Scary Girl

by jspgrunt0311

Summary

The story of orphan Athena Shepard and her comrades during Mass Effect 1. There will be sprinkles of her past, including past relationships, childhood and some disturbing situations. Cerberus and BAA&T have a much bigger role in her life and this story as she is basically a genetically modified super biotic marine.
Introduction

Arcturus Station Docks - SR 1 Normandy

Today wasn’t like any other day for the crew of the Systems Alliance’s newest frigate. Today was the day they would be introduced to their new Executive Officer. Lieutenant Jeff “Joker” Moreau was anxious to get the ship going again and begin the Normandy’s shakedown cruise. He’d been sitting in the cockpit calibrating all of the sensors, engines, maneuvering thrusters and every small and seemingly insignificant detail to his liking. He thought that it was a complete waste of time to go outside and stand in formation just to say ‘hello’ to the new XO.

He didn’t think he was being cocky knowing and showing everyone that he was the best pilot in the Alliance. It really was why he was chosen for this assignment. The Vrolik Syndrome did not affect his almost unnatural sense of tactical awareness. If anything, his time in the academy showed his innate ability to put his ship in the best position to win. None of his instructors or even his fellow students could accept it as fact when the day came that he was beating them all on the simulations on a regular basis.

The instructors would always try to handicap him by putting him in the simulators of inferior ships to see just how he would adjust. It always ended up revealing just how much of a better pilot he was compared to them and the rest of the class. Even when he was in control of outdated battlecruisers he would almost always find a way to make the instructors pay for any mistake they made. It didn’t matter whether they were at the helm of the most advanced ships in the alliance fleet, he would more often than not be able to teach the instructors the error of their ways.

His technical and tactical abilities got him noticed enough to be offered a place as an instructor, but they all knew that wasn’t good enough for him. He wanted to fly and so almost to spite him, he was assigned as a transport shuttle pilot. It wasn't exactly what he wanted as a career but at least he was flying. It wasn’t until he was transporting a Turian General to the new Alliance Frigate Normandy that he felt he was in the wrong place.

She was a lithe beauty and he felt so strongly that he should be the one to pilot it. He graduated at the top of his class leaving shattered records in his wake and he knew he was the best even to the point that his instructors noticed him. Their praise would still not get him this assignment. There was no way that the Alliance high command would let a cripple pilot the newest, sleekest and sexiest ship in the Alliance fleet.

So what was Jeff to do? He made the only decision that made sense to him. He made the brilliant decision to steal it and take it for a joy ride. His grand theft starship stunt to just fly the Normandy almost got him jailed, but it sure did get him noticed.

If not for the Turian’s General Invectus and Captain Anderson, he would probably be spending most of his life in a cell. Instead they were so thoroughly impressed with how he handled the ship through the practice course and how he evaded the fighters sent out to disable the ship that they rewarded him with the assignment that was the envy of the Alliance.

The Normandy…was a marvel of human and turian ingenuity. She was now his baby and he would take care of her like a newborn.

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It’s a good thing that the airlock was close to the helm. He slowly got up and retrieved his crutches
to go outside. The helmsman chair was quite comfortable, but every time he had to get up it was a battle not to look like a flopping buffoon because his legs were usually numb for a bit.

He slowly made his way out of the airlock and watched as everyone began to form up. *Do we really need to do this every time we get a new officer?* His frustrated expression betrayed his thought. As he looked around he noticed that Dr. Chakwas wasn’t around yet which was a blessing. He hated being doted upon like he was some kind fine china. He took his place on the left side of the formation where a chair had been set up for him.

He really hated standing in formation. The crutches were starting to hurt his arms. His legs were throbbing as he tried to stand as straight as he could. The chair that had been set up for him looked so tempting, but his pride told him that he would be damned if his first meeting with the XO wasn’t going to be eye to eye.

“Why don’t you just sit?” Lt. Alenko asked him with a little bit of frustration in his voice. His copilot was a biotic marine whose flying ability was about as competent as a turtle was fast. He might be able to moor and unmoor a ship without crashing, but that shouldn’t be the reason he was made the backup pilot. He was an excellent grunt by everyone’s account which made him think that was probably the reason he was there.

“Thanks but no thanks. I’m fine.” Joker hissed out with more frustration and anger in his expression than he intended. Kaiden just rolled his eyes and chuckled at his stubborn friend.

Jeff watched intently when he spotted them as they approached. Captain Anderson came into view first. He was talking to someone and as she came into view he couldn’t believe his eyes. Commander Athena Shepard, the Survivor of Akuze, the Butcher of Torfan? *Wow, she sure is impressive looking.* His eyes were intently watching her to the total exclusion of everything else. She had his complete attention.

As he observed their approach he came to the obvious conclusion that she must be one of the tallest women in the world as she was easily half a head taller than the Captain. She was well over six feet tall and her tight fitting uniform revealed her powerful and intimidating frame as the muscles rippled under it as she walked with an easy going gate.

He started to forget about the burning sensation in his legs and arms and concentrated on her. At her approach Alenko called the crew to attention, *ugh…really Kaiden…fuck.* He thought to himself as he just stood there in the same position and thanked God that she started her greetings with him first.

Her complexion was darker than he would have thought. She had an olive complexion with thick, dark black hair. She smiled quite a bit and was very personable with the Captain. As she got closer he watched her movements, which reminded him of a stalking panther waiting to pounce on her prey.

Her N7 patch became clearer and actually explained her manner of movement. She was a prime example of what a perfect human female should be. He was captivated by her as he was sure most of the crew was. When she finally stepped in front of him with that smile and those beautifully clear and aqua blue eyes, he didn’t know what to say. He probably should have stuck to the basics like *nice to meet you Commander or I look forward to working with you Commander,* but it just wouldn’t be him and sometimes he wanted to shoot himself because of it.

“This is Lt. Jeff Moreau, our helmsman and chief pilot for the Normandy.” Captain Anderson introduced him with a look of dread...for good reason.
“How’s the air up there Commander?” He regretted his words as soon as they floated effortlessly out of his mouth. He almost cringed at what the response would be.

To his relief and pleasant surprise she let out a chuckle as she smiled and lightly squeezed his wrist. “Wow, all that time to think of something and that’s all you got?” Again she lets out a short and pleasant chuckle. “Joker huh…well it’s good to meet the best helmsman in the Alliance. Your piloting skills are already the stuff of legend. I look forward to working with you.”

The fire in his legs finally overtook him in a numbing failure of his body. As he began to fall, he felt himself become lighter as the Commander, with a slight bluish glow in her eyes subtly grabbed a hold of him with her biotics and assisted him in sitting in the chair. With no one being the wiser she made it look like it was his decision to sit down. He’ll definitely have a few bruises from the biotic force she used, but nothing popped so he was thankful. He turned and looked into her eyes with a reverence he had never felt for anyone else. She winked at him and proceeded to Lt. Alenko who saluted crisply and stood like the healthy and powerful marine that he was.

“Commander.” He said as she returned his salute.

“Lieutenant, I hear that you’re a biotic of some skill.” She stated to him as she firmly shook his hand.

“Yes, maam.” He answered in a very militarily appropriate way.

As they made their small talk, he watched Alenko basically come just short of drooling all over himself. He stuttered now and then, but the Commander looked like an old pro at handling all of the hero worship. She continued down the line and finally met with the Turian Spectre Nihlus.

The Turian had spoken constantly about how humans and turians needed to put their past behind them and begin to work together. He asked everyone about the Commander and what they thought of her. It never occurred to him that she would end up the XO of the Normandy. Was there something else going on here? An N7 was rare enough, but now a Spectre was on the ship. Something big was going on. He could feel it in his bones.

When all of the introductions were done, Joker lifted himself up and began to hobble back to the ship almost regretting not bringing his wheelchair. He watched as most of the crew just left him behind except for Dr. Chakwas and Commander Shepard. Dr. Chakwas always looks out for him and even though he gives her a hard time, he is eternally thankful for her concern.

“Come Jeff I’ll help you get to the helm.” The Doctor offered with a motherly tone that just ate at Joker’s nerves.

“I’m good doc. I can get there on my own.”

“I’ll walk with him doc. Don’t worry he’ll be fine.” Shepard added. Joker let his chagrin at the Commander’s offer show plainly on his face.

He watched her as she rolled her eyes. “Don’t be an idiot Jeff, I always like to be the last one on board. Make sure everyone is accounted for and all that.”

It hit him like a baseball bat to the shins. He thought she was worried about him and it turned out to be one of her pre operation rituals that probably existed long before she knew him. Damn it! What a fucking idiot…she’s gonna think I’m some kind of mental charity case.

“Usually I do this by myself. It’s nice to have company for a change.”
Damn her, she was so disarming. “So…is this your first assignment as an XO?”

“Yeah, I guess getting the shit beat out of you by a Thresher Maw and exterminating a bunch of Batarian pirates gets you noticed pretty quickly. Captain Anderson got me this gig after Torfan. Tell you the truth, I’m a little intimidated by the whole commanding a ship thing. I’d rather be in the shit with a platoon of marines. I signed on to be a ground pounder, not Popeye the sailorman.”

He tried to hold his laughter in when she said it to no avail. He had to catch himself from falling down and again she caught him gently. “Well you do have the forearms for it.” He said to her as he pulled himself together with her help.

Now it was her turn to start laughing. It was the most pleasant walk he had ever had…ever. She definitely knew about his disease just by how gentle she was with him, but she never mentioned it once. Her laughter was contagious and he found himself hanging on every word she said. During their walk to the helm he learned that she was half Irish and half Syrian according to her genealogical DNA profile. She lived on the streets of Buenos Aires as an orphan and was always in trouble with the law running with a gang called the Reds. She told him that she actually got noticed by the Alliance Brass when she got into a fight with an N3 commando outside of a nightclub when she was eighteen.

“You fought an N3 when you were eighteen?” Jeff was becoming more and more amazed of her.

“I was a bit of a bitch back then and he did grab my ass like he owned it.” She answered.

“He was lucky I didn’t kill him with his own gun. ‘Nobody fucks with the Tenth Street Reds!’ I told him.” She chuckled lightly.

“Ten minutes later I was in a holding cell with Anderson giving me a choice of doing ten years or joining up.”

She told him that she wasn’t at all remorseful for any part of her life as those experiences made her who she was. As they got closer to the helm he couldn’t help but notice that she crackled with biotic energy.

“Did you always have such an electric personality?” He probed.

“Unfortunately yes…” She hesitated and looked uncomfortable like she didn’t want to say anymore.

“Jeff…I…”

“No, you don’t have to say anything. I feel like I’m prying anyway.” Her face was a little sad as she gazed at him with the most beautiful crystal blue orbs he had ever seen. They were such a stark contrast to her jet black hair and olive skin. He felt the heat building in his cheeks as he quickly turned away. They walked the rest of the short distance to the helm in silence.

He was almost disappointed when they reached the helm and he settled into the pilot’s seat.

“Well Jeff…I’ll let you get to work on your baby. If you need anything don’t hesitate to ask.”

With a gentle squeeze on the shoulder and a crooked smile, she left the cockpit and went on her way. She was probably going to chat a little with the rest of the crew. She was incredible…amazing…he just kept thinking of her beautiful eyes and that gaze. He was left there watching her walk down the walkway like a star struck puppy. *Snap out of it! There is no way in hell that a woman like that would ever even think twice about you.* He thought to himself. He let out a sigh
and got to the task at hand.

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This is where he belonged as he started his launch checklist to make sure that everything was in working order. He coordinated his efforts with engineer Adams and navigator Pressly.

“Drive Core is online and ready. All systems are up and ready.” Lt. Adams said over the intercom.

“Navigation systems and charts are fully updated and ready.” Chief Pressly added.

“All Helm controls active and responding at optimum efficiency.” Joker added to the chorus going over the intercom.

He interpreted the data and manipulated the controls like he was born to do it. It was as effortless to him as it is for someone to breathe. He watched as the massive structure which is the mass relay come into view and began his pre-jump checklist.

“The Arcturus Prime relay is in range. Initiating transmission sequence.”

“We are connected. Calculating transit mass and destination.”

“The relay is hot. Acquiring approach vector.”

“All stations secure for transit.”

“The board is green. Approach run has begun.”

“Hitting the relay in 3… 2… 1…”

They go through the relay in a blinding white flash and seconds later they are at their destination light years away from where they started.

“Thrusters… check. Navigation… check. Internal emissions sink engaged. All systems online. Drift… just under 1500 K.” The look on Joker’s face said cocky and unbearable smugness, which was totally shot down by Nihlus’ next words.

“1500 is good. Your captain will be pleased.” Nihlus mentions as he nonchalantly leaves the cockpit.

“I hate that guy.” The words coming out of his mouth sounded more of frustration than of outright hate.

“Nihlus just paid you a complement… so you hate him?” Lt. Captain Obvious Alenko chimed in with his statement of straightforward puzzlement that was more sarcastic than he made it sound.

“You remember to zip up your jump suit on the way out of the bathroom? That’s good. I just jumped halfway across the galaxy and hit a target the size of a pinhead. So that’s incredible!” He hated to justify himself to Alenko, especially because the guy couldn’t fly a kite let alone the Normandy.

“Besides, Spectres are trouble. I don’t like having him on board. Call me paranoid.”

“You’re paranoid. The Council helped fund this project. They have a right to send someone to keep an eye on their investment.” Alenko shot back without hesitation.
“Yeah, that is the official story. But only an idiot believes the official story.”

“They don’t send Spectres on shakedown runs.” The sound of her voice sent chills down his spine.

“So there’s more going on here than the Captain is letting on.”

“Joker! Status report.” The Captain ordered over the radio, breaking the amusing argument in the cockpit.

“Just cleared the mass relay, Captain. Stealth systems engaged. Everything looks solid.” For all his faults in verbal etiquette, he can be pretty professional sounding when he wants to be.

“Good, Find a comm. Buoy and link us into the network. I want mission reports relayed back to the Alliance brass before we reach Eden Prime.”

“Aye, aye, Captain. Better brace yourself, sir. I think Nihlus is headed your way.” He tried to warn the Captain as if Nihlus was some kind of boogeyman.

“He’s already here, Lieutenant.” Came the response and everyone enjoyed watching Joker cringe uncomfortably.

“Tell Commander Shepard to meet me in the comm room for a defriefing.” The Captain continued in an annoyed tone.

“Your heard that Commander?” He turned to look at her.

She scrunched her brow and bit her bottom lip. “He sounds angry. Something must have gone wrong with the mission.”

“Pff. Captain always sounds like that when he’s talking to me.” Joker adds matter of factly.

“I can’t possibly imagine why.” Probably the best dig Alenko has ever dished out.

“Ugh…I hate when I go into a meeting blind.” She began to turn to leave and paused to look at him and Alenko. She chuckled.

“Later Lieutenant…” She said to Alenko and then her eyes met Joker’s and with a friendly and joking manner she bid him farewell. “Tal luego Fangio.”

She turned and left the cockpit and for a moment Joker was at a loss for words as he tried his damndest to keep his cheeks from flaming up. He took a couple of breathes and turned to Alenko. “What did she say?”

“I don’t know… maybe it was something about your wonderful personality.”

“I am wonderful aren’t I?” Joker responded and Alenko rolled his eyes.
Simulation Stimulation

Chapter Summary

Athena shows off her piloting skills and jokes around with Joker and Kaiden

Chapter Notes

sorry for the delay. Life just gets in the way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Normandy SR1 – Returning to the Citadel after the Eden Prime Mission

“Can you run simulations on this thing?” There was a slight hint of mischief in her voice.

“It can run any simulation you can imagine.” Joker answered like a proud papa. “Do you need a demonstration of what I can do?”

Athena’s lips upturned slightly and she smiled crookedly. “Well, I need to be sure of the competence of my lead pilot.” He heard the sarcasm and smirked.

“Commander, I am the best there is period.”

“I don’t know Jeff, I heard there was someone else who could challenge you for that title.” He watched her as she crouched down next to his chair. “I heard that there are a couple of practice courses in the academy that you don’t hold the records for.” She mentioned to him as she playfully amused herself with his holographic control panel.

“That’s bull! I hold all of the records for every ship type in the Alliance.” He was a little taken aback by her interest in the simulator.

“Why don’t you pull up the Grand Canyon UT47 Shuttle Run?” She asked him. “I’m pretty sure that was one of the simulations where some very disrespectful pilot flew it faster than you did.”

What the hell is she talking about? The Grand Canyon Run? That was nothing more than a time trial obstacle course which had nothing to do with starships. He doesn’t remember ever even running it and shuttles do sort of suck. “I don’t think I ever ran this scenario.”

“How in the hell did she know that?” He pulled up the simulations list and there it was…

UT47 Time Trial Run – Colorado River, Arizona

1. Ensign Athena Shepard – 19:28
Ensign Jeffrey Moreau – 19:34

Oh it was on! “You are a sneaky, no good…damn!” He looked at the time and let out a sigh. “Wow, that’s a great time.” He couldn’t take the smile off his face. He started scrolling through the records and started to notice that her piloting scores were damn near the top in every category of ship. He spanked everyone, but her overall score was in the top five and there were five records that she held and not him. They were all for the smaller shuttles, gunships and fighters. Two of them he could not do as they did not allow the use of inertial dampeners and the G-Forces of the maneuvers would most undoubtedly shatter his spine. It looked like she was by far the best shuttle, gunship and fighter pilot.

“When those scores you could’ve been a top pilot easy.”

“That’s what I wanted, but unfortunately with my biotics and the fact that my ground combat scores were even higher, the Alliance decided they had other plans for me.” She shrugged.

“I thought my talents were going to go to waste, but the N program made sure that I kept my piloting and driving skills sharp. Granted, I don’t get to do it as much as I would like, but at least I get to fly a shuttle here and there, the A61 is my favorite and the Mako is a fun ride too.”

There was something in her voice that sounded a little down. He looked at her and she gave him an anxious gaze like she was pleading for him to not be in awe of her. She looked so tired. That shit on Eden Prime must have been terrible. Maybe a little playful competition will do her good.

“There is no way that score is going to stand. I won’t have it! I’ll show you that there is no record I can’t beat behind this seat.” That seemed to do the trick as she turned and let out a pfft as if to say let’s see what you got. It made him smile.

He pulled up the simulation on his console and changed the controls to that of the UT47 Kodiak Shuttle. “Let me show you what the best pilot in the galaxy can do.”

The Canyon Run is exactly what one would imagine it is. The shuttle starts at the Toroweap Overlook and the job of the pilot is to get the shuttle from the Toroweap Overlook to the Little Colorado River as fast as possible. A one hundred and thirteen mile run that if done in a slow sight-seeing manner was as spectacular a view as there was on any planet. Done the way Academy students were taught, it was a terrifying roller coaster ride of sharp turns, sudden dips and rises that would usually end up with a student crashing their first times out. The one caveat was that the shuttle was in no way to ever go higher than five hundred feet above the Colorado River. Utterly insane.

She sat back in the co-pilot’s chair and brought up the console on her terminal. She then set it to mirror Joker’s console so that she could ‘Ride Shotgun’ during Joker’s run. “What are you doing, Commander?”

“Just seeing what it would be like to ride alongside the ‘best pilot in the galaxy.’” She gestured hand quotes as she said that.

“Well you’re in for a treat commander. Sit back and enjoy.”

The hologram simulation was fully immersive and they were immediately surrounded by the controls of the Kodiak Shuttle. The view from the top of the canyon was spectacular. “It’s beautiful.” Shepard’s voice was so low that he barely heard it.

As the shuttle approached the overlook, Jeff was reminded of one his favorite movies. The Death Star canyon run in the movie Star Wars was one of his favorite scenes of all time. It was one of the
reasons that he decided to become a pilot. “You ready commander?” He couldn’t hide the playful tone in his voice.

She watched him as he lost himself in the flying. He was a spectacular pilot. Sometimes it felt as if she could reach out of the shuttle and touch the Colorado with her hands. The inertial dampeners took a little of the fun out of it, but that was the Kodiak. It had faster than light capability, so the dampeners were standard issue. His reflexes were a blur and there was a reckless bravado to his flying. The river and canyon walls were going by the shuttle at a frightening rate. Her breathing started to get deeper and she started to feel her body start to heat up in all the places that shouldn’t. He cut the angles just right. Rolled into turns and activated the bow thrusters just when he needed the extra push. She turned to watch him work and saw the total and complete concentration on his face, his hands a blur of movement as the canyon walls seemed to constrict to just within feet of the shuttle’s hull. Before she knew it the sky opened up and he performed a barrel roll on the way up. She started to compose herself as she looked at Jeff who looked very upset.

It was the most beautiful example of piloting that she had ever seen. “Oh my God Jeff, that was an amazing run!” She told him as the smile on her face disappeared because Jeff still had a frown on his face.

“For Fuck’s sake Joker what’s wrong?” She now looked and sounded as annoyed as he was. Then it hit her and she looked at the clock.

19:32

“Oh come on Jeff…really…that has you pissed off?” She was giggling as she said it.

“Transfer the controls over to me flyboy. I’ll show you what the ‘Buenos Aires Bitch’ can do.” Her tone and manners were completely unprofessional. She seemed to feel comfortable enough with him to actually be able to take that tone. It was a good thing that no one was around to hear her talk that way or she would probably be reprimanded.

“All yours Commander BABs.” He really should stop while he’s ahead, but he couldn’t help but think that she was enjoying herself and that she appreciated him for treating her like a regular person and not an N7 Badass of an XO that could put him in prison just for talking to her the way he does.

“You’re really skirting the line there Lt.” She turned and looked at him with a serious face and for a moment he thought that he might have stepped over the line. That is until she smiled at him and took control of the simulator.

He’d never ridden shotgun on any simulator ever since he graduated. He was always in control and now he had his XO flying her ass off with him watching her in awe. Her mastery of the shuttle rivaled his in every way. The reflexes, the dips, rises and corners were incredible. Did he look like that while he was flying? As he watched her fly through the Grand Canyon like a bat out of hell, he felt another presence in the cockpit. He turned to see that it was Lt. Alenko and he was watching her with a hunger in his eyes as she completely dominated the simulation. The angles she took were perfect. The rolls were sometimes to show off, but they didn’t detract from the speed of the shuttle. Alenko and Joker were both enjoying a moment of absolute awe in their silent observation of their XO.

19:33

“FUCK!” She exclaimed a little too loudly, while Jeff started to laugh.
“Not today Commander. Looks like BABs is not the fastest today.” Jeff talked through his laughter.

“You’re lucky I haven’t practiced in a while.” She turned and saw Alenko mouth open and unable to stop staring at her, this also put a smile on her face.

Alenko composed himself quickly, but not before the Commander noticed. “I came up to relieve Joker, but it looks like someone already has.” He motioned towards Shepard.

“It’s alright Lt. I came to see just how good a pilot our in house comedian is.”

“And?” Joker with a smug look on his face and a big grin asked her.

“I think you’ll do.” She turned to look at him with all the seriousness in the world, she leaned close to his face and with a soft and husky voice she quietly breathed into his ear. “You are amazing. I’d let you take control anytime.” The heat from her breath caused his skin to prickle into goose bumps that were hidden by his uniform.

The slight scent of lavender lingered in his senses as she turned and began to walk down the gangway towards the control center. He was at a loss for words as he thanked God that his beard was probably hiding the color of his face. Did she just flirt with him? The badass Commander Shepard just flirted with him. He couldn’t lie to himself and say that he didn’t enjoy it. She was a goddess amongst them and it made him feel good that she enjoyed her time with him. She had enough on her plate to think of and if he could make her forget all of the crap for a little while, then he would.

She paused and turned back towards them. “Why don’t you two put the ship on autopilot and let’s grab some midrats.”

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“I’ve never gotten used to losing people and to lose them to a fucking traitor is even worse.” Her eyes were in full Commander/guilty of losing another one of her men mode.

“There was nothing that could have been done ma’am. Nihlus was a Spectre and he was on his own. Jenkins was one of our lead scouts and that was why he was assigned to our ground team.” Kaiden told her with an understanding look.

“I wish I knew them better. I have to write to Jenkin’s family which feels like such a cop out. I wish I could tell them in person what a brave and selfless person he was. I wonder how we would inform Nihlus’ family. Do Turians even have families?”

Joker kind of felt that the midrats were going to a depressing place so he decided to change the subject. “So Commander, where did you learn to fly like that?”

She turned to acknowledge Joker and smirked. “Not my most proud moments in life, that’s where.”

“Commander you don’t need to answer him if you don’t want to.” Kaiden jumped in like he wanted to punch Joker in the face for even daring to ask her a question.
Kaiden’s response clearly amused Shepard. “No Lt. It isn’t like that. The memories of those days were actually pretty good. To answer your question Joker, I was an air car thief…and I might have been involved in some illegal racing circuits.”

“What? And they let you into the Academy?” The surprised look on Kaiden’s face was magical.

“Not only did they let me in. They forced me to go.” She turned to the Lt. with a shrug.

“I never ever expected to be a part of the Alliance military, but it was either this or Jail, so I chose this.”

“Jail? Really?” Kaiden was at a loss as to what else to say.

“Listen Lieutenant, my parents died before I could even remember them. I survived as an orphan. Going from orphanage to orphanage and on the streets. I had to do what I had to in order to survive and once my biotics started to surface I became quite good at stealing cars and selling them to intermediaries.”

“That’s so hot…I mean that’s not good Commander.” Joker added to the chagrin of Kaiden.

She turned to Joker and her eyes were once again that of a predator. He sunk in his seat trying not to look uncomfortable, but that ended quickly when she giggled in the most uncommanderlike way ever.

“You know Jeff, I wish I could have had you as a teammate during our races. We would have been unbeatable.”

“What kind of races were they?” Kaiden asked.

“Classic late twentieth and early twenty first century piston engine cars, I restored a 2013 Shelby GT500 and I whooped a lot of ass in that car.”

“Aren’t those cars illegal and only allowed in museums?”

“They are highly illegal, but Buenos Aires has a lot of places where you can hide a track. La Boca was one and we raced there quite a bit.” She turned and looked Joker in the eyes. “You haven’t lived until you’re drifting your car around those tight corners and your tires are smoking the car behind you.”

“Maybe you can take me for a ride one day? Better yet, maybe you’ll let me drive it?” Joker’s comment got Kaiden a little riled.

“Are you crazy! The Alliance brass would bust you down to private if they found out.” Kaiden said with such a serious tone that Shepard and Joker couldn’t help but start laughing.

“Relax Lt. I won’t do anything to make Captain Anderson look bad. I owe him everything…although you sure make a tempting offer Fangio. I do miss driving…” She let out a sigh. “…but I guess we all have to grow up.”

“Growing up doesn’t mean you can’t have fun anymore. Hell, my younger years sucked. I’d rather be the best pilot than the poor little crippled kid everyone felt sorry for.”

“Why do you call him Fangio?” Kaiden asked.

“Why don’t you tell him Jeff?” The smirk on her face was priceless.
“How should I know? I just thought it was some kind of Spanish nickname.”

Her face looked disappointed and she shook her head. “You mean you didn’t even bother looking it up?”

Joker’s chuckle and look of amusement said it all. “You should see your face. Of course I looked it up Commander!” He turned to Kaiden. “Juan Manuel Fangio was considered by many, and I am assuming every single Argentine, as the greatest Formula One Driver that ever lived. Do you want a history lesson?”

Shepard lightly punched Joker in the arm. “You’re terrible!”

“OW!” Joker feigned like he was in pain which changed Shepard’s expression from one of open playfulness to one of anxious concern.

Joker started to laugh along with Kaiden.

Shepard quickly changed into her serious persona. “Keep pushing Fangio, I might have to test out how fragile you really are.”

“I’d love to see that.” Kaiden added.

Kaiden’s comment broke all sense of seriousness and every one of them started laughing.

As they laughed they didn’t notice Captain Anderson enter the mess hall.

“What’s so funny Commander?” They all turned at the sound of his voice and were immediately at attention. Well, all of them except Joker who slowly got up and…

“Joker sit down. I don’t need you breaking something while trying to salute me.”

“Sorry Captain, I was just getting to know my officers over some midrats. You care to join us?” Shepard seemed to relax a little as she spoke to him.

“Who’s piloting the ship?” He asked.

“It’s on auto, but Kaiden is on duty.” Shepard answered.

“Lt. take your midrats and go back to the helm. If there were an emergency, who the hell would pilot the ship?” Anderson seemed a bit peeved.

“Yes sir!” Kaiden saluted and left for the helm.

“Captain, it’s my fault. I ordered him to put it on auto. Being that we’re just transiting I felt that I would get to know the two most important officers on the ship besides you.” She explained to him and she looked she felt guilty as hell.

“Commander you have to realize that the helm needs to be manned twenty four seven. As far as the ship is concerned, the helm and engineering are the most important parts of the ship. You should know this.”

“With all due respect sir, I have never run a ship. I am a Marine and we fight on the ground. You well know that getting to know the men is a very important part of that. If I broke some rule of running a ship because I was trying to get to know them, I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

“She’s probably the best fighter pilot in the galaxy.” Joker intervened.
“What?” Anderson looked even more peeved.

“What? Have you seen the commander fly? I’d put the Normandy in her hands over Lt. Alenko any day.”

“I’ve seen her academy record Joker.” Anderson answered.

“The record is not going to show you what it’s like to fly. They’re just a bunch of numbers. The Commander is an artist behind the helm.”

Shepard grinned sheepishly “Thanks Joker.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be off duty?” Anderson asked Joker.

“Yes sir.”

“Why are you still awake? We will be arriving at the Citadel in four hours. I suggest you get some sleep because you will be docking the ship. You too Shepard.”

“Aye, Aye Sir!” They sounded like cloned parrots.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys are enjoying this. Just started playing and had no idea how awesome the Mass Effect Universe is.

midrats - Midnight Rations
December 2171 – Buenos Aires Province, Barrio La Boca, Argentina

“You said there would be no issues!” Athena looked at Suarez with an anger that started to boil over.

“They’re not supposed to be here mamita.” Suarez tried to calm her.

They both stared into the car with two children in the back seat. The air car was a Black 2170 Bentley with optional inertial dampeners installed. It belonged to soccer superstar player Jose Villa who played for the team Boca Juniors. If he were alone this wouldn’t have even been a question, but the woman riding shotgun and the two children playing in the rear seat made her think twice.

“Well what the fuck then? I’m not going through with this.” She protested

“We have to get that car! I promised Smith that I would and you know how much of an asshole he is. He doesn’t care about kids or anything and he is a sadistic son of a bitch. He’ll come after anyone you care about if he thinks you’re screwing him.” Suarez was pleading with her.

“I’m the best at this. This one doesn’t feel right Ale. Let’s take a pass please.” Her eyes were ones of a person struggling with themselves.

“Come on.” Suarez whispered as he pulled his pistol and ran towards the car which was parked temporarily in front of a Bodega.

“Damn it!” Athena cursed herself as she approached the driver’s side.

It was over in a flash. Athena used her biotics to open the doors and pull and push the passenger and driver out. The terrified children started to cry almost immediately to the utter guilt and remorseful ridden feelings that started to bubble inside of her. She climbed into the driver’s seat with Suarez riding shotgun when she turned to the two kids and opened the rear doors.

“GET OUT!” The coldness of her yell even surprised her as the two children ran out of the car and into their mother’s arms. The look on the children’s faces would be something that she would not soon forget.

“Don’t do it asshole.” Suarez had the gun pointed out of the driver’s side window at the driver who looked like he wanted to challenge them.
“Put that away! What the fuck Ale!” Athena yelled.

“Great game last night Jose.” Suarez threw that in as an insult with a smile, knowing that Boca had lost to their crosstown rivals River Plate the night before.

They were off like a bat out of hell. As they flew Athena disabled the location beacon system in the car with a quick blast of her biotics.

“That training in Munro sure was useful.” Suarez mentioned.

“I swear if you ever make me do something like this again…” The kid’s faces appeared in her thoughts as she piloted the air car. “I’m done Ale, that was it. That was my last one.”

Suarez just hung on as Athena put the pedal to the metal and arrived at Smith’s Chop Shop in two minutes. “Oh come on mamita nothing happened. So what if you scared a couple of kids, big deal.”

“That was too close. No more.”

As she landed the car, Joaquim Smith was there smiling and clapping his hands in a faux applause.

“That’s the best Christmas gift anyone has ever given me.”

“This one’s going to cost you.” Athena chirped.

“Suarez I thought you ran the show for the Reds. What’s up with flacca being all hostile?”

“The whole family was in the fucking car you asshole! Your shoddy intel failed to tell us he was going to be with his whole family!” She continued.

“You wound me my friend.” Smith puts his hands to his heart in a dramatic enactment of a heart attack. “My intel was dead on. I told you the car would be there and it was there, the family was just collateral fodder that happened to be there as well.” He shrugged his shoulders as if that is just the price of doing business.

“Ten thousand credits and it is yours.” Athena was seething and was on the edge of losing control. “I hope it you like it because it will be the last one you get from the Reds.”

“Ha! That’s not what I agreed to with Ale. I get this one in exchange for forgiving Ale’s debt to me.”

“WHAT?” Athena turned and looked at Suarez who tried to avoid her gaze in shame.

“Oh…He didn’t tell you?” Smith smugly added.

“What the fuck is going on Ale? What did you do?” She looked at him with a demanding expression on her face.

“I can explain mamita…” Suarez started but was interrupted by Smith.

“You really didn’t know did you?”

“It’s just a little red sand. I don’t do it…” Suarez looked at her as her heart sank and her rage bubbled over.

“You mother fucker! You promised that the Reds would be clean of all that shit! You hypocritical
fuck! No wonder you didn’t give a shit about that family in the car! As far as I’m concerned, I’m done. You can all go fuck yourselves!” With that she turned to walk away when one of Smith’s men blocked her exit.

“Bad idea Smith. Let her go man. You don’t know what you’re dealing with.” Suarez chirped.

“Nonsense. Flacca is not going anywhere until I say she can. Juan, bring her pretty tall ass here.”

Juan was a big boy, easily six feet and a half and a mountain of muscle. Athena was not quite as tall, but her muscular frame told all that she was dangerous as well. Still Juan should be able to easily overpower this girl.

“Juan is it?” He nodded and smiled the smile of someone who was used to being able to pummel just about anyone. “I suggest you move aside before I make you look like the pussy that you really are.” Her tone was dead serious and her glare told Juan that he had better move or he would get hurt.

Juan leans into her ear and whispers so softly that Athena almost didn’t hear him. “If I let you kick my ass, will you go on a date with me?”

She throws a biotically enhanced uppercut that lands on Juan’s chin with a sickening crack. He falls backward completely out and is only kept from smashing his skull on the concrete by Athena’s biotically assisted cushioning of his body. She kneeled down next to him and stealth fully put something in his pocket. “Call me.” She whispered and got up to see that they all had their guns drawn.

Her barrier was already up and she grinned. “Smith I will shove that gun so far up your ass that you will be tasting metal for a week.”

Smith smiled. “Is she always this colorful before she gets shot?”

“Don’t do it man.” Suarez pleaded. “Please man, she is a freak of nature.”

Smith flinched and put his pistol away. “Okay Puta, get the fuck out of here…”

She turned to leave when one of his homeboys decided he was going to try and impress his boss. BANG! The single shot echoed throughout the shop. The projectile was stopped in mid-air by her biotic barrier and she turned to see who pulled the trigger. They all had their guns holstered except for one young and stupid kid that looked no older than his early teens. He had a look of terror when one of Smith’s men grabbed his gun and moved away from him.

“Really?” Athena quickly closed the distance with the boy and grabbed him by the collar. “You would just kill me? Just like that, bullet in the back like they did Jesse James you little prick!” Her anger was plain to see.

“Please! I’m sorry…I didn’t mean to…it just went off…please.” The boy was truly terrified as he let some of his bowels speak for him as well.

Smith looked like he was enjoying the show. “Oh this is good.” He whispered to himself.

“It’s good you’re afraid.” She quickly snatched the pistol from the one who took it from the would be murdered. She put it to his head with her finger on the trigger. “How does it feel now puto? How does it feel to know you are about to die?”

“Please no! Please no! Oh my God please nooooooooo!” He begged her while falling to his
knees.

BANG! The shot rang out, but he was still alive and looking down the barrel of the gun with the bullet just floating directly in front of his face.

“Next time it goes into you.” She said to him as the round dropped to the floor in front of him with the pistol right next to it.

“I’m sorry…thank you…thank you.” The boy was kneeling in a pool of his own urine, tears flowing down his face.

The look on the boy’s face made her heart break. She felt like the freak that Suarez was talking about. That traitorous bastard was going to have a lot of explaining to do when he got back to their hideout, if he even had the balls to show up there.

She turned around and started to leave when Smith yelled to her. “If you ever want a job with a real gangster, come to me and I’ll make it happen.” Smith hollered as she left with her middle finger held high for all of them to see.

“Man that is one bad ass bitch.” Smith commented.

“She sure is.” Juan commented as he slowly got to his feet.

********

She was pacing hard in the living room of their hideout on 10th street in La Plata. It was an old abandoned library of some sort. Suarez would have to come sooner or later and she would be there to greet him in all her fury. Suarez might have started the Reds, but she had recently took over most of the responsibilities of running the gang. “No fucking drugs…I can’t believe he fucking….agh!”

She was supremely frustrated. The man who had been her mentor all of her life in the gang was now one of those people he said he wouldn’t become. He was an addict and of all things he could have chosen, Red Sand. She never wanted to be an addict to anything. She saw how addicts would do almost anything for their next hit, dusting or whatever they called it.

“Will you stop pacing chica you’re giving me a headache.” Marianna told her.

“I can pace if I want to…stop me if you think you can.” She yelled back.

Marianna was a little blonde sprite compared to Athena, but she didn’t take any shit either. She got up and just blocked Athena’s path, crossed her arms and faced Athena on her return pace.

Athena stopped right in front of her and before she could say anything. “See, not too hard right?” Marianna grabbed a hold of her arms and sat her down on the couch.

Athena glared at Marianna, but there was no malice there, just genuine affection. “Mari, he’s killing me. That family we took the car from? It was Jose Villa’s.”


“It was terrible. He had his whole family with him. What I did to those kids…they’ll never think of me as other than a monster. It was a miracle that nobody got hurt or killed.”
Marianna was a couple years older than Athena, but she was much more excited and innocent.
“You must have made a killing on that car, right?”

“No…we didn’t. Ale had promised it to Smith so that Smith could forgive his debt to him. So we got nothing.”

“La puta madre! He really is fucked up!” Marianna’s colorful expression made Athena smirk a little. It didn’t last long as Suarez walked into the room. Athena stood up and the stare down began.

“Red fucking Sand…Why?” She immediately cut to the chase.

“I…I don’t know…watching you work those cars so easily made me want to see if it was possible for me to do it. I heard that Red Sand has an effect similar to your abilities and I wanted to try it to see if I could at least attempt to do what you do. It was stupid I know… I won’t do it again I swear.”

“How much were you into him for? That car was worth a lot of Red Sand so don’t bullshit me.”

Suarez turned his gaze down to the floor and was silent.

“Ale!” The sudden outburst from her made him squirm. “How much?”

“I…I’ve been on credit for about two months now.” He answered, his eyes still on the floor.

He felt his body stiffen and unable to move. She approached him and began to search him. “What are you doing?!” He felt a surge of panic as she reached down his waist band and pulled the pistol that he always carried, but never used. “Stop!” He yelled desperately as she reached further down into his crotch and pulled out a bag.

She felt destroyed, betrayed, ambushed. She reached in again and pulled out two more bags. The tears started to flow down her face as she silently let her heart break. “Are you dealing too?”

It was a rhetorical question as she knew in her heart that he was. She pulled out her communicator and started to call the rest of the Reds to come back to the hideout. This meeting needed to happen now.

“I’m so sorry mamita.” Marianna wrapped her arms around her and embraced her with all her might.

“I’m done with you Ale.” She let her biotic stasis field drop and he was free to move around. “You use, you sell, you lie…here take all your shit.” She pointed to the bags of Red Sand of which two contained multiple smaller baggies which could only mean that they were meant to be sold. He quickly grabbed everything and shoved it back in his pockets.

“Athena please…” He tried to talk but she just raised her hand and said.

“No Ale, this goes against everything you taught me. Everything you said about being an addict, everything you said about it making you a slave to your desires and needs, it is exactly what you are now. It’s either me or you.”

After about an hour, all fifteen of the Reds arrived at the hideout.

The ‘Tenth Street Reds’ were a small gang of car thieves and racers. All of them to the man and woman were accomplished at both. They all had puzzled looks on their faces as they entered the
living room.

“Athena, you don’t have to do this.” Suarez pleaded addressing her by her first name which he hadn’t done since she first got to the gang.

“I called this meeting to tell all of you that our leader is dealing Red Sand.” There was silence in the room as Athena spoke. “I don’t know how you feel about this, but I will not stand by and watch us turn into a gang like Smith’s. My solution is simple. We either change leadership and continue down our car thieving and racing route and I stay or you all follow Ale down the drug trade to an inevitable war with Smith and the rest of the clowns in that market.”

“You all?” A boy named Finch questioned.

“If you follow Ale…” She took a breath as her heart started to race. “I will leave the gang. I’m done.”

The silence in the room was deafening.

“It’s not that big a deal! Red Sand can make us more money in a day than stealing twenty cars, or winning any race. It’s the future of the Reds and we shouldn’t just shut it out of our wheelhouse just because mamita is so close minded.” Suarez started to make his pitch.

“Like I said. You follow Ale and I’m out.” Athena reiterated. “Just remember this meeting when you are killing people who used to be your friends and getting killed over that shit.”

“Why don’t we just vote now?” Marianna added.

In the end it was a nine to six vote for Athena. She now led the Reds and she had a decision to make. “Ale you are out, along with all of you who voted for him. You can go find another place to do that shit!”

“Fuck you mamita! I’m not leaving. I started this gang and I’ll be damned if you kick me out into the streets to find another home.” Suarez spoke, but her backers pulled their guns as did his.

“I FOUND THIS PLACE YOU FUCKING TRAITOR! NOW GET THE FUCK OUT!” Athena exploded as the room became filled and crackled with her biotic energy. “Find your own place!”

Suarez hesitated and then decided that maybe it wasn’t worth it to go toe to toe with her and besides they were outnumbered. “Okay…we’ll leave…maybe you’ll change your mind when you see how much we are making. Come on guys let’s get out of here.”

With that, Suarez, Rokosky, Lopez, Taylor, Junior and Santos walked out of the hideout and into the streets of La Plata. She knew that they would become a problem to the Reds. All of the people who left were veterans of the streets and they would be missed, more importantly they would be a bigger problem to her and the Reds.

“They’re going to be a problem.” Finch whispered to himself a little too loudly.

“If they value their lives they won’t be.” Athena answered coldly.

*****
Athena’s eighteenth birthday and she was happy for once. She finally returned Juan’s phone calls for a date and was pleasantly surprised when he told her that he had left Smith’s employment. “They beat the ever living Jesus out of me, but at least he let me live.”

She was a little drunk and put her arms around Juan’s broad shoulders. “I’m glad that he let you live too. I can’t believe you asked me out like that.”

“I figured it was probably my only chance so I went for it. I only saw you at Smith’s once before so I wasn’t about to let another chance go to waste.”

“And then I knock you on your ass. I’m sorry.” Her beautiful blue eyes were now intently gazing at his amber ones.

“That’s the second time you did that. I fell head over heels the first time I saw you…although the first time didn’t hurt as much.” He chuckled as he rubbed his jaw.

“Come on let’s go dance.” She grabbed his hand and pulled him along to the dance floor where Marianna and Finch were dancing together.

The base was pumping and the rhythm was flowing as they lost themselves to the music and danced together. Juan was not a good dancer, but she had to give him an A for effort and courage as she and Marianna were all over him to the utter disdain of Finch. So they switched their attention to Finch and all was well. After a few minutes she continued to dance with Juan when someone bumped into him.

“Excuse me. Sorry.” Came the response from the culprit. Shorter than Juan, but exquisitely built from the looks of the tight shirt he was wearing.

“No problem.” Juan responded and continued to dance.

Again the guy bumped into Juan, only a little harder this time. “You got a fucking problem puto?” Juan squared up to the dark haired and very handsome asshole.

“Turn around meathead and pay attention to your beautiful lady friend there.”

Athena grabbed Juan’s hand and pulled him off the dance floor to the bar. “Come on Juan, it’s getting too crowded on the dance floor anyway.” They were joined a few minutes later by Marianna and Finch.

“That guy’s an asshole!” Juan was steaming, but before he could pull himself toward the floor to confront the mystery jerk, Athena pulled him close and planted a passionate kiss on his lips. Her tongue slithered into his mouth as his mouth parted to taste her slightly sweet alcoholic flavor.

As she continued to kiss him their teeth suddenly clashed together as that jerk bumped into Juan again.

“That’s it let’s go asshole!”

Athena wanted to stop him, but this stranger definitely needed an ass whooping. “Outside. No need to ruin everyone else’s night.”

The four of them followed the Jerk outside and Athena could sense that he was not alone. Her senses were confirmed when two other seemingly perfect looking men joined him.
The two men squared up and Athena was a little excited to watch Juan pummel this asshole. “Hacelo mierda Juan!”

It was over in an instant. Juan swung first and the jerk quickly dodged it and landed a powerful combination of an uppercut and left hook. “Stay down meathead.” The jerk warned as she bent over to help Juan up. As she stood up with him she felt a hand grab her buttocks and squeeze.

She turned to see the Jerk smile. “Oh that is exquisite. Too bad you don’t like real men.”

Her blood began to boil and before anyone could stop her she grabbed the offending Jerk by the neck and biotically choke slammed him into the pavement. The other two attacked her, but Finch and Marianna intercepted them. They made short work of Finch and Mari, but they bought her enough time to biotically pick them up and slam them to the ground. The three men were left in convulsions as Finch yelled that they had to leave.

Athena couldn’t stop watching the three men who looked like they were dying. What have I done? Oh my God, what have I done?!

“Mamita we gotta get out of here!” Finch continued.

She waved them off. “GO! Get out of here! Now!”

They carried Juan out of the area and returned to the hideout in their air car.

She knelt over the three men and began to cry as the police arrived. She offered no resistance as she was arrested on attempted murder charges and was taken to central booking for processing.

Chapter End Notes

"Hacel mierda!" - Beat the shit out of him!
"Puto" - male bitch
"Puta" - just bitch
Happy Birthday Athena!

Chapter Summary

Athena meets Anderson. She enrolls in the academy and gets her first assignment.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Saturday April 11th, 2172 1400 hours – Policia Federal Station, Avenida de Mayo, Buenos Aires

The common cell was crowded as usual. Everyone tended to stay away from her. The giant unconscious form of a man that lay close to her served as a warning. She noticed there were quite a few people she recognized from her seedy life. She was a stranger to most of them, but they saw what she did to the cell boss and they all seemed very aware of what she was capable of doing to anyone who thought they could take advantage of her in her broken state. Their fear was palpable. To them she was a freak of nature, a mysterious and frightening monster, a potential nightmare of their worst dreams and she was on her knees in tears and sobbing intermittently. *God why? What did I do to deserve this life? Why...*

“Shepard! Stand up, you have a visitor!” The guard yelled, but it made no difference she didn’t move in the hope that maybe they would just end her miserable existence.

She felt the guard grab her collar, but instead of getting dragged to her feet she noticed another presence. “Leave her!” The hand immediately let her go.

The voice was strong...commanding. She turned to look at the source. She started from the floor and noticed the glass shine on the shoes first. *Military?* She continued her ascendance and noticed the beautifully pressed blue pants with a gold stripe running up the side. The Blue Jacket was no less impressive and accentuated the already broad shoulders of the intimidating African man.

Her eyes were bloodshot from all of the crying, but she knew that the three she killed must have been military and that this man was sent to get their pound of flesh. She stood up and noticed that she was still quite a bit taller than him. Her eyes were glued to his dark and strangely comforting ones. She turned away as if feeling that she had no right to feel that way around anyone.

He gently put his hands on her shoulders. “They’re fine girl. They will all make a full recovery.”

The revelation released every bit of emotion she had left as her face contorted in a desperate show of anxious relief. The tears flowed freely. “I...I thought I killed them.”

“Ten years ago they would have been dead, but with the advances in medicine in the last couple of years, all they will have is a story about how a girl beat the living shit out of them.” He smiled as he guided her to the bench and made her sit and offered her a cup of water.

“Why are you here sir? Is the military going to try me instead of the locals?” She slowly started to
come to her senses.

He completely avoided answering her question. “Do you know anything about the N program in the military?”

“What?” She was completely puzzled by the question. “I don’t know anything about the military other than they carry big guns and protect Earth from aliens now.”

He laughed softly. “You just put an N3 and two Marines in the hospital and you don’t know a thing about the military.”

“What’s an N3?” She asked while wiping her face and eyes with her hand.

“Here.” He offered her a handkerchief. “I’m hoping that you will find out for yourself.”

She paused at the comment and was very puzzled by it. “What do you mean sir?” She was still sobbing intermittently as she took his handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

“Before we continue I’d like to introduce myself. I am Lieutenant Commander David Anderson of the Alliance Navy.” He held out his hand which she hesitantly took. It was strong and calloused, she could tell a lot about a person’s hands and Anderson’s told of a rough and hard life. She immediately felt a connection to this stranger. Not knowing why she started to become less apprehensive around him.

She examined him and noticed that on his jacket he had an N7 patch on his chest. “Athena.” She politely replied.

“So are you that much tougher than an N3?” She asked him. “Did they send you to kick my ass?” Anderson was a little taken aback. “What?...No of course not!” He noticed that she was smirking.

He smiled back, but quickly got back to business. “Listen Athena, I’m here to make you an offer which was just approved by the Alliance military and the local authorities.” Athena was listening intently.

“The Alliance Marine Corps is looking for capable and tough people and they want to offer you a spot in the next class at the academy in Rio.”

“What?! Are you crazy? Have you seen my record? I’m not military material. I think you would be making a mistake. I’m just a thug and a thief, that’s all.” She was feeling so unworthy of consideration as she let her head and shoulders drop.

Anderson sat down next to her and gently took a hold of her hand. “I don’t think so. You value your friends more than anything and were willing to take the fall for what happened at that disco. I also noticed that your friends didn’t hesitate to fight alongside you. That selflessness and leadership tells me that you are worth a shot.”

“But what about the charges against me?”

“Dropped.” He answered.


“The catch is that you have to come with me, otherwise you will be tried by the local courts here.”

“But why? I’m a criminal who almost killed three of your men. Do you really want me in your
outfit?” The uncertainty in her voice betrayed her nervousness.

“Listen, I saw the video. I saw what you did and how you did it. I know you are an extremely powerful and for some reason only God knows, undocumented biotic.” Anderson told her as she listened intently. “Perhaps the most powerful I have ever seen. If you could harness your skills for the good of the human race, you could be something much greater than you are. Don’t you even want to try to make a difference in the universe?”

Her mind was racing. Athena Shepard a military woman? It just didn’t sound right, but maybe it was right. There was something about this Anderson fella that made her feel like she could do anything. It was worth a try so long as she didn’t get sent back to Munro.

“Ok Sir, I’ll do it.” She was torn, but the charges against her were very serious and this was something legit. She would no longer need to run from the law, no more did she have to worry about dealing with people like Smith and Suarez.

“Sir?” She hesitantly called to him as he intently turned to her. “Can…I say good bye to my friends?”

Anderson smiled and shook his head. “We have to catch the next shuttle to Rio. Here, you can call them with this.”

She looked down at the small device. An Omnitool? She placed it on her left wrist and tapped the interface screen causing the device to come to life. She’d never had the chance to use one, but she looked like a natural.

“Who’s this?” The voice on the other side was Marianna.

“Mari…” Athena tried to talk but was immediately bombarded by Marianna.

“Mamita? Oh my God it’s you. Are you okay? We’ve been killing ourselves here trying to find out what happened. Where are you? Are you at the Police Station?” Marianna machine gunned her questions and comments.

“MARI PLEASE!” She yelled into the interface. The tears were starting to flow again. Some big bad gangster I am.

“What!?” Marianna’s voice broke as she talked. “Why mamita? Why are you leaving us?”

“No choice Mari. It was either become a Marine or jail for at least ten years. Either way, you’re going to have to vote for new leadership because I probably won’t be coming back.” Her own voice was breaking now. “I’m going to miss all of you, but especially you Mari. You are…my best friend…I love you.”

She could hear Marianna sobbing on the other side as she broke herself. “I love you too Mamita. I’ll find a way to see you again. Please keep in touch Mamita.”

“I will Mari…I will.” She deactivated the connection and pulled the omnitool off of her wrist to give it back to Anderson.

“No, that’s yours now. You’re going to need it in the Academy.” Anderson commented to her.

“Thank you sir. Can I ask you a question sir?” She uttered as they stepped into an air cab.

“Of course Athena anything.”
“Do you really believe that I can make a difference and what did you mean undocumented?” She was starting to calm down and accept her fate.

“Undocumented as there is no record of you being a biotic. It’s strange because you’re not even registered in the logs we found at Munro. Someone was trying to keep your existence a secret for some unknown reason. All of the videos and reports referring to you being there are gone.” He explained.

“I hated that place. I hurt a lot of people there and they did a lot of things to me.” She looked him in the eye with a seriousness that he took notice of.

“I’ve rescued a couple of strays in my life. I’ve trained quite a few Soldiers and Marines. I think that you have the potential of being the greatest of them all. Your natural talent is astounding, so to answer your question, yes, I think you are going to make a huge impact.” He wasn’t lying. Anderson felt her raw power and could see the steel like determination in her stare. This one was special.

“You don’t even know me sir. How can you be so sure?” She countered.

“Here, scan this.” He told her.

She pulled up her omnitool like she had owned it for years and scanned the datapad she was given. She noticed that there was a file named ‘Shepard’ on it. She hesitantly opened it.

“What is this all about me?” She felt stupid asking. Of course it was about her and he nodded.

The file contained all sorts of reports and videos with accompanying dates and times. Her entire history was on this one file. One date appeared that caught her attention.

March 15th, 2158 1750 hours – Avenida Belgrano, Buenos Aires.

The file contained a video and a police report. She activated the video and noticed that it was a grainy video taken from a light pole camera. She could still make out the air cars moving in their familiar pattern above the lower streets. Then in an instant, an explosion in the traffic pattern and one air car falls out of the sky in flames and crashes into the ground.

She switches from the video to the police report.

‘Fatal Accident Report #PFA2158000345F

On the above date, I was detailed by dispatch to a sky car accident in the vicinity of Avenida Belgrano…

two subjects later identified as William and Zeihna Shepard were transported to Buenos Aires Medical Center where they expired from their injuries. A third subject identified as Athena Shepard was also transported with no visible injuries…’

Her hand was over her mouth as she read and reread the report. Anderson put his arm around her shoulder as she turned and hugged him as she cried into his jacket.

She pulled back and looked at the stain she left on his collar and shoulder. “I’m sorry sir.”

“It’s okay girl, you’ve needed this for a long time. They loved you very much you know.”

“I had no other relatives to take me in?” She turned to him as she continuously wiped her nose and
face from all of the crying.

Anderson knew that the question was coming. “Liam Shepard died at Shanxi fighting the Turians.”

“Your mother’s family was killed when Batarian pirates hijacked their freighter near the Skyllian Verge before they could be contacted. From the correspondence between them and your mother, it looked like you were going to be heading out there to settle.”

She had a family who when alive loved her very much. It was such an alien feeling and she couldn’t help but think of how disappointed they would be of what she had become. They were all doing something great and she was a common criminal. She made up her mind that minute to give the Marines her best.

“Thank you Sir. I swear that I will not let you down. You’ve done more for me in one hour than anyone has ever done for me in my whole life.”

They reached Ezeiza Airport and quickly made their way through security and on to a Kodiak Shuttle.

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Athena looked around at the inside of the shuttle. It was pretty comfortable and she felt a little more at ease now. She looked at Anderson and admitted. “I’ve stolen one of these you know.”

“I know.” He looked at her with no hint of surprise. “That shuttle had an element zero leak. You took a huge risk taking it.”

“Well your people landed it right in front of me. What was I supposed to do?” She feigned innocence.

Anderson looked at her with utmost seriousness. “The reason they landed was because the leak could have killed them. They secured it and in another five minutes it would have been taken back to an Alliance Base for repair.”

He chuckled. “You were only fourteen? How in the hell did you even know how to even get into it, let alone fly it.” His question lightened the mood.

She was actually a little excited at the prospect of explaining. “I was stealing cars by the age of eleven. I was already pretty good with my biotics so getting inside the shuttle was easy. I used my biotics to just pry the door open and then shut it behind me. Flying it was as easy as the flight simulator game that I played for quite a bit at that time. Sorry about the landing though.”

“Hey, any landing you can walk away from is a good one right?” She lightly elbowed him in the ribs.

Anderson’s smile and obvious amusement made her feel a lot better. “Is that when you lost control of your biotics?”

“How did you know?” She was shocked. How could he possibly know?
“Element Zero has a lot of effects on the human body. Human biotics are a direct result of exposure to it. Most of the time it will cause horrible side effects, but every once in a while a biotic is born. You were already a biotic so this exposure probably just made you more powerful.” He explained.

“So you think I was exposed to it earlier in my life?”

“I don’t know. You’ll probably have to ask one of those scientists in Munro. They could probably answer your question quite easily.” He turned to look at her and all he could see was that she had shut down. There was a palpable feeling of dread that he could sense in her.

“Athena? Are you alright?” She turned to him with a glare that made him cold to his core. He could see that she was starting to panic.

“Athena stop! Munro has been shut down, as have all of the BAaT facilities. I don’t know what they did to you in there because of they purged all of your records from their files. You will never go through that again.” He met her glare with his own and didn’t flinch as her expression changed to one of relief.

“You…You know?” She watched him like a hawk.

“I only know that they experimented biotics and deliberately provoked them to lash out. I’ve seen the videos of what they did to many of the children and adults with biotic potential. That facility in Munro was their most secret. Even more so than Jump Zero. Munro was for only the destitute and those without families otherwise you would have been sent to Jump Zero, although with your power they might have been afraid that you would destroy the station. It is still a mystery as to why they kept your existence a secret. That investigation is still open and you will probably be visited by a NCIS agent in the future.” He didn’t break eye contact and continued to explain.

“Anyway, you won’t have to worry about any of that anymore. You’ll work hard in the academy and learn things you couldn’t imagine. You’re going to do great.” He finally broke eye contact and leaned back in his seat.

“The one thing you’re not going to like is that you’re going to have to follow orders. You’re starting out at the bottom you know.”

“I don’t plan on staying at the bottom for long.” She told him with an expression that said ‘you’ll see.’

“I had a feeling that you would say that.” He was smiling from ear to ear. “You might want to start calling me Commander from now on or sir.”

She started to feel very comfortable around him. “You have a seriously good game Commander. Are you with anyone?” She couldn’t imagine a handsome and polished man like him not being with anyone.

“That’s personal Recruit. Tell you what, if you graduate the academy, I will tell you everything about me.”

“What do I get for graduating at the top?” Now she was just being cocky.

He chuckled and looked her in the eyes. “If you graduate at the top, I will buy you dinner at the restaurant of your choice.”

“It’s a deal sir.”
The shuttle door opened and all hell broke loose as two drill instructors came into the shuttle and began to scream and yell at them. “Get off my shuttle! Get the fuck off my shuttle! Move it, move it!”

As she moved calmly off of the shuttle she noticed a bunch of yellow marks on the ground, they looked like footprints arranged in pairs, in an immense formation of that could be a company sized element. She noticed that everyone was picking a pair and standing at attention on top of one. She followed their lead, but it seems she was a little too slow for one of the instructors. “Hey tree top! You wanna lollygag into my formation? How bout you lollygag over to the pit for some speed training.”

“Sir?” She was feeling a little nervous.

With a motion of his powerful looking arm he pointed to an impossibly large sandbox? So she began to walk towards it when the instructor started to grab her by her collar and drag her towards the sandbox. “Move it hightower! No more lollygagging, this isn’t the hood!” He yelled and she started to run to the pit and got there so quickly that it surprised the instructor.

“Get down and give me twenty!”

“Twenty what?” She replied.

This seemed to set the instructor off even more. “THIRTY PUSHUPS! NOW!”

She dropped and pumped out thirty pushups so quickly that the instructor yelled to do thirty more which she obliged. She jumped back on her feet and waited for the next order. “Get back to formation on the double!”

She moved so quickly back to the formation that the instructor had to yell something positive. “That’s how I like it Eiffel!” She barely broke a sweat, but it was enough that she did have sand all over her body now. Anderson had warned her about the instructors and that she would really have to be in total control of her emotions as they would test her to her limits. So far it was nothing compared to what she went through at that hellhole in Munro.

The first few weeks were more about acclimation and she started to quickly set herself apart from the other recruits. Even without her biotics, she was faster, stronger and just physically dominant over the other recruits. It didn’t make sense until she thought about everything that was done to her in Munro. There were times when she woke up in excruciating pain, feeling like her skin had been torn off her body. There were what she now would recognize as surgical scars on her. They would then leave her alone for days and one day they would ‘test’ her by putting her on the treadmill, or punching a heavy bag. Now she knew, they changed her. But why? Why would they let her escape? These were questions she would find answers to in the future. Right now she would fulfill her promise to Commander Anderson and graduate on top.

The first year was a blurr of learning just the basics of being a marine. Marksmanship, hand to
hand combat, armor familiarization and maintenance, etc… Her ability to lead was very evident and by the end of the year she was recommended for officer candidate school. After a twelve week evaluation and training program she was promoted to Ensign and sent back to the academy to continue her courses.

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June 15th, 2177 0900, Academy Parade Grounds, Rio

She hated speeches, but it came as part of the honor of graduating Valedictorian and an N6 no less. She was the top of the class by a wide margin. All she could think of was how everyone here looked at her with a pride and affection. She continued to scan the audience and found who she was looking for. Commander Anderson was sitting in the front row, his look of pride and joy was evident on his face and it made her feel wonderful inside.

“Ladies and gentlemen, fellow classmates and instructors. To the Class of 2177, I can’t believe this day has finally come. I’m not one for speeches, but as I represent the best class to ever come out of the Academy I feel that they deserve the best speech I can give… a short one, so please forgive me. (The crowd laughed a little) This is both a sad and yet wonderful day. It is the end of our journey here and the beginning of a much more important one. Pretty soon we will be embarking in the defense of the Alliance. I’d like to thank all of the instructors and fellow classmates who made this day possible for me. Most of all I’d like to thank Commander David Anderson. (She looked directly at him.) You showed me that life doesn’t end in a small street in La Plata. You showed me that I could be something better, you showed me that the world is worth defending, you… (she paused and gulped) you saved my life (a single tear started to roll down her cheek.)…again thank you Commander and you owe me a dinner. (again some laughter in the audience and big smile on Anderson’s face.) CLASS OF 2177 AAAATENTION! DIIIISMISSED!”

She ran off the podium and into Anderson’s arms as he hugged her fiercely as she just as fiercely returned the hug. “I told you.” He whispered to her.

“I know…thank you sir.” Her tears were now flowing freely, but they were of joy. Her petty and criminal lifestyle was now behind her. She was now the top graduating Lieutenant of the class.

“I’m so proud of you Athena. Come on girl, tell me where you want to go to eat.”

“There is a steakhouse in Buenos Aires, let’s take the next shuttle there.” She was very excited.

“Very good, you’ve already been assigned a mission off world.” He told her.

“Oh? Already? Where?” She was a little nervous, but excited as well.

“It’s on the colony of Akuze. I’ll brief you over dinner.”

“Sounds good sir.” She confidently countered.
I wanted to explain why she wasn't at Jump Zero and why was never documented as a biotic prior to the academy. More of her time in Munro will be revealed and what that facility did will come in the future.
Akuze

Chapter Summary

Akuze and its aftermath. Really graphic description of violence and death. You are warned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

SSV London, Orbit, Akuze Colony – August 6th 2177

Lt. Athena Shepard looked at her platoon with pride. Tough bunch of bastards

“Okay people, we lost contact with the pioneer team on June 14th at approximately 0900 GMT. We’ve been tasked to find out what the fuck happened down there. From the orbital scans it looks like the physical colony itself is still intact. We’re going to touch down here. After we land we’ll rally just south of the colony here. We’re going to perform a quick recon in force with two Makos accompanying our platoon. The call signs for the Makos are hammer one and hammer two. Squad two you will divide your squad into four fire teams and establish observation posts here, here, here and here. You see anything make sure you call it, I don’t want anything sneaking up on us. Myself along with squad three will first scout the colony proper with the Makos and squad one supplying the cover from this rise here. Squad three will enter the colony from the southern approach here.”

“Cpl Toombs, you take your sniper team and take position on this rocky outcropping, you’ll be providing over watch for squad three’s scouting of the colony.”

“Just in case we are compromised or everything goes to shit, our extraction site is here, about two hundred meters to the east of our drop zone. Are there any questions?”

“What are we expecting to see sir?” Corporal Toombs asked.

“You mean besides a lot of sand and grit? Don’t know Corporal. That’s why we’re here. Something happened and we’re going to find out what. On another note, the London’s sensors have been picking up strange seismic activity in the area. They’re not sure if it has something to do with what happened, but we all know that if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck right?” Athena explained as her men began to chuckle.

She smiled for a second, but quickly changed her demeanor to a serious one. “Listen to me, something happened down there. We don’t lose an entire Pioneer Unit and a fledgling colony for no reason. There’s something extremely dangerous down there so everyone be on your toes and watch each other’s backs. Anything that looks out of place or strange or it just makes your hairs stand on end is reportable. Again, be careful and observant down there. I wish I had more info, but we’re Marines and we’ll get the job done regardless. If there aren’t any more questions… good, now suit up and muster in the hanger asap. Drinks are on me when we get back.”

Athena was nervous, but she couldn’t let them see her that way. This was her first command and she would do everything in her power to complete the mission with as little casualties as possible.
She put on her armor and helmet. The platoon Gunnery Chief checked Athena’s armor and tapped her shoulder to reassure her that she was good to go. Athena did the same for him and helped a couple of marines as well. They boarded two shuttles. Squads two and three were with her while squad one and the sniper team were with the Gunnery Chief. The Makos would make a high altitude drop from a pair of modified Kodiak Shuttles.

“Fast and quiet people, fast and quiet.” She iterated to her men.

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The shuttle ride down was a bit bumpy, but not too bad. They landed with the cover of night and moved out immediately after exiting the shuttles. They were like a well oiled machine as squad one quickly took up positions on the rise. The Makos on the other hand had not gotten to their assigned positions within the allotted time.

“Hammer one and Hammer two, you read?” She called out on her omnitool and there was no response. “Hammer one and Hammer two, you read?” She repeated with no answer and the hairs on her neck started to rise.

“Shepard, this is Hammer one, we read you. Hammer two is having mechanical issues.” SNAFU as usual she thought. “Hammer one, pick up two’s crew and get over here asap!”

“Roger that sir, we’ll be there in five. Hammer one out.”

Three minutes later she watched as the Mako made its way to squad one’s position. Squad two had already split into its four fire teams and were already in their positions. She looked at the rocky outcrop and couldn’t see anything. She smiled knowing that Corporal Toombs’ three man team was there watching them. She felt such pride working with such a professional bunch.

“Let’s go people.” She ordered the men and women of squad three.

They moved out in a single column formation and quickly entered the remnants of the fledgling colony. They went from prefab house to prefab house and found nothing of note. What the fuck happened here? She thought to herself. All of the prefabs looked like they weren’t even set up fully, there were still unopened boxes of furniture, linens and food all over the place. There was no other evidence of the pioneer team ever even being there. There were no signs of conflict or struggle anywhere. The prefabs were still pristinely new.

She noticed that it was deathly quiet and completely devoid of any sounds. She found that strange as the planet looked like it could support a wide variety of plants and fauna, but so far nothing, nada, zilch. It just didn’t feel right.

“London you read?” She called out.

“Go ahead sir.” The communications officer responded.

“So far nothing about what happened here. No signs of anything, if it wasn’t for the settlement prefabs I would say we were never here.” She commented.

“Toombs you read?”
“Go ahead.” Toombs responded.

“See anything?” She was completely at a loss as to what the hell happened. It was like the legends of the Bermuda Triangle back on Earth, swallowing ships and planes into the Atlantic never to be seen again.

“Nothing out of the ordinary. Well one of the Hammer one boys is relieving himself, not very impressive if you ask me.” Toombs answered and she chuckled along with her men.

“Not nice Corporal.” She smirked. “Alright every one, set up your bivouacs where you are and I want a three man guard rotation at the observation posts. Gunny set up the rotation for the other two squads. We’ll see what daylight reveals.”

************

Athena took first watch. It was only about four hours till daylight and she could handle not sleeping better than anyone she knew. She let herself become an all absorbing sensor array. She concentrated on all of her senses. She took her helmet off and started to just take this world in. She smelled its scent, she looked at everything to become familiar with her surroundings, she listened to the sound of the planet and felt its soil. As she listened she noticed a faint yet very distinctive pulse coming from underneath their campsite. “Toombs you hear that?”

“Hear what sir?”

“There’s some sort of faint pulsing sound coming from underneath here.”

“Sir I don’t hear anything.” Toombs responded.

It was there. She wasn’t imagining things. What the hell is that? She thought.

“London you rea…..” She couldn’t get the words out when the ground just started to shake violently underneath them.

“EVERYONE UP! NOW!” She yelled at the top of her lungs to her squad and into her omnitool as the shaking became more and more violent.

“Holy shit!” She heard Corporal Toombs exclaim. It was then that all hell broke loose as it seemed that everyone that had gotten up began to open fire.

She turned to look towards Toombs’ position only to realize that her view was blocked by a towering and massive snake like creature. It was the size of a large building with a blue fluorescent tongue the size of a small house, its end was open and appeared to also act as its mouth. Two enormous claws jutted out from the sides of the supposed head. It turned towards the Mako as it fired its main gun to very little effect. There was a sick gurgling sound as the tip of the monster’s tongue opened up and then a sudden spray of liquid projected at high speed toward the Mako. The sizzling sound as it hit the armor told everyone it was acid. She watched in horror as the acid cut through the armor like a hot knife through butter and the Mako burst into flames.

“HAMMER ONE GET OUT OF THERE!!!!” She screamed into her omnitool. She watched as the crew attempted to get out of the Mako only to die a horrifying death as they got liquefied by the combination of acid and fire. Their armor melting into their skin, their screams of pain were short
and piercing as was the sizzling sound. The smell of rotted human flesh mixed with metal and acid permeated the air.

“EVERYONE EVAC NOW!!! GET BACK TO THE EVAC SITE!!!”

“LONDON!!! GET US OUT OF HERE NOW!!!” She was desperate now. “EMERGENCY EVAC NOW!”

She watched as the beast turned toward one of the observation posts and let loose its acid on them. She turned before she could see what happened. She could hear Toombs’ sniper rifle crack repeatedly and then just go silent. She ran with her men, she would not leave anyone behind as she addressed Gunny. “GO! Get everyone to the evac site! I’m going to get the others!”

“No way sir! I’m coming with you!” The Gunny responded.

“Gunny that’s an order! Get the men to the Evac site, I’ll see you there.” Gunny acknowledged begrudgingly and started to bark orders for everyone to perform a fighting withdrawal.

As they moved away she turned and noticed that the giant monster was gone. The sandy ground quickly hid the fact that this enormous monster was ever even there. She scanned the area and looked toward Toombs’ last position. The outcropping was dripping and sizzling with that deadly acid. She could see parts of what was left of Toombs’ three man team. She then turned again towards Gunny and the remnants of her platoon as they quickly but efficiently moved towards the evac site. “TOOMBS!!” She yelled into her omnitool and she got no response. She scanned the area where the other three observation posts were and could only see the tell tale signs of an acid attack. Seeing that there was no hope to find anyone alive in those positions, she decided to move towards the main body of her platoon.

The ground began to shake violently again as she witnessed the horror surface directly underneath her men and either violently throw them hundreds of feet into the air or swallow them whole into its enormous tongue/maw. The ones unlucky enough to land alive were covered with an acid spray and immediately began to meld with their armor as if they were ice touched by a hot iron. The metal and flesh combined in a sickening mix of sound and smell. They’re gone…They’re gone… oh my God they’re gone! She thought to herself as she fought a losing battle to control her rage, fear and desperation.

She quietly let the rage take her. Her biotic field enveloped her as she charged the monster in a suicidal manner. It turned towards her as the acid dripped from its maw along with pieces of her men not fully dissolved by it.

She unleashed a powerful biotic charge into the air as the creature opened its maw to let loose another acid strike and in an instant she was inside its cavernous oral cavity. Her biotic barrier was holding and she let loose a nova strike so powerful that the head of the creature exploded into large chunks that landed hundreds of meters away. The rest of the monster immediately collapsed forward as its acid sacs spewed their deadly content everywhere. Her biotic barrier was thoroughly depleted and barely holding so she quickly limped out of range just in time as her biotic barrier and biotics in general were drained.

“Toombs can you hear me?” She spoke into her omnitool which looked like it was inoperable.

“Gunny? Anyone?” There was no answer. She got up to look around and saw there was no one. There were pieces of them, there was that sickening smell. There was the dead monster spewing acid in pulses as the heart of the beast did not register its death yet. They were all gone. This monster took them…all of them.
She slowly limped toward the evac site calling out the names of her men. She didn’t see or hear anyone else, not a soul had made it there except for her. Parts of her armor had melted off. She had a nasty acid burn on her right shoulder. It was strange that she felt no pain as the acid seemed to have killed her nerve cells as well. She finally made it to the evac site as an alliance shuttle landed. She could see the marine recovery unit disembark and run towards her. “Find them… please find them.” She whimpered as she let the darkness claim her, she collapsed from exhaustion.

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“Hey Gunny, you up for a game of spades? I got a hundred credits that says me and Toombs will whoop you and whoever you choose.”

Gunny smiled and answered. “You’re on LT! No crying after I take your credits ok?”

“I can’t promise anything, but I’ll try not to.” She countered.

About a half hour had passed as Shepard and Toombs looked at each other like the unbeatable spades team that they were. “You two are fucking cheats!” The Gunny accused.

“Come on Gunny, we’re just a lot better than you are.” Toombs responded.

“I swear Corporal I’ll have you cleaning the latrines for the rest of this float if I find out you’re cheating, and you Lieutenant I’ll…(she raised her eyebrow in an amused and quizzical manner..)… I’ll…Oh I’ll just…Oh, Fuck you Lieutenant.”

She started to laugh…they all started to laugh. They were all laughing hard as she noticed that Toombs’ ear was just hanging there by a flap of skin. She immediately stopped laughing as they continued. She watched as their skin started to melt away, revealing the bone, fat and muscle underneath. As they continued to laugh and rot away, they began to move towards her. She fell back from her chair as she clumsily attempted to crawl away from them, but it was to no avail as they swarmed on top of her. “Why LT? Why did you leave us? Why did you let us die?” Toombs or what was left of him asked.

“I’m sorry! Oh my God I’m so sorry!” She was screaming at the top of her lungs as they continued to climb all over her. “Please stop! I’m sorry! Stop….STOOOOOOOOOPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP!!!!”

“Lieutenant wake up! It’s only a dream.” She could hear the voice. It was calm and soothing. “Open your eyes Lieutenant.”

She slowly lifted her eye lids and the light was blinding as her vision adjusted to the light. She noticed that she was lying on a floor mat in the engineering section of the ship. She was drenched in sweat looking as if she jumped in a pool of water. “What the?”

She looked around and she recognized the Captain of the London and his XO. She also noticed that she was surrounded by a barrier generated by the FTL Drive on the ship. “Sir what happened?” She was desperate to hope that it was all just a horrible nightmare.

“Lieutenant, how are you feeling?” The ship medic asked.

“Why am I confined in this force field?” She asked as she was starting to come too.
“Lieutenant, you’re being confined because your last biotic episode nearly breached the hull of the ship. You’re nightmares are causing you to unleash your biotics. We’ve been keeping you sedated for the past four days. This is the first time you have been coherent.” The medic stated.

Four days? It started to dawn on her that what happened to her platoon was real. She turned to the Captain, her eyes were desperate. She began to ask. “My men…”

The Captain immediately interrupted her. “Lieutenant, there was nothing you could’ve done. The videos from your feeds and our ship cameras showed you and your men performing one of the most valiant actions I have ever seen. You and your men solved the mystery of what happened to Akuze, and you (he pointed at her) killed that Thresher Maw.” Her face started to slowly contort into an expression of anguish.

“Drop the field now!” The Captain ordered.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” The medic commented.

“Drop it now! I’m not going to ask again.” The Captain threatened.

The field dropped and the Captain immediately rushed Athena and took a hold of her shoulders. “It’s not your fault girl. There was absolutely nothing more you could’ve done. What I saw was an amazing marine who did everything possible to complete the mission as safely as possible.”

She looked at him as her eyes welled up with tears. “I let them down sir. They trusted me to get them out of there and I failed.”

“Lieutenant! You didn’t fail. You’re actions and the actions of your men revealed an unknown threat and destroyed it. You and your men secured the future of the colony and because of what you did, we now know what to look for and how to detect these monsters. Your men are all heroes, as are you.” The Captain told her.

“I’m not a hero. My men are heroes, not me.” She started to compose herself.

“Lieutenant, we’re headed back to Earth. You’re to report to the Dr. Aaloka at the Alliance HQ in Vancouver as soon as we get there.”

“Why? I’m not hurt.” She countered.

“My friend, you need to see her. She will help you. I won’t lie to you Lieutenant, you’re the finest Marine I’ve ever seen. We need you at your best and not beating yourself up for something that wasn’t your fault.” The Captain’s words were comforting, but not enough to erase that terrible scene inside her head.

“Is that an order sir?”

“It is.”

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Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 1st, 2178, 1345 hrs – Tana’s Bar and Grill
Athena never understood what the brass saw in her. She lost her entire platoon at Akuze and they treated her like a hero. She got her N7 patch as direct result of her actions on Akuze as well as a field promotion to Staff Lieutenant. She was happy that she was back to full duty though and she was now slated for an important mission off world again. She had yet to meet her company and was waiting to be briefed by some intelligence officer.

She continued to drink her ‘Quilmes’ when she watched a pretty blonde woman in Alliance Blues enter the bar and immediately make a bee line for her.

“Mari?!” Athena leaped out her chair and embraced the Lieutenant. “Aye, Dios mio! I didn’t recognize you. I guess you’re out of the Reds now huh?” Mari nodded.

“Why didn’t you write me that you were in the Alliance?”

“I tried to, but there is a lot of secret shit going on when it comes to you.” Marianna answered.

“Secret shit?” Athena looked at Mari’s uniform and smiled. “Aren’t you an intelligence officer?” Mari chuckled. “I just got my assignment.” She took a deep breath. “The only reason I’m here is because they know that I know you personally.”

“So what’s your assignment?”

“I’m here with your orders. I can’t tell you out loud and the brass told me to tell you not to read it here.” Athena scanned the data disc with her omnitool and opened up her orders. “So much for not opening it in public.”

“Well, you really didn’t order me not to open it, you just suggested it.” Athena read her orders as she talked with Mari.

“Do you know where I am going?” Athena asked and Mari nodded in the affirmative.

“They deliberately kept my letters from getting to you?” Athena asked her.

“I have a stack of my own that they returned to me saying that you were unreachable.” Mari countered.

“Mamita, I don’t know what’s going on, but please lookout for yourself. I’ve heard your name mentioned by a lot of high ranking and high profile people. If I find out anything, I’ll find a way to tell you.”

Athena looked at her long time friend very differently now. She was an intelligence officer now and not the sky car thief that she knew from a long time ago. She looked great. Her uniform was pristine and she filled it out nicely. Her hair was in a tight regulation bun and she was the picture of a professional soldier.

“Thanks Mari.”

Mari looked at Athena in awe. This was her best friend from a long time ago and she was even more impressive now than she ever was as a ‘Red.’

“Is that it?” Athena asked her as if she was waiting for more, Mari nodded and said. “Yup. Nothing else.”
“Sit down and join me Mari. I would love to catch up with you. I mean look at you. You look fabulous. When did you enlist?” Athena motioned to the seat across from her.

“A year after you left, Fitch decided to join forces with Suarez and I bolted. The nice thing about never getting caught as a criminal is that there is no record. So I decided to give the Alliance a try and maybe I could join you out there.” Mari was more than eager to tell Athena everything and continued about her life in the Academy.

“The trouble I had was my combat skills were pretty lacking and I got my ass handed to me in hand to hand. Kind of like that day outside the ‘New York’ club. (They both chuckled at that memory.) The good thing was that my sneaky manipulative skills were outstanding and I could usually use them to get what I needed. So they stuck me in intelligence and here I am, six years later talking to my…(her eyes started to well up)…best friend?” She gave Athena a look that melted her heart. Athena took a hold of her hand and nodded.

“You always were.” Athena told her.

“I don’t know why I did this, but I printed all of the letters I wrote to you during the Academy and before. Here…look.” Mari pulled out a thick bundle of papers from her satchel.

Athena was no longer affected as easily as she used to be. Her emotions had become more controlled and hidden. She looked at the bundle; she looked at Mari and thought to herself that there were at least two people that care about her and a single tear slid down her cheek.

“I missed you so much Mamita. Maybe now we can get back to the good ole days eh? Well without the law breaking…” Mari shrugged her shoulders.

“When do you have to go back Mari?”

“I have a couple of days too. Why don’t we go out tonight like we used to and tease a few boys.” Mari had that mischievous look on her face just like when she was kid. Athena started to laugh.

“Mari you haven’t changed a bit. Okay, We’ll do that if my next meeting doesn’t fuck it up. Let’s exchange omnitool codes and I will call you if it’s a no go.”

“It shouldn’t, but okay.” It was as if Mari knew that she was meeting with Commander Anderson and Rear Admiral Steven Hackett. “They’ll probably be here any minute.” Mari smiled as she got up and excused herself.

“Mari…It’s great to see you again.”

“Likewise Mamita. I’m sure I’ll see you tonight.” With those last words she turned and exited the bar.

She was happy to see that Mari was doing so well although she thought about Fitch and the rest of ‘her’ Reds that had gone over to Suarez’s gang. It troubled her a little bit, but she didn’t think of it much. She shook her head as she remembered that Suarez was the first person to help her out, but she quickly realized that in reality Suarez helping her was nothing more than him helping himself to a cash making machine called Athena Shepard.

She was into her third pint of ‘Quilmes’ when she saw Anderson walk in followed by whom she could only assume was Admiral Hackett. Their eyes met and immediately, Anderson’s eyes softened and he guided the Admiral to the table. She stood up and greeted them. “Commander…”
Admiral.”

“Shepard.” Anderson returned her greeting as he shook her hand.

She turned to shake the Admiral’s hand which was firm as he pulled her arm and kissed her cheek. She looked flabbergasted as the Admiral pulled back with a smile on his face. “What’s the matter Shepard? Have you never greeted another Porteño before?”

“Get the fuck out of here…” She put her hand over her mouth as she caught what she said. “Sir, I’m sorry…I didn’t mean to…”

Hackett and Anderson were laughing. “You didn’t know that Steven here was born in Buenos Aires too?” Anderson told her. “He wanted to meet you in person.”

They all sat down and ordered drinks from the waitress.

“I’m glad you decided not to bring him around a couple of months ago.” Athena commented, now with a comfortable grin on her face.

“You mean after that enormous bar room brawl you started in Vancouver?” Hackett mentioned.

Her shoulders sagged as the admiral spoke. “You know about that?”

“Listen Athena, we’ve all been there. David and I sure have been and it’s one of the things that you never truly get over. I saw what you did on Akuze, they put me in charge of investigating your actions there. Those pencil pushing assholes wanted to hang you, but fuck them. You did everything right and because of you and your men, Akuze is now a viable, productive and much safer colony. That’s also why I recommended you be patched an N7.”

“Thank you sir.” She looked him in the eye and nodded almost meekly.

As they ate and drank, they talked small talk. They compared academy stories which had them all laughing. They talked for what seemed hours in a very informal atmosphere. “Commander? We should probably go somewhere to talk about my next assignment.”

Anderson nodded and turned to look at Hackett who also nodded.

“Come on let’s go to the office. We can talk in there.” Anderson motioned.

They took a cab to the Alliance offices in Buenos Aires.

“Okay, I know I am going to some moon named Torfan in the Skyllian Verge?” Athena stated.

“We’re going to wipe out the Batarian pirates that are based there. They were responsible for the attacks against Elysium. We want you and your company to lead the assault against them.” Anderson told her in an animated way.

“Are these the pirates that killed my mother’s family?” She was already picturing what she would do to these pirates that took away a part of her life that she never knew and never would know.

“We’re not certain, but this base has been a source of raids and pirating for some time. The sooner we get rid of it, the better.” Hackett answered.

“When do I leave?”

“You’ll be heading to Arcturus Station where you will take command of Lima Company 3rd
Battallion 6th Combat Brigade of the 103rd Marine Division. You’ll be serving under Major Kyle. You leave for Arcturus Station next week so you have time to relax.” Hackett told her.

“What are you two doing tonight?” She asked mischievously.

“I got nothing planned…you?” Hackett turned to Anderson who answered the same.

“Then it’s settled, you two are coming with me and Mari tonight and I won’t take no for an answer. No uniforms, civilian attire only.” She smiled at them.

