shaft she began to stroke once more. “Didn’t you?”

“Yes,” he whined as she came to his tip, his cock twitching at the need for release. “I’m sorry.” A low moan escaped his throat when he felt Leela’s grip tighten.

“I don’t believe you,” she teased, letting her voice drop a bit lower.

Releasing her grip, she ran her forefinger along the underside. She watched as his hips followed her finger, running a callused fingertip along his glistening erection. She laughed inwardly, knowing that he was enjoying this. She would even go so far as to say he was relishing it; surrendering himself to her.

“I do, Commander,” he whispered earning him a flick to his tip. “Spirits,” he groaned as he felt some drops of cum land on his hips.

“That’s not what I’m called anymore, Garrus,” she growled flicking his tip again.

“I’m sorry, Ad…admiral,” he panted at the sudden surge of pain. He tried to hide his discomfort, but a tiny whimper still escaped him. When he felt her hand on his cock once more, he buried his face in her neck. “Leela,” he begged, his flange spiking as he felt the pressure inside him finally becoming too much, “Leela, please?”

“Yes, Garrus,” she whispered, knowing that he had finally had enough. “You can cum.”

With one final stroke, she felt him pulse against her hand. His breathing was deep and ragged as he came. She felt his nails dig into her side, drawing a bit of blood as she stroked him. He twitched with each stroke, more of him flowing out and onto her hand and the sheets. His eyes were shut tightly and she couldn’t help but kiss his mandibles as they twitched with each ragged breath. When she finally felt him relax against her, she continued to stroke him as she whispered gently to him. Slowly his cock retreated inside; plates closing, but she wasn’t finished with him.

Lifting his head, she slowly traced the fingers of her left hand along his lips; his fluids leaving a
small trail along his plating. He said nothing and stuck out his tongue licking at the small trail before finding her fingers. She felt his purr in her chest as he began to clean her. Taking her gently by the wrist, he started at the heel of her palm, lapping up the greatest concentration of his fluids before running along the length of each finger. Her eyes remained focused on him as he went about his duty. Her mind enamored at the dedication to the task she had given him with a single minded devotion. His tongue finding each crack and crevice that his fluids had penetrated. Like him enjoying the sound of her more masculine voice, she knew that he enjoyed his cleaning just as much as she enjoyed watching him. When he finished, she leaned in and kissed him; sucking the taste of him off his tongue. Both of them moaned into each other before breaking the kiss and relaxing in one another’s warmth.

“How’re you feeling?” asked Garrus rather lazily.

“I feel fantastic,” laughed Leela after a quick massage of her throat.

“Good,” he chuckled when he caught onto what she was doing.

“What about you?” she asked, her voice slowly returning to its usual pitch.

“I feel like a shower.” That got him a laugh from his mate and feeling his courage rise he asked, “Care to join me?”

“Yeah,” she sighed before climbing off his lap and pulling him off the bed.

She laughed when she saw a slight caution in his step. Keeping his hand in hers, she led him to the shower where they both began cleaning one another. They were both careful to avoid doing things that they knew would excite one another, but that didn’t stop them from the occasional kiss or playful pinch. As she finished washing her hair for the second time that evening, Leela shook the water from her eyes only to open them and find Garrus leaning against the wall.

“Garrus,” she asked cautiously hoping he wasn’t having an attack.

“I’m fine,” he sighed regaining his composure instantly. “I just got a little dizzy.”

“Are you sure?”

Despite his calm demeanor, and the lack of his mandibles twitching, she still couldn’t fight being worried.

“I’m sure, Leela,” he reassured her, reaching over and shutting off the water. As he retracted his hand, he ran it along her hair, his claws stroking the tangled mass of red. “It was just a dizzy spell.”

“Okay,” she said before giving him another kiss and exiting the shower.

Grabbing a couple of towels from the linen closet, she handed one to him and dried herself quickly before heading back to the bedroom. As he dried himself off, Garrus noticed that there was a bit of a problem with their current predicament. Stepping out into the bedroom, he watched as Leela pulled on a long-sleeved tee-shirt before sliding on a pair of boxers.

“Ummm,” coughed Garrus when he noticed her outfit. “Can you go into the kids’ room and get the overnight bag?”

“Why,” laughed Leela as she tossed took his towel from around his neck.

“I want to be dressed before I try and make my way back to the living room.”
“I see,” answered Leela after his explanation. She said nothing else before heading into the closet. He could hear the scraping of her drawers and when she reappeared she had a pair of undergarments and pajama bottoms for him.

“Solana,” she explained after seeing the confusion in his eyes. “She dropped them off a couple days ago; thought we might need them.”

“Thanks,” he laughed as he began to get dressed. When he finished, he couldn’t resist pulling her close and burying his face in her hair, relishing the strawberry scent.

“Can you stay?” she asked wrapping her arms around his waist. “I mean, I know we agreed to go slow and if you don’t want to stay…”

“I’ll stay,” he said pulling her close and burying his face in her hair. “But on one condition.”

“The sheets,” she asked suppressing her laughter.

“The sheets,” he repeated before joining her.

~*~

She woke up a couple of times that night in a cold sweat; her mouth dry and her hair plastered to her head. She had no trouble falling back asleep, because he was there; his arms holding her tightly and his voice in her ear telling her that everything was okay. When she woke the third time however he was gone, his side of the bed cold but still messy from where he’d slept. Seeing that it was well past nine in the morning, she pulled herself from the mattress and made her way downstairs.

She could smell something spicy in the kitchen. When she reached the bottom she found Sam, her aunt, EDI (who was still dressed in her costume), Joker, Jack, and the kids all sitting in front of the bar eating food and watching a movie. Waving hello to them, she found her mother stumbling out of the kitchen, heavy bags under her eyes and a steaming cup of coffee in her hand. She muttered something close to a good morning and lumbered up the stairs.

“What’s her…,” Leela’s voice trailed off when she saw Garrus standing at the stove cooking breakfast, complete with an apron.

“What?” he asked looking a little perturbed at the look she gave his apparel. “You act like you’ve never seen me cooking before?”

“No,” she laughed joining him at the island. “I’ve just never seen you cook anything edible or wearing an apron for that matter.”

“Fair point,” he grunted as he laid a sausage like patty on a plate. “What do you want to eat?” he asked after washing the pan and setting it back on the stove.

“Whatsoever the other humans are eating,” she answered with a chuckle. Garrus nodded, moving to fry up some bacon and began preparing waffle mix.

“So,” she coughed as she got up and poured herself a mug of tea, “when did you learn to do all this?”

“I made myself learn,” he replied as he poured the batter into a waffle iron. “Kids can’t eat premade food all the time.”
“I find it rather…stimulating.” she said, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek before heading back to her seat.

“I see,” answered Garrus with a quick twitch of his mandibles. “But I don’t think that’d be wise to do here in the middle of the kitchen.” He gave her a wink before adding, “It may traumatize our friends and family.”

“I completely agree,” laughed Leela as she began to fiddle with a small black box on the island, “especially if they hear us.”

“Don’t touch that,” snapped Garrus earning him a reproachful look. “Sorry,” he sighed taking the box, “that’s not really something to be opened right now.”

“Okay,” said Leela pulling her hand away from the box and instead fingered the lip of her cup. “Where’d it come from?”

“EDI,” answered Garrus as he began plating her food. “Well EDI and I figured it out together, but she’s the one who noticed it.”

“You brought EDI along on a shopping trip?” Leela was actually quite amused by this notion as she thought such a trip would be like taking a child.

“Yeah,” answered Garrus handing her a bowl of fruit to accompany her breakfast.

“Garrus,” asked Leela after swallowing a large chunk of maple covered waffle, “there’s only a couple of things that can fit into that box so it’s no use hiding it.”

Swallowing the meat he had been cooking when she entered, Garrus let out a sigh of defeat and shut off the stove before picking up the box. It shook in his hand, but there was no sound of rattling which removed one possible answer from her list.

“All right,” Garrus sighed, sitting down next to her. “Can you please put down the knife and fork?”

Leela stuffed one last bit of waffle in her mouth and smiled apologetically.

“Sorry,” she said before pushing the plate away. “You have my full attention.”

“You sure?” he asked wiping away a drop of syrup with his thumb.

“Yes,” she chuckled, licking at the syrup.

“Okay,” he said with a shake of his head he set the box down and began. “I’m pretty sure you’ve already figured out what’s in this box and what it’s going to be used for. But I’m not going to ask you today.”

“I see,” replied Leela with a twitch of a smirk on her lip. “Why’s that?”

“Well there are quite a few reasons. The first is…” he began when there was the sound of thundering footsteps as Kevin chased after Ismene, shouting something about her hitting him in the face with her bear while EDI chased after them, curious as to the outcome of their quarrel, “those two.” They both shared a quiet laugh before Garrus continued. “The next reason is that we’re both too busy with our work to take time to focus exclusively on ourselves.”

“I can agree with that,” Leela sighed biting into a piece of melon. “I know last night was a bit rushed.”
“A little,” Garrus chuckled taking a bite of his meat patty. “But you can’t deny that it was a long
time coming.”

“Damn right it was,” Leela chuckled placing a hand on his thigh.

He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek before reaching down and placing her hand on the table.
Grabbing the box, he turned her hand over and placed the box in it. “Shouldn’t you be holding onto
this?”

“No,” answered Garrus as he closed their fingers around the box. “This is for you, for when we
both feel that we’re ready.”

“Garrus…I…,” she took a deep breath and sniffled loudly. “Okay,” she laughed wiping a stray tear
away, “I’ll let you put it on when we’re ready.”

“Okay,” laughed Garrus wiping away his own stray tear. Palming her cheek, he rested his forehead
against hers and whispered, “I love you, Leela.” He started to panic when he saw that she still had
tears rolling down her cheeks. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No,” she laughed wiping at a few more tears. “It’s just,” she paused and covered his hand with
hers, “You’ve never said it before.”

“Yes I have,” retorted Garrus with an annoyed twitch of his mandibles.

“When?” teased Leela taking a bite of her waffle before dabbing at her eyes with a napkin.

“When you’re asleep,” he whispered feeling a sudden heated flush.

“Like I said last night,” she gave him a gentle tap on the nose with her fork, “you’re a pervert.”

“Like you haven’t done the same,” teased Garrus. Taking her the fork from her hand he gave it a
gentle squeeze and nuzzled her forehead. “I am sorry that it’s taken me so long to,” he let out a
small cough before finishing, “vocalize it to you. I just thought that I made my feelings quite clear
and that you knew how I felt.”

“I see,” she laughed leaning into him. “But I am curious that since I’ve only heard it once vocally.
How the other way you’ve said it sounds.”

Expecting some loud high pitched noise to emanate from him, Leela was rather surprised when he
gently palmed the back of the head and pressed her forehead against his chest. She felt a deep
resonating hum resonate from his chest in the form of two long purrs and five short rapid ones.

“Are you serious?” she asked in disbelief.

“That’s a close approximation,” he laughed pulling her close. “But, I promise to say it out loud
more often.”

“Fine with me,” agreed Leela snuggling against his chest. “Just say it one more time.”

“Your food’s getting cold,” snorted Garrus hoping to save him the embarrassment of having the
others hear him.

“That’s why we invented things to reheat them.” Her elbow prodded him in the ribs which earned
her an annoyed grunt about how the food was better warm. “Just say it.”

Groaning half-heartedly, Garrus rested his head on hers. Running his hands through her hair, he felt
her nuzzle against his chin and whispered, “I love you, Leela.”

“I know, Garrus,” she replied, her fingers locking with his. “I love you as well.”

“No Vakarian without Shepard.”

“And no Shepard without Vakarian.”
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Leela goes on a mission and meets a few new people. One of which will have a bigger effect on her life than she thinks.

Chapter 34

“So Shepard,” shouted Kaidan over the hail of bullets, “bet you thought you’d never have to wear armor again?!”

“Shut up, Kaidan!” Leela reloaded her Paladin as another round whizzed past her ear. “Just make sure you subdue them; not kill them!”

“No shit!” Kaidan pulled away the weapons from a couple of nearby settlers before gently throwing them into a bush.

Leela shot forward with her biotics when she noticed a decrease in enemy fire. The people that had been firing on them stared up at her in shock as she pointed both her pistol and shotgun down at them.

“Lay down your weapons,” she ordered.

She could see the fear in their eyes; guns shaking in their hands as they realized who was staring down at them. The asari leading them nodded and set her gun on the ground as the turian and salarian followed suit.

Holstering her weapons, Leela lifted theirs and sent them flying toward a nearby rock before speaking into her radio, “Steve, we’re clear to bring in the supplies.”

“What supplies??” barked the turian stepping forward. She was a large female with black facial markings and silver plates. She was young, judging by her voice, but old enough to have served given the tattered state of her armor.

The asari stepped forward and gently pushed the female back as she spoke, “I believe a more correct question would be, ‘Why have you brought us supplies?’”

“If you’re willing to listen and not shoot at us,” fumed Leela as she puffed her chest up, “I’d be more than happy to explain.”

“Fair enough,” conceded the asari with a nod to her cohorts. When they were gone, she extended her hand, “Jee Regala, I’m the head of this settlement.” When Leela took her hand she apologized, “I am sorry for our behavior Commander.”

Leela gave her a nod before correcting her, “It’s Rear-Admiral now.”

When they finished their conversation, Leela was surprised to see how much the settlers had calmed down. She couldn’t really blame them for their initial reaction. Leela and her team had arrived with military equipment. Though lightly armed, it had been enough to send the settlers into
a frenzy and began firing at the seemingly unexpected arrival. Leela could have sworn that one of the people working under her had sent word ahead, but given their greeting it was clear there had been a miscommunication.

“Once again, Rear-Admiral…”

“Just call me Shepard,” chuckled Leela at Jee’s insistence of calling her by rank.

“Very well, Shepard,” the name rolling clumsily off her tongue. “I would like to extend to both you and your people our gratitude in helping us rebuild.”

“We need to stand side by side,” replied Leela with a sincere smile. “If we don’t then the victory was for no reason.”

“It’s still odd to see the geth helping us,” replied Jee as she watched a Prime and several pyros begin repairing a destroyed building.

“Just treat them with respect and they will do the same.”

“I’ll make sure to pass along the message.” Jee nodded, giving Leela one more handshake before heading off to facilitate her people.

When she was alone, Leela let out a loud sigh finally able to relax. It had been a huge risk arriving in the manner that they had. With an unidentified signal to go on, they had little choice but to conscript armed frigates as escorts for their transport. Leela had been reticent to join in this mission, since it meant her having to possibly engage in combat. Before entering the atmosphere, she’d gone through the usual process of equipping her armor. She even wrote an entry but she was still uncomfortable. She had hoped she wouldn’t have to be sent into active combat, but given the circumstances, she’d been foolish to think they wouldn’t fire back. It was why she ordered the use of non-lethal rounds when their scanners picked up bio-signatures of Citadel space species. If she hadn’t, they’d be burying bodies instead of fixing buildings along with the pride and injuries of the settlement’s citizens.

“Shepard!”

Leela broke her gaze from the geth workers and turned to see Tali approach with a geth hunter.

“Tali,” she said with a smile, “and….”

“Nare,” replied the geth with a higher register than Leela expected.

“Nare,” repeated Leela with a slight inclination of her head. “What can I do for you?”

“I was coming to report that we should be able to leave the planet in about three standard weeks.” The usual weariness in Tali’s voice told Leela that there was more unwelcome news.

“Nare,” inquired Leela with a small sigh, “can you leave us for a moment?”

“Of course,” replied the Geth with a small bow. “Shepard-Admiral and Tali’Zorah.”

When Nare was gone Tali removed her facial coverings and took a deep breath.

“Keelah this planet is murder on my sinuses.”

“I thought you had taken the treatment,” chuckled Leela as they began walking toward one of the buildings.
“That doesn’t mean I still can’t have an adverse reaction to unknown flora.” Tali removed a small handkerchief and blew loudly into it before handing Leela a pad. “That’s the shipping manifest as well as the duty roster for our visit.”

“An additional two weeks!” Leela exclaimed after reading over it. “That explains it,” she mused after seeing the condition of the prefab units and their supply levels. “I’m surprised they’ve lasted this long.”

“Well, they’ve had to make do,” groaned Tali after blowing her nose again. “My people have already sent in reports of irrigation systems and several species of animals. They were lucky they had prepared before the war. If they hadn’t, the turians on this settlement would have starved.”

“Good,” sighed Leela taking a sip from her canteen. “Do you need to visit the medical tent?”

Tali shook her head after yet another prolonged sneeze.

“I’ll be fine in a couple days. Remember I’m a quarian, we adapt to our illnesses.”

“Still,” smiled Leela with a pat on the engineer’s head, “get an antihistamine or something. I can’t have you covering our hosts in phlegm.”

“Fine,” groaned Tali snatching her pad back, “I will mail you the information once I get this,” she motioned at the small dribble on her nose, “under control.”

Deciding it best to accompany Tali, Leela made sure she was taken care of before heading to the transport ship to check on the unloading. It was progressing smoothly. At least a third of the supplies they had brought with them were already unloaded and the equipment for night work was already in place. The settlement was in desperate need of repairs and resupply and Leela was glad to be of help. As she returned to her quarters on the transport, she was glad to strip out of her armor and take a shower. She still had several reports to file and calls to make, but after that fire fight she was in need of some form of relaxation.

Just the mere thought of firing her gun again sent shivers throughout her body. As the water pulsed against her back, she couldn’t help but watch her hands tremor violently. Balling them up, she slammed them against the wall until she felt her fists go numb. It didn’t do much, but Leela was glad to lose the feeling for just a moment. When she finally did regain feeling, she cleaned herself up and was fine until she heard a loud slamming noise from inside her room. Putting on her robe, she reached for the spare gun she kept hidden in the bathroom and burst into her quarters to see Steve and Joker cleaning up familiar looking black case.

“Hey Shepard,” said Joker with a slight blush on his face. “Umm, you think you want to x-y-z?”

It wasn’t until she noticed Steve’s averted gaze, Joker’s pulling at his cap, and the hint of a breeze brushing past her nethers that Leela realized that she had forgotten to put on her pants. Returning to the bathroom, Leela pulled on her sweats and came out asking, “What the hell is this?”

“This,” announced Steve with a satisfied smirk, “is one of those containers you kept in your old quarters.”

“One of my…. ”

Leela shot forward not caring at what the two of them saw and began inspecting the container. It didn’t take long for her to find the markings. Rubbing her fingers along the knife marks she’d made, Leela let out a loud sigh and stood up excitedly. First, she gave Steve a tight hug and a kiss before turning to Joker and doing the same, albeit much more gently.
“Thanks,” mumbled Joker stepping away quickly and resting on a nearby chair, hands understandably in his lap.

“Sorry,” apologized Leela as she readjusted her robe. “It’s just that I didn’t realize you guys had found these.

“Actually,” replied Steve with a nervous cough, “Garrus has most of them. This one we didn’t even know had gone missing until now.”

“Who had it?” Leela didn’t care that Garrus had seen the others but the thought that someone else had gotten to them bothered her.

“It was actually in Alliance lock up,” explained Joker his hands fidgeting in his lap. “They were keeping them in case you didn’t come back and they needed to make a film or something. They tried to get the ones Garrus has, but when they came for them...”

“Of course he was prepared for them,” Leela laughed and sat down on case giving it a gentle pat. “Thanks guys,” she sighed contentedly before pointing at the door. “Now get the hell out of here so I can get changed or I’m going to tell EDI and...”

“Detzan,” added Steve.

“Detzan, that you two did more than drop off a container filled with my journals.”

Both men hurried out the door and Leela finished dressing. Then she left the ship with a fresh journal and pen in her hand. Most of the day crew was clocking out for the evening and she accepted some of their pads before settling down in the mess area that Jee had pointed out earlier. Finding a table in a corner before digging into her meal, she pulled one of her journals out form the pile of pads. Then uncapped her pen and began writing; stopping only to eat. She had no real thoughts on what to say, but it was best to get it out the way she used to back when she was younger and frustrated. It felt good to let it everything out especially the way the past couple of years had been. Even when she had been captive she had few people to talk to. She didn’t have the means to express herself beyond the occasional painful scream from her surgeries or the violent outbursts she had when doing farm work for her captors. As her pen flew across the paper, Leela remained unaware of a presence until she decided to take a sip of water. When she did, she saw a young turian boy and girl staring at her.

“Hello,” she replied giving them a smile. “Is there something I can do for you?”

“You shot at our mother earlier,” stated the boy calmly.

“I did,” replied Leela after a moment’s silence. “I am sorry that I did it but we were protecting ourselves.”

“Why didn’t you use real ammunition?” asked the girl with a curious twitch of her mandibles.

“Well,” grunted Leela after taking another bite of pasta. “We didn’t know who we’d encounter or if they were friendly or hostile so we didn’t want to take the risk of unnecessarily hurting people.”

“Does it make any difference?” asked the boy with a scalpel-sharp glare.

Leela stopped mid chew caught off guard by the question and swallowed loudly before nodding. “Considering that we took that precaution; I’d say it does.”

“But what about the gunships?” the girl questioned; her gaze no less penetrating than her brother’s.
“Those were a precaution as well,” answered Leela. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest but she remained calm.

“I don’t like the contradiction,” commented the boy shaking his head. “If you’re willing to take the heavy armaments for air support you should take them in for your ground support as well.”

“Neither do I,” sighed his sister. “Humans are weird.”

Both of them turned and wandered away back toward their mother who immediately set to scolding them. Leela didn’t need to be a master in picking up on the subtleties of turian emotions to know what she was saying. The furious glances of the female in her direction was enough to tell Leela that she’d be better off on the ship.

“Anything I can do about that, Shepard?”

Turning, Leela saw Tali and Sam standing behind her watching the turian scold her children before returning them to their seats. Shaking her head, she pointed at the two empty chairs across from her and closed her journal. Sam had decided to go with the stew and it actually smelt quite delicious, while Tali stuck with a regiment of fruit.

“Trying to kickstart the process with vitamins,” asked Leela after swallowing a mouthful of pasta.

“Yes and no,” Tali sighed as she sniffed what looked like a piece of melon before biting. “I’ve been craving sweeter things lately. Doctor says it’s a possible side effect of the treatments. But they won’t know until the blood work is done.”

“That’s a bit ominous,” commented Sam after taking a bite of stew drenched bread. “I mean they don’t normally run blood tests unless it’s serious.”

“It’s not uncommon among quarians,” remarked Tali after sipping at her tea.

“Need me to put in a call to Chakwas or Michel?” Leela was growing a bit concerned about Tali’s lax attitude at the situation.

“It’s a cold,” chuckled Tali. “If it was anything more, I would have contacted them right away. But, this is a cold and I’m taking the necessary precautions just to make sure.”

“Okay then,” Leela sighed before turning to Samantha. “How’re those reports going?”

“Today’s work went smoothly,” commented Sam as she handed Leela a pad. “But we’re still going to need a few more days before we can fully get a handle on something resembling a set schedule.”

“Can the settlement spare anyone? Engineers or scientists?”

“Very few,” sighed Sam as she took her pad back. “This is a farming settlement so most of them have a rudimentary knowledge of what needs to be done.” She exhaled loudly and took a large bite of stew before saying, “But it still won’t help since we’d need to spend time correcting and training them.”

“Then do it,” Leela barely acknowledged Sam’s argument and ordered, “They need to be trained. We can’t stay here forever and even the people who decide to stay are going to need help. Better they learn it now rather than when an accident happens.”

“Of course,” conceded Sam as she made a note on her pad. “I will contact Jee and her people tomorrow.”
“Never thought I’d see that again,” Tali shook with silent laughter and refused to stop when Leela glared at her.

“What’s so amusing?” Leela was confused but found herself smiling nonetheless.

“You acting like a commanding officer,” teased Tali as she sipped her tea. “I rather miss it.”

“I don’t.”

Leela and Tali turned their attention to Sam who asked with a shrug, “What?”

“You don’t miss being aboard the Normandy?” Tali asked, sounding offended at the prospect of Sam not enjoying her time aboard the ship.

“I never said that.” Sam stuck her tongue out at Tali before taking another bite of stew. “I’m merely stating that I did not enjoy certain aspects of serving with Shepard.”

“What the hell did I do to you?!” exclaimed Leela through a mouth full of pasta.

“I seem to recall a large amount of ass chewings because I misfiled a report once or twice.” Sam gave Leela smirk before adding, “Not to mention how many times I caught you and Garrus…”

“All right,” sighed Leela tossing down her fork, “I get it. I was a bit of a pain.”