“I’ll come by and pick both of you up.” She shook Anderson hand and kissed his cheek as well as Hackett’s and left to get ready.

Chapter End Notes

Porteño – In Argentina it is someone who is from Buenos Aires.
Quilmes – Argentine brand of beer. It’s the Budweiser of Argentina.

I purposely left out the names of the London’s crew and of her platoon mates with the exception of Toombs, because who knows what the hell Bioware/EA are going to do with the next Mass Effect and I don’t want my stuff to conflict too much. Again, thanks for reading and your comments and critiques are welcome.
Arcturus Station – May 8th, 2178

The view of the station was spectacular. Arcturus Station was a marvel in the middle of space. The capital of the Alliance was the home of over forty thousand Alliance Soldiers and civilians. After taking in the view she continued to peruse the duty roster of the people under her new command. Lima Company was filled with experienced Marines. She kept noticing a repeating trend in their service records showing that the majority of them served in the Skyllian Blitz. They were all veterans and her three lieutenants were graduates of the N School in Rio. Lieutenant Ostrovsky was an N5 and a tech expert, Lt. Patel was an N3 and an infiltration specialist and last but certainly not least, Lt. Nelson was an N3 with an expertise in heavy weapons. All in all Lima Company looked like an elite unit on paper and their service record looked very impressive. She put down the datapad and continued to watch the space station get bigger and bigger as they approached for docking.

Athena had just arrived at the station and was walking off the ramp when she was approached by a Marine Major. She immediately snapped to attention and saluted. The Major smiled and returned the salute.

“Staff Lieutenant Athena Shepard reporting for duty sir.”

“At ease Lieutenant.” The Major extended his hand and Athena took it. “Major Kyle, I’ll be your CO for this drop. Your company is in the middle of a training exercise on holographic deck three.” The Major motioned for her to follow him.

“I’m sure you’ve been briefed that 6th Combat Brigade will be the spearhead of this assault.”

“I have sir. Admiral Hacket and Commander Anderson briefed me back on Earth.”

“Then you should know that we are dealing with mostly Batarian Pirates. Have you ever had dealings with Batarians before?”

“No sir. By what I read they are very competent warriors and their pirates are the primary source of problems in the Skyllian Verge.”

“They were responsible for the Skyllian Blitz not to mention slave raids, colony raids and merchant raids. These pirates are a menace that need to be exterminated. This base on Torfan will be destroyed and will show these animals that the Alliance is not to be messed with.” The Major passionately told her.
“Do we have any intel on the base itself sir?” Athena asked

“We do, but we will discuss that with the rest of the Company Commanders. The meeting will be in two hours. Come, let’s go watch your company in action.”

SSV Budapest – May 31st, 2178

“The Pirates have Turrets here, here and here. This makes using our gunships impossible until they are taken out. The Cruisers Budapest and Cairo will clear the airspace and perform an orbital bombardment prior to our landing and that should take care of the turrets.” Major Kyle explained.

“What if the bombardment is ineffective?” Athena asked, while looking at the satellite images that were being shown of the moon’s surface.

“Have you ever seen what cruisers can do to a planet’s surface? It’ll work.” The Major answered.

“Sir with all due respect, these satellite images don’t show all of the crevices where other turrets could be hidden. Shouldn’t we scout out the surface first?” Athena continued to the obvious annoyance of the Major.

“Yes we should, but we don’t want to tip off the pirates there and have them escape.” The major countered. “Besides, the Cruisers will be on call for fire missions.”

“The bombardment is going to announce that we are there anyway. I suggest that a small recon team be sent in prior to anything else so that we’re not sent in there blind.” Athena slumped in her chair and mumbled under her breath. “This is going to be a shit show.”

“Your concern is noted, but like I said we cannot afford to let these bastards escape and if the recon team is spotted, their leaders might escape.”

“The pirate’s main base of operation is here and the cruisers will hit it with everything they have. We should be able to take the base with hopefully minimum casualties.” The Major continued with the brief.

“Lt. Shepard, your company will spearhead the drive into the base. India and Kilo Companies will provide fire support. Take prisoners if you can, but do not risk your lives to do so.”

“Is there any way we can get a company of Makos to land with us?” Athena asked.

“Yes there will be two Makos dropped and they will join the initial assault.” The Major answered. “Like I said, they are not expecting us and we have to hit them hard and fast.”

Athena studied the battlefield carefully and noticed that there would be no way of knowing exactly how big this base was without boots on the ground. There was also very little cover.

“How deep do these tunnels go? If they are deep enough, our bombardment won’t even scratch them. Also how do we know that the main base is not underground?” She pointed at the various vents of which she was sure that many of them were also hidden from the satellite images.
“We don’t know, but the entrances are pretty well marked here and here. Look people, I know that the intelligence is shoddy at best, but these pirates are very quick and will abandon this place in a hurry if they even sniffed that we were coming. We’ve been monitoring communications for the past month and a half and they have absolutely no clue that we are coming. I’m not saying this is going to be easy, but we can’t squander the element of surprise.”

***************

Athena looked at her company and was damned impressed. There was a loose yet unmistakably disciplined air about them. They all stood in three columns inside the cargo bay of the Budapest. This was going to be an air assault and they would be dropped quickly onto the moon and establish a strongpoint. They were all in their battle armor and Athena could feel the Budapest’s guns firing as the ship shook from the recoil. It was reassuring that whatever was being shot with those guns was probably turned instantly into a pile of molten goo.

“We’re coming over the drop zone…3…2…1…GO! GO! GO!” Came the pilot’s voice over the intercom. With practiced efficiency the columns surged toward the open cargo bay doors and began to jump out. One hundred and sixty six men all out in a matter of seconds.

Everyone seemed to be prepared for the cratered surface that awaited them and used it immediately for cover as they were engaged by pirates that were hidden in the cracks of the many rises and broken ground that existed. She watched as these pirate positions were literally disintegrated by the Budapest’s last fire mission from almost point blank range. The Budapest was forced to go back to orbit as it was taking fire from what seemed all over the place.

Before Athena could even start barking out orders she was taking fire. Her Biotic Barrier was holding and she had surrounded her immediate area so as to effectively cover the closest squad to her. “OSTROVSKY! TAKE OUT THAT POSITION TO YOUR RIGHT FLANK, WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS SPOT PRONTO!” She yelled as she noticed that they were pinned inside a kill zone.

“PATEL YOU COVER HIM! WE’LL COVER THE FRONT WHILE HE TAKES OUT THAT THORN IN OUR SIDE!” Athena ordered.

“AYE AYE MA’AM!” Was the response from her two Lt’s.

“NELSON, YOU’RE WITH ME!” Athena barked and got no response. She immediately looked towards the direction where Nelson was supposed to be and saw his body laying in a pool of blood.

“DAMN IT!” She yelled to herself. “SARGENT WILSON!”

“YES, MA’AM.” Was the immediate response. “YOU HAVE THIRD PLATOON! YOU’RE WITH ME!”

After they had secured the immediate area, Athena did a headcount and to her ultimate dismay discovered that she had lost almost a third of her men. Fifty seven marines including Lt. Nelson were dead and she still had to move out and spearhead the assault on the main base.

“Major do you read?” She called out, exhaustion and frustration coming through her voice.
“Go ahead Shepard.” Major Kyle responded and she could hear the sounds of heavy fighting at his position.

“Where are my Makos? We just got our asses handed to us by three lightly manned positions and I’m going to need those guns if you expect me to take their main position north of here.” Again sounding frustrated.

“Negative on the Makos. I diverted them to my position, we’re in dire straits here.” Athena heard that and was furious.

“That’s just fucking great!” She yelled to herself.

Athena knew that Kilo company was covering her left flank and India company was supposed to cover her right. She contacted the other two company commanders and got some sobering news. They had both lost over half of their men in the initial assault. They had secured their positions and were now waiting to assault the main pirate camp.

“Patel, Ostrovsky, Wilson.” She called out on the comms. “We’re going to have to move now before those bastards have a chance to regroup and get their heavy weapons in the game. We’re going to move as quickly as we can while Kilo and India companies cover our flanks. “Speed gentlemen, is the key here. I don’t need to tell you that this is going to be bloody, but if we can take that position we will have the advantage of terrain for the rest of the fight.”

Her men followed her lead as they moved out swiftly toward the main encampment and as they were going over the rise they were surprised that Athena was right. The Batarians were caught with their pants down in the middle of setting up their artillery. The pirates had no time to react as the fight became a hand to hand blood fest as the heavily outnumbered pirates were wiped out to the man. Lima company’s losses were two injured.

“Area secure ma’am.” Patel called out as the last of her Lieutenants to do so. She also heard Lima and India companies call out that they had secured their respective sectors.

“Major Kyle do you read?” Athena called out.

“Go ahead Shepard.” Athena noticed that there were no sounds of combat going on anymore at the Major’s position. She could hear the Makos idling in the background.

“Main position is secure, be aware that there is a network of tunnels underneath this site.” That motherfucker is still waiting around and not moving?

“You took the position already?” The sound of surprise in the Major’s voice gave her a little satisfaction, but the loss of so many good men and women brought her feelings back to finishing the job.

“We’re moving to your position now. Wait until we arrive.” The Major ordered.

As they waited for the Major and HQ Company to arrive, Athena assigned her men to scout out all of the rubble where buildings once stood and make sure that the tunnel entrances were secure and that no one would be sneaking to the surface to kill them. She also set up a perimeter around the base knowing that there were tunnels outside of the base that might be used to help with counter assault against them.

Athena walked around examining the corpses of the pirates. Goddamn they’re ugly. She thought to herself. Those eyes and face made them look like walking humanoid spiders. It gave her a little chill to remember how much she hated spiders.
It took about a half hour for HQ Company to take up positions in the main base area with the two Makos providing heavy cannon support. The Major’s company looked largely intact and the two makos had a few laser burns and dents were they were hit. This only fueled Athena’s resentment that the Major was just covering his own ass and not thinking of the mission.

“Tough fight Major?” Athena sarcastically mentioned as she glared at him while he approached them.

“Watch your tone Lieutenant!” He barked back, not liking Athena’s insinuation.

Athena tried to calm herself, but it was no use. “FUCK YOU MAJOR! WHILE YOU PUSSIED OUT IN THE REAR, MIKE, KILO AND LIMA COMPANY LOST OVER ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY MEN AND WOMEN TAKING THIS FUCKING PIT.” Her two remaining Lieutenants had to grab a hold of her as she was furious. “THOSE MAKOS COULD HAVE MADE A HUGE IMPACT, BUT YOU KEPT THEM TO COVER YOUR OWN WORTHLESS ASS!”

“That’s it! When this is over I’m citing you for insubordination! I’m going to make sure they bust your ass back down to private!” The Major yelled back.

“I can’t wait for the hearing Major! When everyone will know that you almost cost the operation, and caused unnecessary casualties because you were yellow!” Athena barked back as she jerked herself free from her Lieutenants. She pointed at the Major and repeated. “I can’t wait for the hearing.”

As Lt. Patel and Ostrovsky calmed Athena down, Major Kyle studied the scout reports and the new intel from the taking of the main pirate base. “We’re going to have to clear these tunnels.” He whispered to himself.

He came up with a plan that had Lima, Kilo and India company enter the tunnels at three different points. He surmised that since HQ company was the most intact, they would guard the surface entrances to make sure none of the pirates escaped. He had also requested that gunships be sent to continue to scout for more tunnels entrances as most of the heavy anti-aircraft guns were taken out by other battalions involved in this operation.

Athena did not like it, but she understood the reasons for it. The Major seemed to be doing his best and he looked very tired as he poured over the recently made, handwritten maps of the area.

She walked up behind him. “I’m sorry sir.” She said softly to him.

He waved her off. “I know Lieutenant, this has been a shit show and it’s hard on all of us. We all say things we don’t mean in the heat of the moment.”

“I know sir, I’ll try to control my temper a little more. You need any help?” Athena felt a little ashamed that she broke, but she needed to unleash really badly. Seeing so many of her men die the way they did just lit a fire in her that she had problems controlling.

“No Shepard I’m okay, I got this. Thank you.”

She smiled softly and turned to leave. “Oh and Lieutenant…be careful down there.” He advised.

“Thank you sir, I will.”
The tunnels were well lit and very well maintained. They were clearing room by room and it was a slow and methodical process. So far most of the rooms near the surface were abandoned and booby trapped. These were easily avoided or if too difficult to disarm, she would set them off using her biotics. Her sensors on her helmet was telling her that they were six hundred feet underground. Damn, solid rock and they kept digging. Gotta give it to those four eyes, they sure are persistent. Hmm…sensors say the air is breathable down here. They must have some kind of environmental generator in here.

As they continued down the tunnel network, the companies had to separate into squads to full clear out all of the side tunnels. She kept her pistols at the ready as she continued to slowly make her way down what they now knew was the main tunnel in the network. She could hear the rest of the company making contact and fighting in the side tunnels. Her squad had now come to a T intersection where the main tunnel split. Her sensors determined that the split to the left led to an enormous room while the one to the right continued to wind its way to who knows where.

Athena set the squad to cover her as she and two other members went into the room to clear it. They quietly entered the room and the sight that they beheld would haunt their thoughts for the rest of their lives. Bodies piled upon bodies, men, women and children, mostly human, but there were a few Asari and Batarians as well by the looks of them. It looked like they were executed as a last ditch effort to cleanse the area of anyone that could identify them to any authority. According to her helmet sensors these people had been killed pretty recently as they still let off some heat from their bodies.

“Major do you read?” She called out.

“Go ahead.”

“There are hundreds if not thousands of bodies down here, mostly humans, but several Asari and Batarians as well. It looks like they’ve been executed sir. I recommend that we send a recovery unit once we clear this complex of the vermin.” The fury in her voice was unmistakable.

“Roger that Shepard. We’ll make sure they are all identified and that their families are told.” The major assured her.

Athena was about to turn and leave, but then from the corner of her eye she saw movement. She rushed to the movement tactically with both of her pistols drawn. As she got closer she quickly noticed a small figure crawling out of the pile of dead humans. It was a small Batarian child, covered in blood and gore. She could see tears in the child’s eyes as she met the little one’s glazed over stare. Leave it to the Batarians to enslave their own as well.

Athena quickly holstered her weapons and reached for the child. The little one instinctively took Athena’s hand and squeezed with all of her tiny might. “We’ve got a survivor!” Athena frantically yelled over the comm and to her immediate squad mates.

Athena pulled the little one out and embraced her gently. “It’s okay, we’re going to get you out of here.”

“Momma…where’s my momma?” The little one asked desperately resulting in Athena pulling her closer.
“Everything is going to be okay, I’m going to go look for her okay?” The little Batarian girl nodded.

“Sargent Christie!...” The squad leader came immediately. “I want you to take the squad and search this room for any other survivors. Here take this little one. I’m going to take two people and continue down the tunnel to see if there are any more rooms like this one.”

Unfortunately there were another twenty rooms just like the one she left her squad in. Out of the thousands of bodies, there were maybe twenty survivors. This was a massacre of unarmed and helpless people on a scale that she had never seen. *These animals cannot be allowed to live!* She was furious and her rage was at a level that she would destroy anything she considered hostile.

“Shepard you read.” She heard Ostrovsky on her comm.

“Go ahead LT.”

“According to our sensors, that tunnel you’re in should intersect with the enormous room we are trying to break through to. The main body of the Batarians is trying to push our way to try and escape. I’ve only got four men with me to hold them back. If you can get behind them, we could force them to surrender.”

Athena and her two tag alongs were out like a bullet, rushing through the main tunnel to reach Ostrovsky’s position. She took out the two Batarians guarding the rear of the enemy formation with her pistols at point blank range as their shots were absorbed by her barrier and dropped harmlessly on the floor.

She looked into the room which was the size of a small stadium. It was filled with Batarians and... *fucking humans too!* Getting their ships ready to escape. There were two enormous gates on the ceiling waiting for the right moment to open to make their escape.

*No fucking way!* She pulled her two squad mates close and whispered in their ears. “No fucking prisoners. They all die here today. Do you understand.” There was no doubt what Athena was telling them and they understood.

The two privates nodded enthusiastically and began to fire their weapons to the surprise of the pirates who were now being attacked from two sides. One of her men, a heavy weapons expert, began to fire his M-100 grenade launcher. The resulting carnage was astounding. The pirates were now caught in an inescapable kill zone, firing ineffectively at the biotically protected marines causing the mayhem.

When the firefight began to subside, Athena launched herself with her biotic barrier up and began lifting entire groups of pirates into the air up to the gates and letting them fall to their deaths as they landed with a crunching thud. She smashed them against the walls, she threw grenade after grenade into the shuttles that were attempting to take off and they exploded with the sickening smell of burnt flesh.

Athena was in a zone as she methodically killed pirate after pirate. She didn’t care that some had put their hands up and surrendered and neither did her men. They had all made up their minds that they needed to put a round into the head of every one of these animals so that they would never hurt anyone else.

Her squad mates watched as she mowed down a group of ten to twenty trying to surrender, then smashed them into the walls with her awesomely powerful biotics, and to finish them she would methodically pierce every one of them through their hearts with her omni blade. Her rage had
consumed her and she was a mindless killing machine, finishing every pirate in sight. They ran from her to try and surrender to the others, but she would pull them away and execute them personally with her omni blade all the while her men would watch. Most of them with outright glee at the sight of their commander personally getting the vengeance that was denied the dead slaves, the others watched in horror only too afraid to protest.

It was a frightening sight. Athena and the remaining forty two men of her company had turned into beasts of unquenchable thirst. Even when there appeared to be no one left, she and her men continued to search the remaining shuttles for any pirates that might have tried to hide, dragging them out screaming for mercy in a vain attempt to stop her from slaughtering them.

“I’m going to show you the same mercy you showed your slaves.” She would say.

The Marines lost over three hundred men and women that day, almost half of them from Lima company. It was nothing compared to the losses that the pirates suffered. In addition to their main base of operation being destroyed, the pirates lost over twenty shuttles, ten fighters, and one frigate either destroyed or captured. The pirates were dealt a crushing blow by the alliance military, one that they would never recover from in Citadel space. The Skyllian Blitz had been avenged.

The moon of Torfan had become the graveyard for over two thousand Batarian and Human pirates, over seven hundred of them killed at the hands of Lima Company and most of them personally by Staff Lieutenant Athena Shepard, Commander of Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Combat Brigade, 103rd Frontier Division, she would forever be remembered by every Hegemony Batarian as the “Butcher of Torfan.” It would be a name that would stick to her even with some of her comrades.

The day after what the brass was calling an astounding success, Major Kyle resigned from the Alliance Military. Apparently the amount of death and carnage of this operation was too much for him. Major Kyle had called her a murderer and butcher during the debriefing causing her men to call him a coward who didn’t do anything to help the situation.

“You weren’t even there and you have the nerve to say anything. The reason some of us are still alive is because of her, not you!” Lt. Ostrovsky defended her. “Did you even see the piles of slaves they executed or was that too much for you too?”

“That doesn’t excuse cold blooded murder!” The Ex-Major retorted.

“Those animals will never harm another being again. They won’t be tried and let go on fucking technicalities. Sometimes cold blooded murder is what is needed for justice. The rest of those pirates will now think twice before fucking with the Alliance again.” Athena non-chalantly told the Ex-Major as she sipped her Quilmes with the rest of her men.

She raised her glass. “Here’s to us! Who’s like us?” She toasted and what was left of her company enthusiastically answered. “DAMN FEW! And they’re all dead.”

“HOOOORAH!” They all yelled in unison.

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December 24th 2178 – Arcturus Station Rec Lounge 1630 hours
After four months of psychiatric treatment, Athena decided to spend her Christmas Eve beating the hell out of a heavy bag. She wore her issued shorts and t-shirt which were soaked in sweat. She could see every one of their faces as she struck the bag with a force no human should have. All those men and women dead, those dead slaves, the piles of and piles of dead pirates whom she killed, she could see all of their faces in her mind. The beautiful little Batarian girl that she pulled out of the massive pile of bodies made her smile a little and tell herself it was worth the death and carnage she caused. Those animals are gone and she had personally made a difference in the galaxy. Sometimes many have to die in order to save many more, she would tell herself. She struck the bag again and again with increasing force. Her knuckles were calloused over from striking the bag so much. She no longer had the hands of a lady, they were the hands of a warrior. Her body was hard as a rock and her muscles rippled as the bag looked like it was about to explode from her strikes. The doctors had told her that her bone and musculature was about fifty percent denser than what humans are supposed to have. Her Biotics measured off the charts as did her physical strength and endurance. As she continually smashed strike after devastating strike into the bag, it finally gave way as the chain holding it in place snapped and the one hundred and fifty pound bag was launched fifteen feet from where she was standing. The rest of the gym crowd turned their heads to see what had become an almost routine occurrence. Athena smiled and shrugged. 

*What did they do to me? It’s like I’m a fucking super hero.* Her thoughts returned to Munro and those scientists. She had never gone through so much pain, but every time they did something to her, she came out of it feeling differently. It had been almost ten years since they poked and prodded her. She searched and searched, but there were no answers. It was as if she never existed at all other than her life outside of that facility. She swore to herself she would find out what happened to her records of her time there. Somebody must have had a use for them or they would not have been erased so completely. She was scheduled to leave for Earth tomorrow and spend some time to herself in Mar Del Plata. She swore that she wouldn’t do shit while there other than sun bathe and cocktails, hopefully meet a cute guy and forget her life for a little while.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys are liking this as much as I am. Critiques are welcome. I am always looking for ways to improve my writing style.
Some Tidbits of Intel

Chapter Summary

A little down time, some Cerberus and Athena gets to see Joker's piloting skills for the first time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Atlantic Beach, NC, Saturday June 20th 2178, 1150 hours

It sure as hell wasn’t Mar del Plata, but she couldn’t complain as the white sand beach was beautiful. Actually, if she was objective about it, the beach was more beautiful than Mar del Plata. The sand here was just pristine she thought as she buried her toes in it and leaned back into her beach chair. She wore a white string bikini that was very typical of the ones worn by the girls in Argentina. She had the feeling that it was not quite as common in North Carolina as she got some weird stares from the people there, although some of them stared for a completely different and not so innocent reason. She was approached numerous times by both men and women in the hopes that they would get lucky. Once they found out who she was though, they backed off their hope of getting lucky and began their hero worship.

She watched as at least twenty marines, many of them with their significant others tended to an enormous and elaborate barbecue on the beach. They all looked so happy as the Summer Solstice approached, one of them looking into his Omni-tool to make sure they didn’t miss the count-down.

She smiled as she took a sip from her Stela…she watched as one of the young marines frantically approached her with two flukes and a bottle of what she assumed was Champagne. Corporal Liam McConnel was from Paterson, NJ had the bad luck of drawing guard duty this week and could not go home and celebrate the holiday with his family and friends. He was another young worshiper, but he had a set on him when he surprised the shit out of her by asking her to come to this celebration. She graciously accepted to the delight of the young man.

“Lieutenant come on you’re going to miss the count down!” The young Corporal from New Jersey was so innocently exuberant.

“We wouldn’t want that now would we?” She answered him while taking the fluke. He quickly poured the Champagne into her glass and his own as the countdown had begun. She slowly got up and with Corporal McConnel, headed to the area where the group had gathered. She watched as Corporal McConnel’s expression changed to that of an awestruck child as she absolutely towered over him by at least half a head. It made her miss Lima Company, none of those magnificent people would ever worship her the way these young ones did. She could drink and enjoy their company and vulgar banter all day long.

She left Arcturus Station on what was supposed to be a month’s worth of leave, but that got canceled and she was ordered to report to Camp Lejeune, NC for a new assignment. The “official” job she was given was training officer, but the real reason she was there had more to do with her
history and her ungodly abilities.

“HOOOORAH THE SUMMER’S HERE!!!!!!” They all yelled in unison and she was very content with the small moment of unbridled joy. She watched as the matched pairs started dancing to the music, enjoying the beginning of Summer. She felt a little down, thinking that there would never be a person for her because of who she was. She downed her fluke after cheering with everyone. Her shoulders slumped a little and she began to walk back to her beach chair.

“Lieutenant!” She turned to see that Corporal McConnel had his arms wide open as if expecting a hug.

Athena let out a chuckle. “Don’t you think that would be a little inappropriate Corporal?”

She watched him as he shrugged with faux innocence and then turned with a more serious look of…almost…pity? “It just looked like you could use one Lt.” He put his arms down and began to turn to walk back to the others.

Athena let out a sigh and pulled Corporal McConnel back to her and embraced him fiercely. “You were right Corporal.” She whispered in his ear as she remembered another violent year for her. The tears began to well up in her eyes as she remembered her men from Lima company that didn’t survive Torfan, the men she lost at Akuze, the images in her mind overwhelmed her as she collapsed into Corporal McConnel’s strong young arms.

She was brought back to her senses by his young and concerned voice. “Lt. are you okay?”

She pulled back from the embrace, keenly aware that many of the other revelers were watching now. She looked into the young man’s eyes. “Thank you Corporal…I…you were right. I did need it.”

She turned to the crowd. “A Toast! To the Fallen! It’s because of them that we can do this! Let us never forget their sacrifice!” The tears in her eyes were streaming down her cheeks as she downed another fluke.

“HOORAH!” They all raised their glasses and downed the contents in the same manner.

“Hey LT! You up for the customary feats of strength?” A different voice from the crowd called out.

“Feats of Strength? What’re you talking about?” Athena was very puzzled by the challenge.

“It’s part of a non-denominational holiday started in the late twentieth century.” Corporal McConnel told her. “You can actually celebrate it any time.”

“Really…What’s the holiday?” Now Athena was slightly amused.

“It’s called Festivus.” He replied with a smile. “It was started by some guy named Costanza in the late twentieth century.”

“Sounds like fun…okay…who do I whoop first?” She scanned the crowd as she saw another beautiful marine approach the area with an aluminum pole?

“A stripper pole, what are you insinuating Marine?” She was a little unsure of what to say next.

“This is the Festivus symbol, an excellent example of strength to weight ratio.” The Marine was chuckling as he said it.
“How come I’ve never heard of this holiday…and I try to celebrate everything if I can.” Athena said as she watched everyone sit around the aluminum pole.

“We don’t like to share it. It’s a Camp Lejeune unofficial holiday.” McConnel told her.

“Hey Liam! Did you hear that Johnson finally figured out what an I.D.10.T form is.” An amused voice from the crowd announced.

“A FESTIVUS MIRACLE!” McConnel exclaimed enthusiastically.

Athena was amused at the laid back and humorous tone that everyone was taking. Sure it was weird, but they all seemed to be having a good time and it actually took her mind off the more serious things going on in her life.

“LT. As the highest ranking member out here, you should lead the proceedings with the Airing of Grievances.” McConnel took her hand and made her stand in the middle of the circle. “Keep it light.” He whispered to her and it immediately made her smile.

“Well to start, I got a bone to pick with you McConnel.” McConnel turned around and pointed to himself as if he was innocent of anything she was about to say.

“Why is it that you never lift the toilet seat when you take a piss? Not only that, he doesn’t even have the courtesy to wipe it down when he’s done. You should start pissing sitting down from now on. As a matter of fact that’s an order. Oh and can you please, pleeease close the door!” The whole group started to laugh.

The Airing of Grievances was a lot of fun. There were some that were hurt your sides funny and some that were so stupid that they turned out to be funny. One small female marine stood up and pointed at her. “I got a grievance with you LT.” The whole group just stopped everything and you could hear a pin drop. “You think you could slow down on the runs? Not all of us have ten foot stilts for legs you know. It’s hard to keep up with an ostrich when you’re the size of a Cornish hen.” Athena burst out laughing, tears forming in her eyes as everyone else joined in the laughter.

The Feats of Strength were just as silly. One particularly gigantic marine challenged her. When she began to square up to him he looked at her puzzled and asked. “What are you doing LT?” Athena was now the one that was puzzled.

“Well…Aren’t we gonna go at it?” Athena was now the one that was puzzled.

“Are you crazy LT? I’ve heard about you. There’s no way I’m going to get my ass kicked in front of all these ladies. I got something else in mind if you would indulge me.”

Athena nodded with a curious smile. “Whatcha got private?”

“Manley, ma’am.” He answered. “This is the deal. There will be ten members of the opposite sex down in the surf. Your mission should you choose to accept it is to run down to the surf, pick one of them up and drag or carry them back to this point at which you will have to take a shot of McConnel’s moonshine. You will repeat the process until you rescue all ten or pass out trying.”

“Do I get to pick who I rescue?” Athena asked.

“No, we pick each other’s victims.” He answered.

Athena smiled at the young and gigantic private. “You’re on Tiny. So who goes first?”

“My mother raised me right…Ladies first.” He commented.
Now normally she thought that she would destroy this kid, but the rules made it so that he had a significant advantage. He went out of his way to choose the biggest boys in the group for her to rescue, saving his own big two hundred and sixty pound ass for last.

It took her nine minutes to finish the challenge and she could feel the alcohol start affect her as she set the big private down gently on the sand. She was drenched in sweat with sand all over her. “Let’s see what you got now Tiny.”

The crowd was roaring at what really was an awesome display by any standard. “Holy Shit Lieutenant! That was incredible!” McConnel was in awe...again.

So Athena picked out all of the women Manley was supposed to carry and didn’t do him any favors either, because she chose herself for last and that was something she was sure he wouldn’t be able to handle. No one ever asked her how much she weighed and when they guessed it was always wrong. Most thought she weighed in the area of one hundred and seventy or eighty pounds, little did they know that their guesses were off by almost one hundred pounds.

Sixteen minutes later, Manley was trudging through the surf with Athena draped over his big shoulders. “Damn! What do they feed you girls in Argentina?” He was struggling mightily as he took one slow step after another toward the drop off zone. He finally crossed into the zone and collapsed face first into the sand with Athena on top of him. Manley finished in seventeen minutes and twelve seconds.

“Private are you okay?” Athena was a little concerned and a lot buzzed from that fucking moonshine.

“Did I win?” He stammered.

They all laughed at him, but Athena was truly impressed by the young private. She grabbed him by his shoulder and sat him up on a beach chair. There was sand all over his body that reminded her of her academy experience as a sugar cookie.

“That was really impressive private.” Athena had the urge to take him to her room and have her way with him, but she knew that was a no no with the regs and he was too drunk.

“She kicked your ass Private!” One of the ladies exclaimed proudly as she took hold of his face and planted a ferocious kiss of apparent envy on his lips.

“Damn LT. you could be one hell of a lifeguard. Ever think of a career change?” McConnel mentioned in his wise ass way.

She had an awesome time with them. Their innocent and joyous celebration of the summer was just what she needed. They had all stayed out on the beach till night fall. Athena ended up taking some of the younger and drunker Marines home as she had stopped drinking immediately after McConnel’s horrid moonshine, in anticipation of just such a thing. She called in a favor and was able to procure a Kodiak Shuttle for the occasion. She got the entire drunken group back to the barracks with no issues, although she did have to help carry some of them back to their racks.

She made sure that her last drop off was Corporal McConnel and before he stumbled out of the shuttle. “Corporal?”

He turned and had just the most drunkenly curious look on his face.

“Thank you. I really appreciate you taking me out with your squad mates.”
“Not a probleemss LT.” He slurred out with a lot of effort in trying to sound sober. “Ith’s nizze to thee a ofither who…hic…can hang withhh uzz grunths.”

“Good night Corporal.” She smiled and turned to leave.

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Sunday was an easy day for most people, but it was actually her busiest. She did her morning exercises and run and went to the mess hall for breakfast. She entered as she usually did and saw that most of the partiers didn’t even bother to wake up yet. The mess hall was pretty empty on the weekends as most of the Marines that were not on duty usually left for other places away from the main base.

She ate her American style breakfast consisting of a large Cheese Omelet smothered in chipped beef, Homefries and a Belgian Waffle. Her coffee was extra strong and she followed it down with a large grapefruit juice. In Argentina they called it an English breakfast, but this was far better than any English breakfast she ever had there. It was all the energy she needed for what was coming up next.

She made some small talk with the other Marines in the mess hall and she made it a point to visit the Marine cooks and their staff, telling them how excellent their food was. It was always good for extra rations for her.

She never felt comfortable walking into the physical rehabilitation lab. It felt really close to the Munro facility and she insisted that all of the scientists take off their white lab coats. They acquiesced to her demands and it made her feel a little bit more comfortable, but she would never be fully comfortable with these people and today there was an unknown added to the mixture of scientists. Athena watched as an Asari entered the room and began to look her up and down.

“Athena! This is Matriarch Kelirania T’nato. She is one of the foremost experts in Biotics and their application. She is here to see if she can help us understand why your biotics abilities are so far and beyond any other human that we know of.”

Athena glared at the Asari matriarch as she did not introduce herself. She only looked at Athena like a test subject.

“The last person to look at me like that ended up on the floor in a pool of blood.” Athena’s glare bore into the Asari who to her credit did not flinch.

“I suggest the rest of you leave the room as me and the Lieutenant are going to get acquainted.” Athena could feel the energy emanating from the Asari Matriarch.

The rest of the scientists were tumbling over each other trying to get out with the exception of one. “What are you doing? This was not discussed and is highly irregular! You will both back down now!”

“I need to evaluate her. You will leave immediately or I will!” The Asari woman responded and to Athena expectations, the last human scientist quickly left.

As he left the Asari woman glared at Athena and smiled the smile of a predator about to take down its favorite prey.
T'nato did not hesitate and attacked Athena with a biotic push that slammed into Athena’s barrier with a force that she had not yet felt from another person, compared to the Thresher Maw though, this was a pin prick and it put a smile on Athena’s face.

“That all you got bluey?” She felt her barrier struck again with another type of attack she had never felt. Still again a pin prick. Athena could see the frustration on the Asari’s face.

The Asari’s biotic charge again felt like a pin prick on her barrier and Athena had enough when she pinned the Matriarch to the wall with her biotic push and held her there. “Had enough or do you need me to really let loose on you?”

“This is not possible! How are you?” The Matriarch had such a confused expression on her face.

Athena kept her pinned to the wall and put her face close to the Asari’s. “Don’t make me hurt you. Please back down.” She could see the Asari struggle in vain to free herself only to feel an increase in the pressure exerted by Athena’s biotics.

Matriarch T’nato finally let her guard down and Athena did the same. “I’ve never felt such power. I’ve worked with the top vanguards in the Asari Commando Corps and have never seen anyone even come close to what you can do.” There was an excitement in her voice that was not there before.

The rest of the scientific team slowly streamed back into the room which was now a mess. “Has there ever been anyone to reach her power levels?” One of the scientists asked.

“In my eight hundred and thirty two years of life, I have never seen anyone even come close. Lieutenant, you are an aberration.” She watched Athena with a wonder and an almost outright gleeful expression on her face. “I would be honored to help train you to the best of your ability if you will accept me.”

“I just beat you handily. What could you possibly teach me?” Athena was very skeptical and a little bit annoyed at all the attention.

“Granted, but you are just raw power. I can teach you more finesse and how to use your power for even the slightest of jobs. I can also teach how to concentrate your most powerful strikes into an area the size of pin head.” Matriarch T’nato was very enthusiastic and it looked like she really wanted to take her on as a pupil.

“Why now? Why not when I was younger, or after my disaster on Akuze?” Athena continued.

“We did not know. The moment your government secretly contacted mine, our curiosity was peaked and they sent me. Now that I’ve seen what you can do, I would love the opportunity to train you.”

“Why would the Asari government want one of their Matriarchs training another race that may be rival species? Isn’t it against your laws or something?” Athena kept questioning.

“I am a Matriarch my dear. If I deem you are worthy for training, my sisters will agree. Come girl walk with me.”

Athena took her up on the offer and walked out of the rehabilitation lab. Some of the scientists wanted to follow, but T’nato and Sheppard waved them off.

As they got out of earshot of the lab, Matriarch T’nato turned to Athena. “Lieutenant, you are unique now, but you have not been the only one to wield this kind of power. The last one to have
this kind of power was a Krogan who died during the Rachni wars over two thousand years ago. As far as I know, you and the Krogan Warlord Urdnot Furak are the only beings to ever possess this kind of power.”

Athena was listening intently as the Matriarch explained that the Asari had trained the Krogan Biotics and their Vanguards. “They may not want to admit it, but the Krogan biotics can trace their training lineage to the Asari. The Krogan saved the galaxy from the Rachni, maybe your race is destined to do something great as well.”

“I guess the Alliance is okay with this?” T’nato nodded in the affirmative. “Okay Matriarch T’nato, I will accept your guidance. When do we start?”

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Planet Binthu – Cerberus Research Facility

“She’s accepted the training.” Miranda informed the Illusive Man. “Hopefully she and the Alliance don’t find out about our connection to this.”

“They won’t…neither the Matriarch nor the Alliance have any idea that we planted her there and Shepard should be trained to her utmost potential. For all the Alliance knows, Matriarch T’nato is exactly who she says she is and the Matriarch believes she has the blessing of the Alliance to do this. They don’t have single inkling of all the links to us.”

“Shepard is our future. Every genetic modification that was done to her and her naturally powerful biotics are what we should be trying to achieve for every human.”

“You think it’s wise to trust her training to an Asari?”

“The Asari are the most experienced and powerful biotics in the galaxy. If there is anyone that can harness Shepard’s power it’s them.” The Illusive man continued. “Matriarch T’nato was only too willing to take ‘the Alliance’s’ offer in exchange for training her.”

“Why didn’t you take her when she was younger?” Miranda asked. “We could’ve molded her into our most powerful agent.”

“She is not an agent!” Miranda was taken aback by the Illusive man’s response. “She is the future of humanity and she has a destiny that I will only try to help her realize.”

“But we could learn so much from her!” Miranda retorted. “The genetic modifications performed on her have failed on everyone else. She’s an extremely valuable resource!”

“She is exactly where she is supposed to be! You will not bring this topic up again!” His tone was firm and final as he lit up a cigarette and took a long drag. Miranda knew better than to test his patience.

“Understood, but you better hope she never finds out about Akuze.” Miranda looked a little perturbed about the Illusive man’s nonchalant attitude towards humanity’s most powerful representative.
“While that would be unfortunate, it’s not unforeseen. We’ll probably do battle with her in the future, but it will only make her stronger and that can only be a good thing.”

“We could use her on Pragia you know…once she’s fully trained.” Miranda commented and almost winced.

“Don’t test me Miranda.” The Illusive man responded with a frighteningly calm demeanor. “Also, make sure that the Matriarch is taken care of when the training is complete. We don’t need her going to the Asari and telling them our business.”

“Understood, I’ll make sure Kai handles the details for that.” Miranda answered.

“Good.”

“On another note, Cronos Station is almost complete. We should be able to transfer our operational headquarters there within the year.” Miranda continued her briefing.

“That’s excellent Miranda. That station will allow us to operate almost carte blanche.” The Illusive man responded with what could only be described as a little bit of enthusiasm.

November 14th, 2179, Camp Lejeune, NC  1023 hours, Artillery Range Bravo

The sound of the explosion carried throughout the base as the shockwave could be felt from over a mile away and shook windows out to even the town of Jacksonville. People had come out of their homes to see what it was and instinctively looked to see if there was a smoke cloud over the firing range. There were a lot of surprised faces when they saw that there was no smoke, or even a trace of an explosion. There were no fighters in the air or anything that any normal person could have associated with that sound.

Staff Commander David Anderson was watching his protégé exercising her new found control over her abilities. It was an awesome sight. The raw power of the nova strike she used on the range cleared an area that was at least two hundred feet in diameter. He watched through his binoculars as she stood in the middle of the clearing. No smoke, no blackened earth, there was just clear ground around her with broken trees at the edge of the cleared area. He watched as she absolutely demolished a platoon of mechs with her incredibly precise biotic attacks. This was no longer the frightened young girl he rescued from the streets of Buenos Aires. This was a full blown biotic super soldier that thanks to him and he would say God as well, served the interests of the Alliance and humanity. God help anyone who got in her way.

Matriarch T’nato approached the Commander. “She is incredible Commander. I’ve never had the pleasure to be in the presence of someone as great as her. If she were an Asari, we probably would worship her as the incarnation of our Goddess.”

“Don’t tell her that. It’ll go to her head.” Anderson chuckled as he said it and yet he felt a strange sensation that the Asari had a point.

“It was an honor to train such a fine young woman. Thank you for the opportunity.”

“You should thank the scientists. They were the reason you are here in the first place.”
“I will, but I must take my leave. There is a shuttle waiting to take me to the next ship back to Illium. I should really leave.”

“Matriarch? You’re leaving?” Athena appeared as if she teleported out of thin air.

“Yes my dear, there is nothing more that I can teach you. May you use your gifts for the benefit of the galaxy.”

“Anderson? ANDERSON!” She was absolutely shocked and overjoyed to see her mentor. She rushed to embrace him. “Why didn’t you say you were coming?”

“I’ll be leaving now my dear.” The Matriarch interrupted. Athena turned to her and embraced her as well. “I’m going to miss you Lady T’nato. I really enjoyed spending my time with you.”

“I enjoyed it as well. Please…whatever you do, do not let this change the kind, fun and caring person that I have come to admire.” She pulled away from the embrace. “I won’t…I promise.”

With that Lady T’nato left their presence and Commander Anderson was left with Athena and two other scientists from what had been called project Prometheus. “Commander, Project Prometheus has been a huge success. We’ve catalogued Lieutenant Shepard’s power levels both biotically and physically. We’ve taken tissue samples and discovered that she has been through extensive genetic manipulation.”

“You do realize that all of what you are telling me is considered Top Secret right?” The Commander’s serious tone surprised the enthusiastic scientist.

“Yes sir, but I was informed you are cleared for Top Secret access.”

“What about the LT. here? Is she cleared?” Commander Anderson motioned at Shepard who was mildly amused at Anderson’s demeanor.

“Oh leave him alone Commander.” The scientist looked unsure until Athena rescued him. “I’ve already seen all of the results. So what does that tell you Thomas?”

Athena turned to Anderson who was thoroughly entertained as the last of the scientists left the area. “Well it’s official; I’m a fucking super hero.”

“Well that’s good because I got your orders back to the fleet. You’re going back to Lima Company on Arcturus. It’s been reformed as a fast Recon and Raid company. They’re already calling themselves ‘Shepard’s Lunatics.’ It’ll be right up your alley.”

Athena’s eyes lit up at the thought of going back with her old company. “When do I leave?”

“Remember that month’s leave you are owed? Well you got it. Anywhere you want to go, I am authorized to set it up for you.”

“I think I’m going to do New York this time. I’m going to pay Marianna a visit and maybe get into a little trouble. You wanna come?” The mischievous smile she gave made him chuckle.

“You know I can’t. I have to go meet Admiral Hackett in London tomorrow.”

Anderson was very amused as he walked with her. “The shuttle will be waiting for you at the air station whenever you wish to leave. I have to go catch the next shuttle to London.”

“So that’s it? Can’t stay for a couple of drinks? That’s weak Commander.” She nudged him.
“You know that normally I would, but this time I’m actually under a time constraint.”

“Tell Steven I said hi and that he owes me a dance.”

Arcturus Station - February 14th, 2183 0900 GMT

Athena was standing on the observation deck staring at the beautiful new frigate. SSV Normandy, *damn she is a looker.* Athena thought. The new symbol of Human and Turian trust.

She watched as the ship broke its moorings and quickly left her sight. *Too bad. I would’ve loved to take a tour.* She thought.

A few seconds later she heard the alarm. “ALL HANDS BATTLESTATIONS! ALL HANDS BATTLESTATIONS! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! ALL HANDS BATTLESTATIONS!” She turned toward the window and saw a squadron of fighters deploy and soon they were out of sight. “Commander Shepard, report to the hanger bay with the designated boarding party.”

She was off like she was shot out of a cannon. “You hear that Wilson?” She called on her omnitool.

“Got it Commander, we’re already half way there.” Came the response which put a smile on her face. *What the fuck is going on?* She thought to herself as several scenarios went through her head.

*Did somebody steal that ship? No way it’s gotta be something else.* It was the only scenario that made sense, other than another war with the Turians.

She armored up with the boarding squad and entered the assault shuttle. It was a heavily armed and armored version of the Kodiak. She could hear the radio chatter as she sat down in her seat next to the pilot. “Everybody buckled in?” The pilot asked.

“We’re all here. Let’s go.” Athena answered for them.

“Some crazy ass stole the Normandy?” She started to chuckle a little, but held back because of the seriousness of the situation.

The shuttle pilot hung back behind the fighters as they attempted to take down the engines of the frigate. It was to no avail as the frigate avoided every shot. Whoever was flying that ship was an incredible pilot. He made that beauty dance. She kept watching the fighters make their runs only for the frigate quickly alter its course in order to make them miss.

“There’s no way I would have missed those shots. Somebody needs to retrain that squadron!” She chirped to the utter amusement of her men and the shuttle pilot. Watching the large frigate avoid getting hit reminded her of the old videos of the World War Two bombers being attacked by single engine fighters.
“That thief is actually flying the prescribed shakedown course better than anyone I’ve seen so far, and he is getting shot at.” The shuttle pilot sounded like he was admiring the thief. She had to admit to herself that she really wanted to meet this person.

“Squadron three stand down, stand down.” She heard come over the comm. “All units stand down, stand down.” She watched as the Normandy was guided back into its mooring.

“Security to airlock fifteen, security to airlock fifteen.”

“That guy is going to spend a little bit of time in prison for this…I might pay him a visit…that was such a sexy display of flying.” She said, the last part a little too loudly.

“Sounds like you got the hots for that thief Commander.” Wilson commented. “Why do all the good girls like bad boys?” He asked jokingly.

“You think I’m a good girl?” She chuckled at the thought.

Wilson’s cheeks turned a little pink, but he recovered quickly and responded. “Well you’re really good at being bad.”

She turned and winked at him. “You know this is the first time I’ve played cop. I was the one usually being chased back in the day. It’s kind of nice to do the chasing for once.”

Two hours later they are still outside of the station waiting for the hangar doors to open. They had stayed closed once the station was locked down and now they were having problems opening them.

“Commander Shepard do you read?” There came a very familiar voice over the comm.

“Go to Shepard.”

“Once you’re back on the station I need you to report station control for a debriefing.”

“Anderson?” She shot back.

“That’s Captain Anderson to you Commander.” Athena smiled a big toothy smile. “ANDERSON you old dog! If they ever let our asses back on, I’ll go see ya.”

“You know him Commander?” Wilson asked.

“Yup…He’s the reason I’m a Marine.”

Half an hour later she was back on the station talking to the new Captain of the Normandy. “Wow she’s yours?”

Anderson looked like the proud papa of a strapping young boy. “She’s mine, well ours.”

That last word took her by complete surprise. “What...ours?” She was completely confused.

“As of today you’ve been transferred over to my command and are now the XO of the SSV Normandy. I’ll introduce you to the crew tomorrow.”

“What about my boys? Who’s taking my place?” Now she was sounding like a concerned mother looking out for her kids.

“It came out today. Lieutenant Commander Ostrovsky is now the CO of Lima Company.”
Anderson could see the relief on her face when she mentioned her XO’s name. Ostrovsky was a great marine and would lead Lima Company the right way.

She felt a little anxious at the thought of being responsible for an actual warship. Warships were not like Marine Combat Platoons. There were engineers, cooks, maintenance people, etc who were in reality non-combatants. Her grunts on Lima company could take care of themselves to the man or woman. Every one of them was a trained killer able to meet out death. This was going to be different, which she had to admit to herself was a little exciting.

“Well I should go say my farewells to the boys.” She began to leave, but paused and turned towards Anderson. “Is that pilot in the brig?”

Anderson shook his head and smiled. “You’ll meet him tomorrow. He’s been made the lead pilot of the Normandy.”

“You always were a great judge of talent. I would have given him the job too.” She laughed as she turned to leave.

Chapter End Notes

Well I finally committed to the Illusive Man's and Cerberus' involvement in Shepard's life. Hope I know what I'm doing.
Eden Prime

Chapter Summary

Athena goes to Eden Prime. Doesn't like Nihlus at all, or the Turians in general. She's a little bit Xenophobic and can't stand the Council. She has a moment with Jeff at the end.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Eden Prime

She had met Nihlus during her intro to the crew of the Normandy. Athena was polite, but she was a little cold to the Turian. Now she was standing in the comm room alone with him. As she walked in the room he turned to look at her. He was an imposing looking alien in his own right. She wondered to herself how she would fight him if she had to. He wasn’t quite as tall as her, but then most people she knew were shorter than her. She could almost sense that he knew how she felt about him, but that didn’t stop him from trying to start a conversation.

“Ah Commander Shepard. I was hoping you’d get here first. It will give us a chance to talk.” She could sense his slight discomfort, but he made good on not showing it.

“Where is he going with this?” Her tone and expression are as cold as a Siberian winter.

Nihlus starts to pace around the room and Shepard keeps her eyes on him, studying his gate, how his limbs move and the obvious ways to cripple them. Besides the Batarian, the Turians were the other race that she knew was not that friendly with humanity. “I’m interested in this world we’re going to. I’ve heard Eden Prime is quite beautiful.”

“Aren’t you trying to scare me Spectre?” Athena’s fury was starting to surface. “This isn’t going to be Shanxi where you overwhelmed us by surprise. We can actually start right here if you’d like to dance?”

“That’s not…what I meant.” The Turian was taken aback and she sensed that he did not want to escalate things. “You’re people are newcomers Shepard. The galaxy can be a very dangerous place. Is the Alliance truly ready for this?”

Athena felt like there was a hint of smugness in his tone and the glare she gave him was one of a predator about to rend its prey limb from limb. “You…”

“I think it’s about time we told the commander what’s really going on.” Anderson interrupted what would have turned out to be a tirade about Turian aggression.
It caught her by surprise. Anderson was keeping something from her? He’d always been straight with her and it was that characteristic that made her respect him so. “What?”

“This mission is far more than a shakedown run.” Nihlus commented.

“Yeah no shit. I figured that out as soon as they let a Spectre on board.” Athena was looking at Anderson a little cross.

“We’re making a covert pick up on Eden Prime. That’s why we needed the stealth systems operational.” Anderson added matter of factly.

“Why not tell me earlier? You didn’t trust me? Why the hell would you make me the XO and keep me in the dark about this sir?” Athena was definitely cross with him.

Anderson was in no mood for back talk. “This came down from the top, Commander. Information strictly on a need-to-know basis. A research team on Eden Prime recently unearthed some kind of beacon during an excavation. It was Prothean.”

“Didn’t the Protheans vanish like 50,000 years ago?” Athena looked interested, but she was still puzzled about why a Turian was along on this ride.

Nihlus saw the confusion on her face. “Their legacy still remains. The mass relays, the Citadel, our ship drives --- it’s all based on Prothean technology.”

Anderson was now standing side by side with Nihlus and it was almost as if they were trying to sell her on an idea. “This is big, Shepard. The last time Humanity made a discovery like this, it jumped our technology forward two hundred years. But Eden Prime doesn’t have the facilities to handle something like this. We need to bring the beacon back to the Citadel for proper study.”

And of course the Turian had to chime in like they had as much a right to something on a human world as if the object were on one of their own. “Obviously, this goes beyond mere human interests, Commander. This discovery could affect every species in Council Space.”

There was something about him saying mere that pissed her off. “I don’t understand why we told them anything. (She turned to look at Anderson.) Why didn’t we just keep the beacon for ourselves?”

Now Nihlus sounds offended as he lets loose his opinion of the human race. “You humans don’t have the best reputation. Some species see you as selfish. Too unpredictable. Too independent. Even dangerous.”

She was about to go off about how the Turians are just as dangerous when Anderson started talking. “Sharing that beacon will improve relations with the Council. Plus, we need their scientific expertise. They know more about the Protheans than we do.”

“So you’re telling me that this is like an olive branch that we’re extending to the Council. I hope the Alliance knows what its doing.” Athena was dumbfounded. Giving the Council something so valuable just so humanity could be told what they could and could not do.

“The beacon is not the only reason I’m here, Shepard.” Nihlus continued.

“Nihlus wants to see you in action, Commander. He’s here to evaluate you.” Anderson added.

“Since when do we answer to the Spectres? If he wants an evaluation I can whoop his ass right here and send him back with his mandible in his hand.” Athena looked at Nihlus with a certain
amount of disdain.

Anderson looked pissed and reacted that way. “That’s enough Commander! You’re smart enough to know how things work, Shepard. The Alliance has been pushing for this for a long time. (He started to calm down as he explained the goals to Shepard.) Humanity wants a larger role in shaping interstellar policy. We want more say with the Citadel Council. The Spectres represent the Council’s power and authority. If they accept a human into their ranks it shows how far the Alliance has come.”

“I was impressed, no actually I was astonished when I read the reports of Akuze and Torfan. Either one would have been incredible on their own. To do both is unbelievable! In any case you got the job done in both cases and that’s why I put your name forward as a candidate for the Spectres.” Nihlus jumped in.

Athena was a little surprised and a little pissed that he knew these things about her. “Why would a Turian want a Human in the Spectres?’”

“Not all Turians resent Humanity. Some of us see the potential of your species. We see what you have to offer to the rest of the galaxy and to the Spectres. We are an elite group. It’s rare to find an individual with the skills we seek. I don’t care that you’re Human. I only care that you can do the job.” Finally Nihlus said something that made her rethink her opinion of him. He was a soldier who saw another talented soldier and wanted that soldier on his team.

“I’m flattered that you think so, but I don’t really like other people making decisions about my future.” She really was flattered. Almost as flattered as when she received her N7 patch.

“This isn’t about you Shepard! Humanity needs this. We’re counting on you.” Anderson sounded desperate. Damn is it really that important to the Alliance? She thought to herself.

“I need to see your skills for myself, Commander. Eden Prime will be the first of several missions together.” Nihlus was almost giddy about seeing her in action.

“You’ll be in charge of the ground team. Secure the beacon and get it on to the ship ASAP. Nihlus will accompany your group to observe the mission.”

“Okay, just give the word Captain.” Great, now I gotta babysit a Spectre too, Awesome.

“We should be getting close to Eden…” Anderson started to talk but…

“Captain! We got a problem!” Joker interrupted over the intercom.

“What’s wrong Joker?” Looked into the empty air with a frustrated expression. Joker really did get under his skin.

“Transmission from Eden Prime sir, you better see this!” Joker sounded like he was almost in a panic.

“Bring it up on screen.” Anderson ordered.

The scene they watched unfold on Eden Prime was disturbing. She watched the screen with a stern and emotionless expression. The sounds of Marines fighting for their lives while a superior force was taking their lives resonated throughout the scene unfolding on Eden Prime. “THEY CAME OUT OF NOWHERE! WE NEED EVAC…” The young man was cut off as something in the distance caught her eye. Something enormous, something she did not recognize.

“Reverse and hold at 38.5” Anderson countered.

There it was. A monstrous looking machine on the surface of Eden Prime. “Status Report!” Anderson sounded frustrated.

“Seventeen minutes out, Captain. No other Alliance ships in the area.” The sound of Joker being so professional made Athena chuckle a little.

“Take us in Joker, fast and quiet.” Anderson ordered as Athena looked around at Nihlus and huffed.

“This mission just got a lot more complicated.” Anderson looked at the screen and she could see how serious he was. He was the father she never had and she would move mountains for him.

Nihlus didn’t take his eyes off the screen when he began speaking. “A small strike team can move quickly without drawing attention. It’s our best chance to secure the beacon.”

“Grab your gear and meet us in the cargo hold.” Anderson motioned to both of them.

Anderson turned to her. “Tell Alenko and Jenkins to suit up, Commander. You’re going in.”

Joker came over the comm. as they got closer to their drop site. “Somebody was doing some serious digging here Captain.”

“Your team’s the muscle in this operation, Commander. Go in heavy and head straight for the dig site.” Athena was starting to feel uneasy about this mission. Her mind went back to Akuze and Torfan. It was the unknown that scared her, the unknown that killed so many of her men and women. Nihlus was a Spectre and he was trained to the highest degree like all N7’s were. She didn’t trust him for a second.

Nihlus decided he was going to scout ahead of her crew. “I thought you were here to just observe.” She sarcastically mentioned to him.

“Approaching drop point one.” Joker announced.

“Situations change Commander and this has just turned into something different, besides I work better on my own.” Those were the last words she heard him say.

A human world and a fucking Turian is leading the rescue? She felt a little guilty at thinking such racist thoughts, but like the Batarians, the Turians were never friendly with humankind and they were also responsible for killing family she never knew she had. “I don’t like putting my life in the hands of a Turian, sir!”

“Nihlus is on our side, he wants you in the Spectres and he wants that beacon.” Anderson reassured her.

“I hope you’re right sir. Ok, I’m ready to go just say the word!” She sounded so gung ho that she almost threw up on herself.

“The mission’s yours now Shepard, good luck!” Anderson sounded so confident in her.

“What about survivors Captain?” Kaiden asked with true concern in his voice.
“Helping survivors is a secondary objective. The beacon’s your top priority.” Anderson answered.

“Alenko, Jenkins, you two ready?” She wasn’t very familiar with either one of them and she sounded cold and calculating as she asked.

“Yes ma’am!” They answered in unison as they examined their weapons and armor for the final moment before they jumped off the ship and onto Eden Prime.

“Athena you’ve got to be on your best behavior.” She heard over her helmet comm as she landed in a disturbing looking landscape.

“Aren’t I always?” She playfully retorted.

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Kaiden never thought he would be part of a fire team that consisted of the famous Athena Shepard. She was a Commander in every sense of the word. She led from the front and expected to be obeyed to the letter. Not that he had any problem doing whatever she wanted, he had nowhere near the experience she had and her biotic power was damn frightening.

“Alenko! Take cover there. Jenkins I want you to scout ahead, stay in cover and wait for us by the outcrop of trees over there.” Shepard barked with a certainty that left no room for doubt.

Kaiden quickly moved to the large boulder that Shepard had pointed to and realized why she was so well thought of. He could cover Jenkins movements all the way to the trees from where he was.

Jenkins quickly began to move toward the trees when a flash of movement caught his eye.

“Jenkins take cover!”

It was obvious that Jenkins did not see the danger ahead or he would have heeded his warning.

“Jenkins! Goddamn it!” Athena yelled with a fury that absolutely terrified him as he watched her leap out of cover and run at an ungodly and biotically enhanced speed towards Jenkins.

It was too late as a swarm of Unknown Drones opened fire on Jenkins, completely catching the corporal by surprise. The shots penetrated his shields like a hot knife through butter, dropping him instantly. The drones then turned their attention to Shepard. Kaiden began to panic as he too leaped out of cover and sent out a powerful biotic push at the drones. Kaiden destroyed one of the drones before watching the Commander draw what looked like two Katanas enveloped by a dazzling biotic aura. In what could only be called a whirling blur of destruction, she cut down three of the drones before unleashing a biotic push strike on the last drone to devastating effect. She quickly moved to the trees and surveyed the immediate area before she silently motioned for Kaiden over.

“It ripped….” She put her pointer finger over her lips to shush him.

She pointed to her eyes with her index and middle fingers then pointed to what appeared to be an observation post of some sort. It appeared to be heavily guarded by what looked like automaton troopers and assault drones. The machine like beings also seemed to have been holding a colonist prisoner and were attending to him.
“Kaiden, we’ll give Jenkins a proper service when the mission is over. I need you to stay focused okay?”

Kaiden was disturbed by how quickly and unexpectedly death could occur to anyone. Jenkins was so young and eager to please and it was his undoing. “I’ve got your back Commander.”

“I’ve got some burned out buildings here, Shepard. A lot of bodies.” Nihlus came over the air. Bodies? Not again…whoever is doing this is going to pay! She thought.

“I’m going to check it out. I’ll try to catch up with you at the dig site.” Nihlus continued.

Shepard nodded in acknowledgement and turned back to Kaiden.

“Listen, I want you to…” She began to say but was interrupted by bursts of fire from the automatons.

Kaiden watched as a battle armored marine was performing a fighting withdrawal towards them.

“Well that takes care of the distraction.” Shepard shrugged and was off like a bullet out of a gun. “Cover me!” She yelled as she almost seemed to disappear, she could barely make out her outline as she moved to a flanking position. He began to fire in concert with the marine that looked like she was about to buy it. Kaiden let out a powerful stasis field that held the two Assault Drones in place. The Marine got back to Kaiden and they watched in horror as a colonist the machines were attending to got skewered on some sort of impalement device. As their attention was drawn to the poor colonist they both saw a flash of movement in their peripheral vision as Shepard appeared behind the two automaton troopers and systematically buried her biotically enhanced blades to the hilt, destroying them instantly. Once the Stasis field came down the two Assault drones self destructed.

With the immediate threat gone, Kaiden watched as the woman Marine bent over with her hands on her knees and apparently attempted to catch her breath.

She turned to look at Kaiden, smiled and took a look at Athena. “Thank you Commander, I didn’t think I was going to make it.” She raggedly breathed out.

She then stood at attention and saluted. “Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams of the 212. You the one in charge here ma’am?”

“Easy with the saluting Williams. I don’t need their snipers knowing who to shoot out here.”

“Sorry ma’am.”

“Are you wounded Williams?” Shepard asked her quickly.

“A few scrapes and burns. Nothing serious. The others weren’t so lucky.” Williams answered almost out of breath. “Oh man. We were patrolling the perimeter when the attack hit. We tried to get off a distress call, but they cut off our communications. I’ve been fighting for my life ever since.” She sounded as disturbed as she looked.

“Where’s the rest of your squad?” Shepard asked.

“We tried to double back to the beacon, but we walked into an ambush. I don’t think any of the others… I think I’m the only one left.” Williams was visibly trembling as the words left her mouth.
Shepard’s face expressed an understanding at William’s words. She put her hand on Williams’ shoulder. “It isn’t your fault, Williams. You couldn’t have done anything to save them.” Now it was Shepard who was trembling. The fury was starting to build and she was trying her damnedest not to show it.

“Yes ma’am. We held our position as long as we could, until the Geth overwhelmed us.” Williams stated, she seemed to be taking the loss of her squad mates very well considering their current situation.

“The Geth haven’t been seen outside the Veil in nearly two hundred years. Why are they here now?” It was a disturbing question that would have to wait for an answer. Kaiden almost couldn’t contain his concern.

Or maybe not. “They must have come for the beacon.” Williams stated urgently. “The dig site is close. Just over that rise. It might still be there.”

“Ok let’s go.” Shepard quietly ordered them.

They continued towards the beacon with Athena scouting ahead…using some kind of biotic stealth field. Kaiden was extremely puzzled and relieved. He was never trained to do anything of the sort, who trained her…how…I never saw her at Jump Zero. “She’s amazing.” Williams interrupted his train of thought.

“Yes she is. I might have to ask her to teach me some of those biotic tricks.” Kaiden was so reverent it made Ashley chuckle.

“She could probably teach you better tricks than that Lt.” Ashley playfully told him.

“Kaiden, Ashley get up here.” Sheppard came over the air.

They reached her quickly enough. The bodies of scientists and researchers were all over the area where the beacon was supposed to be. Two Geth troopers seemed to be guarding the area. Kaiden noticed a couple of drones as well. Athena looked at her teammates. “Same as before. You guys takeout the drones, I’ll take care of the grunts.”

“Got it ma’am.” Ashley looked like she was ready to destroy anything in their way. Vengeance has that effect on some people.

Kaiden nodded with a serious puss on his face. He was also probably thinking about Jenkins and all of the death that they encountered on the way here.

Athena phased out with her biotic stealth field and took off down the right flank. “Start firing now!”

The two drones were destroyed in a matter of seconds as the Geth Troopers began to fire in their direction not seeing the stealthy assassin coming up their left side. She pulled her two Jormangund Pinnacle pistols and from point blank range basically executed the two troopers with a shot that caused their flashlight looking heads to explode.

The beacon was gone.

“Where the hell is it?” Williams sounded supremely upset and not to mention the bodies of the dead scientists laying there made the situation that much worse. “Did the Geth take it or did we move it?”
“No matter, we keep pushing until we get where we need to be. We’ve got to move faster.”
Athena sounded so cold, this was not the playful and giggly commander on the Normandy. Williams was in awe and Kaiden was a little frightened at Athena’s demeanor.

“The research camps are just on the top of this ridge, up the ramps. If they were moved by us then they would have taken them in that direction.” Williams pointed.

Shepard led the way as the lead scout and just slaughtered Geth after Geth as she reached the top of the ridge. The unknown factor the Geth may have once possessed seem to be gone and now that she knew what they were capable of, she didn’t hesitate to attack on sight. Once at the top of the ridge, Nihlus checked in.

“Change of plans Shepard, there’s a small space port ahead. I want to check it out. I’ll meet you there.” The Turian’s voice annoyed her, but she had to admit to herself that it was nice to have someone with Nihlus’ ability on her side.

Athena scanned the area and her shoulders just slumped at the sight of such devastation. Damn it.

“Looks like they hit the camp hard.” Williams added.

“Good place for an ambush. Keep your guard up.” Kaiden mentioned to her as he took cover behind some supply crates.

Athena continued to examine the area and to her horror noticed dozens of those impalement devices with their victims. Their semblance to humanity was gone, replaced by a bluish monstrosity that could only be described as humanoid. She watched as the devices retracted in unison and those things came to life.

“Oh, God! They’re still alive!” Kaiden’s voice was wavering.

“What did the Geth do to them?” Ashley sounded much more composed.

Athena didn’t hesitate and sprang into action. “ENGAGE! TAKE EM OUT!”

Ashley immediately opened fire and started pumping rounds into the abominations. Kaiden hesitated, but quickly regained his composure and unleashed a biotic push on a trio getting a little too close to Ashley.

As Ashley and Kaiden finished off the four or five attacking them, they turned to see that Athena was in the middle of what could only be called a small horde of the creatures. Her biotic swords were absolutely butchering the creatures. Two or three at a time would fall with every strike with body parts being launched in all directions. Again, Ashley was in awe as she charged in to help Athena with her own Omni blade. Kaiden froze at the sight…Ashley and Athena were like two reapers of death as they cut a swath in the swarm. It took him only a fraction of a second before he started to unleash with his own biotic push and cleared a small area to the rear of Athena. He then opened fire with his heavy pistol and in the end they made very short work of these creatures.

Athena stood in the middle of an enormous pile of bodies, while Ashley also had a pile where she was standing, but hers was quite a bit smaller. “Nice job chief.”

“You too Kaiden.” She knew that Kaiden had hesitated a couple of times, but in the end he performed marvelously so she let it slide…for now.

They ended up searching a couple of the housing units and found a couple of scientists who very thankful to be alive. They told Athena about the beacon being moved to the spaceport and how
they hid from the attack. What caught her ear though was when she asked about Nihlus. One of the scientists mentioned a Turian leading the attack against the colony. It couldn’t have been Nihlus as he was on the Normandy, but could it be some sort of Turian attack to avenge their loss on Shanxi?

If Nihlus was involved she would skewer him and his accomplice. “Ashley take us to the spaceport.”

As Ashley led the way to the spaceport they encountered numerous husks and Geth which they took out easily enough. Kaiden no longer hesitated and as a team they became an incredibly efficient killing machine. Then she saw the monstrous ship. It looked like a giant squid standing near the spaceport. It took off and she couldn’t help but wonder how such an enormous ship could perform atmospheric operations. The crater it left behind was at least a thousand feet in diameter. They continued through the habitation sheds where they spoke to another group of colonists hiding in their sheds. She learned about a smuggling ring and that the ship had some sort of jamming system that was loud enough to hurt organics. All in all nothing of note and they continued to the spaceport where they found Nihlus’ body.

“Shot in the back of the head? Executed?” Kaiden knelt down next to the body to examine it. They were surprised by a colonist hiding amidst the cargo containers. He explained how another Turian named Saren had shot Nihlus. He also mentioned that Nihlus seemed to know this Saren.

*What the fuck is going on?* “Let’s head to the platform and get that beacon.” Athena ordered. Ashley looked like she wanted to shoot that smuggler. “Not worth it Chief, let’s go.”

When she watched Kaiden work to disarm those bombs under fire, she forgot all about his little hiccups in the beginning of the mission. He was absolutely cold as ice and so proficient that he disarmed all of the bombs with minutes to spare. “Kaiden that was amazing!”

Kaiden smiled. “Thank you Commander.” Once everything was quiet Kaiden began to reflect on what he saw here. The death and destruction was awful and the way Shepard and Williams just relished their roles as killers bothered him a little, but man were they impressive in combat.

“Normandy, the beacon is secure. We’ll be standing bye.” Athena spoke into her mike.

“The beacon wasn’t doing anything like that before.” She could hear Ashley speaking. She turned to tell them to make sure the area was secure when she saw that Kaiden was moving closer to the beacon and it suddenly activated, she moved quickly to drag Kaiden away as the beacon was pulling him towards it. Try as she might she could not move away and suddenly felt pulled into the air. Her mind went blank and all of a sudden she saw these unknown aliens being massacred by machines. The street she was standing in disintegrated with everyone on it and she watched as everyone that survived was mowed down with no chance of survival. She heard the screams of what seemed an infinite amount of beings, screams of terror, fury and then just silence.

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Kaiden sat in the med bay feeling as guilty as ever. He watched as the Commander breathed slowly and easily. The doctor said she would be okay and just needed some rest. Dr. Chakwas continued her examination of him to see if there were any lingering effects from that Prothean thing that knocked out the Commander.
“I’m fine doc.” He sat and sounded annoyed as the doctor looked him over. He looked over to Shepard and watched as she started to move and he heard her groan as she started to sit up.

“I think she’s waking up.”

Doctor Chakwas informed her that she was out for over fifteen hours and about her unusual brain activity. Other than that she was physically fine and ready for duty. She felt like she had a whole bottle of McConnell’s moonshine. The vision seared into her mind of a massive genocide was still in her head.

“I saw—I’m not sure what I saw. Death, destruction. Nothing’s really clear.” She mentioned to the doctor.

“How’s our XO holding up doc?” Anderson stepped into the med bay. He was deceptively quiet when he wanted to be.

“All her readings are normal. I’d say she’s none the worse for wear. She’s as healthy as bull.” The Doc replied.

“Glad to hear it. Shepard I need to speak to you in private.” He sounded relieved.

As soon as everyone left Anderson asked her how she felt. She responded that she was fine, but they continued as if it were a debriefing and she made her concerns known about everything that happened down on Eden Prime. She made a case to keep Chief Williams on as she had more than proven herself. She felt bad about Nihlus and Jenkins, but she knew it was just part of being a marine and it was always the part she never got used to.

“I won’t lie to you, Athena. Things look bad. Nihlus is dead. The beacon was destroyed and geth are invading. The council’s going to want answers.” Anderson said with a solemn tone.

“The council can kiss my ass! We did everything we could and lost almost half a colony to those things and a fucking Turian was actually leading them! Fuck them, we did nothing wrong!” Athena’s colorful language actually made Anderson smirk a little.

“You know I’ll back you to the end. You’re a damned hero in my book, but that’s not why I’m actually here. That other Turian, Saren. He’s a spectre, one of the best. A living legend. But if he’s working with the Geth it means he’s gone rogue. A rogue spectre’s trouble. Saren’s dangerous and he hates humans.” Anderson turned to look at her and there was genuine concern on his face.

“Fuck him! He better hope I never catch up to him.” Athena angrily retorted.

“Well he’s allied himself with the Geth. I don’t know. I don’t why. I only know that it has something to do with that beacon. (He started to pace the room and stopped in front of her.) You were there just before the beacon self-destructed. Did you see anything? Any clue that might tell us what Saren was after?”

“Before I blacked out I had some sort of vision.” She folded her arms in front of her and leaned back on the bunk.

“A vision? A vision of what?”

“I saw synthetics, machines…Geth maybe. They were slaughtering people. Butchering them.” Her eyes were glazed over as her mind relived the vision.
“We need to report this to the council, Athena.” Anderson voice startled her from her momentary trance.

“They’re going to think I’m nuts! They’ve never been our friends and I’m sure I’m not one of their favorite people right now.” She was actually holding herself tightly.

“Listen Athena, we don’t know what kind of information was on that beacon. It could have been lost Prothean technology, ancient weapons of mass destruction blueprints? Whatever it was, Saren took it. I know Saren. I know his reputation and his politics. He believes humans are a blight on the galaxy. This attack was an act of war! He has the secrets from the beacon. He has an army of Geth under his command. And he won’t stop until he’s wiped humanity from the face of the galaxy!” He was dead serious.

“I’ll find a way to take that bastard down.” Athena responded with a determined tone.

“It’s not that easy. He’s a spectre. He can go anywhere do almost anything. That’s why we need the council on our side.”

“God I hate this. I guess if we can prove that scum has gone rogue, then they should revoke his spectre status.” Great, now we have kowtow to these fucking aliens who could give two shits about the concerns of humanity.

“I’ll contact our ambassador and see if we can get an audience with the council. He’ll want to see us as soon as we reach the Citadel.”

It was only a few hours and she awoke in a cold sweat. It was like Akuze, Torfan and the Beacon had invaded her mind with images of death and destruction. She got up and left her room. She made her way to the galley and made herself a large cup of strong coffee. She sat by herself and let her mind go through all of the images of her violent past. The tears started to flow out of her thousand yard stare as she thought of the men and women she lost, of all those batarian and human slavers she executed on Torfan. The Butcher of Torfan, maybe I am nothing more than a weapon.

“Commander are you okay?” The voice startled her as she awoke from her trance to look into the eyes of the Normandy’s lead pilot.

She attempted to wipe the tears from her eyes, but it was no use as they just continued to pour from what seemed an endless reservoir. “I’m afraid I wouldn’t make very good company right now.”

“That’s okay Commander, I’m considered pretty annoying company by most of the crew anyway.” It made her giggle through her tears.

Her empty stare was back as she went back to her past. “I’ve killed a lot of people Jeff. Did you know they call me the ‘Butcher of Torfan?’ That I got my men massacred by a Thresher Maw on Akuze? Hell I couldn’t even save Jenkins from a bunch of shitty recon drones.”

“STOP TALKING LIKE THAT!” Joker yelled angrily at her. “You’re a real hero not that made up shit you read in the comic books or see in the movies. You have all the scars and flaws of a real person and despite that you do incredible things. If you think I’m going to shed a tear for those slavers you’re wrong. I’ll shed a tear for you, whom they made do terrible things so that others
don’t have to do them. I’ll cry for you Shepard because I can see how much it hurts you.”

“Major Kyle called me a murderer, the brass on Earth wanted to fry me for losing my men on Akuze and now I have to answer to a fucking alien council for losing a valuable piece of tech and two very good men. If it wasn’t for the Captain and Admiral Hackett, I wouldn’t even be here.” She continued and her eyes were completely bloodshot from the tears still flowing.

“They’re not the reason you’re here. You’re the most amazing person I’ve ever met and I know you would’ve ended up here no matter what.” He sat down next to her and as she shifted in her chair her thigh rubbed his in a way that released a nasty static charge due to her biotics. “OW!”

She smirked as the tears stopped. “I’m sorry Jeff. I have that effect on everyone around me.” She shrugged as she turned to face him and that crooked smile was back on her face. “Well there’s no way I’m going back to sleep, you want to test yourself against me in the F61?”

“You mean a dog fight?” Now he was smiling as well and she nodded with a seriously evil grin.

“Thank you Fangio. (She grabbed a hold of his hand and gently squeezed it.) You’ve now become my resident shrink, I think you’re going to get sick of me.” She kissed his cheek and continued up toward the main deck and the helm. He stood there dumbfounded and in shock by the peck. “Oh come on Jeff, we Argentines are very affectionate toward our friends. I’ll have you know that I pecked Admiral Hackett as well.”

“I might have to hang out in Argentina next time we go back to Earth.” His cheeks were a little crimson, but the gruff hid it well as he still just stood there.

“Well, you coming? I’m gonna teach you what a real fighter pilot can do and how lucky we both were that I wasn’t one of the pilots out there trying to shoot you down.”

They spent the rest of time running simulations at the helm while Kaiden decided to modify the navigation algorithms to perform more efficiently. When it was almost time for Joker to resume his helmsman duties they decided to head back to their berthing areas to clean up before they both were back on duty and arriving at the Citadel. They walked together when they reached the berthing deck and she stopped before heading to her room. “Jeff, (he turned and looked at her.) Thank you…really…you didn’t have to…”

“Oh stop it, you’re my favorite person in the galaxy and the only one who seems to be able to put up with my shit. Of course I had to.” He was waving her off nonchalantly which made her laugh again.

“You and me, drinks on the Citadel after I meet with the council. Okay?”

Did she just ask me out? Did the most incredibly beautiful, dangerous and exotic woman in the universe just ask me out? Oh my God! She asked me out!

“Jeff will you say something? Are you okay?” Did I just overstep my bounds? Better now than later.

Will you say something you idiot. “I…I…of course Commander…ye…yes. I would love to share a couple of cocktails with the great and beautiful Commander Athena Shepard.”

The smile she gave him made his heart patter uncontrollably and his breathing ragged. Man this is one hell of a risk she’s taking…fuck I’m taking too. He thought as her scent lingered in his mind and brought a big grin to his face.
I'll explain the Katanas later, let's just say a certain Cerberus Assassin was in the academy with her. As always hope you guys are enjoying it and will try to use less in game dialogue in the up coming chapters.
Chapter Summary

Athena gets her Spectre status, command of the Normandy, all of her crew minus Liara and finally gets to wind down a little with Jeff and the crew.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Club Flux

Jeff was never one to go out…ever. When he accepted the invite from Shepard to go out for drinks he didn’t expect to be alone for so long. He knew that she hadn’t stood him up because he was watching her on the video feed accepting her new Spectre status from the council. He chuckled to himself as he took a sip of his unusually tasty Batarian brandy. Who’d thought that those four eyed barbarians could create such a delicious beverage?

“Wow, they’ll let just about anyone into the Spectres now.” A Turian said it loud enough for him to hear and he guessed that he expected Jeff to get up and defend her honor. He really didn’t even think about standing, but defending her was a definite action he would engage in.

“Well, they’ve been letting slugs in for so long, it’s about time they let in a real warrior.” He countered and could hear the clicking of his mandibles which indicated some anger on the Turian’s part.

“Maybe you could show me how humans are real warriors.” The clicking and sub-harmonics were so noticeably aggressive that it made Jeff chuckle. Jeff shifted in his seat and looked the Turian in the eye.

“See that’s the great thing about us humans, we all have different skills. I’m the best pilot in the galaxy so if you want to challenge me in a flying duel I’m all for it. If you want to fight here in the bar well you’ll have to take that up with her.” Jeff pointed over the Turian’s shoulder to a smiling Athena as she walked past the Turian and sat down across from him. To Jeff’s chagrin, Kaiden and Ashley sat at the table with them.

Athena turned to look at the Turian now just standing there looking just a little bit uncomfortable and staring at the four humans. “Jeff who’s your friend?”

“Oh this is just some guy who wanted to tell me how humans shouldn’t be allowed in the Spectres.” Jeff was smiling as he said it and Athena stood up and faced the Turian.

“Oh really?” She towered over this particular Turian. This was no Nihlus or her new acquaintance Garrus who was actually a little taller than her.

The Turian was visibly shaken and started backing away from her. He put his hands up as he backed away. “Uh maybe my drink is writing credit chits my rear end can’t cash…I’ll just go over there and drink my drink.”

“Here, (She pulls the Turian’s hand forcefully enough to demonstrate the ass whooping he just
avoided and puts a credit chit in his hand.) Have one on me.” Athena flashed her pearly whites at the
now surprised guest who took the chit graciously and headed back to the bar. She turned to sit
back down and noticed that both Kaiden and Ashley were on their feet as well. Jeff was in his
chair, leaning back with both hands behind his head and a big smile on his face. The three looked
at Jeff and Athena broke the silence. “I can’t take you anywhere.”

“What’d you mean?” Jeff jokingly asked while pointing to himself. “And what’s with the
diplomacy there? A couple of days ago you would’ve knocked that guy into next week.” He
almost fell off his chair when he saw a huge Krogan and a very large Turian standing behind
Athena’s chair. He reflexively pointed to them and Athena turned around.

“Oh right. Garrus, Wrex, this is Lieutenant Jeff Moreau, helmsman of the Normandy. Where’s
Tali?” Athena stood as she introduced them to Jeff as he is the only one who didn’t know them.
Both Ashley and Kaiden had already met them, with Ashley being a little more hostile than
Athena.

“They’re going to be joining us in the hunt for Saren. Well Tali too, but who knows where she is.”
Athena stood next to Garrus who was slightly taller than her; Wrex on the other hand was a
monster of a being. He looked like a walking tank from a prehistoric era.

“Tali went to retrieve some of her belongings and will meet us at the ship.” Kaiden responded as
he took a sip of the brandy Jeff had bought for the table and turned to Jeff with a pleasantly
surprised expression. “This is really Batarian?”

Jeff smugly nodded his head in confirmation.

“You recruited three aliens just like that? What’s going on Commander?” Jeff was an equal
opportunity offender and he asked it in a more playful manner than it merited.

“Well Garrus here is former C-Sec and has been on Saren’s ass before they took him off the case.
I asked him if he still wanted to go after him and…” Athena explained but Garrus interrupted her.

“You bet your human ass I want to come along. That arrogant bastard needs to pay for his crimes
and now I don’t have to answer to some bureaucrat before I put a round through his skull.” Garrus
anger was palpable as his mandibles clicked and his sub harmonics demonstrated.

“And Wrex… (Wrex turned to look at Athena.)…is fantastic in a fight.” Wrex nodded.

“I get the feeling that you people are going to be in a lot fights and I want to be there.” Wrex’s
deep and imposing voice matched his appearance. “Can’t let you Humans and Turians have all the
fun.” The deep chuckle that followed his statement actually made Jeff smile.

“Oh and if you didn’t know…The Normandy is mine now.” Athena didn’t look too happy about
that last statement.

“Yours now? As in you’re the CO?” She nodded and Jeff let out a long whistle while he leaned
back in his chair. “Holy shit, Commander! What happened to the Captain?”

“He and Udina agreed that I should have my own ship now that I’m a Spectre. They said that the
Normandy would be perfect for me, but enough of that. We have a few hours before we need to
begin preparations for departure, so let’s enjoy it. Come on Kaiden, it’s time to dance!” She
grabbed a hold of Kaiden’s hand and before he could begin to protest he was being dragged to the
dance floor.

The bass in the place was pumping with an electronic beat that was repetitive and just not to Jeff’s
liking. Jeff would be lying if he said that he didn’t feel that little green monster start creeping up his back as he watched Commander Shepard move to the beat with Kaiden. Contrary to popular belief, Shepard was a great dancer and Maker help him he couldn’t take his eyes off her as she moved her hips, turned and flipped her hair making Kaiden look like a love struck puppy. Those black leather pants hugging her every curve didn’t help either. He wanted to reach out and feel that spark hit him again like in the mess hall on the Normandy where she had opened up to him. The burdens put on her by everyone must be so suffocating and yet there she was dancing, smiling and teasing Kaiden on the dance floor like a girl with not a care in the world. *God, she’s so amazing…* He watched her move and occasionally she glanced over to him with the smile that would stop his heart. He also noticed that everyone in the club was looking at her. She was more beautiful than any of those other girls on the floor, including the substantial number of Asari that were present.

“You might want to pick up your jaw from the table Lieutenant.” Ashley was staring right at him with a grin so wide it made him uncomfortable and for the first time in his life he couldn’t think of a snarky counter. “I do see the reason though.” Ashley turned toward the dance floor, got up and went to join them. Now the two women had Kaiden sandwiched between them and he was turning all sorts of colors to the amusement of both women. Ashley was a looker in her own right and she moved just as well as Shepard, but with maybe a little more seductive intent towards Kaiden.

These were the moments that Jeff felt the reasons why he didn’t like to go out. He was the cripple who couldn’t dance and man was he jealous of guys like Kaiden. Kaiden seemed like such a nice guy, with a godlike body and just an all-around good person. His shy yet strong personality made him a dream catch for most women.

“Stop moping and join them.” Wrex mentioned as he moved to sit on the ledge next to the window.

“Yeah that’s not going to happen…unless you’re willing to carry me back to the med bay with a couple of broken bones.” Jeff turned to look at the mountain that was Wrex who looked at him right back and if a Krogan could look confused, Wrex was confused. “I have this disease that makes my bones brittle, especially my legs. It doesn’t affect my piloting, but if I was to go out there and dance, you would be peeling me off the floor with a spatula.”

Wrex started to laugh. “Ha! I like you human.” Wrex put his hand up like he was going to give Jeff a pat on the back.

“Whoa! Wrex gently…you’ll turn me into a puddle of goo!” Jeff put his hands up in a defensive posture.

“Oh, yeah sorry. Sometimes I forget how squishy your kind is.” Wrex was surprisingly gentle, but man his hands, claws were incredibly hard and he would hate to see what they could do in anger.

“Everything is squishy to you Krogans.” Garrus chuckled at Wrex and Jeff’s interaction.

Jeff again turned to look out on the dance floor and watched with an amused expression as Kaiden looked like an innocent school boy trapped between two gorgeous ladies of the night. Athena turned and met Jeff’s gaze and time froze for him. She smiled sweetly at him; she then whispered in Ashley’s ear and walked off the floor towards the table. He couldn’t stop looking at her as he could see the skin on her face and neck was glistening with sweat. Her eyes never left his and as she got closer he could see her lick her lips clean of that salty sweat that glistened all over them. It was as if the world had gone into slow motion as he watched those leg muscles ripple underneath those super sexy leather pants as she walked towards him. She finally made it to the table and pulled her chair closer to his and sat down close enough to him to release another powerful biotic spark.
“OW! Fuck Commander that hurts!” Jeff was jerked back into reality and watched as Athena giggled like a five year old.