“Well, we all had a reason to be,” said Tali with a reassuring pat on Leela’s shoulder. “Not every day that you have to worry about impending galactic doom.”

“Yeah, worry,” Leela mumbled; fork clattering against her plate.

Her appetite dissipated, Leela gathered her things and left the mess hall heading out into the night. The planet was rather beautiful, more of a deciduous forest than anything and rather brisk, but overall pleasant. The sky was a deep purple and the stars had an odd blue reflection to them that Leela hadn’t seen before. Walking through the work area, Leela was granted several salutes by the military personnel and she returned them half-heartedly, her mind weighted by darker thoughts.

Deciding that she needed to occupy her mind, Leela headed toward the workout area of the transport ship when she was interrupted by what felt like a wall.

“What the f…,” she looked up to see a large man standing in front of her dressed in an Alliance engineer’s outfit and a ball cap.

She couldn’t quite place it, but she felt like she’d seem him somewhere before. He was tall, broad, and tan with eyes that were a gentle brown. He had a lot of freckles but it was his chin, nose, and eyes that bothered her. The way they fit his face was eerily familiar, but the shock on his face kept her from probing too deep.

“Sorry,” she took a moment to look over his outfit, “Specialist Taushir.”

“It’s okay, Rear-Admiral.” His voice was deep and gentle, a sign that he had yet to really see combat. He gave her a quick salute before taking her hand, “I should have been paying more attention.”

“No worries,” she said feeling a smile form on her lips. “Are you starting or ending?”

“I’m done with my shift, ma’am.”

She could tell he was nervous and giving his arm a gentle squeeze she said, “You been with the
“I just graduated basic about seven months ago,” his words were rushed and she could feel him tense up at her touch.

“Relax, Corporal,” she said with what she hoped was a calming smile, “I’m not here to cause any problems. I’m just going to hit the gym before going to bed.”

“It’s not that, Rear-Admiral.”

Leela could see his eyes peering at her beneath the brim of his cap. She wished the lighting were better so she could get a better look at his face but he was keeping himself hidden quite well, as if he didn’t want to be seen.

“Then what is it?” she asked as the communicator in her ear begin to beep. “Pardon me. Yeah?”

“Shepard, it’s Traynor.”

“What’s the problem, Sam?”

“No problems. It’s just that you have an incoming transmission from Garrus.”

“Thanks, Sam. Tell him I’ll get back to him in a few.” Cutting the link she turned her attention back to the corporal and asked, “Sorry about that. You were saying?”

“It’s nothing,” he said with a forced grin. “You should go and take care of whoever is trying to contact you.”

“Corporal,” she reprimanded, knowing exactly what kind of grin he was giving her. “If someone is giving you problems, I can help you sort it out. Believe it or not, I know a thing or two about having to stick up for yourself.”

“It’s not that kind of problem,” he shook his head as he gave her a quick salute, “but I appreciate the concern, ma’am.”

“Okay,” she said after returning it. “If you have any problems, I do keep an open line of communication. Even if you’re staying here for a while. I take a vested interest in those under my command.”

“I’m sure you do,” he scoffed with what she could swear there was a hint of contempt in his voice. “But, I have a feeling the person you need to call back takes more precedence than a soldier like me.”

“Okay,” answered Leela rather shocked by his reply. “Still,” she placed a hand on his shoulder, “just because I may not have a personal connection with you, doesn’t mean I don’t care about what happens to you. You’re someone under my command and that means a lot more to me than just giving orders to you.”

“Thanks,” he said with a heavy sigh. “But, I’ll be okay for now.”

“All right,” she said releasing his arm and heading toward her quarters. “My door is always open,” she called back as she entered the lift.

But when she looked, he had already left the cargo bay.
Up in her quarters, Leela dropped into her chair just a little too hard and let out a whine of pain as she hit the padding. Rubbing the base of her spine, she checked her omni-tool and was glad to see it was only nine in the morning on Earth. Inputting the necessary information, Leela waited as her monitor buzzed. As she waited, she began flipping through the pads. She made a few notes before glancing at the screen, suddenly falling out of her chair to the floor with a surprised screech.

“Ha ha,” said a voice on the other end as it removed a werewolf mask. “I scared you.”

“Yeah,” gulped Leela as she climbed into her chair, “that you did Kevin. Is Garrus around?”

“He’s getting Ismene ready for bed.” She could see that the boy was already wearing his pajamas, an oversized tee-shirt with a small brown and white creature on the front. “Do you need me to get him?”

Despite her initial misgivings, Kevin and Ismene had reached the point over the past several weeks to where the two of them could have polite conversation with her for a few minutes. It wasn’t much and the kids lost interest with her after a few moments, but it was an important step since they now no longer looked at her with discerning glares.

“I’m right here, Kevin.” Garrus appeared behind the boy and nudged him out of the way, “Get to bed.”

“Okay,” sighed the boy giving Garrus a hug. “Good night.”

Both adults said good night and when he was gone, Garrus let out a loud sigh.

“What’s the matter?” Leela scanned Garrus for any signs of stress but the most she could see was his hand shaking slightly.

“I’ve uh……,” she watched his eyes and noticed that he was averting his gaze, like he was trying to hide something from her.

“Garrus,” she said calmly, “what’s the matter?”

Letting out another loud sigh, he turned his gaze to her and said, “I had an accident.”

“What kind of accident?” she failed to sound calm as the last accident he had was the reason for the slight tremor in his hand.

“I…,” he stopped and let out a low growl before continuing, “I fell down the stairs at Kaidan’s place.”

“Oh,” Leela was unsure of how this was an issue, “Are you okay?”

“I’m going to need surgery,” his voice was cold and firm, telling her that this was a non-negotiable. “The medication isn’t having as much of an effect as they thought, so they’re going to go in and try to see if an implant will help regulate what’s going on.”

“How long will you be out of commission?” she asked, trying to tried to hide her worry but a humorous flick of his mandibles told her that he already picked up on it.

“At least two weeks; three at the most,” he grumbled, sounding less than excited at the prospect. “Mostly because they want to make sure that it doesn’t adversely affect my motor skills and everything.”
“Okay,” she gave him a reassuring smile and leaned forward. “What do you need me to do for you?”

Garrus gave a nervous chuckle, “That’s the thing. I’m not sure you’ll want to.”

“Garrus,” she laughed scooting her chair a bit closer, “ask me.”

“Will you take the kids?”

Leela felt her stomach clench at the request but she nodded anyway, “Yeah.”

“You want to take a moment and think about it?”

She laughed with him and shook her head, “I don’t need to. They’re important to you and so they’re important to me. But, would they have a problem staying with me on the Citadel? I don’t think they’ll like me staying in your house.”

“That’s fine,” Garrus gave her a soft look. “They liked your place…felt more like home.”

“Hey,” she gave him a smile, “you’ve given them that.”

“I know,” he sighed heavily, “they just deserve more than a multi-room prefab unit.”

“Maybe when they get used to the concept of ‘us,’” she pointed between the two of them, “then maybe we can talk with them about moving or maybe building a place for us on Earth or even Palaven.”

“You have any ideas?” Garrus looked intrigued at the concept. “I mean I know a lot of places on Palaven that I can show you. Shit,” he swore as he lost control of his hand and knocked over a glass that was sitting on the desk.

“You okay?” Leela eyed him cautiously as everything but his head disappeared below the desk. “Should you be bending over?”

“I still have a good hand and I’m not dizzy.” Garrus tossed the bits of glass into the garbage before sighing, “When will you be back?”

“Two, maybe three weeks. It all depends on what goes on with the settlement.”

“Okay,” replied Garrus, clenching his fist. “I’ll set the surgery for about four weeks out. They said I’m not in any immediate danger and if need be, your mother said she could take them if things go south.”

“All right,” replied Leela. “I will see what I can do with getting out of here early. Just in case.”

“Stay. That’s an order from me to you.”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to order me around, Vakarian.” Leela’s voice dropped a bit and she could see a mild flutter to his eyes.

“You sure about that,” he purred, noticing depth in her voice.

“I don’t know,” she answered licking her lips, “I think I’m going to need a bit more convincing.”
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

So Garrus and Leela get the kids ready for their extended stay...things get a little hectic and heavy.

Thanks to :iconillusionsfire76: for everything.

Chapter 35

Title: To Be Whole

Author: Mizutanitony

Game: Mass Effect

Rating: M

Pairing: Garrus/FemShep

Disclaimer: Owned by Bioware and EA not me!

"Garrus?"

Opening his eyes, Garrus groaned loudly at the dull light of the lamp hitting his eyes. Turning, he saw Ismene standing at the foot of his bed with her teddy bear. Though she sounded calm, Garrus could tell by the twitch of her mandibles that she wanted to talk to him. Sitting up, he waved her over and took a deep drink of water.

"What's the matter?"

Shuffling over; eyes downcast as she approached, Ismene asked, "Do we really have to leave tomorrow?"

Pulling her close, Garrus nuzzled her forehead and said, "Little One, I have to go. If I don't, I won't be able to play with you or take care of you."

"But what about staying with..."

"Ismene," Garrus chuckled as he stroked the back of her skull, "you'll be safe with her."

"We're safe with you," argued Ismene with a stamp with her foot.

"That's enough!" Garrus felt himself begin to get dizzy after yelling.

He'd had this argument with both of them several times over the past week. They'd be leaving tomorrow with Leela after he was checked into Huerta. It had been difficult to keep this from them for as long as he had. When he did tell them, it had led to the kids throwing quite a few temper tantrums. Eventually, he had gotten them to calm down enough and agree to stay with Leela rather than bouncing from house to house. Granted there were friends on Earth they could stay with, but
Garrus thought this was a smarter path. He'd already gotten permission from their teachers to attend school via transmission, yet something told him that this may prove to be a problem. He was going to be gone a lot longer than the kids were used to and he was hoping that they wouldn't go feral. It wasn't that he didn't trust Leela, he just didn't know how she'd be able to handle them. It had taken him over a year to figure out how best to handle them and he didn't know what experience Leela had with kids outside of her cousins. Deciding that it was pointless to worry about it, Garrus turned his attention back to Ismene.

"Leela, was my commanding officer. She led us to win against the bad guys and is one of the bravest people I know."

"I know what they tell us in school," countered Ismene with a loud huff.

"This isn't about what you're school is telling you." Garrus was doing his best to keep himself in check but he knew she caught the subtle vibrations of his agitation. "This is what I'm telling you and I think I would have a much better idea of what she's like over your teachers, don't you think?"

"I guess," hummed Ismene as she looked up at him. "You promise that she'll be able to protect us?"

"I promise," chuckled Garrus as he gave her a gentle pat on the head. "Now," he stood up with a groan, "why don't we get you and Teddy back in bed? We have a long day tomorrow."

The following morning proved to be somewhat difficult since Garrus spent much of it fighting with Kevin and Ismene about where they had hidden their suitcases. Neither of the kids would fess up to his questions and Garrus finally found the suitcases hidden outside in beneath a large tarp. When asked about why they hid them out there, Kevin merely shrugged and Ismene blamed Urz for trying to chew on them. Deciding it wasn't worth the effort; Garrus gathered them up and led them outside just as Hannah arrived in in her husband's old eezo powered jeep. Bolting from the porch, Kevin and Ismene nearly tackled the woman who laughed at the sight of Garrus struggling with the luggage.

"Set those down, Garrus. You two," she snapped at the luggage, "get your bags."

Leaving her side, the kids shambled back up to the door and took their bags to the car.

"Thank you," chuckled Garrus at Hannah's control over them.

"I've got almost four decades of dealing with an incredibly difficult daughter. You've barely had two years." When Garrus approached her, she pulled him toward her and gave him a kiss on the forehead, "and you'll have a whole lot more."

"Thanks," whispered Garrus, returning her gentle forehead kiss before heading to the jeep. "You think she's going to be okay with them?"

"I think she'll be able to manage," concurred Hannah as she made sure the kids were secure.

"Oh yeah," asked Garrus as he fastened himself in.

Climbing into the jeep, Hannah turned to Garrus with a fresh cigarette in her mouth and gave a short snort before speeding off toward the shuttle bay. When they arrived, the kids began fussing about why they couldn't stay with Hannah, but one look from both Hannah and Garrus shut them up quickly. They remained quiet as they went through their check-in and neither of them made sound for the entire trip. Kevin occupied himself with school work while Ismene drew on her pad. Garrus wasn't complaining as it let him focus on getting his last few reports done before docking. When they docked, Garrus was glad to see that very few people were in the bay. It wasn't common,
but with the way he'd been feeling over the past few weeks, noise wasn't something Garrus wanted to deal with.