She turned to him and her eyes just made him freeze. “If I didn’t know any better I’d say there’s one hell of a crackling connection between us two.”

Jeff smiled as he rubbed his thigh where the spark went off. “More like a fucking lightning bolt!”

She started to laugh as she put her hand on his thigh and squeezed gently. “Jeff you know something?”

Jeff was puzzled about the question and shrugged his shoulders. “What is it?”

“You stealing the Normandy was the absolute hottest thing I’ve ever seen.” The sweat was still dripping from her and she had the look of a predatory cat playing with a mouse she just caught.

He shifted in his seat as she leaned toward him.

"When did you decide you were going to take her for a joy ride?” Was that awe in her voice? Well she used to be a thief and I guess stealing an Alliance Frigate was pretty cool.

“As soon as I saw her. The brass basically told me that there was no way a cripple would fly the Alliance’s newest frigate. So as I was flying a shuttle and saw her, I thought to myself that there would be only one way I would ever get to fly her. So I pretended to take a tour of her and locked the pilot in the airlock as I took control of the ship.” He had her full attention which made him feel great. “The rest…well you were there for the rest.”

“I sooo wanted to meet you after that. I told my boys I was going to pay you a visit in the brig and see if I could commandeer you as a pilot for one of our assault shuttles. Anderson had other plans for both of us obviously.” She leaned in toward him. “I’m glad that you’re with us Jeff. There’s no one I would rather have flying me around…well maybe other than me.” There was a look in her eyes that spoke of a yearning. She knew that according to Alliance regs she could not fraternize with any of the crew, but now that she was a Spectre, maybe she could bend the rules a little.

“There is no one in the universe that I would want to fly around with.” His voice was confident yet there was an uncertain tone to it as he also seemed to struggle with the fact that Athena was his commanding officer and the regs definitely forbade him pursuing her. This didn’t stop him from putting his hand on top of hers and look her straight in the eyes. “I mean that.”

Her eyes sparkled at the revelation and the great, powerful Athena Shepard blushed a deep shade of red as she tried in vain to stare away from him. “Come on…w…we should start heading back. We have a lot of prepping to do and I have to introduce everyone to our new crew members.”

As they slowly made their way back to the Normandy Athena hesitantly asked Jeff to do something for her. “Jeff can I ask you to do me a favor?”

“Anything.” Was his short and direct response as he wheeled himself in his chair back towards the Normandy.

“I have a couple of unedited videos that I need you to watch…I…I…have to know what you think.” She sounded so unsure of herself it was disturbing, like she was about lose something she considered precious to her.

“Akuze and Torfan?” He asked.
She nodded with an expression of sadness.

“I already told you how I felt. What could those videos possibly show…” Jeff spun his chair to face her when she interrupted him.

“Just watch them. You decide if I’m an idiot afterward.” Her tone was forceful and almost Commander like. “Oh and they’re both classified Top Secret, so don’t share them with anyone.”

They were transiting to Therum and during his shift at the helm, he decided to watch the videos Athena had lent him. Jeff was not much for watching documentary videos so it was a strange thing to find himself enraptured by the videos of Shepard’s two signature missions. He had only seen clips here and there of the Akuze and Torfan missions and they were highly edited. They always showed her in a heroic light. He sat at the helm and he first watched the unedited video of Akuze. They were extremely classified, but Athena had insisted he watch them without her.

Akuze was pretty much everything he expected and as disturbing as all of the imagery was, all he wanted to do was get up from his chair, limp down to her quarters and put his arms around her. There were tears in his eyes as he watched her valiantly try to save her men from that monster and when she finally killed it, he could see how broken she was afterwards. How in the world did she recover from that? My God, how strong is she?

Torfan was another story. He watched as she lost man after man in the assault to eliminate those pirates. It wasn’t until she was in the tunnels that he found what weighed so heavily upon her. The piles of bodies, the Batarian child she rescued, the massacre in the launch bay were too much for even him to watch as he paused the video and looked away. The tears were streaming down his face.

He un-paused the video and continued. He watched as she coldly and ruthlessly executed every one of the pirates in that bay. He watched as she used her biotics to toss them hundreds of feet into the air and letting them drop with a disturbingly bone crunching impact in the most disconcerting positions. The fury in her eyes, the vengeance for those innocents in her heart fueled her deadly rampage. She showed them no mercy and her face was perfectly calm as she did it. Her men were no better as they joined her in the carnage. He watched how at the end she just collapsed on her knees in the middle of what looked like thousands of bodies. Her men picked her up and carried her out…she lashed out against those pirates with everything she had. How could she not be broken?

He put the ship on auto-pilot and limped from the helm down to her quarters. He gently knocked on the door. “Commander? Can I come in?”

The door opened and she was sitting on the side of her bed rubbing her eyes she looked toward Jeff and could see the tears in his eyes. Her face started to contort into one of anguish as the tears silently started to flow from her eyes as well. Jeff closed the door and rushed to her side actually forgetting about the threat to his health of moving so quickly. He embraced her with all of his might. “Remember when I told you there was nothing on those videos that would change how I think about you?”

She nodded as she buried her face into the base of his neck. He could feel the warm tears on his skin as she sobbed.

“Well I lied. I…I know of no other person that could’ve handled what happened at those places and not break. It just shows me that you’re the strongest and most amazing person I know, more
than I originally thought. Oh and yes, I've decided that you're an idiot.” The laugh that came out of Athena’s mouth was so filled with contradictory emotions of extreme anguish and joy. She turned her head to face him as he let go of her and she reacted by pulling him back to her ferociously. “Careful BABs you’re going to break me. I’m a very delicate flower you know.”

“Oh Jeff I…I’m sorry…” She loosened her grip and backed up only to see that smug smirk on his face. She actually let loose a biotic spark on him.

“OW! You did that on purpose!” Now she was smiling her beautifully crooked smile.

“Jeff, I’ve never shown those videos to anyone other than Anderson and my best friend Marianna. I just wanted you to know that I appreciate you listening to me and being the able to put up with my issues…th…thank you Jeff.” She started to stand when she felt Jeff’s hand gently grab her shoulder pulling her back to sit down again.

She sat down next to him and turned to face him. His lips were on hers suddenly, ravenously with a desperate desire so intense that it stole her breath. She quickly adjusted and found herself returning his kiss with an equally ferocious and lustful one of her own. She parted her lips so that her tongue could explore his mouth more fully and he obliged gladly as she forced him to lay back. She gently mounted him with while never breaking their lip lock. When she finally broke contact, he let out a whimper of protest at the separation.

Her weight was considerable but not uncomfortable. He looked up at her and struggled to sit up because he desperately wanted his lips on hers again. She smiled as she forced him back down putting her finger on his lips. “Easy killer.” She said as she slowly lowered herself to within an inch of his face and try as he might he couldn’t close the distance.

“Who’s at the helm?” She hotly whispered into his ear causing goose bumps to appear all over his skin.

“Fuck! I knew I should’ve waited for Kaiden to relieve me.”

“You should’ve. That’s bad planning on your part.” She whispered into his other ear. He still couldn’t move and it was pure torture as she lightly brushed her lips against his.

She was using her biotics to pin him? “Please…Athena.” He begged her with the desperation of a person whose only essential need was being denied him.

Her lips crashed into his with a feral intensity. He eagerly accepted this gift as he desperately kissed her back. “You have to go back to the helm...(she talked through the kiss)...that’s an order Lieutenant.”

She rolled off of him and let him loose. “I…Is this okay?” She asked him.

He smiled as he slowly stood, now just noticing that maybe that sprint he performed when he came in did pop something in his legs. “I don’t care…I’ve never wanted something more in my life than this.” He pointed to her laying on her side with her long and beautiful legs dangling from the side of the bed. “Is this okay with you?”

She smiled so shyly and looked away from him. “I…I really like you Jeff. I’ve never felt so close to someone not named David or Marianna. I’m more than okay with this, but we’re going to have to keep this quiet.”

He nodded as he slowly limped toward the door. “Hold on, let me get dressed and join you.” She stood to her very imposing height and he couldn’t believe what had just happened.
“I don’t think I’ll ever get used to how tall you are.” He mentioned. “No heels when we got out okay?”

Athena turned to him as she was putting on her uniform jacket. “No promises, you have no idea how much I love shoes.”

When she was finally done she opened her door and they began to walk toward the stairs leading to the main deck. He finally grimaced at the pain in his knees. The look of concern on her face made him feel guilty. “You didn’t do it. It was my awesome display of speed in the three yard dash to your bed.”

God she’d fallen so quickly for him. He was the perfect combination of loud and long-winded with shy and slightly goofy. He didn’t judge her the way she judged herself. He saw her as somebody else that she didn’t even think existed. Not to mention he was the sexiest stick man she had ever met. “Come on let’s go see Doc...(He began to protest but her glare put an end to it.) I need my pilot at one hundred percent.”

“But what about the helm?” He retorted.

“I’ll take her for the next few hours until Kaiden relieves me. I might even stretch her legs a little.”

“Oh my God Commander, please let me watch you fly her...please.” He sounded so eager it actually made her laugh.

“No until you see Doc.” Oh my God I sound like his mother.

“Well then help me get there. At this pace we’ll be halfway into Kaiden’s shift before I get out to watch my second favorite pilot.” He really was a little boy.

“Misbehave with Doc and you might just earn yourself a spanking.” She told him with a playful yet aggressive tone as she put her arm around his upper torso and underneath his arms to help him.

“You promise?” Was his reply and she had to put her other hand over her mouth to not laugh as loud.

“You’re terrible.” She brought him into the med bay where Doctor Chakwas was waiting with her arms folded in front of her and a deadly serious expression on her face.

“He’s all yours Doc. He tried to move a little quicker than he should’ve and well...I let him explain.” With that she turned to leave while looking at Jeff’s frightened ‘dog at the vet’ look on his face. She grinned and left to take control of the Normandy for a few hours.

Chapter End Notes

Well I finally did it! Hope you guys like it. Also have to ask if my switching point of views when Jeff and Athena are thinking is confusing? That’s it, more to come.
Don't let them fool you. They knew.

Chapter Summary

A little more background and Cerberus. A little spat between Jeff and Athena

Chapter Notes

Some disturbing imagery of genetic modification. Just a warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Station Cronos

“You see Miranda, everything panned out the way it should. Not only is she an N7, now as a Spectre she has full license to operate anywhere in the galaxy. There is no way an agent of ours would be able to accomplish the things she will be able to now and with full sanction from the Council.” The Illusive man shifted in his chair as he lit another cigarette.

“She’s on her way to Therum to find an Asari researcher named Liara T’soni, she’s a prothean expert and she could be a possible conspirator with Saren. Shepard’s main mission now is the capture or killing of the rogue Spectre Saren.” Miranda’s mind kept wandering to all the possible scenarios that could lead to a confrontation with Shepard.

“Now she won’t have to deal with the Alliance or Council bureaucracy in order to get him. By the way, what do we have on that rogue Spectre?” The Illusive man inquired.

“He’s a charming one. Hates humans to his core and was probably the reason David Anderson isn’t a Spectre now. No one knows how he got the Geth to work for him or why he’s chasing Prothean tech. We do know that he has an enormous Capital Ship at his disposal. It’s of unknown make, possibly a Geth Dreadnought. That Prothean beacon on Eden Prime was destroyed when Shepard interacted with it.” Miranda was now presenting her findings on a holographic display.

“So Saren is searching for tech…probably to allow him a chance at creating some kind of device to help him wipe humanity out. Why do you think he left the beacon at Eden Prime?” The Illusive Man shifted in his seat while taking another deep drag off his cigarette.

“Maybe Saren also interacted and got what he wanted from it. He was probably in a hurry to stay ahead of us. He did try to destroy it by planting explosive charges, but that was foiled by Shepard and her ground team and that’s why it was still there after he left. (Miranda paused as she looked at the presentation on the display.) Oh and it’s also been revealed that Liara T’soni’s mother a Matriarch by the name of Benezia T’soni is working with him.” Miranda turned off her laser pointer and stood there studying her work. “We don’t know if her daughter is working with her, but we do know that Dr. T’soni is on Therum studying a Prothean ruin.”

“Excellent work Miranda, we need to catch up to Saren and find out what he’s up to. Make sure our field agents are informed of the situation and send Kai in to investigate what that beacon
revealed to Shepard and Saren.” IM (Illusive Man from now on) snubbed out his cigarette and continued to study Miranda’s work.

“On an equally serious note, she’s a lot more dangerous to us now. We’ve confirmed she met with Rear Admiral Kahoku on the Citadel. If Kahoku told Shepard to go looking for the Marines on Edolus, she’s going to get reacquainted with another Thresher Maw and if she wins that encounter she’s going to know that someone...(She paused and turned to the IM.) We lured those Marines to their deaths. I suggest that we make preparations for the inevitable consequences.” Miranda looked at a holographic image of Edolus with a superimposed image of a Thresher Maw.

“As powerful as she is now. That worm doesn’t stand a chance against her. Make sure our bases on Binthu are informed of a possible visit from the Commander and to prepare as such.” IM lit up another cigarette and calmly stood up to take a closer look at the Thresher Maw on the display and addressed it as if it were a sentient being. “The first time you faced her she was raw and savage. Let’s see how you do against an almost fully trained super weapon.”

Miranda looked puzzled yet amused. “Almost fully trained?”

“We both know that there are always things to learn and that no one is ever fully trained.” It was that simple and Miranda had to agree as she gave him a curt nod in agreement. “Everything we did to her has had the desired effect. She is possibly the most powerful sentient in the galaxy.” He turned to look at Miranda. “Also, make sure that we pay a visit to the Admiral to show our appreciation for his meddling.”

Miranda nodded in agreement. “Speaking of powerful sentients, Subject Zero is coming along nicely on Pragia. She’s not as powerful as Shepard, but still immensely more so than all other known subjects.” Miranda informed him. “The only issue is that we are running out of test subjects and may need to acquire more.”

“See to it that Pragia has all it needs. Subject Zero is in a way even more important than Shepard. What our scientists did to get Shepard, has killed every single other test subject. We cannot keep losing test subjects at that rate and Subject Zero will be how we can get thousands of Shepards and advance the human race to the point of galactic supremacy.” IM really did sound like a mad scientist, but Miranda knew better than to doubt him. He and Cerberus really were the reason Shepard was as powerful as she was.

Miranda did have a bad feeling that Shepard was going to become an enormous problem for them. If she ever finds out what happened in the Munro facility, God help us. She walked away from the display terminal and walked down to her lab where she pulled a random video from the Munro facility.

She looked at it curiously. Shepard looked like she was only nine or ten. She was such a beautiful little girl. It just didn’t look right that she was strapped to a table and unconscious. There was so much blood on the floor and it just didn’t seem like the IV’s of plasma should be able to keep up. The scientists with blood stains all over their formerly pristine white lab coats were performing the bone and muscle lacing weave procedure that had killed every other single subject including many on the Pragia facility before it was deemed a dead end and accepted that Shepard’s healing ability must have been enhanced by her repeated exposure to element zero. Many of the scientists tried to duplicate these exposures and only ended up killing more subjects. Shepard truly was unique and many had been exposed to the amount of element zero as her, but none had exhibited the kind of Godlike power that she did. Maybe she was the future, but damn was she making it hard on everyone else.

Miranda fast forwarded the video to the moment Shepard woke up after the operation. The
screams from those little lungs used to haunt her dreams, but she continued to watch it many times over so as to desensitize herself to them. The tears and sobs coming from Shepard’s eyes were heart breaking. How could she not feel anything at all? Shepard screamed and screamed until she exhausted herself and fell unconscious. Shepard was the strongest being she had ever seen. The things those scientists did to her killed every other single person or drove them mad and yet that little girl on the screen survived. That little girl had become humanity’s most perfect representative.

She switched videos to watch the Thresher Maw attack on Akuze. Her power was truly godlike, but she was still a woman who felt the loss of her comrades. She looked emotionally destroyed afterward and yet she still came back from that as well. *She will be the end of us.*

She shut off the Shepard vid and put on the videos of Subject Zero on Pragia. It disturbed her when she watched Subject Zero going through a similar process as Shepard did and Miranda didn’t feel a thing. She shut it off and thought that this was the price to pay to not only protect humanity but to also advance it into the future. The guilt in her heart never seemed to leave her as she thought of what she would do to someone who tried to do those things to her or to her sister.

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Normandy SR1

Jeff really didn’t know how he was going to handle being in a relationship with her. He just finished almost getting blown to smithereens by an exploding volcano to pull her, Garrus, Wrex and a Dr. Liara T’soni off that fucking planet. T’soni performed some kind of Vulcan mind meld shit on Athena and almost passed out from the effort, while Athena didn’t even flinch. The gist of the mind meld was that some kind of ancient machines had destroyed the entire Prothean civilization and were possibly coming back to destroy the galaxy again. The new caveat was that now the mission was to beat Saren to something called the Conduit. Athena also spoke to the Council about Matriarch Benezia being a traitor. They actually questioned her security protocols for Dr. T’soni and Athena promptly cut them off.

She briefed Ambassador Udina and Captain Anderson with Udina basically telling her to be more careful of how she does things because the Council wasn’t too happy with the destruction of the Prothean Ruins on Therum. Now the Normandy was on its way to Feros to investigate Geth activity that had been reported there.

He manned the helm and he turned to see that Athena approached. “I prefer gold to silver. You know for my medal. I’d figure you recommend me for one since I pulled your boots out of the fire.”

“Hmmm, I think you were being selfish since you love these boots so much.” Shepard put her foot on his armrest and slowly ran her hand from the bottom of her boot to the top of her legs. “What would you do without these boots?” She sensually added.

His eyes followed her hands and then he looked her in the eyes. “God I hate it when you’re right!” He pretended to be frustrated and let out a chuckle.
She pulled her foot off the armrest to Joker’s dismay. “What’s our ETA for Feros?” She was back in commander mode.

“About twenty hours commander, barring any incidents.” He answered so professionally that he got her to smile.

“Good. When I get my hands on that Saren, he’s going to wish he was never born, or hatched or whatever Turians do to come into this world.” She turned and walked back toward the command center.

While on their way to Feros they picked up a distress beacon coming from the planet Edolus in the Sparta System, so they diverted their course. Rear Admiral Kahoku had mentioned his unit of marines went missing in the area. They were looking for an Alliance scientist named Armistan Banes who was also mentioned by Captain Anderson and Dr. Michele on the Citadel.

Once they reached Edolus, he dropped the Mako onto the planet’s surface. He was always amazed at how Athena handled that machine. She loved that thing. After traveling a few miles the Mako stopped on the edge of a vast plain. He watched the vid com and saw Athena getting out of the Mako on a rocky outcrop on the edge of that plain. He continued to watch as she forcefully told Ashley and Wrex to stay in the Mako and man the main gun. “I know what I’m doing! Now get back in the Mako and I’ll give the signal when I need you.”

“Commander what are you doing?” He asked over the comm with some concern in his voice.

“Stay off the comm Lieutenant, unless you see something I don’t.” It hurt a little when she was in Commander mode, but he knew better than anyone that when she was in that zone, she was all business and no fluff.

She began to walk over toward the distress beacon and the destroyed Grizzly when he started to see the ground shake around her. She continued to walk calmly toward the distress signal when a huge Thresher Maw began to surface right beneath her. She was a like a black streak as she leaped out of the way and calmly stood to face it. “Today you die alone.” He could hear her calmly say to herself, she unknowingly had left the comm channel open.

“OH YEAH!!!” Wrex’s voice pierced the comm channel sounding like the Kool Aid man from the old commercials. Jeff could almost picture the big Krogan made of glass and filled with the delicious beverage. Yeah he really went there.

Jeff now saw first-hand just how powerful his ‘girlfriend’ really was. With a biotically enhanced speed that could only be described as an unearthly blur she ran behind the monster, climbed its length to the top of its head where she pulled those Katanas and buried them to the hilt in a small area on the top of the head. It happened so fast that he barely saw it. The monster immediately collapsed with only a trickle of its green acidic blood flowing from its two wounds. “It’s nice to know that good research works every now and again. I’m going to have to thank those scientists back on Arcturus. Oh shit, did everyone hear me talk to myself? Anyway, Ashley you can bring the Mako in to the transmitter. It should be safe now.”

Jeff’s mouth was open and he was in absolute shock at what just occurred in the vid com screen. He turned and saw that Kaiden also had a dumbfounded look on his face. “Can you do anything like that Kaiden?” The question was sincere and there was not one hint of sarcasm.

Kaiden didn’t respond immediately as he was still staring at the vid comm in an apparent state of disbelief. “What? Uh…no. I’ve never seen anyone do what she can do…I still can’t believe what I just saw.”
It got a lot worse when she came back on board. “It was a goddamn trap! Somebody fucking lured them there! Get me an open channel to Kahoku…(Her poor comm officer Corporal Sakaui was a little too slow to comply and felt Athena’s wrath.) ARE YOU FUCKING LISTENING??! NOW GODDAMN IT!”

The poor comm officer complied as quickly as he could. “Channel open ma’am.”

He watched her furious expression closely, it was the same as the one he saw in the Akuze and Torfan videos. She was visibly trembling and he wanted nothing more than to get up, hold her and bury his face into her neck, but he knew that it might look a little inappropriate, not to mention the regs and all. She went into the comm room and closed the door. Ashley tried to listen in but she couldn’t make out what they were saying, but when Athena came out she ordered him to plot a course for the Citadel.

“What about Feros?” Jeff questioned the order.

She looked deadly serious and it was a frightening sight to behold. “I’ll brief everyone two hours prior to our arrival on the Citadel.” She completely ignored him.

“In the meantime I’ll be down in the hanger bay working out. Don’t bother me unless it’s absolutely necessary.” With that she turned and left for the elevator.

A half hour later, Jeff’s shift ended and he relinquished control to Kaiden. “Has anyone gone down to see her?”

“Ashley just told me that Shepard is just absolutely kicking the shit out of a steel skinned punching bag and all of those who approached her were totally ignored.”

“Well that’s not good. I’m going to go see her.” Oh boy…I hope I know what I’m doing. Jeff thought to himself as he turned and started to make his way slowly but steadily toward the elevator. “If she’ll respond to anyone it’s going to be you. But just be careful Jeff, I’ve never seen anything remotely like her.” Kaiden sounded truly concerned and Jeff nodded in acknowledgement, but was truly frustrated. Athena wasn’t some wild animal to be treated with such fear. Maybe it was because he saw that playful person more than most, he knew who she truly was. She would never hurt anyone who didn’t deserve it.

He stepped in and he could already hear the impact sounds of her hitting that bag. When the elevator door opened the sound of her punches were almost deafening. He slowly limped out of the elevator and into the hanger bay and he finally saw her. She had her back to him. She was wearing a black tank top and tight workout shorts. Her body was covered with sweat. Every strike caused the sweat from her body to fly off in different directions. She could probably kill anyone except maybe Wrex with those shots.

He looked over at Wrex and it looked like Shepard just made another fan. He was pretending to clean his shotgun, but his eyes were on Athena almost exclusively. Garrus was underneath the Mako doing who the hell knows what. As he got closer she finally put her hands down, her breathing was hard and he noticed the blood dripping from her knuckles. Damn this woman! ‘Commander! What the fuck are you doing!?’

He didn’t run to her because he didn’t want to hurt himself again, but he so wanted to touch her and hold her.

“What is it Lieutenant? I thought I made it clear not to bother me unless absolutely necessary.”
Her tone was so cold it froze him in place. The fact that she didn’t even turn around to face him also was too much and he responded by backing up and addressing her with a little fury of his own.

“Well I think that me having some concern for how you’re doing is absolutely necessary.” It came out a little bitchier than he intended.

She still didn’t turn to face him and addressed him with her back facing him. “That’s not necessary lieutenant. I don’t need your help.” She sounded even colder than before.

_Did she just dismiss me like I’m a nobody?_ “Excuuuuse me, oh great high and mighty Commander Shepard for worrying about you! If you’re going to talk to me like I’m not even here, then with all due respect, go fuck yourself ma’am.” He was really pissed off. “I’ll be in my pod if you feel the need to apologize to me. Oh, and while you’re at it apologize to Corporal Sakaui, he didn’t deserve it either.” He slowly turned around and limped his way back to the elevator. He swore that he heard her sob a little and then with a fury not seen before she started smashing that bag again with even more intensity than before. _Great job moron, you just made it worse for her._

As he slowly and hesitantly stepped into the elevator, Garrus approached him with disturbing speed and stopped him. “Are you really that stupid Joker? Can’t you see she’s hurting? (Jeff’s anger had started to subside with guilt starting to replace it and he listened intently to the big Turian’s tirade.) You’re the only one she didn’t outright ignore. Me, Wrex and Ashley are practically invisible to her. Now go over there, plant your ass on a crate or something and wait for her to calm down. It’s pretty obvious to me who she’s going to want to talk to when her obsession with hitting shit passes.”

_Garrus is really a fucking awesome guy and more than a little intimidating. The difference in personality between him and Nihlus are night and day. Maybe it was the fact that he was a former C-Sec officer and Cops tend to be a very perceptive bunch._ “Okay, I know you’re right and I was stupid to even think I could get to her right now.”

“You’re not stupid Lieutenant; you’re just a little slow in understanding her psyche. It was obvious how her change in posture was affected by just the sound of your voice. Didn’t you see her visibly relax when you spoke?” Garrus really was amazing.

“I…really didn’t. All I saw was outright aggression.” Jeff was dumbfounded by Garrus’ ability to read her.

“You really need to train your senses Lieutenant. It was pretty fucking obvious to all of us here.” Garrus told him and he saw how Wrex and even Ashley nodded in agreement.

He sat down on an uncomfortable box just out of sight of Athena. He talked to the requisitions officer Sgt. Chris Zienewicz. He spoke with Jeff an about some new experimental leg braces that he could possibly get a hold of for him. “They look like a pair of tights you can wear under your uniform. They’ll allow you to move with a little more ease.” Jeff listened intently and thought that with Athena’s new spectre status, she practically had an almost unlimited budget when it came to the requisitions. It was a pleasant conversation in the midst of the artillery barrage named Athena Shepard.

The pounding on the bag lasted for another fifteen minutes and then it finally went silent. He slowly maneuvered himself off the box and started to walk out of the supply area only to see Athena walking into the elevator. “BABs WAIT!” _Oh fuck really? Did I just do that in front of everyone?_

Totally surprised, she turned and her eyes met his. She held the door open and the little smile on
her face melted him. She was back. He slowly made his way to the elevator and he couldn’t help himself once inside. “Going my way?”

She giggled like that little five year old girl he never met and turned to him and started. “Jeff…I’m so…”

“No…No…This one was totally on me. I’ll totally know better next time you need to blow off some steam. I’m sorry I made it harder for you.” He waved her off.

“No…that’s no excuse. I shouldn’t treat the people I love that way…ever. Mari and you have been my anchors in the stormy sea that is my head. I’m so sorry Jeff that I treated you like that.”

“Oh will you please stop! I’ve never had a girlfriend before and I’m pretty sure we’ll have more spats like that.” He nonchalantly explained.

To his surprise she stopped the incredibly slow elevator in between decks. She closed the distance, grabbed his face with both hands and fiercely kissed him. He could see fireworks going off in his head. Her body was soaked from sweat and he could taste its saltiness on her lips. He embraced her and pulled her closer so that their bodies were now in full contact. He buried his face in her sweaty neck, kissing it and even giving it a little nibble which caused her to let out a moan that sent shivers down his spine. When she finally let go he was covered in her sweat and blood from her hands. She looked at him a little alarmed, but that expression changed once he started to sing.

“Love in an elevator…giving it up while I’m going down?” He started…

She let out a loud and healthy laugh and struggled to get back to her point. “Are you out of your mind? How are we going to explain that?” She pointed at him and now he saw why she was so alarmed. He was soaking wet from her sweat, and he looked like he had just been shot in several places with all the blood stains on him.

Jeff didn’t care as he tried to kiss her again, but was rebuffed. “Jeff I’m serious. How in the hell…”

“Oh you can do that invisibility thing you do with your biotics and no one will be the wiser. They’ll just see me as a bloody mess coming out of the elevator and you could head to your room.”

Wow! That almost makes sense except that everyone is going to think she either kicked my ass or we had a passionate make out session in the elevator.

Athena smiled a huge grin as she now pulled him tighter. “You really want to do it here?” Her eyes were dead serious and he flinched a little.

Now Jeff was usually a very confident person and he so wanted to make love to this wild and fierce beauty before him, but it had occurred to him that he had never done it and didn’t really have a clue what to do. Sure all of the porn he watched in his life kind of gave him a blueprint of what to do, but watching sex videos and actually doing it were two different things. “I…I’ve never…” She’s going to laugh at me. Fuck!

She looked at him with an understanding expression. “You’ve never?” She gently let him know what she knew. “Oh baby I already I knew that.”

He almost looked offended. “What? How?” Am I really that bad at reading people?

“It’s the way you kiss. It’s so sweet and tender that you almost make me feel guilty of taking advantage of you.” She bit his ear and he let out a whimper. “You’re like a brave and eager little puppy.”
His face was beet red. “Great. Of all the words you could’ve used to describe my sexual prowess, puppy is definitely not the one I would have preferred.”

She gave him a quick peck. “Okay so this is what we’re going to do. I’m going to drop you off back in the hanger bay and I am going to go back up to first, apologize to Corporal Sakaui and then I’m going back to my quarters to get cleaned up. I’ll meet you and the rest of the crew in the mess hall for the briefing and dinner.” She pulled him close and gave him a ferocious hug, holding the back of his head pulling his face into her neck. “Thank you again Jeff. I don’t know what I did to deserve having someone like you, but I’d do it again.”

She let him out and Ashley rushed to him like he was in need of emergency medical services. “Lieutenant! Is she alright?” Wow, I’m covered in blood and she’s asking about BABs?

“She’s okay. All this blood and no concern for me?” Joker feigned offense, but Ashley was just as bad as he was.

“I know it’s not your blood, hell if it was I think you’d be nothing more than a pink smear on the elevator wall.” Ashley grinned, “She’s a fucking typhoon. I feel bad for who has to clean up after her, which today it looks like it’s going to be me.”

“What do you mean?” Jeff asked her.

“Look at you! You’re a fucking disaster. Take your clothes off!” Ashley ordered him pretty firmly as she pulled some clean clothes out of one of the supply boxes.

As Ashley helped him into his clean clothes Wrex approached them. “So you’re the one she has the hots for?” Wrex towered over both of them and looked at Jeff in an investigatory manner. “I have to say that you’re not very impressive. I don’t know what she sees in you.”

Jeff chuckled at the comment. “I don’t either Wrex, I don’t either.”

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In the end she decided to go to Feros before heading back to the Citadel.

I have to control myself better, but seeing that trap...those men dead because of some organization called Cerberus. Well Cerberus, we’re going to get to know each other very well and soon. She thought as she went over her reports on her desk. Kahoku disappeared after his last transmission and he pointed to this organization’s involvement. It was a secret Alliance Black Ops organization that had apparently gone rogue. He also said that they were involved in highly secret and illegal genetic experimentation on humans. This sent chills down Athena’s spine as some of the nightmare that was the Munro facility would come to mind. Could the Alliance have known about this? The thought made her a little angry, but she suppressed it for now because she didn’t know what they knew.

Feros was a shit show. Geth were all over the prothean ruins and the ExoGeni ruins. There was a monstrous sentient plant called ‘The Thorian’ living in the middle of the ruins attempting to control the colonists of Zhu’s Hope and producing these abominations called ‘Thorian Creepers.’ Apparently the Geth were sent there by Saren to kill this thing because it was a liability and Saren knew that she was following him. The reason for wanting it dead was Shiala, an Asari who once worked for Matriarch Benezia that was ‘sacrificed’ to the Thorian in exchange for something called the Cipher. Saren apparently did not want Shepard to receive the Cipher. Through another
of those melds Shiala shared this Cipher with Shepard. She still didn’t understand the vision any more than before but Shiala had said that understanding the Cipher’s gift would come with time. She had received the gift of Prothean knowledge and understanding and was told that she would be able to understand the Protheans as if she were a Prothean.

During her debriefing she melded once again with Liara to see if she could make sense of what the Cipher did. All that the meld revealed was that there was information missing from Shepard’s interaction with the Beacon on Eden Prime. Once she dismissed everyone from the debriefing she communicated with the Council and was promptly criticized for killing the Thorian and of course Counselor Sparatus had to give her shit about saving a human colony. They so know how to get on my nerves!

She walked to the med-bay and Dr. Chakwas did another check up on her. After about a half hour she gave Shepard the thumbs up and Athena went to check on Liara. It seemed that Liara’s mind was getting as much a workout as her own and she wanted to make sure Liara was okay. He walked in to find Liara sitting at her desk studying something at her workstation.

“Are you alright Dr.?” Athena abruptly asked and startled the young Asari.

“I’m fine Shepard although I do appreciate you coming to make sure I was alright.” Liara turned and stood to face Shepard. “Commander, I’ve never experienced anything like that. You’re will and mind are incredibly strong. Those experiences would have killed a lesser mind.” She sounded like she was in awe.

“There are a lot of things that should have killed me and yet here I am. I’m glad you’re okay Liara. Please don’t hesitate to tell me if anything or anyone is bothering you.” Athena offered sincerely.

“Thank you Commander, but I will be fine and can take care of myself.” Liara responded and it made Athena smile.

“What can you tell me about your mother?” Athena leaned her backside onto the workstation desk and folded her arms in front of her.

“Well she raised me alone and I never knew who my other mother was because she never mentioned her.” She rubbed her temples with her hand.

“Other mother? You mean another Asari?”

“Yes, I’m…a…pureblood and this is probably why she never mentioned her. She was probably ashamed of it.” Liara tried to explain.


“Pureblood unions are frowned upon by my people. They say that nothing is gained by a union of two Asari. Traits found in other species adds to the genetic diversity that is desired by most of my people. ‘Pureblood’ is a derogatory term used by most of my people for what I am. They would never say it to my face, but it is still thought of.” She continued to explain. “My mother being one of our spiritual leaders had a lot of followers and is a very powerful biotic so if we are to face her, we should be prepared. I would like to join you with the ground team if at all possible.”

“You’re more than welcome to come with us. Are you any good in a fight?” Athena needed to know that she would be able to hold her own.

Liara nodded. “I’ve taken care of myself for so long and have had to defend myself many times. I
won’t let you down Commander.”

Athena smiled at the young looking asari and squeezed her shoulder. “Hopefully you can talk some sense into her. Oh, I’m going to need to evaluate your combat skills for myself. I’ll set up the hanger for an assessment from me and Chief Williams is that okay?” This illicited a nod and a shy grin from Liara. She then watched Athena walk out of the room.

*God she’s so cute.* Athena thought as she walked away.

After arriving on the Citadel, Athena made a beeline for the embassy. She wanted to talk to Anderson and Udina about Cerberus in person and she wanted answers before heading to Noveria.

Chapter End Notes

To everyone who is reading I thank you. It's a great feeling to know you guys may be enjoying this almost as much as me.
Why is everything so complicated?

Chapter Summary

Athena is pissed about Cerberus, Major Kyle is mentioned, Noveria happens.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Citadel Part II

No fun and games on this visit to the Citadel. Kahoku was the only one who had known about this black ops group? No way! Former Alliance? Somebody knows something. She brooded as she traveled down from the Normandy with Garrus. Tali helped Engineer Adams with the tuning of the Normany’s engines. She left Ashley to assess Liara and see what she could do. Wrex and Kaiden were helping move crates in the hangar bay to make room for another Kodiak shuttle.

When she got to the Embassy she told Garrus to wait outside and went in. “Why is it that only now I am finding out about this group called Cerberus?”

She caught both of them by surprise. “They’re a terrorist organization, what else is there to tell.” Udina smugly answered.

“Then tell me why I don’t hear of anything being done about my unit being lured on Akuze or Kahoku’s men being lured and killed on Edolus? All with the same exact type of distress beacon, I want some fucking answers right now! There is no way a black ops team made up of Alliance scientists and elite soldiers does the shit they did and no one notices!” Her glare could penetrate steel and especially Anderson.

“Athena, we’re telling you that we’re not in the know when it comes to Cerberus. They have ties that are deep within the Alliance leadership and government and not all of those higher ups disagree with them.” Anderson was a little pissed at the insinuation.

“This is the second time I’ve been lured to a Thresher Maw nest. This is more than a coincidence and I will find out. You two better hope I don’t find out you’re involved with them!” She barked out as she started to leave the embassy.

“ATHENA! Don’t you dare question my loyalty or dedication to the Alliance or you!” Anderson was steaming as he berated her. “Cerberus is a terrorist group that I would love to take down, but Saren has an army of Geth and a giant super Dreadnought he is using to figure out how to wipe out humanity! Get your priorities straight or I swear I’ll find someone else to do this job!”

She felt ashamed at her selfishness. Udina she didn’t trust a lick, but Anderson was her father for all intents and purposes. She loved him like one too. “I’m sorry Captain…it’s just seeing that monster again…seeing the remains of that pioneer unit…it was too much…someone killed over a hundred marines and for what…” She was breaking again. “I don’t understand…why would…you have no idea…” She lowered her head and whispered to herself. “So many dead…because of me.”
“Athena please girl, please stop beating yourself up over it all…” Anderson tried to console her but it only made her angry.

“I’ve been responsible for the death of over a thousand people! Fathers, sons, daughters, mothers!!! How in the hell could you even begin to understand how many lives I’ve destroyed?!? Now you put me in command of a starship with another fifty lives and let’s not forget the aliens who are also my responsibility and send me out to battle a fucking rogue Spectre with a super ship and an army of Geth. Again, please tell me how in the fuck could you possibly understand my plight? Not to mention you (she pointed to Udina.) and that fucking Council are doing almost everything in your power to hinder me!” Her rage was almost out of control as the room crackled with her biotic energy.

“You’re right Athena…I’ve never suffered those kinds of losses, but I still understand because I have lost men under my command. I have killed many in the name of the Alliance and I know how that weighs on a soul. You have to accept it and move on or it will kill you in the end. Also remember that you are saving the lives of thousands if not millions.” Anderson closed the distance and a giant spark hit him. He didn’t flinch and saw the tears streaming from her eyes as she lowered her head. He pulled her into an embrace which she returned fiercely…a little too fiercely as she heard Anderson’s breath leave him. He didn’t complain and maintained his embrace which she accepted.

“David…I’m…I must seem like such a disappointment to you.” She lifted her head and gazed into her friend’s dark and strong eyes.

His deep and strong chuckle made her feel more at ease. “Don’t be such a drama queen. Like I said, I’ve been there and I know. I’ve been broken too…there’s no shame in that. We all have to put ourselves together and keep going. If for nothing else, our loved ones deserve it.” His words rang true. She needed him and was so glad he was in her life.

“Well if you two are done, I have work to do.” Udina chimed in with that arrogant and smug expression that made her want to filet him.

“Listen, I know you’re restocking to head out to Noveria. Why don’t you meet me at Apollo’s Café and we can...(He paused and ushered her out of the room.) talk.” He made it clear that he did not want Udina to hear anything he had to say.

“Okay…” She said still sobbing intermittently as she stepped out of the embassy office.

Garrus was outside waiting for her. “Everything okay Shepard? You didn’t blow up half the embassy did you?”

She tried not to smile at the Turian’s sarcastic question. “Maybe I should, but only if Udina was in there alone.”

“The Ambassador? What a surprise! A politician someone wants to kill, ha! I’ll bet you’re not the only one who wants to see the ambassador pushing up daisies.” She let out a laugh that was a little too loud. She had really softened on Garrus and it showed. Jeff told her what he did during their spat in the hanger and she really appreciated it, but didn’t know how to show it.

She let out a chuckle and smiled as she looked into the big Turian’s eyes. “Where in the hell did you hear that one?”

“I heard Wrex say it.” The answer made her cough and she laughed again.
“Wrex…who…what…oh forget it.” She paused a few seconds as they walked toward the elevator. “You know what Garrus…” He turned to look at her. “You’re alright.”

“Thanks Shepard…although I did think you were sort of an asshole when I first met you.” He addressed her with all the seriousness in the world.

How could I be such an ass. Nihlus was cold yet respectful if a little arrogant, Saren is a monster and Garrus is an absolute gem. They’re just like us except for the claws, teeth and armor plates. Wrex for all his prowess on the field of battle is really a big softie. Liara is an innocent little blue doll that I want to take and ravage…whoa, did I just think that? I hope Ashley isn’t kicking the shit out of her. Tali was pretty cool too, I love her armor…maybe we…no the brass would never go for it.

As they approached the elevator a female field reporter approached her almost desperately. “Commander Shepard! Commander Shepard! Khalisah bint Sinan Al-Jilani Westerlund News. Would you answer a few questions for our viewers?”

Athena stopped and turned to face the reporter who seemed to be a bit shocked at her height. “What do you want to know?”

“You’ve been given a unique position to represent our race. People want to get a sense of how you’ll do that.” Athena watched as the cam bot’s light turned on as Jilani immediately started the interview.

“Humans have been trying to get the respect of the galactic community for the last twenty six years. With that in mind, what are your feelings on becoming the first human Spectre?”

She’d never done an interview before and she knew that this was either going to go extremely well or it would end in disaster. She tried to be as pleasant as possible. “It’s a great honor actually. They are the elite of the Council’s forces and come from every race in Council space. It could have happened sooner, but now that it happened hopefully it will open the door for us to do more.”

“Some believe that without firm action on our part, the Council will continue to treat us like ‘poor relations.’ Have you encountered any situations where the Citadel has asked you to place its needs before the needs of Earth?”

“They know better, but we must also remember that the Citadel is now our home as well and we must defend it as fiercely as any of our colonies. We can’t have a place here and not care what happens.” She looked Jilani in the eye while she was prepping another question.

“You truly believe that don’t you?” Whoa…a little smug and condescending are we?

“Whether I believe it or not, it is what the current situation is and we must make the best of it.” Athena was staying calm and she could hear Garrus chuckling in the background.

“You’ve been given command of an advanced human warship for your missions. Is there anything you would like to say about it?”

“It’s a human and turian design with a fantastic crew. Many of the aspects of the ship are classified, so I can’t comment on it.” She looked over to Garrus who was hiding behind a sign and she could see his shoulders shaking. I take everything good I ever said about you. She cleared her throat and tried to appear professional despite Garrus’ extremely unprofessional although very entertaining behavior.

And Jilani just kept going. “So the Turians have knowledge of the Normandy that is being kept
secret from the Alliance public? Do you think it was appropriate to hand the Alliance’s most advanced warship over to the Citadel?”

“Did you see something that I didn’t? The Normandy hasn’t been handed over to anyone. She’s my ship and last I checked I’m human. Same goes for my crew.” Athena was starting to get annoyed and it just seemed to spur this bitch Khalisah on.

“Human, yes but you do work for the Citadel now commander.”

“I work with them not for them. There’s a difference.” Athena could hear the intermittent clicks of Garrus behind the sign.

“One last question Commander. Rumors back home have you tracking a rogue Spectre named Saren. Do you have any comment on that?”

“Sorry, I’m afraid I can’t comment on whatever, my current assignment may or may not be.” Athena cleared her throat again.

“Don’t worry, we’ll find out. The eyes of Earth are on you. Don’t let us down. Thank you for time, Commander Shepard.” With that her little cam bot shut its light and Athena quickly stepped into the elevator.

Garrus quickly joined her. “You handled that really well. I thought you were going to slug her.”

Athena looked at the big Turian and saw actual tears in his eyes. “You’re as bad as Joker.” She couldn’t contain her smile.

“Well at least I’m better looking.” He retorted.

She let out a chuckle and squeezed the big Turian’s shoulder. “You are pretty handsome for a monitor lizard.”

“I don’t know what that is, but I’ll take it as a compliment.”

Athena and Garrus arrived at Apollo’s Café and were seated at the lower level overlooking the Presidium Lake. Athena immediately scanned the area for bugs and revealed a hidden camera with a microphone above the area and two other hidden microphones on the bannister. Garrus was about to speak when Athena lifted her finger to her lips to be quiet. She quietly let out a biotic surge into the bannister completely destroying the two microphones with a subtle sizzle and the smell of burning electronics. She turned her attention to the camera and let out another subtle biotic push that knocked the camera off its post and into the lake below. “Now we can talk.”

“Executor Pallin is going to be so upset with you.” Garrus told her.

“How’s he going to know? The cameras that can see us were all pointing away when I disabled these.” She shrugged her shoulders and gave him a wink.

“You’re pretty good commander. I’m impressed.” Garrus actually looked it…as much as a Turian could ‘look’ impressed.
“I aim to please.” She playfully retorted.

They made some small talk about Garrus’ life before and she opened up to him about her criminal past. “It would’ve been fun to match wits with you Garrus.”

“You would have been too easy to catch.” He waved his hand at her dismissively.

“There is no way in hell that you would have caught me.” She giggled which surprised Garrus, but also made him feel better that she was okay.

Athena was genuinely curious about how he would catch her. “Just humor me. Tell me how you would do it? Oh and please don’t tell me you’re going to use a bait car. That’s such a cop out.”

“Well after seeing you drive the Mako, how else do you think I should catch you? I’m a decent driver, but you’re way out of my league in that department.” Garrus started to tell her as he immersed himself in the ‘what if’ he was telling her. I’d sit and watch the car from a distance as you approached it. I’d watch you get your hopes up and think of how pathetic my effort was. You’d take off like a Salarian being chased by Wrex and then I would press a little button that disables all of your controls. Of course I’d wait a few minutes to watch the dash mounted cam and enjoy the look of utter frustration on your face. Then I would approach the car slowly and with a swagger that only I could pull off. I’d lean over and show my beautiful face in your window and watch all that frustration turn into outright disbelief and capitulation. HA! It would be glorious.”

She was trying to hold in her laugh as she watched him actually live the moment in his head. “What control jammer would you use?”

“Oh wouldn’t you like to know.” Garrus could see the amused look on her face so he continued. “Okay, you talked me into it. You being from Earth would mean that no way in hell would I use any that were made there being that you’ve probably already encountered it and beaten it. I’d probably go with a Serrice Council Jammer. I know the chances you’ve seen one of those are pretty low.” He turned to look at her with what appeared to be a deeply satisfied expression, almost like he beat her already.

“Oh you have no idea the things I’ve seen and beat. I was only caught once because of a bait car. After that my biotics helped me escape every single trap you cops ever set for me. You’re going to have to do a lot better than that handsome.” They sounded like two little kids arguing who had the best toy gun.

“It would be fun Commander. Too bad we’re both good guys now.” She smiled at the big Turian.

“What’s good here?” She asked him.

“For you humans? How in the executor’s ass should I know, my food is dextro-protein based. You’ll have to find out for yourself commander.”

“Well I’m paying so get whatever you want.” She watched as Anderson approached their table. He sat down next to Athena and gave Garrus a nod.

“Oh David, this is Garrus Vakarian, former C-Sec officer extraordinaire and fellow Saren hunter.” Garrus stood up to his impressive height. “Garrus, this is Captain David Anderson, my mentor and my savior from a life of crime.”

“Good to meet you Garrus.” He looked at Athena and smiled at his girl looking so comfortable around an alien. She had come a long way from Eden Prime.
“Likewise sir.” Garrus’ military bearing is excellent when he turns it on.

“I ordered steak and potatoes for both of us. I hope that’s okay.” He nodded with a grin.

“You know I can never turn down a good steak.”

“So what did you want to tell me?” She wasn’t about to let the conversation get light until he told her what she wanted.

Anderson looked toward Garrus. Athena waved him off. “He’s fine, you can tell me in front of him.”

“Do not repeat this to anyone.” His eyes were intense and there was no doubt that she was about to learn something important. “Your friend Marianna, she’s investigating multiple leads pertaining to Cerberus and their operation. Only I, Steven and now you know.” The chill that went down her spine froze her in place. This was one of her rocks. Mari was her sister, the one who had kept her sane during her time in the Reds and worse.

“Mari?” Her tone was all worry and protective. Still, she was at a loss of what to say.

“She reports directly to Steven, so don’t worry. No one else knows. Steven did tell me to tell you that when he finds out what’s going on with them, he will relay the messages directly through to you via his secure channel.” David saw how uncomfortable she was with this. Mari was her connection to home and as solid a friend as there was.

“Why her?” She asked with an uncertainty.

“She approached Steven with the idea and said she would do it regardless, so Steven had her reassigned to fleet intelligence and put her out with him on the SSV Orizaba. She told Steven that you would be worried about her, but said you would do the same for her.” He regarded Athena’s worried expression. “Remember what I told you about your friends the day I first bailed you out?”

Athena nodded with a small smirk as she remembered the fight outside the club. She started to reminisce about Juan, Finch, Mari and the three marines she put in the hospital as well. “Yeah, yeah, yeah…I know. Mari better not do anything stupid or I’m going to be so mad at her.” She paused. “I know Steven will take care of her.”

“Don’t repeat this to anyone.” Anderson looked at her with all the seriousness in the world and then turned his attention to Garrus. “You either Garrus.”

“And risk the wrath of this one?” He pointed to Athena. “I may be the most handsome being on the Normandy and I plan on continuing to be.”

Athena couldn’t help but snicker at the comment. Anderson on the other hand did not and was still glaring at Garrus.

“Understood Captain.” Garrus addressed Anderson with an equally serious tone.

“Good, let’s eat. I hear the steak here is pretty good.”

*******************************************************************************
SSV Normandy enroute to Noveria

“Commander we have message coming in, its marked priority one. Oh big surprise the Alliance needs you again.” Joker’s voice came over the intercom.

“Shepard? It’s Admiral Hackett. We’ve got a mission for you.” He sounded and looked pretty tired, but she was glad to hear from her Porteño friend.

“Steven! I’m so glad to finally hear from you.” She blurted out to his obvious amusement. “Sorry Admiral, what do you have?”

“It’s good to finally hear from you as well Athena.” She could see him grin softly over the comm. “Major Kyle, your commanding officer on Torfan has set up a small compound in the Hawking Eta Cluster. He’s attracted a number of biotic followers. He’s become an outspoken critic of the Alliance and we believe he’s mentally unstable. This could be trouble Athena.” Hackett changed his tone to a serious one.

The name brought back some horrible images in her head. She didn’t hate him, but he wasn’t on her Christmas card list. “What kind of proof do you have that the Major is dangerous?”

“Three days ago we sent two Alliance reps to meet with him at his compound. They’ve disappeared. We believe that Kyle and his followers killed them. That compound is a cult, Shepard. They call him ‘Father Kyle’ now. He’s set himself up as some kind of religious leader.”

“You got anything else on him?” She wanted to make sure that she knew everything about him.

“He’s not the same man you served under. He feels directly responsible for all the Alliance soldiers who died at Torfan. His psych evaluation showed that he couldn’t handle the stress of command any more. He was given an honorable discharge and early retirement. We’d hoped he would get better in time, but we underestimated how far gone he was. Now it looks like it’s too late.” There was a sadness in his voice as he talked about the Major.

“Early retirement? I heard he resigned.” He should feel responsible, that fucker did cause a lot of unnecessary deaths and then he has the nerve to give me that fucking ‘Butcher’ nickname.

“That was the official story, but no he was forcibly removed from the Alliance military.”

Now she was curious as to what the hell did the good Major do to get the attention of Alliance HQ. “What were those Alliance reps going to talk to Major Kyle about?”

“They wanted to bring him back to an Alliance facility for treatment. Major Kyle served us faithfully for many years. We weren’t about to abandon him. Given his state of mind, however, he probably saw them as a threat. We’re almost certain he had his followers kill them.”

He killed them? I don’t care what his state of mind is, he’s going to pay. “You said that his followers were biotics?” Biotics? What the hell? He never treated me with any pity.

“Yes, Major Kyle never showed any biotic tendencies himself though. I think he’s just latching on to a group he identifies with. Many biotics feel marginalized or ostracized by society. Kyle probably sees them as victims who need his protection. And they see him as someone who will fight for them. Unfortunately he’s convinced them that the Alliance is somehow responsible for all of their problems. We can’t let him go on like this.”

“What do you want me to do with him? You know that he and I did not part on the best of terms. It might get very ugly.” She did want to kill him, but she really was worried that he would send his
little biotic army to its death against her.

“I’ll trust your judgement Athena. Maybe you can talk him down.”

“God I hope you’re right.” There was a feeling of dread going down her spine. There was a slight pause but she remembered to ask about Marianna.

“Oh and Steven, take good care of my girl or we’re gonna have problems.”

“You know Athena, Argentinian women should be given lieutenant’s bars as soon as they’re born. Not only do I have one bossing me around here, now I got you bossing me around there too?” She could feel the genuine affection from her very high ranking friend.

“Well you chose us didn’t you?” She put her hands on her cocked hips and gave him her best ‘bitch’ look.

“That I did. That I did. Good luck Shepard, Hackett out.” Athena could hear him chuckle on the other end.

Noveria started as a shit show with them almost getting shot down and ended in a spectacular shit show. Everybody needed a favor. From spying for the Armali Council which she did not do, to smuggling for a Hanar which she did do. The shit she had to do just to get a pass for the Peak 15 facility affected the careers of several individuals, ended the lives of some corrupt security guards, and put the administrator, a Salarian named Anoleis, in jail. Garrus was in his natural element with his investigation of the Administrator and in the end got the Turian Lorik Qui’in the administrator job once Anoleis was booted. Gianna Parasini, who ended up being an investigator for Noveria Internal Affairs was grateful and offered Athena a drink the next time she saw her.

The big fight with the Geth in the garage pissed her off because maybe the boxes got through because the Geth were inactive, but how the hell did the weaponry and her commandos get through without setting off the alarms. Some fucking security, Geth armed to the teeth and a team of heavily armed Asari commandos not to mention all of these wonderful heavy turrets lining the path up to the Peak 15 station. She was in a rage as she drove the mako like a maniac. She could feel Garrus and Liara’s uncomfortableness as she drove what she could only assume was too close to the ledge of the mountain pass.

When they finally reached the facility on Peak 15, it didn’t surprise her that the shit show would include something that was thought extinct for thousands of years. She helped a group of scientists and others stranded on the peak. An Asari Commando felt her wrath for turning some people into husks similar to those she fought at Zhu’s Hope. When she finally reached the labs and confronted Benezia. She ended up finding out that Saren and Benezia were trying to breed Rachni soldiers from a captured Rachni Queen to help destroy Saren’s enemies. Benezia also acquired the location of the Mu Relay. She talked to Benezia who for an instant was able to resist Saren’s and the giant ship she called Sovereign’s influence, gave her the location of the Mu Relay. She captured the Matriarch after she seemed to succumb to Saren’s influence again. Athena used her stasis to hold her while Garrus put her in restraints. Benezia struggled until she exhausted herself and passed out from her effort to escape her captors. On their way back to the ship Benezia woke and started to struggle ferociously with her restraints.
“Mother please! Fight him!” Liara desperately pleaded with her to stop.

Benezia turned and looked at her daughter. Liara could not see her mother in the glare, there was nothing left of her. “You’re all so pathetic. You think you’re going to be able to stop Saren… hahaha! What a waste, you all could have served him and had a purpose in the world he is going to usher in.”

Benezia started to struggle again, only this time she managed to break every bone in her hand to get it out of the restraints. She lashed out at Garrus with her biotics and tossed him 20 feet. The only thing saving him from a broken neck was Athena’s reaction time and biotically cushioning his impact with the wall outside the Normandy’s mooring area.

While Liara was distracted and going to help Garrus, Benezia quickly used her good hand to grab Liara’s pistol and attempt to kill Athena. Athena was quicker and much deadlier. She put a round through Benezia’s skull before she could even raise the pistol to aim. Athena could see the dismay in Liara’s face as she was standing right next to her mother as she fell in a gushing pool of Asari blood. Liara was in tears as she kneeled next to the now dead Matriarch in attempt to stop the flow of blood from her skull.

“MOTHER!!!MOTHER!!!PLEASE!!!...” Athena was heartbroken as she watched the young, sweet Liara try in vain to save her mother. She lowered her head as Garrus tried to comfort Liara. She took a deep breath as her own tears started to well up in her eyes. “Why mother? Why couldn’t you just give up?” It was a voice so low she barely heard it.

“I…I’m sorry Liara…I…She didn’t give me a choice.” Athena was barely holding it together.

“I know Commander…this isn’t your fault…Saren is going to pay for this.” Liara’s sweet voice was gone. This was something else. There was a darkness to Liara’s tone that was not there before. Athena knew it well from herself…it was rage and vengeance all rolled into one.

After the event on Noveria were over, she and her ground team had killed an Asari Matriarch, a squad of Asari Commandos and a shitload of Geth, not to mention she bonded with the Rachni queen and released her on the promise that she would disappear and never wage war again. She left Noveria with mixed feelings. She got what she needed to continue her pursuit of Saren, but she also felt incredibly guilty of killing Liara’s mother. So much so that it affected her more than it even affected Liara.

When they were back on the Normandy she debriefed the entire ground team and spoke to the Council. Of course they criticized her decision to let the Rachni Queen free and also that she couldn’t bring Benezia in alive. In one ear out the other. She thought to herself. After her Council briefing she went up to the helm where she had a conversation with Jeff about the whole thing. As always Jeff blamed everybody but her. He was the sweetest thing and usually made her feel better, but this time she didn’t and she needed to see Liara.

She walked through Dr. Chakwas’ med bay and Chakwas tilted her head toward Liara’s room. “Talk to her. She’s been unusually quiet, more so than before.”

She slowly made her way into Liara’s room when she heard the Asari whisper. “It’s not your fault.”

Athena didn’t disturb her and noticed that Liara was going through her personnel records. What the hell? Is she gonna try and come after me? No…no…she won’t. Athena told herself.

“I’m so sorry Liara…” Liara jumped from her seat and almost hit the ceiling.
Liara turned and nervously tried to compose herself. She finally did so and addressed her. “It wasn’t your fault Commander, Benezia did it to herself. If you hadn’t stopped her, she would have killed us all…or worse.” She noticed that Athena’s eyes were moist and by the Goddess they were the most beautiful crystal blue orbs she had ever seen. She felt ashamed that Shepard had come out of a feeling of guilt and all she could think of was how stunning the commander was. Tall, powerful, imposing and beautiful…she could be the living embodiment of the Goddess herself.

“That doesn’t mean you didn’t care for her and that this didn’t affect you.” Liara didn’t know what to do here. She did love her mother, but she hadn’t talked to her in so long.

“I appreciate you worrying about me Commander, but there is no need. I will be fine.” The answer looked like it did not satisfy the commander.

“Liara, please don’t hold your feelings inside. I know what that is like and it is not a good thing. If you need an ear please come and get me. I will always have an ear for you.” Liara smiled inside.

“I’m sorry commander. It’s just that I always make a fool of myself when it comes to interacting with you humans and I do not want to do that with you.” There was the shy and sweet Liara that Athena liked so much.

“You do not and if anyone is making you uncomfortable, you tell me.” Athena was deadly serious and could only think that Ashley was the one making her uncomfortable.

“Your crew has been nothing but kind and understanding to me. It is my own awkwardness that is the problem.” Liara’s foot fidgeted as she folded her arms in front of her.

“Like I said, if there’s a problem or you just need to talk I would be honored to listen.” She took hold of Liara’s shoulders. “Okay?”

Liara nodded once and Athena swore that she saw a little tiny smile on the cute Asari’s lips. “I will. I’ll be okay…and thank you commander. I think I’ve taken too much of your time already.”

“Like I said, if there’s a problem or you just need to talk I would be honored to listen.” She took hold of Liara’s shoulders. “Okay?”

Liara was amazed at the power she felt in Athena’s grip on her shoulders. She turned, sat at her terminal and continued her studies on the Commander.

“You know you could just ask me about it instead of sneaking a peek at my personnel records.” Athena was a little upset that she was standing right there and not being asked anything when it was so obvious how curious Liara was about her.

Liara looked like she was about to fall apart. “I’m sorry Commander…I…It’s that…the…I didn’t mean to…It’s just that I am more used to reading reports and dissertations than actually speaking to the source. I’m sorry…I will make an effort to talk more to you.”

Athena chuckled at Liara’s attempt to remain composed. “It’s okay Liara. I didn’t say you couldn’t read up on me…If you have a question don’t hesitate to ask me.”

“You must think me such a fool.” Liara told in her still frazzled state.

“No Liara, I don’t think you’re a fool, so stop thinking that. Being thrown in with a bunch of humans and aliens when you’re used to working alone has to be difficult and you’re handling it wonderfully.” With one last squeeze of Liara’s shoulder, Athena took her leave, leaving Liara breathing in lungfuls of air and with her heart racing like it had never before.

She is a Goddess. Liara thought as she was mesmerized by the commander leaving her room.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who continues to read my dribble. Promise more Cerberus next chapter and an old acquaintance makes an appearance.
Who's Gonna Drive You Home Tonight?

Chapter Summary

A snippet of Athena’s life in the Munro Facility and as a member of the ‘Reds.’ Sorry for the delay, but it’s taking me longer and longer to write these chapters due to other obligations and work. I hope you guys enjoy this chapter is quite a bit longer than the others as it kind of got away from me.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Munro Facility 2164

Athena was standing in the middle of the dirty and dank lab room while this strange blue woman in pristinely kept yellowish body armor slowly paced around her and stared at her with a disturbingly smug smirk on her face. “Do you know who I am little one?” The blue woman in the yellow armor asked her with a menacing tone.

Athena shook her little head.

“I am Captain Wasea of the Eclipse Mercenary Company. Me and you are going to get very well acquainted.” She continued to circle Athena as if she were assessing a threat and then without warning she struck out with a biotic push that slammed little Athena into the wall with a loud thud.

Athena’s tears started to flow as she wailed loudly and tried to pick herself up from the cold concrete floor. She then felt a force push her into the floor. “What’s the matter little one? You don’t want to play with me?” Athena could hear the woman whom now she would consider a blood enemy taunt her as tears streamed down her face as she cried her eyes out.

“STOP IT!!! YOU’RE HURTING ME!!” Athena screamed with all of her little might. The pressure was so intense, she never felt such power and she began to really feel scared.

Wasea just laughed and applied a little more pressure with her considerable biotic power. The white lab coat wearing scientists outside in the viewing area were all taking notes and were impassive to the scene unfolding in front of them.

“Fight me you little shit!” Wasea continued to increase the pressure on her little target. She had already killed four of the little humans and it seemed that this would be her fifth. Or so she believed.

What happened next would surprise and shock the veteran merc.

“ARRRRRGGGGH HHHHHHHHHH!!!!! I…SAID…STOOOOOOOOPPPPPPPPP!!!” Athena not only stood to the amazement and frustration of the asari merc, but lashed out with an explosion of biotic energy that launched Wasea forcibly through the thick concrete wall on the far side of the lab. The biotic explosion went out in all directions shattering the thick one way observation glass of the viewing area and impaled two of the scientists with huge sword like shards of glass. The ceiling exploded upward destroying a vacant office and at the point where Athena let out the blast,
the concrete floor and wall had a wide crater, exposing the earth below and behind them.

Athena just stood there huffing and clenching her little hands into fists with all the rage of a little girl, her biotic field still crackling and filling the room. A few seconds later the apparent effort of her impressive biotic display appeared to take effect on her little body as she fell unconscious exactly where Wasea had pinned her before. Another second later security guards donned in black body armor came in and scooped Athena up and took her out of the lab.

A few minutes later Wasea slowly got back to her feet in the middle of the rubble created by one of the most impressive displays of power she had ever seen. It was eerily quiet in the room she was so forcefully removed from. She stumbled through the hole she made while favoring her left leg. She could feel the warmth of her own blood slowly dripping from her thigh and mouth. Wasea was disappointed to see that the little Goddess was gone. She surveyed the remains of the lab and couldn’t help but admire the utter destruction caused by such a little human girl. She continued into the remains of the viewing area and it was nothing but devastating carnage in there. Two of the scientists were impaled by huge shards of glass and it was obvious that they died instantly. The other three with their lab coats soaked in the red blood of themselves and their comrades lay there in shock. They were undoubtedly bleeding out as the puddles of blood were getting bigger and she had to struggle to keep her footing on the now slick floor.

*Five kills before even becoming a full adult...wow.* Wasea thought to herself and smiled. She would have to look out for this one in the future. Maybe recruit her as soon as she could. She slowly made her way out of the viewing room and continued down a long corridor to the main office of the facility.

She limped her way into the office and was greeted by the overseer of the facility sitting behind his impeccably kept oak desk. “She is the most powerful biotic I have ever seen. I don’t know how that’s possible, but if I hadn’t put my barrier up in time, I would have been a blood stain on the wall of your lab.”

The dark skinned human smiled. “Thank you Wasea. You were invaluable in this evaluation. Now we know that there is no way we can send her to Jump Zero. If she exploded like that up there, she could punch a hole in the hull of the station.”

“You humans are an interesting bunch...that little girl will either be your savior or your demise.” Wasea paused briefly almost as if she forgot what she came to the office for. “Now on the matter of my payment...” Wasea got right to the point. She was a mercenary after all.

“The credits have already been transferred to your personal account. My men will escort you to the shuttle off world.” Two of the large armored security guards seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Wasea smirked as she looked at them. “A pleasure doing business with you, don’t call me again to do anything with that little Goddess.” She turned with her head held high and limped out of the office.

Athena woke up in her small room hugging her little stuffed Mafalda doll. The bed was a lot more comfortable than she remembered. She looked around the small padded room and thought to herself that maybe she had a bad dream. That mean blue lady couldn’t have been real, but she felt pretty sore. Maybe she slept in an awkward position and that’s what was causing her soreness. She sat up on the bed and dangled her feet off to the side. She looked at herself and found that she had no bruises or any other injuries what so ever. Ever since she woke up that day with all of those cuts and stitches, she really didn’t get hurt anymore and she just felt stronger. She hopped off the bed and opened the door; they never locked her up anymore and let her walk around to the cafeteria so she could eat whenever she wanted. There were a lot of places she couldn’t go, but she
didn’t care as much and it felt good that she could talk to a few of the other children that were allowed to do the same as her.

When she entered the brightly lit cafeteria, she noticed that it was uncharacteristically quiet. Athena didn’t care because her favorite person was there behind the food station. Giselle, the big and happy food server gave her a huge smile as she approached.

“Athena! I hope you’re hungry, we’ve got el desayuno Ingles today.” Giselle was so happy to see her it made Athena so warm inside to know that someone smiled because of her. It actually put a smile on her own face.

Her favorite, a lot of eggs with bacon and sausage, she would end up eating twice as much as an average adult would. She sat by herself and wondered where all of the other kids she knew were. She shrugged her shoulders to herself and finished off her third plate. After which she started to get up to leave and heard one of the adults call her over. There was no smile, there was no warmth for this one and Athena responded accordingly by staying stoic and just doing what she was told. She did not like the ‘white coats’ at all.

She slowly walked over to this stunningly beautiful Asian lady in the white coat who was inspecting her with her stare. “Athena, how do you feel today?”

“I feel fine.” Was the short answer and she would not give anymore.

“Do you remember what happened yesterday?” The woman continued to probe.

Athena began to think…the blue lady was real? The woman was looking at her with a questioning stare. “You’re talking about that mean blue lady who tried to hurt me?” The woman nodded at the question.

“I hurt her back.” Athena’s response was once again short and to the point, devoid of any emotion.

“Do you remember what happened afterward?” Athena watched the woman’s expression to see if there was any sort of emotion or concern and found that there was nothing but that same annoying curiosity all of the ‘white coats’ had.

“The last thing I remember is waking up just now.” Athena glared at the scientist whom for the first time in her short life exhibited something she would later come to know well, fear.

“Oh…Ok that’s all then. You can go.” The lady stuttered a little and Athena just took her stuffed Mafalda and left for the library which was the next room over.

The library was small and cramped, but Athena didn’t care because she loved to read. Most of the kids would go and watch T.V., but not her. She must have read every book in the library twice already. It didn’t matter if it was a book on engineering, scientific theory, history or even a love novel, if it had words, she would immerse herself in it. Her favorite book was actually one that Giselle had snuck to her during dinner one night. She had told her to keep it in the library on one of the bottom shelves so no one would notice it. Athena found a better place, as the book shelves were quite deep and she hid the book behind some of the smaller books. ‘Sun Tzu: The Art of War’ had been read by her at least five times since she got it. She remembered every line and word of it. She remembered Giselle would tell her that it would help her and teach her lessons that would be very important for her in life. When a scientist found it about a year later, they began to lock her in her room again.

It was already too late though, she had learned to make herself look weaker than she really was.
Athena was always cooperative and remained pleasant to the ‘white coats.’ So much so that in only a few months she was allowed to walk free again, but was barred from the library. She also learned to her dismay that Giselle had been replaced as the food server. Giselle was the only person she really liked and now they not only took her away, they took her passion for reading away as well. She needed to figure out a way out of this place and she would exercise the patience that the Legendary Chinese General had taught her.

‘Know thyself, know thy enemy, a thousand battles, a thousand victories.’ (Sun Tzu) She thought of the important lesson that quote taught her and for the first time she began to consider everyone and everything in the facility an enemy or an obstacle. During that year she memorized every door, every scientist and which doors they had access to. She studied everyone’s movements like a hawk and noticed that at the end of the day most of the people who were there would go through a single door that she did not have access to. That interested her because she wouldn’t see those people anywhere in her allowed wandering area until the next morning. That doorway leads out or at least to an exit. She thought to herself.

Every day she was allowed outside for a couple of hours in a heavily guarded enclosure with four extremely tall and solid concrete walls surrounding the compound. She measured her steps from one end to another, by the end of the year she had a full floor plan of the areas she had been allowed to go to. The lab was the weak spot in her opinion. She remembered a couple of days after her encounter with the blue woman where she faked going unconscious after her most powerful display yet, she was escorted to the lab to see the damage she had caused. She noticed the large crater which seemed inconsequential at the time, but now as she thought back she knew the foundation of the building ended at that room and that if she were to go to that room above it she could probably break out through the outer wall of that same room.

She continued to train her biotic ability so much so that she could now lift objects as small as a glass of water without spilling it. She also made sure that her most powerful blast was not nearly as powerful as the one she let out with the blue woman. It infuriated the ‘white coats’, but she would not push any further. She learned to use her biotics to form a barrier around herself, she refined it constantly but also kept it weaker so as to not arouse suspicion of her true power.

The scientists would pit her against other biotics and she would always win. These other children and some adults as well would go into a murderous rage when they fought her. She didn’t think that she killed them, but she knew deep inside that she probably did severely injure many of them. Some of them were injured so badly that she never saw them again. Athena had good control of her power, but not that good and it made her all the more determined to escape.

May 7th, 2165, Athena looked at the date on the digital clock mounted on the foundation wall in the lab. She could hear the ‘white coats’ harping on her that she wasn’t trying hard enough and that she would not eat tonight if she did not try again. Athena thought to herself, it was time.

‘He who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not, will be victorious.’ (Sun Tzu) She let out a semi powerful biotic explosion which knocked all of the ‘white coats’ in the room to the floor. Knocking some of them unconscious and leaving the rest disoriented. She then let out a hugely powerful push into the ceiling, shattering it and revealing the empty office upstairs. She could hear the commotion outside of the lab as two of the intimidating security guards rushed into the room to subdue her. She quickly leaped up into the office as the two guards began to fire their tranquilizer darts. The darts were harmlessly caught by her biotic barrier as she made her way to of all things an open window. She quickly leaped out into the streets of Munro, Argentina. She quickly ran through the crowds that didn’t even notice her in her undergarments, there were many destitute children in Munro and in Argentina in general and she did not stick out one bit. She ran and ran and ran, she ended up finding herself in an alleyway at the back of a restaurant where she
just put her back against the hard brick and curled her legs to her chest. She wrapped her arms around herself and began to sob into her legs. She heard a metal door creak open to her right and just about jumped twenty feet into the air.

She stared into the eyes of the terrified young man with his black plastic bag of garbage. He paused for a second and stared at her in a cautiously curious way. She met his gaze with the blood shot and teary eyes she had acquired with the occasional sob here and there. She turned to start running again.

“No wait Chiquita!” The tanned man with the honey eyes and the strange poufy black hair yelled. It stopped her and she turned to glare at him which took the man aback a bit. “Are you hungry?”

The question kind of shocked her. She nodded slowly, but not trusting this person one bit. Giselle was the only one she ever trusted and they took her away.

“Wait here. Don’t run okay.” The man went back inside and a minute later came back out with a plate of milanesas con pure. Her absolute favorite dish in the whole world. “Here, take it. It’s okay.” He extended to her slowly as he kneeled down to her level.

She warily approached him, never breaking eye contact with the man until she finally reached the plate and immediately backed away to scarf the food down. As the food disappeared she never stopped hawking the man. Maybe it was the way he was dressed. It appeared to her that this is the way all food servers dressed. She noticed that he was younger than most of the ‘white coats’ and he also sported a pair of simple stud earrings which none of the ‘white coats’ ever wore. He was dressed in a white apron much like the one Giselle wore, his face wore an expression of concern she had not seen in a long time.

“What’s your name chiquita?” His mannerisms remained nonthreatening and it seemed that maybe he truly was concerned for her. Her tears hadn’t dried yet as she finished the delicious plate of food and answered him with a soft and frightened little voice.

“Athena…”

“Alejandro! What the fuck are you doing!” A large and overly obese man had stormed out of the door with an expression filled with anger and malice. “That’s coming out of your pay. Now get back inside and do your job.” He pointed at Athena and it was obvious that this large man held some power over the younger one. “You get out of here!” He made a waving motion with his arm as he approached her menacingly.

Athena’s biotics flared to life as she pushed the obese man back into the metal door with a loud thud. She turned around and started running again. It seemed that running was all she did now.

“Wait chiquita!” She heard the younger man’s voice and slowed down to see what he wanted. She turned around to see him take off his apron and throw it in the obese man’s face. “Go fuck yourself! I quit you heartless piece of shit!” Alejandro looked so angry and defiant as he seemed to almost want to strike the larger man.

The large man peeled himself off the floor in front of the newly dented door and got his wits about him. “I’m calling the police you little shit.”

Alejandro laughed as he got in the larger man’s face. “And tell them what, that this little girl just beat the shit out of a full grown fat ass like you?” He turned to look at Athena and gave her a big smile and a wink. He started to walk away from the larger man who had gotten up with an expression of supreme frustration and reentered the restaurant with a massive slam of the door.

Athena didn’t feel that this Alejandro was a threat just yet so she let him get closer as she nodded her head once.

“That was pretty cool what you just did. Where did you learn to do that?” He was now right in front of her. She noticed that he smelled heavenly, like the food in the restaurant. He was quite tall and his posture was not one of someone getting ready to assault her.

“I learned that in…” Don’t trust him, he hasn’t earned it. “I don’t remember.” She answered innocently as she rubbed her eyes dry.

“Where are your parents?” He kneeled down in front of her again with a look of concern.

She dropped her head and responded quietly. “I…I don’t have any.” She looked back up and saw that he was still there.

He stood back up and pointed to her as he pulled something out of his pocket. “Don’t run okay? Promise me you won’t run.”

“Okay.” She said softly as she watched him take out some type of tool that looked like long wire with a hook on the end attached to some type of electronic interface device.

She continued to watch him as he slowly approached what looked like a sky car. Now she was fascinated and super curious at what he was doing. He inserted the wire into the electronic lock and began to type on the interface in his hand. To her surprise the door of the sky car opened and he got in and shuffled over to the driver’s seat. Again, he inserted the wire into the ignition interface and began use that little piece of electronic and in her utter amazement saw the sky car begin to float. Athena’s mouth was agape as the handsome young man turned to look at her.

“I’ll give you a ride to wherever you want to go.” He chuckled when he saw the expression on her face.

Athena composed herself and changed her expression to one of determined defiance. “If you try anything I will hurt you.” It wasn’t an idle threat and Alejandro knew it.

She hopped in enthusiastically he closed the door. The sky car took off and merged into the traffic pattern above the city. Athena had never seen anything like it. It was so beautiful and overwhelming at the same time. It looked like an intense cluster of stars littering the landscape.

“So that’s the name of the city.” It was an Aha moment for her. For all of the time she spent there, no one ever told her the name of the town they were in. She had asked so many times, but no one ever told her. It was as if it were some kind of big secret among the ‘white coats,’ even Giselle
never told her. The more she thought about it, the more she wanted to get away. That town had a place she never wanted to go back to and she would fight to the death before letting anyone ever take her back.

“You didn’t know?” He shrugged, chalking it up to her being homeless. The sky car swerved sharply and descended at a disturbing speed causing her stomach to flutter with a strange feeling.

“This is where I get off. My hangout is around the corner if you want a place to stay.”

Alejandro opened his door and jumped out of the car with an urgent step. “Come on. You can’t stay in the car. The police will be looking for it and you don’t want to be in it when they find it.”

She also jumped out of the car and decided to follow him to his hangout. Athena didn’t trust him, but she admitted to herself that he did help her and fed her. That was more than anyone else did for her out here. They walked quickly around the block of what looked like a bunch of apartment buildings and finally made it to the door of his so called hangout. It was a large wooden door to the front of a three floor apartment complex. “Come on I’ll introduce you to my friends. We call ourselves the ‘Reds.’”

“The Reds?” Athena looked puzzled and couldn’t understand why anyone would call themselves a color.

“We’re a group of friends with similar interests. Come on, I promise you, nothing is going to happen and maybe you’ll like it here. Let’s start by me formally introducing myself. My name is Alejandro Suarez, leader of the 10th Street Reds and you are?” Ale bowed with a flair and then stood up with that handsome smile he had.

Athena let out a giggle and caught herself quickly becoming serious again. “Athena from Munro.”

Ale saw and heard the giggle and smiled a big grin. “Okay Athena from Munro, will you let me introduce you to my friends?”

Athena nodded and followed him into the apartment building.

May 25th, 2165, Avenida Presidente Figueroa Alcorta, Buenos Aires Argentina

It was only a couple of weeks since she escaped and now she was on her initiation job for joining the ‘Reds.’ They had allowed her to stay with them out of a sense of pity. Athena didn’t know why they pitied her and not the hundreds of homeless kids she saw in the street, but they weren’t her problem. She needed to impress Ale to become a full-fledged member of the ‘Reds.’

It was Saturday and the Monumental Stadium was packed to the gills with people watching the River Plate Soccer Team play. The constant and thunderous noise coming from inside the stadium was deafening even outside where she was. This actually made her job that much easier. No one would suspect a little girls dressed in the in the colors of the home team would possibly be up to no good. Red, White and Black were the colors of the River Plate Club and coincidently they were also the colors of the ‘10th street Reds.’

She walked down the avenue searching for a particular type of Sky Car. She didn’t want to get some jalopy even thought that was okay too according to Ale. No, she would get the best sky car she could find. After going up and down the block multiple times she started to feel frustrated because there wasn’t a single car that she liked. She decided to turn down a side street and there underneath a streetlight she saw something worthy of her savior and protector. She stared at the
2166 Honda Civic XSE with dual antigravity boosters and her mouth began to salivate. If she could bring that car back to the shop, she would be respected and treated as an equal among the rest of the ‘Reds.’

Ale had taught her how to use the little jimmy tool and she memorized every code for every car. The problem with the new cars was that their codes were not programmed into the tool so she would have to do it manually. Sometimes the manufacturers got lazy and didn’t change the override code from the previous year’s models. Athena was hoping that this was the case for the Civic in front of her. She had memorized every single override code for every single sky car made and now she was about to try the 2165 code on the 2166 car. She attached the device to the electronic lock and started to type in the hexadecimal code, once finished the door opened. She was overjoyed that had actually worked. That is until the alarm went off and nearly made her jump through the roof of the car. “Shit!” She exclaimed as she involuntarily let out a biotic charge which shut everything down. The alarm was now quiet and everything in the car turned off.

Damn it, I ruined this car. She looked around to make sure no one was watching and when she was sure, she sat up in the driver’s seat and let out a sigh. She started to bang her head on the dashboard in frustration, when all the systems turned back on. She stopped and examined the center console display and it read ‘0000000000.’ A full reset? HOLY SHIT! A FULL RESET!!! Athena let out a squeal that would have made Wilbur proud as she pressed the power button and the car’s antigravity drive started to hum. She entered the new code for the car abcdef0123 and it was accepted.

She took off like a bat out of hell with a feeling of sheer joy at her newfound freedom and the fact that flying was now her favorite thing in the whole world. She made a beeline for the hideout and quickly hid the car in the gang’s garage where they were all waiting for her with mouths and eyes opened wide in disbelief. Athena just stole the most popular car in the world, not only that it was the latest model. She stepped out of the car like a conquering hero. “Is this good enough?” She said smugly.

Ale tried not to smile, but it was impossible. Athena from Munro was a little gem and he would make sure that she was taken care of. He had read about biotics, but because of their rarity he’d never thought that he would actually meet one let alone have one in his gang. “Nice job Chiquita, here you earned it.” This little one, well not so little because she was very tall for what he assumed was a young teenager. She was at least 1.7 meters tall already which meant she was going to be one tall ass chick.

Alejandro tossed her a red and black jacket that was too big for her. She frowned at him and he laughed. “You’ll grow into it. Shit you’re what twelve, thirteen years old?” She smiled at Ale but didn’t answer. He didn’t need to know and she wasn’t going to tell him until she felt comfortable. “Welcome home chiquita. Welcome to the ‘Reds.”

April 11th 2168

Athena was underneath her pet project cursing everything and everyone like a drunken sailor. “Fuck! I’m never going to finish this fucking thing!” She felt so at home now with what she considered her family. She was by far the best car thief in the crew and pulled more than her weight in money and respect. So much so that most of the extra money she had gone to rebuilding a Pearl Black 2013 Shelby GT 500 that she became obsessed with. She wiped the sweat and grease off of her face, actually smearing most of it and started to hear your sides laughter in the garage. Athena smiled as she knew that was her little blonde friend Marianna.
She slid back out from under the car and saw that Mari was sprawled on the couch not three feet from where she was working. Mari was in tears laughing and when she turned to look at Athena she doubled over and the laughter became even more intense. “Oh…my…God…” Mari had to catch her breath, but couldn’t stop laughing. “This is the best show here…”

Athena smiled at her very well put together friend who looked like she was getting ready to go out. Mari looked stunning with her skin tight red dress and red pumps, well except for the mascara that had run all over the place. Athena threw her dirty and greasy rag at her. “What’s so funny?”

Mari dodged the rag and sat up again while pulling out a mirror from her black leather purse to fix her now disastrous make up job. “I just sat here for a full five minutes and listened to you curse out everything in the universe from under the car. I mean…to quote you, fuck you screw! You’re not good enough for my car! Get the fuck out of here! Followed by a small screw flying out from under the car…that’s priceless, mamita you are the best.” Mari looked at her towering friend and couldn’t believe she had just turned fourteen. She must be at least 1.85 meters tall. “Oh that reminds me, we’re all taking you out tonight so get your ass cleaned up and dressed to impress.”

“I forgot about my birthday…I wish I knew who my parents were, why they abandoned me and left me in that place.” Athena walked over to the tool rack and hung up her tools neatly as she turned to Mari and asked. “Do you think we would be different people if our parents didn’t abandon us?”

“I stopped asking that question and told myself that I would never do that to anyone. To me they are dead and I don’t ever want to see them.” Mari was pretty cold and angry as she said it and never stopped fixing her make up. “You guys are my family and I would never do that to you or anyone here.”

Mari stood up in her heels and she still couldn’t look Athena in the eyes. “Mari…I just wish I knew why?” She asked as she washed her hands at the slop sink and it looked like she was washing tears from her face as well.

“Mamita please don’t make me regret coming in here…oh fuck it.” Mari tried to lighten the mood but in the end she got up and quickly closed the distance with her giant friend. She pulled Athena into a fierce embrace now remembering that she was only a fourteen year old girl who had seen too much of the ugly in the world. Athena for her part returned the embrace as her tears flowed onto Mari’s dress, not to mention the grease on her coveralls. Mari didn’t care, this was her best friend and to hell with the fucking dress. “Mamita it’s okay. If you’re parents had kept you…I would’ve never met you and imagine how sad I would be without my best friend.”

“You always know what to say Mari.” Athena was wiping her eyes and smiling at her little firecracker of a friend. Mari was sixteen and became a ‘Red’ a year before her. They were the only girls in the gang and they became extremely close friends. They talked about everything and she confided to Mari about Munro, it felt good to talk about it with her. It was as if a heavy weight was lifted from her spirit when she told her of the horrors she went through there. They also talked about the boys in the gang and how Santos was an absolute specimen of godhood here on Earth. They giggled and blushed like the little girls they were as they speculated what they wanted to do with him.

For all their talk and wants they knew that all of the boys in the gang were off limits. Ale didn’t want any kind of relationship getting in the way of business so no relationships other than friendship between gang members. Ale had kicked several of the boys out of the gang when he found out they had made advances on Mari and Athena, he wouldn’t tolerate it.

“Come on Mamita, you’re gonna have to help me pick a new outfit.” Mari pulled away and started walking back to the main hall. Athena felt so bad that she had ruined such a beautiful dress. They
both walked back to their room and quickly changed into their outfits. 