"So where do we go now?" asked Kevin. Ismene was gripping his hand tightly and even though they were the same height, she still seemed so little.

"She was supposed to meet us here," hummed Garrus as he scanned the small crowd. "Excuse me!" he called out to a female turian worker. "Have you seen a red headed woman with burn scars come through here?"

"You mean Rear-Admiral Shepard?" the female asked laughing lightly when she noticed the children. "Have you two adopted?"

"I have," Garrus coughed giving the kids a cautious look. Neither of them said anything so he deemed it safe to ask, "How did you know who I was looking for?"

"You're the most famous turian in the galaxy, Mr. Vakarian." she answered with a heavy inflection of seduction in her voice. "Not to mention you two became even more famous after that little shooting contest of yours in the Presidium."

"What shooting contest?" inquired Kevin, his brown eyes casting a suspicious look at Garrus.

"I'll tell you when you're older." Garrus gave the woman a cold look and the comment he directed at her got a chuckle from Ismene. "I would request that you watch your language in front of my children," threatened Garrus hearing a derogatory subvocal comment emanate from the female.

"Very well, Officer Vakarian," she replied subvocally before responding through popular means, "and to answer your question, I have not seen the Rear-Admiral."

"Thank you," he replied curtly and she left without another word. Deciding the kids needed some stimulation, Garrus turned to them and asked, "How about we go to the shopping district. See if we can't find you some new toys or clothes?"

The kids took advantage of the opportunity. If Garrus still used physical currency, he was certain he would have been ten kilos lighter in the wallet but twenty heavier due to all their purchases. For Ismene it was a bunch of crayons and paints while Kevin picked out a bunch of action figures and a couple of downloadable comics. While they went about playing with their new toys in a Presidium park, Garrus checked his omni-tool and still saw no reply to the email he'd sent to Leela. He was beginning to worry. He knew she'd returned from her trip, but she hadn't contacted him in the past few days. Even though this wasn't unusual he was still worried and was about to call her when he heard someone shouting.

"Where've you been?" he asked after they shared a quick kiss.

"In a meeting with another possible supplier for my work," Leela answered as she climbed over the back of the park bench and put her feet in Garrus' lap. "A volus, just to let you know," explaining as she rubbed her temples and Garrus ran a hand along her leg. "Bastard tried to give us a bunch of secondhand goods that have a history of being defective."

"How'd you handle it?"

Garrus actually enjoyed hearing some of the stories of how she would strong arm a few people into upgrading their initial donations. He knew she only did it because most of these people had started
to see record breaking profits ever since galactic commerce had reopened. Production was up and with some of the advancements in medical technology and other markets thanks to the war and because of his dealings with some suppliers; Garrus knew they wouldn't miss the surplus.

"I gave him an ultimatum," she said with small sigh as his claw gently brushed against her calf, "either he coughs up the extra food and medical supplies or I take it straight to the Council."

"How'd he take that?"

"Not well," she laughed along with Garrus and sat up. She moved closer and took her hand in his and rested her head on his shoulder. "Said that I couldn't do anything since I wasn't an active Spectre anymore."

"You proved him wrong."

"Damn right I did," chuckled Leela when she felt Garrus nudge her. "Not every day you see a volus lose ten pounds when you call up each of the Councilors." Garrus barked out a laugh; catching the attention of the kids. They gathered up all of their toys and ran over to Garrus and began packing away all their toys. As Garrus helped Ismene with her new brushes Leela asked, "How're you two doing."

"I'm okay," replied Ismene with a nervous twitch of her mandibles.

Her voice was much softer than Leela had ever heard it. Normally she was rather abrupt or passive-aggressive with Leela, but today it seemed like Ismene was actually attempting to be nice. Not one to pass up an opportunity like this, Leela leaned over them.

"You like to paint?"

"Yes," whispered Ismene as she finished putting her brushes into their holder. "I also like using crayons and pencils."

"Do you have any that I can look at?"

"I can draw you something," Ismene mumbled as she buried her face in Garrus' stomach. When he gave her a slight nod she added, "What would you like me to draw?"

"I'll let you decide when to draw it," Leela gave her a warm approving smile. "Artists work better when they're inspired rather than when they're told."

"Okay," Ismene gave her a few happy twitches of her mandibles before asking, "Can you draw?"

Garrus gave a snort causing Leela to punch him in the arm. "I'm a better artist than I am a cook," she argued.

"That's not that hard, my love." Garrus let out pained growl when he felt Leela's elbow in his ribs. "WILL YOU STOP THAT?!"

"Sorry," chuckled Leela giving him a kiss on the cheek. She then turned her attention to Kevin who was trying to figure out which toy he should keep out. "Now that is a cool action figure."

"Thanks," Kevin grinned broadly as he held it out for Leela to see better, "He's a bit old but I still like him as much as when I first got him."

It was a turian action figure with several chips and dings on him. He was well used but still in
excellent condition, though she was certain he was supposed to have more armor than what he was wearing.

"Well I like him," Leela pointed at a familiar looking krogan figure in red armor holding a shotgun. "Where'd you get him?"

"He just came out," exclaimed Kevin. "I'm gonna show Uncle Wrex the next time I see him!"

"Please tell me there isn't one of me," Leela gave Garrus a pleading look only to scowl when she saw him nudge the bag away with his foot.

"You're gonna get it later," growled Leela. Taking a moment, she took a deep breath and finally pointed in the direction she came. "There's a rapid transit over that way. So let's get everything packed up and we can get you all to the apartment. I got a little surprise for you when we get there."

"What kind of surprise?" asked Ismene as she took Garrus' hand while Kevin made shooting noises with his Wrex action figure.

Approaching the terminal, Leela punched in the information for their car and after loading it said, "You'll just have to be patient and see."

The ride felt even longer after that comment. Leela was beginning to learn that patience was neither kid's strong suit as both peppered her with questions about what they'd see at the apartment. Garrus merely laughed quietly to himself as he listened to Leela struggle to keep her patience. She was doing remarkably well considering that both kids were coming at her at once. However, by the time they arrived at the entrance to her apartment building he could see her patience was at its breaking point. When she opened the door to the apartment, Garrus didn't notice anything out of the ordinary and proceeded to enter the downstairs room they had stayed in during the party.

"Upstairs, lover," Leela called from the stairwell.

Turning, Garrus could see that Kevin and Ismene were standing at the top of the stairs staring expectantly at him. Leaving the luggage next to the door, Garrus followed suit with Leela's hand resting on the small of his back for support. He made it with no trouble but stopped to collect himself just past the top step. When he gave Leela a reassuring nod, she led them down the hallway to find to reveal the spare upper room to be set up with two beds, two dressers, and a couple of desks.

"By the spirits?" whispered Garrus when he saw the furnishings. Both kids rushed into the rooms, Kevin taking the bed closest to the door and Ismene taking the one against the wall furthest from the door. They were fairly large for kids their size and both of them immediately began bouncing on them.

"Hey!" exclaimed Garrus pointing at the floor. "Those look expensive so quit with the jumping."

Both of them dropped off the beds and rushed toward the door, Kevin's toothy grin staring up at them while Ismene's mandibles flapped excitedly.

"Thank you!"

Leela's face turned a bright red at the kid's gratitude.

"You're welcome," was all she could muster before regaining her composure. "I'm glad you two like it."
"It's bigger than our room on Earth!" exclaimed Ismene as she pointed at the dresser.

Garrus shifted uncomfortably at the comment and grumbled, "We talked about that Ismene. You'll get the spare bedroom when we get back home."

"I know," grumbled the girl as Kevin snickered at his sister's scolding.

"All right," sighed Leela hoping to break to tension. "Why don't we get the kids bags and help them unpack. Then order some dinner?"

"You don't have anything to eat in the house?" asked Kevin rather perplexed at this offer.

"I haven't gone shopping in a few days," chuckled Leela nervously.

"Garrus always cooks us dinner."

"Kevin," snapped Garrus tugging on the boy's hair. "Quit being rude."

"I was being honest," barked the boy as he rushed down the stairs.

"That doesn't mean you have to be rude about it." Garrus let out a loud snort and turned to Leela, "They'll eat whatever you order."

"I want sushi!" All of them turned to Ismene who shrugged, "Aunty Liara bought it for me once. I like it!"

"There's a sushi place nearby," chuckled Leela as they grabbed the bags. "Kevin would you like sushi?"

"Do they have noodles?" the boy asked with a grimace as he reappeared with his clothes bag.

"I think so," Leela wasn't too sure but she thought they might be able to accommodate him. "Do you not like sushi?"

"Not really," grumbled the boy as he put away his clothes.

"Well, I'm sure the menu caters to more than just sushi," said Leela with a reassuring pat on his back.

"All right," mumbled the boy. "Can I have a soda?"

"I WANT SODA!" howled Ismene when she heard her brother's request.

Leela deferred to Garrus who nodded, "You both have been pretty good today so I think a soda is acceptable."

Despite the screaming from the kids, the meal went surprisingly well. Both of them were rather well behaved, but made a bit of a mess as they tried to eat with chopsticks. It was rather amusing, especially when Garrus attempted to use them along with Ismene to make her feel better about her lack of dexterity. In the end though, he made as big of a mess as the kids. Leela couldn't help but laugh as the waitress came and removed the chopsticks from the table, save for Leela's, and gave them some flatware instead.

After that, Leela took them to the arcade where Kevin ended up winning some music downloads and a stuffed animal. Garrus confiscated the music but let him keep the toy while Ismene tried her hand at Kepesh-Yakshi. She didn't last long, but the person she played against did her best to help
her and even got Kevin in on the game. The game ended in a draw as it was too difficult for either child to comprehend, but they stuck it out as long as possible until giving it up to more experienced players. When they left the arcade, Garrus asked what the kids wanted to do and they headed out to a movie after which they returned to the apartment for the rest of the day.

Kevin and Ismene spent most of the day playing in the apartment having left Urz on Earth with Hannah since there were few places for him to get a decent amount of exercise on the Citadel. Both Ismene and Kevin had whined at Garrus for leaving him behind. Though once they saw Boo running around the lower floor in his hamster ball they forgot all about their pet varren. They spent nearly two hours chasing him around, but Garrus had to put a stop to it when they tried to play catch with him.

Leela thought she'd have more trouble with them, but she guessed that because Garrus was still in the apartment they weren't as anxious. They listened and were calm, but after she took Garrus to the hospital tomorrow she was certain they'd become more difficult to handle. Deciding not to worry about it, she joined them in playing some games and even watched a couple of vids with them. Finally, she let Garrus get them ready for bed. When the kids were down, they retired to the main bedroom and collapsed on the bed.

"You nervous?"

Turning his head, Garrus stroked her cheek and nodded, "Very."

He rolled onto his side and pulled her close, his lips finding her forehead as he stroked her hair. She felt his chest shaking and reached up stroking the back of his neck. She watched the tears fall down his mandibles. She kissed them and rubbed her forehead against his, whispering that he'd be okay.

"Promise me," he whispered as she held him close. "Promise me, that if something happens…"

"You didn't need to ask, Garrus." She rubbed his fringe and placed kisses all along his ridge.

"You'll come back."

"I'm not you," he replied with a small laugh.

Rolling them over, Leela rested herself on his stomach. She removed his visor and kissed his lips. He let out a low purr to match her moan and when they broke she nuzzled his forehead.

"The thought of seeing you again kept me going, Garrus. Just keep me in your thoughts and you'll make it home to us."

Nodding, Garrus gave her another kiss before nipping at her neck. She let out a loud moan as his teeth grazed her skin.

"I promise," he whispered as nipped his way down her shirt.

"Okay," she groaned as she felt his hand slip down to the top of her pants. She hadn't changed yet, but by the way that he'd been looking at her all day she knew that he was getting ideas. Tugging at her belt she tried to pull back, he kept her in place.

"Heck of a mood swing," she laughed as she heard the buckle of her belt jingle.

"Well, you have that effect on me."

His face had moved to the left side of her neck, the roughness of his plates rubbing against her scars; electricity shooting down her spine. He let out a small victorious grunt at removing her belt
just as they heard a low knock at the door and a voice asking to come in. Garrus let out a frustrated groan as Leela rolled off of him, giving the voice permission to enter. When the door opened Kevin and Ismene entered, tears streaming down their faces and asking for Garrus to come and sit in the room with them for a bit.