Athena liked leather and her shiny black leather dress hugged her body in all the right ways. Coupled with her black pumps she projected the image of someone who could pass for a woman in her mid-twenties and not in her early teens. A little smokey eye and lips, coupled with her wild jet black hair and she was ready to go. “Mamita you are going to slay them looking like that!” Mari was always amazed at how beautiful Athena was. It was good because she intimidated a lot of men with her height and beauty. It made Mari’s and the rest of the gang’s job of protecting her a little easier.

Mari found a white mini dress and clogs and had to switch over from her now ruined red dress. “I swear I’ll get you another one Mari.” Athena sounded a little ashamed that she ruined the dress, but it didn’t matter as Mari looked just as glamorous in the white as she did in the red dress. 

“You girls ready yet?” Ale sounded so frustrated that they still hadn’t left, but when he saw them his mouth dropped. “Oh my…Mari, Athena don’t you think you girls are a little young to go out looking like that?”

Mari and Athena looked at each other and giggled, which pretty much gave Ale the answer he wasn’t looking for. “Ugh! This is going to be a long night. No drinking other than water for you two.” He ordered and they both nodded in unison. “You two are going to get us kicked out for fighting looking like that.” He grinned that happy smile he had whenever he thought of his two bad ass girls who would steal from the Pope if he asked them to.

Buenos Aires, Club Bahrain, 0020 hours

The line was around the corner as they waited to get inside the dance club. Mari and Athena were a little nervous that they might not be able to get in, but Finch’s ID’s were always top notch and he seemed to have all the confidence in the world. “I don’t even think that they’ll check your ID’s.” He joked. “I mean DAMN! Look at you two.”

Athena smiled and then something in the distance caught her eye. She watched as what looked to her like an Alliance Kodiak Shuttle was making an approach to land about two blocks away. Athena always wanted to see one up close and she started to get excited. “Save my spot!” Without warning she took off in an impressive display of running in high heels.

“WAIT! Where are you going!” Mari yelled.

“I’ll be right back don’t worry.” She reassured them as she ran as fast as she could; it was actually an incredible sight considering the heels she was wearing.

She made to the block at the same time the shuttle was landing. It was a glorious machine! Inertial Dampers, faster than light capable…oh did she so want to fly it.

She watched as it touched down and the side hatch flipped open and the two pilots exited quickly and shut the door promptly. They made their way to the front of the shuttle and began to talk into their omni tools. What are they doing?

“We need a containment unit here pronto.” She heard one of them say and then they seem to relax and start talking to one another. So it couldn’t be that serious.
“Mari is going to kill me.” She whispered to herself as she snuck up to the rear of the shuttle unseen by the two pilots. She quickly pulled open the hatch with her biotics and ran inside slamming the hatch behind her.

She could hear the two pilots knocking on the hatch desperately, but she couldn’t hear what they were saying. She looked over the controls and to her delight they were exactly like the simulator game that she had been playing for a long time. She powered up the shuttle and noticed that the two pilots backed away as she started to take off. She engaged the forward thrusters and the extreme acceleration was as awesome as she thought it would be. She jumped when she heard the sonic boom. “FUCK YEAH!!!” She yelled to herself.

An alarm had kept sounding throughout the entire thing and she noticed that the power reserves were dropping steadily. Athena made the prudent choice and decided to land…”Shit! Sometimes I really need to think things through.” The power levels started to drop at an accelerated level and she would soon be on the ground whether she liked it or not.

She searched and searched and then she saw the park next to ‘River Plate Stadium.’ At this hour it should be pretty empty because it’s actually pretty dangerous at night. She quickly steered the shuttle toward the stadium and when it came into sight, she lined up the park. She was about thirty feet in the air when the power went out and the shuttle came to a crashing halt in the large open field of grass in the park. The entire cabin went black. “Shit, I better get out of here.”

Why do I always talk to myself? She thought.

The hatch would not open so she gave it a biotic shove and it opened more violently than she intended as it was ripped from its hinges. She grabbed her heels and took off running into the darkness of the park. Her I-Tool ten was lighting up with calls from Mari, Ale and the rest of the gangs. She decided to call Mari back.

“Where the hell are you! We’re out here looking all over the place for you! What the fuck mamita?” Marianna sounded really angry, but she also sounded relieved, she could hear Ale in the background cursing her out.

“Damn it Athena what the hell? You want to kill us all while we’re young? Where the hell are you!” Ale was pissed, but he also had the sound of relief in his voice.

Athena was so excited that she started to blather over her I-Tool. “I went for a joyride! Oh man it was awesome! AWESOME! CAPITAL A.W.E.S.O.M.E…”

Mari came back on. “Mamita where are you? Please we’re really worried.”

Athena was still beaming at what she just did and almost didn’t hear. “I’m fine, are you guys still near the club?”

“We’re not on line anymore…” Mari started to explain, but Athena cut her off.

“Get back on line. I’ll meet you guys there in five minutes. This is the best birthday ever!” Mari smiled at how excited Athena was. She started to wonder what the hell happened.

They all went back to Club Bahrain and it was only twenty five minutes after Athena had actually left the line. They were all anxiously waiting for her when an Air Taxi pulled up to the front of the line.

Athena stepped out of the Air Taxi looking as hot as ever…she looked like a movie star with her shades on as she leaned toward the driver and paid him. “Keep the change.” She happily told
him. She looked around for them and suddenly she was approached by one of the door security men.

They couldn’t tell what she was saying to the man, but he was smiling from ear to ear and when she spotted them, she waved them all over. “She’s something else. She got us in…I love her.” Mari smirked as she approached Athena and when she got close enough she pinched her hard in the arm. It was like trying to pinch a concrete wall, damn she was hard. Nonetheless it got Athena’s attention.

“Ow! What was that for?” Athena was so happy at this point it didn’t matter that she really didn’t feel the pinch.

“That’s for giving us all a heart attack!” Ale interrupted Mari as they walked into the club and the music was just pounding into their souls.

“I took an Alliance Kodiak Shuttle for a Joyride.” She threw it out there like it was nothing special and waited for the responses.

Mari smirked. “You mean like that one on the monitor?”

They all turned in unison to see the giant monitor in the center of the floor showing a tall and beautiful thief dressed in a black leather dress, still wearing her heels open the hatch and take the shuttle to the utter disbelief of the two pilots screaming for her to stop. It was a good thing that her face was hidden by the angle of the camera.

‘The Reds’ to the man were watching with their mouths open in shocked disbelief. Ale turned around to her. “Mamita that was really stupid what you did. The military is not an organization to fuck with. They’re going to come after you when they find out who you are.” Ale was very distraught and this caused Athena to rethink her actions. “You’re going to have to lay low until this whole thing blows over. No more of your craziness for a while and you’re going to have to change your hair or something to throw them off of you.”

“I’m sorry Ale…it…was…AWESOME!!!!” Athena squealed as she grabbed Mari and picked her up like a little doll and hugged her fiercely.

“No! It was STUPID!” Ale screamed at her for the first time ever. “You’ve brought way too much attention to yourself and in turn the rest of us. It was absolutely the stupidest thing you’ve ever done.” Ale was so angry with her and now she understood why. As she watched the video on the screen she totally understood why. There was no mistaking that her actions would have incurred unwanted attention from the authorities. This was something that she knew better and now she would have to watch herself as she looked around the room with some people pointing at her and then looking at the video.

“I think it’s time for me to bail.” Athena said nervously as she put her sunglasses back on.

“We’ll meet you back at home.” Mari told her. “It probably wouldn’t be smart for all of us to leave together.”

As Athena turned from her friends to leave, she looked toward the entrance of the club and noticed two police officers talking to the bouncer near the entrance. “Ah shit.” She looked around to see if there was another way out and saw the emergency exit. Well, I might as well end the night with a bang. Just before she turned toward the emergency exit, her eyes met one of the police officers who then tapped his partner on the shoulder and pointed to her.
Here we go. She took off like the road runner trying to get away from the coyote, it was a lightning move and she was out of the door in a mere second. Once outside she hopped around removing her heels and took off in the direction of the hideout. The officers had no idea that she could move so quickly and not only that she learned that if she stuck to the roof tops she could avoid the city cameras as well. The first escape ladder that she found she leaped up and climbed up. She was on the roof in seconds with the sounds of sirens coming from all directions.

There was a problem with this building. It was the fucking shortest one and if she was going to get to the next one, she would have to make an Olympic level long jump to the next building’s fire escape ladder. She hesitated a little, but the increasing volume of the sirens prompted her to get moving and she took a running leap reminiscent of Spider Man and made the fire escape ladder with ease. She now had a few buildings in a row she safely make the jump to, which she did and she climbed down the last one’s fire escape. After about a twenty minute run, she made it back to the hideout through the back alleys and more roof tops. There would be no way that they would have been able to follow her and she avoided all of the cameras from the club all the way to the hideout.

She entered their apartment and sat on the living room couch, she was sweating a little and she was curious as to what was going on. She turned on the monitor and there it was. The news had put out a full blown manhunt for her, thank goodness that they did not get a shot of her face. They kept looping the part where she left the two pilots standing there with both clueless and shocked expressions. I still think it was awesome! She couldn’t help but smile. Totally worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Will probably sprinkle a few more of these pre-mass effect chapters as I go, it’s just so much fun to tell Athena’s story that I can’t help myself.
The Good Major

Chapter Summary

Kaiden and Athena share some info about each other. Major Kyle situation is handled.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Good Major

Athena sat in the darkness of her room at her terminal reading everything she could regarding her former CO. She rubbed her temples in tired contemplation. The Normandy was on its way to Presrop as a favor to Admiral Hackett. Athena couldn’t help but think that Major Kyle was a phony. She was there when he kept the Makos for his own protection and if not for the magnificent performance of the companies under her command, they would have been massacred. Athena occasionally thought of calling Hackett to cancel the mission, but there was no way she would. Not only did she not want to disappoint Hackett, she wanted Kyle to pay for the murder of those two innocent negotiators. How could he be such a scumbag?

She continued to read the underlying cause of this problem. She already knew from personal experience that biotics were much maligned and feared in the civilian world. She thought about how Ale and others would sometimes call her a freak. Even though they were being playful about it, sometimes she thought that it was true. None of them could ever understand what it was like to have such power, maybe living amongst others with similar abilities was really the way to go.

As she continued to research Athena discovered that the L2 implant which she never received was causing many physical and mental problems with their recipients. They were such a problem that many of the people with the L2 implant were part of a movement demanding reparations and recognition of their faulty implants and the terrible price they were paying. L2 implant? Where have I recently heard of it...of course Kaiden! Athena quickly realized that she had someone whom she could talk to about the L2’s plight. She turned off her terminal and was in complete darkness while she pondered the situation. She started to think about Kaiden and how well he fit in to the crew. He didn’t seem to have any issues, but if he was anything like many Marines, he hid his pain from everyone.

That coward will do anything to save his own ass. She thought of the Makos and all of the men under her command that died because the good Major wouldn’t release them as he was supposed to.

Damn it Athena! You can’t make this personal; he’ll sacrifice all of those people just to protect his own ass. I have to figure out how to separate him from them without fighting. This was going to be a shit show she thought in her heart. She stood up from her terminal and walked over to the foot of her bed. She sat down and as she lay back into her bed to try and get a couple of hours of sleep before her shift started. As she started to relax, she cleared her thoughts and slowly fell into unconsciousness.
She awoke three hours later for her duty shift. She quickly put on her uniform, tied her hair up into a bun and headed out to relieve Lt. Pressly. As she finished putting the last pin into her hair she addressed Pressly who was at his navigation station. “You’re good LT, I got her.”

“Presrop sure is on the ass end of the galaxy.” Pressly noted to Athena’s obvious amusement. “She’s all yours Commander.”

Athena stared at the galactic map and sighed as she leaned forward with her hands on the bannister. She started to walk down the stairs of the command center when she noticed that Kaiden was approaching her from the helm.

“Kaiden, Can I talk to you for a moment?” She started to walk in step with him.

“Of course Commander what is it?” Kaiden stopped and turned to address her.

“Let’s go eat, it’s actually pertinent to our mission and I want to make sure that I cover all of our bases before we go planet side.” She motioned for him to continue down the stairs into the cafeteria. As she poured herself a large cup of coffee, Kaiden was making himself some kind of chocolate and coffee concoction. “On an unrelated note, when did Joker relieve you?”

Kaiden smiled as they both started to pile on the food on their respective plates. “About an hour ago, why?” They were both walking back to an empty table when they heard someone comment on the mountains of food they both had. “He showed up early because he said he couldn’t sleep.”

“I didn’t know we had a couple of Elcor on the ship. Damn Commander, is there anything left in the kitchen for the rest of us?” Garrus’ started in on both of them as he came strutting out of the weaponry room.

“Oh just shut it Garrus.” There was no malice in her response; on the contrary, her smile betrayed her affection for the big Turian. “Why don’t you go back in there and recalibrate those guns again.”

“I’ll have you know that the guns are in optimum working condition thanks to the most handsome being on the Normandy.” Garrus retorted with faux offense taken. “Plus Joker asked me to get something from the kitchen which until you two emptied it, had plenty of food for everyone.” Garrus continued to the food line and helped himself to his dextro food and filled a second tray with eggs and bacon for Jeff. “I’ll see you later Commander, gotta make sure Joker is fed before those bottomless pits you and Kaiden call a stomach empty out the food stores.”

Athena couldn’t keep the smile off of her face as she watched Garrus walk toward the stairs and out of sight. She then turned back to Kaiden who had been busily gorging on the food in front of him.

“Wow, do I really look like that when I eat?”

“Kaiden? I want to ask you something and I’m pretty sure you’re dying to ask me something.” This got his attention as he tried to swallow the food he had in his mouth.

“Biotics?” Kaiden quickly responded and Athena nodded with a curious expression and a simultaneous feeling of dread. “Shoot Commander, you can ask me anything and I’ll try to answer
“I never knew about Jump Zero while I was in Munro. Did you hear of the Munro Facility?” She sounded cautious knowing that the subject of biotics was very personal and disturbing.

“There was another facility for Biotics? As in BAaT?” Kaiden wasn’t surprised. Of course she would have been trained, but by whom?

Athena nodded her head. “I saw that acronym on a lot of paperwork while I was there. I also saw the name Conatix there. Are they related?”

“They’re one and the same basically. Conatix ran the Biotic Acclimation and Temperance program. They did do a lot of outsourcing though. For us they used Turian mercs as instructors who were more like jailors than teachers. How about you?” Kaiden responded as he sat back in his chair looking like he was taking a break from shoveling food into his gullet.

“They brought in a lot of people and I always had a one on one. I never trained with anyone other than the instructor. They were all human except for my last one who was an Asari merc named Wasea. I don’t know how they knew what to teach me because the only person other than me with biotics was that Merc I think I killed.” She looked like she was reliving the moments in her mind as she talked and explained her situation.

“I escaped there after five years there. I was on the streets for the next seven and a half. I was always curious as to why they never put an implant in me like they did to everyone else.” She talked matter of factly about it all, but he could sense that she was not comfortable.

“You don’t have an implant? How’s that possible? How do you control your biotics?” Kaiden was now truly shocked. This woman had a way of surprising him to his core.

“The doctors and scientists at Camp Lejeune told me that I had a benign growth at the base of my brain that seemed to act as a natural implant. It’s almost as if it was an organ that helps me channel and control my power.” Kaiden couldn’t believe what he was hearing and she could see it in his face.

“Kaiden, I hurt a lot of people at that facility and they did things…to…me.” Her eyes welled up when she turned to meet his gaze. “I know they experimented on me and…” She paused as she thought of the absolute shit they put her through there. “They made me fight the other kids and adults that were there. I tried to hold back, but I think I killed some of them. It was like they turned into animals and lashed out at me with everything they had. They were probably drugged with some kind substance that made them crazy aggressive. I know now that a lot of the people there disappeared without a trace.” She couldn’t keep eye contact as she dropped her stare to the food in front of her. Kaiden was very empathic to her story.

“Believe me commander when I say that I understand.” He put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed.

She smiled knowing that he probably did to some extent. “Enough about me, what can you tell me about the L2 implants.”

“I can tell you that I’m one of the lucky ones. I only get excruciating headaches. Some people suffer debilitating pain, some go mad and some die from the complications caused by it.” Kaiden continued to explain while he shoveled another sausage into his mouth. “It’s not hard to see why some of them demand the Alliance make reparations because of their incompetence pertaining to the L2 implant.”
“Why do you think these biotics are going to Major Kyle?” She also started to eat her scrambled eggs with a vengeance.

“You know. We’re sort of mistrusted by everyone except the military. They probably think that being in that commune gives them the protection they don’t have anywhere else.” Athena looked at her ground commander with soft eyes as he explained to her everything she already knew. “They’re also with a group of people that understand each other intimately.”

“But why do they trust him? He’s not one of them and he most certainly didn’t have any sympathy toward me.” She looked and sounded frustrated. “His actions on Torfan caused a lot of unnecessary deaths and that motherfucker had the nerve to give me the nickname of the ‘Butcher.’ He’s a fraud.” Kaiden felt a little uncomfortable at the outright anger and contempt she felt for that man. “And now his fucking people murdered a couple of innocent negotiators…that bastard is going to pay.”

“You have to be careful how you handle this commander. If he has their loyalty we could end up with a blood bath down there.” Kaiden was trying to dial back Athena’s anger at the Major. “Maybe you could take me with you on the ground team. Two human biotics might be able to talk them down and maybe we can get the major to come quietly.”

Athena took a deep breath and huffed. “You’re right of course. I’m letting my personal distaste for the man get in the way of what I should do. When the time comes, me, you and Liara will go groundside. Can’t hurt to have three biotics there right?”

Kaiden nodded as a small piece of egg was stuck on his chin. Athena gently removed the piece and showed it to him. “Was that there the whole time?” He asked as he began to blush a little.

“No Lieutenant, if it was, I didn’t notice it until now.” Athena answered as she chuckled and quickly finished off her plate of food. “I should make my rounds. Go get some rest, I’m gonna need you at full strength tomorrow.”

“Aye, Aye ma’am.” Kaiden responded as he stood and started to make his way to his sleeping pod.

“Oh and Kaiden!” She barked and he turned his attention back to her. “We really do need to talk about this in more detail in the future, okay?”

“Absolutely commander, whenever you’d like to I’m ready to answer any and all questions about what I know.” The sincerity in his face and voice made her feel a warmth toward him that was not there before.

“Thank you Kaiden.” She started to walk back toward the stairs when she turned to watch Kaiden strip his shirt off to enter the sleeping pod. The sight was worth the pause at the stairs. Damn he’s hot!

*****************************************************************************

Presrop

They were standing outside the metal doors of the large and fortified commune compound. The compound was built into the ground and there was no doubt the structure contained an elaborate
system of tunnels and rooms underneath. The good Major refused to let them in. Kaiden pleaded with the man through the intercom and got nowhere. He tried to make them understand that he too was an L2 biotic and he empathized with them. Kaiden tried every trick in the book, even the one where he appealed to their sense of responsibility to other biotics that would be harmed because of them. Athena had had enough.

“Major! If you don’t agree to talk to us, we will come in and force the issue. The death of every single one of your ‘children’ is going to be on your hands. You know who this is. You know what I can do so you know not to test me!” Athena was furious at the game the Major was playing.

“Shepard?” Came the voice on the other end. It was uncertain now and full of fear. “The Alliance sent the ‘Butcher’?”

“Yes they did. I will kill everyone in there and show you the same mercy you showed those negotiators if you don’t talk to us.” It wasn’t an idle threat. Liara and Kaiden watched her and were taken aback at the dark side of Athena they rarely saw. She was angry that they killed the negotiators and was willing to condemn them all to her frightening fury if they didn’t parley.

“Okay, okay…please don’t hurt them. I’ll talk to you if you promise not to harm anyone.” The good major finally seemed to have come to his senses.

The metal door opened with a loud creaking sound like they would in some cheesy horror film. The three of them began to enter when their way was blocked by what looked like a group of ten of the Major’s so called children. On particularly large male walked right up to Athena and got in her face. The man was still about three inches shorter than her, but he exuded an air of angry confidence. “If you hurt the father, we will kill you.”

Athena’s temper was starting to rise at the threat when she looked the young man in his deep brown eyes, not backing an inch, if anything moving closer so that their heads almost touched. “Did you hear the fear in your father’s voice? He’s seen what I can do and we can cut to the chase right now if you want, I’ll have no issues killing every single one of you and then taking his carcass back to the Alliance.” Her eyes started to glow with that familiar biotic spark as the room started to crackle with her power. “Try me, you murdering piece of shit.”

“Commander stop!” Kaiden yelled to her with a desperation that she had not ever heard.

“Please Commander…let’s talk to the man first.” Liara also sounded and looked like frightened doe.

It didn’t matter as the group started to follow that large man’s lead and their powers started to flare. As Athena stared down the man, an almost maniacal grin appeared on her face. The man finally saw the gravity of the situation as he started to back away.

“NO STOP! PLEASE STOP! THEY ARE INNOCENT!” That was a voice she recognized as she turned her head to look in the direction of it. There was Major Kyle looking as desperate as ever, but at least this time he came to the aid of his people instead of sitting back and watching the carnage like he did on Torfan.

“I am Major Kyle. I know why you’ve come. We have no quarrel with you. Why can’t you people leave us alone?” He sighed and looked at Athena with a disgusted expression.

Athena was in no mood for a lecture by this cowardly loon and she needed only to know one thing. “Where are the other Alliance officers? The ones who came before me.”
An audible gulp could be heard from the Major and some of his followers. “They wanted to take me away from here. They wanted me to abandon this place, to turn my back on my family. They spoke blasphemy.” Major Kyle looked like he was spacing out and staring through her. It reminded her so much of how he was on Torfan. “I did what I could to make their end quick and painless. I had no other choice. It was necessary to protect my children. Only I can keep them safe.” Kyle looked directly at Athena and they both locked eyes.

Athena motioned for him to walk with her, away from his so called family. Kyle motioned for his followers to stay where they were and they did so. When they were out of obvious ear shot, Athena began to speak. “The Alliance sent me here to bring you in Major.” She saw him bristle at that comment. “Can’t you see that this has gotten out of hand? Don’t you understand that you’re endangering your followers?”

“You’re the one endangering them now!” He glared at her as he ranted. “They sent the ‘Butcher,’ the unstoppable demon named Shepard thinking I would fight you and in the end they could have this whole situation cleansed like you did for them on Torfan.” Athena was glaring back as the Major paced back and forth. “No, that is not going to happen here. I will go, but I need to explain to my family first.”

“By all means Major go and explain it to them.” The faux sincerity coming from Athena made the Major pause. “Tell them that by ordering them to kill those Alliance negotiators, you now have to pay the consequences and that they can also pay for your sin of cowardice, like 3rd Battalion had to on Torfan!” Athena did not break eye contact and there was a slight biotic glow in her eyes.

“No! This was my fault. My children are innocent, pure. Please, I never meant for this to happen. I’m…I’m sorry.” WOW! Did he just admit he’s in the wrong? Athena thought to herself and was at a loss of what to do. It looks like he’s going to give himself over to her.

Athena’s demeanor quickly changed from one of an angry demon of vengeance to one of understanding and kindness. “You’re doing the right thing Major. Come on.”

“Wait! If my children see you taking me away, they won’t understand. They will attack and you will be forced to kill them all.” There was absolute terror in his voice. “You’ve shown me the errors of my ways Commander. Now you must give me time to explain it to them. It is the only way they will understand. Please give me one hour! After that, I will meet the Alliance authorities at the gate of my compound and surrender without violence. Please, I give you my word.” Athena could see the sincere and desperate plea in his face. He wasn’t lying.

“I’m going to trust you Major, but I swear if you so much as sneeze at the Alliance men, I will come down here and wipe out your compound one ‘child’ at a time until I get to you.” Athena’s glare told him not to question her. “Are we clear Major?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, and thank you Commander.” Athena had already turned on her heels and was out the door. Kaiden and Liara looked as surprised as everyone else in the room. “Kaiden, Liara let’s go. The Major is going to have a talk with his children and I don’t wish to be here for it.”

The large group of the Major’s followers made way as the three left the compound. Athena turned to look at the one who challenged her when she came in and gave him a playful wink as she walked out of the front gate.

“He’s not coming with us?” Kaiden looked surprised as they climbed into the Mako.

“He has to talk to his people so that they don’t go violent and we end up having to wipe them out.” She strapped herself into the driver’s seat.
“I hope you know what you’re doing Commander.” Kaiden was not sure if this mission was a success or not.

“Me too Kaiden, me too.” She responded as she switched on the big motor and put the big vehicle into reverse spinning the tires in a cloud of dust. “Jeff you read?” She spoke into the comm mike and performed a full speed j-turn like it was nothing special.

“Go ahead.” Joker responded.

“Inform the Fifth Fleet to send a recovery team and instruct them to wait outside the gates of the compound. Major Kyle has promised to surrender to them within the hour.” Athena was so glad that the situation didn’t deteriorate and that her plan to use her reputation and history with the Major didn’t backfire.

“Will do Commander, anything else?” There was a hint of relief in Jeff’s voice as well and it put a smile on her face.

“Yeah, get us off this rock please.” She was still a little nervous, but she didn’t think that Major Kyle would go back on his word after explaining the consequences if he did.

Athena had the mako running full throttle to the extract site. “Commander that was incredible. It felt as if everyone there wanted to fight, but you talked them down. I believe that they did not want to test their mettle against your fearsome reputation.” Liara sounded like she was in awe and her breathing was a little ragged with excitement.

“The Good Major has seen me perform live; my reputation would not have been enough. The fact that he has seen what I can do is what allowed me to talk him down.” Athena talked nonchalantly as she jumped a huge crater and hit the thrusters at just the right time so as not to cause a jarring landing. Liara watched in utter amazement as the commander handled the powerful machine while simultaneously explaining how she talked Major Kyle down.

Kaiden looked at the radar screen and saw that the Normandy was making its approach. “Thirty seconds to rendezvous Commander.”

“Got it.” Athena responded as she watched the Normandy approach at an impossibly low altitude. Again she had butterflies in her stomach knowing Jeff was flying her and no doubt showing off for her. It brought a huge grin to her face. “Watch this Jeff.” She accelerated to full throttle as the Normandy came to a stop and began to lower the ramp for the Mako.

“Slow it down Commander.” Came the worried voice of Jeff over the air. Jeff’s heart started to race as he watched her incredibly fast approach.

“Nope.” She said as the ramp was only half way down when Athena activated all four thrusters and basically leaped into the Normandy’s hold. Immediately after activating the thrusters, Athena locked all six wheels with the brakes and came to a smoking and screeching halt in the cargo bay just about a foot prior to hitting Garrus who to his credit didn’t flinch, move or anything. He just had his arms crossed in front of him and shook his head. Athena turned to look at Liara and Kaiden with a ‘that was fun right?’ smile on her face.

Liara looked like she was about to throw up. She had turned a darker shade of blue and Athena was guessing Liara didn’t like it as she jumped out of the Mako and made a beeline for the Cargo Bay restroom.

Kaiden was smiling and chuckling. “That was an awesome display of you driving skills
Commander.” Kaiden was intrigued how the fearsome Commander Shepard could actually be nothing more than a little immature girl sometimes. “Damn.”

“The next time you want to give me a heart attack Commander, just shoot me instead okay?” Jeff came over the air.

“Oh shut it.” She responded playfully. “Or was that super low ground shaving approach standard Alliance Operating Procedure for frigates?”

“Touché Commander.” She could hear him struggle to hold in his laugh.

An hour later Athena was in the Comms room speaking to Admiral Hackett.

“Athena, your helmsman just forwarded your report on Major Kyle. We sent in a team just as you instructed and Kyle’s followers have disbanded and the Major surrendered to us without incident. We’ll make sure he gets the help he needs.” She could hear the concern and relief on his voice. “To be honest I thought this thing was going to end in a bloodbath. I don’t know how you did it, but you saved a lot of lives. Congratulations Athena, that was outstanding.”

“I guess you were right Steven. I was the right person for the job. He wouldn’t have surrendered to anyone else. He knew what I could do and didn’t want any part of it. Thank God it worked. If I had to…” Athena thought about the alternative ending in which she probably would have killed everyone in there. She sighed and looked at the holo image of the Admiral. “How’s my girl doing?”

“You know I can’t talk about that. I’ll send you updates on my secure channel.” Hackett could see the worry on Athena’s face. “Don’t worry she’s fine.” The words looked like they lifted Athena from that temporary funk she got into when she asked about Marianna.

“Thanks Steven, anything else?”

“Be careful with that Saren, he’s incredibly deadly.” Admiral Hackett wasn’t as close to Athena as Captain Anderson, but she considered him a close friend and she could hear the worry in his voice.

“Don’t worry about him, I’m going to mount his skull in my quarters when I kill him.” There it was. Athena meant it as a joke, but it was almost as if she sounded too serious for it to be one.

It didn’t matter because Hackett chuckled on the other end. “Take care Shepard, Hackett out.”

Chapter End Notes

I really, really wanted to off the Major, but I just couldn’t see Athena killing everyone else in the compound because of him.
The Raids

Chapter Summary

Athena takes care of Mass Effect 1 Cerberus ops. Pre-Virmire.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Binthu

The Normandy was in the process of silently making its way to the Citadel for a power meeting with Anderson, Udina and the Council as to what their next move would be in regards to Saren. Athena had other plans before she would continue on to the Citadel, she wanted to make a detour for the planet Binthu to follow up Admiral Kahoku’s lead on the mysterious organization called Cerberus. The Normandy was in full stealth mode as she entered orbit around the planet undetected. There were three bases on the planet separated by several miles of rough terrain and hostile environment and to top it all off they all looked like they had heavy turrets for defensive purposes.

Athena looked at the layout of the planet and came to the uncomfortable conclusion that they were going to have to hit all three bases at the same time in order to achieve a full element of surprise and to save as much information as possible. It was a good thing that she added another Kodiak to the ship or the attack would have been impossible. “I want everyone in the communications room immediately.” She barked her orders into the intercom.

As they all filed in, some of them wiping the crud out of their eyes from just waking up, they took a seat. When Athena was satisfied that everyone was there she began to address them. “I’m sure you’re all wondering what we’re doing orbiting this out of the way shithole in the galaxy. I want to tell all of you that this is one of Cerberus’ main bases of operation in the Galaxy. We’re going to take them out and try to save as much data as we can from their databases.” Athena looked as serious as anyone had ever seen her. “The three bases here, here and here will have to be taken simultaneously. We need to get in as quickly as possible.”

She pointed to the turrets rendered on the holographic map. “The bases are all defended by a duo of heavy turrets that will have to be taken out. Garrus, Wrex and Ashley you’re going to take the Mako and take out the most northern base. The mountain here should be able to give you some cover to take out the communication antenna and the turrets. You’ll also take fire team one of the Marine detachment to help you secure it.” Athena was extremely confident in the trio of warriors she picked for this site.

“Kaiden, you, Tali and Liara will take the base here in the valley. You’ll take fire team two from the Marine detachment. Kaiden, I had Garrus arm the Kodiaks with air to ground Shrike missiles to take out the communications antenna and those turrets.” She looked at Kaiden in the eye knowing he was thinking that maybe he got the short end of the stick when it came to an assault team, but it also made him proud to think that she would trust him enough to send him out with them.
“Are we expecting any resistance besides the turrets?” Kaiden asked.

“The sensors aren’t picking up much activity outside of the bases. No sensors, no guards or any other type of detection units have been seen. They might think that being out here in this remote place gives them a sense of security and hopefully it’s made them complacent. They probably haven’t even locked their doors.” Athena looked a little frightened at the lack of intelligence about the site.

She straightened up and continued her briefing. “I’ll take fire team three and hit the base on the mountainside. I’ll take the other Kodiak and take out the turrets before assaulting the base. We will coordinate our attacks to start at the same time so they don’t have time to communicate with each other.” She observed that everyone was listening intently. “Comm silence will also be a priority. No chatter until we launch the initial strikes.”

“Commander, are you sure this is a good idea? I thought Saren was our priority?” Liara mentioned with an uncertain and mousey voice looking almost ashamed at asking such a thing.

“I agree, but this group is a clear and present danger to the Alliance. If I can nullify them then the rest of the Alliance will be able to concentrate on more important things…and…this is very personal for me.” She started to feel the dread start to bubble under her cooler commander facade. “I don’t want force any of you to go through with this, but know that I’ll go down there by myself and take those bases one by one if I have to. If any of you don’t wish to participate then please speak now, I will not hold it against you.” She stopped pacing back and forth and stopped to face them all in front of the holo display.

Kaiden felt such a sense of pride and loyalty when he spoke out with as much conviction for what he basically consider a family member and fellow biotic. “I’m in Commander. No way I’m letting you do this on your own.”

Ashley, Wrex and Garrus spoke up at the same time. “We’re with you Commander.”

Tali also sounded like she could take on an army on her own. “We’ll teach those bosh’tet. They will regret the day they were born.”

Liara was at a loss, but could not be more amazed at the loyalty and enthusiasm of the rest of the crew for their commander. “I am definitely with you and I didn’t mean to offend anyone here.” She looked a little embarrassed at even suggesting this might not be the best course of action.

“Good then, all of our Omni tools are synchronized to GST, Jeff I want the Mako dropped in 10 minutes to give them time to approach their target. The Kodiaks launch in 15 minutes. First strike will commence at 0878 GST.” She looked around and had to hold back her emotions knowing that they all basically volunteered to risk their lives just for her. “Alright people, let’s take these bastards out.”

They all filed out of the briefing room and continued to the cargo bay where they quickly armored up and entered their vehicles.

She quickly boarded her Kodiak and immediately began the preflight check. The three man and one woman fire team quickly followed her in and strapped themselves into their seats. “We’re good to go ma’am.” Corporal Sakai informed her.

She closed the hatch just in time to hear the Mako drop. Not a peep on the radio as this was going to be a totally stealth strike. The dance had just begun. She plugged in the coordinates of her target and waited for the time to launch which came sooner than she expected. She watched as
Kaiden’s shuttle as it quickly made its way to its target and she peeled off with a flair to go to hers.

0878 She launched her first shrike and destroyed the communications antenna. The turrets activated, but she stayed low and used the terrain to hide her from them until she was ready to fire again. She popped out from below the cliff face where the base sat and launched her two shrikes into the turrets totally disintegrating them. “Shepard to strike force, outer defenses destroyed here. I want a status report.”

Jeff came over the air to confirm that all teams had neutralized the outer defenses of their targets. “They’re all good commander. Ashley’s team is already inside. Kaiden’s on the ground and breaching as well.”

Athena turned to her men with a calculating glare. “Let’s go.”

“You were right commander!” Ashley came over the air, the sounds of gunfire and combat in the background. “The door was wide open!”

Athena and her team flowed out of the Kodiak in a swift, flowing and practiced manner. As if they had done it thousands of times. Athena led the way as point and attempted to open the door which to her obvious disappointment was now locked. “No matter, Corporal, you and your men stand back.” The Marines stood behind their commander when she let out a biotic blast that slammed into the door with such force that it destroyed the very substantial hinges that held them in place. They entered swiftly as she raised her barrier to protect all of them and drew her two Jormangund Pinnacle pistols. As they moved through they noticed the frantic scrambling happening in front of them. The Cerberus operatives, scientists and personnel weren’t ready for them. It brought a huge grin to Athena’s face. The scientists responded in chaotic and unpredictable ways. Some just cowered in front of them and she made sure to give them a biotic shove into the walls to knock them out. If they were injured she didn’t care as she continued down the hall of the facility and into the main lab room. Her barrier held as she let loose with her pistols as well as her biotics. She could feel the rounds hit her barrier and it just started to make her more determined to finish this quickly. Athena was surprised by one of her privates as she let loose with her sniper rifle which was considerably louder than her pistols, taking out a pair of Cerberus soldiers at the far end of the room. She saw that most of the soldiers were running toward the weapons locker which Cpl. Sakai promptly destroyed with his grenade launcher. She smiled a little thinking that arming her detachment with the best equipment possible was a very good decision that was now paying off.

There were many scientists frantically typing at some of the terminals there when their skulls were split open by Athena’s team’s weapons fire. They continued past the main room which actually had a large force field enclosure with what looked like a Rachnii Warrior and a human body within it.

They encountered more scientists in the last two rooms and killed or stunned them all. Once they cleared all of the rooms they went back to the main room. “We’re all clear here commander.” Ashley sounded excited through what was now silence in the background.

“We’re good too commander.” He heard Liara huff into the comm. She was obviously exhausted.

“Commander, these seemed to be research facilities. There were Thorian Husks here in a force field enclosure.” Kaiden added.

“Kaiden, Tali, I want everything from their computers. I don’t care how insignificant it may be.” She felt an incredible sense of relief at how smooth the operation had gone.

“Secure your prisoners in the facilities with your fire teams to watch them.” She continued over
the comm. “Jeff, prep the systems for the data transfers.”

She turned to Cpl Sakai. “You ready to take that thing out?” She motioned to the Rachni warrior and thinking about what the Rachni Queen told her about the ones that were separated from her.

“Yes Ma’am.” Not even a hint of hesitation. God she loved her grunts.

She walked to the terminal that obviously controlled the force field and turned it off. It was over in seconds as the fire team and Athena opened up on the Rachni before it even had a chance to make a move to attack them. It dropped pretty much were it was standing.

“Sakai, round up all the live ones and take them outside.” She turned to address him and then began to walk toward the body a few feet from the giant Rachni. She put her hand over her mouth when she recognized the figure. She kneeled down next to Admiral Kahoku’s body and felt for a pulse. She knew there wouldn’t be any. She put her hand on his forehead and addressed him as if they were still alive. “I will make them pay Admiral. I promise you that.”

“Jeff inform Alliance HQ that we’ve found Admiral Kahoku and that he’s been murdered by Cerberus and that we have some prisoners that need to be picked up.” Athena was angry again, but by the looks of this research compound, she had dealt them a huge blow.

“Aye aye Commander.” Jeff sounded a little frightened. It’s not every day that you find a kidnapped and murdered admiral.

After they gathered everything from the research facilities and dragged all of the scientists into the entrance area inside the northernmost base, Athena began to address the scientists. She aligned all of the uninjured ones into three equal rows, approximately twenty of them, in platoon formation while Kaiden treated the more seriously injured in the adjacent room. “Who’s in charge here?” She asked with a cold and steely tinge in her tone. The scientists all responded the same way. They couldn’t look her in the eye and stayed silent.

She grinned as she started to pace in front of their formation. “Is there any reason why there’s a dead Admiral in your facility?” Again, no one responded. “No? I guess dead admirals just mysteriously appear sometimes huh.”

“Wrex, what do you think we should do with them?” She playfully asked her giant Krogan comrade.

“Get whatever information you need by any means necessary. I can do it if you need me to.” His deep and powerful voice seemed to put many of the scientists in an uncomfortable state as they started to look at each other. They seemed to be contemplating the options.

“We will not talk to you without a lawyer from the Alliance present. We know our rights.” There it was. The one ballsy enough to open his mouth not out of fear but out of anger had decided to step forward. “You have no jurisdiction here and that is the last word I or anyone of us will say to you without a lawyer.”

Athena turned to look at Wrex who was almost shocked at the stupidity of the man. She turned back and approached the man who seemed so angry that she disrupted their party. The man was
small in stature, bald and wore those ridiculous round spectacles. She walked up to him and stood only inches from him. She examined him from head to toe and found that he was sorely lacking physically. “Let me see your hands.” She ordered to the puzzlement of the scientist. He took too long and Athena violently grabbed his wrists tightly and examined his hands. It was no surprise to her when she found these pristinely manicured hands. No callouses, no imperfections, in other words his hands had not done a day of hard labor in their life. She let go of his wrists and grabbed his chin as she addressed him. Her face was inches from his. “You’re in my world now. I’m not that little girl your type used to abuse in Munro. There will be no lawyers, you will either talk or you will die. It’s really that simple.”

She released him and he immediately grabbed his wrist which had fresh bruises from her grip. He was clearly shocked at her behavior. Cerberus had apparently taught him that Alliance officers were of the play by the rules types. Actually it seemed that maybe Cerberus was wrong about this one.

“So, now that the ground rules have been laid out, who’s gonna talk first. Come on, don’t be shy.” Again there was silence. “No takers...really? Okay then.” Athena put her armor helmet back on and approached the scientist who was obviously the most senior now and grabbed a hold of his wrist. She dragged him from the formation toward the exit door. He started to resist realizing what she probably had in mind.

“Wrex, link your holo projector to my helmet video feed. I want all of them to see and hear this.” She instructed as she closed the airlock behind her. Wrex did as she asked and seconds later there was a holo display in front of the formation with the scientist struggling to open the inner door of the airlock.

“Are you going to talk?” Athena asked again.

“Please they’ll kill us all. Please have mercy.” The man was in tears as he knew the outer doors led to the Sulphurous atmosphere outside. He would die as the atmosphere would probably dissolve him from the inside out.

“YOU SONAOFABITCH! YOUR PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WIPING OUT MY PLATOON AND A COLONY ON AKUZE AND NOW YOU ASK FOR MERCY?! YOU WIPED OUT AN ENTIRE PIONEER UNIT TOO AND NOW YOU MURDERED AN ALLIANCE ADMIRAL, BUT YOU HAVE THE GALL TO ASK FOR MERCY?!” She was fuming. She pressed the button that opened the outer door and dragged him out with her. The fear in his eyes as he held his breath and tapped her shoulder while nodding his head as if to say okay, you win I’ll talk.

“You’re lucky it isn’t raining.” She launched him roughly back into the airlock and quickly shut the outer doors and purged the airlock before opening the inner doors and throwing him a little less forcefully into his empty spot in the formation. “So talk!” She demanded.

The scientists all explained that their facilities were experimenting on different things. One was attempting to control Rachni so they could be used to scout and defend worlds with hostile environments. Another was doing genetic modifications and experimentations. They were studying the effects of thresher maw acid on humans and also the methods the Thorian lifeform used to control its creepers. The third site was experimenting with artificial intelligence and mechs. They informed her that all of the information they gathered was on the databases she raided. They also told her that Cerberus had acquired many of the Exogeni files pertaining to the Thorian.

Athena felt quite good at her ability to extract information. The scientists and technicians all stood
there watching her in anxious uncertainty. She walked in front of every scientist examined their faces in the hopes that maybe she would recognize one of them. She almost resigned herself to thinking that it was impossible. There was no way that anyone from Munro would be there until she reached the back row and stopped in front of an attractive Asian looking woman. Her memory kicked into overdrive. “You…” The woman visibly flinched hoping that Athena did not recognize her. “You were there!”

Her mind went back to the day after she killed that Asari merc, the cafeteria, this woman had asked her if she remembered what happened. “WREX! Get everyone out of this room now…I’m going to have a talk with this lovely young lady here, alone.”

The woman was trembling as the rest of her colleagues were led out of the room and into the main lab area. “You know it must really suck that Karma has a way of catching up to everyone.” Athena now had a connection here in front of her. Munro was here on Binthu. “Tell me everything about the Munro facility or I swear I will rip out those pretty finger nails one by one.”

“Please Athena…I was only an assistant technician in Munro. I wasn’t privy to everything they did there. I did not have access to much except some of the reports. I’ll tell you everything I know, just please don’t hurt me.” The woman was visibly shaking and looked to be on the brink of a breakdown.

Athena gently took a hold of her hands and made her sit down Indian style on the floor in front of her. Athena sat in front of her and softly addressed her. “I won’t hurt you, but I need to know everything you know and why was my presence there wiped from the systems.”

The woman’s name was Shay Lee and she was only at the Munro facility for about a year before Athena escaped. She told Athena about all of the experimentation that was done on her and that Conatix was trying to use her as a template to create a race of biotic superhuman soldiers. Shay told her that she not only had an accelerated but also regenerative healing ability. She told Athena that it might have been one of the side effects of her mother’s exposure to eezo. Her muscle and bone density and weaving procedures would not have been possible without that healing ability. The growth at the base of skull that acted like a biotic implant was not touched for fear that it would affect her abilities. It also came as a revelation that Wasea was not killed during her confrontation with her, but five technicians in the viewing room were. Shay was very thorough in her briefing also telling her that the reason there were no children in the cafeteria that day was because Wasea had killed them all in their confrontations with her. Shay also revealed that although she did injure many of her opponents during her ‘tests,’ not one of them was injured as seriously as she thought and no one else died from her actions during Shay’s time there.

Athena was in tears by the end of Shay’s briefing. She had recorded all of it and was struggling not to grab Shay by the throat and crushing her windpipe. “I want the names of every worker you can remember from there. I don’t care if they were just the janitor or the overseer.”

Shay rattled out names which meant nothing to her. When she finished, Athena shut off the recorder and addressed Shay. “Go join your colleagues.” She managed weakly.

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She poured through the files she had just unencrypted thanks to Wrex’s persuasive manners in getting the Cerberus technician on Binthu to talk. She had everything from those bases staring her
back on her Terminal. Nepheron was only a day away in the Columbia System. She sat on her bunk as she went over the information on her Savant X Omni-tool when Jeff came over the intercom system. “Mamita?”

It immediately brought her out of her funk as she grinned slightly at her old nickname coming out of Jeff’s voice with the sexiest American accent. “What is it Fangio?”

“Um Admiral Hackett is hailing us, I’ll patch him through to your room.” He sounded semi-professional, but she could forgive him for almost anything.

“Shepard, Nice job on the Binthu bases, from the videos this operation could be used in the academy as an example of what surprise can achieve. All of the personnel have been taken into custody and we have all of our best techs looking over the files you sent us.” Hackett sounded like a proud papa. “But, I didn’t call to congratulate you. I want you to know that I’ve discovered that you’re not the only one with an interest in Cerberus’s operations. I’ve received some information I thought you’d want to see.”

“What do you mean Steven?” She considered that maybe it was a little unprofessional to use his first name, but she considered him a dear friend so until he corrected her she would use it.

“Someone is killing former Alliance Scientists. There have been four deaths in the past month.” He explained.

It sent a chill down her spine. “Former Scientists? Sounds like someone has a project they’d like to keep secret.” Steven wouldn’t give her this information if it didn’t have something to do with her.

“We found a connection between these scientists… and you.” She could hear his voice had a tinge of uncertainty. “They all worked on a classified project several years ago, on Akuze.”

The word brought back all of the emotion, images and horror of that mission. She started to visibly tremble as she stood up from her bed. “Are you telling me that Alliance scientists were involved in the slaughter of my unit, of a whole colony?”

“I can’t get any information on what they were working on. The project records are sealed.” Hackett sounded supremely frustrated that he couldn’t give her more.

“Commander… Athena. What you do with this information is up to you. I just thought you’d want to know. There was one other scientist on the project: Dr. Wayne. He’s on Nepheron. I’ll be in touch Commander, good luck. Fifth Fleet out.” Hackett was very abrupt with his good bye and it bothered her. Usually they would chat a little, but she could feel his anger over the possibility that the Alliance was responsible for the deaths of her men, her magnificent and heroic comrades.

The Normandy reached orbit around Nepheron a day later and she was stunned to see that the base had already been taken by a mercenary group called Hade’s Dogs. They were in the process of breaching the innermost room when she warned one of the mercenaries there not to try to stop them. The merc saw Wrex and Ashley along with the legendary Commander Shepard and just waved them through. “We’ve got company, just let them pass.”

They made their way swiftly through the base when she heard a loud explosion in the direction of their travel. Athena took off at her now familiar blurring biotic speed, Ashley and Wrex tried to keep up in vain. Athena turned toward the smoke at a t-intersection and quickly made her way through the smoke. She cleared the smoke and the sight in front of her shocked her to her core.
One of the Mercs, no not one of the Mercs… it was someone she recognized. It was someone whom she thought she failed… knew she had failed.

“STAY BACK! I’ve got no grief with you! All I want is this bastard!” The merc yelled with an anger she knew all too well… a palpable feeling of vengeance was in the air.

“Please! He’s a madman!” The Cerberus scientist sounded desperately fearful. “Mr. Toombs, you’re insane! You need help!”

“SHUT UP! You don’t get to lie! You don’t…” He paused as his eyes met hers and the immediate feeling of recognition hit them at the same time. “Shepard? My God, Shepard, is that you?”

She pulled her helmet off and didn’t bother to hide the tears that were flowing now. “Toombs? But… I saw you die on Akuze. How did you… how are you…” She couldn’t finish the thought with the raw emotion of grief still running through her heart.

Toombs didn’t flinch and kept his pistol trained on what she assumed was Dr. Wayne. “They took me, Shepard. The scientists.”

“You can’t prove any of this! This man is delusional!” It was like white noise to Athena who could not stop staring at one of her comrades that she thought had been massacred.

“They were running tests on the Thresher Maws. They let those things hit us just to watch and study.” Toombs continued and jolted her awake with the word Thresher Maw. “I woke up in a holding cell. The scientists were delighted that I’d survived. Now they had someone to run tests on.”

“What did they do to you?” She quietly asked as she began to contemplate her failure.

“You can’t believe Toombs! He doesn’t have any proof! I demand a fair trial!” Athena finally turned her stare to the scientist and it transformed into a seething glare.

“Shepard was at Akuze. That’s all the proof she needs.” Wrex sounded almost as angry as she felt.

“He deserves to die for what he did. For me, you and for our unit, are you with me?” Toombs trigger finger gingerly played around with the trigger, but did not pull it. Athena wanted badly to kill this man, but she knew that he probably had a lot of information that would lead to the head of these projects.

“Let me take him in. Believe me, he’ll answer for his crimes.” Athena started to plead with Toombs.

“Weren’t you listening? He’s part of a secret organization! I don’t know what Cerberus is, but they’ll never let their operation become public!” Toombs sounded conflicted now that his former commanding officer was there with him. He trusted her, but this man did deserve to die. “This is the only way! Are you helping me, or are you killing me?”

All she wanted to do was take a hold of Toombs and embrace the man she failed. “You’re better than this, Toombs. You’re not like them.”

“Don’t you dare Shepard! Don’t you dare tell me who I am! You got away with a few scratches and a scary reputation! The rest of the unit died, and I was tortured for years, Shepard! You can’t judge me! You don’t have the right.” She was losing him, the same way she lost herself after
Akuze, but she wasn’t willing to give up and would die to save him now.

She slowly stepped forward toward him. “Toombs… I… I’m sorry. If I knew, I wouldn’t have left you. If I knew I could have saved you, I would have. All I can do is help you now. Please let me.” She put her hand on his shoulder as he looked her in the eyes which were now filled with tears flowing down her cheeks.

Toombs lowered his weapon and turned to face her as he removed his helmet. The acid burns that scarred his face reminded her of the monster that they slayed together. “Okay, I’m no murderer. They couldn’t make me into one. Just as long as he goes to trial.” She pulled Toombs into a ferocious embrace.

She couldn’t believe he was alive. “You’re alive…” She whispered. Toombs was taken aback, but quickly adjusted and returned her embrace as the tears also began to flow out his own eyes.

“You’re not alone anymore Commander.” He whispered back to her as they pulled away from each other. He grinned at her meekly. “Maybe the screaming will stop now. I don’t know.”

She knew that he was trying to joke with her, that’s the Toombs she remembered and it brought a weak grin to her own face, but she knew that he wasn’t joking. “Those bastards can’t hurt you anymore and I swear that I am going to make them all pay. In the meantime I want you to go to Dr. Aaloka in Vancouver. Tell her I sent you. She helped me a lot and I’m sure that she can help you too.” She looked him in the eye and he silently nodded. “You have my number. Call me anytime or send me a message anytime.”

“Thanks LT… I mean Commander… I think that you just saved me.” Toombs quietly mentioned to her.

“You saved me too Toombs, me too.” Athena responded as Ashley and Wrex shoved Dr. Wayne out of the room. “Jeff tell Fifth Fleet we need a ship for a pick up.”

“Aye aye Ma’am.” He came back over the comm.

She scoured the base computers and recovered some encrypted files, but she noticed that most of the computers had been purged. Toomb’s mercs really took the wind out of her sails when it came to acquiring information.

She turned to watch Dr. Wayne sitting on a crate as if nothing had happened. There was no remorse on his face, no acknowledgment that he had been a part of an unspeakably horrible thing, it looked like he was actually happy how things turned out.

She walked over to him with a determined purpose and with an open hand, she viciously slapped him hard enough to knock him off of the crate. A large welt began to appear on his right cheek. She picked him up by his neck and slammed him roughly into the wall. “What are you…” He struggled to get out as her hand started to slow the air flow to his lungs.

“SHUT UP! You’ll speak only when spoken to!” She looked into his eyes and was satisfied by the look of utter terror on his face. “You’re lucky Toombs was here or I would have killed you on the spot! I hope you get off because I will find you and I will exact the vengeance for all those marines and those colonists you so callously thought of as fodder.” She continued to hold him against the wall and watched with deep satisfaction as he began to pass out from oxygen deprivation. She dropped him in a heap and walked away, leaving him on his knees bruised, bloodied and desperately gasping for air.
Just before leaving the room, Athena stopped and a huge grin appeared on her face. She turned to look at Dr. Wayne and asked him in the most calm voice he had yet to hear. “Have you ever seen a Thresher Maw up close doctor?”

“We dissected the one you killed on Akuze.” He answered as he got back on his feet holding his throat.

“No, I mean a living breathing Maw.” She watched him start to cower as she approached him. “You know like me, Toombs and actually Wrex here.”

“No… why?” When Dr. Wayne saw that Athena was not going to hit him again, he stood to his full height and addressed her quizzically.

“Get you environmental suit and mask on. We’re going on a little trip before fifth fleet picks you up.” She ordered him. “Hey Wrex, Ashley, you’re gonna want to see what happens next.”

After a few minutes of forcing him to put on his environmental suit, Athena threw Dr. Wayne into the back of the Mako and along with Wrex and Ashley she took off like a bat out of hell towards the west.

“Commander? Where we going?” Wrex asked.

“To visit the family of a couple of old friends.” She answered with a calm and quiet demeanor. The moment they cleared an unassuming rise, Wrex let out an excited utterance. “Oh Shepard I love you!” The Mako came to a stop at the edge of a large flat plain.

“Commander what are you doing?” Jeff came over the comm with a fearful tone in his voice.

“I know what I’m doing Jeff and this needs to be done.” She shot back as gently as she could. “Wrex, Ashley man the Mako cannon and just watch unless I call you, okay?”

“Aye aye ma’am.” Ashley obeyed instantly as she reentered the Mako and manned the gun.

“You’re no fun Commander. I want a piece of that one.” Wrex looked disappointed.

“No Wrex, I’m not going to kill this one this time so don’t worry. I am going to teach that little prick in the back a lesson though.” She explained to him, and she seriously did not want to kill another one of those things unless she had to. She marched to the back of the Mako, opened the hatch to see Dr. Wayne sitting there, the welt on his eye was now a full-fledged shiner now. “Let’s go Doctor.” She waved him out.

Dr. Wayne seemed hesitant at first, but the hesitancy turned into outright terror and he wouldn’t budge from his seat.

Athena forcefully pulled him out of the mako by grabbing a hold of his arm and throwing him to the ground. “Get out here!”

“Please don’t kill me. I’m sorry, I swear I’ll tell the authorities everything I know, just please don’t kill me.” He had collapsed to his knees in front of her and was pleading hysterically for his life. It was pathetic that such a coward could have had a hand in dealing so much death and now he can’t even face his own.

“Oh shut it and stop being so dramatic.” Athena dragged him to his feet and they walked together to the edge of the perfectly flat and sandy plain. “Take a look doctor, do you see anything
familiar?"

“What?” Dr. Wayne was trembling and there were tears rolling down his cheeks.

“No?” She turned to look at the Doctor, when all of a sudden she biotically lifted him off the
ground and pushed him about three hundred feet into the sandy plain and set him down gently.
“Still nothing?” She yelled at him from a distance.

He looked genuinely confused as he stood back up and watched her sprint another three hundred
feet into the plain past him. Dr. Wayne looked on curiously as it seemed that Shepard was sending
out biotic pulses into the ground.

“Commander please don’t.” Jeff sounded worried and upset over the comm.

It was too late as the telltale tremors signaled the arrival of an old and deadly acquaintance. It was
like the coming of an ancient Kraken out of Greek mythology when the gigantic Thresher Maw
surfaced just a few feet from where Athena stood. “WHAT ABOUT NOW DR. WAYNE!”

Dr. Wayne was paralyzed with fear. He just stood there looking up at the building sized creature
as it seemed to search for its prey. “A little different from a dead one isn’t it?” Athena asked as the
Thresher Maw turned its attention to her voice. Athena could hear the gurgling sound that was the
precursor for an acid strike. Athena to her credit was not afraid or panicked, on the contrary she
actually looked quite jovial as if she was dancing with an old friend. The acid strike came and
landed, Athena had moved so quickly that the strike hit nothing but sand.

“Please let me help you kill it!” Wrex was pleading with her over the comm.

After what seem like an eternity, Dr. Wayne finally reacted and started to run toward the rocks
where the mako was parked. The maw immediately switched its attention to the doctor and lunged
forward like an oversized snake striking out against its prey. It was an amazing sight to see
something the size of an Alliance Cruiser move with such speed. Dr. Wayne was not going to
make it as it seemed he moved in slow motion. He turned to see what he would have assumed
would be his final moments as the maw’s head was about to envelope him. He fell to his knees
once more and curled in on himself in the fetal position knowing he was done for.

But it was not to be, in an instant he felt himself being violently jerked into the air and he opened
his eyes he noticed that he was heading back toward the rocks. He turned his head to see the maw
bury itself under the sand in a thunderous cloud of dust and sand. He landed next to the mako with
a loud thud and a stabbing pain in his shoulder from it being dislocated. He couldn’t believe he
was still alive and then he turned his back and saw the reason why. Athena was standing over him
like the Greek Goddess she was named after. Her biotic aura glowing a ghostlike blue flame all
over her body as if she were the goddess of vengeance herself. “Do you recognize it now?”

Dr. Wayne was trembling violently as his fearful stare met with Athena’s angry one. “I’m so
sorry…please…I…” He began to break down and cry like someone who had faced his own death
and could now empathize with those he considered only ‘test subjects.’ There was no consoling
the man, as she dragged him to his feet and gently put him in the Mako.

“Wow Commander….wow!” Ashley couldn’t stop beaming at her. “If nothing else, he’ll have
nightmares about you and the Maw for years to come.”

“Too bad I couldn’t sprinkle a little of the acid on him for the extra feel. I don’t think he would
survive.” Athena was not pleased at all. She wanted Dr. Wayne dead, but she would hold off for
Toombs. She would show mercy to one of the men who didn’t deserve it because Toombs
deserved it. She would not let him down again, she would not fail him ever again and this bastard would stand trial because she promised Toombs he would.

“You’re way too much of a capital tease, Shepard.” Wrex chimed in with his usual callous wit. Wrex wanted to kill that Thresher Maw so badly that he almost sounded angry at her.

Athena glared at Wrex as if to say enough already, she sat down in the driver’s seat and they headed back to the main base to wait for the 5th fleet pickup.

Chapter End Notes

I thought that the Toombs reunion in the game was way too weak. Unless you were a renegade, there is no way Shepard would have reacted so non emotionally to seeing one of her first comrades alive. I also thought Wayne needed some punishment before going to trial. Again thank all of you for reading and putting up with my totally inconsistent posting schedule.
Cerberus Games

Chapter Summary

Athena works out with Ashley, makes up with Joker and some Cerberus spook and 007 stuff.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Normandy SR1 Hanger Bay

Athena was so glad to be on her way to the Citadel and pleased with at least some results of her anti-Cerberus operations. She knew that she had crippled the organization to an extent, but wished she had gotten more decrypted information. She got a lot of satisfaction from seeing Dr. Wayne get a small taste of his own medicine. She wished she could have taken Toombs and made him part of her crew. She would reminisce fondly about the young Corporal. He was the joker of the platoon. Toombs was always ready with an inappropriate remark or horrendously offensive comment that would leave most the platoon in stitches. To see him the way he was broke her heart and filled her with rage. Cerberus had changed Toombs into a vengeful and angry individual.

“Commander, are you okay?” Ashley’s question woke her from her thoughts.

“I really hate them Ashley. When this Saren business is done, I’m going to destroy them.” Athena couldn’t help but confide in the Gunnery Chief who reminded her so much of Marianna that they could be sisters.

“I think I feel the same way about Saren. I can’t wait to see his eyes when we obliterate his plans and take him out.” Ashley understood Athena intimately. The loss of her unit on Eden Prime to Saren and his Geth affected her greatly and she empathized with Athena’s almost unquenchable need for vengeance.

Athena cleaned the barbell she was holding up to her shoulders and began to perform her front squats as she continued to address Ashley. “You know, I can almost understand what they are trying to do, but to do in the fashion that they do is unconscionable. My people are not expendable and their tests on children are the last straw.”

“Civilians too, people who just want to live their lives and be left alone. It’s one of the main reasons why I joined.” Ashley watched in restrained amazement as Athena squatted what would have been the equivalent of six hundred pounds with the mag-weights attached to the barbell. She effortlessly performed twenty repetitions and dropped the barbell on the deck.

Ashley approached the barbell and feigned like she was going to pick it up as it was. It made Athena chuckle. “Don’t hurt yourself Chief; I don’t need Chakwas chewing me out for you too.”

“I’m not crazy commander.” She playfully responded and set the mag-weights to one hundred and seventy five pounds and promptly cleaned it to her shoulders to begin her set. “To change the
subject, what’s up with Joker? He seems a little angrier and more bitter than usual.”

“He’s mad at me again. He keeps telling me that I take too many unwarranted risks.” Athena watched her Chief as she struggled to complete fifteen reps before she promptly dropped the bar on the deck.

“The Thresher Maw?” Ashley wiped the sweat from her forehead with the towel Athena tossed her as she nodded.

“Yeah…he doesn’t understand that they’re not that much of a threat to me anymore.” She quickly adjusted the mag-weights and promptly began her last set.

“No offense commander, but I kind of agree with him. All it really took was for you to make a mistake and that Maw would have ended you and for what, to teach a little piece of crap a lesson?” Athena continued her reps as she pondered Ashley’s comment. “Believe me when I say that I enjoyed the lesson you taught that pipsqueak immensely, but I also see what Joker saw. That monster is not something to toy with, even for you commander.”

Athena dropped the bar again and wiped her brow with her own towel. “I know…I just…damn it, you’re right. Thanks Ash.” Ashley was adjusting the mag-weights and nodded in acknowledgement of her commander.

“Joker you read?” Athena tried to sound angry.

“Go ahead Commander.” Damn, he really is mad at me. Athena thought to herself at the uncharacteristically cold response.

“My quarters NOW.” She emphasized as angrily as she could manage without laughing.

“Can’t leave the helm ma’am, Kaiden is off duty. Sorry.” With only three pilots on board, it kind of put a monkey wrench into her makeup plans.

“I told you he was pissed at you.” Ashley grunted as she performed her last set of front squats.

“He won’t be for long. I’ll bet you he’s his cheery self within the next five minutes.” Athena started to walk toward the elevator when she heard Garrus chime in from underneath the Mako.

“I’ll take that bet. If I win, I get to drive the next time we go ground side, FUCK!” Athena heard a clanging of what she could only think of as a stripped bolt and his claw smashing into the metal a little too hard.

“And if I win?” She asked as she waited for the slowest elevator in the universe.

“I’ll buy when we get back to the Citadel.” He answered.

“Deal. Easiest bet I ever won.” She entered the elevator and headed to the helm. She didn’t even bother to change out of her workout shorts and sports bra as she stormed into the helm dripping sweat everywhere. Jeff turned to look at her and she looked pissed, but damn she looked sexy with those braided pigtails and the sweat just glistening all over her body. “You’re out of uniform Commander, or is that another rule you can break as you see fit.” He turned back around and continued to pilot the ship as if she didn’t exist.

He heard the security door come down with a loud thud. “WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU’RE TALKING TOO LIEUTENANT!” The tone and volume of her voice startled him to his core as he flinched in his seat. He turned to look at her to see that her expression did not match her
voice. She slowly walked over to his chair and put one leg over and straddled him.

“Commander? What are you…?” The fierceness of her lips smashing into his sent fire going
down his spine.

“I’m sorry….please forgive me.” She whispered softly through the kiss and slowly forced his lips
to part as she probed his mouth with her tongue. She slowly pulled away to see that her actions had
the desired effect. “I SWEAR LIEUTENANT I WILL HAVE YOU FLYING A GARBAGE
SCOW IF YOU EVER DO THAT AGAIN!” He smiled at her as he pulled her into another
ferocious collision of their mouths.

“Not fair mamita…not fair.” He chuckled as he dreamily pulled away from her. “YES MA’AM!
IT WON’T HAPPEN AGAIN!” He didn’t think that he sounded convincing.

“IT BETTER NOT! FOR YOUR SAKE!” Was there nothing that Athena wasn’t good at? She
really sounded upset and if it wasn’t for the fact that she was totally taking advantage of him he
would have thought that she was about to beat his ass. “My quarters when your shift is over.” She
hotly whispered in one ear causing goose bumps to appear all over his arms. “That’s an order.”
She whispered in his other and took a nip of his lobe which caused him to buck his hips into her.
She then gave him a quick peck and got up to open the security gate, again with that scowl. She
stormed back out and headed to her quarters with everyone getting out of her way.

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Cronos Station

“Binthu’s gone dark and it looks like we lost Nepheron as well.” Kai Leng coldly described as he
addressed the IM (Illusive Man). “The Binthu bases just stopped communicating and all we got
was a short distress signal that went silent about twenty seconds later. It also looks like they
captured a substantial number of personnel at both facilities. If Lee or Wayne were among
them…”

IM didn’t let him finish. “She’s coming into her own. All three facilities without as much as a
peep?” IM admired the fact that Athena was now more of a goddess than a human. “How could
this have been possible?”

“They were warned, but I’m guessing the bases at Binthu were all hit at the same time with their
communication antennas taken out before they could call for help. Nepheron was actually
assaulted by a merc band and they fell more to brute force.” Leng looked at the footage from their
spy camera orbiting the planet Binthu and everything he suspected was exactly what happened.
The way Athena’s three teams of warriors took the bases on Binthu was so professional and swift
that he actually felt a pang of admiration. She was the only person that he wished to test himself
against. “The Normandy’s stealth systems were pretty effective in concealing their location until
the last second. They didn’t stand a chance. We should have reinforced them.”

“No, we lost Binthu the moment Kahoku found out we were there.” IM lit up a cigarette and took
a long drag. “By the way, how did he get the location of our bases there?”

“We don’t have anything concrete, but we believe the Shadow Broker is involved.” Leng
answered as he continued to rewind and play the video of Athena’s team taking those bases.

“We’re going to have to take care of that thorn. We can’t have some alien information broker
involved in our business.” IM sat back as he addressed Miranda who walked in during the
briefing.

“By the looks at suddenness and speed of the attack, I don’t think they had a chance to purge the
databases on Binthu.” Miranda looked very concerned that Athena now had more information on
them and their operations. Granted, all of Cerberus’ operations were sealed so there would be no
danger of Athena finding out about any other operation, but now she would clearly have a picture
of how Cerberus operated and that was dangerous in itself. It was at least a comfort that
Nepheron’s systems were completely wiped of most of the sensitive information there.

“That’s irrelevant. The research data from there has already been sent here and the research can be
continued at one of our other facilities.” IM nonchalantly pointed out. “Make sure that our other
bases are made ready and make an example out of any that don’t meet our specs.”

“Watching her and her team I don’t think we would be able to hold any of the bases unless we
turned them into fortresses.” Miranda joined Leng in looking at the video footage in absolute awe
of the woman. “We’ve created a monster.”

Everything had started to unravel recently. Subject Zero was lost to them as the Pragia Facility
was closed down due to the rioting of the subjects and the escape of Subject Zero from there.
Athena had destroyed their operations on Binthu and Nepheron. Kai and Miranda looked at each
other and silently acknowledged their failures in both of their assignments.

It seemed to Miranda that everything that had to do with Shepard was unraveling. Even things
connected indirectly to her like the Teltin Facility on Pragia.

“Pragia has been closed down like you ordered, but I was unable to secure Subject Zero. It looks
like the Blue Sun Mercs took her.” Miranda’s and Kai’s briefing seemed to have turned into a
smoldering ruin with failures being described with every other word. They watched IM as he
contemplated her revelations and took another pull of his cigarette.

“Have all of the usable data transferred to both Lazurus and Minuteman Stations. I want you to
assemble another team to continue this work there until we find another terrestrial home for
them.” He addressed Miranda who could not help but be in awe at how calm IM was in the face of
so much bad news.

“On to better news, Athena has taken care of Benezia and her operation in Noveria. It’s also
rumored that she set a Rachni Queen free.” Miranda added to the brief and to the IM’s credit he
did not show any kind of reaction to these revelations. “She’s also got Benezia’s daughter Dr.
Liara T’Soni, the Prothean expert, working with her now. It seems that she’s built quite a team for
herself.”

“My contacts in the Alliance also tell me that the ship Saren is using can actually control the minds
of sentients. He said that Saren uses it control his followers.” Kai could see that IM was intrigued
by this report. “The reports indicate that he used it to control Matriarch Benezia and her
Commandos.”

“And we still have no idea who or what created that ship?” IM asked it as a question, but it was
clear to both Kai and Miranda that he expected an answer soon.

“No, but it definitely is not a design from the council. It might be Geth, but that is not certain.”
Miranda felt a little uncomfortable giving such an inadequate answer, but it was all she and Kai had at the moment.

“If it’s not Geth then we have an unknown involved in our game and that is not acceptable. Find out everything about that ship. This is now your priority.” IM snubbed out his cigarette and made it clear that he wanted to know everything there was to know about Saren’s Dreadnought.

“I’ll put myself and my best agents on it immediately.” Leng answered dutifully.

“No I think Miranda should handle that. I need you to go on a recruitment run to the Citadel. I’ll send the dossier to your Omni Tool.” Kai nodded and proceeded to leave the room with a purposeful step.

“I think trying to recruit Ms. Quiroga is a mistake. She is Alliance intelligence and she could ruin us.” Miranda mentioned with an almost smug tone.

“She is extremely close to Athena and that makes her valuable in ways none of you are. If she doesn’t work for us, then it’s always better to liquidate her before she becomes too much of a problem.” IM didn’t want to force Marianna to work for them, but he would not allow her to run freely and try to ruin his mission. If he had to kill her, he would.

Marianna was sitting at the bar in the dance club Flux dressed to the nines in her skin tight red mini-dress and red pumps as she took a sip of her martini. The music was blasting and the flashing light matched the thumping beat of the music. She scanned the room and noticed that she was being watched when an attractive Asian man sat at the end of the bar. A few moments later the man disappeared only to reappear sitting to the left of her. It made the hairs on her arms stand on end, but she didn’t even acknowledge his presence as she kept her back to him.

“May I buy you a drink Lieutenant Quiroga?” He was very smooth and confident in his approach, but that is to be expected from a former N7 turned Cerberus operative.

“Why Mr. Leng, I’d be delighted. Vodka martini, double O seven style for the occasion.” She turned on her seat to face the formidable assassin who to his credit actually smirked as he ordered the drink for her.

“The Illusive Man requires your presence and he won’t take no for an answer.” He didn’t try to sound menacing or anything close to threatening. That is how real assassins work; they don’t need to portray themselves as deadly when they already are. She appreciated his candor and would reward him in kind.

“Does this have anything to do with our mutual acquaintance?” She asked as she played the part of a woman who was just simply interested in the man in front of her. The slight smirk on his face was answer enough. “You do realize I’m an Alliance Officer right?”

“It doesn’t matter Ms. Quiroga, he knows great talent when he sees it and he thinks you could help him in his mission to save humanity.” Kai was good, but he was no spy. This sounded more like a prepped speech than a recruiting effort.

“Really? Save humanity? From what if you could please indulge my curiosity.” She effortlessly
asked him a question she didn’t expect him to answer.

“That is for the Illusive Man to answer, not me.” Kai flinched a little as if he was a little perturbed at her manner of speaking to him.

“What if I refuse?” Marianna knew what the answer to her question would be. The toothy grin on Kai’s face told her everything. Mari was never afraid of death and if Kai thought that death would motivate her to betray her friends he was sorely mistaken. “Pffff!” She let out with a chuckle. She closed the distance so that her face was so close to his that she could feel the heat from his breath. “Tell your Illusive Man that I will meet him when I choose, I’m not at his beckon call.” She stood to get up, but Kai grabbed her arm to pull her back down. She sat back down with a smile as she flipped her hair over her left shoulder. The result was that two large and muscular men approached the bar in a manner dangerous enough to catch Kai’s attention which allowed Marianna to wrench her arm free.

“Is there a problem here?” The incredibly imposing African man asked as he and the other equally imposing Euro man invaded Kai’s personal space.

“No problem John, my friend here just needed to clear up why he didn’t call me last night.” She was so smooth and friendly, but her two assistants knew that this man was very dangerous because she flipped her hair over her left shoulder as the signal to come save her. She stood up and whispered in Kai’s ear. “Meet me in the Presidium Commons, Apollo Café tomorrow morning. I’ll be alone.” She quickly walked away from him and Kai smirked at the audacity of the woman. She knew who he was and didn’t flinch. He would not miss their date.

She was smart to pick public places to meet him, but she also knew that Kai was a tenacious bastard and that he would probably be waiting for her in her apartment. Too bad he would have to guess which of the five she was in and God help the person that broke into hers. She was going to infiltrate Cerberus, but she couldn’t make it easy on them. John and Michael were incredible operatives in their own right and they would probably be able to handle almost any situation except Mr. Leng himself. N7’s were killing machines unmatched anywhere, including the Spectres and Kai was probably the second best N7 that ever lived.

As she walked to her apartment she knew she was being watched so she stepped into one of the many shops to do a little browsing. She surveyed the area for exits, obstacles and persons. She memorized the scene and picked out a few touristy things like cups and faux jewelry. She caught a woman watching her a little too long. Mari made no notice of it but she knew that this tall blonde was the tail she had to shake.

As Mari pays for the trinkets she just gathered, she also pulled a small unperceivable object from her purse. She puts her bag over her left shoulder and walks out to continue her journey towards her apartment. As she continued to walk and set off her Omni Tool as if someone was calling her. She quickly stepped into a tight alley and dropped the object she was carrying. She started to run as quickly as she could toward the back of the building and activated the object she dropped by Omni Tool. The object instantaneously produced a holograph of Marianna in her dress while speaking into her Omni Tool, complete with dialogue. “Mamita, you know I can’t talk here.” The holograph said with a grin.

The holograph would occupy her tail for at least a minute which was more than enough for Mari to lose her. She pressed a button on her Omni Tool and her red dress changed to black. She also pulled a black wig out of her purse and donned it with effortless precision. She quickly made her way out of the other side of the alley toward her apartment. The walk to her apartment was a lot easier now that she knew she wasn’t followed.
She entered her apartment and all of her protocols were still in place. None of the doors had been opened and neither had the windows or grates. She was alone and she also knew that John and Michael were close by. She smiled and thought to herself. *Not good enough Kai, I’ll see you tomorrow.*

Apollo Café 0800 GST

Marianna entered the Café area and immediately saw Leng sitting at one of the tables overlooking the lake. She was in her full Alliance uniform as she sat down across from him. “Mr. Leng.” She greeted with a smile.

“Ms. Quiroga.” Leng coldly responded.

“So talk, Mr. Leng.” Leng pulled up his Omni Tool and put up a field of silence around both of them. He then manipulated the controls and a small hologram of a man appeared.

“Ms. Quiroga, a pleasure.” The man took a pull from his cigarette as he greeted her. “I don’t have much time before this transmission is discovered so I’m going to make this short.”

“I’m assuming you’re the infamous Illusive Man.” She fearlessly worded. “Funny how you go out of your way to talk to me. Why?”

“Let’s not be coy Ms. Quiroga, I know you’ve been digging up dirt on Cerberus and that cannot be allowed to continue. You have one of two very simple choices to make Ms. Quiroga, join us or I will make your life a very short one.” IM sat down in what she assumed was a chair and took another drag. “Know that I have Athena’s best interests involved and would never ask you to go against her. She is too valuable to humanity for anything to happen to her and I know you feel the same way.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck about you or your organization. All I know is that you all are the reason Mamita has her nightmares, cries into my chest and has to deal with monsters you put in her life. She is my sister and I’ll be damned if I ever work for you. I will see your organization in a smoldering pile when she gets done with it.” Her face was calm as she looked Leng in the eye knowing he was sizing her up for a strike. “Go ahead Kai, do what you have to do.”

The hologram disappeared and Kai had a big grin on his face as he pulled a small blade from his belt. Just as he was about to strike he felt a force push him violently over the bannister and he fell into the lake below. Only one person had that kind of power which went through and overloaded his antibiotic shield. Athena was there!

“Leng not now! I want you off the Citadel immediately!” Miranda came over the air. “Illusive Man wants you to back down and get back.”

Leng didn’t like being ambushed and now he was being told to back off. “On my way.” Leng turned on his stealth field and quickly made his way out of the lake. He watched Athena jump off the main deck of the Apollo Café and biotically slowed her descent as she looked around for him. He’s seen Asari Commandos move around like that. She looked so different from when he first met her in the Academy. She was a raw and immensely powerful physical specimen; he had no clue that she was biotic until he joined Cerberus as she never used them in the Academy. She was a magnificent creature, he couldn’t help but be tempted to take her on right then and there, but
Illusive Man wanted him out of there and he had never steered Leng wrong. He slowly made his way back to the space port, leaving Athena dumbfounded by his disappearance. Leng took the look of frustration on Athena’s face as a small victory. He knew that he would meet up with these two again and he would extract his pound of flesh. He really hated biotics as this was the second time he was foiled by one. Jack and Athena would pay for humiliating him.

Chapter End Notes

This one was more fun. I hope I did the spooks justice, but I just don’t know too much about spy stuff. I know the ending of this chapter is kind of corny, but Kai needed to see what he was up against so that the next time he can adjust his tactics. Again, critiques, suggestions and comments are welcome. Thank you all.
Chapter Summary

Kai Leng and Athena Shepard in the Academy. Big time smut in this one so if you don’t like that sort of thing, you can skip the academy section of this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

October 3rd, 2175  Alliance Academy, Rio, Melee Methods Class

The sounds from the cavernous gym could have come out of a bad porno movie if someone were to walk in with their eyes closed. Grunts, screams, and the yelling of, ‘COME ON!! YOU GOT IT!! YEAH BABY!!!’ could be quite comical if the people in there weren’t pushing weights, running on treadmills with increased gravity switches and whatever else could pass as a physical activity. The gym was divided into several areas, weights, cardio, etc. The biggest crowd by far was at the corner of the gym watching an absolute master plying his trade on the sparring mats.

Athena was standing at the side of the matt watching Kai just absolutely destroy another Cadet in an unarmed sparring session. He had such a smug expression as he left his opponent in a heap on the mat with a little blood coming from his mouth. She crossed her arms and let out a huff as Kai grinned when he made eye contact with her.

“Leng! That was oooouuutstanding. Did any of you see what made Cadet Leng so gosh darn dominant in that match?” The large and well-muscled male instructor asked the class with his distinctively North Carolina USA accent.

“He continuously moved in the lateral plane and did not give Cadet Chamot a target to hit.” Athena answered. “He also moved away from Cadet Chamot’s strong side while simultaneously striking him with multiple punches, kicks and throws. Not to mention that there is a huge gap in the skill level between them.” She looked over to Kai who looked like he was a little offended. She gave him a playful frown and returned her attention to the instructor.

The instructor knew that both Shepard and Leng had been dying to get into a full contact sparring session with each other, but he felt that he should hold off because they would both probably be out of commission for a quite a while afterwards. “Good answer Shepard, now get on over here and get in a fighting stance.” She quickly stepped into the fighting area of the matt and faced off with Cadet Jameson. Athena was much bigger than Jameson and not to mention stronger and faster. This was not a fair fight, but damn if Jameson looked like she was ready to kill her.

The sparring match didn’t last long and Athena made sure to give a look over to Kai and give him smug expression which he met with a mischievous smile. “So, same question, why was Cadet Shepard so dominant?”

“Shepard is a physical freak and her skill level is much higher than Cadet Jameson. With all due respect sir, I believe Cadet Shepard learned about as much during her match with Cadet Jameson as I did with Cadet Chamot.” Kai responded with an air of arrogance and cojones that surprised and actually amused the instructor. Kai turned to look at Shepard who made him chuckle when she
gave him an air kiss.

“Nice try Cadet Leng, but you two wannabe N7’s will not be doing any full contact sparring for a bit.” The instructor actually chuckled at the both of them. “Now Pair off and spread out!” The instructor barked.

Athena immediately made a beeline for Kai as he did the same toward her. Kai was a magnificent Cadet. There was no doubt in her mind that he would be an amazing Marine. He watched her with the eyes of a predator as they squared off. This would be a light sparring session and as they circled each other they feinted and struck with feather light power, but razor sharp precision. Athena was considerably taller than Kai, but Kai’s body was a compact, muscular and powerful fighting machine.

“So Kai…maybe we should find a private place for a match since it seems the instructors don’t want us to go at it.” She let off a lightning jab which to her surprise he dodged and countered with what would have been a vicious body shot. Kai smiled slightly and got her attention when he attempted a spinning back fist only to find her in his face with her right arm wrapped around his chest. Kai knew that this move would usually end in a bone crushing body slam to the matt, but since it wasn’t allowed in the light sessions she just let him go and they continued their dance. “So what do you say Kai?”

“You know that if they catch us, they’ll kick us out of the Academy right?” Kai answered her with a look of disappointment. “We shouldn’t.”

“How about we ask that we be allowed to train with each other in private? We can promise not to do any full contact stuff until we’re allowed, which will probably happen at the end of the class this year.” Athena smiled as she got caught with a greatly deceptive uppercut that probably would have broken someone’s jaw if it had landed with full power. “Maybe if we approach the instructors together they will be okay with it.” He nodded as she let loose with a lightning fast round house the stopped a full inch from his front thigh. He stared at her like she had cheated and all she could do was give a slightly crooked grin.

At the end of the class, both Athena and Kai had gone over to the group of instructors and made their pitch. The four instructors looked at each other and one in particular looked a little shaky about letting them have this. Instructor Sgt. Lawson was worried about them taking the training too far and putting each other in the hospital. “You’ll have our permission on one condition. If either one of you come to class with so much as a papercut on your face, I will pull my permission. Do we understand each other?”

“YES SIR!” They both answered simultaneously unable to hide the delight in their expressions.

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Sunday October 12th 2176  Alliance Academy, Rio 0600

It was their free day and here they were as part of their continuing routine. Kai had taken Athena under his wing and was shocked at how quickly she learned things. She was still slightly slow in thinking ahead of her opponent, but he had to admit that he had yet to find anyone who can do that...
better than he could. Her pure physical advantage was enormous. He had heard of all the records she shattered during physical training, but to see what she could do with his own eyes was mind blowing. Watching her strike a heavy bag was as intimidating a ritual as there was. The speed and power of her strikes were unmeasurably awe inspiring.

His strikes were probably the most powerful non Athena strikes in the Academy, but they were so far below Athena’s power that it gave him pause. He remembered striking her in the midsection once to test her and found that it felt like he had hit a concrete wall with his fist. She gave him such a toothy grin when she looked at him and then shrugged her shoulders as if his punch had felt like nothing more than a mosquito bite.

Kai circled her on the matt as they both pulled their wooden practice swords to spar in the ancient art of sword fighting. They both liked to use dual swords style with Kai favoring the Huyadao style swords and Athena favoring the larger Baquashendao style. It was a real treat for anyone in the gym when they would do their dance of death with the swords, but today it would be a private dance as the gym was empty this morning because they had procured the first hour for themselves. No doubt many of the cadets partied a little too much the night before anyway and wouldn’t notice that the doors were locked.

“I’ve never met anyone like you Athena. You are truly worthy of my respect. I never thought I would find anyone here that could earn it until I met you.” Kai was truly impressed with this beautiful and deadly upperclassman.

Her crooked smile was the only response he got as she lunged toward him so quickly that he barely had enough time to get his swords up into a defensive position, simultaneously sidestepping her attack. She stumbled forward slightly as Kai smacked her behind with a loud whack using the flat of his sword. “Not good enough girl.” He muttered to her. “That was actually a little disappointing. You should know better than to over commit on the first strike. It might work on someone who doesn’t know you that well, but against me that was a wasted move and I could have killed you quite easily.”

Athena turned to face him again with her smile still in place. “I could think of worse things than being stabbed by your sword, Kai.” The comment struck him like a war hammer as he lost all concentration to which Athena took full advantage as she foot swept him onto his back and promptly mounted him with both swords crossed over his neck. She made sure he was firmly held there. “I kind of like this position, what about you?”

She had him so completely helpless that it frightened him, until he saw her flirtatious smirk which brought a smirk on his own face. “I could get used to this.” His response caused her to relax to which he took full advantage of by bridging over and switching their positions with him on top now, but still in Athena’s ground guard with her legs wrapped around his waist. “But I think I like this better, what about you?”

Athena looked into Kai’s smug and expressive eyes and couldn’t take his teasing anymore. “Take me Kai! Take me now you magnificent asshole!” Athena squeezed her legs and pulled him down to her which allowed her to take a hold of the back of his head and brutally crash her mouth onto his.

“Athena no! We’ll get thrown out!” Kai protested but found that he could not resist, he did in fact reciprocate her forceful kissing with his own hands wandering all over Athena’s powerful body. Could this truly be the ancient Greek Goddess of Legend. She was everything that every other woman he knew was not. He couldn’t help himself when he expressed himself out loud to her. “Athena…goddess of Wisdom and War…you’re a temptress…you’re so
magnificent…I need…I need to have you.” Kai pulled himself up as Athena’s naughty expression invited him forward and she let her legs open for him, he then tore his shirt off revealing a physique that would make Apollo proud.

“You fucking tease! Get the fuck over here!” Athena tore her own shirt and bra off like they were a piece of paper and let her pretty substantial breasts burst into Kai’s view. Kai looked overwhelmed at the scene in front of him as he swallowed a lump in his throat and she approached him like a panther hunting her prey on all fours. When she reached him she reared up on her knees and he then shoved her forcefully onto her back and began to pull her shorts down toward her ankles. She sat back up and leaned forward to try and meet his lips only to feel him grab her braid and pull her head back forcefully.

She felt his mouth on her throat as he raked his teeth along the line of her windpipe causing her to gasp. “I will have you my goddess!” He bit down at the base of her neck as he pulled her legs around his waist, lifted her up with some effort and to her obvious delight at being handled in such a forceful manner. Kai walked her over to the dumbbell racks in front of the mirrors. He then forcefully set her down onto the uncomfortable dumbbell stack with her back slamming into the mirror and shattering it into a beautiful web-like crack. Athena growled as she pulled him tight, again crashing her mouth onto his and then viciously biting his trapezius as she took him to the ground knocking over a stack of barbells that was behind Kai with a loud cacophony of clangs.

“Come on motherfucker! You’re Goddess commands you to take her!” She straddled him on the ground as her mouth crashed into his with her teeth biting his lower lip and drawing some blood and a feral growl signaling Kai’s ire.

She could see the anger in his face as he flipped their positions forcefully and pulled on her braid so hard that she whimpered. “Is this what you want?” He asked with a satisfied tone. With the adrenaline shooting through his body he again lifted her and slammed her back onto a pile of aerobic risers knocking them all over the place. Her legs squeezed him as he fell on top of her. “You will please your Goddess. You will worship me.” She softly growled as she overpowered him and climbed on top and straddled his face. His breaths were coming in gasps as he eagerly buried his face into her love zone, licking and lapping like someone who was dying of thirst. “That’s it my little subject…that’s…oh fuck Kai!” She could hear him chuckle under her as his arms wrapped around her thighs and pulled her tighter to him. “Oh God!…Oh….KAIIIIII…don’t stop….don’t stop…oh…oh…ooooohhhh shiiiiiiit!” She had gone over the precipice and her body quivered as she came with the force of a Hurricane. Her legs squeezed tightly around Kai’s ears as she made him feel the power she had over him. As the waves of pleasure started to subside from her orgasmic high she began to relax her vice-like grip and immediately felt his weight shift under her as he had slipped his legs in front of her face and once again he pulled her down and got on top of her. His rock hard member in her face which she gladly took into her warm and moist mouth as he leaned back and she sat up to more easily be able to please him.

After a few minutes his resistance had totally collapsed as he grabbed her braid and pulled her off with some force. The guttural growl that left her mouth reminded him of a feral lioness demanding her king do his duty. “I want to take you.” He almost sounded like he was begging and it was something that made Athena’s grin even wider.

“Come.” She softly whispered as she signaled him to come to her with her index finger. Kai moved forward and he forcefully put her onto her back as she opened herself to him. He plunged into her with all of the force he could muster earning him a moan from her that almost made him finish right there.
“Fuck me Kai, take me…oh…” She looked him in the eye and saw the steamy, lustful glare of Kai staring back at her as the sweat poured from his body. He was a machine, like the pistons of a big engine he was relentless in his rhythm to the utter ecstasy of Athena who moaned and whined her approval. Their sweat intermingled with their slick and slithering bodies. Sliding over each other, the feeling of their slippery and hot skin became an aphrodisiac as it became apparent that they both were so hot for each other and that there would be no stopping the inevitable and desired ending to this carnal encounter.

Kai tried to stay in control, but it was no use. “I will have you…you damn succubus…I will… I…” That last bit sent him into convulsions as she felt his heat enter her body. He pounded and pounded and pounded until he was exhausted and fell on top of her as he could go no more. He was everything she expected him to be. A warrior both in battle and in lust…he was magnificent. As he lay there completely at her mercy, she was amazed that she could be so privileged to see him look so vulnerable. His body lay there in a heap on top of her. She held him close and squeezed firmly. “That was fun. I think we should do this more often.” She whispered hotly in his ear. “Maybe like right now.”

Kai pulled his head up and looked at what he considered his equal. “We can’t do this again. We can’t risk getting thrown out of the Academy, I couldn’t live with the thought that I had caused you and I to fail.”

She scratched the top of his head softly with her nails. “I don’t think you could fail at anything Kai.” He again lifted his head and looked her in those hypnotic crystal blue eyes and it seemed that he was at a loss of what to say. “You’re magnificent Cadet Leng, I would even dare say that you might even be a little better than I.”

“Oh shut it Shepard, we’re probably going to be trying to outdo each other for the rest of our careers.” He chuckled as he peeled himself off of her and finally scanned the gym to his own horror. It was a disaster and it didn’t help when he noticed Athena’s back was bleeding from the cuts she probably got from the broken mirror. “We’re fucked Athena. When they see this we’ll get reprimanded for sure.”

“Oh we’ll be fine. Let’s clean up as much as we can. We’ll say the mirror broke because one of my swords slipped out of my hand.” She was so nonchalant it actually made him a little more secure as he put his shorts and shirt back on. He then turned to watch her put on her shorts and bra, the look of her impossibly long legs attached to that beautifully sexy ass caught his attention and damn if he didn’t want her again. He closed the distance so quickly that Athena didn’t have time to put her bra back on. This time it was his mouth crashing on hers. “Round two?” She giggled.

“Ding, ding.” He responded with an almost evil grin.

Monday October 13th 2176 0600 hours, Academy Superintendent’s Office

Kai and Athena were standing at attention in large spacious office in front of a large oak desk with a large Asian male with the rank of Captain sitting behind said desk. The gym had been left a total disaster and had to be closed for repairs. Two of the large wall mirrors were totally destroyed, aerobics risers were lying everywhere in various states of destroyed and just about everything in the gym was in a state of needed repair. When they had both finished their ‘Full Contact’ match, they stood in the middle of the gym looking like two mischievous dogs left home alone for too long. They were both blooded and beaten with bruises, cuts and abrasions everywhere. Athena turned to look at Kai who was as serious as always while trying to nurse his fat bottom lip where she bit him. She tried to stay stoic but couldn’t and chuckled a little too loudly.
“You think this is funny Shepard? I ought to call Commander Anderson and tell him what you did. How’s that for funny.” When the Superintendent mentioned Anderson’s name it sent a chill down her spine.

“No please sir, I promise we won’t do it again.” Athena was almost in tears thinking of how disappointed Anderson would be in her. “Please sir I’ll do whatever you want me to just don’t kick me out.”

The look of puzzlement on the Captain’s face was a surprise to both of them. “Kick you out? Why in the hell would I kick you out? You two have the highest ground combat scores in the history of this academy. The fact that you’re both here at the same time is incredible.” Captain Isoruku Yamato looked at both of them and sighed. “It’s only natural that you would have wanted to test yourselves against each other, I just wish the cameras in the gym were working when you two decided to have your private sparring match.”

Athena would never tell anyone that she shorted and purged the whole system using her biotics when Kai wasn’t looking. She would continue to perpetrate the belief that all of the destruction in the gym was her and Kai doing a full contact sparring match and not a meeting of carnal and unrestrained lust. She told Kai that she knew how to take care of the cameras and it seemed that Kai had accepted her expertise in regards to the cameras. They would stick to their story of a match getting out of hand and that would be the end of it. “Sir please don’t blame Cadet Leng, I baited him into a match while he was teaching me a new sword fighting technique. This was my fault not his.”

Kai looked indignant and spoke out. “With all due respect Shepard, this was just as much my fault as yours. Don’t try to fall on the sword for me.” There was a slight hint of humor in Kai’s comment and it added to the torture Athena was experiencing as the sword comments were killing Athena’s resistance to breaking into all out laughter.

The super looked at both of them and chuckled. “You two are no longer allowed to work out on your own in private. You can still continue your training, but no longer unsupervised. You’re also restricted to base for a month and no shore leave. Kitchen duty for both of you as of today until I’m convinced you both learned your lesson. Is that understood?” The super left no room for misinterpretation.

“Yes Sir!” They both yelled in unison.

“Alright dismissed. Now get to your classes.”

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Citadel Dock, Normandy SR1 - Mess Hall

Athena sat across from Marianna as she debriefed her on everything she discovered about Cerberus. Mari was good and she told her that most of the scientists in Munro were connected to Cerberus. She didn’t have a complete picture of what they were trying to do, but it seemed plausible that they wanted to create an army of biotic super soldiers using Athena as a template. Mari also said that she wasn’t the only project they were working on. Cerberus had a very similar
facility working out on Pragia, Mari didn’t have the details, but it seemed eerily similar to the Munro facility. It seemed that Cerberus had recently caught on to her and sent the one and only Kai Leng to either recruit her or kill her. *I can’t believe he’s working for those bastards.* “Mari you’re really lucky, Kai is probably the most deadly person I know.”

At the mention of Leng’s first name Mari’s facial expression turned from the serious Lt. Quiroga into one of mischievous curiosity that reminded her of that little bitch from Buenos Aires. “Kai? How well do you know him?” Athena started to blush a little when she scanned the room for others.

“Don’t you fucking dare repeat this to anyone!” Mari had such a shit eating smile on her face it made Athena cringe. “You already know don’t you?”

“Oh I know you and him tangled in the gym at the Academy. Somebody tried to erase the camera feeds, but missed one little not so inconspicuous camera sitting on the front desk that recorded everything that happened at the front entrance.” She watched Athena’s expression of mortification and shock creep up her neck in a shade of crimson that Mari had never seen on Athena. “Mamita all it showed was one moment where Leng grabbed your braid and pulled your head back. That was it, but I can tell that your escapade in the gym had nothing to do with combat even if there was no sound in the video.” Mari watched her friend’s expression change to one that was more relaxed.

“This is why I hate fucking spies.” Athena breathed a sigh of relief.

“So...tell me what happened. I want details.” Mari put her hands together and rubbed them quickly as she scanned the room for unwanted ears only to notice Ashley, Tali and Liara as they approached the table.

“May we sit Commander?” Athena looked at Ashley and the rest of the women of the Normandy and it seemed that they looked like they almost knew like something juicy was about to be spilled.

“Sure, why not, but I swear to all of you.” She looked at all of them with a glare that was meant to be serious, but Mari could see it wasn’t. Liara on the other hand looked like she was rethinking joining them. “I’ll throw you all out of the airlock if you repeat what I’m about to say to anyone.” Ashley made a face of faux surprise and shock as she sat with her tray of food. “Oh, Mari this is Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams, Dr. Liara T’Soni, and Tali’Zorah nar Rayya. Ladies, this is my best friend Lieutenant Marianna Quiroga.” Athena quickly introduced them as they all nodded their acknowledgment of each other.

Athena told her story about her and Kai at the academy in very vivid detail. Ashley turned all sorts of red but Athena could tell that she was thinking of something or someone else. Liara looked almost excited as her breathing was coming in gasps. Tali looked amused, but you couldn’t really tell with her mask. Mari looked like she wanted to hear more. “It was the best sex I’ve ever had, bar none.” She finished her tale and looked around the room to make sure they were the only ones who heard. “He was also the best sparring partner and teacher of hand to hand combat that I’ve ever had as well.”

“Did you love him?” Ashley asked innocently.

Athena forcefully spit out her water spraying all over the table and herself. “I don’t think what me and Kai had could ever be called love. Lust yes, but not love.” Athena had to spread out some of the liquid on her shirt with a napkin because in reality it would only go away when it dried. Good thing it was only water. “He was a lot of fun, but there was something so dark about him. I sensed it in the way he so enjoyed putting a beating on the other recruits. He would always have to be told to stop.” She continued to reminisce. “He was too focused on being the best and he really didn’t
have any significant amount of time to spend with me other than when we practiced together.” She paused while she collected her thoughts. “I think I could’ve loved him if he let me, but he just wouldn’t let me. I think he just thought of me as a pleasant distraction and that’s it.”

“I can’t believe he’s working for them now. The day he got N7, I tried to message him a congratulations, but he never returned my message. Then I’d heard he killed that Krogan and got convicted of murder.” She sighed. “Deep down inside I knew he would do something like that. How did he get out?”

“Cerberus sprung him and now he’s probably their top operative.” Mari answered her.

“Mari, he’s an enemy you don’t want.” Athena’s face was full of worry and doubt. “He’s a killing machine that can probably give me a run for my money. I’m going to petition Steven to transfer you to the Normandy. If he wants you, he’s going to have to go through me and he’s going to be very surprised at the shit I can do now.”

Athena stood up to see Jeff slowly move to take a seat with Garrus and Kaiden. “Does he know about it?” Ashley asked her.

“Ash, I’m not joking about that fucking airlock.” Mari chuckled and Ashley gave her a smile that she knew meant that she would not betray her trust.

Athena took her leave of the ladies who as soon as she left started to chat like long lost relatives. It actually put a smile on her face at how well they were all getting along.

“Hey Lieutenant!” She heard Ashley yell and then saw Kaiden look up. “I’m gonna need some help with the maintenance of the guns. Is there any way you can do that?”

“I’ll assign Corporal Sakai okay?” Kaiden answered professionally despite shoveling what amounted to about a pound of potatoes down his throat.

“Damn he’s clueless.” Ashley looked dreamily at Kaiden.

Athena shouldn’t giggle as this is a serious breach of Alliance protocol, but she would be a hypocrite to enforce the rules too harshly. So she just smiled and blurted out. “He’s pretty hot though. Good taste chief, good taste.”

Chapter End Notes

I had this one written for a bit and was dying to get it out here. In my story Kai was in the class behind Shepard’s and I suspected that they knew each other and well this happened. I took my inspiration from the love scene in the movie "Mr. and Mrs. Smith” with Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. Kai is one of my favorite characters in the game and well there it is. I hope you guys can forgive me for this one.
SSV Normandy Helm - Citadel Docks

Never in his life did Joker so eagerly want for Kaiden to take the helm. He was so distracted by Athena’s little show six hours before that he couldn’t concentrate and if an asteroid appeared in front of him, he’d probably crash into it. The image of her sitting on his lap while he was piloting almost sent him into convulsions. She really was a goddess and he found himself trying to think of what she really saw in him. Granted she had taken a liking to him immediately which to him was a miracle in its self. He usually rubbed people the wrong way with his wise ass remarks or his sometimes undisciplined manner. It sure was a good thing that they were docked at the Citadel.

“You’re good Joker. I got her.” Kaiden as always appeared fifteen minutes early. This usually annoyed him, but today he was thanking God for Lt. Alenko’s sense of punctuality.

“Thanks Kaiden.” His appreciation for the early relief took the Marine by surprise.

As Joker started to slowly make his way out of the helm he grimaced in the prickly feeling his legs always had from sitting so long. “You need to get out of that chair more often. You’re going to end up with a blood clot one day from sitting so long.” Kaiden was serious as always and it did seem that he was concerned for the health of the bad ass lead pilot of the Normandy.

“You sound like the Commander. She’s already ordered me to do a half hour on the bike every day.” He turned away not wanting to meet his eyes knowing he hadn’t followed her orders yet. “She’d kill me if she knew I haven’t started yet.”

“Oh she knows. Believe me she knows and I think you’re in for a rude surprise when you go down to see her now.” Joker’s face was priceless anxious. As enthusiastic as he was before to go to her quarters now his expression was full on dread. Kaiden snorted a laugh as he looked at Joker. “She doesn’t know.” He told Joker whose expression resembled someone who looked like they had been drowning and was now finally able to take breath.

“Damn Kaiden, that was cruel, even for you.” Joker had to admit to himself that he was fooled and that Kaiden’s deadpan style was damn good. Joker thought that he was going to make Kaiden pay for this, but right now he had an appointment with a goddess.

“Just make sure you start doing the PT she asked you too because if she finds out you’re not, she’s probably going to supervise you and believe me she’s a monster in the gym.” Kaiden wasn’t joking as he and Ashley had taken it upon themselves to work out with her and her relentless pace of exercise was on another plane of existence.

“Okay Dad, I’ll start tomorrow.” Joker played the part of a brat pretty well considering he really
was a brat. “Don’t scratch the paint on my baby okay?” He smartly commented and began his slow journey down the main corridor.

He had to use his crutches as his legs were being extremely uncooperative. He continued down the stairs and could hear intense laughter in the mess hall. As he rounded the corner at the bottom of the stairs and looked into the mess hall he could see Ashley, Athena, Tali, Dr. Chakwas and Marianna all in tears, he could even tell that Tali was laughing under that mask because she looked like she was having a seizure with the way she was doubled over. Marianna seemed to be telling a story. This put a smile on his face as he watched Athena’s face sporting an expression of absolute joyous laughter with tears included. He liked Marianna instantly, she was as much of a wise ass as Ashley, but with more subtleness. He also knew that Marianna was Athena’s rock and had done a lot for Athena. He grinned and slowly approached the intimidating group of women. “What’s so funny?” He interloped and they all turned in unison to look at him.

“Oh wouldn’t you like to know Lieutenant, none of your beeswax.” Athena responded in such a playful tone that he forgave her for that insolent answer. She stood up to her towering self and waved at him to follow her. “Come on, we need to talk.”

“Hold on a second chica, you never properly introduced me to your helmsman.” Marianna stood up and didn’t even look at Athena as she walked over to Jeff. “So you’re the sexy Frigate Thief Mamita was gushing over?” Jeff could feel Marianna eye him up and down as if she were inspecting him for worthiness and was found wanting.

Athena was amused by Mari’s antics, but she knew her game and playfully introduced them. “Mari shut it. Lieutenant Jeff Moreau, lead pilot and probably the best helmsman in the galaxy. Jeff this is Lieutenant Marianna Quiroga, Fleet Intelligence, second best car thief I’ve ever known (Mari coughed like she was about to challenge that remark but Athena plowed on with the intro.) and now resident pain in the ass.” The affection coming from Athena was palpable. This was Athena’s sister in all but blood and God help anyone who tried anything with her.

Jeff politely put out his hand and she took it lightly while pulling him closer for a peck on the cheek. “I really do need to take my next shore leave in Argentina.” He joked.

“Do the men in Argentina do that too?” Ashley asked and Athena nodded. “I heard the Italians kiss both cheeks.” Athena and Mari both nodded. “I also heard that the French tongue each other when they meet.” The entire room stopped and stared at Ashley. There was a silent pause and then the whole table broke out in laughter. “What? That’s not true?” Ashley tried to continue her train of thought, but it was no use as she also broke down and started to laugh.

Athena and Jeff excused themselves and made their way to her room. He slowly and intently looked her up and down from behind. She was still in her Alliance Dress Blues and although it was loose fitting, he could just make out the outline of her magnificent frame. Damn if she wasn’t perfect. He started to get angry at himself that he couldn’t keep up with her gate. She turned to look at him as she let her hair out of that regulation bun and it fell in a beautiful wavy mess over her shoulders. “God she’s so beautiful.” He whispered to himself. He started to hurry as quickly as he could. He entered the room after her as she undid her uniform blouse.

“Oh wouldn’t you like to know Lieutenant, none of your beeswax.” Athena responded in such a playful tone that he forgave her for that insolent answer. She stood up to her towering self and waved at him to follow her. “Come on, we need to talk.”

“He’s a brat. “Don’t scratch the paint on my baby okay?” He smartly commented and began his slow journey down the main corridor.
goddess like her, who could take her pick of the most beautiful men in the universe would want to
be with of all people, him. The prickly feeling in his legs actually brought him back to full
consciousness to see her sitting on the side of her bed directly opposite him. Her face now only
inches from his. “I…what?” Was his incredibly uncharacteristically nervous response.

The grin that appeared on her face sent a wave of electricity down his spine. “You…Jeff, you’re
an amazing person. I don’t want to take advantage of you, I mean I…I do want to, but not if you
don’t want to.” She actually sounded nervous? “I don’t want to lose you as a friend.” Oh shit
here it comes. I knew it was going to happen. He thought to himself as she continued to speak to
him. “You’ve listened to me tell you about everything and helped me more than you can possibly
imagine.” He zoned out and didn’t listen to a word she was saying. Please don’t say it, please
don’t say it… He continued to think to himself as his expression turned to one of absolute
desperation until he couldn’t take it anymore.

“If you say you just want to be friends, I swear I am going kick your ass right here.” He stopped
listening to her little speech and blurted it out to her immediate shock and amusement. “I don’t
give a fuck if you’re the high and mighty Maw Killing, Pirate Exterminating Commander Shepard.
I will fucking kick your ass if you say it. How do you think it will look to everyone if a cripple
beat the shit out of you?” He started to get angry as he looked her in the eye only to get a big smile
in return.

“I was going to ask you if you were sure you knew what you were getting into, you asshole.” She
responded as she stood up in front of him and threw her blouse at him leaving him with that
nervous but now relieved expression as he tried not look at her marvelous physique. She leaned
into him and put her hands on the armrests of the chair. He was dead silent as he looked away
from her. “So do you?” He heard her but it seemed that his mouth couldn’t form the word to
answer her.

Her scent filled his senses, his eyes were met by her magnificently perfect and piercing aqua blue
ones. “I…I…Oh…fuck! I don’t know why you make me so nervous.” He could see how
amused she was at his fumbling attempts to get his wits back. “Yeah, real funny…” He looked
down and tried to think of a clever response and all he got was something completely different.
“You probably think I’m such a dork.”

Athena let out that little girl giggle that he loved so much. He knew that she wasn’t thinking about
anything except good things now. “You are a dork, you are a major dork, but you’re my dork
and…” She stepped back, walked slowly to the other side of the bed, she crawled onto the bed on
all fours and with a predatory expression on her face, and she finished her sentence. “Commander
Athena Shepard absolutely adores her DORK.”

He didn’t know what to do. It was like he was living in a dream world and he would wake up once
again at the helm thinking there is no way that she could possibly be interested in him like this.
There she was though, he wasn’t waking up, his body wasn’t responding like it would in a dream.
He squeezed the arm rests of his chair with all his might like he might be taken away from this
moment.

She relished the look on his face, God did she want to ravish every inch of him. She had never felt
for anyone the way she felt for Jeff. He was wonderfully awkward with her in these encounters,
but he was a great listener and friend, and damn if he wasn’t the sexiest pilot in the Alliance. “So
back to my original question…do you know what you’re getting yourself into?”

Jeff looked like he legitimately wanted to think of a thoughtful response to her question when the
comm came on. “Commander? Captain Anderson and Ambassador Udina request your presence
at the Embassy, ASAP.” Kaiden sounded almost apologetic.

He watched as she totally flopped onto the bed, burying her face into the mattress. She looked up to see Jeff still watching her. “Tell em I’ll be right there.” She answered Kaiden as she gave Jeff a frustrated smile.

“I really don’t know, but I don’t care. Who’d a thought that my first real girlfriend would be a goddess name Commander Athena Shepard. If you turned me into a pile of goo, I think I would be the happiest pile of goo in the galaxy.” He watched her put back her Dress Blues back on and noticed as a streak of crimson crawled up her neck and cheeks. “Now I know why you smile all the time when you do that to me.”

“Oh be quiet you...you...you sexy ass goofball.” She buttoned her blouse as she stuck her tongue out at him. “You wanna get something to eat when I finish, Tali knows this great place in the Commons.”

“Wow...that’s the second time you asked me out.” There was the smug ass pilot that she knew. He was back to his wisecracking self because Anderson and Udina just saved his ass. “Can’t say I don’t love having you as a stalker.”

One thing he noticed about Athena was how fast and efficiently she got dressed. She was already putting up her hair in that bun and the rest of her was already decked out in her blues. “I’ll call you?” She looked back as she was about to walk out of her own room.

He nodded enthusiastically as his own face started to heat up. She smiled once again at his slight discomfort and walked out. “Damn it. She got me again.” He whispered to himself.

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Ambassador Udina’s Office, Citadel

When she walked in she could see that Udina was agitated and ranting again. “Shepard! We have an urgent request of you.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Shepard smirked at Anderson who shook his head slowly as a warning to her not to push the Ambassador today.

“Asteroid X57 seems to have lost all comms and is on a collision course to strike Terra Nova in the Asgard system of the Exodus Cluster.” Athena studied the Ambassador’s expression and he seemed to be visibly shaken.

“I’m on it. Do we know anything specific to the situation?” She asked professionally.

“The asteroid has three fusion thrusters that are used to maintain a close orbit. It seems that they are malfunctioning and are now pushing the asteroid toward the planet. Shepard...there over four million colonists on Terra Nova, that asteroid is the size of Manhattan Island. It will destroy everything on the surface if it hits.” This was probably the first time she had seen Udina as a real person.
“How long do I have?” She examined the astro-chart laying across Udina’s desk.

Udina pointed to the approximate location on the chart and its projected course. “You’ve got fourteen hours, but since it takes at least ten to get there from here…well you do the math.” Anderson seemed to emphasize the importance of leaving now.

“Kaiden, get on the comms and inform everyone that shore leave is canceled. I want everyone back on board and the Normandy ready to go before I get back.” She was out the door leaving Anderson grinning with pride. “Charles, plot a course for the Asgard system in the Exodus Cluster.”

It really wasn’t fair how fast she was compared to the others. Athena reached the dock so quickly that the crew that was on shore leave was still standing in formation outside the airlock doing a roll call to make sure they were all back. “DETAIL ATTENTION!” Ashley yelled out and the entire formation went from smoking and joking, to a snapping position of attention. Ashley turned toward and saluted. “All present and accounted for ma’am.”

Athena returned her salute. “Excellent, at ease. Get everyone on board, we’re leaving in ten minutes.” She turned and quickly made her way to the airlock. “Kaiden are we ready to go?”

“Yes ma’am. Just waiting for everyone to get on board.” Kaiden responded.

It wasn’t five minutes before the Normandy broke her moorings and headed out for the Exodus Cluster at full speed.

She quickly made her way to her quarters to find Jeff on her terminal searching for stories on her. “Jeff, what the hell are you still doing in here and not in your sleeping pod…well it doesn’t matter. I need you at the helm immediately, I’m gonna need Kaiden in the briefing room.”

Jeff could see that whatever meeting she had with Udina and Anderson was pretty serious as she was in definite Commander Mode. “What’s going on Commander?” He watched her expression change to one of frustration once her eyes met his.

He started to stand and grabbed his crutches. “I’m sorry Jeff, but I need you at the helm like now.” She gently picked him up, crutches and all and quickly made her way to the helm. He was amazed at her strength and speed, _I mean holy shit! I’m like a feather to her, God her muscles are so hard she feels like she’s made of iron. Damn._ He thought to himself.

She made it to the helm in less than a minute with Kaiden already out of the pilot’s seat. “She’s all yours Joker.” Kaiden quickly motioned her to the chair.

“Six hours and seventeen minutes early, makes your fifteen minutes look pretty lame.” Jeff joked to Kaiden. Kaiden smirked at him and retorted. “Gee, Thanks Joker.” It sounded as sarcastic as it was.

“I’ll need everyone in the briefing room immediately.” Athena ordered over the comm. “Jeff I’ll tell you what’s going on after the briefing okay?” She sounded like she did something wrong and was trying to explain herself, but he knew that at this moment she was mission first and he could forgive her of almost anything that would seem to be a little harsh to an outsider looking in.

He turned to give her wink. “Understood Commander.” It was all she needed to see from him causing a thin creasing closed upturn of her lips. He then turned back to the helm controls and as he often did and lost himself in the ship’s controls.

He hit the relay two minutes ahead of schedule. Pressly’s navigating and Jeff’s piloting skill
combined into an incredible combo of efficiency when it came to transiting the Mass Relays. While in transit approximately thirty minutes after hitting the relay he could hear Kaiden’s and Athena’s shoes make their familiar click clack on the walkway as they approached the helm.

“You’re good Jeff, I got her.” He heard Kaiden and started to get up from the pilot’s seat. He saw Athena and was actually waiting for her to tell him what was going on.

“So?” He watched her face and it was actually fraught with worry as she shook her head.

“Can you believe that there is an asteroid aimed and accelerated at Terra Nova?” She responded and he could see her wheels turning in her head.

“Could someone be doing this on purpose?” He asked her as he continued to adjust the controls.

“If it’s on purpose, I’m gonna go with the Batarians. They seem to always wanna do the mass killing thing around here.” If he thought that his input would lighten her mind a little he was dead wrong. She contemplated what he said and her expression changed to one of cold, calculating and seething fury.

“They better hope for their own sake that it’s not them. I swear I will make Torfan look like a pool party if it’s them.” This is the side of the Commander that frightened Kaiden and now Jeff saw it and thought to himself. *I’d hate to be those poor bastards if it does turn out to be them.*

“Hey Kaiden, don’t scratch the paint okay?” Jeff joked not thinking his line was getting old. Kaiden rolled his eyes and took a seat.

Athena slowly walked with Jeff back down to the berthing area. “Jeff you should get your rest. I might end up needing you to pull us out of there Therum style if things go to shit.” Jeff didn’t even hesitate because he knew she was ordering him to rest. She wanted him at his best and that worried him about how bad this mission was going to be. As he was about to step into his pod, he felt her hand pull gently on his shoulder. He turned to make eye contact and she put on that crooked smile. “Are you really sure you know what you’re getting into?”

It totally blew him away as he chuckled. “Not out here Commander, the cameras, you’re crazy.” He couldn’t contain himself as she laughed and left him to rest and headed to the hangar probably to clean her weapons and check on the shuttles and mako.

They made the Asgard system in nine hours and thirty three minutes. Athena decided on one four man team to do the job. She figured that if she could turn off the southern most thruster, the other two would begin to steer the asteroid back around toward its corrected orbit around Terra Nova as long as she shut the other two in time so as not to let the asteroid come back around. Jeff watched his vid connection as Athena, Garrus, Wrex, and Kaiden cut a swath through prepared defenses as she also methodically deactivated all of the thrusters. When Jeff thought of the Batarians and their involvement, he couldn’t help but wince a little about what must have been going on inside those facilities. He got a glimpse when he connected to Athena’s helmet cam and all he could see were Batarians and some Krogans being mowed down like a scythe taking down a field of wheat. “Jeff you read?”

“Go ahead Commander.” Her voice addressing him was a surprise.

“There should be a shuttle with three of these fucking bastards leaving the surface right about now, take it out.” Jeff could tell she was pissed. *She’s probably going to want to hit the bag when she gets back.*

It was a chance for action! He looked on his targeting display and saw a small shuttle of Batarian
make taking off from the surface. “Yes ma’am.” The Normandy immediately went into action and
Joker sounded all hands battle stations. He then initiated a pursuit of the said shuttle as he watched it
desperately maneuver to try and escape from what turned out to be the giant spider lying in wait
called the Normandy. Jeff smiled because he knew that those Batarians were probably trying
frantically to put in a faster than light solution into their computer to make a jump. Jeff lined up
the shuttle with ease and let the mass accelerator cannon go off with a slight jolt to the Normandy.
The end result was disintegration as the shuttle just disappeared in an exploding cloud of tiny
particles of debris.

He was so excited that he screamed into the mike. “DIRECT HIT!” After a few seconds he
scanned the area and confirmed that the debris field was the remains of that shuttle. His adrenaline
started coming down and he began to get a weird feeling that coming over him. He couldn’t really
put his finger on it until he thought to himself that he had just killed someone for the first time in
his career. He had just ended someone’s life and once he realized it the feeling of absolute nausea
became overwhelming.

“Got him Commander.” He could hear his own voice break a little. Were they just trying to
escape Athena’s wrath? Did I just murder them in cold blood? He was surprised and also
disturbed at how easily he pulled the trigger on that defenseless shuttle. What if it had been a full
complement of people in there? It looked like it could hold at least twelve individuals easily as it
seemed to be a similar size to the Kodiak. “Nice job Jeff.” He heard her and noticed a little hitch
in her voice. Did she know?

He pulled up the vid and watched it over and over. He zoomed in, zoomed out trying to see if he
could make out any people, but it was useless. The Mass Accelerator cannon had turned the
shuttle into a cloud of tiny particles. Those three Batarians didn’t know what hit them, their death
was instantaneous. A single tear started to roll down his cheek as he thought about it. There was
no doubt about it. He didn’t like the feeling.

“Jeff we’re ready for pickup.” He heard her and thought how awful it must be to carry her burden.
Jesus does the Alliance owe her big time, shit we all do!

Once she came on board she immediately went to the briefing room and opened a channel to the
Citadel Embassy. Udina looked ecstatic. “Shepard that was a close one, but you have reaffirmed
our decision to choose you to do this job. Thank you Shepard.”

“Some Batarian named Balak was behind this and he killed several of the miners. He and his crew
have been liquidated and shouldn’t be bothering any of our colonies again.” Athena sounded so
cold as she described what happened that it made Anderson visibly flinch. “We need to find out if
these operations are being sanctioned by the hegemony. I’m getting sick of these four eyed
bastards.”

“If this was sanctioned then it’s nothing less than an act of war.” Anderson’s voice was relaxed,
but there was a seething fire underneath that calm façade. “I’ll let Alliance HQ know. I’m sure
the Hegemony is going to deny everything.”

She slowly entered the helm to see that Jeff was watching a recording of his downing of the
Batarian shuttle. He kept rewinding it and playing it over and over again. “Jeff, are you okay?”
Her voice broke a little because she knew that he had never killed anyone until now.

“I’m fine…It’s just…I don’t feel right about taking out that shuttle like that. Why didn’t you ask
me to disable it instead?” He was upset and the question was actually a good one.

“The Batarian’s name was Balak. He doesn’t deserve your concern…that son of bitch aimed an
asteroid at Terra Nova in the hopes of getting his revenge for Torfan and Elysium. He butchered several of the miners and scientists on X57. He rigged the room where he kept the rest of the workers with explosives and gave me a choice. To take him or save the people from being blown into a bloody mess of body parts and metal.” She didn’t take her eyes off of his. “I chose to help those people, well Kaiden is an amazing bomb tech…Jeff I’m sorry, but he was willing to wipe out a colony of four million, I couldn’t let him get away.” Jeff felt ashamed that he questioned her. He knew that she would always try to at least end things peacefully, but there really was no peaceful end possible for this one.

“I’m sorry Commander, I just…it’s just that I never…I ended three lives today.” She squeezed his shoulder and he turned to look at her again. There was an understanding in her gaze that immediately told him that she knew how he felt. He let out a little grin that she reciprocated.

“It doesn’t get easier, just be thankful that you’re not numb to it yet.” He could see that she had broken many times and the Alliance just kept putting her back together only to send her out again. “Do you know that the only thing keeping me from murdering every Batarian I see is the image of a little girl crawling out of a pile of bodies. A tiny…beautiful…innocent Batarian girl crying for her momma. That little girl and the other three Batarian slaves we rescued from Torfan took the numbness away for a while, but they also gave me the motivation to keep exterminating these slaver vermin where ever I see them.” She turned her face from him because it hurt that she had to explain herself why it was necessary, but the alternative was worse and she didn’t think that he understood. He did not respond and only watched her with what she interpreted as pity, like she had lost part of her compassion her bloody and violent life.

She looked at him with eyes that could burn a hole in his skull. “I’m sorry Jeff, I DID ask you if you knew what you were getting yourself into did I not?” She didn’t like his judgmental stare. It was something he had not done before and now he was just like everyone else. It really upset her to see that he could be that way as well.

He was broadsided by the comment. He didn’t think she was serious when she asked that silly question. Of course he knew and he wouldn’t have it any other way. He noticed her aggressive stare and knew he made a mistake by questioning her on this. She started to turn to leave when he didn’t say anything.

“NO! Athena please don’t go.” His outburst caught her by surprise. Her angry stare was still there, but it looked like she was expecting something from him, anything to take away her anger. “I’ve known since I met you. I’m sorry…I truly didn’t understand what you must have felt during any of those missions, but now I think I feel a little bit of what you must go through. It’s not like I wasn’t trained to shoot things down right?” She squatted next to his chair to listen closer with her anger quickly dissipating as his words left his mouth. “I wouldn’t change places with anyone in the universe if it meant I couldn’t be with you.” She smiled as she leaned her forehead onto his.

“I think I’ve fallen for you Lieutenant Moreau.” She whispered to herself low enough to earn her a puzzled look from Jeff. “You might regret your decision.” She playfully told him as she stood up.

“Never.” He adamantly answered and turned to return to his duties.
Too many games and stories gloss over the killing of sentients. I wanted to show that it does affect people and since Joker had never killed anyone during the game, what better opportunity than the X57 mission. Yeah I know that Balak gets away in the game, but that really bothered me because the Normandy was so close. What kind of ship could Balak possibly had? I say at the most a freighter and at the least a shuttle with FTL capabilities, both of which would be easy prey for the mighty frigate. Anyway thanks for reading and comments/critique is always welcome.
The Ducati

Chapter Summary

Another glimpse of Athena’s past gets Jeff all hot and bothered. Athena bonds with Wrex through his favorite activity.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SSV Normandy – Enroute back to Citadel

Jeff was tired. He thanked Kaiden for relieving him as he peeled himself out of the helm and began his long trek down to his pod. Athena was sleeping for once and she absolutely needed it the way she was being run ragged. He made his way to the mess hall and noticed Marianna and Ashley watching a holovid on Mari’s Omni-tool. Mari turned to see that he was trying to sneak by. “Joker! Come here, you need to see this.”

He was so tired and he needed to go to sleep. “Can I take a rain check? I really need to get my beauty sleep.”

Mari’s smile and understanding had a playful quality to it. “Sure I understand, maybe tomorrow.”

“Is that her?” Ashley asked. “Wow!” The word ‘her’ caught his attention and although he tried to resist asking who they were talking about, he broke.

“Who are you talking about?” He asked even though he knew exactly who Ashley was asking about.

“Oh, I thought you were taking a rain check.” Mari was very comfortable with being a total wise ass with him. The grin on her face told him that it could only be one person and that was why he broke. So he slowly made his way to the two women sitting there.

Mari looked really excited. “She would kill me if she knew I had this vid. Come here and sit.” She patted a spot to her left side for him to join them. “Let me start it from the beginning. The music is from Athena’s I-Tool can’t do anything about that other than lower the volume on it.”

“Don’t you dare! I want to hear this.” Jeff chuckled as he sat next to Mari and the vid began. The song playing was ‘Girls Got Rhythm’ by the legendary twentieth century rock band ACDC. “ACDC? Great taste, no wonder we get along so well.” He commented to the amusement of Mari.

“You like that shit too?” Mari laughed. “You two are never allowed near anything that would control the music we listen to okay?” She gently squeezed his leg.

He started to pay more attention to the vid and saw what looked like a street in any city. “Where is this?” He asked her.
“La Florida in Buenos Aires, keep watching.” She answered.

Jeff watched the video as a throng of people walked past the camera living their lives, going to and from work, play or whatever they were doing. This was obviously a video taken from a light pole camera that was pointed down at the street. He continued to watch and noticed a tall, tight leather pants and jacket, dark sunglasses and very long and high ponytail Athena stop underneath the camera. “Wow is that her? Oh My my, she looks so hot!”

Mari chuckled and nodded. “Just so you know she was only seventeen in this vid, you perv.” The amount of red going up Jeff’s neck signaled his embarrassment.

Athena was looking around the area in a suspicious manner and she was probably up to no good. It looked like she was comfortable with the situation when she walked over to and mounted what looked like a cherry red Ducati Air Bike. She pulled some kind of tool and appeared to plug it into the bike all the while the music was blaring from her I-Tool. The bike began to float as its anti-gravity drive engaged. Athena put the tool back in her purse and took off with the camera following her. “Did she just steal that air bike?”

Mari nodded. “It was a bait bike. That’s why the camera tracked her after she took it. This is her greatest achievement as a thief, bar none. Well maybe the Kodiak shuttle was more impressive, but this one was just like it was out of a movie. Just keep watching.”

As he watched, the scene switched to another camera and the song switched to another ACDC song ‘Heatseeker.’ The camera was on the front of a police patrol that started to pull behind her and turned on its emergency lights. He watched as she turned to look back and damn it if she didn’t smile at the camera before she took off like a bat out of hell. The way she weaved through the traffic pattern made everyone look like they were standing still. “She’s getting away! Somebody hit the kill switch now damn it!” The panic in the officer’s voice was evident.

“Did you edit the video so that the music volume faded when the police were talking? Nice job, this is some serious Hollywood quality shit you made here.” This time it was Jeff’s turn to be a wise ass and Mari ate it up as she nodded and smiled.

“I got her, holy shit she’s moving!” Another officer chimed as the camera switched to his car. She went by him at nothing short of light speed. “Hit the fucking switch now!”

“Kill switch engaged!” Came a voice that was obviously not involved in the pursuit. The camera didn’t switch and soon the speck that had been Athena on that bike became bigger until the pursuing officer was right behind her. She looked like she was frantically looking for the kill switch then the camera shows nothing but static for a second. When it comes back on Athena blows a kiss to the camera and is once again hauling ass away from the officer. “She disabled it! Damn it, she’s running again!”

“All units in the vicinity of La Florida, we have officers in pursuit of a red in color Ducati Air Bike being driven by a female with a middle-eastern complexion, black hair and dressed in black leather wearing dark sunglasses. All units not currently occupied please respond and assist.” The dispatcher instructed over the radio.

The camera switched constantly from light poles, ground cams, building cams and patrol cams showing Athena’s remarkable piloting skill. She squeezed in between two buildings leaving the two patrol cars to travel around the building and losing sight of her. She would dive in and out of the traffic pattern with such speed that it looked like she was definitely going to hit something or be hit by something. She taunted the police by standing on the seat of the bike as they tried to close the distance only to drop back in the seat and accelerate at an alarming rate. She was an absolute
blur and the police just couldn’t keep up with her. “What is she doing?” Ashley asked as Athena dove for the ground and skimmed it at an alarming speed as she weaved through the canyons of buildings.

“There aren’t as many cams that can follow her near the ground and there are a lot more places to hide. I have to switch views to this one.” Mari adjusted her Omni-tool and now they were watching Athena’s sunglasses cam. She hadn’t slowed down and wow was she taking a risk with those blind corners. “I had to manually cut the official vids with her sunglass cam, but keep watching.”

“Does she not know how to drive slow? I mean this explains everything when it comes to her and the Mako.” Ashley chuckled when the camera switched again to a light pole as Athena finally slowed to a normal pace. She was looking around for what Ashley and Jeff assumed was a place to ditch the bike, but they were wrong. She parked under another light pole camera and got off the bike. She began to open the control panel just below the main operating display. A quick spark shot out of the display and they could see that the bike had ceased to operate. She calmly took off the license plate and started to type quickly into the control panel. A few seconds later the bike came back to life. She delicately replaced the panel and then turned toward the camera, blew it a kiss and was gone. The camera which had followed her, no longer did.

Marianna could see that Jeff and Ashley were puzzled by what just happened. “She reset the main control input with her fucking biotics. Short of actually getting a hold of a new bike, she just basically got an entirely new bike that was no longer coming back on the police computers as the same one they were chasing. She also took the license plate off and so that it would just come back as an unregistered bike which was not a priority for the police at that moment.”

The video switched back to her sunglass cam and she no longer needed to fly as crazy as she did to get away. Her camera continued to run as she piloted the bike around some abandoned streets and pulled into a garage with a young Marianna clapping her hands as she pulled in. There was no microphone so there was no sound of them in the vid. Jeff could only imagine what they were saying to each other.

“Keep watching.” The video continued and showed Athena return the next day back to where the whole chase began. She parked the spotless (They obviously washed it.) bike underneath the same light pole she found it. This time she was dressed in ripped jeans and a white t-shirt with black leather gloves. Her hair was pulled into two tight braided pigtails and she had the same sunglasses as before.

“Oh really fair that she can make any outfit look hot? I mean come on how am I supposed to go to sleep after this?” Jeff and Ashley were glued to the vid of their commander actually being a bad guy. Ashley looked a little disturbed as she was always a goody two shoes, but she understood that Athena was an orphan and being raised on the streets is something she would never wish on anyone. Jeff on the other hand couldn’t get past the driving and the absolute glam-monster that Athena was.

They continued to watch as she reached into her purse and pulled out her lipstick. It was a darker shade of red than the bike as she applied it to those beautifully plump lips. She kissed the front of the bike’s frame and wrote something on it with her lipstick. She then just walked away and the vid went to static.

“She returned the bike?” Ashley was very surprised. “She probably could have made quite a bit for a Ducati.”

“What did she write on the bike?” Jeff could only think of how awesome it would have been to be
on that bike with her. No wonder she was such an incredible pilot.

“Check it out.” Mari pulled up a picture. It was the front of the bike with a kissing stain and a note written in lipstick. Thank you for a great night and especially for letting me play with your toy for a little while. I love you guys...Muuuuuh! There also looked like there was a signature there which definitely looked like Athena’s.

Jeff started to laugh. “She’s so awesome. Not even a scratch on it.”

“She didn’t want to steal from the Police, it was bad enough that she made them look awful by getting away.” Mari shook her head as she explained to Ashley. “Believe it or not they took that bike back to their labs to see if there was any DNA on the lipstick, but to their disappointment there wasn’t enough according to their scanner. So they actually preserved the bike and sealed the kiss and writing onto the paint. They recently sold it for almost a million credits which was given to the orphanages in the city on behalf of the Federal Police and Athena Shepard.”

Ashley looked pleasantly shocked. “Does she know?”

Mari nodded. “They asked her if it was okay to sell it with her signature on it. She is the hero of Akuze and Torfan and her name is big time. Shit, you both knew of her way before she became your commander right? I actually sent the police the video which they showed at the auction.”

Jeff wasn’t shocked at all. He did know her and this was something that she would definitely do. “I think that’s so awesome. Why isn’t this story known by more people?”

“She really didn’t want her name in the newsfeeds for this although it did get some press, well you know how the press is with feel good stories. They play for a day or two and you never hear about it again.” Mari shrugged.

“Why would she kill you if she saw that you had this?” Ashley was curious because there wasn’t anything real embarrassing in the video. If anything it showed the carefree thief that turned into the hero of humanity. To Ashley it was a story of redemption.

“She can say whatever she likes, she’s ashamed that she was a criminal. She always talked to me about how her life would have been if her parents survived. That’s all I’ll say, she’ll have to tell you the rest.” Marianna answered.

“You people need to be more considerate of others that are trying to sleep and pipe the fuck down!” Athena had opened her door, yelled out and slammed the door shut once again.

Marianna was giggling into her hand as Ashley stood and quickly headed to the elevator. Jeff smiled and headed to his pod to get some seriously needed sleep. He hoped that he would dream of her and that bike chase. That shiny black commando look she had on the bike was as hot as it got. To have that ponytail in his face as he held on for dear life was making his body heat up. Fuck! I gotta get some sleep damn it! He thought to himself as he stepped into the pod. His thoughts switched to Athena a few seconds ago. He chuckled at her droopy and drowsy look and hair that looked like it exploded everywhere. She’s still super-hot. With that he fell asleep.

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Normandy Hangar Bay
The sparring session was light and Athena was trying to teach Liara some of the finer points of biotic combat. She knew that Liara had some training and was competent, but her training with Matriarch T’Nato was of the commando variety and she was going to try to pass some of it to Liara. Since Liara had limited combat experience with weapons, she would try to get her comfortable with barriers and making sure that she could be deadly in close. Today Athena was demonstrating her ability of throwing a tremendously powerful and debilitating biotic punch.

Athena watched Liara as the cute Asari maiden hit the steel target and put a sizable dent in it. That punch would have sent even Wrex across the room. It put a big smile on Athena’s face. “You really are a natural at this Liara. It took me two days to learn how to do that and you learned it in only a couple of hours. I’m sure Commando training would be nothing for you.”

Liara turned to see Athena with that beautiful smile on her face and she began to feel the heat rise up from her neck all the way up to her face. “Thank you Commander, you’re being way too kind.” Liara reminded her of Jeff when she got uncomfortable and damn was she a looker. “If you’re ready for a real sparring match I’m game.” There was that sexy ass baritone Barry White voice of Urdnot Wrex as he looked amused at both of them.

“I could listen to your voice all day Wrex.” She smiled and there was a definite uptick to his mouth. “Come on you walking tank, you want some of this?” She directed him with her index finger to come closer.

“Rules?” She asked him since he was the guest.

Wrex looked at her like she grew another head. “Rules? What rules?”

“She means that you can’t go all out in the ship without risking putting a hole in the hull and killing us all.” Garrus chimed from underneath the Mako.

“Oh…okay, no biotics for you.” Wrex sounded so mischievous it made Garrus laugh and put a grin on Liara’s face.

“What about you?” Wrex was actually an incredibly powerful biotic and even with her physical abilities she would be hard pressed to be able to beat him with all his power.

“I meant both of us. We’ll go all out one day, maybe with another Thresher Maw involved.” He wasn’t kidding.

“Okay you big turtle, let’s see what you got.” She stepped into the sparring area and did her best Bruce Lee impression. She waved him in with her best scowl.

Wrex unbuckled his armor and carefully put it to on top of one of the crates. He was as intimidating without his armor as he was with. He had plenty of carapace covering his vitals and a huge hump that made him at least eight feet tall. He easily weighed around a thousand pounds and moved around way too effortlessly for something his size. He was magnificent. She watched and heard as his thunderous steps announced his entrance into the sparring area. “No crate throwing or damaging equipment either.” She had the sick feeling that there was going to be no way to avoid destroying the entire hangar bay.

Wrex nodded.

“Oh this is going to be good. Hey Joker, you watching this?” Garrus had climbed out from under
the Mako and of course had to open his big mouth.

“It figures, she can’t find a Thresher Maw to play with so she has to pick on the biggest baddest Krogan in the galaxy. Nice work Commander.” Jeff’s voice sounded like he was okay with this.

The hangar bay soon filled up with all of the off duty personnel, but Kaiden and Ashley were conspicuously absent. *Good for them.* She thought to herself that this was the perfect time for them to get away with something. Too bad no one could do the same for her and Jeff...and maybe Liara.

Wrex and Athena began to circle each other slowly and deliberately. “So Wrex, have you ever encountered humans in your travels as a merc?” She was waiting for his first move and she really liked to trash talk to her opponent.

Of course Wrex didn’t answer and charged her like a Cape Buffalo. It surprised her, but compared to her he was way too slow. She sidestepped thinking how easy it was to avoid his charge and was surprised when he grabbed a hold of her leg as he twisted mid-charge and flung her toward the bulkhead where he usually sits and cleans his weapons. She was air borne and moving at a pretty decent clip toward the bulkhead. She curled up and then extended her legs so that she hit the bulkhead with her back. The loud thud and large dent made everyone gasp. She slowly slid back down the bulkhead toward the floor. Her vision was a little blurred and she couldn’t remember ever being hit so hard. She shook her head to get her bearings and saw that he was charging again.

This time she decided to change her tactics a bit. His weight gave him a big advantage in any grappling situation. He could lift her like a paperweight and do whatever he pleased, so she decided to chop him down like a tree. Using throws was out of the question because she saw that he was trying to bait her with that possibility. The few weakness every Krogan had were their inability to reach above their heads and defend their hump area and they were slow by human standards.

She waited for the last second of his charge and leaped into the air as he tried to reach up to grab her with little success. He stood up straight and felt her on top of his hump and before he could do anything she landed a double hammer strike with a resounding crack on the top of his head which made him kneel as the world began to spin. He saw a blurry image of her land in front of him and he instinctively put his arm up and caught a powerful punch in his block. He instinctively lashed out with his head and caught her right in her forehead. She reeled back into the bulkhead with what looked like blood streaming from the top of her head.

“WREX! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING!” Joker was not okay with what just happened, but Wrex was still groggy from her strike. His head-butt should’ve ended the fight and yet there she was smiling as the blood poured down her face.

He started to stand when he felt a tremendous impact from a leg kick on his right leg that made him collapse back to his knees, the pain was excruciating. *Oh this Human Female is a Krogan Warrior in every way!* Still in a daze he felt her lifting him off the ground and a second later he was in the air... “COMMANDER STOP!” he heard Liara’s concerned scream as he was waiting for the ending impact that never came as he felt himself floating gently back down to the deck.

Wrex stood up, finally shaking the haze in his vision to see Shepard’s bloody face staring back at him with a look of concern on her face. “Wrex are you okay?”

Wrex started to laugh. “Shepard, you’re alright. We have to do that more often. Ha! You’d make a terrible Krogan.”
Athena had a puzzled smirk. “Why is that?”

“You didn’t finish me off.” Wrex was chuckling. “You really are alright Shepard.”

“You Krogan are really out of your minds.” Garrus commented as he slid back underneath the Mako.

“Why would I want to layout and hurt my comrade? I need you healthy, not a bloody mess.” She huffed as Liara used a towel to wipe the blood off her face. “If I didn’t roll back from your headbutt I think you would have had me. You’re one impressive warrior Wrex, no wonder everyone is afraid of the Krogan.”

“Commander stay still or I will call Dr. Chakwas.” Liara sounded so playful. The immediate stare she got from Athena immediately caused her to look away as a darker shade of blue crepted up her neck and cheeks. Athena chuckled and an amused grin appeared on her face as Liara continued to wipe the blood from her forehead and face while returning her gaze to Athena’s wound.

“Maybe they should be more afraid of you humans.” Wrex retorted with a chuckle.

“That’s what I say.” Garrus muffled comment coming from underneath the Mako caught her attention as she was about to retort she noticed something on Wrex’s frill.

Athena examined Wrex’s frill and noticed a large fissure running from the top of his frill to the back of it. “Oh shit Wrex, you’re sure you’re okay?” She pointed to his frill.

“You cracked it, I know. It doesn’t happen often, but when it does it tells every Krogan that sees it that I was in one hell of a fight. They’ll probably want to know what did it so they could test themselves against it.” He laughed with that deep and thrumming voice. “As far as my frill, don’t worry it’ll be good as new in about a week and it will actually grow a little.” Wrex was very nonchalant about it. “The crack will actually scar over and I can always say I got it from you. The most you’ll have to worry about is having some Krogan whelps trying to challenge you in the future.”

The blood finally slowed to a trickle as the bluish yellow bruise started to form around the impact point at the center of her forehead. “It’s a good thing we didn’t wear armor or we would have destroyed the hangar.” Athena’s facial expression turns into one of revelation. “Oh by the way, I think Marianna tracked down that Turian trader you were looking for.”

Wrex’s eyes widened. “Where?”

“He’s on Tuntau in the Phoenix system of the Argos Rho Cluster.” As she spoke she could see Wrex’s mouth start to sport a toothy grin.

Athena really liked Wrex he wasn’t as no nonsense as he tried to make himself seem, but when he gave his word on something it was as good as gold. They had many conversations during their pursuit of Saren and though they started on shaky ground when he executed that piece of shit Fist, (He did say he was going to kill him after all.) she now trusted him with almost everything and vice versa. He told her that he had worked for Saren and helped him take out a Volus trading vessel only to leave before getting paid because it didn’t feel right. He mentioned to her how his father betrayed him and forced him off Tuchanka to become a Merc. The genophage, Rachni wars and the Krogan rebellions were all part of his history. She knew he deeply cared about his people and wanted a better future for them no matter how indifferent he tried to act about it. She had promised to help him in his quest to retrieve his family armor and maybe help him with other things if he needed it.
“Your friend is very resourceful. How did she find him?” Wrex was truly impressed and grateful for such assistance in what he thought Athena would consider a menial task.

Athena smiled at the thought of Mari working for her now. “She’s a Pitbull…I mean she’s like a ferocious Varren when it comes to hunting intelligence, and she’s extremely good at it. If he has your armor, I hope he decides to part with it peacefully.”

“I’m going to kill h….” Wrex started.

“Wrex, promise me you won’t kill him unless we have to.” She cut him off so quickly that it surprised him. “Didn’t you say that the worst insult is to be not worth killing?”

“Only because I respect you Shepard, okay I give you my word, but I think that arrogant prick is going to die anyway. He’ll do something stupid.” Athena believed him, but she didn’t want to always have to kill everyone to get what she wanted. Hopefully Tonn Actus would see the foolhardiness of challenging a team led by her, Wrex and Garrus, not to mention the threat of an orbital bombardment from the Normandy’s guns.

Chapter End Notes

I do love sprinkling some of my Shepard’s past into the story. Wrex and Athena whooping each other’s asses in a sparring session is always fun. As far as the side quests go, I’ll try to mention all of them and how they were resolved, but I might just go and write a one shot related to this story. And yes I’m still trying to resolve the Joker/Liara/Femshep mess I am creating here.
Old Friends

Chapter Summary

This is an expanded version of the Old Friends encounter with Finch at Chora’s Den.
Heh, uhm it’s a little long, sorry it got away from me again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SSV Normandy Hangar

It had been a couple of days since they had saved Terra Nova from asteroid X57. The Normandy was in dock at the Citadel to resume the restocking of supplies that got interrupted by the asteroid turned cruise missile. Athena had a meeting with Anderson and Udina the next day so she made time for the crew to get some R & R. She wanted to take Mari with her, but Mari had become almost obsessed with trying to find Dr. Saleon for Garrus. The good Doctor was involved with some very questionable activities, mainly the black market trading of body parts and organs. So now Garrus and Mari were hunched over a terminal in the hangar discussing possible places where the doctor could have gone. “Maybe we could bait him out?” Mari could be heard.

“You think Shepard would go for it?” Garrus watched Mari work the terminal going through her own special channels and also using Athena’s Spectre access to see if there were any places where there was any unusual activity concerning special body parts such as Krogan testicles, Salarian hearts, Turian livers, or even Human hair.

“Have fun guys, don’t stay up too late.” Athena playfully yelled as she made her way back up to the CIC.

“So you grew up with the Commander?” Garrus knew this was one of Athena’s closest confidants and he was as curious as anyone for anything concerning Athena’s past.

“Yeah, we were in the ‘Reds’ together. I’ve known her since I was fourteen years old and she’s been my best friend ever since.” She continued to run her filters to see if anything would come up.

“Any good stories?” Garrus asked.

“What the fuck Garrus? If you weren’t always down here under that fucking tank maybe you would’ve heard me tell them. I actually have a video of one her best moments.” She chuckled at him with a grin. “Shit, here we go! Look at this Garrus.”

Garrus took a closer look at the screen. “Dr. Heart? Specializing in low cost surgery and organ transplants?” She heard the hum underneath his voice as he spoke. “This was actually one of the leads I was trying to follow, but wasn’t allowed to.” He had the transponder code for the Dr.’s new ship, the MSV Fedele. “Do you think the Commander will help me?”

“She absolutely loves you Garrus and she has a thing for doctors and scientists who do those kinds of things. I can guarantee you that she will do it.” She could see how excited he was getting.
Athena told her that Garrus was a former Cop. “Come on, let me show you the video I showed Jeff and Ashley the other day. Maybe after seeing it you’ll admit to her that you’d never be able to catch her.”

Mari heard his clicking as he started to laugh. “I don’t know what it is about some of you humans that make you think you’re so good.” Mari chuckled and turned to him with a gleam in her eye. “It’s just because we are that good.” She had a playful spark in her eye as she looked at him.

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The Wards just outside of Chora’s Den

“Really Wrex, you had to tell Jeff and Tali to meet us at a Strip Bar?” Athena addressed him in a very annoyed tone as they made their way to Chora’s Den.

“Come on Shepard, Flux is a dud, at least at Chora’s Den I can maybe get in a fight or do something enjoyable like watch those sexy Asari dancers.” Wrex sometimes put things in perspective as to how incredibly shallow he could be.

“I don’t understand why my sisters put themselves in such seedy environments.” Liara chimed in.

“Don’t knock it till you try it.” Wrex responded to her. “You’d be a star attraction with that back side.”

Liara started to blush that familiar shade of blue as Athena smirked. “Come on we shouldn’t keep Jeff and Tali waiting.” Athena told them.

They approached the entrance to the strip bar and Athena couldn’t help but notice someone leaning against the wall to the right of the entrance. She was always aware of her surroundings, but as she got closer, the man who was watching her like a hawk started to make her hair stand on end. “Do I know you?” She quickly closed the distance and in an instant she recognized the person. “Finch?”

He smiled an uncomfortable kind of smile, like he knew he was about to tell her something that she wouldn’t like and hoped that she wouldn’t smash his skull against the wall. “So you do remember.” He didn’t look like the Finch she remembered. She briefly thought of the young and vibrant kid that took a beating for her outside that club in Buenos Aires.

“What the hell are you doing here Finch?” Her tone was firm and cold. He bolted for Suarez’s gang as soon as she joined the Marines. Mari had told her everything. “I didn’t know you assholes had enough creds for interstellar travel.”

“Umm… I thought you would, I mean is that any way to greet an old friend?” His uncertain tone made her remember how nice a kid he used to be when they were in the ‘Reds’ together. “You probably forgot your old roots. Don’t see too many vids mentioning your past with us. I wonder how people would look at you if someone were to tell about your less than stellar past.”

“Shepard, you want me to crush this bug?” Wrex’s immensely imposing presence made Finch take a couple of steps back towards the corner. Athena put her hand on Wrex’s chest to stop his forward momentum.
“No Wrex, I can handle my friend here. Go inside and keep Jeff company.” She was now glaring at Finch.

Wrex let out a growl and made a faux charge toward Finch who looked like he was about to relieve himself until Wrex and Liara entered the club. Finch turned and looked at Athena and saw that there was no softness in her eyes for him. “What do you want Finch?”

“One…uh one of our boys got caught up doing some illegal stuff. You know a little red sand, a little smuggling, you know…uh kind of like the stuff you used to do with us.” Her expression was cold and steely as she listened to his story. “Maybe you can tell the Turians to let him go?” He was so unsure of himself. “If you do…we won’t go public with your less than pure chapter of your history.” He couldn’t even look her in the eyes.

The maniacal smile on her face told him that maybe he had overstepped his bounds. He tried to run but could not move. “Finch what happened to you? I used to think really highly of you.” She slowly caressed his face with her hand. “What’s the matter? The ‘Reds’ having problems with the interstellar law now?” She moved closer to his face and she could see his now petrified expression as she quietly whispered in his ear. “Do you remember that night in Buenos Aires? Do you remember what I did to those Marines?” She released her stasis field and allowed him to move around. He nodded to her in acknowledgment of his memory of that night. “Have you any idea of the things I can do now?”

“Athena p…p…please it was only a little red sand. Curt Weisman is young and scared, he didn’t do anything serious. Please if you ever thought anything of me, help me.” He was desperate and she didn’t drop her glare. Finch was always good at bullshitting and his discomfort told her that there was definitely something he wasn’t saying. “J…Just talk to the guard in there and see if you can get them to release him, please.”

“We’ll see. Don’t go anywhere.” Athena left him there expecting him not to be there when she came back. She walked into Chora’s Den and it hadn’t changed a bit. Wrex, Tali, Liara and Jeff were sitting at a corner booth with a pair of Asari dancers all over Wrex. She scanned the area for the Turian that Finch described and found him at a table with two other guards. She approached the guard and immediately introduced herself. “I’m Commander Shepard, I’ve got reports that you have a human by the name of Curt Weisman in your custody.”

“What’s it to you?” The guard wasn’t intimidated one bit.

“Spectre business that’s what.” She answered smugly.

The guard looked at her and then in an instant recognized her as THE Commander Shepard. “Of course Commander, we do have him in custody.”

“What did he do?” She needed to know because deep inside she was hoping that Finch was telling the truth about these ‘Minor Offences.’

“He poisoned medical supplies destined for one of our colonies. We have evidence that the group he belongs to is connected with other anti-alien activities.” Her heart sank and she knew that Finch was lying to her. Finch had tried to play her, but he was nowhere near as slick as he used to be. She wanted to believe him because she had a soft spot for him, but to know that now he was involved with a hate group was weighing heavily on her. “Is there anything that we need to be aware of Commander?”

“No, there was an issue, but after your explanation I believe I have the answers I need. Thank you.” She left the Turian looking like he needed clarity, but he would have to be happy without it
because Athena made her way out of the club again.

To her surprise, Finch was still there looking as anxious as ever. “Tell me what the hell is going on Finch. What the fuck are you involved in?” She was furious and he could tell. He should’ve known better than to approach her for help. He knew it was a bad idea.

His face dropped as he could no longer look her in the eye. “I didn’t want to ask you…you and Mari left us, but Smith wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

“Are you out of you mind? I would never be involved in the shit you’re involved with. A racist terrorist group Finch? Really? Why? ...You know what don’t answer that. I don’t care and I’m not going to help you.” She was furious as she crowded him, grabbed his shirt and pinned him against the wall. She saw the hopeless look on his face and she let out a sigh as she let go of him and gave him a little space. “Is it really that bad now? You had to know that I wouldn’t get involved in your shit.” His expression was one of saddened acquiescence. This is not how he wanted to see her again.

“Ale died a couple of months ago. Smith had him taken out for not being able to pay his debts.” The news of Alejandro’s death hit her hard as the memories of her former mentor and protector started to flow freely in her mind. Her eyes began to well up with tears, which she tried in vain not to shed. For all his faults Alejandro Suarez rescued her from the streets and it hurt to know that she had abandoned him. “Smith dissolved the ‘Reds’ and now we work for him.”

She felt for him, but trying to poison a colony of Turians was just too much. “Damn you Finch. This is not how I would have liked our reunion to go.” Smith was someone she couldn’t stand. He was a dangerous person and now he had followers with a mission to kill aliens. “He should’ve left Ale and the rest of Reds alone.”

“He thinks we’re useless and I think he’s going to kill me if I go back and tell him that I couldn’t free Curt.” Finch looked visibly shaken and as she examined him closer she could see the remnants of bruising over his left eye. No doubt, Finch’s life had gotten a lot harder since she and Mari left.

“I’m going to free Curt for you on the condition that you and the other Reds disappear.” She wanted to make sure that Finch would do as she asked. “I don’t ever want to see your name involved in any of Smith’s shit okay?” She squeezed his shoulder and there were tears in her eyes. Damn you Ale…damn you.

“Okay.” He answered her meekly. “I hate him, mamita. I wish you were still around, I know you could’ve stopped us from making these horrible decisions.” She couldn’t contain herself anymore and pulled Finch close and embraced him fiercely. “Thank you mamita, I swear I’m out and I’ll tell what’s left of the others once I get back to Earth.”

She pulled away and gazed at Finch’s sad face. “What’s left?” This night was just getting worse.

“Yeah it’s only Me, Rokosky, and Junior left. All the people who chose you are doing their own thing with me as the stupid exception. Lopez died in a Red Sand deal gone bad, Santos is in jail for murder, and Taylor disappeared and no one of has any clue where he went or what happened to him.” There sounded like there was a lot of guilt in his tone, but now there was also some semblance of hope.

“Like I said, I want you and the rest of the ‘Reds’ to disappear. If I find out you’re still involved with them we are going to have serious problems.” Finch gave a saddened look probably recognizing that Athena and Mari were once two of his best friends had left and were so far away.
The look on her face revealed that she still cared for him and the rest of the ‘Reds.’ “Do you understand what you need to do Finch?” Her pleading look told him that she was giving him and the rest a chance to get out and there was an almost hopeless quality to her gaze.

He nodded to her. “You won’t see any of us ever again. I promise.” She really needed to control her emotions, but this was just too much. She embraced Finch once more and started to take her leave of him. “Thank you Mamita.”

She went back inside and looked over to Jeff who saw the tears in her eyes. She continued towards the Turian guards and immediately addressed them. “I’m going to need you to release Curt Weisman on my Spectre Authority.”

The guard’s mandibles flared in surprise. “What? You can’t be serious!”

“I’m deadly serious. Just know that I will be taking care of this group with extreme prejudice.” The Turian guard glared at her and shook his head. He got on his comm and instructed the guards at the holding area to release Curt on her Spectre authority.

She wiped her eyes as she approached the table and noticed that Wrex now had three Asari and one human dancer seductively dancing all over him. Jeff looked at her when she sat down next to him. “You okay?”

She nodded to him and tried to put up a brave front. He must have taken that as a green light to down his drink and it did seem like he was enjoying the show. “I… I can’t stay. I have to talk to Mari.” The emotions were overwhelming her as she stood and ran out of the club.

Liara watched Athena move impossibly fast out of the club. “Something must have happened with the other human outside.”

Jeff was already quite buzzed, but still mentally sharp. “What? Another Human?”

Wrex still totally enjoying the attention he was getting from the dancers answered him. “It looked like she recognized him, she called him Finch.”

Jeff’s eyes went wide. “Finch? Oh shit I gotta get back to the Normandy. Wrex help me into my chair.”

Liara was already running out of the club with Tali right behind her. Wrex was still contemplating whether he should leave or stay.

Jeff started to get annoyed by Wrex’s lack of action. “Wrex! That man was part of her past and he can only mean that there is a shit storm in our future. We need to get back now.”

Wrex growled as he gently pushed the four dancers away and then carefully help Jeff into his powered wheel chair. “There better be a Thresher Maw involved.”

Within minutes Athena was back on the Normandy, looking for Marianna. She found her in the mess hall eating with Kaiden and Ashley. They all turned to see her pained expression as she quickly made her way to her quarters. “Mari I need to talk to you in private.”

Mari knew that face and she had a dreadful feeling as she followed Athena into her quarters. “What’s going on?” She asked.

“Smith killed Ale.” Marianna’s expression changed immediately into one as pained as Athena’s.
Ale was as much a mentor to her as he was to Athena. Even with all his faults she also had a soft spot for the former leader of the ‘Reds.’ “What? How…what happened?” There was no hiding the shock in her tone as the tears began to form in her eyes.

“Finch was here and he talked me into freeing one of the Smith’s people from a Turian stockade. I almost killed him until he told me what was going on back home. Lopez is dead too, Santos is in jail for killing somebody and Taylor is gone.” Mari listened and she could feel the seething rage bubbling underneath her saddened friend. It was a rage that was also lurking underneath her own mask of misery.

“I’m not going to ask you about Finch, but you do remember I told you that he had left for Ale’s gang not long after you left?” Athena did remember and it ate at her. “What I didn’t tell you was that he tried to persuade the rest of us to go over as well. None of us listened and he ended up going by himself.” Athena listened to her friend intently and Mari could see her processing her word. “Listen, I’ll look into this. With my contacts and your Spectre status, we should be able to get to the bottom of what happened. Just remember that Finch was always a great actor and I hope for his sake that he was telling you the truth.”

Athena looked at Mari and knew she was right. Mari was the only person she knew that could see through almost anything. “You really think that Finch might not be telling us everything?” She saw the fear in his eyes, but she also remembered seeing him visibly relax when they started talking more calmly. “What would his end game be by telling me Ale…? (She paused and looked at Mari.) He wants to take out Smith and take over the gang himself?” It was one of a lot of possibilities as she thought out loud. She was uncertain about Finch’s motivations, but she knew what she would do when she found the truth. “Even after we left they still manage to drag us back into their shit. Mari find out everything you can and see if you can find Taylor. If he’s alive I need to talk to him. Get Garrus to help you, he’s a wiz at finding people who don’t want to be found.”

Mari admired Athena’s ability to switch from an emotional wreck to a competent and imposing commander. Mari nodded and before she took her leave she gave Athena an intense stare. “Don’t worry. I WILL find out what’s going on.”

As Mari walked out of the room Athena noticed Jeff rolling in on his chair. She smiled at her pilot/secret love. “I’m sorry Jeff, something came up and I just wouldn’t have been good company.”

Jeff’s eyes were soft and understanding as they scanned her face. “Talk to me Commander. What’s going on?”

She let out a sad chuckle. “My past is coming back to haunt me that’s what.” She let out a huff and continued. “My old gang is into some seriously no good things and I can’t stand by and let them continue.”

“What…” She put her hand up to stop him.

“Don’t ask…I’ll explain it when I know everything. Right now I don’t have enough to tell other than I am going to find out and put an end to their operations.” She wasn’t being overly commanding. It was more like she was asking him not to question her on this for more personal reasons. He understood. There were things in his past that he did not want to be asked about and she always seemed to understand. He would be no less understanding of her needs.
The rogue VI shut down with a repeating binary message that read

01001000
01000101
01001100
01010000

It was in an old ASCII code that translated to the word ‘help.’ “Hackett owes us big again.” Athena commented to Garrus. “You know I’m getting sick of these Alliance shits somehow always getting Marines and Soldiers killed with their fucking science projects. I wonder what the hell went wrong with this thing.”

“Same thing with us, our scientists are always espousing technology for the betterment of the Turian culture. They never tell you that maybe the cost is too high.” Garrus mandibles clicked as she could feel the annoyance in his subharmonics.

“We made the same mistakes and ended up creating the Geth.” Tali commented as she examined the terminals.

“Tali, could you download everything you can from the databanks? I have a sneaky suspicion that this was done as an experiment and I want to know if we can find out who’s responsible.” Tali nodded and began to work. “Jeff, send a message to Alliance Command. Tell them that the Luna Training Facility is secure.”

“Aye aye ma’am.” Jeff responded in a supremely professional way. Athena smirked thinking that being this close to Earth, he might get replaced too easily if he were to show any kind of unprofessionalism.

When she got back to the Normandy, Athena immediately made her way to the helm. “I want the Normandy cleaned up as best you can and I am authorizing 48 hour shore leave into Buenos Aires. I’ve got some business on Earth I have to take care of.” The woman sounded deathly cool as she instructed Jeff in what really amounted to an illegal operation on their home planet.

Jeff had deftly put the Normandy in Geosynchronous orbit at the edge of the atmosphere over the city of Buenos Aires. “Alliance control this is SSV Normandy requesting an approach vector to Ezeiza.” They were drifting about eighty miles above the city with slight orbital corrections done with the Normandy’s thrusters.

“Alliance control this Normandy, you’re not scheduled in the arrival logs. Stand by while we clear an area for you.” The controller sounded a little excited, probably knew who the ship carried.

“Alliance control, what’s going on?” Jeff turned to look at her and she was still cool as an icicle. “What’s up Commander? What’s going on?”
“My old gang has become involved in anti-alien terrorism.” He could see the frustration in her facial expression. “I mean really, how do you go from stealing air-cars and illegal racing to fucking Terrorism? Oh yeah, I forgot about their Red fucking Sand dealing.”

“Maybe they had a bad experience with Turian food or something.” Jeff turned his head to look at her. “I mean maybe if we introduce them to Garrus, there could be some interspecies love happening there.”

“Yeah, at the business end of his sniper rifle.” She countered, slightly more playful than before. “Jeff can you tell Mari to meet me in the hanger bay?”

“Aye aye Commander.” He turned back to his console. “Lt. Quiroga, your presence is requested in the hangar bay.” He almost jumped out of his chair when he felt a squeeze of his shoulder and turned to see that Athena was still there smiling a smile that she just seemed to save for him.

“Thanks Jeff. When I finish this crap, I’m going to take you out for a joyride.” Jeff’s cheeks were again heating up and before he could ask her to elaborate she turned and quickly made her way down the gangway.

“Damn her…she did it again.” He muttered to himself.

“SSV Normandy this Alliance Control, you are cleared to land on Alliance Pad number fourteen.”

“Thanks control.” Jeff activated the main engines and descended toward Ezeiza Airport. The landing was non eventful and as smooth as a baby’s bottom.

Athena was discussing with Mari on what they needed to do during this operation they decided to call ‘Cousin Red.’ They were in casual civilian attire. “You ever been to Lujan?” Jeans, sneakers and a tight black ACDC logoed t-shirt for Athena and of course Mari had black jeans, the latest black and red Nikes with an expensive gray under-armor t-shirt. Both of them decided to wear dark Oakley sunglasses and long low ponytails.

“Once, I had to ditch a car there for Smith that prick.” Mari knew exactly what she was doing. “God, I hope he’s there. Taylor turned out to be the smartest of all of us.” She looked at Athena and there was a smirk on her face.

“I hope we don’t scare the shit out of him when he sees us.”

Mari smiled at her friend. “He’s going to shit when he sees us.”

“Pressly you read?”

“Go ahead Commander.”

“I want an eight hour rotation of minimal staffing. You, Kaiden and Moreou have the ship. Make sure you make time for yourselves as well. I’m available via omni-tool any time.” Athena made sure that Normandy was taken care of before she left with Mari.

They took a taxi to Lujan which was about fifty miles west of Buenos Aires proper. It took about ten minutes to reach their location. They tipped the driver and stood in front of the small house at 1458 Avenida 25 de Mayo. The windows and doors were barred to prevent burglaries. Athena smirked at the security measures as she looked at her friend. “You ready?” Mari nodded and knocked on the door.
“Hold on a second. I’ll be right there.” It was a woman’s voice that sounded like she was exasperated.

“Momma I can get it!” A little girl sounded excited as they heard the quick patter of her footsteps on the other side of the door.

“Athena! Espera! Ai hija me vas a matar.” Athena looked at Mari with a surprised expression. *They named her Athena?*

“Hold on, hold on Athi.” That was Franco Taylor she recognized his voice immediately. He was chuckling as he looked through the peephole. “Can I help you?”

“Franco, could you open the door? I need to talk to you.” He recognized that voice and the height. It couldn’t be, *how in the hell did she find me?*

“Athena?” She pulled up her sunglasses and there was no mistaking those eyes. It was her. “Oh my God!” Athena heard him work the locks quickly and the door opened. “Come in, come in! Oh…Marianna?” There was a joy in his face to see them that she didn’t expect as he pulled them inside and closed the door.

“Who is it Franco?” The woman’s voice yelled from what Athena would have assumed was the kitchen.

“Old friends Mamita, old friends. Come out here. This is unbelievable!” He answered as he pulled Athena into an unexpected embrace and then did the same to Mari. He looked at both of them trying to read them. It was obvious but not unexpected. “Commander Shepard! Damn!” He quickly put his hand over his mouth and looked at his little daughter. “Sorry Athi.”

Athena looked at Mari and smiled. Everything in Taylor’s file was spot on. Married, two children and working as a mechanic for a local shop in Lujan. “Franco what the…” Taylor’s wife was obviously surprised by the two stunning women standing in the entrance of her house. “Who are…” She looked at Athena and her mouth dropped. “Commander Athena Shepard? Oh my please excuse the mess.” She started to pick up toys and dolls from the floor of the living room.

Athena and Mari were actually pleased with how the meeting had begun. “No please, you should see my quarters. This is pristine in comparison.”

“This is my wife Silvia and well you know my daughter…Athena. We named her after you.” Taylor seemed so proud of his situation and if she were honest she was proud of him too. “My littlest one Franco Jr. is sleeping.” He paused for a moment. “You have to stay for dinner.”

“Franco, I don’t want to impose any more than I already am. I just needed to talk to you about something.” Athena tried to politely refuse, but Taylor would have nothing of it. “Nonsense, you’re staying and we can talk afterward. We’re having your favorite.”

Milanesas, oh the thought of having milanesas was too much for her and she relented to the immediate approval of Mari. “Ok Franco we’ll stay.” He then led them to the living room to sit and talk about old times.

“I’ll add two places…I can’t believe that THE Commander Shepard is going to have dinner with us.” There was that hero worship that made Athena uncomfortable, but this was different. Civilians were the reason she was in the Alliance Military. She wanted to be their protector and make the galaxy safer so that they could live their lives. The fact that they appreciated it more than the brass made her feel like it was worth it.
The little blonde girl stared in amazement at the tall and beautiful woman standing in front of her. “You’re really tall!” Athena stared back, equally amazed at the little girl. No dirt, no bruises, nothing like how she grew up. This little one was being raised and protected by two people that loved her and would probably die for her.

“I know. Sometimes I hit my head on things normal people don’t. It’s really annoying.” The little girl’s gaze didn’t waver. “I’d love to be small like you. I could get into all sorts of things that I can’t now.”

“Papi says that you keep us safe from bad people. How do you do that?” Oh this little one was asking questions made her waver a bit and Mari saved her as usual.

“She tells the bad people to stop and if they don’t, she puts them in jail.” Wow really Mari? I’m an interstellar cop now? Garrus would probably collapse in convulsions of laughter if he heard that.

“Really? Do you…” The little Athena would probably continue her relentless interrogation if not for Taylor interrupting.

“Chiquita that’s enough pestering of Commander Shepard.” Taylor had returned from the kitchen, this time with a little bundle named Franco in his arms. “This is little Franco. Come on food’s ready.” He was awake as his dad gently prodded her to hold him. The feeling of complete helplessness coursed through her as she awkwardly took the little baby into her arms. Athena examined the beautiful baby boy with the hazel eyes that now seemed to only have eyes for her. It almost hypnotized her and she knew right then and there why she did what she did.

“So beautiful…” She whispered to herself and lifted her stare to Taylor who was smiling the smile of proud papa. “Your family is lovely Franco, how does it feel?” Taylor was not an orphan like her, but he ran away from home when he was fourteen and ran with the ‘Reds’ until that day of the vote.

“It’s wonderful, I mean it’s a lot of work, but it’s worth it.” Taylor looked at his former comrade and could see a sadness in her expression. Mari recognized it too, knowing that she knew about her own parent’s deaths. “Come on let’s eat, Mamita makes the best milanesas you’ll ever have.”

They ate and made small talk. The food was heavenly, homemade milanesas and mashed potatoes were to die for and she made a point to compliment Silvia. She had a double helping, which really wasn’t enough, but she didn’t want to be a rude guest. She helped clear the table and went out to the back to speak to Taylor in private.

“Franco I’m so glad you got out.” She commented as he lit a cigarette and offered one to her and Mari. They both refused politely.

“Yeah, I left that same day of the vote. Ale was crazy with that Red Sand shit. He took a hit of it immediately after we left and I told myself I was out. Sorry about voting against you.” He didn’t regret anything because in reality there was nothing to regret. He got out probably the only time he could. “You know that Ale showed up in front of my friend’s shop a couple of days later trying to get me to come back? He was a mess and I could tell he needed money…again.”

“What’d you do?” Mari leaned on one of the large flower pots in the back.

“Told’em no. I was done and I wasn’t doing any of that shit anymore.” He took a drag as he had a look of contemplation. “You know what’s weird though? Last time I was in La Boca, a couple of days ago I saw Finch and some other guy beating the hell out of somebody outside a bodega there.
They didn’t see me and I got out of there as quickly as I could. I don’t know what’s going on, but Finch seems to be acting as Smith’s muscle now.”

“You’re sure it was Finch?” Athena’s head dropped and Mari squeezed her shoulder.

“Oh yeah, it was him. I don’t know what that poor sod did, but I didn’t stick around to find out. Like I said I am done and don’t ever want to see any of them ever again.” He let out a huff.

“Do you know where they’re based out of?” Now Athena was in full battle assessment mode.

“I don’t think Smith ever moved out of his chop shop and to tell you the truth, I think they’re using our old hideout as well.” He snubbed out the cigarette and let out flowing puff of smoke.

“Thanks Franco, I’m really happy for you. I’m actually jealous. Here’s my contact id. Call me every now and then. It’s nice to hear from old friends.” She squeezed his hand. “We’ve taken enough of your time.”

“If you’re ever in the area, you and your friends are always welcome.” Franco immediately sent a test message to her omni-tool so that now she had his id as well.

They bid their good byes and walked a couple of miles to the high speed transit station. They boarded an air-bus to La Plata and a date with Finch, Smith and the rest of the scum that she used to call friends.

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Their old hideout had changed quite a bit. It now belonged to a movement called the Terra Firma party. “What the fuck?” Athena muttered to Mari who was sitting next to her on the roof of a building to the north, examining the people with her binoculars. “Mari I’m really sick of all this political bullshit. Now we got some of these scumbags trying to kill innocents, Finch and Smith are going to get theirs.”

Athena was feeling all sorts of bad emotions. Anger and embarrassment being the two most prominent, Finch had played her like Mozart did music. She stood up and focused on two particular persons. Finch along with Smith, were laughing it up with a couple of people in front of the building. “Mamita what do you want to do? We might really be overstepping our bounds with this one now.” Marianna was worried as Terra Firma was recognized as a legitimate party and taking out their members could be seen as treason.

She couldn’t fight her feelings at this moment. “I’m gonna kill them both!” Her mind went back to the poison they were going to use. She pictured her dear friend Garrus being poisoned and killed by a batch of their medical supplies. She even thought of Executor Pallen whom she compared to some of the police on Earth lying dead somewhere because the Turian version of Advil had been poisoned. “You don’t have to come on this one Mari. This is going to be a pure Spectre Op.” Her breathing was a bit labored and Mari saw the rage in Athena’s posture. Nothing hurts more than betrayal. She trusted Finch and gave him the benefit of the doubt because of how he handled himself a long time ago in a bar fight.

“Mamita please I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Mari took a hold of her shoulder and spun Athena to look at her. “You can’t just murder them.”
“The fuck I can’t! How many people have they already killed? How many more attempts are they going to make? For those two, it ends today. I may be an Alliance Marine, but now I’m also a Council Spectre and it’s my job to root out threats like these two. Just like the Council wouldn’t do shit about Saren until it stared them in the face, the Alliance isn’t going to do shit about these two until their body count is high enough to merit its attention. I’m done being reactive.” Athena seethed. “Humanity wanted a Human Spectre, well now that I am one, they better be ready to deal with the consequences.”