"Yeah," sighed Garrus as he got off the bed. Turning, he gave Leela a kiss and whispered that he'd be back before taking them by the hand.

"I'll come with you." Garrus and the kids gave her a shocked look. Taking Ismene's hand, Leela looked at them and said, "I have to learn how to do this if I'm going to put you guys to bed at night."

"Okay," answered Garrus after a moment's silence.

Tugging gently on Kevin's hand, they formed a line with Kevin behind Garrus, Ismene behind Kevin, and Leela bringing up the rear. It only took a story to get the kids to calm down enough and another ten minutes for them to fall asleep afterwards. Leela watched in silence as Garrus handled the kids. She admired how they looked at him with such innocent adoration. It was something she thought she'd never be able to witness, but she was there, watching her mate read the children a story about a turian and his pet. After they were tucked in, she stopped him in the hall and gave him a deep kiss before taking him by the hand and leading him toward their room.

"What's the rush?" he laughed as she locked the door behind them.

"No rush, love." She guided him toward the bed and after another deep kiss whispered, "I just want to…" her hand stopped on his crest and she let out a loud sigh.

He covered her hand and gave her a gentle kiss.

"I know."

She could feel the tremors in his hand and knew that what they both wanted wouldn't happen that night. Instead she fell next to him, curled up tightly against him as he pulled the blankets over them. She felt his lips on her head as his fingers stroked her hair.

"Good night, my sweet," he whispered as he felt her bury her face in his neck.

She sighed happily and kissed his neck before whispering, "Good night, my love."
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Leela babysits...enough said.

Chapter 36

As she stepped past the waterfall near her office, Leela was certain something was wrong. It was too quiet and Leela didn't like it. Ever since she had brought the kids home, there was always some sort of noise. Whether it was them fighting, playing, or answering questions for their school work, there was always some kind of noise. Setting her pad down on the kitchen counter, Leah grabbed a bottled water before heading upstairs. Checking her omni-tool, Leela was surprised to see that the kids' lessons had ended over an hour ago and she was hoping they hadn't figured out the locking mechanism for the front door again. It'd make three times in the past week that she'd have to reset it if they had. When she approached the door to their room, she heard hushed whispers and knocked.

"Don't come in!" shouted Ismene.

Leela heard a series of scraping noises and hushed whispers and knocked again.

"Open up you two!" she ordered before taking a sip of water. "I told you that you aren't supposed to keep your door shut unless it's bed time."

"She said hold on."

While Leela could appreciate the kids' independence, she beginning to find it grating. She hadn't been much better as a kid herself, hell she'd been a lot worse. But at that moment, the kids were her responsibility and if she knew Garrus, he never let them out of his sight. Entering an access code, Leela felt her frustration beginning to boil when she heard it buzz and flash that the code was invalid. There were only a few people who could teach them how to something like that and if they had, Leela was going to make sure she'd get the answer out of them. Raising her fist, she slammed it against the door and shouted.

"KEVIN! ISMENE! OPEN THE DOOR NOW OR I WILL PULL IT DOWN!"

She heard more scraping and the hurried rush of their feet. They knew she wasn't kidding as she'd done it once already when Ismene had tried to disappear into the room with snacks and drinks. She pounded again to get her point across. After a few minutes, during which she continuously knocked against the door to hurry them up, the door hissed open to reveal Kevin and Ismene covered in paint. Her mouth dropped and Leela pushed past them, running into the room. A strangled gasp escaped her throat as she saw the floor, beds, covered in paint with toys that littered the room.

"What…" she turned to them and then back at the mess, "what did you….go…kitchen…now…"

"But," began Kevin and Ismene.

"I said now!"
The kids bolted from the room; feet thundering down the steps as she tried to compose herself. She couldn't believe the mess they had made in the hour that they had been alone. Her mind began to reel at just how much money had been wasted because of their mess. Taking several deep breaths, Leela finally tore her focus from the room and made her way into the kitchen. The kids had taken their usual seats at the island. Both were still covered in paint and Leela was glad that they hadn't tracked any on the floor. Not saying anything, she removed two buckets, some gloves, and other cleaning supplies from beneath the sink. She filled the buckets and spray bottles with water and cleaning solution. Handing the kids some of the supplies, Leela pointed to the stairs. The kids simply grabbed their equipment and headed toward the steps with Leela right behind them. It took them nearly three hours to make a big enough dent for Leela to be satisfied with what they had accomplished. She'd have to call in a few people for the heavier stains. She'd been able to salvage the sheets but the kids wouldn't be able to sleep in the room for a few days until the ventilation system removed the fumes from the room. After grabbing some clothes for each of them, Leela set about getting them cleaned up before preparing dinner.

It wasn't an easy task.

Garrus had written down a few meal ideas for her use while he was in recovery and so far, only one meal had been edible. Still, that didn't stop her from trying and she was getting the hang of breakfast according to the kids; either that or they were feigning politeness. As she prepped the ingredients, she saw a large mound of dark brown hair bob past the kitchen counter and whistled at it. Kevin turned the corner and appeared, dressed in a tee-shirt and pajama bottoms. "What?"

Leela gave him a stern look and he simply glared back.

"Come here," she said pointing in front of her.

The boy stomped forward and stuck his hands out for inspection. After clearing his arms and hands, Leela checked his face and hair for any remaining paint. He smelt strongly of soap, which was a good thing, but Leela had to take extra care with his thick hair. She didn't know why Garrus didn't get it cut and when she'd asked Kevin about it, he refused to answer. Giving him an approving nod, she handed him a datapad off the counter.

"Your Aunt Tali programmed this, so don't even think about trying to access video files or games."

Taking it, Kevin stomped out of the kitchen and headed into the living room.

When he was gone, Ismene appeared from around the corner with her teddy bear on her shoulders and her mandibles fluttering happily. "I'm clean," she chirped.

Leela gave Ismene the same look she'd given Kevin and the girls mandibles stopped moving immediately. She allowed the same inspection to be done, even though it took a bit longer because of her plating. When Leela approved, she handed Ismene a pad of her own and pointed at her seat.

"Sit there. Kevin! Get in here as well."

She heard the boy growl but he appeared all the same and sat next to his sister. As she cooked, Leela periodically checked their pads to make sure they were following her instructions. She was grateful for Tali's precautions and satisfied with the results. As she set the soup to a simmer, Leela
retrieved a soda from the fridge and gave a bottled water to each of the kids. They drank silently but she noticed a curious glint in both of their eyes.

"What?"

"Nothing," said both kids before returning to their pads.

"I highly doubt that." Leela took both pads and after stirring the soup, she turned her attention back to them. "Are you two still mad at me for making you clean?"

Kevin gave an apprehensively shook his head while Ismene nodded slightly.

"Why'd you do it?" she asked after their answers. "If you aren't willing to accept the consequences, don't do something that can get you in trouble."

"We were bored," answered Kevin as he scratched at the counter, "and you were busy."

"So you decided to nearly destroy a room that I'm now going to have to pay to clean up?" Leela shook her head and gave them a sad smile. "Do you two do this when Garrus, your grandmother, or your aunts and uncles aren't in the room?"

"No," both kids answered shaking their heads.

"So if you don't do that to them, why would you do it to me? Do you to dislike me that much?"

Neither kid answered which was enough for her.

"What did I do to make you not like me? Are you afraid that I'm going to take Garrus away from you?"

"It wouldn't be the first time someone's left us."

The tumblers all fell into place after Kevin said that. She couldn't believe that it hadn't been that obvious. Turning the stove down, she rounded the island and pulled them both close to her chest. They didn't fight her, instead they fell into her and she could feel their tears soak her shirt. She gave each of them a gentle kiss on the head.

"No one else is going to leave you," she whispered.

Behind her, the soup begin to boil over. Using her biotics, she shut off the stove and moved the pot onto the island cutting board. Returning her hand to Ismene's head, she rubbed the special spot Garrus told her about.

"I know you miss your mom and dad, but look what you have now. You have Garrus, Grandma, your aunts and uncles. None of them will leave you behind; they love you too much to do that. All of us, myself included, know what you're going through. We've all lost people important to us."

"But what if Garrus doesn't come back?" asked Ismene as she rubbed her face into Leela's chest. "We're going to get sent away again!"

"No you aren't," replied Leela with a gentle kiss to each of their heads.

"How do you know?" Kevin whimpered, his eyes red from his tears. "Garrus is the only one who wanted us."

"I want you." Leela gave both of them a smile, but received skeptic glares in return.
"Are you sure?" asked Ismene as she tugged at Leela's shirt. "Garrus wasn't sure he wanted us."

"But he does now." Leela replied with a soft smile. "And your aunts and uncles all love you so if something happened to either of us they'd take you."

"They're always busy," snorted Kevin.

"How often do they watch you for Garrus when he's busy?"

Kevin turned his gaze away telling her he had no answer.

"You see?" she chuckled at his reaction, "You guys won't be sent away if something happens to Garrus or to me. You'll be with people who love you and if I know Garrus, he has the paperwork ready just in case."

"Have you heard from him yet?" Ismene asked worriedly.

"I heard from his doctor." Leela felt nervous at giving them this news, but she figured that it would help them cope. "They said that he was improving, but he's still not able to stay awake for very long."

"It's been over a week," growled Kevin. "They said that he could have visitors in a week."

"In about a week," reminded Leela with a gentle pat on his back. "It could be longer. He has to get used to the implant and that means relearning to do a few things."

"He can't talk?"

Leela shook her head and sighed, "Not in the way you or I are used to Kevin. Only Ismene'd be able to tell us what he's saying right now."

"Then why can't we go?" Kevin's eyes were still red and it hurt to actually see the pain.

"Because he wouldn't want you to see him like that." It was the first thought that came to her mind. "But he said he'd send word when he was ready. You just have to trust him."

"Fine," he huffed. "Since we aren't going to the hospital, can we eat now?"

"Sure." Leela gave him and Ismene a smile and finished preparing the soup.

She'd made Ismene's soup the night before and knew the girl liked it cold. Setting the kids bowls down in front of them, she watched as they gingerly tasted it before the scraping of metal against china filled the kitchen. In record time the bowls were empty.

"That was good," chirped Ismene as she held out her bowl. "Can I have more, please?"

"Same," said Kevin holding up his bowl.

After three bowls each, the kids were finally satiated and resting on the couch watching a movie while Leela figured out what to do for them. She'd figured that the kids were frustrated about their situation, but she didn't realize how deep it went. In the past two years, the kids had lived through a huge war and lost both of their parents. She remembered something Garrus had said; about how it was going to be difficult watching the kids learn about the harshness of the galaxy. She'd seen kids who had it rougher, but that was different as she eventually left those kids and offered help from afar. Now she was in it for the long run, she couldn't run, or hide, or keep her distance. She had to deal and handle it. She had to comfort and offer advice.
In essence she had to be a...

Leela felt her heart clench in her chest as the thought finished in her head. It was a concept she'd never thought to associate herself with, something she had given up on years ago. Now that role was going to be associated with her by not only herself, but also her friends and surviving family; wherever they may be. They were secondary, right now she needed something to distract the kids.

After a few minutes, an idea formed in her mind and she came to a decision quite easily. Setting down the cup of tea she'd just made, Leela headed into her room and began rooting through her closet for supplies. When she found enough, she dumped pile after pile over the balcony railing. After the fourth one, Kevin and Ismene came out and looked at the pile, then up at a panting Leela who smiled down at them.

"Take those into the living room," she requested as the kids began poking at the pile. "I've got an idea."

The kids shrugged and gathered what they could while Leela tossed the final few bits of supplies over the railing. Jumping over the ledge, Leela used her biotics to soften her fall. Mentally thanking Samara for her advice on how to biotically float, she used her biotics to gather the remaining supplies and added them to the pile the kids made.

"All right you two," she began as she rolled up her sleeves, "we're going to have a bit of fun tonight."

"I thought we were in trouble?" Ismene cast Leela a skeptical look. "Garrus doesn't let us have fun when we're in trouble."

"Well, you two worked hard to clean up your mess, so why not have some fun?" As Leela began moving some of the furniture, she smiled at them and said, "Plus, I'm not Garrus. So move the coffee table behind the bar please while I move the couches."

The kids followed orders without question as Leela took the cushions off the couch and moved them into position. She didn't tell the kids her plan but as she began tying the ends of sheets together, they slowly figured it out. Their energy increased substantially when they realized what was going on and the sound of their laughter was more than enough for Leela. Finally, after an hour of tying and pinning sheets, Leela threw the pillows and cushions beneath the canopy of their sheet fort, she grabbed a couple electric lanterns and lit them.

"Now," she sat down on one of the large floor pillows, "what do you want to do first?"

Immediately, they began raiding the kitchen for any snacks Leela had hidden. With their efficiency, she was certain they had been sneaking them since they arrived. She turned on a few of her favorite movies from when she was a kid. She was glad that they enjoyed them and happily surprised when the kids began quoting the movie.

"How do you guys know this movie?"

"Garrus showed us," piped up Ismene as she chomped into her third candy bar. "He found a bunch of files in an old hard drive. He let us watch a bunch of stuff from it. That's how we came up with our costumes."

"I knew about that," she laughed. "But he let you watch a lot of these vids?"

"He watched all of them," said Kevin with a sad smile. "He said it helped when he missed you."
"That's a lot of videos," whispered Leela as she stared back at the pig on the screen herding sheep.

"He always had one on," replied Kevin with a smile.

"He laughed at a lot of them," snickered Ismene as she watched the pig race around the pen. "He said they were silly, but he kept watching them."

"Like I said, Garrus said watching them helped him out," Kevin yawned loudly as the credits started to roll but perked up when Leela started a new movie.

Silence fell over them as they watched the next movie. She noticed how the kids had slowly moved closer to her, which made her smile. Still, she could feel something was still bothering them. Just as the movie reached the spot where the protagonist's lie was revealed, Ismene asked, "Leela why is your voice so weird?"

Leela did her best not to choke on her soda which made both kids laugh uncontrollably.

"Glad you find it funny," she gasped as she massaged her throat. When she could finally breathe calmly, she looked at Ismene and asked, "What makes you think my voice is weird?"

"It's just..." the child began, averting her gaze; her mandibles twitching slowly as she paused to find the words, "It's just that your voice has a sound to it. Like you're hiding but being honest." She looked up and then said, "Also when you talk, it's like you have two different voices."

"Is that why you don't like talking to me?"

Ismene nodded.

"It's confusing and I don't know how to talk to you."

Leela looked to Kevin, prepared to ask him what he thought of her voice, but the boy was looking up at her with a guilty look.

"You know," Leela assessed quickly.

"I heard Grandma and Garrus talking about it one night when I was getting some water. She was telling him about when you told her and," Kevin pointed to the urn up on the mantle that held her father's ashes, "how you felt when you were my age."

"What'd Grandma tell Garrus?" squeaked Ismene looking at her brother. "I wanna know!"

"Ismene," sighed Leela and turned to the girl. She could feel Kevin shaking against her, the strangled gasps of his laughter muffled by her shirt. She slowly rubbed the small of his back as she said, "Ismene when I was Kevin's age, I figured out that something wasn't right with me. Like I wasn't the person who I supposed to be."

"Okay," replied the girl with a curious flick of her mandibles. "Isn't that normal?"

"It is," chuckled Leela as she felt Kevin calm against her, "but I was feeling different in a way that you're not used to."

The girl let out a curious purr, "I don't get it."

"Well," Leela struggled to find the right words. It had been different with Garrus and the others. They at least had experience in the realm of sexuality, but the kids were different and she had to find the right words.
"Okay," she said when she finally came to something she hoped Ismene could relate too. "Do you know how boys and girls are different?"

"Yes," nodded Ismene with a bashful twitch. "Garrus told us after we saw a scene in that show with the smugglers." Ismene then went on a long, but rudimentary, speech about how babies were made which had Leela blushing a bit.

At least he was thorough, she thought after Ismene had finished her explanation.

"Well that's good you know," she said after a quick recalibration of her thoughts. "Since you're aware of all….that. That will make things easier."

"Make what easier?!" Ismene was getting more and more frustrated and Leela had to calm her down before continuing.

"Well Ismene," Leela said as she rubbed the back of the girl's neck, "the thing is that when I was born, my parents named me Liam.."

"Is that a name humans give girls?"

Leela could see the wheels turning in Ismene's eyes.

"It's a name they give boys," explained Leela with a gentle sigh.

"So..." Ismene scratched at Leela's jeans, "you're a boy?"

"In a sense," sighed Leela as she took the girl's hand. "You see, when I was a little older than Kevin I was very sad and I didn't know why. I figured out that I didn't like being a boy and so I looked for information on the extranet. I figured out that what I was feeling wasn't new and I wasn't the only person whose outside didn't match the inside."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ismene's voice was beginning to grow anxious at Leela's explanation.

"Well it's like how you see letters. You see letters arranged in one fashion but they're only read in a different way. But in my case I saw myself as a girl, but everyone else saw me as a boy.."

"So it's like they had the dyslexia?" Ismene scratched her head confused at this explanation.

"Yes and no," smiled Leela as she pat the girl's head. "You see my brain told me I was one way but my body grew another. So, people saw only my body and for a long time I had to play the part. I had a person who helped me, like your tutors help you. Then I got medicine to help me, but it took a long time for me to be happy with who I am."

"So why didn't you like being a boy?" inquired Kevin after his laughter has subsided.

"It's just how my brain works," repeated Leela. "While consciously I know what I wanted to be and what I am, mygenese decided that I had to look and appear male. That's why I had to have all my medicines and visit doctors."

"Did you not want to be a daddy?" Ismene asked innocently. "I know that I want to be a mommy."
Leela felt her ears warm with the question and said, "If I'd have waited a little longer, I could have taken steps to ensure I could have been a daddy."

"Oh," answered Ismene. She scratched her chin for a moment before asking, "Can you still have kids?"

"No, I can't," answered Leela matter of factly.

"Why not?"

"Well Ismene," Leela shifted uncomfortably as she tried to find the words. "Some people like me, after going through years of their medicine and doctor visits have surgeries that help the outside match the inside. Other people just continue to look the way they are and live their lives. While others have the medicine and doctors, but no surgery. Everyone is different and we need to respect how they choose to live their lives."

"Oh." Ismene scratched her mandible. "I guess that makes sense."

Ismene then looked up at Leela and asked, "Does that mean I can have a sister?"

"Umm Ismene it doesn't work like that," Leela shook her head hoping she wouldn't have to explain everything to Ismene again.

"Why not?" she whined as and stared at her brother. "If you can do it, why can't Kevin?!"

"NO!" shouted Kevin as Leela burst into laughter. "I like being a boy!"

"Well that doesn't mean you can't change your mind!" Ismene stuck out her tongue at Leela and said, "Can you talk to him?"

"I can't, Ismene." Leela gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. "He has to feel that way and if he doesn't then we have no right to make him."

She felt Kevin curl up next to her and felt her eyes begin to water.

"Fine," huffed the girl turning her attention back to the movie. "He'd make a stupid sister anyway."

Leela laughed for a good five minutes after that while Kevin fumed next to her. By the time the movie was done however, both kids were curled up on either side of Leela, pinning her. As her legs began to fall asleep, Leela's omni-tool rang. Answering it she saw her mother's face appear on the screen and sighed.

"Hey."

"You look like shit," replied her mother as she set aside a data-pad. "Kids give you a tough time today?"

"Like you wouldn't believe."

Leela then went into a long explanation of what had happened regarding the room and paint. Hannah burst into laughter once Leela explained how long it had taken to for them to clean and the money Leela would have to fork out for a deep cleaning.

"You should know not to take your eyes off kids. Remember all the trouble you got into?"

"I don't remember covering an entire room and my bed in paint!"
"Were they water based?" snorted Hannah as she leaned back in her chair. When Leela confirmed she shrugged, "Then you got off light."

"I guess," Leela yawned and shook the sleep from her eyes before asking, "Why didn't you tell me about Kevin knowing?"

"I didn't see any reason to," she answered without hesitation. "He heard us, we talked with him, and he didn't seem to mind. Did he give you a tough time about it?"

"No." Leela began shifting her legs to get the blood flowing and stopped when she felt like they were being stabbed by tiny needles. "But Ismene asked me about my voice which prompted my having to explain it to her."

"She figured out the pitch thing?"

"How'd you know about that?" Leela was shocked at her mother's question.

Hannah laughed at her daughter and said, "Garrus kind of figured it out when you met chasing Saren, but he didn't think anything of it until you two…"

"Oh," Leela hadn't guessed that Garrus had figured it out beforehand. "That explains his attitude before the Collector base."

"He loves you," answered Hannah with a shrug. "All of them do."

"I know," Leela sighed and looked down at the kids. "It's kind of weird how they've taken to me."

"Never thought you'd be a mom?"

Leela froze at her mother's question and Hannah immediately apologized.

"It's fine," answered Leela with a sad smile. "I just got so used to the idea that I never thought…" she sniffed loudly and laughed.

"Same here," chuckled Hannah. "You deserve it."

Leela wiped away the tears and smiled.

"Thanks, Mom."

Hannah nodded and smiled. They talked for a few more minutes before hanging up. When her omni-tool shut off, Leela was prepared to curl up with the kids but an email alert caught her eye. Taking a moment, she opened it up and smiled at what she saw.

Leela,

Cant sae mch. Stl fgring fngrs oot. Redy for vsats.

Com soyn.

Lv,

Garus

Smiling Leela opened up the keyboard and wrote back.
Grrs

C u tmorrw.

Lve,

Leala

She knew he'd get a laugh out of that and curled up next to the kids happily, soon drifting off to sleep; anxious for what tomorrow would bring.
“You’re looking good today.”
Leela looked up from her book as Patty approached. Setting it down, Leela smiled and pointed across the garden area of Huerta Memorial. It was the typical serene beauty that was normal on the Presidium. Sterile and clean except for the construction going on around them. Several sections had long since been repaired and echoes of work could be heard throughout, Leela focused solely on the scene playing out in front of her.
“It’s because he’s doing much better since the last time we were here,” Leela said with a smile. “You all have done amazing job with him.”
Leela’s brow furrowed when she saw Garrus’ hand shake as he tried to lift Ismene’s toy just a little higher than his hand would allow. Leela’s first instinct was to walk over and say that they’d played enough, but Patty stopped her with a gentle hand on her shoulder. It took a while, but after much struggle and strain, Garrus was able to make Ismene’s teddy-bear act like it was flying. Both kids’ eyes lit up at the sight and she watched Garrus’ mandibles twitch happily. His eyes looked up and she saw the pride in his eyes of his accomplishment. The pride that said he was doing it for them and her. She felt her heart clench and watched a smile flash in his eyes before returning to Kevin and Ismene.
“You see,” smirked Patty with a satisfied sigh. “He can do it if he’s given enough time.”
“Is his right hand always going to be like that?” Leela asked as she watched the bear slip from Garrus’ grip onto the grass. She heard Ismene and Kevin say that it was okay and watched as he looked away embarrassed. She knew what was going through his head and she wanted Patty to tell her that it would pass, that he would get better. Her eyes said it all and Leela felt the familiar burn of tears in her eyes.
“He’s also going to need that cane for the rest of his life.” Patty added in a clinically cold voice, not a stoic or insensitive cold, but that of a doctor. “The enhancement we put in his spine couldn’t fix all the problems he had. His speech will progress as you’ve heard in your more recent visits, but he will have motor control issues for the rest of his life.” Patty turned and pointed at Leela’s leg, “Kind of like you.”
Leela snorted extending a middle finger and Patty chuckled. When the asari stopped laughing Leela stood and embraced her friend, whispering her thanks. She felt her friend’s arms squeeze her back and Patty gave her a kiss on the forehead.
“You are a godsend,” she whispered.
“I’m just good at my job.”
Both of them laughed loudly but were interrupted by Ismene shouting at them. The moment broken, Leela shouted back, “We’re coming!”
Patty let out a loud hiss as she palmed her head and Leela apologized. They walked next to each other, talking about some of Garrus’ exercises and when they approached they heard him greet them.
“Hello.”
It was strangled and still a little clumsy, but he’d improved dramatically over the past few weeks since her first visit. Patty remarked that it wasn’t an uncommon thing for patients to do when they had a reason to leave and Garrus had been making strides every day. He still had problems with handling utensils and he was a long way from cooking, but that was pittance compared to what they saw in his eyes. It was a sad and quiet defeat that Leela saw behind the smile knowing his days in the field were just about over. She knew he felt that he was once again a turian without a purpose, and she vowed that she’d make sure he found his purpose once more.
“Hey handsome,” she sat next to him giving him a soft kiss and nuzzled him. “How’re you holding up?”
“I’m okay,” he answered with only a hint of a pause between words. “I’m still having problems
walking and with my hands when I lift anything over a few kilos.” He looked hopefully up at Patty, who had a soft sadness hidden in her sapphire eyes. “It won’t get better will it?”