Marianna nodded knowing that Athena was right. The Alliance had actually put her in this position and now not only was she responsible to the defense of the Alliance she was also responsible for defending the Council Races from their enemies as well. “Okay, what do we do?”

“Mari you’re done. I don’t want you involved in this. You don’t need to get dirty on this one and it’s my call.” Marianna started to protest, but Athena would have nothing of it. “Mari no, this is going to get really ugly and you don’t need to be there for that. Plus it’ll be easier if I did this alone, no offense but you would only slow me down Chiquita.”

Mari nodded sadly. She knew. She SAW how capable Athena was. It was a frightening thought that Finch and Smith didn’t really consider who they were fucking with when they tricked her. 

*God grant them mercy because mamita is going to extract her pound of flesh.*

“Go back to the Normandy, I’ll be back when I take care of them.” Mari was terrified at the thought of what her best friend was about to do. She would have never chosen this life for her, *damn this universe, she deserved better.* She remembered the young Finch and a tear started to roll down her cheek.

Mari looked at Athena with her eyes welled up and filled to the brim. “Mamita be careful.” Athena gave her a sad expression and nodded as she turned and leaped off the side of the building.

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Smith’s Garage

The place hadn’t changed a bit except for the fact that there was a lot more activity now than when she remembered. There were a shitload of body guards, guards and associates crawling all over the front of the building. It was 2305 GST and it was dark save for the street lights and building lights. Finch and Smith looked completely at ease as she watched them from her perch on the ledge of the building directly in front of his garage. She projected the image of one of those dark comic book heroes/villains watching her intended prey. As she watched them talk she quickly noticed Curt Weisman approach them with a huge grin. They greeted each other like old friends with a grin. She realized then that Finch had gone totally over to Smith’s group.

She continued to observe silently as she thought of Ale’s obituary. He was identified through his DNA profile and the picture with the police report positively identified him as Alejandro Suarez. He was beaten to death and the pictures of his beaten form disturbed her to an extent she never felt before, adding to her already immense sense of grief. *Every stupid thing he did because...he still never hurt anyone.* This was going to be quick. She had picked out the piece of building she was going to use for them.
The bad thing about some of the buildings in this area of the city was that they were decrepit and falling apart. Athena had thought of using falling debris as the tool to take out Finch. She felt that Finch was the most deserving and would settle for just him, but if she could get all three of those would be murderers with the same slab of concrete she would.

This was her chance as they were in a conversational triangle in front of the building. She began to pull slowly at the concrete slab that was already loose and waited for them to walk toward the garage. It couldn’t have been planned any better as they laughed and slapped each other’s shoulders and walked directly underneath their doom. She released her hold and watched as the thousand pounds of concrete fell from three stories up and landed with a horrendously loud and sickening crunch. Curt’s leg was trapped under the huge and now broken slab as he screamed and howled in pain. Finch and Smith had disappeared underneath the slab. A couple of the bodyguards were injured, but not too badly. They would recover completely. It was a perfect hit. Athena turned and quickly walked in the opposite direction feeling strangely satisfied at the results. It was weird that she didn’t feel a single ounce of guilt or empathy for them. Why should she? They obviously believed that Turians or any other aliens for that matter were nuisances that needed to be eliminated like a vermin infestation. She actually felt pretty good about it until she thought of the young Finch, Ale and the rest of ‘Reds’ family. The cameras would only be able film the massive slab fall and this would be seen as a freak accident. It was a fitting end to her history with the ‘Reds.’

She pulled her black hoodie over her head and slowly made her way down the fire escape of the building she was on. She walked away from the scene in a very calm and collected manner as the sounds of sirens and emergency vessels poured into the area. *I hope you rot in hell you motherfuckers.*

After walking several miles in the darkness of the night, she pulled up her omni-tool and called a taxi. When the taxi pulled up she removed her hoodie to show the driver that she wasn’t some threatening thug. She thanked God when he opened the door and traveled by taxi back to Ezeiza, back to the Normandy, back to ‘her’ family.

She slowly made her way up the Normandy’s ramp to see that Marianna and Jeff were there waiting for her. She dropped her gaze quickly passed them without saying one word. “Not here, in my quarters.”

They were just too fast for him and he couldn’t keep up with his crutches, but to his surprise they were both waiting for him at the Commander’s quarter’s entrance. She bid them all to enter. “Mari I think maybe you should arrest me for what I just did.”

Marianna was already in tears. “Not a fucking chance you bitch!” Mari was furious at Athena. Athena didn’t even look up as she was thoroughly beaten emotionally. Jeff was thoroughly confused. “You did what had to be done and damn them mamita! God damn it they deserved it!” Mari wasn’t furious at Athena, she was furious that Athena was beating herself up over another difficult decision she had made. “Did you read the whole police report of what they did to Ale? Didn’t you see the pictures?” Athena nodded meekly as she quietly let her tears drip onto her jeans. “Don’t you ever ask me something so stupid again!” Marianna sat down next to her best friend and pulled her head into the base of her neck and the mighty Commander Shepard, the Bad Ass Gangster Shepard started to cry like a baby, like someone who had lost someone dear to them.

Jeff wanted so badly to embrace her. To tell her it was okay, but he didn’t know what they were talking about and felt like he was out of place. “Maybe I should…” Athena reached out and put her hand on his thigh.
Her eyes were swollen from the tears as she looked at him with an almost pathetically weak expression. “Please stay.” It was a whisper so low, but it might as well have been shouted from the mountain tops. She was hurt and she was hurt badly inside.

Jeff grabbed a hold of her hand and squeezed as hard as he could. “Of course. What happened?”

Athena sniffed and then took a deep breath and quickly let it out. She wiped the tears from her eyes. “Remember Chora’s Den? When I left in such a hurry about two weeks ago?” He nodded. “Let’s just say that some of the former members of the ‘Reds’ were involved in the poisoning of medical supplies destined for a Turian colony.” He watched her intently as she explained herself. “They denied it of course, but the Turian investigation definitely pointed to them.” She sighed and almost started to shake. “I…let them go free on the Citadel on the promise that they would disappear.”

“By the look on your ugly ass face, my guess is that they didn’t disappear.” Jeff tried to add a little levity and felt a little better at seeing Athena cough with a little almost non-perceptible grin.

She shook her head. “Betrayal…He lied to me and I let them go. I don’t know if they did anything else, but I wasn’t about to let them continue to operate in the manner they were operating,“

“You…” He held his voice. She nodded slowly and dropped her gaze. Jeff didn’t know how to feel about this. This was an assassination she had just done for the Council, for the Aliens and it was bothering him. He understood that she was a Spectre, but she was Human first. This was the slippery slope that everyone talked about pertaining to Spectres, he just didn’t think that it would apply to his Commander. To BABs. The look in her eyes told him that she was conflicted, but in the end she made the difficult decision to end the lives of a couple of terrorists. It was really quite simple.

Jeff cupped Athena’s chin and raised her face to look at him. “Jeff I really think that maybe you and me would be really bad for you. You deserve better than a trained killer.” His smile sent her heart into a fluttering mess.

“Oh shut up BABs, you’re stuck with me whether you like it or not. You think I’m going to let the hottest chick in the universe dump me? I’ll stalk you for the rest of your life, well maybe the rest of my life.” Mari smiled and got up.

“You both know what the regs say about what you two are about to do, but I SEE NOTHING.” She quickly turned around and left the room.

“I hate what they do to you.” Jeff slowly moved from his chair and took his spot next to her on the bed. “You don’t deserve this shit. They don’t deserve you.” She could tell that he was referring to the Alliance and the Council.

“Did you fall out of a cloud or something?” She turned and looked at him with a deep affectionate gaze. “You, Anderson and Mari must have shared a place with the Angels because I think that’s what you are.”

He pulled her close and embraced her as fiercely as he could. It was like hugging a block of iron. She leaned her head onto his shoulder and gently let out a sigh. “Well Commander I have to do the rounds since I am the duty officer at this moment.”

He slowly got up and began to retrieve his crutches. He slowly made his way to the door. “Jeff?”

“What is it?” Now she was sprawled on her bed as she looked at him with her head toward the foot
of the bed in an upside down gaze.

“Come ere.” She waved him over with her index finger. He slowly made his way to the bed.
“You don’t regret your decision?” The question actually made him laugh.

“You’re something else BABs, you’re really something else.” He chuckling all the way out the door and she felt a bright and airy feeling inside her chest. She would literally die for him.

The next morning she woke up ass early and took a taxi back to La Boca. When she got to her destination she radioed the Normandy. “Jeff you read?”

“Go ahead Commander.” Still so professional, it put a grin on her face.

“Tell Kaiden or Pressly to get their ass up there and relieve you. That’s an order. I want you and Garrus to meet me at the coordinates I’m sending you.” She didn’t sound angry, so what the hell was she up to?

“Aye aye ma’am.” She smiled at the sound of his excited voice.

Forty five minutes later Jeff and Garrus stepped out of the cab to be greeted by Athena all decked out in her sexy leather thief outfit he had seen in the vid Marianna showed him. She had her high pony tail and well now they were Oakley Sunglasses, but damn Jeff almost fell just seeing her like that.

“What are we doing here Commander?” Jeff sounded nervous. He looked so cute in his jeans and t-shirt. She had to admit that he did have a chest and arms to die for.

“Nice neighborhood.” Garrus commented at the emptiness of the streets.

They were standing in front of a storage unit complex. “Come on. I’ve got one more errand before we leave and this one should be fun.” They entered the complex and stopped in front of a unit near the gated entrance. She punched a few codes into her omni-tool and the unit door slowly opened. “This…is my baby.”

Jeff and Garrus’ mouths were open in total shock. The beautifully restored black Mustang had a presence all its own. Jeff actually let out a squeal when he saw the red N7 insignia painted lovingly underneath a reared up Cobra snake icon on the front quarter panels. “She’s beautiful.” Garrus couldn’t contain his excitement. “You built this?”

Athena looked like a proud parent. “Come on, I only have one legal hour to drive it to the auction house.”

Jeff looked so sad. “You’re selling her? Why?”

“I wish I didn’t have to, but I can’t maintain her anymore the way I want to. The money I get I’m going to buy an air-bike and the rest is going to the orphanages in Buenos Aires.” Athena was saddened, but the car’s sale was going to positively affect a lot of kids with the money it would demand.
“Come on let’s go.” Athena started the car and the deep growl of that big block V-8 startled Garrus and Jeff together. “Jeff you got shotgun.” She had that mischievous grin on her face as Garrus sat in the back leaning over the center between the front seats.

Jeff sat in the front seat with a rudimentary seat belt as the only thing protecting him if this ride went to shit. The vibrations penetrated his body as she viciously revved the engine. “I think I’m a little scared.” He turned to see that Athena had her Sunglasses tilted above her forehead and was staring right at him.

“You should be.” She growled as she revved the muscle car and slammed the gear box into first. The sound of the tires screeching as they took off made Garrus laugh. The tires were still smoking as they drifted out of the gate and she slammed the car into second. Jeff watched her and there it was. Athena the bad ass fighter pilot, she was fully immersed in controlling the powerful beast underneath her.

Garrus and Jeff were totally engrossed in the roller coaster ride they were receiving courtesy of their commander. She turned corners like a pro racer and accelerated the car so quickly that Jeff felt almost pinned to the seat.

Athena was about to slam on the emergency brakes and do a one hundred and eighty degree turn, when at the last second she remembered who was riding with her and just slowly came off the throttle. The car came to a full stop and she looked over to Jeff. “You ready?”

Jeff’s breathing was in excited gulps, his face was a perfect example of a child on Christmas morning. “There’s more?”

“Well I wouldn’t be a nice girl if I didn’t share. Come on you first.” She jumped out of the car and ran to his side to help him out. She walked him over to the driver’s side and helped him in. She explained the clutch system and the shifter in an accelerated course. He tested out the pedals to make sure his body could perform the necessary tasks and to his giddy ecstasy he found that there was no discomfort.

He started to rev the engine and put the car in first gear. It promptly stalled. “What happened?” His mood suddenly dropped.

“Stay on the gas Jeff. You have to concentrate on giving it just enough gas to not stall it or if you want to spin the tires, just floor it and release the clutch.” She explained calmly. “Just be careful you don’t lose control if you want to do a rolling burnout.”

Jeff nodded with excitement as he started the car again. He was surprised at how satisfying the growl of that engine was. He slowly let off the clutch and floored the accelerator. The resulting acceleration caught him by surprise as the car hit seventy mile per hour in first gear. “Shift into second Moreau…” He quickly did so and made the rear wheels chirp at the sudden increase in power as they zoomed past buildings at over one hundred miles per hour.

Jeff’s face was bliss. “This is unreal! Oh my God I want one!” Athena directed him to an empty lot and taught him and Garrus the art of drifting and donuts. Garrus was as giddy as Jeff when his turn came up. He actually looked a little ridiculous, but somehow he managed to be able to use the pedals perfectly and he also had the Turian equivalent of a shit eating grin on his face.

“Commander we should use this instead of the Mako.” He joked. “I think it’s a huge mistake to sell it, unless you sell it to me.” Jeff laughed and Athena chuckled. At the end she took back control of the beast to take it to the auction house.
They approached a long straightaway which led into the city. It was part on an old highway that was still maintained because of some of the heavy equipment that moved along it. She stopped the car. “You boys ready?” Jeff and Garrus nodded with an obvious excitement.

She slammed the car into first, no burnout, just brutally powerful acceleration. Second gear and they were still pinned into their seats. The engine roared as she deftly put it into third gear, fourth, fifth and finally sixth gear. Jeff watched as the street became a blur and they felt the suspension work as the beast just seemed to float over the road. He turned to look at her and she was smiling, he looked at the speedometer and it read two hundred and seven miles per hour. “Holy shit!” He chirped.

The long and appropriated drag strip came to an end as the streets became more congested with work vehicles and private vehicles of persons who couldn’t afford a sky-car. She reached the auction house three minutes late, but didn’t care. She got to share an experience with two of her closest friends. They enjoyed it so much that it made her enjoy it that much more.

Athena exited the car and she gave the key to the curator of the auction house. She kissed the top of her car and turned to meet a horde of people who had been alerted to her presence there. Garrus and Jeff peeled themselves out of the car with the biggest grins they ever had on their faces. Garrus turned to Jeff with the unmistakable flare of his mandible. “I think I love her.”

Jeff started to laugh and then stopped. “Wait…You’re not serious are you?”

Garrus chuckled deeply. “I already know she’s off limits there, as you humans say Romo.”

Jeff rolled his eyes and snorted. “That’s Romeo you Turian savage.”

Garrus hissed as he laughed at the comment. “A very handsome savage.”

She signed autograph after autograph before Jeff finally got a cab to pick them up and take them back to the Normandy. A really nice ending to a very shitty shore leave for the Commander.

Chapter End Notes

I really enjoy writing these past relationships and expanding them a bit. Athena being a Spectre now makes her responsible for defending Citadel Space as well as the Alliance. They really did create a monster.
Chapter Summary

Athena fulfills her promises to Garrus and Wrex. A little closure on Earth. A little Liara.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cemetery San Jose de Flores, Buenos Aires

Athena and Mari stood together in their Dress Blues at a small, simple and unusually well maintained headstone at a grave marked Alejandro Suarez. There were no dates, no flowers, no pictures, just the name. San Jose was a large cemetery where many of the destitute were buried; it really was nothing more than a mass grave of the unheard and unseen. The site was not particularly well maintained and both Athena and Mari stood out with their impeccable dress blues. Ale was lucky that he was even buried, most people who didn’t have someone, were cremated and their ashes were scattered to the winds. Someone must have claimed the body in order for it to be buried. They stood there in silent contemplation until an unknown showed itself.

“He was a confused, careless, often wrong, but caring person.” They both turned to see who would’ve said something so accurate that it made Athena wince in obvious emotional pain. A tall man in a cheap gray suit approached them, the golden badge of the Federal Police plainly visible on his belt. His gate was confident and steady as he approached the two ex-‘Reds.’ They both continued to watch him approach them when Mari recognized the man. “Detective Larson? Sir, why are you here?”

He smiled and Athena could tell that the man who must have been in his fifty’s had at least some affection for Marianna. “Did you know that he kicked his Red Sand habit?” That got Athena’s attention as again her emotions were becoming hard to suppress. “He and I talked quite a bit when he became a CI for us.” He bent over and placed a bunch of flowers on the grave. “He told me that he had done a lot of bad things in his life and that he wanted to make amends.” Athena dropped to one knee and put her palm on the headstone.

“I’m so sorry Ale, I wish I could’ve been as good a friend to you as you were to me.” Athena’s whispered to the grave as she took out something from the inside jacket pocket of her blues. It was a picture of the old Ale. The big poofy Elvis style black hair and that smile he used to get his way every time she didn’t agree with him. She took the adhesive backing off the picture and placed it below his name on the headstone. She then turned to the Detective as she stood up, her Alliance Blues a little dirtier on the one knee now. “Did you have a suspect?”

He nodded seriously. “Not enough evidence to arrest him, but Ale was afraid of him and told us that if anything happened it would probably be him.” He was searching his pockets for something and pulled out a picture. “Do you know him?”
Athena and Mari got closer to the detective and looked at the picture. It was Finch. “He was in the ‘Reds’ with us. Really? Why do you think it was him?” Athena again had to work to contain her emotions and to keep herself from lashing out in a rage. “That little weasel actually threatened him?”

It was obvious to Athena that the detective was digging and if it was obvious to Athena, it was damn well obvious to Mari. “I’m not at liberty to discuss why, but let’s just say that Finch had an interest. I’ll leave it at that.”

“You were trying to infiltrate Smith’s gang weren’t you?” Mari immediately commented. The Detective’s lack of acknowledgment told them that it was exactly what they were trying to do.

“It’s gotten impossible since the Terra Firma party got involved. They took me off the case and closed it for lack of evidence.” He looked so flustered that it reminded Athena of Garrus. “I know they were up to no good, but I had nothing concrete.” He actually smirked at the last word.

Athena didn’t react to his smirk, but Mari did. “What’s so funny?”

“You know sometimes karma does come through and does a fantastic job in cleaning up the dirt around here. Last night Smith and Finch were killed when a piece of their building literally fell on top of them.” He looked at Athena directly knowing that she had been in the city when it happened. To her credit her reaction stayed neutral, but her comment was anything but.

“When you fuck with one of God’s angels, sometimes he’ll send down a lightning bolt or a building.” Detective Larson watched her mannerisms like a hawk and to her credit she didn’t flinch and returned his stare with her own equally intense one.

“Just out of curiosity, where were you last night?” Right down to it with no hesitation.

Athena let out a chuckle. “I was in the city, why? Do you think I killed them?” She didn’t feel an ounce of remorse so it came out as a very comfortable reply.

He put his hand up to stop her. “It’s a little suspicious and one hell of a coincidence, but no, I don’t think you did and I’m not going to open a case for those two slime balls anyway. I mean why should I when everyone is telling me it was an accident, who am I to argue?” His stare went from Athena to Mari and back. “Commander Athena Shepard and Lieutenant Marianna Quiroga, he was so proud of you two. He said that you two were what inspired him to work with us.”

He was about to turn to leave when Athena grabbed his shoulder and turned him back towards them. “Thank you Detective, you didn’t have to tell us, but I’m glad you did.” She gave him a light embrace and Mari did the same. “Detective?” Athena almost sounded bashful.

He gave her his full attention. “Yeah?”

“Did you purchase the plot?” Mari smacked her in the back of the head as soon as she asked the disrespectful question. Athena to her credit didn’t even flinch.

He didn’t answer. He only chuckled at the two Alliance Officers. “You two be safe out there okay and give em hell.” They both nodded and he took his leave.

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Jeff was watching the helmet feed from Garrus. Their positioning was pretty tactical with the exception of Athena who was front and center trying to convince yet another person not to fight. Her black tactical battle armor brought back thoughts of her in that leather outfit she wore just a day before on Earth. _Easy Moreau keep your head in the game. She makes anything she wears look good damn it._

Athena’s patience was starting to run thin as she argued with the big Turian pirate. Tonn Actus was not much of a negotiator and it seemed that he really was spoiling for a fight. “Can’t we just make a deal? I don’t want to have to kill all of you.” She was pleading with a very amused Actus, which actually played into his bravado. She turned to address the rest of his crew. “I mean come on, isn’t being a privateer about making money?”

Garrus looked like he wanted to say something and she nodded. He stood out in front and looked up at Actus. “You mean to tell me that you’re going to pass up some creds for a piece of metal that has no value to you?”

Actus’ sharp predatory teeth appeared in a wide and rapacious turian grin. “Call me a sentimental fool, but it has a lot of value for me and I know it does to him.” He pointed at Wrex who looked like he was at the end of his rope. Actus was acting so smug and arrogant up there on the second level of his makeshift base. He was literally talking down to them.

“How much?” Athena yelled, clearly knowing he was going to say something ridiculous.

“One hundred thousand creds and it’s yours.” Actus was chuckling as he said it. He could see Athena’s shoulders slump as she let out a sigh.

“How about I give you ten thousand and we can all live happy and healthy for another day.” Athena responded with that cold and calculating expression that Garrus had recognized as her precursor to an all-out attack on her target. Some of the pirates looked like they were beginning to get nervous. Those must be the ones that knew who she was and her reputation as a pirate exterminator. To the pirate’s credit though, they were already sighting down on them. Both Garrus and Wrex slowly and deliberately took steps towards the cover of a pillar and large crates.

One of the Actus’ men was whispering into his ear and you could tell that Actus was getting upset, but so was the other Turian. Actus finally put his hand up to stop the other one from saying anymore. He stared down directly at Athena. “You know what? I think I’m going to hang you’re Krogan pet’s skull over my bed.” They were his last words as Athena’s biotic charge and nova burst had pirates flying off the second level and landing with some serious force on the first level.

Athena heard Wrex’s roar as he was using that giant shotgun to deadly effect on the first level. Garrus had taken cover behind one of the pillars near the entrance and started to pick off pirates at an alarming rate with that sniper rifle of his.

Rounds were hitting her barrier at a steadily decreasing rate as she knew Wrex and Garrus were wiping the floor with Actus’ underlings. She scanned the second level to see that those who didn’t get launched off the second level did get launched into the walls. Some were lying still while others were writhing in the obvious pain caused by their injuries. She continued to scan and saw Actus slowly trying to crawl into a room. She biotically pulled him back toward her and put him down directly in front of her. He tried to lift his pistol, but she knocked it out of his hand with a forceful slap. The hideout was now starting quiet down with the occasional boom of Wrex’s
shotgun as he took care of the last threats down on the first level.

Tonn Actus was on his knees with his dark blue blood trickling from his mandible and several other spots of his body. “WREX WILL YOU HURRY UP!” She was so angry. “BEFORE I KILL HIM!”

“Wait…wait…I’ll give it to you…please.” Actus started to beg and was cut off when Athena picked him up by his neck and pinned him against the bulkhead.

“You stupid asshole! I wanted to make a deal…I didn’t want to do this, but no! You had to try and show how much of a bad ass you and your little group of second raters are!” She turned to see Wrex approach with a smugness that pissed her off even more. She looked Actus in the eyes. “Asshole…” She then dropped Actus in a heap. “…and fuck you too Wrex!” She turned and made her way back down the stairs. “You can find the fucking Armor without me!” She yelled at him and she stormed out of the complex. Wrex looked absolutely flabbergasted as he watched her walk down the stairs and out of the building.

She walked outside of the complex, clearly disturbed at the result of her trying to be diplomatic. Garrus followed her out seconds later. He put his claw on her shoulder. “You okay?”

“Why does it always have to end like that? I made him a decent offer right? Why not just take it and everyone walks away happy and healthy?” She looked so disappointed. “It’s just that…it was so unnecessary.”

“Commander, some people don’t want to be diplomatic. It’s that simple, he was going to try and kill us no matter what you offered.” Garrus explained to her. “You know that better than anyone and yet you always seem to give them a chance. You’re an amazing person Shepard.”

“I’m so tired of it. Just once I want someone to be more reasonable.” She responded in obvious exasperation.

Wrex soon came out with the family armor that cost so many lives. “I didn’t do it.” Wrex told her. “Like you said, he wasn’t worth killing.” Athena looked at Wrex who shrugged his shoulders. “Being around you is starting to make me soft.”

Athena smiled sadly at her enormous Krogan friend. “Face it Wrex, you’re nothing but a big cuddly teddy bear.” The simple gesture had showed her that Wrex, a Krogan Battlemaster of the first order could be as civilized and merciful as any of them.

“Don’t go spreading that around Shepard.” The genuinely happy smile that appeared on Athena’s face made him chuckle. “Oh and Shepard?” She resisted the urge to hug the big oaf. “Thank you.” She was so proud of her walking fortress. “Garrus I swear if you say anything, I’ll feed you your sniper rifle from the other end.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it you big bruiser.” Garrus was laughing.

“You do realize you’re all on a recorded vid stream right?” Jeff announced. “What’s it worth to you Wrex not to publish the video?”

“Joker, you gotta be kidding me right? Fucking around with me and Garrus is one thing. Wrex might tell you it’s worth a couple of your limbs and then actually collect.” Athena came back again with the look of frustration.

“Point taken. Three to pick up?” Joker responded quickly and comically.
Normandy CIC

Athena leaned over the galactic map and started to rub her temples in frustration. “This is ridiculous. We’ve been searching all over the Galaxy for him and we have nothing. That damn conduit is the key, but I can’t seem to figure out the coordinates for it.” She continued to look at the map intently. “Garrus, can you come up here?”

Garrus responded quickly as he made his way upstairs from the mess and approached the CIC. “What’s up Commander?”

She gestured to the galactic map, specifically the Herschel System in the Kepler Verge. “Is that the ship?”

Garrus stepped up next to her and examined the target she had highlighted. “MSV Fedele, yes Commander that’s the one Dr. Saleon, aka Dr. Heart should be on.”

“Joker, put us on an intercept course with that freighter.” She barked out the order coldly and efficiently. “Kaiden, Prep the Kodiak, Garrus you’re with me. Ashley?”

“Aye aye Commander.” Jeff sounded equally cold and professional, but both Ashley and Kaiden had not responded yet.

“Ashley you read? Kaiden?” Now Athena was a little worried and as she was about to key the mic again…

“Kaiden here, will do ma’am.” Not quite out of breath, but he was definitely huffing.

“Williams here Commander.” She sounded completely out of breath.

“Suit up Ashley. We’re boarding a freighter. We’ll meet you in the hangar bay in five.” *Was she working out or…* The thought of her and Kaiden getting it on actually made Athena a little jealous. She quickly removed the thought from her mind and focused on the current task.

They all met in the hangar bay, Ashley donning the last piece of her armor as Athena and Garrus walked in. “Good workout?” Garrus asked in the most sarcastic tone he could possibly pull off.

The glare she gave him could have bored a hole through the armor plate of the Normandy. “It was a fantastic workout.” She retorted smugly.

Athena smiled at the Chief. “I’ll bet.” She then turned to see Kaiden’s face who was standing at the door as they entered the Kodiak. He looked like a baby who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. “Come on let’s go.” She sat down next to Garrus and across from Ashley who just couldn’t maintain eye contact with her. The door closed and the seals pressurized with an audible hiss. “We’re ready Joker, is the hangar clear?”

“All clear commander.” Joker responded. “Opening hangar bay doors.”

The shuttle left the Normandy’s hangar bay smoothly and quietly. The quickly made their way to
the freighter. “Kaiden open a comm channel.” Athena ordered. “MSV Fedele this is Commander Shepard of the SSV Normandy, prepare to be boarded.”

There was no response to the hail. Athena repeated the hail three times before she stopped and ordered Kaiden to moor the Kodiak to the nearest airlock.

As soon as the airlock opened, the ground team was assaulted with the most repugnant smell imaginable. “Rotting flesh.” Athena mentioned with a matter of fact expression. She had experienced the scent on both Akuze and Torfan, the enclosed area just seemed to intensify the odor. Ashley and Garrus both had uncomfortable looks on their faces. Ashley stepped over to the nearest bulkhead and heaved her lunch onto the deck.

Garrus watched Ashley empty her insides and began to convulse. “Oh that’s not good.” He went to the opposite wall and let his insides project themselves forcefully from his innards.

Athena watched them both in obvious amusement. “Are you two done? Let’s go.” Both Garrus and Ashley looked at Athena in utter amazement.

“How do you…” She began to ask her.

Athena stopped her with a gesture. She shrugged nonchalantly. She didn’t want to tell them that Torfan and Akuze smelled a lot worse because she knew it would always result in follow up questions she wasn’t comfortable answering. She opened the first door that led to the main hall of the freighter. “You gotta be kidding me! Aw fuck!” She began to fire at what looked like a combination of Thorian Creeper and Geth Husk. Their greenish color, rotting flesh and terrible smell reminded Athena of the old Earth Horror vids she watched when she was with the reds. The only difference was that these ‘zombies’ came in Salarian, Turian and Human shapes. It seemed like a small horde charged at them as they poured out of the cargo bay and into the small hall they were now in. Athena let a forceful biotic push that slammed most of them back into the cargo hold. The team made short work of the ‘zombies’ in the hold and then proceeded to clear the rooms which were located forward of the main cargo hold. All in all they cleared the ship of twenty of the creatures from all of the ship’s areas but one.

They made their way tactically toward the front noticing that there were a couple of the dead things which seemed to have been killed previously on the floor as they went. They all bore the signs of being shot by someone other than the ground team. Athena pointed out the dead things and silently signaled her two companions to keep an eye out for the armed defender. Once they made it the last door of the freighter, Athena tried to open it, but it turned out to be locked. Athena overloaded the security lock with her biotics and the door opened to reveal a startled Salarian standing in the middle of the room. “Oh thank you! Thank you for saving me from those things!” Athena’s glared at the Salarian in obvious suspicion.

“Commander! That’s him! That’s Dr. Saleon.” Garrus’ sounded angry as well as excited.

“What he’s crazy! I’m Dr. Heart! I don’t know who he’s talking about!” The Salarian was in full panic mode.

Athena turned to Garrus. “Are you sure it’s him?”

“Positive.” Garrus didn’t hesitate as he stepped forward and raised his rifle. “I’d harvest your organs first, but we don’t have the time.” The Salarian began to cower as he shrunk to the floor in a ball.

Athena watched the coward cringe and before he could pull the trigger, she stepped in front of
him. “Garrus, don’t.”

Garrus slowly lowered the barrel of his rifle and his anger was very evident. “But Shepard he…”

“We should bring him in. If we turn him in we can find out what he’s been up to all these months.” She tried to explain, but all Garrus could see was the Salarian starting to stand.

The seething anger that Garrus felt was almost too much, but Garrus respected Shepard too much and would not ever violate her trust. “You’re a very lucky Salerian. You owe the commander your life.”

There was a metallic gleam that was now coming from Dr. Saleon’s hand as he lifted his arm towards Shepard’s back. “Oh, thank you soooo very much.” Garrus forcefully shoved Athena aside and fired one round into Dr. Saleon’s skull, which literally exploded all over the room.

Athena stood up ready to rip Garrus a new asshole, but when she saw the pistol in the Salarian’s hand she dropped her head and let out a sigh. “Thanks Garrus.” She put her hands on her hips and let out another huff. “Fuck, I didn’t have my barrier up either. Damn it!” She walked over and picked up his pistol and it was a beautifully maintained Carnifex. “Can you download everything from the Databanks?” She turned to Garrus who nodded.

After spending a good hour on the Freighter downloading everything but the kitchen sink, they left the ship and radioed the Citadel to send a ship for recovery, identifications and inventory. Garrus looked so conflicted and it seemed that he was agonizing over the results of his quest. “And so he died anyway. What was the point of all this?” Garrus quietly commented to her.

“You’ve said yourself Garrus, I try even though sometimes it doesn’t matter. The point is that sometimes it does matter and even though we can’t predict how people will act. We can control how we’ll respond. In the end, that’s all that really matters.” She looked in to his predatory eyes and gave him a saddened expression.

He paused for a moment and looked as if her were in deep thought. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. You know, I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone like you Shepard.” Garrus nodded in acknowledgement.

They all exited the airlock and boarded the Kodiak to return to the Normandy. “OH MY GOD!! That smell!” Kaiden sounded incredibly disgusted as he heaved dryly. Athena, Ashley and Garrus were snickering as Kaiden was completely taken by surprise the malodorous aroma that had now engulfed the inside of the shuttle. Not to mention they all still had chunks of ‘zombie’ all over them.

“You puke, you clean!” Ashley’s bark was awfully playful.

In the end Kaiden did let his insides out all over the control panel to the obvious amusement of all three passengers.

Kaiden turned to look at them in total frustration as he switched on the decontamination protocol inside the shuttle. “That was totally uncalled for!” The pathetically offended expression on Kaiden’s face only fueled the amusement of the three who ended up breaking out in gut wrenching laughter.

“Gotta admit it, it’s pretty funny.” Joker came over the comm.

Kaiden wasn’t amused. “Next time you pilot the shuttle and I can sit back and laugh at you!” He barked out with the sounds of the gruesome threesome laughing their asses off in the background.
Athena’s mountain of food was disappearing at an alarming rate. Biotics sure could eat, but Athena seriously ate more than anyone she’d ever met. She kept looking at the data pad with an intense stare and a thoughtful expression. “They sure hide their flaws well.” She put the data pad down and took another bite of what looked like synthetic meat.

“Hide what?” Liara couldn’t help but ask. Her curious nature always got the best of her and it was also a chance to speak to the beautiful commander.

“I searched everywhere for something on Saren, but it seems that up to this point there is nothing on him except that he’s a hero. No mention of the people he ended up killing on Camala with his wonderful use of EEZO refinery explosions.” She sighed as she took another bit.

“Most Spectre operations are kept secret for a reason. I’m sure that your operations are also being kept secret.” Liara tried awkwardly to continue the conversation. Athena looked at her and grinned.

“You know Liara, when I was young I hated your people.” It was so blunt that it made Liara shrink in her seat. “Did you know that I almost killed an Asari merc named Wasea from the Eclipse Company when I was ten years old?”

Liara fidgeted in her seat as she tried not to look uncomfortable. “Commander I’m sorry I didn’t mean to…”

Athena raised her hand dismissively. “Oh Liara, I don’t hate your people anymore…well maybe Councilor Tevos, but that’s beside the point. I hated the Turians too and the Batarians. Point is that we’re all in the same situation it seems. Politicians are all the same no matter the species. There are scum in every species and there are…” She paused and took Liara’s hand. “Wonderful people as well.”

Liara blushed at the physical contact and she almost forgot what she wanted to ask the Commander. “Oh commander that reminds me, have you been able to decipher your visions from the beacon?” Athena shook her head.

“I still see the destruction in my dreams and it definitely seems to be some sort of synthetics killing off organics, but some things aren’t clear.” She explained.

Liara was nervous. “Maybe…if I performed another meld…perhaps I could…”

Athena didn’t even hesitate. “Of course, if there is any way to find out what these visions mean then let’s do this. Come let’s do this in private.” Athena got up and led Liara to her quarters.

Liara started to feel guilty as she entered Athena’s quarters. Although a melding might help them understand the beacon’s visions better, it wouldn’t really reveal anything that was still missing from those visions. She was more nervous because she wanted to experience that powerfully strong mind that was Athena Shepard again. She was a remarkable and beautiful human woman with the powerful mind equivalent to that of an Asari Matriarch.

Athena turned to face her and could see the nervousness in her face. “Liara are you okay?”
“Y…yes, it’s just that being in your quarters is a little…unnerving.” Liara responded with her face now in full bluish blush.

“We could go to your quarters if it makes you more comfortable.” Athena responded with a slightly mischievous grin on her face.

“No, that will not be necessary.” She quickly responded and stood arms-length from Athena. Athena was looking down at her and was obviously waiting for Liara to initiate the melding. Liara put her hands on the sides of Athena’s face. Liara’s pupils dilated until her eyes look like two black pools of obsidian. “Embrace eternity!”

Athena’s mind was as strong as she remembered. The visions were clear and it was obvious that the missing pieces were still missing. She could feel Athena’s mind reach out to her, her mind was so powerful, so primal and yet refined in ways that should not be possible for such a young being…she was…she is… Liara could feel the tendrils of her mind spread over Athena’s nervous system as the connections with her own nervous system began to be linked. Liara’s body started to glow that familiar bluish biotic glow as the heat built up inside her. Athena’s did the same, but her aura seemed to engulf the both of them. Liara’s body began to shake as Athena’s power became evident. No…please…it’s too much…please… Liara pleaded to herself, but did not stop. The desire to partake of Athena’s essence was too intense to resist. Her eyes turned to Athena who was breathing deeply and hotly as a sensuous moan left her lips… It was more than she expected and Liara’s body reacted deeply and sensuously when all of a sudden she felt a powerful jolt of biotic energy coursed through her body resulting in her being knocked into the bulkhead and off her feet.

“LIARA! Are you okay?” Athena rushed to her and knelted down in front of her.

Liara was breathing heavily and in gasps. “By the Goddess! How did you do that?” Athena smiled at her.

“You’re a naughty girl Liara.” Liara started to blush terribly. “I know what you tried to do.” Liara slowly stood up and could not maintain eye contact with her. Athena gently took a hold of her hands. “It was nice, but don’t do that again.” Athena told her in a comforting yet stern tone of voice.

“I’m sorry commander…it’s just that you’re…an…an incredible person and…I got carried away.” Liara felt extremely guilty at trying to take advantage of the trust Athena had in her. “It won’t ever happen again. I’m so sorry.” Liara slowly started to walk out of Athena’s when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

“Did you see anything new?” Athena was back in Commander Mode and wanted to know what Liara saw. She also didn’t have the heart to tell her that Matriarch T’nato had taught her quite a bit about the Asari and their methods of making love. Compared to the Matriarch, Liara’s attempt was clumsy although not totally unwelcomed. Athena had felt herself starting to lose herself in Liara’s aura when she pushed back because it didn’t feel like the appropriate time. If she wanted to, Athena could ravish the young maiden with the lessons she was taught.

“Oh…of course commander.” Liara was very uncomfortable now that she had been exposed and rebuffed. Athena’s understanding grin did put her a little more at ease. “I’m sorry commander but the visions you’ve had are still missing pieces and I cannot understand what the missing pieces could be.”

“Relax Liara, I’m not mad at you. I’m actually angrier at myself for letting you get as far as you did.” How could she understand what I wanted? She knows much more about the Asari than she has told me. “I should’ve stopped you sooner, but like I said before, it was really nice.” The
gentle tone that Athena had for Liara made her visibly relax.

Liara grinned sheepishly as she turned to face Athena. “Is there a chance…that…that we?”

Athena shushed Liara with her index finger gently touching her lips.

Athena’s gentle smile had an element of mischief. “We’ll see.”

“Commander we have a priority transmission from the Citadel Council.” Jeff broke through the situation that Athena was having with Liara.

“Put it through to the communications room.” She answered. “I’ll be there in a minute.” She turned and acknowledged Liara with a soft smile. “It’s okay Liara, we’ll talk later. Don’t beat yourself up okay?” With that she quickly took her leave and made her way to the communications room.

“Patching it through Commander.” Jeff sounded different to her. She couldn’t put her finger on it, but something was bothering him. She’d find out about soon enough. He wasn’t one to keep things inside like she was.

Councilor Tevos sounded almost giddy when she began to speak. “Commander Shepard, We’ve received information that may be critical to your mission against Saren.”

Athena’s eyes went wide with the name. Did they have a target? “That’s fantastic Councilor, I could use all the help I can get.”

Councilor Valern seemed a little more reserved and sounded a little unsure of himself. “We’ve received an urgent message from one of our infiltration regiments in the Traverse.”

“You mean spies.” Athena moved closer to the holo-projection.

“Spectres tend to attract attention, Commander. But they are only one arm of the Council. Special Task Groups are often a better choice for monitoring developing situations.” Tevos tried to explain as if Shepard had been insulted. They should know better, all she wanted was a target and how they got it for her didn’t matter one lick, unless they were stupid enough to reveal that they had a target for a while and did not inform her.

Valern explained further. “We currently have several infiltration units scattered throughout the border regions of Council Space. This particular unit was gathering intel on Saren.”

“Gathering information? As in they’ve been monitoring Saren this whole time?” She was trying to remain calm as the thought that they knew this whole time where he was started to percolate inside her head.

Valern finally started to dole out information that was pertinent. “Unfortunately the message we received was little more than static. The infiltration team must be in a situation where they can’t set up proper interstellar communications. But the message was sent on a channel reserved for mission critical communications. Whatever they were trying to tell us, we know it’s important.” He continued to speak as it seemed he was the most knowledgeable on the situation. “Considering your interest in Saren, we thought you might want to investigate this. Find out what happened to our team. The signal originated from the planet Virmire.”

“This sounds like a promising lead. I’ll head there immediately. Thank you Councilors.” There it was, if that fucker was on Virmire, she would make it his grave.

“The Council prefers not to become involved in the specifics of Spectre activities. We only want
you to be aware of all your options, including Virmire. Good luck Commander, we will keep you
advised if we learn anything else.” Tevos signed off and she was left standing there with her fists
clenched. Somebody knew where this son of bitch was and waited until their ‘team’ was in trouble
to call her for assistance. The more she thought about, the more it made her angry that the Council
would hold this information back. Now another team of grunts was in trouble because of some
political bullshit.

We got a renegade Spectre to put an end to.” She sounded firm and determined. She was finally
going to kill that bastard.

“Aye aye ma’am.” He sounded off, was he angry at her again? She quickly left the comm room
and made her way to the helm.

He heard her before he saw her. “Have a nice chat with our resident blue school girl scientist?”
He blurted out with more anger than he intended. He really didn’t want to show that much
emotion, but he couldn’t help it.

She felt it and she wasn’t about to let this opportunity pass her by. “Oh we did a lot more than
chat.” She watched him turn to look at her. “Too bad you weren’t there to join us. I’m sure you
would’ve enjoyed watching us.” He turned back to his control display with his face was now a full
shade redder and actually started to fumble through a routine maintenance check. “Probably the
sweatiest mind meld I’ve ever experienced.” She approached the chair, crouched down so her face
was inches from his ear and whispered. “You’re an idiot.” She quickly and stealthily pecked his
cheek, stood up and went back to the CIC.

He smiled to himself. “I guess I am.” He was still a little jealous because he could feel that Liara
was angling for a shot at his girl, but Athena just put an end to that thought basically in her own
way telling him not to worry.

His mind raced and for some god knows reason it went into the gutter. Jeff’s mind started filling
with images he had seen in a Fornax vid. Asari and Humans were involved in a display of lust,
biotics and carnal sex. He imagined Athena as the matriarch of the group as she forced him and
Liara to serve her. *What the hell is wrong with me?* He shook his head and started to again fumble
at the controls.

Chapter End Notes

It’s obvious Liara wants Shepard and as much as Shepard wants to, she is committed to
Jeff. Love triangles are really effing hard. I’m beginning to feel that Athena is going
down a dark road with the things she is discovering about the Alliance, BAaT,
Cerberus and the Council as well. In my opinion, Somebody knew that the STG Team
was watching Saren and didn’t tell the Spectre tasked with finding him on the excuse
that Spectres sometimes attract too much “Attention.” Really fucking weak excuse by
the council.

Let’s recap. Cerberus is a rogue Alliance Black Ops group with very strong political
backing (they weren’t rogue when they were experimenting on her as a child.), BAaT
and Conatix really screwed the pooch in Athena’s eyes with the backing of the
Alliance military, and last but not least the Council keeping info from one of their
Spectres even though they most certainly knew about that STG team on Virmire prior
to them telling Shepard. Shepard and the Alliance are going to have a very rough future in my writings.
December 14th 2176 Academy Offices – Rio

“Sir, you wanted to see me?” Athena peeked her head into the Superintendent’s Office.

“Come in Shepard, this isn’t Academy business so no need for any formality.” It was a good thing too because she was working out with Kai when they called her and she was sweating like she had jumped in a river. She entered the room and noticed that Captain Yamato and two men were standing in front of his desk. It seemed that they were all waiting for her. “This is Lieutenant John Taylor and Lieutenant Commander Hugo Morales of the Alliance Naval Criminal Investigative Service; they’re here to ask you some questions.” Captain Yamato was smiling like he was showing off his champion show horse.

Athena felt a surge of panic start to rise in her gut. “Okay.” She took a deep breath remembering that Commander Anderson had told her to expect someone to come questioning her. The Captain gave her a squeeze on her shoulder as he took his leave and left his own office. She turned to look at the men, Morales gestured towards one of the chairs in front of the desk as if to tell her to sit. “I prefer to stand if you don’t mind.” She folded her arms in front of her. She had come to a realization a very long time ago that her height made her intimidating as hell. She really didn’t want to give up that advantage to a couple of wannabe cops.

The young Lieutenant’s expression as he gazed at her told her that it was the right move. Morales looked more like a seasoned pro as he didn’t even seem to notice her physically imposing posture. “Don’t worry Shepard, we’re not here to arrest you, but we do need to clear the air on quite a few things about you.” Morales finally took a good look at her and smirked. “Personally I would’ve never let you into the Academy, but that wasn’t my choice.”

“So let’s cut the bullshit Commander, what do you want know… sir?” The pause at the end was oozing with sarcasm and contempt.

Lieutenant Taylor pulled out a small camera and placed it on the desk facing them. “Just so you know this meeting will be recorded.” The young Lieutenant mentioned without looking at her. He then looked at Commander Morales and nodded. “We’re ready sir.”

The Commander’s face turned sterner as he began to address the camera. “This is video interview number one of Cadet Athena Shepard, case number AIS012176000434. We are in the Rio Academy, I’m Commander Hugo Morales of Alliance Naval Criminal Investigative Services, I’m Lieutenant John Taylor of Alliance Naval Criminal Investigative Service…” Taylor points to Athena to introduce herself. “And I’m Cadet Athena Shepard, Alliance Academy Class of 2177.”

“The time is 0900 GST and the date is Saturday, December 14th 2176.” Morales finished. He
turned to Athena with the look all cops got when they interviewed anyone. He was going to dig. He was going to guide. He was going to get the answers he wanted. She wondered if they would play good cop bad cop. “You sure you don’t want to sit? It’s going to be a long interview.” Morales mentioned with a hint of contempt.

“Interview or interrogation? Because if this is an interrogation I believe I’m entitled to representation.” If they wanted to play the combative role, then she wouldn’t make it easy for them. It seemed to work as Morales let out a huff.

“Look, if it was up to me this would be an interrogation. It’s not. We’re only here to fill in gaps about you’re history and all of the mess that is a part of your life.” Morales took a seat on one of the chairs in front of the big desk.

She liked his honesty and at least could respect that he openly despised her and her criminal background. She was sure that they had dug up her entire life with the ‘Reds.’ She took his sitting down as an invitation to sit across from him in the other chair. “So Shepard, what can you tell me about your time in Munro, specifically the period between February 15th 2160 and May 7th 2165.”

“That’s a lot of story time Commander. What about my time in the orphanage?” She seemed ready to tell him everything.

He turned to her and answered. “We have most of the files from them and nothing was erased. You’re last entry there was about you hurting another child in a fight and on the 15th of February you were removed by BAaT officials.” He looked at her with a steely gaze. “I’m assuming you were taken to that Munro Facility.”

Athena nodded her head. “Yeah, they stuck me in a small room by myself. I was alone for a day when some African man came in and introduced himself to me as the Super. He said that because I misbehaved, I would have to stay in their school until I proved that I could behave.”

“He didn't give you a name?” He asked.

She shook her head. “No, as a matter of fact no one gave me their name my entire time there. Sometimes they would call each other by name by accident, but for the most part everyone there was either a scientist or a soldier.” She was starting to remember her time there and began to lose herself in the memories. She described in vivid detail her biotic training, the pain of what she assumed were illegal procedures performed on her, the fights, the other biotics there, and her everyday life there. She finally pulled herself back to reality, tears rolling down her cheeks as she attempted to compose herself in front of the NCIS officers. Commander Morales looked absolutely stunned at her candor. Her timeline of events there matched up to some particularly mysterious deaths. One older woman found dead with huge bruises as if she were beaten to death, but there were no tell-tale signs of DNA or foreign fibers anywhere on her body. When Morales showed her the picture, Athena broke down in hysterical sobs.

She knew her. She explained that she had fought with her in an arranged match by the scientists there. “They told me she was fine, I knew deep inside she wasn’t, I slammed her into the wall so hard.” She trailed off. Athena looked at Morales with an expression of dread. “Were there anymore?”

Morales felt terrible at the way he had treated this girl. She was no criminal, not really. She was taken advantage of. She was used, experimented on, put into terrible situations, out and probably broken both physically and mentally. He paused to think of what to say to her. He recognized that she knew there were more. His pause confirmed it to her and she dropped her head into her hands.
“Shepard, you can’t blame yourself for what happened there. We’ve cataloged a lot of the people that were there and can’t locate anyone associated with that place. The ones we did locate and could actually identify are all dead. We don’t know what kind of facility they were running there, but they don’t have any records of you being there and all of the officials at Conatix and BAaT deny any kind of wrong doing at that facility.” He looked at her, still not taking her head out of her hands. “It’s as if they erased everything pertaining to you, like they don’t want anyone to know you were ever there. The vids they turned in to us were missing a lot of information.”

When Athena finally lifted her head, there was a cold but angry expression on her face. “Who are these BAaT and Conatix?” She asked coldly.

“BAaT – Biotic Acclimation and Temperance program, they’re closed down, along with the parent company Conatix. As you may well know, the human race really didn’t have a biotics program until very recently and we are amateurs compared to say the Asari and others.” Athena was staring at him with cold and clear attention. “They were supposed to be the Alliance’s crash course in biotics training, but some of their procedures were very questionable and led to some of the deaths caused at Jump Zero. This forced the Alliance to close them down and figure out another way.”

Athena had read about Jump Zero while on some of her free time in the Academy, but there was nothing on the Munro Facility in Argentina. “There’s really nothing on the Munro place, sounds like somebody is definitely trying to hide something.”

“We don’t know. That’s why we’re here. Everything at that facility has been purged, scrubbed or otherwise deleted. The facility was stripped of everything. The only thing we do have is a pieced together video of your escape, and it was only because you told us the day you escaped. It was a miracle that these cameras have not been recorded over. Here look at this.” He handed her his omni-tool.

The video was grainy and from buildings way off in the distance, but she could make out a little girl coming out of a window and running across the street. The Video was very short and that was probably because most cameras recorded over their own vids after a certain period of time. “This is all you have?” She asked.

He shook his head. “No, if you continue watching you’ll notice that on the next day there were cargo haulers and a massive moving operation in front of the Munro Facility. They sure left in a hurry.”

So they have nothing more than what I have. “Commander, there were at least fifteen people that I did not see again after some of my biotics combat there. I only knew their first names, but I think they’re just aliases.” She remembered every detail and circumstance of every fight she had been in there. She described all of the people in extreme detail, down to even the mole on one of the boy’s neck. She explained how they were all probably drugged with some sort of powerful stimulant and forced to fight her. “I must have fought at least a hundred times there.” Her face was resigned and sad. She hoped that maybe the detectives would find them or at least identify them. “There was one that I fought after an excruciatingly painful procedure that I am assuming made me as strong as I am.” She looked like she was remembering something terrible. “He was a lot older than me…he hit me so hard, but it was as if he hit a brick wall because he broke every bone in his hand and I barely got a small bruise under my left eye. I slapped him so hard that I’m sure I broke his jaw.” All in all she told Commander Morales everything she knew about the savagery of her experience there.

“How is this possible? There had to be at least fifty people working there every day and at least five or six of us. How can they make all those people disappear without a trace?” She looked
really frustrated and until she had an epiphany. “What about the Asari woman I killed there? Captain Wasea of the Eclipse Mercenary Company?”

The Commander took back his omni-tool and started to enter the information. “Hmm, we don’t have any records of her, but that could just mean that they scrubbed all of the information regarding her as well.” Commander Morales continued to type into his omni-tool. “This is a good start though, maybe someone will know what she was doing down here on Earth. We’ll see if we can track down anything on her. If I find out anything I’ll be in touch.” Morales ended the interview and began to stand.

“Commander?” She called out softly. “Please be careful, these people are evil and I think they will…” He stopped her with a gesture.

“Cadet, this is what I do. I will get to the bottom of this I promise you… I think I was wrong about you Cadet, good luck with your training.” She stood and put her hand out to shake hands. His grip was strong, firm, and his hands were extremely calloused. He could see the puzzlement in her eyes and smiled. “I wasn’t always a gum shoe Cadet. I served on Elysium when the Batarian pirates decided to try and destroy it. I’ve seen my fair share of action girl.”

She was a little taken aback. “Of course Commander, I didn’t mean to insult you.” He was a warrior and now a cop. She felt a little guilty about thinking he was a wannabe cop.

He chuckled at her uncomfortableness. “It’s okay, I get that a lot. Come on Lieutenant we’ve got a few leads we need to follow. Thank you Cadet, hopefully we can get some answers with the information you gave us.” He motioned to his partner who had just finished shutting down the camera on the desk. They took their leave and left her in the office. Seconds later, Captain Yamato joined her in the office.

“You okay Shepard?” He looked extremely concerned.

“No Captain…no I’m not. If it’s okay with you sir, I wish to go back and beat on Cadet Leng for a while longer.” She stood at attention waiting to be dismissed.

“Shepard…” He looked at her and sighed. “You’re dismissed Cadet.”

With that she turned and quickly left the office.

SSV Normandy Mess Hall – In Transit to Virmire

“And that’s all I know about Conatix and BAaT. I heard that a year after my interview with Commander Morales, they took him off the case and closed it for lack of evidence. Somehow I’m pretty sure Cerberus is involved in all of it.” She took a long sip of her super strong coffee.

Kaiden’s shocked expression said it all. He had it easy compared to her. “Wow, and I thought we had it bad on Jump Zero. Commander Vyrnnus seems like an angel compared to your instructors and what they put you through. You know the Alliance classified a lot of things pertaining to BAaT because of the screw ups that occurred with the program.” He continued to be amazed at his Commander’s ability to survive such horrors and return to what he could reliably say was normal. “How did you live after all that? I know you were in a gang, but how…”

“Ale is the reason I lived any semblance of a life after that hell hole.” She took another sip with
both hands around the warm and massive cup of coffee. “He saved me, he gave me a purpose, albeit a criminal purpose, but he always stressed the importance of not hurting anyone. We were thieves not murderers he would always remind us. I intimidated a lot of people, but I never killed or hurt anyone.” She sighed in her cup and thought of the last time she saw Ale alive. She cursed him out and called him weak ‘puto’ for taking Red Sand. “I wish I could’ve saved him…instead I abandoned him. I left him at the mercy of those vipers.” She wasn’t crying but Kaiden did get the feeling that she felt like she failed her friend. Her eyes were moist, but no tears trickled down her cheek.

“From what I heard, you did save him.” Kaiden stated to her. “Well, at least according to Marianna’s story.”

“She told you?” He shook his head.

“I overheard her talking to Joker about how Alejandro was working with the police and beat his addiction using you as an example. That to me says you saved him.” She looked at Kaiden in a whole new light. His experience at Jump Zero was awful but his dry sense of humor actually did relieve the tension when talking about such a sore subject for the both of them. She felt a kinship now to him that she didn’t feel with anyone else.

Athena chuckled. “You know once Mari trusts someone she spills her guts like there’s no tomorrow.” Athena’s turned to look at the handsome Marine. “Thank you Kaiden. You don’t know how much this chat really helped me. I hope that if there is anything you want to talk about or need…please don’t hesitate coming to me.” It wasn’t the first time that Kaiden had felt butterflies in his stomach when he talked to her, but it was the first time he felt that she actually was fully focused on him. 

"Ashley would kill me."

"So would Joker."

He thought to himself.

“Oh, Ashley is a lucky girl.” Kaiden spit out his coffee in a shocked reaction.

Of course she would know, but how would she act on this knowledge. “Commander I… we…”

“Relax Kaiden, I’m pretty lax on that particular regulation. I tend to follow the Turian model of running a warship anyway.” She smiled at him which put him somewhat at ease.

“Turian model?” Now he was curious.

She giggled and quickly put her hand over her mouth. “They allow fraternization as a form of stress relief. I think I like it, what about you?”

Kaiden was dumbfounded. She must have been talking to Garrus about that. Why wouldn’t she, the Turians have the largest navy in the galaxy and a very successful war record. “Do they really?”

“He told me they have less personal restrictions on their ships, but their commanders run them much tighter when it comes to order.” Athena chuckled. “I guess I’ll combine the best of both and that’s how I’ll run my ship. Just keep it on the down low Lieutenant.”

“Aye aye ma’am.” He chuckled through the playful retort. “I should go up and relieve Joker.” He stood up to leave and felt her hand on his.

“Kaiden really, thank you.” Her eyes had a hypnotic effect on him.
“Anytime Shepard… I mean Commander.” Her crooked smile as she released his hand told him that he was now truly in her inner circle. He bared his soul to her and she did the same. They both ended up finding out how much in common they shared. He walked to the helm at a slow gate when he finally reached his destination, Joker was a little upset.

“What the hell Kaiden? You’re like ten minutes late.” He started to peel himself out of the pilot’s seat and reach for his crutches.

“Don’t fuck it up Joker. She’s an amazing woman.” Was his response as he sat down and took over flight operations. Jeff looked at him with a surprised expression and knew he must have had a talk with Athena. Kaiden didn’t even bother to look at him for a reply.

Jeff smiled and started to make his way down toward the CIC where he saw Athena leaning over the Galactic Map with a look of deep reflection on her face. She raised her head and made eye contact with him. She winked at him and continued to peruse the map. He chuckled as he made his way down to the mess hall which was totally empty except for about four crewmen of the night cycle having their midrats.

He filled his tray with the wonderful selection of mystery meat and potatoes and sat down by himself. As he ate he noticed that Garrus had entered the mess, filled up a tray for himself and completely ignored him as he sat with the four crewmen. One of the crewmen was a Marine from the detachment on board and they immediately started to banter. Before Jeff knew it, Garrus had the whole table laughing tearfully at one of his stories. Garrus then turned to look at Jeff, he then whispered in the Marine’s ear who almost choked on his food when he started to laugh.

Jeff started to chuckle at Garrus’ ridiculously immature behavior. Out of all the aliens on board, he was considered the most well liked and approachable by the crew. Tali was too nerdy, although Adams and Athena loved her. Liara was as awkward as you could get and just hid in her quarters. Wrex was just way too intimidating although he did have a good sense of humor.

The four crewmen took their leave of Garrus chuckling and carrying on about who knows what. Garrus got up and came over to Joker’s table. “You know… you are one antisocial human. I don’t know what Shepard sees in you.” He sat down and continued eating his dextro-slop.

“It’s my dark and mysterious nature that she loves.” He answered with a smug yet pleasant tone.

“Yeah right… you’re about as dark and mysterious as an angry Krogan.” Joker watched as Garrus super sharp teeth tore into his cut of dextro-meat while he gestured with his hands. “If you didn’t have this pilot thing down, I don’t think she’d look twice at you.”

“What whoa…what the hell is going on here? First Kaiden basically tells me that he’s waiting for me to fuck it up with Athena and now you do the same?” Jeff is taking a bite of his mystery meat and grimacing at the lack of seasoning. He quickly grabs a salt shaker and starts to sprinkle it liberally on his meat.

Garrus started to chuckle. “She is an amazing being, but you don’t have to worry about me. I have my sights set on another.” Jeff was intrigued at who Garrus could be talking about and came to the unsubstantiated conclusion that he must be talking about Tali. “If I were you I’d worry more about Liara and Kaiden, although Liara might be okay with sharing her…just saying…if you’re into that kind of thing. I’m pretty sure that Shepard would love to take advantage of both of you.” Garrus took his final bite of food and got up to leave.

“What!? Where did you hear this? How do you know this?” Jeff was both worried and curious. Garrus just pointed at his nose.
“I can smell it. So can Wrex. It’s subtle but unmistakable. Let’s just say that me and Wrex know a few things now that we didn’t before thanks to Chief Williams and Lt. Alenko.” His voice trailed as he walked away towards the stairs.

Jeff sat there in shock. *Take advantage of both of you?* He thought to himself. He knew Athena had plenty of experience just by the way she toyed with him. Liara on the other hand was probably as clueless as he was, but even he could see that she was attracted to Athena by the way her eyes tracked her whenever she was around.

As he sat there eating and contemplating what Garrus had said, Athena walked into the mess and started to make herself a large mug of coffee. He looked around to make sure that there was no one within earshot. “Babs?” It startled her a little as she too found herself scanning the room for anyone who might have heard that. She then made eye contact with the culprit and smirked as she approached his table. She sat down next to him and jolted him with a little biotics. “DAMN IT!” He jerked and then attempted to compose himself but when he turned to look at her, those eyes just completely made him forget what he was going to say. “Damn you…” He whispered to himself as he looked away with a less than pleasant expression on his mug.

“What’s wrong Jeff? You know you can tell me anything.” She reached under the table and squeezed his thigh. Her look of concern actually got him to talk.

“I…I…don’t know how to…what to tell you.” She could tell he was uncomfortable.

“You wanna talk in private?” It was an innocent request, but his response was anything but.

“You offer privacy to just about anyone huh.” He regretted it as soon as he said it, but the effect was immediate as her gaze became a glare.

“You got something to say Fangio or are you going to stutter your way through this whole conversation?” Her mannerisms became a little more aggressive and confrontational.

He withered under her intense glare. “I’m…You…” He didn’t want to accuse her of anything because deep inside he knew she did nothing wrong. Liara and Kaiden had drooled over Athena since the first time either of them met her. It’s no secret to anyone including Athena. What bothered him was how she could actually choose him over those two. Liara was beautiful, innocent, a little awkward, but incredibly smart. Kaiden was that dark, quiet and brooding type of Marine that women swooned over. Not to mention he was absolutely gorgeous (Jeff was man enough to admit it.). “I’m just a pilot…I’m not good at a lot of things other than piloting and cooking. I’m a physical mess, I’m rude and obnoxious and my sense of humor is pretty inappropriate. I don’t see what you see…and everyone tells me the same.”

Her glare immediately softened to a comforting gaze. “Jeff, you are everything I’ve ever looked for. Like I said before, you see me like nobody else. I know you’re worried about Liara and probably Kaiden, but please don’t. Nothing is ever going to happen with either of them…” She paused to give him a mischievous smile. “…Unless YOU WANT something to happen with them.”

He started to choke on his water and coughed violently. “What?!” She laughed with a mischievous tone and then stopped suddenly.

“Well maybe not Kaiden. I think Ashley would kill us both.” She paused and looked at his uncomfortable but not shocked reaction. “You know, Liara tried to seduce me with her Asari mind meld shit.”
He was just recovering from his choking when he looked up and met her beautiful gaze. She was totally his and he could see that she would do anything for him just by the way she watched him. “You’re a menace.” He chuckled.

“I know.” She looked around the mess hall and it was still empty. “Come on. I’m tired of your shit and I want you now.”

“But you’re on duty.” He tried to protest as the awkwardness she found so attractive started to surface.

“This is my ship mister. That’s a fucking order.” She was so inappropriate and yet so confident in everything she did. “Let’s go.” She used her biotics to subtly help him up as she also offered him his crutches. He did as he was ordered and followed her into her quarters. He scanned the area and noticed that it was so perfect that no one saw them.

“Are you sure?” He meekly asked her.

“I love you Jeff. I don’t care about the fucking regs and I swear that you’re worth losing everything. The Alliance has done nothing but protect Cerberus, the council still protects that fuck Saren and they keep a lot of things from me. I’ll do what needs to be done, but I’ll be damned if they dictate my happiness…and you Jeff (she paused as her eyes welled with tears) make me so happy.” The biotic force that helped him stay up was subtle but noticeable. She pulled him into her quarters and pulled his face into a ferocious kiss. As she closed the door she looked into his eyes and smiled. “If I died today loving you, I would die happy.”

It was all he needed to hear as he dropped his crutches and returned her kiss with as much ferocity as he received. It surprised her as she smiled through his assault on her lips. “I love you too Babs…I wish…”

“Shut up and kiss me!” She cut him off and he responded by grabbing the back of her head and pulling her into another tongue and lip dance. She finally let him go and slowly and sensually walked to her bed. She sat down on the side of the bed facing him. He slowly followed her as he felt that she had stopped using her biotics to assist him. “Come here.” She grabbed a hold of his shirt and pulled him into a deeply passionate kiss. She felt the fireworks going off all over her body as he leaned into the kiss like it was vital to his existence. She could feel him push and she acquiesced as she leaned back for him.

He was leaning over her and tried to lift his legs get on the bed fully. “Hold on.” He was so nervous it made her breath catch at how much of a true dork he really was.

“I’m holding on Romeo.” She almost winced when she quipped at him, hoping he wouldn’t stop.

“Well this is what you get when you’re legs have a mind of their own.” He was playful, but she could see his frustration.

“Oh fuck this.” She was subtle, but it didn’t matter because Jeff felt that he could move his legs with ease now. Her biotics were lightening his legs to the point that he quickly swung his legs over and was on top of her. She looked into his eyes and saw the hesitation in his expression. “Was that okay?” She asked.

He didn’t even bother to answer her as he looked down on the most beautiful goddess that the creator put in this universe. Her eyes told him that she wanted him, the faint blue glow told him that she had helped him, but he didn’t care, he was actually glad she did and he was sure the smile on his face answered her question. He put all of his weight on her and wrapped his arms around
her and squeezed with all his might. “Are you real?” He asked as he whispered in her ear.

“Oh I’m real…” She quickly flipped him over and switched their positions. “I’ll show you just how real I am.” She hopped off the bed and started to take her trousers off. “Take your clothes off.” He almost didn’t react as he was hypnotized by the contrast between her bleach white underwear and bra and her olive skin complexion. He quickly took his shirt off and started to work his shoes. “Wait…I’ll be right back.” He acknowledged her and continued to struggle with his left shoe. He didn’t watch her go into her bathroom.

After a frustrating five minutes he had finally taken off his shoes and trousers. She still hadn’t emerged from her private bathroom. “Are you okay in there?”

“Gimme a minute.” She sounded a little frustrated. “I want you to lay face down on the bed okay?” Now she sounded playful again. What the hell was she planning in there? “I want you to close your eyes.” He heard the bathroom door open. “Don’t you dare look!” She ordered and he smiled as he just relaxed into her very comfortable bed. He sensed her climb onto the bed and on top of him. He then felt a hot liquid pour onto his back. He winced a little, but knew that it must be some type of oil and then he felt heaven as her hands began to knead his back muscles into jello.

The combination her hands on his skin and the slickness of the oil made him moan with such satisfaction. “Oh my God…oh momma is there nothing you’re not great at?”

She relished in the feeling of having him in her hands, his upper body was exquisitely beautiful. His skin was so white and contrasted so much with her own darker tone that she couldn’t help smile. “This is just the beginning, tell me how this feels.” Her eyes flared and her biotic force flowed through her hands into Jeff’s back. His body began to quiver slightly and the sweet sound of Jeff’s moaning was starting to get her temperature up.

“Ohhhh my…please don’t stop…wh…wha…what is that?” He stuttered and stammered his delight to her.

She moved her hands down to his legs and gently kneaded and poured her biotic energy into his legs. “Have you been doing the bike like I asked…no, ordered you?” He looked like he was in such ecstasy until her heard the question. He looked like he was going to turn to look at her. “I said don’t you dare turn around!” She playfully exclaimed. “You know what that means right?”

“Please tell me you’re not going to stop…please…please…I don’t care if you have me riding that bike from Earth to Illium just please tell me you’re not going to stop.” She smiled as she dug her powerful fingers into his hamstrings and just dragged them down the length of his legs. His legs felt a sensation of warmth like they were over a comfortable burning fire, only this feeling was coming from inside and spreading out from her hands. Every nerve, every cell, every part of his body felt it. It was glorious, it was the definition of ecstasy and it was slowly increasing in intensity. Then it hit him like a freight train, his entire body started to seize up in that familiar feeling of release. “Oh…oh…wh…Oh I’m coming…how is this…posi…aaaaahhhh…” She pressed her body into him and held him close as he climaxed for her. His convulsions of pleasure were magnified by his contact with her and he held onto her arms for dear life while simultaneously turning his head to desperately see her face. He saw her lips, her eyes, her hair, her nose and damn it if she wasn’t perfect. He arched his neck to kiss her and she in turn crashed her mouth unto his. He didn’t want this to end, he felt strange that he came and yet felt as if he didn’t and could immediately go again. He felt that he was as erect as a stallion surrounded by mares in heat. He also noticed that he did not spill his seed all over the bed and his own fruit of the looms.

*How is this possible?* He thought.
“Did you like that?” She asked in the most mischievously debauched way possible. “The Asari sure know a thing or two about love making. You can thank Matriarch T’nato for that trick.”

He laid there in pure bliss until she started to peel herself off of him. His pleasure filled groan was all she needed as confirmation that he was putty in her hands. He turned around to look at her and now he knew why she didn’t want him to. He propped himself on his elbows and just stared at her. His throbbing erection approved enthusiastically. His racing heart and breaths also approved. She stood at the end of the bed in what appeared to be one of those Asari stripper outfits. It was white, it was most certainly leather or pleather, he didn’t care. She had her hair in loose pigtails like you would see in one of those Japanese animation movies. His body was still remembering what she just did to him and she just stood there with her hips cocked, one hand rubbing her chin while the other arm was folded under her opposite elbow. She smiled coyly at him knowing the power that she possessed. “Athena…that…” She made him breathless. The sound of her name brought back the goose bumps. “…was wonderful. You…look…I can’t find the words for what I could have ever done to deserve your attention.”

She crawled onto the bed and mounted him again. “You…” She breathed hotly into his ear. “…are the dorkiest and hottest Frigate Thief I’ve ever met.” His surprisingly large member was begging for attention as she slowly sat on top of it, pinning it to his stomach.

He snorted in obvious amusement. “That’s it? What about my charming persona…”

She didn’t let him finish her mouth collided with his. “Shut the fuck up Fangio.” Her tongue probed his mouth as his gave way to her more powerful one.

“Athena…I want to…want you to feel good too.” He whispered his protest through their kiss. “Please let me…”

She put her fingers on his lips to shush him. “I am.” She pulled back and reached down her own hot zone and showed her completely drenched fingers to him. “We’re a long way from being done Fangio.”

The absolute nastiness of that display from his commanding officer, the legendary Athena Shepard sent him over the precipice. This time there was no mistaking what happened as he grimaced, convulsed and spilled his seed on himself. This time it felt empty, he wanted to hold her, to feel her body on his, to be one with her and he just couldn’t control himself. He looked away from her, disappointed in himself.

She quickly leaned back down and embraced him. “It’s okay, sometimes I forget how awesome I am.” She whispered in his ear. This caused him to let out a cackle and forget the feeling of inadequacy he just experienced.

“You suck…” He answered through his own chuckle. “…but I’m serious. I want you to come too.”

“Patience Lieutenant, patience.” She giggled. “Come with me.” She pulled him up and again he felt her biotics assist him.

“You know this really is cheating.” He annoyingly told her as he followed her into the shower.

“If you’re not cheating, you’re not trying hard enough.” She mentioned as she turned on the shower and removed her outfit. She didn’t expect to be out of it so quickly, but she had to be careful with her sexy ass dork. She could make him go into seizures with just a smile it seemed.
The hot water hitting his body made him forget that he was standing in the shower without any pain. It also helped that in the shower with him was his towering and stunning commander. She didn’t hesitate to pull him into her and fiercely kiss him. She wanted him so badly, he was so authentic, so awkward and yet so confident as well. She felt like she was cheating using her biotics the way T’nato showed her. It got her in trouble before with an overly possessive man in New York, but she wanted this more than anything. Leng was purely physical, Jeff had stolen her heart and she hoped that he felt the same.

She started to feel that he was getting his member to stand at attention once more. She grabbed a hold of it in her hand and smiled. “I told you it’s a long way from being over.” He smiled at her.

“You’re so bad. Oh my God Athena…I don’t want to know.” He stammered as a pleasurable grimace appeared on his face.

“Are you going to spank me for being bad?” Athena gave him her best innocent little girl look and he just lost it…again. “Fuck…Jeff how in the hell? I’m sorry, I swear the next one will be better.”

She was too much for him to handle. She needed someone who could satisfy her and he felt totally inadequate about his inability to control himself. “You’re too much Athena…you’re so beautiful and sexy and…oh my God NASTY. I can’t…I can’t help it.”

“All that porn you watch and you still can’t control yourself? How is this possible?” She regretted saying it as soon as it came out of her mouth.

“You know?” He wasn’t shocked considering that everything on the ship was monitored and he sort of thought he would never be in this situation, but he was still a little pissed. “You spied on me?”

She let out a sigh as she started to wash herself. “I wanted to know what you liked and it seems I did too good of a job.” She started to run her lathered hands down his chest. “I wanted your first time to be the best ever, for you and me too.”

“You what?” He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. She did all that for him? She even got the Asari outfit too? He couldn’t stand it anymore and grabbed the back of her head and pulled her lips down to his. “You’re amazing.” He said as he pulled away and took one of her breasts into his hands and lightly bit her nipple.

“Mmmmmm…” Was the ecstatic groan she gave him as she pushed him down to a kneeling position in front of her. She pointed to her erotic zone with her hands. He really liked this cheating, kneeling down like this would be very uncomfortable under normal circumstances. He buried his face into her with an eager desperation that caught her by surprise. Maybe it was because she wanted him so bad that it felt so good, or maybe he learned something from that frighteningly large collection of videos that he had. “Oh Jeff…that’s it…don’t stop baby… mmmmmm…”

His tongue was doing all the work, but when he added his fingers into the mix, she about almost crushed his head with the force she pushed it into her sensually sensitive area. He was eager; he wanted her to come so badly, he would stay down there all night if it took that. He curled his index finger as he had learned and got a groan from the heavens when he hit the spot he was looking for. He continued to relentlessly flick his tongue and thrust his fingers until he could feel her tighten. He felt the pain in his legs and he knew he had her as she just let go and started to quiver. “Oh Shit, Jeff…oh oh…” She eagerly launched herself over the cliff as she collapsed onto her knees in front of him. He wrapped his arms around her waist and looked into her eyes which now had a different glow. The glow of satisfaction was in her eyes and mounting pain in his legs
disappeared again as she smiled and gave him a peck. “So did you learn that from the videos?” He didn’t answer even though he felt redeemed. He looked at her as they stood up and began to dry off and could see her up turned lips. “Was it good?” He wanted to know, he wanted to do even better next time. She deserved every bit of his best effort.

“It was fabulous.” She gently took a hold of his hand and led him back onto the bed. They both lay next to each other on their sides, facing each other. He looked fresh as a daisy in the spring time. “Do you trust me?” That was an odd question to ask.

“You know I do why?” Came his instant response, which brought a grin to her face. He was already hard again and couldn’t stop worshipping her with his eyes.

“I want to try an Asari technique, but I don’t want you to feel like we have to.” She gave the impression that she knew he would say yes, but it also seemed that she was hesitant about his comfort level.

“I trust you. So what is this technique?” Now he was curious again.

“They actually developed it specifically for humans, being that they seem to be able to give pleasure to all of the races, this is totally unique for us.” She mounted him again only this time she was completely naked and made sure that she didn’t do anything that could send him in a seizure. He was in utter bliss underneath her as he slowly raised his hip trying to feel her dampness. “I’m gonna need you to close your eyes and try to think of anything besides what we’re doing here. Think of Garrus’ handsome face if you have to.”

“Ugh! What the hell…really?” He already didn’t like where this was going.

“You need to last a little for this to work and your track record is a little short on endurance.” She looked at him as serious as a heart attack.

“Okay.” He answered quietly.

She watched him close his eyes as she became enveloped in the faint bluish glow of her biotic power. She could feel her nerve endings tingle as she purposely manipulated their pleasure sensors. She then began to slowly extend the field to envelope Jeff and saw him visibly gasp, but to his credit he did not open his eyes. His member was engorged and a rock hard when she slowly slid him inside of her. His unexpected size made her gasp as well. “Think ugly thoughts.” She whispered to him.

Her biotic pleasure field was doing a fine job as she tried to stifle a groan as she started to slowly set her hips to grind on top of him. “Oh momma…I’m not gonna…” She could feel his member twitch as he was on the verge of exploding once again. She didn’t want to do it so early but she decided to unleash the Asari trick now knowing he wasn’t going to last. The biotic field she had maintained went from a pleasurable sensation throughout their bodies, to one where there was an intensely concentrated explosion in their private areas. It was too much for both of them.

“Oh….oh….open your eyes.” She begged him, wanting to see his expression as they both exploded with a feeling of extreme sensual release. He complied and they stared into each other’s eyes as they went over the cliff. Jeff wrapped his arms around her pulled her into him with all of his might and she gently acquiesced while her body intermittently jerked in ecstasy.

“I love you.” She breathed out through her intermittent gasps for air bringing a grin to his mouth.
I’m feeling like Athena is really disappointed in the Alliance and the Council. They both play political bullshit games instead of doing the right thing. Oh it’s going to get ugly.
Virmire

Chapter Summary

Really long chapter. I might have put a little too much in game dialogue, but I couldn’t avoid it as I think this was probably the most important point in the Mass Effect trilogy. The moment she comes face to face with Sovereign. Hope you guys enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shepard’s Quarters:

“I gotta get back out there before they suspect anything.” She turned towards him while swinging her leg across his hip as he lay back on the bed next to her with a grin and both of his hands supporting his head. She then started to twiddle the hairs on his chest with her fingers. “No really, I have to get back out there.”

“Suuuuure you do.” He said smugly. “I can see that there’s a lot of urgency in your movements… lots of urgency.” His smile melted her, but she really needed to continue her shift.

“You’re supposed to be helping me get out of bed.” She mounted him gently and gave him a quick peck. “You suck.” She quickly hopped out of bed to his playful ire. He then watched her suit up into her uniform faster than he had ever seen anyone. He then slowly started to sit up to do the same, but she quickly put a stop to it. “No…stay. You need your sleep for what’s coming and I’d rather you be comfortable. No one will know the difference. Plus…maybe I’m gonna want to ravage you again before your shift.” His lack of shock surprised him, but he drew it up to the fact that she always did things that shocked him, so he now just seemed to expect it. Still, that smile she gave him as she left made his heart beat harder and his stomach flutter. She was amazing and his sleep would be filled with dreams of her…hopefully.

“THEY JUST WANNA, THEY JUST WANNA…GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUUUUN!” The alarm woke him with an incredibly cheesy eighty’s song by Cindi Lauper. He chuckled and wondered if she had her alarm music on a loop. He turned the alarm off and slowly sat up on the side of the bed. He had never slept better while in the Alliance Military. Beds are really badly underrated for the amount of rest that they can provide. It struck him as really comical at how soft she liked her mattress. She was a walking statue as hard as steel, the plush and decadently soft pillows and mattress did not fit with the image of a hard and powerful Marine. As he was about to get up he noticed that his uniform was placed in a neat and easily accessible pile on her desk next to the bed with his hat displayed prominently on the top of the pile. He smiled and slowly put his uniform on and as he grabbed his shirt he noticed that there was a note on the bottom. ‘I OWE U for one ravaging.’ There was a little smiley face at the bottom. It was a good thing he didn’t have anything in his mouth because it would have been spit out with gusto. He laughed to himself and folded the note and put it in his pocket for future ravaging.

He pulled up his omni-tool and gave Athena the signal that he was up. A few minutes later he got the all clear and he left her room to get coffee in the mess hall. He grabbed two big mugs and put them on his tray. He then added a plate of simulation eggs and bacon to his tray and was off to the mess table. He set the tray down along with his crutches and sat there along with Cpl. Sakai who
was the de facto squad leader of the Marine security detachment on the ship. “LT.” The Corporal acknowledged.

Jeff nodded and returned the greeting. “Corporal.” Sakai was another of those perfect physical specimens. He was easily over six feet tall and built like a Greek God. The scars on his upper arm were interesting though and they did catch his eye.

“Batarian pirates.” He blurted out before Jeff could ask. Had he really been staring at the scar?

“Sorry man, I didn’t mean to stare.” Jeff commented with a sense of remorse that made Sakai chuckle.

“It’s okay LT. It’s not like I don’t show it off. It’s a great ice breaker with the ladies.” Sakai answered.

Jeff chuckled lightly as he took a sip of his coffee. “How did you get it, if you don’t mind me asking?

“Typical Batarian shit. We disabled one of their ships in our sector of space in the Skyllian Verge. Fucking slavers. Well to make a short story shorter, I got stabbed in the arm with a Batarian dagger as soon as we boarded. If I hadn’t raised my arm to block it, he would’ve got me in the chest. I got stabbed and he got his head blown off.” Sakai remembered how bloody that day was and started to zone out. “When we got on there they started killing their slaves and massacred about half of them before we stopped them.” He paused and finally came back to reality. “Commander Shepard’s a hero for what she did to them on Torfan. The Verge has been very quiet since then.”

Jeff sighed and nodded in agreement. “She’s a hard woman and even harder Marine. I can’t even begin to imagine what you ground pounders go through.”

“We couldn’t do it without you flyboys. I mean who would get us there if not for you?” Sakai said. “With all due respect LT.”

Jeff was actually enjoying his little banter with Corporal Sakai. “Are you in any way related to Saburo Sakai, the Japanese Ace?” Jeff was a flight buff and Saburo Sakai was one of the greatest fighter pilots of World War Two.

Sakai smiled and nodded. “He is my great, great, great grandfather…maybe add another great to that.” He actually looked pretty impressed at Jeff. “How do you know about him LT?”

“I always wanted to be a pilot and I studied almost everything that had to do with flying. His name figures pretty prominently during World War Two.” Jeff told him as he grimaced at the taste of the eggs. “The Commander would probably love to know that you’re related to one of the greatest fighter pilots of all time.”

“Oh she already knows. She actually told me about one of his dogfights during the war.” Sakai chuckled. “My sister has the flying bug. She’s a fighter pilot on the Einstein. I couldn’t fly a kite let alone a fighter or ship. Gramps would probably be pretty ashamed of his namesake.” They continued to talk about Sakai’s skill on the ground and his lack of skill in the air for quite a bit. They laughed and both came to the conclusion that if they combined their skills to form one person they would be an uglier version of Commander Shepard.

“Oh man that’s such an insult to her.” Jeff laughed. “I’m not much of a looker. Maybe you should combine with Kaiden, you wouldn’t be as good a pilot but at least that way you would look a lot better.”
They both broke out in laughter as they continued their friendly banter only to be interrupted by the Commander. “What’s so funny Corporal?” Sakai immediately stiffened up to Jeff’s amusement.

“Oh leave him alone Commander. We were just talking about you.” Jeff said nonchalantly.

“What?” Athena her eyes bored into Sakai and he started to squirm until she finally smiled at him. “Anything good?”

“We were just saying how awesome it would be if me and him could combine into one person. His martial skill and my piloting skill would be unbeatable…even by you.” Jeff finished off his meal and took a sip of his coffee.

“Oh my…super-hot!” Athena sounded excited and both Jeff and Sakai didn’t know what to say. They were expecting a chuckle or a joke about how ugly they would be, but instead she complimented them on their imagination. “Is there any way to make that happen?” She started to drink the coffee that Jeff had gotten her as they both watched her in shock. “What?” She looked at them in an innocent way. “Bad thing?”

Sakai gave her a mischievous smile. “I’ll have a talk with Dr. Chakwas ma’am. We’ll find a way to make it happen.” She spit out her coffee as some actually came out of her nose. Jeff started to laugh uncontrollably and he was soon joined by Athena and Sakai.

“Corporal, I’m going to keep my eye on you.” Athena wagged her index finger at him with a smile. “I might just promote you for that kind of outside the box thinking.”

“Thanks ma’am. I need to get some gym time, followed by some rack time.” Corporal Sakai stood up and took his leave. “Oh and ma’am?” He paused and turned to see that she had his full attention. “Just so you know, PFC Vasquez ran the mile in four minutes and nine seconds. That’s a full five seconds below the ‘within a minute and a half of my time.’ (He made quotes with his hands.) I think you owe the whole security detachment a round of drinks.”

By the expression on her face one could tell that Athena loved her grunts. Jeff could see the broad grin on her face and could only imagine the type of relationship she had with them. They were her brothers and sisters in arms and the way they gave up their minds and bodies to war made him rethink his occasional jealousy of them. “Absolutely, next time we’re on the Citadel, the drinks are on me.” There was such pride in her voice as Corporal Saburo Sakai turned and left with a big grin on his face. She then turned to face Jeff and her eyes as usual, pierced his soul. “I’m gonna give him a field promotion to Sergeant. What do you think?”

“Don’t know him that well, but he seems like a very competent guy.” Jeff answered as he finished off his coffee. “I’d like to meet his sister though.”

If Athena was the jealous sort, that little comment would have caught her ear and maybe landed Jeff in emergency surgery, but she’s not and she knew that Jeff just wanted to talk flight and pilot stuff with an heir to the legendary pilot that was Saburo Sakai. “Don’t get any ideas mister, I got dibs on that first.” She joked as she began to pile on food onto a tray.

“Hey! Nobody said you couldn’t come along.” He chuckled at the playful insinuation. “On an important note, we need to have another pilot other than you. I know you love flying, but we need a dedicated third shift pilot.”