Leela looked at Patty as her friend’s eyes broke contact with Garrus. “I figured.” Garrus shook his head and held up Kevin’s doll with some difficulty. “It’s not a weight issue Garrus,” muttered Patty as she looked at the children who were confused by the conversation. “It’s a motor control issue. We can’t figure out how to fix the nerves through surgery. There is a slim chance that your body will fix itself but it is highly unlikely.”

“What about the Cerberus technology they used on me?” inquired Leela hopefully. “Can’t you modify that to work with his nervous system?”

Garrus’ head shot up, interrupting his subvocal conversation with Ismene and asked just as hopefully, “Is that possible?”

Even this news peaked Kevin and Ismene’s interest. While they didn’t understand much of the terminology, anything that got Garrus excited flowed into them. They both cheered loudly, but the celebration was short lived as Patty shook her head.

“We tried to retrieve some of the data from EDI and any remains from Cronos,” explained Patty as they all stared at her eagerly. She took a deep breath and finished, “The results were less than appealing.”

“Is it dangerous?”

“Very much so, Ismene,” answered Patty with a sad shake of her head. “Much of what we knew about the procedure was lost in the aftermath of the Catalyst igniting. We were able to find some bits that would work with Garrus around his spine to relieve the pressure but with how turians talk, their hand eye coordination, and so many other factors; we can’t make it safe for him.”

“But they brought back Leela so why can’t it work on Garrus?” Kevin was pouting by this point and clinging defensively to Garrus.

“They had two years to work on Leela,” explained Patty. “Two years to fix her brain, bones, and organs. The procedure was tailored to work exclusively on her. It’s never been tested on anybody but her. Humans are one thing, but getting it to work safely on the other species will take several years.” She turned to Leela who was absentmindedly watching the children and the kids with a far away look and came back to focus on the doctor. “But that doesn’t mean we won’t stop trying and maybe one day Garrus can return to his old self. Just as long as he doesn’t get into any more accidents.”

“I don’t intend to,” he laughed handing Kevin back his toy. “I’ll keep up with my exercises as well. If I can’t hold a rifle again, then that is how the spirits have decided I shall live the rest of my life.”

“But what about going on missions?” chimed Kevin as he set aside his toys. “You like going on missions.”

“I made a choice on a mission, Kevin,” Garrus said softly and seriously, as he explained to the children. “In life, we are given choices and the ones we make choose our path. I chose to save someone’s life and it has cost me a few things but I don’t regret it. I will take responsibility and whatever happens shall happen.”

“Okay,” answered Kevin reserved.

“Besides,” chuckled Garrus as he ruffled the boy’s thick mass of hair, “I’ll be able to stay home with the two of you more.” Both kids let out a cheer at this news and the adults all laughed at their excitement.

“Speaking of home,” all eyes turned to Patty whose smile was as toothy as it was broad, “I think you can be released today if you like?”

“We haven’t had a chance to move any furniture,” said Leela a little worried thinking about Garrus walking up the stairs.

“I think he should be able to manage with a little help.” Patty activated her omni-tool and pulled up a read out of Garrus’ progress. “He’s not had any problems when we’ve had him walk up the small flights outside of heavy breathing. Just have him do it a few times a day to build up the muscle, but make sure you’re home Leela. If you aren’t, he’s going to have to remain on the ground level.”

“What do you think?” asked Garrus to a still awestruck Leela. “You ready for me to come home?”
Leela could do little other than nod before standing up and excusing herself. She felt their eyes on her defeating back as she made a line straight for the bathroom and fell hard against the wall, sliding down to sit on the floor. She felt her heart pounding in her chest and her breathing shallow as she tried to come to terms with the fact that Garrus was going to be coming home with her. She had been preparing for when Patty would tell her the news. She even got his favorite snacks and drinks for when he was ready but she still couldn’t handle it. She felt like she was drowning. The world was spinning and Leela didn’t even hear the people enter the bathroom after her. She was vaguely aware that one was small and shiny and the other was blue. She could barely make out what they were saying; words simply poured out of her mouth in response. She could make out smiles and a few other familiar words; something about if she was okay but the rest was lost on her.

“Hey Patty,” she whispered as things finally came back into focus.

“You had a panic attack didn’t you?” Patty knelt down and began checking Leela’s pulse.

Leela remained quiet as Patty finished checking her. Turning, she noticed Ismene watching curiously, her mandibles twitching anxiously as she clutched her teddy bear. Reaching out, Leela stroked a mandible and smiled. The child calmed at her touch. Leela felt her own pulse slow as her breathing calmed, and she finally felt like she could handle everything the day had thrown at her.

“Are you okay?” the little turian asked apprehensively.

Leela nodded and pat the child on the head.

“I am little one,” sighed Leela happily. “You helped make me feel better.”

“I did?!” Ismene chirped loudly making the women chuckle.

“Yes,” Leela grinned as she asked Patty to help her up. With minor difficulty, she made it to her feet and rested against the wall.

“Are you sure?” Skepticism laced Ismene’s voice and Leela nodded as she caught her breath again.

“I’m sure Ismene.” The admiral took a deep breath and pushed away from the wall. Her legs were strong and when she didn’t falter, she turned to see Ismene’s cautious glare. “You don’t believe me?”

“I don’t know.”

Ismene looked Leela up and down with a similar fervor to Patty’s. Leela took a few laps around the bathroom and stopped in front of the child.

“You believe me now?”

“How do I know it won’t happen to you again?”

“You don’t,” quipped Leela with a small tap to Ismene’s nose.

“Can we stop it?” Ismene rubbed her nose and glared up at Leela.

“Not really,” Leela sighed as she crouched down and cupped the girl’s cheek. “Sometimes I get a bit overwhelmed, and believe me during the war it happened a little too often. But nowadays it doesn’t so much.”

“But you have bad dreams. We’ve heard you.”

“Is that why you two climb in my bed some nights?” asked Leela when Ismene gave her a nervous nod. Leela pulled her close. She felt Ismene’s arms squeeze her and Leela let out a fake squeak of surprise.

“Quit lying,” grumbled Ismene.

Leela laughed and separated from the child. Leela gave her a kiss on the forehead before taking her by the hand and leading her into the hall where they found Garrus and Kevin sitting in a couple of chairs. Kevin was showing off a book that he had to read for school on his pad. Leela had to cough to get their attention, but Garrus held up a finger.

“So what happened to the princess and the pig keeper?”

“They went back to his home after they beat the evil king and now they’re on a journey to destroy the cauldron that makes the evil undead army!”

Kevin’s hands shot up into the air as he explained, hand flailing like he was waving a sword. Garrus held a finger up to his mouth for Kevin to quiet and the boy whispered an apology.

Chuckling, the sniper turned his attention back to Leela and Ismene.
“Are you okay?”
Leela nodded and gave his fringe a gentle stroke with her finger. “Can we go talk somewhere for a minute?”

“Of course,” Garrus struggled to his feet and asked, “Patty, I know that today was supposed to be your day off, but could I impose?” he asked politely, gesturing to the children.
“I’ll take them to the commissary.” Holding out her hands, Patty said, “I hear they have a good number of fruit and sweets available today.”
The kids gave skeptical looks to their guardians and after a nod from each of them, they left. Garrus and Leela walked down the hall away from them. Since they were close to the physical therapy wing, their footsteps were deafened by the clanging of weights and shouts of encouragement. From the corner of her eye, Leela noticed the unsteady quivering of Garrus’ knee as he walked. She became all too aware of her own limp and let out a low breath.

“Do you need my arm?”
Garrus shook his head.
“Can manage,” he chuckled when her eyes widened. “Come on Leela, I’ve taken a missle to the face. I think I can manage walking down a hallway.”
“Fair enough,” she whispered as they came to a door.
It hissed open and they stepped into a lounge like room. It was painted a calming blue and they took a seat on the large sofa that was located near a coffee table. Leela opened her omni-tool and sent Patty an update on their location before relaxing into the couch. They had spent several visits in this room when Garrus was still having trouble walking. It was a visitation room and there were several large couches and chairs which made it a prime place in case Garrus should fall; and he had several times. Each time he had laughed it off but moments later, Leela could hear him cursing. It was painful to watch, but she remembered how she had felt when she was held hostage, Akuze, and so many other times when she had felt alone dealing with her own recoveries. Each time was easier, but overcoming herself was always the biggest challenge and Garrus had handled it better than she ever did.

“What’s bothering you?”
His words were slow and deliberate, much like his steps, a constant reminder of what he was going through.
“I had a panic attack,” she stated simply.
“Please don’t say it was about me.”
“It was,” she replied flatly at his concerned distress.
“Spirits Leela.” He took a moment to gather his thoughts; wanting his words to be perfect and steady. “You have nothing to worry about,” he reassured her as his hand wrapped around hers as squeezed. “I’m going to live. I may not spend another day on the front lines, but I’ll live and I’ll be with you and the kids.”
“It’s my fault you’re hurt,” she choked out, tears carving their way down her cheeks. “Everything that’s happened is my fault and now you’ll have to spend…”
“The rest of my life walking with a cane?” Garrus’ lips brushed the top of her head. “I’m lucky to be alive let alone walking. If I were a human, I’d be paralyzed but thank…” he stopped; the muscles in his throat locking. When he regained control he continued, “Thank the spirits I got to live to see you again and being able to share all that I have with you.”
“But you probably won’t be able to hold a gun ever again, spar, walk up the stairs, or even go on missions. Hell, what about Kevin and Ismene? What about things that you’ll need to teach them that are part of turian culture?”
“I’ll work that out with Sol when the time comes.”
She could see in his eyes what aspects of the culture she was talking about. He would need to start with Ismene soon and he’d already known that Kevin had every intention of joining in. The problem was that much of it involved military prep. In his current condition, he was unsure of how he would handle it but he had talked with Solana and she’d agreed to help him. He hadn’t talked to Leela about this but he saw that the mere mention of his sister made her relax slightly.
“As for your concern with my walking up the stairs,” he scooted closer, the couch squeaking beneath him, “You have your biotics. I figured I can use you as an elevator.”

Leela’s fist pounded his shoulder as she growled, “Fuck you.”

“I don’t think we have the right toys for that.”

Both of them laughed loudly but were quickly shushed by a nearby family. They turned to snickering and Leela fell into Garrus’ chest and threw an arm over him. His arm wrapped around her shoulder and his mandible rested softly on her head. A tranquil warmth spread through both of them, their bodies molding perfectly into one another. Their arms seemed to create a protective cocoon around them, as if to separate themselves from the outside world. When Garrus opened his eyes he could see that the kids were approaching and knew that they had to part.

Stroking Leela’s neck he whispered, “Nothing is your fault, Leela. You made choices that in a way were forced on you. I was there through all of it. I’ve seen you go through so many ups and downs that I know that our friends were all that kept you from falling apart. Even if some blame you, the truth is that it was war and many more would have died if we hadn’t done something. We’re all guilty of one thing or another my love and you don’t need to carry that burden alone.”

Leela nodded and buried her face in his shirt.

“Thank you, Garrus.”

“No thanks necessary,” he murmured as he lifted her chin up and kissed her softly which earned him a groan of disgust from the kids and he retorted, “You won’t be saying that in when you’re older.”

“Did you have fun?” asked Leela only to have a giant snickerdoodle shoved in her face. “What’s this?”

“It’s your favorite!” beamed Kevin as Leela took the cookie. “Oh yeah! Ismene!”

The girl pulled a giant candy bar out of her bag and handed it to Garrus.

“We told Patty your favorites and she paid for it.” Ismene and Kevin both looked a little ashamed at this admission.

“Thank you.” Garrus stood and gave both of the kids a pat on the head before extending a hand to Patty. When she took it, he nodded and said, “Thank you for everything you’ve done over these past few months. But,” he turned to Leela who was busy hugging the kids, “I’m afraid my leaving will be delayed a few days. I would like to give them time to get everything ready.”

“That’s quite understandable,” Patty gave the four a warm smile. “I’ll prepare your paperwork and you three can come back for him in two days?”

“Thanks, Patty.” Leela stood up and embraced her friend once more.

The two separated and Patty headed toward her office to begin processing the paperwork. When she was gone, Leela began making sure that the kids were ready to go. Once it was confirmed that all items were secured, they made the trek back to Garrus’ room that he shared with a salarian who was out for an appointment. After they helped him into bed, Garrus sighed and gave them all one more kiss goodbye. He took an extra moment with Leela and leaned back into the bed. He felt his eyes drift closed as he finally began feeling the stress from the day’s events. Just as she was about to leave, Garrus called to Leela who turned.

“Yes?” she asked; confused as to why he was still awake.

“Just do me one favor...” he said slowly, labored due to his fatigue.

“What’s that?”

“No party.”

“Garrus,” snorted Leela as she shook her head and blew him one more kiss, “I wouldn’t dream of it.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Some more filler regarding Garrus getting out of the hospital and a new character.

Chapter 38

Not owned by me or anything. Owned by EA and Bioware

There he was, a veteran of a galactic war. A highly trained soldier with more kill counts than he was certain any sniper had ever achieved. He had led a crew of specialists and waged a guerilla war against three of the deadliest gangs in the galaxy. But on this day, the day he was finally released from the hospital after over a month, was one of the few days he'd ever feared death.

"KEVIN KEEP IT STRAIGHT! ISMENE, FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPIRITS, WILL YOU STOP PULLING TO THE RIGHT!?

Nurses, doctors, and orderlies dived out of their way as the kids stampeded their way through the hallways. Everything was a blur as Garrus clung to the chair for dear chair jerked, left, then right, followed by the sound of an old man screaming, "You little…." He had no idea where they were taking him as he caught glimpses of people he knew and shouted apologies to them. After what seemed like his fifteenth apology, Garrus finally felt the cool recycled air of the presidium caress his face and fill his lungs.

"You two…" Garrus' voice was shaking as he turned to glower at the panting children.

The smiles drained from their faces. Kevin's normally brown face turned beige and Ismene's throat released a series of subvocal apologies. Garrus snorted loudly and looked over his shoulder to see Leela struggling with his bag as she tried to make amends to all the staff and patients she passed. When she exited the doors, Garrus chuckled at the look on her face but remained quiet as she pulled on Kevin's ear and tugged on Ismene's mandible.

"If you two ever pull a stunt like that again I will blister your asses until you can't walk straight!"

"But…," squeaked Ismene.

"I'll figure it out with you young lady!" Leela snapped making the child recoil with a yelp as she escaped Leela's grip. Kevin managed to wrestle away from her but there was no place they could go to escape her disapproving gaze. "The mayhem you two caused, the damage you could have done, plus the patients you disturbed! You two know better than to act like that!"

"Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to keep your voice down," ordered a disgruntled turian.

"Sorry!" snapped Leela before taking a deep breath. "I'm sorry," she said once she'd calmed down.

"And I'm going to have to ask that you refrain from disciplining your children on hospital grounds unless you want me to call security. I don't care that you're the galaxy's savior, but one should learn to conduct themselves better with their offspring."
"I would watch who you're threatening," hissed Leela as she stomped toward the turian. "It was an empty threat, this time. But if they need a swat in the ass, they'll get a swat in the ass. You just stand there at your post like the good little orderly you are."

"Leela," coughed Garrus from his seat. "Leave the poor woman alone. She's just concerned."

"Concerned about what?" Leela asked indignantly.

"That your mental state may affect your treatment of your children."

Leela turned back to the turian and saw the same emptiness her mirror reflected back at her most mornings.

"Have you?"

"I haven't seen my mate and children in three months," answered the female. "I'd have episodes and she took our daughters."

"Did you hurt them?"

She looked to Garrus and shook her head, "No. My mate is a former Commando. She held me back and I've been here getting therapy. The doctors let me help out in exchange for the therapy costs and some meds."

Leela's arms wrapped around the turian's waist and she squeezed her gently whispering, "You'll see them again." She felt the turian nod and her powerful limbs squeeze her tiny human frame. Leela gave the female a final apology and comforting word, and turned to the kids warning, "You two are going to be punished for your little escapade."

"Yes, Leela," answered both kids in shamed unison.

"I apologize for my intrusion on this matter," replied the female.

"It's fine," said Leela with a sad smile. "Just remember to take it one day at a time."

The female smiled and nodded before excusing herself and entering the hospital. When she was gone, Leela sent a text before handing a pad to Kevin and Ismene to go play with in the grass. With them occupied, she helped Garrus out of the wheelchair and led him to a nearby bench. He handled himself just fine, as she knew he would. His stride was strong but he was still having difficulty maintaining his balance. His hand gripped the cane she'd given to him that morning. It was a strong cane made of walnut that she was assured would support his frame. He'd spent ten minutes testing the support and gave Leela a deep kiss which got a loud giggle from both kids. "What are you smirking about?"

Leela continued to grin as she leaned in and kissed his mandible. "Just the look on your face when you gave me that kiss this morning."

"I kiss you all the time," snorted Garrus as he dropped onto the park bench.

"Way to ruin the moment dear." Leela plopped down next to him and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Because I mentioned that I kiss you all the time?" Garrus looked down at her, mandibles twitching. "How did I ruin the moment?"
"Garrus," she took him by the mandible and turned his head, "It was how excited you were when you kissed me."

"I see," he hummed, palming the handle of his cane. "Well it's a good cane. Sturdy, solid," he rapped it against the concrete, "and it seems reliable."

"Well it's a hand-made strong support system with a nearly unbreakable core," Her hand rested on his and squeezed. 'At least that's what the salesman said about the first one he tried to sell me before I snapped that in half and had him order a custom made one.'

Garrus rolled his eyes and chuckled before resting his head on hers and began rubbing his plates against her flesh. He felt her relax into him and soon he heard the soft breaths of her dozing and laughed inwardly. He had forgotten how tiring it could be having two kids running around all the time. He'd gotten so used to coordinating rest periods for him and them that he had forgotten that she wasn't used to it. Every time she came to visit him she looked just a bit more tired. The dark circles under her eyes had steadily grown bigger and from her emails and the outburst, he could see she needed a break.

"Leela?"

"What," she mumbled, rubbing her face into his shoulder.

"Did you sleep last night?"

"Two hours," she yawned.

"I'll take the kids for tonight."

"Can't," she sat up and rubbed the tired from her eyes, "we got too much stuff to do."

Garrus watched her yawn and shook his head.

"Last time I saw you like this, was the night before you told Victus about his son."

"You've seen me worse," she scoffed. They both chuckled and she felt Garrus' reassuring arm wrap around her waist.

"I have," he replied holding up a hand and began counting. "There was the thing against the Collectors, Saren, Noveria, Rannoch…ow!"

"I get the point Garrus," scoffed Leela as she removed her elbow from his ribs. "After this evening, I'll curl up with you. We can pass out and sleep 'til the kids come crashing down on us."

"That's not likely to happen," he laughed as she rested back on his shoulder.

"Yeah, I know." There was a sudden beep from Leela's omni-tool. "She's here," announced Leela after shutting down the message.

"Who's here?" Garrus stood up and followed Leela who had called for the kids. They headed up the stairs and back to the hospital entrance where a blue air-car had taken residence.

"She really needs to learn to tone it down."

"Wow," exclaimed Ismene as she ran a hand along the car. "Whose car is this?"

"It is mine, young lady."
All heads snapped around to the hospital doors which revealed a tall statuesque purple skinned asari. Her face was covered in green markings and she was dressed in a blue pair of slacks, black tee-shirt, and black suede jacket. Her blue eyes seemed to pierce through them, checking for weaknesses or other defenses to break down. Garrus fought the urge to place himself between the asari and Leela as his mate began to approach the new female. Her head was held high and her limp almost non-existent. Garrus hadn't seen this level of confidence in her since she'd been back, but he knew she was posturing based on the slight tremor in her good knee after each step.

Garrus could see the faintest pulse of biotic energy escape from her hands. The asari's gaze remained focused on Leela. Garrus watched as her cold gaze scanned his mate's body, focusing on the injuries until finally, the piercing gaze slowly transformed into one of motherly concern... Finally, the asari's legs moved forward and Garrus could see Leela relax. Her limp now fully visible, Leela approached the older woman whose arms stretched out in a welcoming embrace. Leela collapsed into the woman, arms squeezing around the asari so tight that she had to reprimand the human.

"By the goddess child, you've been through worse than I imagined." The asari gently pushed the Leela away and shook her head. "But not as bad as I was originally told." A blue hand stroked Leela's scars and the older woman smiled. "At least you walked away with just some scars. They're definitely an improvement."

"It's all part of the job Aunt Tu'Ve," joked Leela with a light punch to the asari's arm.

"Aunt?" echoed the kids and Garrus at the sound of this word.

Turning, Leela gave them all a smile and nodded, "This is my aunt, Tu'Ve J'Kajni."

"So you're Rose's mate." Stated Garrus stepping forward, hand extended. "I can see why you two were attracted to one another."

"What do you mean?" inquired the centuries old woman as she took Garrus' hand.

"From the way you were staring down Leela," he smirked with a flick of his mandibles. "Only a formidable person could stand up to the Shepard women," he chuckled at the strength of her grip. "And I can tell from the strength of your grip, you've spent some time as a Commando."

"Commando and instructor," smiled Tu'Ve as she wrapped an arm around Leela's shoulder. "Her parents hired me to tutor this red headed mule when she first started exhibiting symptoms of biotic potential."

"Thanks for giving him fuel to tease Aunt Rose with," huffed Leela as she tried to hide a smile.

"You're most welcome my lovely niece," Tu'Ve smiled at Leela before walking to her car where she removed a couple of bags and presented them to the children.

The kids looked to Garrus for permission and when he nodded, they ripped into the brown paper; eyes widening in surprise at what each contained. Both kids stammered words of thanks while Tu'Ve grinned at them in appreciation.

"What did you spoil them with?" sighed Leela as she walked forward with Garrus. When they saw the gifts, they both laughed while the kids glowered at them.

"What's so funny?" barked Ismene.

"Watch those sub-vocals," warned Garrus as he heard the anger in Ismene's voice. "They may not
"Well, you need to stop talking about how you find Leela's butt nice."

Garrus' mandibles fluttered embarrassingly as he heard Leela, Kevin, and Tu'Ve laugh behind him. Patty had told him that he'd have problems with his voice control, but he didn't realize just how little control remained. He tried to look menacing to his mate and the children, but the three continued to laugh while Ismene did her best to keep her own giggles under control. He remained stoic until they all calmed down.

His flutters slowing and turning into annoyed twitches as he asked, "So would you explain to me why my mate felt the need to power up her biotics?"

"It's a reflex I groomed into her," smiled Tu'Ve as she took the bag from Leela and headed toward the car. "You never once noticed how when she is nervous or when she's in a tense situation her barriers go up? If she doesn't want to be touched or doesn't wish to have others around her, she subconsciously creates a barrier. Only when she realizes that it's up, will it either remain and grow stronger or dissipate."

"I've seen several biotics do that," huffed Garrus as he limped toward the car with Ismene in tow. "Just because she can do it doesn't make her special."

"That may be true," smirked Tu'Ve as she slammed the trunk shut, "but Leela's biotic fields react differently. I taught her to mold it to work with her body to increase her striking power." Tu'Ve gave Leela a stern look, "Which is one of the reasons why she has so many scars."

"Don't teach me offense if you aren't willing to work on defense," retorted Leela as she opened the car and helped the kids inside.

"I taught you everything you'd need to move up in the ranks," commented Tu'Ve with a tired sigh. "It's not my fault that you didn't improve your defenses. I always told you that your barriers needed work."

"That sounds familiar," snorted Garrus. "Maybe we should talk to Jack and…"

"Oh shut it Garrus," Leela bit, shooting him a venomous glare.

"Or what?" he teased as he passed by her, "are you going to turn on your barriers and push me back?"

"Only in the places that matter the most." A malevolent grin spread her lips leading Garrus to mutter that he knew ways to break them. "I look forward to the attempt."

Climbing into the front, while Garrus settled in the back, Leela turned to her aunt and asked, "So, what's Mom got planned for this evening?"

Tu'Ve turned on the car, and they took off as she smiled at her niece, "All I'm going to say is that you're going to have a tough time sleeping tonight."

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