Athena sat down across from him and gave him a little bit of a sad face. “You’d take that away from me?”
“Oh don’t give me that face. It’s not gonna work on me…” Jeff countered as he watched her eat at a disturbingly fast rate. She paused her gorging and looked up to meet his gaze. Her mouth was still full and Jeff just thought about how ridiculously little girlish she looked eating like such a slob. “Oh come on, it’s not like you couldn’t take the controls anytime you wanted to. I mean who would stop you?”

She didn’t even bother to swallow her food. “Okay, anyone you have in mind?” She asked him as she chewed her food. He shrugged his shoulders. “Really? Okay, bring me some names and I’ll shoot up the request to David to get it done. Hopefully we’ll be able to get it done after we have a little chat with Saren on Virmire.” She continued to shovel food into her mouth. She didn’t even notice that he was staring. “Before you even get excited, Sakai’s sister is out of the question.”


“She’s a fighter jock and from what I hear, she’s a grade A fighter jock. She already leads her own squadron. There’s no way she would want to be here to fly a frigate. Even if it is the pride of the Alliance Fleet.” Jeff listened to her argument and came to the same conclusion as she did. Those F61 pilots loved their fighters and they were pretty arrogant about their own abilities. Fighter jocks were the only ones that he was actually envious of. Because of their manipulation of the inertial dampeners to conserve power during extreme maneuvering they pulled G’s that would shatter his spine. It was one of the few jobs he was excluded from being able to do because of his medical condition.

He observed her critically and thought that Athena would have been a legendary fighter pilot and she definitely had the attitude for it. “I know, but maybe you could still put out a feeler to see if she would be interested.” Jeff countered, still not willing to give up.

“Will do Lieutenant, I’ll get right on that.” Athena’s plate was empty and now she was downing her large glass filled with some sort of energy concoction that was designed to help with her biotic recovery. “Anything else?”

“No that’s it. Unless you have something for me?” He got up and grabbed his crutches. He turned to her and she was sitting back in her chair smiling at him. “I should go and relieve Kaiden.”

“Come on, I’ll walk with you. I need an ETA anyway.” She quickly got up and slowly made her way up to the helm with him. When they finally reached the CIC he continued toward the helm while she addressed Navigator Pressly. “Lieutenant Pressly, do we have an ETA for Virmire.”

“We’ll be there in approximately six hours. Stealth systems will be engaged once we’re close to the Hoc system.” Pressly was very good at his job and his update was completely off the top of his head.

“Very good. As you were.” She responded. “Jeff can you advise everyone on the ground team to meet me in the comm room?”

“Kaiden is already on his way, I’ll make sure everyone else knows.” Jeff responded from the helm.

The comm room was filled with heated arguments as to what the best approach was to the planet. Despite the fact that the Council had an STG team on the ground, there was a frustratingly minimal amount of recon on the base there. No comm was getting out and sending any communications in was out of the question because it would alert Saren to the Normandy’s presence. There was also no word on the location of the giant dreadnought under Saren’s command or his Geth either. In the
end it was decided that the Normandy would do a stealth drop about ten miles outside of the main base. Athena, Wrex, Tali along with the Mako were going to be the hammer of this operation. They would move toward the base as quickly and as quietly as possible and get as much intel as they could before rushing in to kill the bastard.

The stealth drop was uneventful and demoralizing at the same time. Jeff informed the ground team that the base was equipped with heavy anti-air turrets that would have to be taken down before the Normandy could provide any kind of support.

It was obvious that any attempt at stealthily approaching the base was for naught. Saren’s Geth and Krogan troops were all over the place. By the time they reached the outer gates of the compound, the Mako’s mass accelerator cannon was white hot and smoking. Athena’s barrier got one hell of a workout as Geth Snipers hit them from every direction. Tali’s incredible knowledge and ability to hack into the Geth individual units made short work of them while she stayed inside the protective cocoon of Athena’s barrier. Once inside the Gatehouse, Wrex and Athena absolutely demolished the interior defenses. Tali then hacked into the first of the two series of anti-air turrets and programmed them to fire on any Geth or Non-Alliance ship that came within range. “Let’s see what happens if that Dreadnought comes into range.”

Athena was breathing pretty heavy when she turned to Wrex. “What are all these Krogan doing fighting for this asshole?” She recovered pretty quickly when she thought about the Krogan. “You know what, there are a lot of Krogan fighting for him, even on Feros there were quite a few of them.”

“I don’t ever remember there being this many of them working for one boss.” Wrex sounded very disturbed. “We usually don’t get along with each other long enough to work together.”

They continued toward the inner gates and it was the same old thing. Geth and Krogan up the wazoo, Tali’s knowledge of the Geth was invaluable, she hacked into the systems of a huge Geth Colossus and it turned on its comrades with devastating effect. By the time the rest of its synthetic comrades destroyed it, the Colossus had taken out more than half of the enemies guarding the last gate. The Mako made short work of the troops outside the gate and once again Athena and Wrex brutalized the interior defenders. The final Anti-air turrets were taken care of courtesy of Tali. Jeff set the Normandy down in a clearing within the STG basecamp and then proceeded to inform her that they were grounded.

Athena met with the Salarian commander, Captain Kirrahe who told her that every other Anti-Air gun in the area had been warned and were ready to open fire as soon as the Normandy took off. He suggested that they wait there for the reinforcements that the Council had promised them. When Athena told the Salarian Captain that they were the reinforcements, he looked very upset. The worst part about the whole thing was that the base was being used to breed an army of Krogan for Saren. When Wrex asked him how it was possible, Kirrahe answered with the worst possible answer. Saren had cured the friggin Krogan Genophage. Then to add insult to injury, the suggestion by Captain Kirrahe to destroy everything almost set Wrex off. “Is he going to be a problem?” The Captain asked without any modicum of empathy what so ever.

Athena glared at the Salarian. “I might be a problem if you ever speak to one of my people like that again!” Kirrahe was taken aback and tried to respond but was quickly shut down by her hand. “I’ll talk to him I don’t need to hear any more crap coming from your oral cavity.”

“I’ll be ready in case your chat doesn’t go well.” Ashley chimed in to reassure her.

“Ashley, for the love of God, stand down. He’s saved your ass a couple of times too. Even if you don’t, I trust Wrex with my life. He’ll listen to me and if not I’ll beat some sense into him.”
Athena loved Ashley, but she could be a little trigger happy sometimes.

Athena walked confidently over to Wrex who was pacing back and forth on the beach, muttering unintelligibly to himself and letting off rounds from his shotgun into the water until he saw her approach. “Shepard this isn’t right. If there’s a cure for the Genophage, we can’t destroy it.” She could hear the fury and conflict in his voice.

“I understand why you’re upset, but we both know that Saren’s the enemy here. He’s the one you should be pissed off with.” He was still huffing.

“Really? Saren created a cure for my people. You want to destroy it.” Wrex was as conflicted as he sounded. “Help me out here, Shepard. The lines between friend and foe are getting a little blurry from where I stand.”

“Blurry? Really? You’ve got some fucking nerve to use that kind of language with me!” Athena started to get angry at him and it started to show with her tone. “This isn’t a fucking cure you asshole! It’s a weapon he’s using to fuck your people in the ass just like the Council did! If he’s allowed to keep it you won’t be around to reap any of the benefits. None of us will!”

“That’s a chance we should be willing to take.” He got right in her face. “This is the fate of my entire people we’re talking about!” She didn’t blink or back away from her formidable and angry friend. Instead she listened to him, feeling his pain and seeing his dilemma. How would she react to something like this? “I’ve been loyal to you so far. Hell, you’ve done more for me than family ever did. But if I’m going to keep following you, I need to know you’re doing it for the right reasons.” He turned from her and took a few steps away from her and turned back to face her.

She sighed and stared into the big Krogan’s eyes. “Wrex, you know me as well as anyone. Tell me in your heart that you know this cure isn’t just some way for Saren to make slaves of your people. I happen to think that he’s creating slaves, but if you think differently then I will fight alongside you tooth and nail to save this base.” She stood there calm and collected as if knowing that Wrex would answer her the way she knew he would. He was a brother who had her back many times and had spilled his own blood to protect her. She would not betray him for the fucking Council and in any case would still kill Saren when she found him.

“Damn you Shepard…” He bowed his head in acknowledgement of what he already knew to be true. “We were tools for the Council before and to thank us for wiping out the Rachni, they neutered us all. I doubt Saren will be as generous.” He sighed and stood up to the tall and enormously proud specimen of a Krogan that he was. “Alright Shepard, you’ve made your point. I don’t like this, but I trust you wholeheartedly and I’ll follow your lead.” He approached her and she took him into a powerful embrace. “Just one thing, when we find Saren, I want his head.”

“Not if I get him first.” She countered with a smile that made Wrex chuckle at her.

Wrex watched her walk away and wondered how the soul of a Krogan ever got into the body of a human. In his mind Athena was way more Krogan than she was human, but she did have a habit of doling out mercy which wasn’t a Krogan trait. He was a little annoyed that some of that had rubbed off on him. What she did have was his unquestionable loyalty; he would die for her as much as he knew that she would die for him. That kind of commitment wasn’t even common for his people, let alone the alien races. He heard her tell that Salarian asshat what she could become if he disrespected her people again and Wrex believed every word. Shepard considered him one of hers which he had to admit made him feel quite honored. She had a band of mismatching personalities and opinions which she forged into a fighting team that would be the envy of even the greatest Krogan Battlemasters. Hell if Shepard could accomplish what she did with all of these different races and personalities, how could he not be able to accomplish something with just his
own people? Wrex made up his mind that when they finished with Saren he would return to Tuchanka and take up Shepard’s challenge to help his people.

Captain Kirrahe watched the human speak to the impossibly large and angry Krogan. She stayed calm throughout most of their conversation and actually did something that he did not think possible. She talked him down and actually had a laugh with him at the end of their conversation. He also observed the other human female sighting down on the Krogan with her sniper rifle before putting it away once it seemed that the dangerous Krogan was placated. *Smart. Offer an olive branch, but have the dagger ready.* He thought to himself until Shepard walked straight toward her and angrily reprimanded her. After a heated argument Athena squeezed the other female’s shoulder as a sign of peace, but he could tell that Athena was supremely annoyed at the other human female.

The other thing Captain Kirrahe noticed about Shepard, was her incredibly powerful manner of movement. Being Salarian, he recognized the strengths and limitations of his people’s physiology. He also studied the same for as many races as he could find. Humans were naturally, much stronger than Salarians and almost as quick, much like the Asari and Turians. Athena though, by the impressions left in the sand looked to be much heavier than the average Human and her gate revealed what he interpreted as incredible power and quickness. He also heard the rumors of her immense biotic power and told himself, *Thank the maker she is on our side.* He watched as she approached him with supreme confidence or was it arrogance?

“Thank you for speaking with the Krogan. The assault on Saren’s base will be difficult enough as it is.” It was obvious that the Captain had a thing for Krogans and Athena wanted to wring the Salarian’s neck, but she kept her cool and remained civil. They were after all, going to take down the bastard who attacked Eden Prime.

“I assume that means you’ve come up with a plan.” Athena watched the Salarian like a hawk and she was impressed at the fact that he did not flinch or hesitate. He probably didn’t even know how much of an ass he sounded like when he talked about Wrex. It was probably that lack of empathy that irked her most.

“Of sorts, we can convert our ship’s drive system into a twenty kiloton ordinance. Crude but effective.” Athena chuckled at the plan. It was the sledgehammer plan that she approved of whole heartedly.

Ashley got excited at the notion of nuking the shit out of Saren’s base. “Nice. Drop the nuke from orbit and Saren can kiss his Turian ass goodbye.”

The Captain didn’t hesitate to shoot down Ashley’s suggestion. “Unfortunately, the facility is too well-fortified for that. We’ll need to place the bomb at a precise location.”

Athena started to get that frustrated expression on her face. “Where do we take the nuke? And how do we get there?” It always seemed that nothing could be simple.

“The bomb needs to be taken to the far side of the facility.” He answered. “Your ship can drop it off, but we’ll need to infiltrate the base, disable the AA guns and pacify any ground forces there.” He made it sound like it was easy with the way he just rolled from one objective to the next.

Kaiden chimed in with what everyone was thinking. “You want us to go in on foot? We don’t have enough men.”

“It does sound a bit risky. Is there no other way?” Athena was trying to think of it even as she asked the question.
“No, but I think we can work around that.” Kirrahe started to explain. “I’m going to divide my men into three teams and hit the front of the facility. While we have their attention you can sneak your ‘shadow’ team in the back.”

Athena was impressed and horrified at the same time. “Damn…It sounds like a good plan, but your men are going to get slaughtered.”

“We’re tougher than we look Commander. But it’s true I don’t expect many of us will make it out alive.” He continued to talk and he began to look more uncomfortable. “And that makes what I’m about to ask much more difficult. “I need one of your men to accompany me to help coordinate the teams.”

Athena nodded, but she started to get the feeling of dread come over her. “We’ll need someone who knows Alliance communications protocols.”

Kaiden immediately volunteered. “I volunteer Commander.”

Ashley didn’t let Athena even consider it before she made her own case. “Not so fast LT. Commander Shepard is going to need you to arm the nuke. I’ll go with the Salarians.”

She felt Kaiden flinch, but he didn’t back down and Athena knew why. It was unprofessional, but she understood. “With all due respect Gunnery Chief, it’s not your place to decide.”

Ashley understood it as well, but she wasn’t about to get a tongue lashing by her friend with benefits. “Why is it that when someone says ‘with all due respect’ they really mean kiss my ass.”

“Sorry Kaiden, but the Salarian team needs a heavy hitter and I agree with Ash. I need you to arm that nuke.” Athena instructed, using her logic to justify her decision to herself. “No crazy heroics okay Ash?”

“Aye aye ma’am.” Ash responded enthusiastically.

“I’ll have the ordinance loaded onto your ship and brief your crew on its detonation sequencing. Do you have any questions before we go Commander?” He had to give this guy credit for bravery and decisiveness.

So the plan was set. Kirrahe’s teams would provide a three pronged diversion while Athena’s team of herself, Wrex, Tali and Garrus would infiltrate the base and take out its defenses. Athena’s team would have to move quickly so that she could save as many of the diversion team’s people as possible.

She listened to Kirrahe’s motivational speech which wasn’t bad, but she’d heard better from some of the old movies she watched from time to time. She was sure she heard ‘Hold the Line’ somewhere else and might look it up later. She gave nod to the Captain and Ash as they moved out. She and her team did the same.

With the fight that the Geth and Krogan put up she could only imagine what Kirrahe and Ash were up against. They tried to make things easier for the diversion teams by taking out the enemy’s ability to communicate, their Sat-Bomb capability and they destroyed their drone refueling depot. Athena could see that both Wrex and Garrus were falling in love with Tali’s ability to hack the big Geth units and make them do her bidding. Her biotics were being taxed to the limit as she lashed out relentlessly, breaking the flesh, bone and steel of their enemies. It got quieter once they got inside the facility proper. It wasn’t the good kind of quiet though and they ended up finding some homicidally insane Salarians, Husks, Geth and those wonderfully fluffy Krogan. All this along
with lab facilities that were eerily familiar to Athena. She could tell they were doing genetic experiments there and it was confirmed when they reached an office with an Asari scientist hiding in it. Rana Thanoptis was there studying the effect of Saren’s ship on the minds of sentients. How a mysterious signal coming from the ship compels all to obey Saren, but that wasn’t all. The scientist told them that Saren was afraid that the signal was affecting him as well. Rana pleaded with Athena to let her go in return for access to Saren’s private lab. Athena agreed and sent Rana running in horror, knowing that she would probably not be able to outrun the nuke blast. They quickly made their way into Saren’s lab only to find it empty of the rogue Spectre.

And then her eyes were opened to the real enemy when she found another beacon within said lab. Her mind was now much more tuned to it and it was much easier for her to interact with it. The vision was so clear now thanks to the Cipher. The Reapers were giant sentient machines and they were exactly who Saren was working for. That ship Sovereign was a Reaper! She saw thousands of them destroying, massacring and butchering Protheans on a genocidal scale. It felt as if they were wiping out her own people as a tear started to roll down her cheek. They wiped out the Protheans and Saren was now working for them to make it a future reality for the Galaxy again!

As she walked away from the beacon she felt a presence in the room. She turned toward a working terminal that had lit up and become active. She slowly approached it and saw a holographic image of that giant dreadnought Sovereign come into view.

Wrex voiced what they all felt at the moment. “I get the feeling that something bad is about to happen.”

And damn if that thing didn’t confirm Wrex’s comment. “You are not Saren.”

“What is that? Some kind of VI interface?” Tali sounded every bit the nerd that she was.

“Rudimentary creatures of blood and flesh. You touch my mind fumbling in ignorance, incapable of understanding.” Athena’s skin began to prickle as the mechanical monster spoke.

Tali realized very quickly that she’d made a mistake. “I don’t think this is a VI.”

“There is a realm of existence so far beyond your own you cannot even imagine it. I am beyond your comprehension. I am Sovereign!” Now the machine sounded like just another scumbag craving more than they should have.

“You’re an actual Reaper. Saren found an actual Reaper. He’s more of an ass than I thought and now he’s a puppet to some over built toaster oven.” It was her defense mechanism to insult, but she knew deep down that the monster didn’t feel a thing.

“Reaper? A label created by the Protheans to give voice to their destruction. In the end what they choose to call us is irrelevant. We simply are.” It didn’t waver, it didn’t pause, it was on a singular mission and it would not deviate from it.

Tali was horrified and she couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “The Protheans vanished fifty thousand years ago. You couldn’t have been there. It’s impossible!”

“Organic life is nothing but a genetic mutation, an accident. Your lives are measured in years and decades. You wither and die.” There was no emotion or empathy in its voice. It was a machine bent on the extermination of all organic life. “We are eternal. The pinnacle of evolution and existence. Before us you are nothing. Your extinction is inevitable. We are the end of everything.”
“The Galaxy will be ready for your arrival! We’ll face you and defeat you!” It even sounded desperate in her head. It was overwhelming to be facing what amounted to what many would call a god.

“Confidence born of ignorance. The cycle cannot be broken.” It spoke to her like an arrogant English teacher telling her it’s not TOMAYTO it’s TOMOTO.


The machine just kept speaking in its deep monotone voice. “The pattern has repeated itself more times than you can fathom. Organic civilizations rise, evolve, advance and at the apex of their glory, they are extinguished. The Protheans were not the first. They did not create the Citadel. They did not forge the mass relays. They merely found them, the legacy of my kind.”

“The forbidden fruit…so we would develop in a way that you would be able to control. Diabolically clever.” Athena had to admit it. It was brilliant.

The monster actually paused. Athena would chalk it up that she had actually impressed it. “We impose order on the chaos of organic evolution. You exist because we allow it. And you will end because we demand it.”

Tali was almost in a panic. “They’re harvesting us. Letting us advance to the level they need then wiping us out!”

“So what’s the reason for destroying organic life? Resources? Slaves?” There had to be something otherwise there really would be no point. Athena thought.

And the arrogant machine didn’t skip a beat in bloviating about its superiority. “My kind transcends your very understanding. We are each a nation, independent, free of all weaknesses. You cannot even grasp the nature of our existence.”

“Who created you? Where did you come from?” Athena thought it was the most unanswerable question and she was right. No one knows how the universe came to be and anyone who claims to know is lying to themselves. Scientific theories about the creation of the universe were no better than religion’s versions of the same.

The machine of course avoided the answer. “We have no beginning. We have no end. We are infinite. Millions of years after your civilizations are eradicated and forgotten, we will endure.” It actually made her smile that these ‘superior’ machines were as clueless about their own creation as organics were…albeit she sported a very uncomfortable smile.

“So where are the rest of you?” She thought that maybe Sovereign was just a scout, but it could be that he might just be a disgruntled AI. “Are you the last of your kind?”

“We are legion. The time of our return is coming. Our numbers will darken the skies of every world. You cannot escape your doom.” Damn, at least they know now that there are more of these monsters. It would help them make preparations.

“You’re just a machine and machines can be broken.” It sounded weak to her too.

“Your words are as empty as your future. I am the vanguard of your destruction. This exchange is over.” With those last words the windows were blown in as an exploding round struck the outside of the structure.

And of course the shit started rolling. “Commander? We got trouble!” As Jeff’s excited voice
“Hit me, Jeff.” Athena responded quickly.

“That Ship Sovereign? It’s moving. I don’t know what you did down there, but that thing just pulled a turn that would shear any of our ships in half.” He almost sounded in awe of it. “It’s coming your way, and its coming hard! You need to wrap things up there…fast!”

“There’s nothing else we can do down here Commander.” Tali’s calmness surprised her. Just a few seconds ago she was ready to throw up at the sight of Sovereign.

They quickly made their way to the AA Gun controls and deactivated them. Joker brought the Normandy in to drop off the Nuke. Kaiden and a small team of Salarians began to arm it when it seemed that Saren’s Geth and Krogan made a concerted effort to attack that position. Wrex, Garrus and Tali had their hands full holding off the horde of enemies as they surged toward their position. Athena moved quickly within the horde and released a nova strike that must have eliminated a majority of the enemies.

“Ashley where the fuck are you?!” Athena screamed into the comm.

“There’s too many Commander! We’re not going to make it…just go!” She could hear the desperation in Ash’s voice.

“I still need a few minutes to arm the bomb. Go get her!” Kaiden sounded equally as desperate.

“Ash hold on! I’m on my way!” Athena ran off on her own to the dismay of everyone. Her physically as well as biotically enhanced speed was impossible to follow. She was gone before they knew it. After a few minutes Kaiden had armed the bomb and now there was a countdown. Saren’s Geth and Krogan again attacked in force and were dangerously close to overrunning them.

“If this is the way I’m destined to go it will be glorious!” The barrel on Wrex’s shotgun glowed an eerie red as he continued to pump round after round. Garrus didn’t speak, but his sniper rifle was cracking round after round into the enemies that didn’t seem to have an end. Tali looked exhausted, but she managed to hack one of the Geth Primes and it was doing some serious damage.

“Commander we’re not going to be able to hold on much longer!” Kaiden yelled into the comm. “I’ve activated the detonation sequence on the bomb. We’ll hold on as long as we can, get Ash and the rest out of here!”

“That’s a negative soldier! NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND! Tell Joker to meet us at your location!” Athena screamed angrily into the comm. “On my way with some luggage!”

No sooner had Kaiden heard Athena over the comm did he look at one of the ramparts off to his left and see the Commander with Ashley slung over one shoulder and Captain Kirrahe on the other. She made one of those biotically slowed leaps and landed behind them. She looked gassed, but still let loose a powerful biotic lift that had two Krogan and a Geth Prime take flight hundreds of feet into the air only to come crashing down with a crippling thud. A couple of quick rounds from Garrus finished them off and they were left with only Geth Troopers which were getting mowed down by Wrex, Tali and Kaiden.

As Athena breathed deeply and in gasps attempting to recover she noticed a flying platform with a large Turian on top of it. Her adrenaline started to pump when she recognized who it was. “SAREN!” She yelled as she got out in the open and he began to biotically assault her barrier. “Jeff get your ass down here and get us the fuck out of here!” Saren softly landed his flyer and
stepped off with an arrogant and confident posture.

“I applaud you Shepard. My Geth were utterly convinced that the Salerians were the real threat. An impressive diversion. Of course it was all for nothing. I can’t let you disrupt what I’ve accomplished here. You can’t possibly understand what’s really at stake.” Her rage was building as she fired round after round into his barrier to no avail. She finally stopped firing and lashed out with her own verbal assault.

“Sovereign and his kind destroyed the Protheans! What else is there to understand?” Did Saren think that the Reapers would be merciful?

“You’ve seen the visions from the beacons, Shepard. You of all people should understand what the Reapers are capable of. They cannot be stopped!” He really was trying to convince her. “Do not mire yourself in pointless revolt. Do not sacrifice everything for the sake of petty freedoms. The Protheans tried to fight and they were utterly destroyed.” Was he really pitching this weak ass argument to her? As Saren continued she looked over at Kaiden’s position and they were pinned down by a couple of Geth Primes. They were holding out well, but for how long. She was going to have to end this conversation quickly. “Trillions dead, but what if they had bowed before the invaders? Would the Protheans still exist? Is submission not preferable to extinction?

She watched as the Primes started to fight each other. *Damn, Tali.* “Do you really believe that the Reapers will let us live?!”

“Now you see why I never came forward with this to the Council. We organics are driven by emotions instead of logic. We will fight them even when we know we cannot win. But if we work with the Reapers, if we make ourselves useful, think how many lives could be spared!” Damn if he didn’t sound like he was doing it for the right reasons. It would have been a good argument except that she talked to Sovereign directly and he was pretty much hell bent on destroying everything. “Once I understood this, I joined Sovereign, though I was aware of the… dangers. I had hoped this facility would protect me.”

There it was. He was aware to some extent that Sovereigns had been directing him. “You’re afraid Sovereign is influencing you. You’re afraid he’s controlling your thoughts.”

The Primes were still going at it and Wrex was still trying to take the hostile one out with a biotic Reave. “I’ve studied the effects of indoctrination. The more control Sovereign exerts, the less capable the subject becomes. That is my saving grace. Sovereign needs me to find the Conduit. My mind is still mine…for now. But the transformation from ally to servant can be subtle. I will not let it happen to me.” He really sounded like he believed what he was saying to himself.

She watched as Wrex took out the legs of the remaining Prime and began to butt stroke it. “Why are the Geth following Sovereign?”

Saren actually chuckled. “They believe Sovereign to be some kind of God. The pinnacle of their own evolution, but the reaction of their deity is most telling. It is insulted. Sovereign does not desire the pitiful devotion the Geth hurl at it. They are just tools and no amount of belief on their part will change that.” The big prime finally stopped moving and she could see that her little group was totally exhausted. “But as tools they are useful. They will survive the coming invasion. If organic life is to survive, we must also prove we are useful. We must work with the Reapers.”

“Why does it need the Conduit? What is it? Maybe we can use it to stop them.” She found herself pleading to buy a little time to recover.

“The Conduit is the key to your destruction and my salvation. Sovereign needs my help to find it.
That is the only reason I haven’t been indoctrinated.” In one sentence he talks submission and usefulness. Then next he talks destruction. *He’s really fooling himself isn’t he.*

“Sovereign’s been manipulating and you don’t even know it! You’re already under its power!” She could feel his inner conflict.

“No! Sovereign needs me! If I find the Conduit, I’ve been promised a reprieve from the inevitable. This is my only hope.” He doesn’t really believe it either.

“Why don’t you help me? Together we can stop it! We don’t have to cower and submit, we can beat them!” He’s going to suffer for his doubt and his betrayal.

“I no longer believe that Shepard. The visions cannot be denied. The Reapers are too powerful. The only hope of survival is to join with them. Sovereign is a machine and it thinks like a machine. If I can prove my value, I become a resource worth maintaining. There is no other logical conclusion!” Athena felt his pain. He might have had noble intentions, but now he was nothing more than an accomplice to a race of genocidal machines.

Might as well keep pushing. “You were a Spectre. You were sworn to defend the Galaxy. Then you broke that vow to save yourself!”

The rest of the crew was starting to take cover as best they could and looked to her. She waved her hand at them as if to pause. “I’m not doing this for myself. Don’t you see? Sovereign will succeed. It is inevitable. My way is the only way any of us will survive!” Kaiden gave her a concerned look and pointed at his omni-tool timer. “I’m forging an alliance between us and the Reapers, between organics and machines. And in doing so, I will save more lives than have ever existed! But you would undo my work. You would doom our entire civilization to complete annihilation, and for that you must die!”

She gave the signal as Saren took off in his flyer and began to bombard her with biotic and conventional pistol fire. Her barrier held as she smiled inwardly, his biotics were not quite as strong as Liara’s mother and she confidently started to fire her pistols at his flyer with deadly precision.

As fired her pistols at him, his biotic barrier just shrugged them off. She had tunnel vision and didn’t see a Geth Rocket Trooper lining up a shot at her. By the time Garrus took him out it was too late. The rocket slammed into Athena’s barrier with brutal force and finally took it down. The shock from the explosion took her off her feet and when she finally came to her senses, Saren had picked her up by the throat and lifted her off her feet. The look on his face was homicidal, but his grip was not as strong as she would expect. Wrex was stronger and Garrus could probably hold his own against this scumbag. As they stared into each other’s eyes, Athena grinned the grin of someone who knew the hell she was about to unleash on him.

The sound of the two minute alert from the bomb distracted Saren and she came down on him like the God of Thunder with a sledgehammer-like punch that completely shattered Saren’s mandible. He dropped her and as she began to get to her feet she saw that the flyer had taken him away with such amazing speed, she couldn’t get a good shot at him. She looked at her crew and they were ready to depart. “Joker! What the fuck where are you!” As she yelled the Normandy appeared at almost an instant with its hangar door open and ready for a pick up.

“Somebody call for a ride?” Jeff let out, but the desperation of the situation made his joke fall on deaf ears. Wrex picked up Kaiden and headed for the hangar doors, Garrus picked up Kirrahe, and Athena carried Ashley’s unconscious body. Tali’s tough little ass didn’t need any help although she looked every bit as exhausted as everyone else. As soon as everyone was on board the
Normandy turned and began its ascent at neck breaking speed. “Alright everybody hold on!” They were three hundred miles away when the nuke detonated in a flash of radioactive glory.

Athena and Garrus immediately made their way to the sick bay. Dr. Chakwas was ready for them as both Athena and Garrus set down their respective people onto the beds there. “Take care of them Doc.” As she turned to leave Kirrahe weakly grabbed her wrist.

Kirrahe’s left eye was closed shut and his left arm looked like it broken in three places. He had a hole in his chest armor and was slowly bleeding from it. “M…My men?” He asked with a weak, tired and concerned expression.

Athena looked at him with a pained expression and shook her head. “They saved us.” She responded as Kirrahe let go of her hand. She could see how badly the news affected him. Sometimes she forgot that not everyone loses their entire unit in one mission. Well, now there were three people in that room that had and they would all have to live with it.

“Commander please, I need to work.” Dr. Chakwas shoved her out of the sick bay. Athena left the sick bay with Garrus as Kaiden limped in.

“You okay?” She asked him.

“I’ll be fine, just a massive head ache. I’ll be fine.” Kaiden looked like he was in terrible pain. He took the last bed and lay down.

She started to walk with Garrus back toward the elevator when she noticed the blue blood dripping from his upper torso. “Garrus, are you okay?” He waved her off and nodded.

“Just a flesh wound. Thanks for the concern, but you look like varren shit too.” She let out a chuckle that actually hurt.

“Fuck! I think that rocket cracked a couple of ribs.” Athena winced as she smiled at the mess of a Turian. “We certainly aren’t going to win any beauty contests.” She stopped dead in her tracks just before getting on the elevator. “Go on. I’ll be down there in a minute.”

She made her way back up to the CIC and headed to the helm. The crew looked at her with an awe that actually made her uncomfortable. She was a mess and she had blood dripping from her mouth and nose, probably from the rocket blast.

He turned his head to see her standing there with some of her armor plates torn off or shattered in place. Her hair was still in that tight bun but there were strands stuck to her face which was caked with mud and blood. She was alive, and as scared as he was he knew she would make it. She was incredible, the vid feed of her rescuing Ash and Kirrahe would have gotten her court martialed for taking such a dangerous and unnecessary risk, but that was who she was. She was a Marine through and through and it was one of their edicts to never leave one of their own behind. He smiled and turned back to piloting the ship. “Rough night?” He playfully asked as he dug through his pockets and produced the ‘ravaging’ IOU and offered it to her without even looking at her.

“Oh my God really?!” She was chuckling and wincing at the pain it caused on her side. “You really are an ass Lieutenant Moreau.” She seemed genuinely and pleasantly surprised. “Gimme a couple of hours and a hot shower. Oh, in about half an hour I want everyone in the comm room for a debriefing okay?” He nodded as she crouched down next to his chair. “So you’re not upset?”

“Upset no, scared as hell yes. You were in ‘Commander’ mode. I understand…it’s actually kind of hot.” He didn’t see the bloody smile but did feel the peck on his cheek as she got up and walked
back down the gangway.

The briefing had to take place without Ashley and Kaiden as they were still recovering in the med bay. “We need to get to Ilos. That’s where the Conduit is.” Athena’s vision was now as clear as day. It was almost like she recovered a part of herself as she spoke. Liara had offered another melding, which she agreed to and maybe the Prothean expert could connect any insignificant details that she might have missed.

“Forget it. The Mu relay’s in the Terminus Systems. Alliance ships are not welcome there. Neither are Spectres.” Tali voiced her opinion almost immediately.

“The Conduit’s on Ilos. That’s where Saren is headed and that’s where we’ll be waiting for him when he gets there!” Athena understood the risks and they were outweighed by the threat to the Galaxy that Saren and the Reapers posed.

“Saren will have his entire fleet orbiting Ilos. You will never make it down to the surface without reinforcements. You must alert the Council. We need a fleet to… (She paused and winced in pain.) ohh.” Liara could be forgiven as she didn’t understand military doctrine nor the stealthy capabilities of the Normandy.

“Liara are you okay? Maybe you should have Dr. Chakwas look at you.” Athena mentioned to her with some concern.

“I will go back to my room and lay down for a spell. Joining with your mind is exhausting.” Liara did look like she was about to pass out.

“We’re done here. Jeff set a course for the Mu Relay and Ilos.” Athena started to bark her orders. She was still all bruised up, but she was at least showered and in a comfy clean uniform to boot.

“Commander, there’s a comm buoy nearby. I can link us in if you want to report back to the Citadel Council. You know, to warn them about Sovereign.” Jeff came back with a suggestion that made sense. Even if they didn’t believe her, they would at least be warned of what could be headed their way any day now.

“Set the link up.” She answered.

He patched it through and there they were in all their holographic glory, all three of the wonderfully pampered Councilors.

“Commander Shepard, I’m pleased to see your mission on Virmire was a success.” Tevos announced with an almost disappointed tone.

“Saren is formidable enough without an army of Krogan serving under him.” Sparatus added not really knowing that the real threat wasn’t Saren, but the Reaper Sovereign.

“The Krogan would have served Sovereign, a Reaper, not Saren” Athena corrected him.

“Yes we saw mention of this on your report. Sovereign, a sentient machine. A true artificial intelligence. This news is quite alarming… if it turns out to be accurate.” As Valern spoke
Athena couldn’t help but want to wring his friggin neck.

“Sovereign’s a Reaper, Saren admitted it.” She was starting to get frustrated at always having to explain the obvious to these three idiots.

“He’s playing you, Shepard! Saren still has contacts on the Citadel. He probably saw your earlier reports, the ones talking about your visions and the Reapers.” It was hopeless that these three would see her report and take it a face value.

Valern continued their ridiculous assumptions that Saren was the real threat. “It’s highly possible Saren is using false information to throw you off balance. Our own intelligence has never turned up any corroborating information.”

“You three are unbelievable, and here I thought Alliance command was bad. So it’s basically going to take thousands of those giant Reapers on your front lawn to convince you.? It’ll be way too late when that happens.” Athena’s frustration was showing. “Sooner or later you’re going to have to take what I say on faith, Councilor.”

Tevos continued to straddle the fence like an Asari lady of the night. “Try to see it from our perspective, Commander. Saren is a threat we can recognize. However as far as we know the Reapers only exist in your visions.”

“Our decisions affect trillions of lives. We cannot act on the accusations of a single person. Not without solid evidence.” Valern added.

“The Council cannot take any official action here. That is why we created the Spectres. You have the authority to act as you see fit.” Tevos just basically told her that she was on her own.

“If you truly believe that Sovereign is the real threat. Then you must take whatever steps are necessary to stop it and Saren.” Valern continued with his smug expression.

“Good luck Commander, from all of us.” Tevos cut the comm.

So there goes the support. Athena walked back out to the CIC and stepped up to the galaxy chart. She looked at the Pangea Expanse and thought of how in the hell would she get to Ilos without being detected.

She almost jumped through the roof when Joker spoke over the comm. “I forwarded the mission update to the Citadel, Commander. We’ve got confirmation on those reinforcements. Ambassador Udina wants us to report back to the Citadel. The Council is massing a joint-species fleet to deal with Saren and his Geth.”

“Are they fucking schizo?! They just basically told me we were on our own and now they want us to come back because they want a fleet sent into Terminus Systems…something doesn’t smell right.” Athena was thoroughly confused, but now both of her bosses wanted her to return to the Citadel. If she didn’t, it would amount to a mutiny. At least she could drop off Ashley and Kirrahe to get more advanced medical care. Dr. Chakwas could only do so much in the Normandy’s med bay. “Okay Jeff, set a course for the Citadel. I want the Normandy at the head of that fleet.”

“Yes ma’am!” Joker sounded a little excited.

Chapter End Notes
I know it seems like a cop out to save both Kaiden and Ashley, but I felt that Athena was capable and I had to find a way to tire her out so that she didn’t rip Saren apart during their conversation. I really wanted to say f@#k off to Udina about returning to the Citadel, but I think it’s more fun in the end to return to the Citadel then to just go to Ilos, which you end up doing anyway in the game.
A couple of scenes prior to the Normandy’s Ilos rendezvous. Athena joins Joker in an exclusive club.

Normandy Hangar – Enroute to the Citadel

Athena sat down next to Wrex and pulled out her armor maintenance kit. Wrex was busy lovingly polishing his family armor. It now had a mirror-like shine and he looked like he was extremely satisfied with it. Athena started to address her own armor, which was in desperate need of repair. She started to unscrew the damaged chest plate and couldn’t help but notice the dent on the inside of the plate as she examined it while removing the screws. Once the four mounting screws were taken out, the plate came off with an audible pop. She retrieved a new chest plate from the supply box. She began to carefully maneuver the plate into place and then began to screw it back into its proper place. She continued to methodically replace all of the numerous damaged plates in the same fashion. She placed all of the damaged plates into a bin and was surprised at how well the armor had worked. She had bruises, cuts and even a cracked rib, but nothing had fully penetrated her armor.

She had replaced half of her armor plates in comfortable silence. Once she was done with her armor, she examined it one last time to make sure she didn’t miss anything. Once satisfied she set it aside and put away her tools for it. She looked up and noticed that Wrex, Garrus and Mari were all intently looking at her.

“What?” She asked with a perplexed expression.

“You enjoy showing off your bruises don’t you?” Mari smirked. “You all do.” She pointed at Wrex’s crest, which now had another web like crack on it.

Athena was in a tank top and shorts and Mari’s comment made her smile. She was bandaged around her chest and her left arm, but she felt like she was just making the doctor happy as she didn’t think she needed them. She took out her weapons maintenance kit and began to disassemble her two Jormangund Pinnacle pistols. “Not all of us can be a flawless Barbie doll.”

“Ouch, I deserved that.” Mari chuckled.

“Barbie Doll?” Garrus asked with an honestly perplexed expression.

“Look it up.” Athena shot back with obvious amusement. She pulled apart her guns and began to clean one of the barrels.

“How’s Ash?” Garrus asked knowing that Athena had just been in the med bay.
“She’s going to recover. She took quite a beating, but doc says that with a few weeks, she’ll be back on her feet.” Athena explained. “She’s one tough woman.” She paused wiping the barrel of one of her guns and looked up. “I’m more worried about Captain Kirrahe.”

“Who’d a thought that a Salarian would be as tough as that little bastard?” Wrex added. “Those STG types are a very different breed.” Wrex paused for a bit. “Probably the only Salarian that I can say I respect.”

“Well, losing your entire unit can break you. Another minute and I would’ve been too late.” They all watched her as she talked. “Ash and I survived, but I don’t pretend to know how Salarians deal with those kinds of losses.” Athena put together one of her guns and dry fired it.

“That was really stupid of you.” Wrex mentioned to her which immediately resulted in Athena stopping what she was doing and glare at him. “You know it was. You’re the only one who clearly understands and sees the threat the Reapers pose and yet you unnecessarily risked your life to rescue two people who would have willingly given their lives for you to live.” Wrex wasn’t about to back down and Garrus backed him up.

“He’s right Shepard. What would’ve happened if you died? Do you think that Saren and the Reapers wouldn’t continue on their merry mission to destroy the Galaxy?” Garrus continued and watched as Athena’s shoulders slumped and she dropped her head. “Do you think Pressly or Kaiden would’ve been able to pick up where you left off?”

“I…I know…” Athena meekly replied. “I just couldn’t do it…” Wrex put his big hand on her shoulder. “I couldn’t leave her.”

“We know. We all would’ve done the same, but that wouldn’t have made it right.” Garrus continued and then paused. “You’re the only one of us that is not expendable.”

“No…none of you are expendable to me.” It was so quiet that they almost didn’t hear her. She looked up and watched them with a loving and yet concerned expression. “I would never leave any of you. So don’t ever put me in that position. You’re not just my subordinates. Y…You’re my friends and I will never abandon any of you.” She put her second pistol back together and dry fired it.

Mari knew it to be true. Athena wasn’t anything if not loyal to a fault. She always considered her biggest failure to be her abandonment of Alejandro. She vowed that she would never let that happen again. These people risked their lives every time they went ground side with her. She would do no less for them. “Mamita, you’re still wrong. How would you treat Kaiden if he did what you did and he had the knowledge of the Reapers?” Athena turned to her with a look that said, ‘really? You too?’ “What do you think Ashley is going to say when she wakes up? Captain Kirrahe?”

Athena started to lose it a little and bit out with a little more anger than she intended. “I don’t give a fuck what all of you think! I can’t change who I am and you’ll just have to accept it or MAKE ME change!” She picked up her gear and started toward the elevator.

“Mamita please! Don’t you see? It’s like you’ve been chosen by some higher power to stop these monsters. Without you, we might as well just kill ourselves.” Mari ran after her and stepped in front of her at the elevator just in time for the door to open and reveal Kaiden there with his damaged gear.

“Shepard…” Kaiden started to speak softly as if he hadn’t slept in days. “You took a terrible risk…” Athena was about to explode when he put his hand up to stop her. “Thank you.” Athena
was stunned at how tired Kaiden looked; she gave him a weak little smile and nodded her acknowledgement. He stepped past her and squeezed her shoulder as he went and joined Wrex and Garrus in the maintenance of his equipment.

Athena looked down at Mari who looked almost ashamed, but still defiant. “I’d kill myself before I’d ever allow you take that kind of risk for me.”

Deep down Athena didn’t disagree, but it didn’t mean that she had to like what they said. “Then I would carry your lifeless body back.” She smiled weakly at her best friend who looked exasperated and finally gave up and pulled her into a ferocious embrace.

“You’re impossible mamita…fucking impossible.” Mari stepped away from her with her own grin. She rejoined Garrus, Wrex and now Kaiden to assist them with their gear.

“I love you too.” Athena responded as she stepped into the elevator.

Mari sat down next to Garrus and picked up the lower receiver of his sniper rifle and began to clean it. “She’s incredible.” Kaiden mentioned.

“She’s selfless to a fault. It’s going to get her killed one day.” Wrex was just too matter of fact for Kaiden. He was about to respond in anger, but was cut off by Wrex’s continuing commentary. “Although I have to say… I would kill and die for her. She’s more than worthy.”

“We all would.” Kaiden sounded annoyed. “The problem is that she wouldn’t have gone if I didn’t tell her that she had some time.” He paused and looked at Wrex. “It was my fault she went.”

Wrex started laughing with that deep baritone laugh that made the metal benches they were sitting on vibrate. Mari looked at Kaiden and shook her head. “There was no way she wasn’t going to try and save her, whether you told her she had time or not. She’s just built that way.”

Kaiden chuckled. “We should probably do a better job of keeping her out of harm’s way.”

“Shepard’s a warrior.” Wrex mentioned. “She’s a magnet for violence, whether she likes it or not.” Wrex commented as he took apart his shotgun.

“That’s bullshit Wrex.” Mari came back at him to his surprise. “When we were running together with the Reds, we almost never had to resort to violence to get what we wanted.” Wrex maintained eye contact with the petite human female and was pleasantly surprised by the lack of fear in her eyes. “Although… the time she spent in that Munro Lab was as violent as could be. I can’t believe she came out of that place without becoming a psychotic killer.”

“So Akuze, Torfan, Virmire, Eden Prime, etc. are aberrations in her life?” Wrex sarcastically shot back. “She’s a calculating killer in the field. She has a soft side, but the diamond hard side she shows on the battlefield when threatened, is as awe inspiring as I have ever seen.”

Garrus had to comment to make one point. “She’s merciful too. She’s actually taught me that sometimes mercy is needed, even for the worst people.” Garrus chuckled. “She’s as likely to save a stray Thresher Maw as she is to kill it.”

“I hate that she’s so influential. Actus’ ass can thank her for being alive. I should’ve killed him, but I wouldn’t have been able to look Shepard in the eye if I did.” Wrex quietly commented as he examined the trigger guard on his shotgun.

Kaiden watched as they all went about telling their Shepard stories which just confirmed to all of
them that she was an amazingly resilient person, both physically and mentally. He chuckled at the sight in front of him. Two humans, a Turian and a Krogan all speaking like they knew each other for years and it was all because of Shepard. She was the bond that kept this team together and they would all follow her to hell if they had to.

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Med Bay

Athena walked into the med bay and made a bee line for Dr. Chakwas. “Doc, how’re they doing?”

Chakwas looked up from her desk and gave her a tired smile. “Williams took a pretty good beating. She had some head trauma which resulted in a concussion…” Athena put her hand up to stop her.

“Are they gonna be alright?” She asked.

“They’re both going to make a full recovery, but Williams is going to need more advanced treatment than I can give her here. It’s good thing that we’re heading to the Citadel.” Chakwas explained with a comforting tone. “They both need to be transported to the Hospital as soon as we dock.”

“Call me as soon as she wakes.” Athena nodded and took her leave.

“That makes two people that I’ve got to inform.” She shot back with obvious amusement. Of course Kaiden would want to know as well.

She thought to herself as she dropped off her gear in her room, grabbed three coffees from the mess and headed up stairs to the CIC. Lt. Pressly was busily examining the galactic chart when she entered the CIC. She stopped to observe the galactic chart and offered one of the coffees to him. “Commander, we’ll be at the Citadel in about two hours.” He graciously took the cup and immediately took a sip.

“Thank you Pressly.” Athena smiled at her XO and headed to the helm.

Even before she could say anything Joker chimed up. “I’m glad you saved her, but I’m not gonna lie.” He paused as his voice cracked a little. “I thought I was going to lose you…” He turned to look at her as if to make sure that she was there. “That was worse than Therum…” He continued to gaze at the beautiful mess of bandages, bruises and cuts that covered her body. “You’re not invincible you know.” His voice was pained and yet relieved. She could see the almost desperate plea in his eyes as he looked her over. She couldn’t believe how much it affected her. She carefully set his coffee next to him on his armrest.

“You said you knew…” He stopped her with a wave of his hand and then took a sip of his coffee.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. I knew what I was getting into. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t affect me to see you almost die like a thousand million times.” He started sounding a little more like he was trying to joke around, but it sounded forced. “I wouldn’t change a thing.” He whispered just loud enough for her to hear as he turned back toward his piloting controls. “Thanks for the coffee by the way.”

He didn’t turn to see the smile that would have melted his heart. He listened for her to say something, but nothing came. He could tell that she was still there, but did not turn to look at her as he continued to pretend to pilot the ship. He knew that she would see right through it as a pilot herself. “Jeff?” The voice was hopeful and yet uncertain at the same time. He turned his head to
look at her as she held her mug with two hands in front of her nose, obviously enjoying the warmth and aroma that the mug provided. “Why do you put up with me?”

He started to laugh a hearty and genuine laugh. “You mean besides being the hottest woman I’ve ever met?”

“I’m serious Jeff.” She took a sip of her coffee and waited for a real answer.

He paused and looked at her. She was being sincere and he had to answer truthfully. He paused a second as he thought of what to say. “I love that you don’t treat me any different than anyone else… well besides the love making of course… and allowing me to use your bed which now is going to be a problem because there is no way I’ll be able to sleep in one of those pods ever again.” She was chuckling into her hand as he spoke. “…but mostly yeah…oh and you never, not once mentioned my disease. You treat me like a normal person and that is probably the one thing that stood out to me the most.” He paused as he continually reset the timer for the for the garbage chute ejection control. “Everyone else treats me like I’m some fragile piece of fine china, but you…being someone who could crack a Krogan’s skull with her bare hands treat me like there’s nothing wrong with me. I don’t understand why.”

She smiled at him. “Believe it or not, we’re two sides of the same coin. Where you’re the fine china with the flight skills of an eagle, I’m the indestructible Commander Shepard, the ultimate killing machine and the ‘hero’ of humanity.” She changed her tone to that of one that was mocking herself. “When I first met you… you shocked the hell out of me.” She paused as she remembered his remark to her and began to smile. “How’s the air up there…” She whispered. “As weak as it was for a joke, I couldn’t believe you said that…and in front of David too.” She watched as his shoulders shook with silent laughter. “At that moment you were the hottest guy in the whole universe to me.” She gazed at him with loving eyes. “You tell it to me like it is, you don’t sugar coat anything and you’re the best pilot I’ve ever seen. You see me in a way that I don’t even see myself. What’s not to love about you?” She approached the chair and crouched down next to him. “I would die for you.” She hotly whispered in his ear. “You’re more than worth it.” She continued with her hot breath on his ear giving him goose bumps.

He smiled as he leaned the side of his face into her lips and rubbed it on her mouth like a happy cat. The smell of the lavender soap she used was penetrating his senses as he closed his eyes and sighed. “I would too.” He whispered back and it resulted in a peck from her as she stood back up.

He turned to watch her walk back toward the CIC and caught her quickly looking back at him. She gave him a smile and disappeared behind the CIC.

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Citadel Council Chamber

She walked up the stairs in her full battle armor with Kaiden and Garrus in tow. They were met at the top by Ambassador Udina who seemed really excited. “Good Job, Shepard. Thanks to you, the Council’s finally taking some real action against Saren!” It actually set her at ease to hear him say that. It took a lot to convince these idiots, but having a fleet respond to Illos is a lot better than just their one frigate.
Then Tevos put her more in the mood that she expected to be in because of them. “The ambassador is correct. If Saren is foolish enough to attack the Citadel---as you believe---we will be ready for him.”

Sparatus then just confirmed her worst fear that they were setting up a defensive posture which was useless. “Patrols are set up at every mass relay linking the Citadel with the Terminus systems.”

“What about Ilos? How many ships are you going to send there to attack him?” She already knew the answer. These three wouldn’t lift a finger to do what was right. They were going to pay for their stupidity, but she needed them to know that what they were doing was dooming the whole galaxy.

Valern once again treated her like an idiot. “Ilos is only accessible through the Mu Relay which is deep inside the Terminus systems. If we send a fleet there, the only possible outcome is full scale war.” They didn’t get it.

“We’re doomed.” She thought as the always annoying Udina began to feel his oats. “Now is the time for discretion Commander. Saren’s greatest weapon was secrecy. Exposed, he is no longer a threat. This is over.”

Her blood was beginning to boil at the thought that these idiots were playing into Sovereign’s hand. “Secrecy isn’t Saren’s greatest weapon! The Conduit is!”

“Saren is a master manipulator. The Conduit is just a distraction for his real plan to attack the Citadel.” Valern couldn’t help himself and continued his ridiculous line of thought that Saren had skillfully manipulated her.

“Don’t you see? Sovereign’s the real threat. Saren’s just a servant of the Reapers.” It was falling on deaf ears and she knew it.

“Only you have seen the Reapers, and then only in visions. We won’t invade the Terminus Systems because of a dream.” That was it then. They had tricked her into coming back in order to keep her from doing what they knew she would do.

“One ship going into the Terminus Systems won’t start a war. I can be discreet.” She had to keep her cool, she had to get them to see reason. She needed to get to Ilos.

Sparatus just wasn’t falling for it. “You detonated a nuclear device on Virmire. I wouldn’t call that discreet!”

“Your style served you well in the Traverse, Commander. We recognize that, but Ilos requires a deft touch. We have the situation under control.” Tevos always the fence straddling bitch that she was continued with the talking down session.

It was enough as she exploded in anger. “You three never took my words at face value and you ended up with egg on your faces! If Saren finds the Conduit, we’re all screwed! WE HAVE TO GO TO ILOS!”

Sparatus didn’t even flinch as it seemed that he was used to this kind of banter, probably because he dealt with the other Spectres and STG Commanders. “Ambassador Udina, I get the sense that Commander Shepard isn’t willing to let this go.”

“There are serious political implications here, Shepard. Humanity’s made great gains thanks to you, but now you’re becoming more trouble than you’re worth.” Udina’s words struck her like a
sledgehammer. Just like everyone else it seemed that the Alliance was just using her. They didn’t really care or believe that an enemy with the power to wipe out all life in the galaxy was waiting to invade from dark space.

Kaiden exploded to Athena’s surprise. “You bastard! You’re selling us out!”

Udina walked around like a cat that had just had its fill of milk, completely satisfied with what was going on. “It’s just politics Commander. You’ve done your job, now let me do mine. We’ve locked out all of the Normandy’s primary systems. Until further notice, you’re grounded.”

“Are you insane?! After everything I’ve done you still don’t believe me?” Her biotics were starting to flare as she fought to control herself. She felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see Kaiden with a worried look. She took a deep breath and turned to the ambassador, which didn’t help.

“I think it’s time for you and your team to leave, Commander. This no longer concerns you. The Council can handle this, with my help of course.” He sounded every bit as condescending as the three Councilors did.

“You four are pathetic! All the lives sacrificed so that we could be able to save Trillions will be for nothing because of you.” She had to find a way to Ilos, even if it was in a garbage scow. She turned around and quickly made her way as far away from those four incompetent and terrible leaders.

She made it back on board in record time and headed to the helm. “Are we really locked out of the systems?” She asked Jeff.

He nodded and showed her the problem. None of the primary systems responded to any of the controls. “There’s no way to bypass the blocks.”

“Bullshit. There has to be a way. Tali can you come up to the helm please?” She responded. “Between the three of us, we should be able to figure out a way to get those locks off.”

A few minutes later Tali entered the helm. “We have to figure out how to take the electronic locks off and take the ship.” Athena addressed her with a desperate plea. Tali looked at her through her mask and responded a little more excited than Athena expected.

“You mean we’re going to steal the Normandy?” Athena nodded with all the seriousness she could muster. “Okay, but I’m going to have to run a diagnostic with my Omni-Tool first.”

“Go ahead; we don’t have time to waste.” Athena ordered her and Tali immediately complied and it took her approximately four minutes to come to a conclusion.

“The only way we will take those locks off is to reset the whole system to original specs. We should be able to do it with a static discharge, but it would take a very delicate static discharge to do so and not damage the circuitry.” Tali chuckled uncomfortably as she explained.

“Do you think you could produce this charge?” Athena asked and Tali shook her head.

“No, that’s the problem with static discharge. It is an inherently unpredictable and violent occurrence.” Tali sounded down.

She was starting to lose hope. “Isn’t there a way to block the signal from the Citadel?”

“It wouldn’t matter. If the locks aren’t taken off before the block, they would still be active after
we blocked the signal.” Tali could see Athena’s posture start to deflate.

“Jeff, you have anything?” She sounded so defeated it hurt him.

“Gimme a minute.” He tried to stall, but knew that he shouldn’t. “No, I got nothing.” He admitted to her with his own frustration coming through.

“Tali, when I was younger I would use a biotic discharge to reset the systems of Sky Cars so that I could steal them. Do you think it could work here?” Tali started to ponder the implication. A biotic electrical discharge should be small enough not to damage the circuitry, but she didn’t know if it would work. A sky car’s systems are much different than this.

“Your guess is as good as mine, but I would imagine that the systems on the Normandy are much more robust.” Tali started to type in computations into her Omni-Tool. “It’s worth a try.”

“Jeff, where do you upload your preferences?” Athena asked him and Jeff pointed to the slot where his Omni-Tool was already plugged in. She went through her own Omni-Tool and pulled up her file on the Kodiak that she had stolen when she was a kid. “I would imagine that the settings are all standardized as much as possible on Alliance ships.”

Jeff was watching her work her Savant Omni-Tool. The Serrice Council sure knew how to design things. She unplugged his Cipher and plugged in her Savant. “How is this going to work?” He asked her.

“I don’t have time to explain, but when I’m done and if it works, I’ll tell you.” She answered him but her eyes never left her Omni-Tool. “The basics are all there, but there are a lot of extra settings that I don’t recognize. Tali what do you make of these?” Tali moved closer and looked at Athena’s Omni-Tool.

“Those are the for the EEZO core see how they match up to the Kodiak’s core, granted the Kodiak’s is much smaller, but some of the settings are there. Those are for the life support, water, gravity, these are for the Navigation, drift calculation, and see these here…” Tali and Athena were so immersed in their decrypting of the Normandy’s systems that they didn’t even notice that Captain Anderson was talking to Jeff on the comm.

“Commander?” Athena didn’t even flinch as she and Tali continued staring at the Omni-Tool. “Commander!” Jeff finally yelled and Athena jumped to look at him.

“What!” She yelled back with a clearly perturbed tone.

“While you two were trying to figure out how to steal an Alliance frigate, I was talking to Captain Anderson. He wants you to meet him at Flux, ASAP.” Jeff chuckled at her annoyance.

“Tali could you continue filling in the settings in my Omni-Tool?” She took off her Tool and made for the air-lock.

Tali took Athena’s Omni-Tool and began to examine the settings. “Wow this is one devilishly clever program. I wonder if the Alliance knows that she has this, I’ll bet they don’t.” She blurted out loud.

“What’s so good about it?” Jeff asked her.

“Let’s just say that if we had this thing set up before, we could probably take the ship right now.” Jeff could hear the awe in Tali’s voice. “I’d love to meet whoever wrote this code.” She continued to fiddle with Athena’s Omni-Tool as Jeff just turned back to the controls with an amused
expression.

Half an hour later Athena came through the Air-lock like a bolt of lightning. “Jeff be ready at the controls. David is going to unlock the controls from Udina’s office!”

“What?! He’ll be charged with treason!” Jeff sounded very disturbed.

“Well if you got a better idea then shoot, otherwise be ready to move.” She came back at him a little angrily.

“What about Tali?” He mentioned.

“I need more time.” Tali was still totally immersed in Athena’s Omni-Tool.

“Which we don’t have.” Athena came back just as the locks came off the controls. “Jeff, go! Get us out of here!”

“Holy shit! I’m stealing her again! I hope they put is in adjoining cells.” Jeff sounded excited.

Athena chuckled, but she was way too serious at the moment. This was mutiny that they were committing, a capital offense. She couldn’t in good conscience ask those under her to follow her involuntarily. “Jeff open the intercom, ship-wide please.”

“Comm open Commander.”

“This is Commander Shepard, as you may know, we are on our way to Ilos. What you may not know is that this mission is not authorized by either the Alliance or Council. I have taken the ship and will do what is necessary to stop Sovereign and Saren from using the Conduit to usher our destruction.” She paused a second. “Make no mistake, this is mutiny. I will be court martialed and I cannot force any of you to join me. Those of you who do not agree with my decision can muster in the hangar bay and we will allow you to leave in one of our shuttles. I will not think any less of any of you and I am proud to have served with such fine people. Shepard out.”

“You know no one is going to leave right?” Jeff commented as he had the ship entering the Citadel relay.

“I agree with Jeff, we would follow you into hell if we had to.” Tali added.

Athena nodded and headed down to the hangar bay. As she passed the CIC, Pressly nodded to her. “We’re all with you Commander.” He mentioned and noticed that the navigation crew nodded with grim determination.

She walked toward the stairs to be met by now Sgt. Sakai. “Make sure you save a piece of that Saren’s ass for me ma’am.” The comment was a stark contrast to his crisp and solid salute. “We’re your Marines ma’am. You’d have to launch us out of the air-lock to get rid of us.”

She tried to hold it back, but her emotions were starting to get the better of her as she walked down the stairs and entered the elevator. When the elevator door opened she finally became overwhelmed. Garrus and Wrex were there in their usual spots. She continued to scan the bay and the only other soul there was Sgt. Zienewicz the requisitions officer. Wrex was the first to open his mouth. “Looks like no one is taking you up on you offer.”

The tears were slowly sliding down her cheek. They all believed in her. She couldn’t believe that they all would do this for her, but she also thought that maybe they all understood the tremendous responsibility they had to the galaxy. They were literally the only ones going to try and stop
Sovereign and his attempt to bring an ancient and immensely powerful enemy from dark space. “You didn’t seriously expect anyone to leave did you?” Garrus was actually surprised as his mandibles clicked with curiosity. The tears in her eyes weren’t tears of sadness, but those of one who truly knew she was trusted, believed and loved by those that mattered most to her. They had all basically given up their lives for this and she would not let them down.

She suddenly turned serious as she took a deep breath and turned to Garrus. There was a slight biotic glow to her eyes and an anger that was now focused on her enemy. It took Garrus and Wrex by surprise when she looked at them both and with a calm and cold voice addressed them. “I’m going to kill them both.” She turned and entered the elevator back to the upper decks.

Wrex turned to Garrus. “I almost feel sorry for them.”

Chapter End Notes

I almost took Anderson completely out of the stealing the Normandy thing, but in the end I thought it was more important to show that she still had him as her most important ally and mentor. She always knew he wouldn’t abandon her and I just wanted to show that along with her crew, he was also willing to show that he believed her and would lose everything to help her get the mission done.
The final battle with Sovereign and the Geth. Some celebration afterward.

Ilos

Athena didn’t expect to find a mass grave of Protheans, but that’s exactly what was on Ilos. It was possibly the last bastion of Prothean civilization, their last vain attempt at survival from the Reaper Harvest. Add a Prothean VI named Vigil that explained what the Protheans were doing there and Athena got a picture of what happened during their culling. The Protheans had sent out their warnings through the beacons so that the next civilizations would hopefully be able to break the cycle of mass genocide that is conducted by the Reapers every fifty thousand years or so for millions of years.

Vigil explained that the Citadel itself was a trap. It along with the mass relays was built by the Reapers. The Citadel was in actuality an enormous Mass Relay that linked to dark space. If the Citadel relay were to be activated, the Reapers would pour through and everything they all knew would be destroyed. Athena learned that the Reapers conserved energy out in dark space by almost shutting down, knowing that in that hibernation-like state they were vulnerable to attack. They would wait in the relative safety of dark space for the thousands of years that organic life would need to evolve and rebuild and then once the Citadel Relay was activated they would return. They were able to keep it a secret thanks to their Keepers whom just seemed like a benign species of organic creatures that maintained the Citadel. They maintained the basic functions of the Citadel for alien species to use without those said races fully understanding the technology behind it. It was the ultimate Trojan horse.

The Reapers would then be free to wipe out the entire leadership of the Galaxy in a single strike. According to Vigil, it was how they wiped out the Prothean leadership. It was an ingeniously effective strategy. From the Citadel the Reapers could cut communications, control the mass relays and take their time wiping out life one system at a time. Deep down inside Athena admired the Reapers for their ingenuity, but now that she knew their game she wouldn’t allow it to be played the way the Reapers wanted.

Using the Conduit to gain access to the Citadel once the Reapers had retreated to dark space; Vigil explained how the last of the Protheans used the Conduit and altered the Citadel systems so that the Keepers would no longer respond to the Reaper signals. Those creepy looking bug-like Keepers would no longer open the Mass Relay to dark space.

Now Saren’s traitorous ass was on his way to attempt to override this Prothean alteration that was keeping the Reapers in dark space. Vigil provided Athena with a data file that would also keep the Citadel firmly under organic control.
Garrus and Tali were amazed at the ingenuity of the Protheans. If they stopped Sovereign, it would be because the Protheans had enough forethought to leave these incredibly valuable crumbs of information and clever tools behind.

The journey to the Conduit was tough but somewhat easier than she would have expected with the Mako’s heavy cannon making short work of the Geth guarding the path there. When Athena caught sight of the Conduit, it shocked her. “They built a mass relay.” She whispered in awe.

She put the Mako in gear accelerated to top speed almost instantly. “Garrus start showing me how much of a bad ass you are with that cannon.” Athena barked loudly.

They must have been doing over sixty miles an hour as she evaded the multiple Geth Colossus’ fire and Garrus planted a head shot on one of them with the big gun. Its head exploded in a spectacular fire ball of sparks and metal. As they got closer to the Conduit Athena could feel the pull of the dark energy being emitted by it. At one point there was a blinding flash as they hit the relay and traveled to the Citadel almost instantaneously. The landing on the Citadel was rough as the Mako slid on its roof and took out two Geth troopers guarding that side of the relay. It was rough, but a landing you can walk away from is always a good one right?

As they made their way to the Council Chamber, Athena was like a whirlwind as she waded into the enemy like a Scythe through a wheat field. Her biotic power was on full display. Garrus watched as she used her Reave to literally pull a Geth Prime apart and then finish it off with a powerful biotic flare that resulted in synthetic blood, sinew and skeletal framework exploding in all directions and littering their path. It didn’t even slow her down as her next victim was a Krogan that got in her way. It made the mistake to let loose with its own biotics only to discover Athena’s swords slicing through its carapace like paper and piercing its three hearts causing the Krogan to fall like a sack of potatoes at her feet. Garrus and Tali just tried to keep up with her, Tali hacking her ass off and Garrus’ sniping skills kept the number of enemies she had to deal with to an acceptable number. Her barrier and swords got a lot of work, as did Garrus’ rifle and Talis’ Omni-Tool. The trail of Krogan dead and destroyed Geth was substantial, but nowhere near the amount that was on Virmire. When they finally reached the Council chamber Athena scanned the area and observed that Saren was already working on the terminal trying to override the Prothean’s work.

Athena didn’t hesitate as Saren turned to face her and immediately began to fire both his pistol and biotic attacks on her. They were powerful, but not powerful enough to penetrate her barrier and as she got close enough, she used an incredible biotic leap to propel herself almost a hundred feet into the air to close the distance to a more personal span. Saren’s panic had become evident on his face as his attacks were not having the desired effect on her. She rapidly descended on him and drew her swords while in midair. The now familiar blue glow of her biotics was almost blinding as it enveloped Athena’s entire body and swords. The sword in her left hand came down with such tremendous force that it struck his skull with the thunderous echo of biotic power. Saren’s head was split in two. Her sword did not stop there and continued to slice down deeply and ended up getting stuck in Saren’s chest as he fell, killed instantly by the super powerful human. She watched him fall with an almost maniacal grin on her face and once she saw that he was limp and lifeless, she spat on his carcass and turned back toward the console. She quickly accessed the Citadel’s terminal and uploaded Vigil’s data. It worked like a charm. She now had complete control of the Citadel’s systems. “Now let’s see how you’re gonna bring back your friends.” She muttered into the screen.

“We should open the arms and see if the fleet can attack Sovereign.” Garrus mentioned.

“I’m gonna open a communications channel to inform the fleet we have control.” She responded.
Once she opened a channel, the first thing she heard was that the Destiny Ascension was in trouble and that they had the Council on board. I wonder if they believe me now. She thought as she pondered the irony of those idiots getting killed because they didn’t listen. Who’s manipulated now huh, motherfuckers! If it wasn’t for the fact that the Ascension had five thousand Asari crew, Athena wouldn’t have blinked twice at letting them get what was coming, but the next sound she heard on the comm lifted her spirits.

“Normandy to the Citadel, Normandy to the Citadel! Please tell me that’s you Commander!” Joker sounded so desperate. If they got out of this alive, she was going to fuck him through the bulkhead of her quarters.

“I’m here Jeff.” She answered.

“Caught that distress call. I’m sitting here in the Andura sector with the entire Arcturus fleet. We can save the Ascension. Just unlock the relays around the Citadel and we’ll send in the cavalry!” He really wanted to get in there and start doing what he did best.

Garrus didn’t like the idea. “Screw the Council. We need to open the arms and concentrate on Sovereign! You should hold back the fleet until you get the arms open!”

“You know me better than that Garrus.” She would have followed Garrus suggestion except for the fact that the Ascension had all those crewman on board. She would not sacrifice them unless absolutely necessary.

“I’m opening the relays now Jeff. Save the Destiny Ascension.” She ordered.

As the relay opened, the Arcturus fleet came in with a vengeance. Their flanking attack on the Geth fleet was a thing of beauty. The Arcturus fleet took the Geth fleet by complete surprise and totally annihilated them in a scene that reminded Jeff of the battle of Salamis in ancient Greece. “Destiny Ascension you’re clear.” Jeff informed them with an obvious glee in his tone.

Jeff could tell that Athena had full control as the Citadel arms reopened and Admiral Hackett ordered them to attack Sovereign, which was perched on top of the Citadel Council Chamber.

“Shepard, you did it!” Tali yelled out excitedly. “That was incredible!”

“Um, you might want to hold off on the celebration for a little bit.” Garrus mentioned as he pointed to the garden where Saren’s body fell.

They all watched in horror as Saren’s body was enveloped with a dark and sinister blood red energy she could only assume was from Sovereign. They watched Saren’s body spasm and jerk as the blinding energy consumed him until it finally stood there on its own watching them with his glowing and unnaturally red eyes. This was no longer Saren. This was Sovereign!

The fleet started to launch every weapon they had at Sovereign, but it seemed to have little effect. Sovereign then began to use its main weapon and destroyed two cruisers with almost no effort. “It’s too powerful, we need to retreat!” One commander came over the comm.

“Negative! This is our only chance. Concentrate everything we have on Sovereign.” Hackett sounded really determined. He knew the stakes and he wasn’t about to leave anything on the table.

Athena leaped down into the garden without any thought of just how powerful Sovereign was. “I am Sovereign and this station is mine!” Oh how she loved the sound of desperation from that fucking over grown toaster.
She raised her barrier and it was immediately hit with a blow that almost took it down. “So I now know that you fear me…I will destroy you.” She calmly stated to this unholy avatar of the machine. Sovereign was lightning quick and as Tali and Garrus pumped round after round into its barrier she pulled her remaining sword. It moved like those quick Infiltration Geth units and was incredibly hard to track, let alone hit. So she waited a split second and when it leaped off the wall she immediately hit it with a singularity that caused it to float in the air. Athena could see its limbs struggling to find a grip and she smiled the smile of a predator. She then leaped into the air and sliced the monstrosity completely in half with an explosive strike from her remaining sword. As the pieces landed they completely disintegrated without a trace with that unholy energy dissipating in the process. Sovereign was dead.

“It’s shields are down! Now’s our chance!” Jeff exclaimed.

“Hit it with everything we got.” Hackett ordered and all of the ships just opened up in a concentration of fire not seen by any Human fleet ever. The shots were now getting through and actually causing heavy damage to the beast.

“Hard on my flank! We’re going in!” Jeff barked into the comm and performed an Immelmann turn as he swung the Normandy around for torpedo run. The torpedo ran true and straight as it hit dead center and went right through the monster’s hull. The resulting explosion ripped Sovereign apart with pieces flying all over and damaging several of the cruisers that were too close.

Jeff watched in horror as one of those pieces struck the Council chamber where Athena, Garrus and Tali were. “Oh my God NO! Oh please no, no, no…that didn’t just happen.” The comm was open and the whole fleet could hear him. “Get somebody to the Council Chamber now!”

“Commander this is Normandy, do you read? Commander, this is Normandy, do you read. Please, Athena! Please…” The comm was silent. He stopped piloting the ship and slumped into his chair.

“Lieutenant, what are you doing?” Pressly came up and asked him worriedly. Jeff didn’t answer as he just sat there.

“Pressly.” Kaiden interrupted as he came up the gangway. “I’ll take over Jeff. Go.”

He turned to look at Kaiden. Jeff’s eyes were welling with moisture as he nodded and began to stand. “Thanks Kaiden.” Jeff’s friendship with Kaiden had grown to one of mutual respect and admiration. Kaiden could see just how desperate he was to see her and he now had dread filling him from what he just saw. Jeff grabbed his crutches and started to make his way down to the shuttle bay.

“I’m sure she’s fine Jeff.” The one thing about Kaiden was that he was a horrible liar and Jeff could feel the dread in Kaiden’s own voice despite his hopeful statement.

Wrex, Liara and Marianna joined him as they exited the Shuttle at what was left of the Citadel docks. Jeff had taken his chair and was moving almost too fast for his three comrades. The elevators to the Council chamber were not working and they would have to take the stairs. Wrex carried him gently and even was able to carry his chair. It took them a good half hour to make it up the stairs and into the chamber. Anderson was already there with a C-Sec team trying to find survivors. Tali was the first that they found. She was underneath a large column of metal that had pinned her leg. She was extricated from her position, amazingly with no damage to her enviro-suit. Garrus ended up crawling out of under what seemed like a ton of debris with no worse than a limp. Mari hugged him with a surprisingly ferocious hug. “Where’s Athena?” She asked him and the look of dread in his eyes made her eyes start to well up.
Marianna turned to Jeff and Anderson who both looked awfully despondent. Jeff lowered his head and began to visibly weep while the Captain tried in vain to hold his emotions in check.

Wrex was the first to see her. “I knew it. Tougher than the mother of all Thresher Maws.” He chuckled as he watched her lift a beam of metal out of her way. “Not bad Shepard, not bad at all.” He voiced to her and she smiled at her walking fortress of a friend. “A Reaper and a Spectre all in one day…damn Shepard.”

Anderson ran to her and was the first to embrace her. “You really are a super hero.” He joked and it caused her to chuckle as she returned his embrace. “Are you hurt?” She looked at him and shook her head. She looked dirty and bloody, but she still moved with that powerful gate that said don’t fuck with me. “I knew there was something about you that I saw in Buenos Aires. You saved us all.” Anderson pulled her close again.

Marianna and Garrus were next and Marianna just took a hold of her and pulled her in so forcefully that she almost knocked herself out with the force she embraced her with. “Easy Mari, you’d think I was dead or something.” She chuckled.

“You did it Mamita. Damn…you did it!” Mari was weeping like a small child and would not let go of her.

“I hope the idiots appreciate what you did Shepard.” Garrus was the lone voice of somberness. “What you did was extraordinary.”

“We all did it.” She replied as she pulled away from Marianna and smiled at them. “You’re an artist with that rifle Garrus.”

Jeff was sitting there trying to wipe the tears of premature mourning as Athena approached him. “Every time I heard your voice over the comm, I knew we were going to be fine.” She had eyes only for him at that moment and he felt a wave of affection and love come over him. She gently pulled him into an embrace and whispered in his ear. “I owe you one ravaging tonight.” He laughed as he tried in vain to keep the tears from overflowing from his eyes.

“I hate you.” He playfully retorted and wouldn’t let her go. When she finally pulled herself from him, he sat in his chair with the biggest smile. “You owe me far more than that.”

Tali was the last one to address her. “Shepard, that was incredible. I don’t have the words to describe what you did.”

“All of you stop talking like it was just me! If it wasn’t for all of you, I wouldn’t have been able to pull it off. So stop with the ‘I did it’ talk.” She was a little perturbed, but nothing short of Udina’s voice could ruin her mood right now. “Tali, if it wasn’t for you we would have been even more knee deep in Geth than we were.”

“Well as your superior officer I order you and your crew to take full week’s leave after you’ve been debriefed.” Anderson sounded so content and proud at the same time. “For the mean-time I want all of you checked out at the hospital.” Athena gave him a look of complete annoyance and was about to protest when he shut her down. “That’s an order Commander.”

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Ashley sounded so much better. “Commander, you got him?” Athena smiled as she used a wet towel and wiped as much grime as she could from herself.

“Got them both.” Athena responded with a little pep in her voice.

“Damn, I wish I could’ve seen that fuck’s face when he knew he was beat.” Ashley sounded in awe. “It was an honor serving with you Commander.” She still struggled to speak a little, but Ashley was in a really good mood. “Hey doc, when can I go back on duty?”

“You should be ready in about a month for light duty. You have to let your body heal or you’ll be no good to anybody.” The obviously annoyed Salarian doctor commented.

“That giant ship Saren was using was a Reaper. It was actually using Saren to do his bidding.” Tali told her while trying to reassure that same Salarian doctor that there was nothing wrong with her.

“She killed them both. You should’ve seen it Ash. She looked like a…how do you humans say it?” Garrus was having trouble formulating his thought as a pretty Asari nurse bandaged his arm. “A container of opened ass whooped.”


Athena felt better than she had ever to be surrounded by such exceptional people. “Where’s Mari and Jeff?”

Anderson answered quickly. “They went to buy supplies for the party on the Normandy tonight. It’s amazing how many of shop owners stayed behind.” He looked at her with proud eyes. “Whenever you’re ready to be debriefed, the Council and the Ambassador are waiting for you up in what’s left of the Council chamber.”

“I’ll meet you there after I change into my Blues if that’s okay.” She answered.

“Take our time girl, let them wait. You did save the fucking Galaxy after all.” He sounded as happy as he looked. She nodded at the man she considered her father. He believed in her from the beginning. He never wavered and took risks for her that he didn’t need to. She loved him for all he did for her and would always do her best to make him proud. He grabbed her by both shoulders and looked into her aqua blue eyes. “Thank you Athena…for everything.”

She smiled. “Please let me get out of here before I start crying again.” Anderson chuckled and let her go. She left the hospital and met up with Wrex and Liara just outside the entrance.

“Shepard! I take it you’re okay?” Wrex asked excitedly and she smiled back as she nodded. Liara looked as shy as ever and seemed to not be able to look at her in the eye. “Liara? What’s wrong?” They began to make their way back to the docks and the Normandy.

“N…nothing Shepard. I…mean…I was terrified that we were all going to die. What you did was…so unbelievable.” She turned her head and now met Athena’s stare and did not break. “You’re a goddess Shepard. We Asari live for a thousand years and most of us don’t make a mark like yours in our entire lifetimes.” She stopped and looked down only to feel Athena’s hand gently
caressing her face.

“You were one of the main reasons we won this battle Liara. For one so young, you’ve already put your stamp on history.” Athena laughed at saying the word ‘young’ when pertaining to her beautiful Asari comrade. She then took Liara by complete surprise as she planted a short and tender peck on her lips. “You’re an amazing person Liara and a wonderful friend. Come on let’s get back to the Normandy so I can get this political ball washing over with.”

Liara’s expression changed to one of puzzlement. “Ball washing?”

Athena’s crooked grin told Liara that this was a human expression that would need some explaining later. “Let’s just say we’re going to have to make everyone happy by basically not telling them that we warned them.”

“Oh.” Liara blurted out. “So it’s just being politically astute.”

“Exactly, it’s a lot more crass than that, but the premise is pretty much that.” Athena explained as they walked together to the Normandy.

The hot shower felt so good that Athena wanted to stay in it for much longer than she could. For the first time since she killed her first Thresher Maw, she was really sore. Her muscles and head ached from the effort she exerted in killing Sovereign and Saren, not to mention their army of Geth and Krogan. She quickly got dressed in her blues, arranged her hair in a tight bun, inhaled two biotic nutrition bars and was out the door. She met with Anderson at the dock and they both made their way to the Council Chambers.

“I’d rather fight another Reaper than have to look into the faces of those vultures.” Athena’s voice was playful, but there was a hint of truth behind her words. “Even Udina is a fucking scoundrel.”

“They’re all politicians Athena. Remember that all they see is an opportunity to make themselves look good.” Anderson had his own experiences with politicians and they were eerily similar to her own. “Udina is a rat, but at least he does have humanity’s best interests at heart.”

“I don’t trust him. I don’t really trust any of them…well maybe Sparatus because at least his hostility is out in the open.” Athena’s voice was starting to change to one with an angry tone.

“Rumor has it that this little fight just put our asses on the Council.” Anderson told her.

She huffed. “It’s the least they could do. If it wasn’t for the Alliance Fleet, the whole galaxy would now be in the middle of a Reaper invasion.”

Anderson chuckled and patted her on her back. “They owe you more than they could ever repay.” He paused a second and continued. “Just remember that it’s actually not a good thing to be owed by those parasites. It’s actually better to be even or actually owe them something.” He stopped her and the look he gave her was as serious as could be.

She also became serious. “What’s wrong?”

“I just want you to be careful from here on end. I don’t know what the future holds, but I want to
make sure you’re still a part of it.” He could tell that she was listening and more than that, she understood because she’d experienced the treachery that is involved in interstellar politics.

“I will.” She nodded as she answered him.

They entered the Council Chambers and to no one’s surprise, there were cameras everywhere. Udina was now standing among the councilors speaking in what appeared a relaxed and easy manner. They all turned to watch her approach and every camera in the room turned toward the first human Spectre and savior of the Galaxy.

The meeting didn’t take long and in the end the human race was given a seat on the Council. She recommended Anderson as the human councilor because he was a soldier who knew what it was like to fight for something, that and the fact that she trusted him with the whole fiber of her being. Both Anderson and Udina didn’t like it. Anderson did not want to be involved in the cut throat business of politics and Udina thought he was the most qualified for the position. Athena didn’t care. That was their problem and they would have to figure it out on their own. She was done with them for now and even though she felt a little guilty about recommending Anderson, she knew he actually was the best person for the job no matter how much he protested. He ended up walking her back to the Normandy and once he cooled down, told her that she was probably right.

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The party on the Normandy was a great time. The music was good, the conversations were better and the company was the best. Athena was in her element when a Tango started to play pulled Wrex out to the open area in the mess hall now commandeered as a dance floor. He followed her out despite his protests. “Shepard what in Tuchanka’s cratered ass are you doing?”

“Come on Wrex, you need to lighten up a little. Plus I want to see that sexy Krogan.” Athena pointed at him. “…shake that big booty.”

Wrex chuckled heartily. “If it was anyone else, I would have said no, but for you I will.”

When Wrex stepped out onto the open area and took a tight hold of Athena, she let out a little whimper. The look of surprise on her face was evident, but it was a pleasant revelation. They started to move sensually and the whole party started to whoop it up. Athena’s eyes lit up when she discovered how well Wrex was leading her. They flowed from move to move to the total surprise and adulation of everyone there. They ended the dance with Athena being dipped as she held Wrex’s face sensually close to hers. “You are so full of surprises Wrex.” The smile on her face was mirrored by Wrex’s equally toothy grin. The applause was deafening as the whole crew was yelling for an encore.

“If my kin ever saw this, I’d be flayed alive.” Wrex explained. “Fuck em. This was fun and dancing was once a part of my people’s history. It will be again. I swear it.” Wrex sounded supremely determined.

“If there’s anyone that can do it, it’s you.” She exclaimed as she stood and kissed the big Krogan on his cheek. “If you need me, I swear I’ll be there.”

“I wish it were that easy; this is going to be something I have to do myself, but thank you Shepard. You’re a battlemaster worthy of all the legends of my people and one day we will rise to join the
rest of the galaxy as equals.” He responded as they walked off the dance floor.

“I hope I’m around when it happens.” Athena smiled.

“I’ll try to hurry it up for you.” Wrex joked and they both laughed heartily.

As the night wore on Athena let loose and danced to her heart’s content and when she wasn’t she sat with Jeff and Mari and teased him to no end. She actually tasted that Batarian Brandy that he had bought and it was delicious. “It’s going to put you on your ass Jeff. You should slow down.” She pleaded playfully with him.

“I’ll be fine BA…I mean Commander.” He caught himself and took another sip of his drink.

A few too many drinks into the night Ashley made her appearance in a wheel chair and started challenging Jeff on who could do the best wheel chair tricks. Jeff being the ever competitive person he was could not avoid the challenge. The problem with being drunk is that your judgment goes first and as luck would have it, Jeff ended up breaking his left arm trying to do a wheelie only to end up falling straight on his back with his left arm caught underneath the left wheel.

Athena gently helped him right the chair and she could smell the sweet scent of brandy on his breath. “Too bad you’re going to spend the night with Dr. Chakwas instead of me.” She whispered in his ear.

“OHH THATHS BULLSHISHTH!!!” He slurred loudly, totally oblivious to his left arm just dangling there. “YOU O…OWE ME ONE RAVAATHIINGTH!” Athena’s face turned red as she looked around the room hoping no one understood him. Wrex and Garrus were laughing at the fact that Jeff was really going to feel that pain when he sobered up. Anderson and Hackett looked somewhat concerned. She lifted him gently and turned toward the med-bay. “ONE RAVVVVAAAATHIINGTH!”

“I think you’re going to have to sleep it off.” She was mortified and worried as she carried him to the Med-Bay. “Hey doc! Could you please give him something? He’s trashed and he broke his left arm, he’s delusional.” Athena was desperate, but the doc was quick and gave Jeff a dose of something that put him out immediately. “Thank you doc.” She turned to look at him as he now slept and had a worried look on her face.

“You’re welcome Commander.” Chakwas always was ready for anything. “He should be out for at least eight hours. I’ll put in an IV so that he doesn’t wake up with a headache.” She started to examine his arm. “Idiot!” She blurted out. “He’s lucky that it looks like a clean break and he didn’t do any permanent damage.” She turned back to Athena. “Don’t worry; he’s going to be fine in about a month with a steady dose of medigel.” Athena’s expression changed to one of relief as she let out a huff of air. “Now run along Commander, I’ve got to splint and brace his arm and then I’ll join you back out there.”

Athena walked back out chuckling and met up with Ashley and Marianna. “Is he going to be okay?” Ashley sounded as guilty as she should.

“He’s gonna be okay.” Athena huffed. “Ash you should know better.” She chastised her injured friend. “You know how he is.”

“I’m sorry Commander. He just talks way too much about how great he can handle the chair and he annoyed me.” Ashley retorted as Athena could see both Hacket and Anderson approach.

A feeling of dread started to rise up within her. “Is he going to be okay?”
She nodded. “Yeah, he’ll be fine. Dr. Chakwas said it was a clean break so he should make a full recovery.”

“That’s good cause he’s one hell of a pilot. By the way, where are you going to take your leave?” Hackett asked her while he smiled from ear to ear.

“I think I’m going home Steven. I’m taking Joker, Garrus, Mari and Sakai. Maybe I can find some trouble for you two to bail me out of. You wanna come with me?” She answered.

“Buenos Aires?” He asked and she nodded. “I’d love to, but I have a lot of work to do. This victory resulted in a lot of organizational as well as physical rebuilding and cleanup. I’m also responsible for informing the families of the…well you know.” She remembered how hard that was and didn’t envy her high ranking friend at all. It was a thankless job that took a lot out of a person. The emotions involved in informing the families of the dead were always exhausting and awfully taxing on one’s feelings. She was glad that she didn’t have to do it.

“What about you David?” She asked.

“You ask me now? You just recommended me for the Council. I have to stay here now thanks to you.” He wasn’t being serious and she could tell, but she could also tell that he really couldn’t go.

She shook her head in faux disapproval. “Well me, Mari, Garrus, Jeff and Sakai are all going together. Liara might join us afterwards. If either of you have the time you should join us.”

“You know I think that you’re the only Junior officer who would rather hang out with her superiors instead of away from them.” Hackett was chuckling. “Although I think Joker and Mari would rather we not be there.”

“Well Jeff is a little leery of both of you, but Mari loves you Steven and thinks the world of you David.” Athena retorted with a sly smile.

“I can handle one bossy Argentine woman, not two.” He laughed as he took a sip of his bourbon. He then turned serious all of a sudden. “David, you were so right about her.” He turned to see the big grin on Anderson’s face and then turned to look at her with a pride that she had not seen before. “Damn was he right about you. You can probably write your own ticket to any assignment you want now.”

“According to Sovereign there are ‘legions’ of Reapers waiting to come back. I’d like to make sure that I’m involved with all of the preparations to make sure they don’t.” She quickly answered him.

“Somehow I knew you would.” Hackett wasn’t the least bit surprised. “In the meantime I want you to enjoy yourself. You more than deserve some r and r.”

“Thanks Steven, just be ready to bail me out.” She chuckled as she pulled the Admiral into an embrace. She noticed that Anderson was giving her a scowl. “Oh don’t worry David. I’m only joking…maybe.” She couldn’t help but give him a mischievous response.

“Let’s see, Krogan, Turian, Quarian, Asari and Human. I can’t believe that you got them all to work together.” Anderson commented as he took a sip of his single malt.

“What can I say? I’m a people person.” She took a sip of her own Stella.

“Oh and before I forget, the recruiting unit wants to take some pictures and vids of you when you get back to Earth. Make sure you get in touch with them.” Anderson smirked at the obvious
annoyance in Athena’s face.

“Somehow I think you have something to do with them wanting to use me.” She squinted her eyes at him in false anger. “Are you trying to get me back for recommending you for the Council?”

“My lips are sealed Athena.” He said it with such a smugness that it only confirmed that he was the culprit.

“Come on Athena, they’ve been dying to use you as a symbol ever since Torfan. We could only hold them off so long and now with what you did here, there is no way the brass will back off on this.” Hackett added.

“Do I really have to?” She sounded like a child being asked to make her bed.

They all got a good chuckle at her obvious annoyance.

The party lasted till the early light cycle and Athena was for once at peace with everything that had occurred. As all of the guests left to their respective sleeping areas, she went to the med-bay to visit a certain drunk that she was very fond of.

Dr. Chakwas was asleep in the bed next to Jeff almost as if she were his guardian angel. Athena could tell that the good doctor cared deeply for him. Jeff was still out and would probably not wake up for a couple of hours. She examined his broken arm and saw that it was splint and held together with an elaborate aluminum brace. She chuckled as she caressed his face. *You’re such an ass.* She thought with a smile. She pulled one of the other unoccupied beds and placed it next to his and lay down on her side facing him. She wanted him to see her when he awoke and she wanted to look into his beautiful blue eyes when they opened. It only took a few minutes before she passed out and was fast asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Not done yet. Will be updating with a few more chapters before of Athena’s past and the month after her victory. Hope you guys are enjoying the ride as much as I am enjoying messing up the Mass Effect universe with my Fic.
Chapter Summary

The crew has a well deserved shore leave. ***WARNING*** There is some sensual action at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Buenos Aires, Barrio de la Florida

Showing Garrus around the city was a lot more work than Athena had anticipated. His diet requirements being the biggest pain in the ass, forced them to go back to the Starport in Ezeiza and basically buy up all of the dextro-based food and drink there. Jeff stayed at her apartment in Buenos Aires while Garrus stayed at Marianna’s apartment a couple of blocks away.

“This is cozy.” Jeff mentioned with a little bit of hesitation. He didn’t know if Athena was still mad at him for the chair stunt he pulled on the Normandy that ended up with his arm in a brace.

She totally ignored his comment. “Garrus, is there any special way to store your food and drink?”

“It’s basically the same as yours. Keep it cold to preserve and heat it up to eat.” Garrus answered. “Maybe we should label them so that none of us end up ingesting the wrong thing and need to make a visit to the hospital.”

“Good idea.” Athena made room in her incredibly substantial SubZero fridge and freezer.

“That is one big ass fridge BABS.” Jeff couldn’t help but notice the massive size of them. “Why would you need such a big refrigerator?” Again, she didn’t respond to him and it started to visibly make him anxious and uncertain. “How many times do I have to say I’m sorry before you talk to me?” He pleaded with her as he slowly and painfully stood up and carefully began to limp toward her.

She turned to look at him and noticed his effort which immediately caused her to rush to him and gently embrace him. She held him tenderly and looked into his uncertain eyes. She smirked and planted a soft and tender kiss on his lips. She pulled away and helped him back in his chair.

“You’re an ass. You know that don’t you?” She joked with him and he nodded now with an expression of complete bliss.

“Now that you two love avians have made up, can we get to the drinking before you both make me throw up?” Garrus just always seemed to know what to say as Jeff and Athena started to laugh. He seemed to attempt to conquer the world of human metaphors all the time.

“I’m sorry Garrus, it’s just that Jeff scared the shit out of me and I probably would have killed Ash if he didn’t turn out to be okay.” Just as she finished her sentence, her omni-tool started to beep. It was Marianna. “What’s up girl?”
“Are you guys ready to go?” Mari sounded so antsy it made Athena chuckle.

“We just got here Mari. We’re putting Garrus’ food and drink away.” She answered with an obviously amused expression.

“I’m coming over.” The line clicked and Mari was gone.

Jeff chuckled. “She’s really excited.”

Garrus pulled one of the bottles of Turian Brandy from a bag and opened it. He took one long swig and let out a satisfied sigh as he leaned back on the love seat in the living room. “This isn’t half bad, Shepard.”

“I aim to please.” She answered with a bow and then continued to put away the last of his food. She then pulled out a twenty four ounce Quilmes. “Oh and to answer your question Jeff, you’ve seen me eat right? That’s why I need these big ass fridges.”

Jeff smiled as he switched over to the couch. “It’s a good thing you workout.” He reached over to the coffee table and grabbed a Quilmes for himself. “So what’s on the agenda for today?”

“Well, first we’re going to go the Monumental and watch the Pumas play the All-Blacks.” Both Jeff and Garrus looked puzzled. “It’s a Rugby test match.” She looked at Jeff. “You know… kind of like American Football only better.”

“Rugby?” Garrus asked.

“It’s a physical game where two teams of human athletes beat the hell out of each other trying to score points by moving a ball from one end of the field to other.” Athena explained. “You’ll see.”

“I would’ve never pegged you for a Rugby fan.” Jeff added.

Athena sat down next to him and snuggled up close to him. “What, you don’t think a girl could like to watch a group of beautifully built men slap each other around in the mud?”

Jeff almost spit out his beer. “When you put it that way, I’ll never watch a football game again… not that I ever watched that crap anyway.” God, he really loved her scent. He visibly relaxed and leaned into her as the side of his head found her shoulder and he took a full breath through his nose.

As they all began to relax and door flew open and Marianna stormed in like a tornado. She was decked out in a River Plate soccer team jersey. “What the hell? Come on people let’s go! We’ll miss the kick off if we don’t leave now.”

“You know we’re going to see the Pumas right?” Athena mentioned as she stood up and finished off her beer.

“The Pumas?” Marianna responded quizzically. Athena rolled her eyes at Mari’s cluelessness. Even though the Pumas were a really good Rugby Team, they always took second fiddle to the soccer teams.

“I don’t even know why I’m taking you.” Athena told her.

“That’s alright because you don’t have to. Garrus said he would go with me.” Mari shot back to the total surprise of both Jeff and Athena.

Athena and Jeff both looked at Garrus. Athena smiled in disbelief and turned to Mari who had a
big shit eating grin on her face. “Shut the front door! Really?” She exclaimed.

Mari nodded and turned to Garrus. “I don’t know Shepard, something about a beautiful and intelligent human female who has no fear… kind of turned me on.”

“Oh that’s awesome.” Jeff could see the shock in Athena’s face. “I wish I could take a picture of your face.” Athena lightly punched Jeff in the shoulder and before he could even fake an expression of pain she gave him a glare that froze him in place. Jeff laughed and put his hands up. “Hey I don’t want any trouble.”

“You two are in major trouble!” Athena gave both Garrus and Mari a faux glare.

“Oh come on Shepard! You’ve admitted to me that I’m hot for a monitor lizard.” Garrus was as serious as a heart attack trying to convince Athena that the feelings between him and Mari were mutual. All it did was cause Mari and Jeff to laugh even harder. Athena turned her glare exclusively to Mari now who as always did not flinch.

“Oh you’re one to talk.” Mari responded with a huff. “You, the illustrious Commander Shepard, basically broke all the Alliance regs to bang your pilot.”

“I think she’s got you there.” Jeff responded through his laughter.

Athena playfully took a hold of her best friend and lifted her over her shoulder. “That’s it Mari, you’re done. Let’s go you two.”

“Put me down you bitch!” Mari yelled while laughing as Athena carried her out of the apartment.

Athena finally put her down outside of the apartment and Mari ran to the driver side of her Skycar and started to open the doors. “There’s no way you’re driving my car mamita.” She gave Athena a stern look, which caused her to roll her eyes as a result.

“You think I want to drive that jalopy?” Athena remarked with her hands on her hips. “On a serious note, can you take Garrus and Jeff’s chair? I’ll take Jeff.”

“Sure, but why can’t we go together?” Mari asked with a puzzled look.

Athena walked over to her small garage and raised the door to reveal a brand new, pearl black, Yamaha Skybike. “I’m taking my bike on its maiden run and I’ll meet you both there. I’m sure Jeff wants to ride with me.”

Mari smiled in acknowledgement as she got into her car. “Don’t be late mamita.” She mentioned mischievously.

“She’ll probably get there before us the way she drives.” Garrus chuckled. “I don’t know if Jeff is going to be with her or if he is going to become a stain on some building in the middle of the city.”

“Fuck you Garrus. Don’t scare him.” She climbed on to her bike and gave Garrus a wink. She put on these ridiculous looking goggles and motioned to Jeff. “Come on Jeff get on.”

Jeff’s heart was pumping out his chest as he climbed on behind her and put his good arm around her rock hard midsection. He pulled himself tightly into her as the smell of her hair overwhelmed his senses. His new favorite scent was lavender as it reminded him exclusively of her. He leaned his head into her back and let out a satisfied sigh. He didn’t even notice Mari’s car lifting off and performing a barrel roll as it headed for the stadium.
“Here put these on.” She offered him a pair of goggles over her shoulder.

“Where did you get these, a World War one museum?” Jeff joked as he put them on and noticed that they had a Heads Up Display built into the glass. The goggles displayed everything from direction, speed, collision alerts to G forces, location and altitude… not to mention what song was playing on the sound system. “Wow these are nice.”

“No dampeners on this one Jeff, what were you rated for in the Academy?” God he loved her. She thinks of everything for him and what the hell has he done for her? Jeff again started to feel a little unworthy of her, but that ended when she turned her head to look at him with those goggles and it made him chuckle.

“Never been tested, but the medics at the academy told me I should be able to pull about four g’s without snapping my spine.” He responded while quickly planting a peck on her lips before she turned around again. She smirked, but there was a hint of pink on her cheeks that sent a warm wave of fuzziness all over his body.

The feeling of having his arm wrapped around her made her skin get goose bumps. “Hang on.” She warned as the bike lifted off and she felt his grip get tighter. She accelerated in a brutally quick fashion and could feel Jeff pull even tighter. It made her smile. She was in total control of a real flyer for the first time since the academy had her training on fighters and gunships. She thought that she was going to regret auctioning off her Mustang, but the bike made her rethink that regret as she weaved through the traffic pattern like a calculating maniac. She made sure that she kept the G’s and negative G’s below two.

“Babs let loose. I want to see how fast this thing goes.” Jeff barked in her ear and it resulted in an ear to ear grin on her face.

She maneuvered the bike just below the main traffic pattern and hit the accelerator. Jeff jerked back a little in total surprise at the power of the bike. He could see the speed increase on his goggle display, 320 kph, 400 kph, 480 kph… his grip began to loosen at the power and for a second he felt afraid that he was going to fly off the bike. The feeling didn’t last as Athena let off the accelerator and backed it down. He held her tighter than he had ever held her. He buried his face into her back as he noticed that now his breaths were coming in heavy gasps. “Jeff are you okay?” The bike continued to slow as there was an evident sound of concern in her voice. He didn’t answer as he looked up and noticed that she had pulled over onto a designated shoulder area off to the side of the traffic pattern.

“I…wow…that was amazing. I’ve never felt like that before. Now I know why fighter jocks are so hesitant about flying anything else.” He stuttered but he was still holding on for dear life to her. She pulled her goggles up and once again her aqua blue eyes hypnotized him as she gazed at him with that super sexy crooked smile. He couldn’t help himself as he lunged up toward her and kissed her ferociously and passionately. It took her completely by surprise, but she didn’t pull back. If anything, she returned his passion and ferocity in kind. He finally pulled back and raised his goggles to stare into her eyes. “I can’t believe I’m in love with my Commander.” He quietly mentioned to her with a slight grin on his face.

She squeezed his hand. “I love you too Jeff.” She pulled his hand to her lips and kissed it. She then pulled down her goggles as he did the same. “Mari is going to kill us if we’re late.” This time there was no brutally powerful acceleration. It was just a gentle merge into the traffic pattern as they continued toward the stadium.

Just before they were about to exit the traffic stream, Athena heard the familiar ‘whoop whoop’ of a siren behind them and by the looks of the blue flashers knew that they were being stopped by the
police. “Great.” She mumbled as she maneuvered the bike down and landed on a street below with the police car right behind her. She turned to see the two policemen get out of their car and approach them. She pulled up her goggles and kept her hands on the steering bars.

“Policía Federal, licencia, registración, seguro por favor.” The tall and impressive looking policeman asked her in Spanish. (License, Registration and Insurance.) Athena opened the forward compartment on the bike and took out the requested paperwork. She smiled at the officer who looked a little nervous as he took the paperwork. She turned to look at the other officer who looked a little older and was watching her like a hawk. She could now tell that she was dealing with a trainer and trainee. She turned back to the younger officer whose eyes widened as he looked at her paperwork. “Shepard? Comandante Shepard?” She nodded and smiled.

The young cop turned to his superior who now also had an awe struck look to him. The stop turned from how many tickets was she going to get to an autograph signing and a police escort to the stadium. When she pulled into the parking lot she was waved through to the VIP area where she shook the policemen’s hands and greeted the security personnel. She showed her tickets to the security guards who both laughed and waved for her to follow them. They even brought a chair for Jeff to use as they followed the security guards to a VIP Booth. “Por favor, esto no es neceses…” The guard put his hand up to stop her.

“It is very necessary. We do this for movie and sports stars who seem to expect it and whine like little babies at every point. I think that everyone here will agree that people like you and you’re friend are a lot more deserving than those premadonnas.” The man who appeared to be the head of the security detail lectured her. “My name is Stephan. If you need anything just call me on the comm system there. Help yourself to anything in the booth. It’s on the house.” Stephan was about to leave when she stopped him.

“You’re going to spoil me.” Jeff mentioned to her as she gave him a beer and snuggled up next to him. “I mean come on, a VIP Booth?”

“I aim to please remember?” She playfully joked.

“Well you’re definitely hitting the bull’s eye on that all the time.” He retorted as he took a swig of his beer.

“ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?!” Marianna stormed into the booth with Garrus behind her. “I’ll bet you got free parking too, didn’t you?” Athena chuckled as she nodded her head. “I should’ve let you drive…damn it.”
“Enjoy yourselves, uh Garrus there are no dextro-drinks in here, do you still have your brandy bottles?” Athena was concerned for Garrus and wanted him to have as good a time as he could. He shook his head and told her that one of the security guards confiscated before they got into the stadium. “I’ll take care of it.”

She called Stephan on the intercom and minutes later he showed up with the bottles and two little kids in tow. Athena took the bottles and handed them over to Garrus. The two little girls looked up to her with shy expressions as they held on to Stephan’s legs. “These are my two little angels. Athena, Victoria, this is Commander Shepard.” Stephan introduced his little ones to her as she bent down to their level.

“It’s really nice to meet you.” Athena gave them both a peck and wondered to herself if Stephan had named one of them after her. ‘Athena’ really wasn’t a common name and she noticed more girls being named that after Torfan. She felt extremely flattered at the supposition. The two little girls smiled and squeezed their dad’s legs even harder. “You wanna hang out with us?” Athena looked at Stephan’s face to make sure it was okay and he grinned as he nodded. She put her hands out and the two little ones let go of their dad and took a hold of her hands. She picked them both up and brought them to the window to watch the kick off.

“Is it true that you shoot lightning from your hands?” Little Athena asked her with all the cute curiosity of a five year old. Athena smiled and nodded as she put her down let out a biotic spark that caught Jeff by surprise and caused him to spill his beer. Jeff looked at her with evil intentions, but that subsided with the wonderful sound of the two children’s laughter. “That was awesome! Do it again!”

Jeff’s glare was telling her don’t you dare. “I can’t do it all the time, but there are other things I can do like…” Athena’s eyes began glow that familiar biotic blue as she gently lifted little Athena and Victoria off the ground to their utter delight. She had them floating all over the booth and had them gently settle back into her arms.

“More! More!” They were ecstatic as they kept asking Athena to do it again. Stephan watched in utter amazement as the fearsome warrior known as Commander Shepard demonstrated just how tender and gentle she could be. Stephan stepped in to try and save her and they latched on to Athena so hard that it made her laugh. Athena relented and had them floating around the room again only this time she gently maneuvered them into Stephan’s arms. She signed both of their coloring books and Stephan was about to take his leave when Athena stopped him.

“You can leave them here if you want Stephan. It’s no trouble and if any of the other guards have kids you can bring them up if they want to.” Her offer was so genuine that it floored Stephan. How could someone this famous and important be so down to earth?

“I wouldn’t do that to you Commander. You’ve done more than enough for us.” Stephan graciously declined and let himself out with his two girls crying like banshees. Athena felt a little pang of guilt at the state she returned them to Stephan until Garrus came up behind her and put his claw on her shoulder.

“You see that Shepard? That’s why everyone would follow you to hell and back.” Garrus sounded like he was in awe.

“She’s something isn’t she?” Mari remarked as she took a shot of Jose Cuervo. “Now get over here and let’s enjoy ourselves.”

Jeff was at a loss for words to describe what he just saw. He’d seen her tear apart a Krogan with her biotics, slay a Thresher Maw and kill a fucking Reaper among other things. To watch her with
those two small and delicately beautiful little girls was another revelation. To use her incredibly formidable biotics to amuse two little girls was something he would have never expected. She was wonderful, there was no denying it now. He didn’t deserve anyone like her. She should probably be with one those formidable athletes down on the field. “Jeff, what are you thinking?”

“Huh?” Athena’s question caught him by surprise. “Oh, nothing.” He responded clumsily which resulted in Athena squinting her eyes in a semi aggressive glare. “Is there anything you’re not good at?” He finally commented.

“What do you mean?” She asked and then took a shot of Cuervo for herself.

“Oh come on Mamita! You know what he means!” Mari exclaimed with Garrus chuckling under his breath. “You were wonderful with those girls. Where the hell did that come from?”

Athena lowered her head and her eyes began to well up with tears. This was not the response any of them were looking for. They were only joking with her, but it seemed that this was something that Athena took seriously. Jeff immediately shuffled over to her and grabbed a hold of her hand. “Baby what’s wrong? I didn’t mean to upset you.” She chuckled through her tears as she looked into his eyes.

“It’s just that after Munro and how I was treated there, how a lot of kids growing up in the streets are treated and how I scared Villa’s kids when I stole their parent’s car, I don’t ever want to treat a child like that. I want them to smile, laugh, play…it’s just that I don’t ever want being mean to kids associated with me. Kids don’t deserve hardship. They deserve protection and security. If I can make them smile and laugh while keeping them safe, I will.” She explained as she wiped her eyes and then took another shot of Cuervo. “I’ll be fine.” She pulled Jeff’s hand to her mouth and kissed it. She looked around at Mari and Garrus and then back to Jeff. “I love you guys.” She announced to them with a big smile on her face.

They watched the game and they had a fantastic time. Both Garrus and Mari became a little bolder with each other as Mari ended up sitting on Garrus’ lap. Jeff seemed to have a good buzz as he snuggled with her. As usual, Athena’s genetically enhanced metabolism made it almost impossible for her to get a buzz let alone drunk. The All Blacks won 24 to 14 but the Pumas put up a good fight. As the stadium began to empty Stephan came into the booth.

“Are you guys going to need a ride home?” He asked them.

“Thank you Stephan, but no. I’m fine and I’ll drive everyone home.” She smiled at him as she motioned for the rest of her crew to start on the journey back to the apartments. Garrus and Mari stood up and Jeff put himself in his chair and began to roll his way out. They made their way down the concourse and just before they could leave, their way was blocked by a large group of very large men and what looked like their families. Stephan turned to her and smiled.

“This is actually a first. Both teams found out you were here and they wanted to meet you.” He whispered to her.

“It’s okay I’m used to it. You should’ve seen the starport.” As they walked up to them one particularly enormous All Black stepped to the front. He was obviously of Polynesian descent and he was easily as tall as her and probably over two hundred and sixty pounds of solid muscle. Athena noticed that he couldn’t stop staring at Garrus and it wasn’t a curious stare. It was an outright aggressive glare.

Athena stepped in his line of sight and got in the large man’s face. “You okay big fella?” She wasn’t about to let Garrus take any of this obvious racist shit, but she wanted to remain pleasant.
The man did not shrink. It reminded her of her old friend Juan when he worked for Smith. So she got closer and whispered in his ear. “Please don’t. I really don’t want to hurt you.” She pulled back and he looked at her with an almost disgusted look.

“I lost my father at Shanxi…” He started and she stopped him immediately.

“I lost an uncle there! I also lost the rest of my entire family to Batarian pirates! This Turian (she pointed to Garrus) is one of my best friends and is basically my brother. You’ve a problem with him then you have one with me.” Athena stepped back and basically dared the big man to make the first move.

Garrus stepped in front of her, obviously annoyed at the notion that he needed protection of any kind. “Shepard thanks, but I can fight my own battles.” The unintended consequence was that now the All Blacks were beginning to rally around the big oaf.

“Akamu! Stop being an ass. If the Commander vouches for him that should be good enough!” One of the wives or girlfriends stepped in front and put her hand out to shake her hand. “Don’t mind him Commander, he’s been in too many scrums and it’s probably made him stupid.” The glare the woman gave Akamu made him shrink a little. The rest of the teams started to chuckle. Athena turned to the glamorously dressed woman and took her hand firmly. The tension in the air just seemed to dissipate and the rest of the two teams’ members gathered around her and introduced themselves. Akamu apologized to Garrus in the end and the meeting of the teams ended pleasantly enough. The members of the Pumas were planning a night out and actually invited them out. Garrus looked really curious and after a short discussion Athena accepted their invitation to go to a very familiar place later that night.

They finally made it to Mari’s car and she carefully helped Jeff get in the back with Mari who was slurring and swaying as she sang along to the music coming from her car radio. Garrus was chuckling at Mari. “Wow she’s a real light weight.”

“Don’t get any ideas Vakarian. Drunk means no.” Athena playfully warned him with a tone of complete trust.

“Does that go for you too?” Garrus retorted while motioning to Jeff who looked like complete drunken bliss.

“Unfortunately yes.” She sighed and got out of the sky car once they got to where her bike was parked. “I’ll see you back at the apartment.” Garrus was a little uncomfortable behind the wheel and didn’t think that he would have to drive so soon. “We can hang out there for the rest of the night.”

They made it back to her apartment with no issues. She carried Jeff into her room, set him on her bed and gently took his clothes off before tucking him under the covers. She watched him for a second and grinned just before giving him a tender peck on his forehead. She came out to the living room and watched as Garrus did the same for Marianna. She watched him intently and noticed just how gentle he was with her. She smirked a little too loudly as it caught Garrus’ ear and he turned to look at her. “I don’t know how in the hell you two are going to make it work, but I have a feeling that if anyone can succeed it will be you two.”

“She’s amazing Shepard. I’ve never met anyone of any species like her. She’s the most non-judgmental person I’ve ever had the honor to work with.” He sat down at the edge of the sofa bed as Athena offered him another Turian brandy. “She’s also more protective of you than I think even you are.” He took the brandy and opened it.
“We’ve been friends for a long time. I think that she’s taken you under her wing now too.” She smiled as she sat on a stool and ate a power bar.

“You know I think I’m going back to C-Sec.” He mentioned to her as he took a swig.

“They’ll probably give you any position you want after this.” She chuckled. “You’d be great.”

“Dad’ll be proud.” He sighed. “He’s never been able to accept that I left.”

“You sure you don’t wanna stay with us?” Athena sounded a little sad that her friend would now be far away at the Citadel. She’d already lost Tali and Wrex to understandable reasons, but she wished that Garrus would stay. He really was her other guardian and whatever he had going on with Mari, reinforced Athena’s protective streak of him. Athena knew that Garrus would never let Cerberus or Kai get close enough to be a threat to Mari. Their combined intelligence assets would be an incredible addition to her war chest, but damn if she didn’t feel more comfortable with both of them on the Normandy.

“I think I can make a difference there. They need a swift kick in the ass and someone needs to prepare them for what’s coming.” Garrus turned to Athena and could see the sadness in her eyes. “You’re not gonna cry are you?” He joked.

“What if I am? I’m going to miss you. You’ve been a like brother to me Garrus. I just wish you would all stay.” Her eyes welled up but she quickly wiped them.

“You know that if you need me all you need to do is ask and I’ll drop everything.” Garrus chuckled. “I can never pass up your tendency of putting me in near suicidal situations.” The last statement caused Athena to chuckle as well.

They continued to talk about their lives, where they had been and where they were going. They laughed, reminisced and cemented their bond of friendship. Both Mari and Jeff woke from their stupors and Athena offered them her unused supply of cleansing pills which they took. The pills were a miracle of science as they removed the alcohol from one’s blood and helped oxygenate it as well. In short they were the perfect hangover cure.

As Jeff and Mari began to recover from their stupor, to everyone’s surprise there was a knock on the door. Garrus immediately grabbed his sidearm. Athena approached the door carefully and looked at the camera to see Sergeant Sakai and a woman who looked like she could pass for his sister at the door. She motioned to Garrus to put his gun away and opened the door. “SABURO! You came! Please, please come in!” As they walked in Saburo tried to introduce his sister, but Athena was way too excited to let him. “Is this who I think it is? I’ve heard a lot about you Lieutenant.” Athena had guessed correctly.

Hoshi Sakai looked quite taken aback by Athena’s size and stature. Her obvious power was evident by the feel of her hand as she shook it. “I hope he said only good things.” She maintained eye contact and came to the conclusion many others did. Athena was a beautiful freak of genetically modified nature. “He said you were tall, but wow. Oh here, I brought some Saki.” She offered the bottle which Athena accepted graciously.

“I’m sorry Lieutenant. It’s not every day that I get to meet the heir apparent to the Legendary World War 2 fighter pilot Saburo Sakai.” Athena tried to stay calm, but it didn’t work and she looked like a star struck child. Hoshi smiled uncomfortably as she was not used to being questioned so excitedly about her famous ancestor.

Garrus watched Athena curiously. He’d always seen almost every human basically stumble
through their words and deeds while they worshipped her. Now it seemed this petite Lieutenant had the same exact effect on her. It was very amusing to watch. Sgt. Sakai immediately came in and shook Garrus’ hand like the comrades and teammates they had become through the crucible of combat. “So this is your sister?” Garrus asked as Hoshi was obviously assessing her brother’s relationship to the giant Turian. She looked impressed at her brother’s obvious affection toward Garrus.

“This is her. Grandpa’s fighter genes were definitely passed on to her and not me.” Saburo answered Garrus who nodded to her as his greeting. She nodded back and noticed Mari rubbing her temples out on the still unmade sofa bed.

“Don’t mind drunken beauty. Some people can’t hold their liquor.” Garrus mentioned while chuckling. “Flight Lieutenant Moreau is in there with a similar ailment.” He pointed to Athena’s room.

“Well I’m sure when he comes out that he’ll be pitching the Normandy pilot opening to you.” Athena commented as she pulled out a beer for herself and her new guests.

“I didn’t know you needed a pilot.” Hoshi mentioned while accepting a Stella from Athena. “Saburo didn’t mention anything to me.”

“Well, Joker doesn’t like that I’m part of the three man rotation and keeps telling me that I need to find another pilot. I don’t think Pressly likes it either.” Athena continued. “Thing is, I love flying and it just seems that everyone is trying to keep me grounded.”

Hoshi actually chuckled. “Your records in the F-61 are still the stuff of academy legends. I can’t see how they could keep you attached to a flying truck like the Normandy.” Hoshi was as much in awe of Athena as Athena was of her.

“HEY! The Normandy is not a truck!” Came an angry response from Athena’s bedroom.

“God I love the F-61. I wanted to be a fighter jock too.” She sighed as Hoshi sat on one of the stools in the kitchen.

“Do they at least let you train?” Hoshi asked and watched as Athena shook her head.

“Only in simulators, they won’t let me take out the real thing. I was also a little busy with the whole Saren and Sovereign thing.” Garrus and Saburo joined them at the island in the kitchen. “Saburo here says that you’re one hell of a fighter pilot.”

Hoshi grinned. “I can hold my own.” She mentioned with a confidence born of someone who was very good at her craft. “I’ve never really been tested in a dog fight.” Her eyes were squarely on Athena.

“I wish.” Athena knew what Hoshi was insinuating and would have loved it. Hoshi grinned from ear to ear.

“The reason I’m here is because our squadron is on shore leave while the fighters are refurbished. We could…meet up at Ezeiza. I’m sure one of my squadron mates can part with their fighter for an hour or two.” Athena could see the steely determination in Hoshi’s eyes. It was a challenge and boy did Athena want to accept.

“Can you get in trouble?” Athena asked with her own crooked grin.

“I’m the best pilot on the best squadron on the Einstein. I think a little joy flying with the hero of
the Galaxy isn’t too much to ask of them is it?”  Hoshi made a great argument.

“You’re on Lieutenant! Name the time and I’m there.”  Athena excitedly agreed as Jeff slowly limped out of her room and sat down in the loveseat.

“So are you going to join the greatest crew in the galaxy Lieutenant Sakai?” Jeff was true to Athena’s word as he began to pester Hoshi about joining the Normandy resulting in Athena playfully slapping his shoulder. He obviously didn’t hear about the date Athena now had with Hoshi or he would’ve been insufferable.

“Stop it Joker, leave her alone.” She lightly put her hand over his mouth.

Mari was already starting to feel the effects of the pill Athena had given her and seemed at a loss for words. Jeff was already sober and amazed. “They really don’t give us enough of these.” Mari mentioned as she shook the bag with Athena’s obnoxiously large supply of them.

“What are we doing tonight?” Jeff asked without missing a beat.

“Well I talked to the Turian Embassy in New York and asked them if there were any dextro friendly restaurants here and they pointed to one in La Plata where there is a resort that caters to Alien tourists.” Athena answered. “We’ll start there for dinner and then…” Athena turned to look at Mari with a knowing smirk. “…we have a date with a Rugby team.”

Mari looked lost. “What?” She asked.

“The Pumas invited us out to Club New York tonight.” Mari started to grin at the realization.

“Mamita, I haven’t been there since that night.” Athena noticed all the confused looks in the room, well except for Mari and to her surprise Jeff.

“The place where Commander Shepard was born.” Jeff blurted out as he leaned back and motioned for Garrus to toss him a beer while he grabbed something for himself.

Garrus, Hoshi and Saburo looked really confused at Jeff’s statement. “I’ll explain over dinner.” Athena added. She looked at Hoshi and Saburo. “You two are coming right?”

“We’d love to.” Hoshi answered. “We have to get dressed though, so if you don’t mind we’ll meet you there?”

“Seven PM at the PalaThessia.” Athena instructed.

“Dress to impress.” Mari mentioned to Hoshi who smiled mischievously.

“Oh I intend to.” Hoshi sounded as confident and flirtatious as she looked. Athena watched Hoshi and Saburo leave and actually felt a pang of admiration for the two and wished she could convince Saburo’s sister to join the crew.

“I have to go get ready too.” Mari mentioned. “Come on Garrus, help me pick out something to wear.” Garrus grabbed one of his luggage bags and started for the door.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” Jeff uttered with faux innocence as they started to leave.

Mari gave him a wink and stopped in the doorway suddenly causing Garrus to bump into her. She eyed Jeff seductively as she ran her index finger over her lips teasingly all the while leaning back into Garrus. “Don’t worry we won’t.” She answered with a sensually charged and raspy voice.
Jeff’s cheeks exploded with color and Mari laughed as she led Garrus out of the apartment. He turned to look at Athena and found her quickly closing the distance between them and straddling him in the loveseat. “You’re mine flight lieutenant.” She was a ferociously sensual creature that he didn’t deserve.

He nodded meekly as his eyes met hers. “You owe me a ravagi…” She didn’t let him finish as her mouth attacked his in an unrelenting assault of lips, tongue and heat. He began to moan softly as his hands roamed all over her magnificent curves.

“I’m going to destroy you.” She said as she pulled back and their eyes met. Never was a threat more desired by its target. Athena looked at her wall clock which read 4:30 pm and smiled at her flight lieutenant who had reached up to pull her down into another ferociously thirsty kiss.

Athena stood up and began to remove her jersey and little by little revealed her incredibly beautiful and genetically modified masterpiece of a body. “I’ll never get used to seeing how beautiful you are.” He said as he pulled his own shirt off with a little bit of trouble because of the brace. As he pulled his shirt over his head he felt a sudden rush of air on his legs. When he finally got his shirt off he noticed that his pants were gone and laying on the floor in a shredded pile. He caught the slight blue glow in Athena’s eyes and frowned a little.

She feigned innocence and shrugged. “I just wanted to help, plus I hated those pants.” She kneeled in front of him with an evil looking grin on her face. Her hand began to gently caress his already rock hard member. “I think I did a good job.” She joked as she pulled it out of its constraining prison that was Jeff’s underwear.

Jeff was gone, his head leaning back on the loveseat trying to avoid watching her or even thinking about her as he felt the warmth of her mouth surround his begging and blood filled participant. “I’m not gonna last…” His plea was desperate as he pulled on her hair to stop her, but she wouldn’t. “Please Athena I don’t want to…” It was too late, she had done it again and he was convulsing into her mouth. “I fucking hate you.” He met her eyes now with a glare.

“You hate me?” She pulled away slowly as her saliva dripped from her lips and onto his conquered member. The sight was so raunchy that it stopped his complaining it its tracks. His little buddy almost immediately began to rise once again. She traced her finger over it as it once again had become a solid tower of love. “You’re rather impressive friend here seems to disagree with you.” She climbed on top of him and the skin to skin contact that he longed for was finally there. He buried his face into her stomach as she began to slowly sit down and envelope him in the warmth of her. She held on to him as she leaned over to the side and on her back all the while still keeping him inside her.

He quickly pulled out to her dismay, but he wasn’t going to allow another quick strike caused by her incredible sexiness and his still somewhat substantial inexperience to ruin his night. “Relax my Goddess, and let me worship you.” It came out surprisingly confident and it caused her to moan sensually and lean back. He pulled as many of the pillows as he could find and knelt in front of her glorious womanhood. It was slightly uncomfortable, but there was no way he would let her know that. He would please her without her assistance. His arms wrapped around her thighs, his mouth and tongue began an oral assault on her swollen lips like a ravenous lion that had been starved of sustenance for months.

“Mmmmm Jeff that’s nice…Ohhh…mmmmm…Ohhh Baby that’s sooooo nice…” Athena was blissfully enjoying Jeff’s talented mouth. It was even better than before as he was hitting all the right spots. She could feel the vibrations of his chuckle and it caused her to buck into his face. “Keep going baby…yeah that’s it…worship me like I deserve…mmmm.” Jeff’s oral assault on
Athena’s womanhood reached another level when he slowly inserted his index and middle fingers into her warmth and began to thrust while rubbing her special spot. He could feel her warm moisture turn into a torrent of wetness. “Oh Fuck! Oh my Go…Jeff don’t stop! Goddamn it!” He chuckled through his task as she began to quiver, he also felt the familiar sensation of her biotics starting to flare. “Jeff PLEASE…OH MY GOD! FUUUCK!”

When the convulsions hit her she let out a burst of biotics that knocked over the bottles on the coffee table and bar. Jeff hung on to her thighs as the biotics had basically paralyzed him in place. She finally came down from her high and sprawled on the loveseat in a beautiful heap. Jeff smiled the smile of someone that had finally gone and accomplished his set task and given her something that she deserved from him. He slowly pulled himself up and sat down on the loveseat at her feet. She looked at him with a completely satisfied expression on her face. “Was that good?” He asked with a totally arrogant grin on his face.

She playfully threw a pillow at him. “You…” She had to take a breath. “That was incredible.” She sat up and snuggled up next to him. “Have you been practicing or something?”

“I just did some homework and I think I passed the test.” He responded while leaning into her.

“You more than passed mister, as a matter of fact you’re now the teacher’s pet thanks to that performance.” She sensually whispered in his ear and started to nibble on it resulting in those cute little goose bumps he would always get. “Now we’re going to fuck until we can’t move anymore.” He was so hard and before he could say anything, she was on top of him. She was like a ferocious panther that would allow no back talk. He admitted to himself that he was a little frightened, but he was also very excited. When she lowered herself onto him, his body involuntarily quivered underneath her. “Oh Baby you feel so good.” Her rhythm was slow at first and he tried his best to not look at her face because he knew what would happen if he did. She noticed and began to kiss his the side of his face and suck on his ear. He knew that now she was playing with him and it almost seemed that she was trying to make him finish quicker than he wanted. *Oh but she feels so good…* He thought to himself.

She then proceeded to just grind on him at a brutally accelerated pace. He began to feel her biotics start to flare again. All his nerves started to feel charged and he finally turned to look at her. She truly was a goddess to be worshiped and she was about to let loose. “Athena I can’t hold…”

With that admission they both went over the precipice together as he pulled himself into her as hard as he could. Every nerve in his body released a torrent of pleasure. So much so that he lost all control of his body as he convulsed underneath her as she did the same. Their bodies had become one and when they finally came down from the release, Athena looked into Jeff’s eyes. “I love you Jeff…” She lowered her forehead to touch his. “If the Alliance ever tried to separate us, I would resign to be with you.”

Jeff felt so flattered. “I love you too, but I don’t know if I’d give up the Normandy for you.” He joked and saw her genuine smile, the one that made his heart melt. Looking into her eyes he finally saw what he thought she saw in him. For some reason she knew that he saw her for who she truly was. He knew her as the Warrior, Commander, Pilot, but more importantly he knew the woman that lived underneath the armor that was Commander Shepard. Jeff saw her at her weakest and did not flinch when she needed him most. She was so beautiful and he could only imagine how many men and women must have approached her with thoughts of conquering her. Never considering her a real person and never getting past the symbol that was Commander Shepard. He never even gave himself a shot at her and yet now could not imagine a day of being without her, for as much as she needed him, he absolutely needed her.
She stood up and mentioned that it was 5:30 pm. “We’ve got to get ready for tonight.” He didn’t even budge and watched her intently. She glistened with sweat and he just couldn’t take his eyes off of her.

“I thought you said we were going to fuck until we couldn’t move?” She turned to him and biotically launched all of the pillows in the room at him. “Hey! I’m not the one who destroyed my favorite pair of pants.”

“Come on Fangio, be serious for once.” He had never seen her so at ease as she made her way into her bedroom. He slowly stood up and followed her into her room.

Chapter End Notes

I have a few more chapters before Alchera. Just know that there is a lot of angst coming this way.
Chapter Summary

Athena goes out with her friends to dinner and the club which started her on the path to being the legend that she is and some Top Gun stuff. Not too serious, but this is the last fluffy one for a bit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PalaThessia Restaurant – La Plata, Argentina

The place reminded Jeff of the Citadel. It was eerie to see so many Turians, Salarians and Asari in one spot, on EARTH! They were all having a good time and it seemed that Athena had done it again. She found a place that was perfect for everyone. He scanned the crowd and sighted Garrus along with Marianna, Saburo and Hoshi. Hoshi was laughing so hard he could see tears in her eyes. Saburo didn’t look too amused which made Jeff conclude that he was the butt of whatever joke his sister was telling.

Athena just couldn’t seem to go anywhere she wasn’t recognized and was busy signing autographs, taking pictures and vids with the patrons and workers at the restaurant. Jeff felt a little guilty at not being able to bull rush her past the crowd, but she always did seem to make time for the nonsense, especially when it involved kids. Jeff wheeled himself to their table and by the look on Marianna’s face he could tell he would probably be interrogated sometime during the course of the night.

Garrus on the other hand was talking with Saburo about the differences in the discipline styles between the Alliance and the Turian armed forces.

“So flight Lieutenant, I heard from somewhere that you’re able to make frigates dance?” Now Hoshi, Saburo’s very attractive fighter jock sister, he could probably talk to for hours about piloting, so he bit.

“You could say that. The Normandy is different though. She could dance before me, just not as well.” Jeff responded nonchalantly.

“Why didn’t you want to fly fighters?” Jeff could forgive her because she probably didn’t know about his Vrolik Syndrome. “I mean as far as maneuverability and dancing goes, the F-61… well I really don’t need to explain.”

“I just like the big ships. The Normandy, with me at the sticks is unbeatable. I mean come on, big guns and big engines? Not to mention you can make yourself a cup of coffee in the galley.” Jeff shrugged his shoulders. “What’s not to love?”

“I’ve seen your scores in the academy. If you’re so into the bigger ships, why not try to get on one of the Dreadnoughts or Carriers?” Hoshi asked curiously.

“If you think that the Normandy is a truck, you should see how those behemoths behave. They’re
no fun.” Jeff responded. “I mean the Normandy is the perfect size. She maneuvers like a sports car compared to those monsters and she has the punch of a cruiser. She can also do atmospheric ops like no other big ship in the Alliance.”

Hoshi was listening to him intently and was hanging on every word. “It looks like an excellent ship. I saw the video of your Immelmann turn when you put that giant dreadnought in the scrap heap.” Hoshi seemed actually very engaged. “It was really impressive.” He could tell that she might be having second thoughts about the Normandy job. Jeff could also tell that Mari had no interest in either set of conversations. She wanted plain and simple gossip and looked a little perturbed that the talks were not going where she wanted them to. She took a swig of her beer and rolled her eyes at these gung ho military types and their boring interests.

“Thank God!” Mari exclaimed as Jeff turned to see that Athena had finally freed herself of the crowd and slowly made her way to join them at the table. Watching her walk in those black pumps and that skintight black dress caused his stomach to do flips. It amazed him how easily she walked in what amounted to six inch heels that put her over seven feet easy. She was the epitome of beauty and power rolled into one. His thoughts drifted to the first time he had met her. His legs were on fire, but the pain took a back seat when his eyes met those impossibly beautiful aqua blues.

Damn…and she’s mine. Jeff thought with a smile.

“Damn Commander! You look hot!” Hoshi exclaimed. Saburo nudged his sister with an elbow almost as if to say ‘really?’ Hoshi just gave a roll of her eyes to her brother. “Well, she does.” She nudged Saburo with her own elbow.

“Thanks Lieutenant. What are we having? Tonight is on me.” Athena announced.

“You really know how to make an entrance mamita.” Mari chuckled.

A Salarian waiter took their drink orders with a quickness and efficiency that she had come to expect from the people of his race. Athena couldn’t believe she was still on Earth.

“Seven A.M. sharp tomorrow Commander.” Hoshi remarked to her.

“Ezeiza?” Athena asked and Hoshi nodded. “It’s a date lieutenant!”

Jeff looked puzzled, but in the end he figured it out. “You two going to play nice?”

“Oh, we’re gonna play nice… reeeeeeal nice.” Hoshi sounded so fucking cocky that it made Athena smirk.

Garrus was intrigued. “What are you two up to?”

“They think they’re being slick with all that fighter jock talk. They’re going to have an illegal dogfight tomorrow at 7 am.” Mari explained as Hoshi, Athena and Jeff motioned to Mari to quiet down. “Oh gimme a break, Hoshi’s been dying to challenge the Commander and damn if it Mamita didn’t want to be challenged. If I was any other intelligence officer, I would’ve already put a stop to it.”

“Dog fight?” Garrus was as confused as ever, but as he sat there he thought about the subject of the conversation and he came to the right conclusion on his own. “A fighter duel.”

Mari sat up and kissed his mandible. “That’s why you’re going to make a great C-Sex… I mean C-Sec officer.” She caught herself, but not quickly enough as Jeff and Athena both had huge grins
on their faces. Garrus also seemed to get a good chuckle out of the faux pa.

“Isn’t that the name of a movie in your collection Jeff?” Athena asked with all the faux seriousness in the world. Now both Jeff’s and Mari’s cheeks turned a bright shade of red as they both glared at Athena with evil intentions.

Garrus began to chuckle a little harder and Athena ended up breaking out in laughter as everyone else at the table looked at them and wondered what was so funny. “Man I crack myself up.” She approved of herself. Jeff and Mari both let out uncomfortable giggles as Hoshi and Saburo looked on, none the wiser, and definitely confused.

As the night carried on, they enjoyed their meals, drink and conversations. Athena talked about her past and had them all listening to her like she was the leader of their particularly small cult. “As hard as David, Mari and I have pried; we haven’t been able to find out much about my time before I escaped Munro.” She paused and took a bite from her enormous pile of food. “Cerberus seemed involved somehow and so was Conatix and BAat.”

“Come on Mamita let’s not go down this road tonight.” Mari tried to steer the conversation to more light hearted subjects. “Why don’t you tell them about the time you stole an Alliance shuttle?”

“I love that story.” Jeff remarked to confirm his approval at the change of subject.

“I thought that was an unsubstantiated rumor?” Hoshi sounded genuinely surprised. “I can’t believe they let you into the Alliance Military.”

“That’s another story I’ll save for another day.” Athena took her last bite and paid using her omni-tool. “Come on, let’s get out of here. I’ll continue with the ‘grand theft shuttle’ story in the cab.”

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Club New York – Buenos Aires

She told the cab driver to drop them off around the corner of the club. She really didn’t want to make a scene and wanted to try and get into the club as quietly as possible. She looked at the long meandering line to get in and sighed. “There’s no way this isn’t going to be a shit show.” She muttered to the entertainment of Jeff and Hoshi.

“Well… it really is your fault for being a towering supermodel.” Hoshi chuckled as she got out of the cab and started to help Jeff out and into his chair. “I mean look at you.” Hoshi continued.

Athena hesitated a little in getting out of the cab and watched as some of the people in the line actually started to stare at Garrus standing with Saburo and Mari at the back. At least I’m not the only one who’s going to get attention. She smiled and slowly stepped out of the cab.

As soon as she stepped on the pavement she started hearing ‘Comandante Shepard?’ being mentioned all along the line. It wasn’t long before people started taking selfies with her and to her surprise, Garrus also. She tried to stay gracious and calm, but she also did want to get inside before dawn broke. Finally, one of the big bouncers came down the line to see what all the fuss was and spotted her. He called on a few of his friends and they were led to the front of the line and inside.
Jeff noticed that it wasn’t terribly crowded inside. It seemed that the bouncers were very diligent in not letting everyone inside. He doubted that he would’ve gotten in if it wasn’t for his beautiful Athena. He rolled himself to the bar and immediately took possession of an empty stool at the end of the bar. He folded his chair and leaned it on the bar directly underneath his stool. He finally let out a sigh and visibly relaxed to the sound of the music. A live band was playing hard rock on the stage with a large collection of groupies at the front. They sounded a lot like the Hair Bands of the nineteen eighties. It was the kind of music that he had heard on Athena’s extensive musical collection. He looked around and noticed that Athena was once again entertaining a group of doters. He then saw Garrus and Mari entertaining another much smaller group of interested people. Athena was so patient with these people and she really did seem to enjoy making her fans as happy as she could. His eyes met hers as she gave him a soft smile and it almost looked like she was pleading to be saved. Then her saviors entered the scene, some of the members of the Rugby team came along and pulled her along to the bar. She was thanking them as they made her way toward him. He quickly turned around and tried to get the attention of the bartender. She paid him no mind until Athena squeezed in next to him.

The bartender couldn’t move fast enough to get Athena’s order. He also noticed that the Rugby players surrounded her like an elite bodyguard detachment. She ordered drinks for every one of them and finally began to visibly relax as she leaned back with her elbows on the bar. “I’m half expecting someone to squeeze my ass again.” She didn’t have to wait long for it to happen. She looked around and saw a very guilty looking Jeff sitting there pretending like he didn’t know what’s going on. She leaned in close to his ear and whispered. “The last time somebody did that, they ended up in the emergency room.”

He smiled as she whispered. “I can think of worse things than getting mauled by the goddess next to me.” He whispered back and it actually made her blush a little.

“You’re terrible.” She nudged him playfully with her shoulder.

The music stopped playing as the band completed one of their sets. Athena watched in curious wonder at what the hell Marianna was doing as she eagerly approached the stage. Mari began talking to the lead singer of the band and then pointed at Athena.

I’m going to fucking kill her… She thought as the handsome blonde haired rocker waved her over to the stage. Mari also joined the rocker in waving her over. Jeff watched her glaring at her friend with an amused grin.

“What’s going on?” He asked her.

“I’m about to kill Mari.” Athena reluctantly left the bar and walked toward the stage. Jeff watched as she greeted the lead singer with the customary Argentine kiss on the cheek. They began talking and he could see Athena shake her head and put her hand up trying to refuse whatever it was that he and Mari were trying to sell her. He continued to watch them as Athena gave a visible sigh to the utter delight of Mari who was hopping up and down and clapping with excitement.

Mari and Garrus walked back to the bar and took their place alongside Jeff while Hoshi and Saburo joined them as well. “You think she’s impressive now. Wait till you see her do this.” Mari bragged to all of them.

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Jeff shot back a little angry at her for making her do something she obviously didn’t want to do.

“Oh… you’ll see… this is totally worth it.” Mari told him while not even acknowledging Jeff’s annoyance. “COME ON MAMITA SHOW THEM!!!!” Mari yelled like a maniac, resulting in
Athena glaring at her with evil intentions. She then continued to engage in conversation with the lead singer and then to Jeff’s utter shock saw the lead guitarist of the band hand over his guitar to her. She stepped up on stage and the entire club was watching in silence as she strapped the guitar on, pulled her bun apart and let her hair fall down in a wild collection of curls.

She looked up at the singer and he nodded to her. She let out a visible breath and addressed the guitar she now had in her hands.

The sound of her skillfully strumming the guitar was a revelation. The lead singer gave an approving glance as the entire band started to play ‘Talk Dirty to Me’ by the eighties band Poison. Athena looked a little uncomfortable at first, but she settled down quickly and the room exploded with the sound of her jamming with that guitar like a bona fide rock star. She started to really get into it as she closed her eyes and felt the music flow through her. She began to ‘bang her head’ while singing the chorus and keeping up with the rest of the band. When she performed her guitar solo the place exploded with cheers and applause. Her fingers were a blur of skillful movement. The smile on her face was one of complete and utter joy. It looked like maybe this is what she was meant to do if she weren’t already the best Alliance Warrior in the galaxy. Hoshi, Jeff and Saburo just sat there with their mouths wide open in complete shock. When the song finally ended, she pulled the strap over her shoulder tried to give back the guitar but the lead guitarist egged her on to continue with another song as he himself strapped on another guitar to join them.

In the end she performed three more songs and when the set was over she graciously handed the guitar back to the lead guitarist. She hugged every one of the band members and was smiling from ear to ear. When she finally got off the stage, the lead singer pointed to her. “COMANDANTE SHEPARD!” He exclaimed to the crowd. She was once again mobbed. Security though managed to help her manage it much better than before.

Jeff admitted to himself that what Mari had put Athena through was absolutely worth it. “Holy shit Mari, you knew about this?” Mari nodded proudly. “Where in the hell did she learn to play like that?”

“There was a point where she was obsessed with playing the guitar and she would spend hours with it. Between her fourteenth and eighteenth birthdays, if she wasn’t underneath her mustang she was strumming her guitar. She actually taught herself to play and even wanted to start a band with me and Ale, but that never happened and eventually she just played for fun at some of our get togethers.” Mari watched again as Athena had to make her way through a mob of adoring admirers to get to them. “There are some vids of her on the net that she thinks aren’t there anymore.” Mari winked at Jeff. “Search under ‘Tall Kitty plays guitar.’” Jeff didn’t even bother to hide it as he put the search into his omni-tool. “I’ve also recorded this performance. She manipulated her omni-tool and uploaded it to Jeff’s and Garrus.

Once she made it to the bar she let loose a biotic charge on Mari that caused her to almost jump out of her dress. “That’s for always getting me into trouble.” Athena commented with a faux seriousness.

“Hey!” Mari yelled as she had to pull her dress back down as it had ridden up a little too high because of Athena’s electrically charged attack.

“Commander that was amazing.” Saburo commented. “You really are something of a renaissance woman.”

“Thanks Sergeant.” Athena replied with a sly grin.

“Shepard, I can’t wait to see what else you’re hiding from us.” Garrus commented.
“I’m full of surprises Garrus, too bad you’re not staying around to find out.” Athena assured him with a smirk. “Too bad the rest of the crew wasn’t here. I think they would’ve enjoyed the show.”

Athena squeezed herself up to the bar next to Jeff and ordered another drink for herself. “You know, that was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen you do.” Jeff whispered in her ear. “How come you don’t play on the ship?”

“Who says I don’t?” She turned her eyes on him and man did she look every bit a beautifully wild and untamable woman with her hair all undone. “You really didn’t snoop around my quarters too much did you?” She grinned. “The Stratocaster is in my closet and my room can be made soundproof remember? You can imagine what you like.” His mind could imagine a lot.

The night ended at five in the morning with all of them except Athena and Garrus totally drunk out of their minds. Garrus accompanied Mari and Jeff back to Athena’s apartment while she escorted Hoshi and Saburo back to their hotel. Athena made sure to leave a note for Hoshi in regards to their duel and that she should reschedule it for a later date. Due to the amount of people that recognized her now she had become accustomed to parking a block away from where ever she was going and it was no different with her apartment now. She paid and tipped the chubby cab driver who tried to stop her from paying. “As long as I’m driving, you don’t pay.” He insisted as his omi-tool continuously blocked the transfer of credits.

“Thank you.” She shyly accepted his kindness. She then removed her N7 earrings and attempted to pass them on to him. He put his hands up to refuse. “Please…it will make me feel better if you take them.” Athena could tell that he was gentle soul with the pictures of his family on the console of the cab. A wife and what looked like three small sons. “Accept them as a gift. You can’t get these anywhere unless you are an N7 operative. Give them to your wife.” If he knew that they were uniquely made for her he probably wouldn’t accept them, so she lied.

“Thank you for everything Commander. You’ll be in our prayers.” She dropped them in his hands and lightly squeezed his hand shut around them. She felt a small pang of jealousy for the life of this simple and kind soul, knowing that it would never be meant for her.

She then began to walk back to her apartment with a smile on her face. These were the people she was fighting for. To think that there was a legion of those monsters hell bent on destroying them made her shudder. She thought of the picture she just saw. The mother looked so frustrated and the kids were all laughing. It was beautiful.

As she turned the corner she paused and saw that there were reporters waiting at the front of her apartment. Not now. She thought as she made her way back toward one of the fire escape ladders on the other side of the building. She took a leap and landed on the first landing of said fire escape. She made her way up to the roof and then leaped down to an open yard in the center of the building that was accessible to all of the apartments.

She opened the door to her apartment and as she entered she saw Garrus sitting on her messy couch with Mari on his lap. He also noticed that Garrus’ hand had gone to his firearm instinctively. Athena chuckled, but inside she was glad that Garrus was the bad ass that he was. “Romeo is in there passed out.” Mari pointed to her room as she caressed Garrus’ mandible.

“There are a lot of reporters outside. You guys are welcome to stay if you want.” It was an offer that really didn’t need to be made. Mari looked like she was set on staying the night and Garrus was not going to complain.

“I really don’t see what the big deal is. You’re not even that good looking.” Garrus joked.
“They must be here for the handsome Turian then.” She chuckled and walked into her room to see Jeff out and in the bed, tucked in like a five year old. She undressed to her underwear and tied her hair up in a loose braid. She removed her makeup and then got under the covers and snuggled close to her pilot. She wrapped her arm over him and kissed the back of his head. He didn’t budge as she pulled him tight to feel the warmth of his skin on hers. She put her head down on her pillow and fell into a deep and satisfied slumber thinking that this was how life should really be.

She awoke sometime around noon to the smell of something heavenly. She noticed that Jeff was gone and that somehow he had gotten out of bed without waking her. *He really is a sneaky one*… She thought as she sat up and stretched her arms over her head with a wakeful sigh. She didn’t even bother to put something on and walked out to the living room area. Mari was propped up on a mountain of pillows on the sofa bed watching a scene with an intensely satisfied look on her face. Athena crawled in next to her like they did when they were younger and more mischievous. She then turned to see that both Jeff and Garrus were at the stove cooking.

Athena looked at Mari and noticed the bruises and scratches on her shoulders. She then looked into Mari’s eyes which exuded nothing less than a totally satisfied sense of ecstasy. “I can’t believe you two slept through the uhmmm… our… playtime.” Mari playfully commented.

“Not all of us slept through that.” Jeff blurted out. “I can’t believe anyone in the building could’ve slept through that.”

Athena’s eyes were wide open in childlike curiosity as Mari pulled the covers over her head. “Since when are you so shy about your love life to me?”

Mari pulled the covers down so that just her eyes could be seen by her and then she quickly hid under the covers again. “I’m shy!” Came a muzzled yell from underneath the covers.

“That’s alright; I’ll get all the info I need from Garrus.” Athena playfully retorted as she started to get out of the bed.

“No! …I swear I’ll tell you.” Mari tugged on her hand to not leave and she quickly rejoined Mari underneath the covers.

As Garrus finished making his own meal he began to help Jeff with theirs. He turned to look at the sofa bed and all he could make out was two lumps moving around and what amounted to a lot of giggling and gasps. “Is it common for human females to act like that?” Garrus finally asked Jeff.

“I haven’t had much more experience than you, but I think it is… for a thirteen year old.” He chuckled to himself as he continued to make omelets for the girls and himself. Man did he love to hear those sounds coming from her. It meant so much to him that she was truly enjoying herself and leaving her Commander persona back on the Normandy. She deserved every bit of happiness and he would do his damnedest to make sure she had as much of it as he could give.

Jeff sat in front of the stove as Garrus passed ingredients to him. As he folded a gigantic omelet he felt two arms wrap around him. “That smells so good.” Athena whispered in his ear.

“I try.” Jeff responded as a content smile began to appear on his face. He slid the omelet onto a plate with practiced skill. “Can you take this to the table?” He started on the next two omelets for him and Mari.

“You’re spoiling me.” She kissed his cheek as she took the plate and set it opposite Garrus.’

She sat down opposite the big Turian who was eating something that looked very similar to her
own eggs. “So Commander, what are we doing today?”

“Mari is gonna have to take over the sightseeing duties today. I promised David I would meet with the Alliance recruiting unit.” Mari took both plates from Jeff and joined Athena and Garrus.

“What?” Jeff sounded a little perturbed as he sat down. “He’s making you do Alliance shit on your shore leave?”

Athena laughed at how cute she thought her Jeff looked when he was upset. “They’ve been trying to get me to do a recruiting video since Akuze.” She started to eat. “I just couldn’t do it before… I was an emotional wreck after Akuze and Torfan.” She turned to Jeff and took a hold of his hand. “This is the first time I’ve felt okay about it.” Jeff could feel the gentle squeeze of his hand.

Jeff grinned like a shy school boy. “Figures you needed me to save you… again.”

“Seriously mamita, do you really need to do this on your day off?” Mari asked while giving Jeff an approving nod for the breakfast.

“A promise is a promise. It shouldn’t be more than a couple of hours…”

“And?” Mari felt that Athena was holding something back.

Athena started working her omni-tool and brought up a message. She turned it so that everyone could see it. “Ezeiza, 7pm sharp!”

Mari rolled her eyes in an annoyed fashion. “Ugh.”

Jeff on the other hand wanted to be there but before he could say anything she cut him off. “I’ll upload the video feeds to your omni-tool. You can watch me whoop her ass on my large holo-projector in the living room.”

“Let’s see. Lieutenant Sakai has been flying these fighters for how long now?” Garrus asked.

“Probably two or three years.” Mari answered.

Garrus looked a little excited as he pondered Mari’s answer. “I think she’s going to wipe the floor with you.”

“Pfft. You haven’t seen BABs in the simulator. If she handles that Trident half as well, it’s going to be a short contest.” Jeff came to Athena’s defense, resulting in a tender peck on his cheek which resulted in her wiping a little egg from his face.

“Thank you baby. At least someone in here has some confidence in my piloting skills.” She stuck her tongue out playfully at Garrus.

“It’s not your skill Shepard, I think her experience is going to surprise you. She’s probably done these kind of drills her entire career and I think Sakai is going to be able to put you in a situation that you won’t be able to counter with reflexes and skill.” Garrus explained, totally oblivious of her playful nature.

“I’ll bet you a vacation on Palaven that I am going to beat her.” Athena sounded as confident as ever.

“You’re on Shepard.” Garrus responded. “No crying when you lose though.”

“Palaven? Really? You couldn’t have chosen Thessia or Ilium?” Jeff sounded distraught.
“ABSOLUTELY NOT!” Both Athena and Mari answered in unison.

The recruiting video wasn’t so bad and she had to admit that she had fun doing it. They were excited about her performance. The director said she was a natural and that some of the footage from her guitar playing in the club was going to make it into the video. She felt really good about it.

She had to admit to herself that Lieutenant Hoshi Sakai was a fabulous fighter pilot. Athena lost the best of seven series of dogfights they had 4 – 3. So many of the moves Sakai demonstrated were guile and experience, like every time Athena made a gravity crushing bank, Hoshi would just drift past her while aiming her guns at her with the maneuvering jets. Athena’s body allowed her to pull three times the g-forces, but she didn’t think of all the slight and subtle things that can be done to win a dogfight. It’s not like fighting in the atmosphere where Athena dominated Hoshi for the first match. Athena lost her last match with a maneuver that so surprised her she had to laugh at the end. Athena had Hoshi in her sights ahead of her and began to gloat over the radio. Hoshi spun her fighter around and while flying in reverse shot Athena out of the sky. It was awesome, unexpected and eye opening. Hoshi was a true artist with that fighter and she was glad that she had the chance to play with a great pilot in her own right. She congratulated Hoshi and actually offered her the Normandy position again which she politely refused.

“You suck Lieutenant.” Athena showed no malice as she joked with Lt. Sakai.

“I’d love to see what you could do if they let you practice with us. That was the most I’ve been tested since I was a wet behind the ears boot.” Hoshi responded with what amounted to be supreme admiration. “Thank you Commander, you probably just made your case to the brass to get reassigned.”

“Don’t be a stranger Lieutenant. You’ll always be welcome on the Normandy.” Athena responded as she saluted and then hugged Hoshi.

“You too Commander. The Einstein will always have a place for you as well.”

After saying her good byes to the whole squadron, Athena took her leave and got on her bike to go back to the expected victory dance that Garrus was going to give her. She chuckled inside as she thought of it.

As she traveled back toward her apartment she got a call on her omni-tool. It was Admiral Hackett.

“Steven! Does this mean you’re going to pay up on that dance you owe me?” Athena answered excitedly. She could hear the chuckle on the other end.

“I’m sorry Shepard, but I’m calling you tell you your leave is being cut short. I need you and Joker to report back to the Normandy ASAP. I’ll brief you once you get there.” He answered with a seriousness she knew meant that something dangerous needed handling.

“Will do sir. We’ll take the first ship out of here to Arcturus.” She answered. “I’ll call you when we get there.”

“Roger that. Oh and if you can tell Saburo he’s being transferred to the Academy on Arcturus.”
“You’re taking one of my best men away? Why?” Athena didn’t like it one bit.

“You’re crew is the most experienced at fighting the Geth and we need that kind of experience in the academy. Hackett out.”

Just a couple of fucking days… that’s all I get? Athena thought and was a little upset, but she knew that if Hackett needed her, it wasn’t for bullshit. She let out a sigh as she climbed off her bike in front of her apartment which now had hanger ons and other sorts waiting to get a glimpse of the one and only Commander Shepard.

She quickly made her way inside to see that Garrus had Mari on his lap. Garrus could see that she wasn’t in a good mood. “Everything okay? I guess a little losing has that effect on some people.”

“Me and Jeff have been recalled. We have to head back to the Normandy.”

Jeff rolled out of her room. “Aw come on, I was just getting used to being pampered by my boss.” Athena looked at HER pilot with an affection she only held for him. These couple of days were some of the best in her entire life. She was truly in love with this brash, corny and wonderful man.

“Come on Moreau, I want you in uniform ASAP. Our flight leaves in a couple of hours.” She was already in her blues and caught Mari starting to tear up. “Damn it Mari…” The sight caused Athena to start tearing up as well as they both hugged each other like it was the last time. “I’ll see you at the Citadel okay?”

“Remember you owe me.” Garrus had gotten up and approached her. Now her tears had become a torrent as she pulled the big Turian into a triple embrace. She pulled back and smiled weakly at him as she tried to compose herself.

“You two behave yourselves… and be safe… please.” She uttered as she dialed up her omni-tool to get in touch with Saburo.

“You too mamita, be careful… I love you.” Mari and Athena hugged again the embrace of two people who considered each other family.

She made contact with Saburo and informed him of his transfer. She had never heard him so upset and she assumed he was cursing up a storm in Japanese. She hated to do that, but she was a Marine and when duty calls, Marines don’t shirk it. She explained Hackett’s reasons and Saburo calmed down a bit, but was still upset. “I’ll find a way to get back to you Commander. I swear it.” He sounded so determined that she was sure he would succeed.

They were all off to Ezeiza where they met with Saburo’s sister and said their good byes. Hoshi laughed tearfully as both Jeff and Athena made their last ditch to get her to accept the Normandy job. Unsuccessful, Athena informed Hoshi of her brother’s transfer to which you could almost see her sigh with relief. They both boarded an Alliance shuttle and were off to Arcturus Station.

Chapter End Notes

I’m actually having trouble letting go of the good times. I feel bad for Athena. I think that she deserves at least some bliss considering what’s coming. The next chapter is going to be brutal.
In case anyone wants to know, Athena’s set was “Talk Dirty to Me” by Poison, “Squealer” by AC/DC, “Intruder” by Van Halen leading into Roy Orbison’s “Pretty Woman” as done by Van Halen, and she finished hard with “All My Life” by Foo Fighters.
Disaster

Chapter Summary

Here we go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Geth, it seemed, were itching to get revenge for the ass whooping the Alliance put on them and their God Sovereign. Hackett had informed her that their spy buoys were picking up Geth Activity in the Armstrong Cluster of the Skyllian Verge and to Athena’s expectation, the Geth were building outposts on several of the worlds there. Once she confirmed the Geth were there, she began a systematic destruction of those said bases and extermination of the remaining Geth there. Three of those bases were quite easy as they were on the surface and the Normandy’s guns made the main job very easy, leaving only stragglers and wounded for the ground team to mop up. The bases on Rayingri and particularly Solcrum were much more difficult as they required a ground team for the main job and intel collection. The Mako and the makeshift Kodiak gunships made short work of the surface forces and turrets. Once they buttoned up in their bases, Athena’s abilities, coupled with an extremely proficient ground team made for a short, but incredibly violent assault. The results of the campaign were additional intelligence on the Geth and the crippling of all their operations in the Skyllian Verge. Athena shared the intelligence with Tali and the migrant fleet to the chagrin of Alliance intelligence. Tali in turn gave her the decrypted information from Virmire. The information was incredibly useful in understanding a lot of Geth doctrine. She forwarded the information to Alliance intelligence and she got a whole hearted thank you from Mari at the Citadel.

Jeff seemed to be having a fantastic time during the campaign. The Normandy had flexed its muscles in destroying a trio of Geth frigates trying to drop off reinforcements. The news videos were having a field day reporting the Normandy’s actions. Joker had become not only the Alliance’s only ace on the month long operation, but a double ace with seven total ship kills in addition to his three kills during the battle of the Citadel. His currently unfinished yet brilliant career had caught the attention of the high command and the media. They were on every channel, galaxy wide and for the first time, Jeff was the subject of most of the news coverage.

Athena loved it. “Hey flyboy!” She called out as she sat and was about to begin her meal alongside Ashley, Liara and Corporal Carlton Tucks who was her new security detachment squad leader. Athena’s outburst solicited a chuckle from both Ashley and Tucks. “You gonna join us grunts or are you too famous now to be seen with us?” If Jeff could have a spring in his crutch assisted walk, he had it as he made his way toward the coffee dispenser and breakfast station.

Jeff turned toward the table, smiled and shook his head. “I can’t be seen with you dregs. What will my adoring fans think?” He responded as he finished getting his simulation egg omelet and bacon. He slowly made his way to them and sat down next to Liara.

Ashley started laughing at the response as Athena just gave him her famous faux glare. “Man… the news cycle must sure be desperate if they have Jeff as the main story.” She commented and for once it was Liara who giggled. Athena turned to look at her shanghaied Asari and grinned
affectionately at her.

Ashley was still recovering from her injuries, but Tucks had more than taken up the slack and proved himself a very good ground pounder. Ashley was steadily improving and was now able to move around on her own. She helped with the maintenance of the weapons and equipment. Chakwas watched her with an evil expression as if to tell her not to do anything stupid.

“How’re the new pilots?” Athena asked.

“Lieutenant Chase has potential, but Greico is Kaiden with a different name.” He responded as he poured himself a drink of whatever juice was in the Carafe at the table. “Why did Kaiden get transferred?” Everyone could hear the frustration in Jeff’s voice. It was like the Alliance was trying to break up the band.

“They’re putting him in charge of some secret project. Probably has something to do with biotics.” Athena answered as she shoveled food into her mouth. They all stopped whatever they were doing and watched her eat in total awe struck disgust.

Tucks was quick to ask questions and he was brutally honest. “You know Commander…” Athena looked up at him with food stuffed into her mouth. “I thought they taught some etiquette at the Officer Candidate School. You eat like a pig being fattened in front of the flag officers too?” Jeff couldn’t contain himself and spilled his juice on himself laughing. Ashley and Liara smiled as Tucks didn’t break eye contact with his Commander.

“Nah… I only eat like this when I’m with the dregs of the Normandy.” Athena responded as she put another mouthful of what looked like meatloaf and sent it down to the bottomless pit that was her stomach.

“OOOOHHHH!…” Jeff and Ashley yelled at the comeback. “Nice one Commander.” Ashley responded. They all laughed and continued their back and forth banter for quite a while. Once they had all finished their meals, Athena informed them that according to Hackett they probably just stopped a Geth invasion.

“We’re heading to Alchera in the Omega Nebula.” She answered. “There’ve been reports of ships going missing in the vicinity. Alliance brass wants us to check it out.”

“Pirates?” Liara commented.

“No one seems to know. Brass thinks it’s the Geth for some reason.” Athena answered. “Either way I have to talk to Hackett and Anderson about prepping for the real threat that’s coming. I feels like everyone is trying to make pretend that Sovereign never happened.”

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Station Cronos
Miranda watched the news feeds with much interest. *A Reaper, a Geth and Krogan army, and a rogue Spectre, Shepard is a bloody Reaper herself.* She thought as the vids showed the Normandy cracking open a Geth frigate with her main gun.

She heard or more accurately felt Kai sneaking up behind her. “How was it?” She asked.

“What do you mean?” Kai said, obviously puzzled at the question and also impressed that she had detected him.

“Going toe to toe with her in the Academy.” She elaborated.

“She’s a force of nature. I’ve never seen someone so strong, fast and as quick a learner as her.” Kai answered. “If she wanted to, she probably could’ve crushed me like a bug, but she held back because she liked me, that’s her weakness.”

“You think she cared for you… or maybe she wanted to learn what you knew and didn’t want to permanently cripple a valuable source of knowledge.” Miranda knew that Kai and Shepard had a raunchy relationship in the Academy, but she also knew that neither of them loved the other. It was all about release for them, it was lust. “It seems that you helped her become this incredible and adept force in the galaxy that she is. She got what she needed from you, while revealing none of her real power to you.”

Kai knew it was a dig at him. Shepard never revealed her biotics to any of her classmates while in the academy. He never even suspected that she was a biotic superhuman. He just thought that she was a genetically modified freak, whom he was very jealous of. He volunteered himself for every procedure that Cerberus offered and was supremely frustrated that they would not attempt any of the procedures performed on Shepard. No amount of explanation seemed to placate him even though they all ended with a near one hundred percent mortality rate, but he knew that there were other ways to even the odds, like cybernetics. “She is a worthy foe and I can’t wait for the day I can pit myself against her again.”

Miranda couldn’t help herself when she talked to Leng. She didn’t like him very much. To Miranda, Leng was nothing more than a talking weapon, a blunt instrument to be pointed at a target and unleashed as Cerberus and the Illusive Man saw fit. “I don’t think that’s going to end well for you.” She continued to examine the monitor and actually started to admire how adept the pilot of the Normandy was. She might suggest to the Illusive man that he be recruited to fly one of their more powerful ships.

She switched vid feeds and watched the video of her playing guitar on Earth. *How does an orphan with so little formal education become so adept in an art form as technical as playing the guitar?* She looked quizzically at the monitor as she pondered the thought. *Too bad that her time with the gang of car thieves wasn’t more well documented.* She could feel that Kai was still there in it was starting to annoy her. “Is there something you need, Leng?”

Kai picked up on her annoyed tone and chuckled. “Illusive man wants to see you.”

Like she thought, Kai never talked to her without reason. He had about as much disdain for her as she did for him. Without even acknowledging him, she was out the door and on her way to see the Illusive man.

She avoided the elevator and walked the three flights of stairs up to the commander center. It was a magnificent piece of engineering. The holo-projectors were state of the art and the view they provided of the Giant Red Star Anadius was spectacular. It took her breath away every time she entered.
She noticed that the Illusive man was watching one of the holo-vids of the battle of the Citadel. A video not shown to the public because of the carnage involved. He sat there silently as he watched Athena slice Saren/Sovereign in two with her biotically enhanced sword strike. “They still don’t want to see it. They’d rather pretend this never happened.” He commented with an air of frustration as he lit a cigarette.

It always amazed Miranda how a man could smoke so much and not have any of the ill effects. “Shepard did everything right, more than we could’ve hoped for. Saving the Citadel, even saving the Council, humanity has the trust of the entire galaxy, and still it’s not enough.” She turned to look at the Illusive man who as always was assessing her.

“Our sacrifices have earned the Council’s gratitude, but Shepard remains our best hope.” He mentioned.

“But they’re sending her to fight Geth… Geth!” She let out a chuckle of disbelief. “We both know they’re not the real threat. The Reapers are still out there…” Miranda’s expression of contempt for the Alliance and Council was clear for all to see.

“And it’s up to us to stop them.” He finished her sentence.

“The Council will never trust Cerberus; they’ll never accept our help. Even after everything Humanity has accomplished, but Shepard, they’ll follow her. She’s a hero, a bloody icon.” There was a tinge of admiration from the Cerberus operative. “But she’s just one woman. If we lose Shepard, Humanity might well follow.”

“Then see to it that we don’t lose her.” It was a simple order with a lot of complications attached to it. How in the hell was she supposed to carry out that one. Shepard was the Commanding Officer of the most active Alliance warship in the fleet. Miranda would try, but this was an impossible request.

She turned toward the exit and walked out while trying to figure out what to do to make sure that Shepard wouldn’t be wasted on the Geth. She re-entered her office and began to open up her spy feeds and displayed them on her vid screens. She needed to get in contact with some of Cerberus’ operatives on the Citadel and Arcturus so she got up and headed for the communication center two decks up. Technically she could use the one in the command center, but she didn’t want to disturb the Illusive man as he too was working to find out everything there was pertaining to Shepard’s current mission.

She waited two hours before getting an encrypted response. It just said ‘Alchera’ and that was it. No mention of what it meant or what it was. Miranda quickly summarized that it had to be a location and as she entered the word in her search engine, it came back to an icy planet in the Terminus System. Gotcha… She smiled as she pulled up the star chart which showed the exact location.

“Miranda!” Jacob’s voice made her jump a little, but she didn’t answer and waited for him to enter her office. “Miranda, turn on the news feed now!”

Damn it! She thought as she now theorized that the whole galaxy was now doomed.

Alchera
They had been scanning the area for four days and they found nothing. Pressly was aggravated at what he considered a wild goose chase. “We’re wasting our time, four days searching up and down this sector and we haven’t found any sign of Geth activity.” Nothing could’ve prepared them for what came next.

“Three ships went missing here in the past month. Something happened to them.” Jeff answered back.

“My money’s on slavers. The Terminus system is crawling with them.” Pressly countered.

“Picking up something on the long range scanner. Unidentified vessel, hmm looks like a cruiser.” Lieutenant Chase mentioned.

“Doesn’t match any know signatures.” Jeff’s neck hairs started to stand up straight.

“Cruiser is changing course, now on an intercept trajectory.” Lt. Chase said with a surprised expression.

Pressly was also surprised. “Can’t be, stealth systems are engaged. There’s no way a Geth ship could possibly…”

“It’s not the Geth.” Jeff interrupted him with a sense of urgency. “BRACE FOR EVASIVE MANEUVERS!” The first hit took out two of the Normandy’s engines and caused all sorts of hull breaches, resulting in Pressly’s and Lieutenant Chase’s instantaneous deaths. I can save her, I can save her, I can save her. He thought as he furiously handled the remaining engines and attempted to evade the next strike. “KINETIC BARRIER’S DOWN, MULTIPLE HULL BREACHES!” DAMN IT DAMN IT! “WEAPONS OFFLINE! SOMEBODY GET THAT FIRE OUT!” I’m not losing her! No way!

“Joker! Abandon ship!” He heard Liara shout over the intercom at him, but he couldn’t do it. This was his baby, he’d done everything to become the helmsman of the Normandy, he wasn’t going to be the one responsible for losing her on his first assignment. No fucking way... I will save you!

Another hit… It felt like someone had used a giant sledgehammer as the Normandy jerked violently from the direct hit. The controls were not responding, nothing was responding… there has to be something… I can save her…

He started to use the remaining maneuvering thrusters in a vain attempt to evade the monstrous ship’s main weapon. It was like a person trying to move with only their fingers, it was impossible. Come on baby hold together… we can do…

“JEFF, WHAT THE FUCK?!” Her voice immediately got him out of his tunnel vision. She’s still on board? A feeling of guilt and horror filled his conscience… of course she is you idiot! There’s no way she’d leave without you! He thought.

“I can still save her!” She didn’t even wait to listen as she violently pulled him out of the chair by his arm. “Agh! Watch my arm!” Was his response to what he could accurately describe as a dislocated shoulder.

“DAMN IT JEFF SHE’S GONE! I’M NOT LOSING YOU TOO! NOW GET YOUR ASS IN THE ESCAPE POD!” She threw him into the pod and immediately if somewhat painfully sat in one of the seats and strapped himself in.

It was almost as if it was slow motion when he saw the beam weapon strike in front of the pod
entrance, a steady and brilliantly bright stream of golden plasma blocking Athena’s path. He could see her eyes watching him through the visor on her armored helmet. They watched him and he knew. *No please…no*… Athena started to float as the artificial gravity producers were destroyed. She had no control of her direction, but was close enough that she hit the pod’s exterior launch button and the door slammed shut as he felt the pod jerk violently as it was launched away. *Oh my God I killed her… I killed her…*

The tears in his eyes began to flow as he jerked violently and in vain against the restraints. He screamed in anguish as he dislocated his other shoulder struggling to release his restraints and join his Commander, the love of his life, his only reason to live. His screams continued as he passed out from the pain of breaking multiple bones, but more importantly for losing his love, his soul mate, his angel. His will to live was gone as the pod floated aimlessly through space. He hoped that the ship that ambushed them would finish him. They had to see the pods, they had to be very easy targets.

The welcome release of death would never come. Jeff lost all track of time as he woke to the excruciating pain of his multiple self-inflicted injuries. He began to cry again and the tears flowed with a renewed and unceasing stream. He wanted to be with her. He didn’t deserve to be the one to live. *Why did she have to come for me?* He thought, but his own answer destroyed him. *I would’ve done the same for her… I would have done the same for her.*

His head slumped down as the pod continued to float aimlessly. He wanted to die… he heard a consistent beep coming from his omni-tool that he did not notice before. Maybe he couldn’t or wouldn’t hear anything. He opened up his omni-tool and noticed that message was sent to him, from Athena! He looked at the time stamp and noticed that it was pretty close to the time she launched him out of the Normandy in the escape pod. He was in so much pain, but he still didn't care or it just didn't seem to bother him as much compared to the pain he was feeling inside.

He was afraid to open it, he knew what it was, and he knew it was her probably telling him to move on and that she would always love him. He didn’t want to open it. He didn’t want to accept that she was gone. The tears were once again starting to flow as he hit the open icon on the message.

A holo-recording started to play and it was Athena standing at the foot of her bed in what looked like her quarters on the Normandy.

“Well it looks like I really did it this time.” Even knowing why she made this recording, she couldn’t help but try to lighten the mood. “I’m really terrible at this. I’m so sorry baby, if you’re listening to this, then something went really wrong and I got myself killed.” Jeff smiled as the tears became a torrent again. “I want you to know that you’re the best thing that ever happened to me. I don’t have any regrets about the life I had with you or the one that I wanted to have with you. The only regret I have is the fact that I know you’re hurting right now. I know I should tell you to let go and go on with your life…” She got closer to the cam and he could see her beautiful eyes as a single tear rolled down her cheek. “…but I can’t. I know how it feels to lose people that are special and it never gets easy. I won’t lie to you because I wasn’t the type to let go either. Just know that the good memories will always be there and they’ll keep me alive in your heart. I know that the pain seems insurmountable, but I know how strong you are Jeff, I know because I never met anyone with your kind of inner strength.” He watched her as the tears dropped onto his sleeve. “I know you’re going to be okay.” She smiled at him. “You better be.” She gave him that faux glare that he loved. “Just know that I’ll always love you and that even death will never change that.” She got close to the cam and kissed it, leaving an imprint of her beautiful lips on his omni-tool holo-projector. His tears wouldn’t stop but she actually made him chuckle as he kissed the holographic image of her lips. “I love you Jeff, please live… live.” He continued to watch as
the holo-message concluded and shut off and was saved onto his omni-tool. *I love you too mamita... I love you... I’ll... try.*

Chapter End Notes

There’s a couple of more chapters coming like this one. Angst is a lot harder to write than I thought. What did you guys think?
Sad Day

Chapter Summary

Shepard's funeral at the Citadel. More angst, anger, sorrow and pain.

Be warned that there are suicidal thoughts in this chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He watched the holo-vid over and over again, just thinking of what he could’ve done for the outcome of that terrible day to be different. I should’ve listened to Liara… how could I be so fucking selfish? He was all cried out, the tears would no longer flow from his eyes. He was in excruciating pain from the beating he gave himself. He assessed no less than four fractures, one of his ribs made breathing feel like he was being stabbed in the chest. Both of his shoulders were dislocated and his left forearm had the bone slightly protruding just below his elbow. He hoped that it would all end soon and he could join his beloved, but knew that now it was only a matter of time before he was either rescued by the Alliance or killed by slavers. Would they really spare a bitter and crippled human pilot?

At that moment his train of thought was broken by the sudden jerking of the escape pod. I guess someone’s got me. His omni-tool started to beep as someone was trying to communicate with him. He opened the channel and heard a concerned voice on the other end. “Joker are you in there? Do you read?” It was Ash. How could he look her in the face? How could he look anyone in the face knowing that Athena died for him… for his arrogance… for his stupidity? He decided not to answer hoping against all hope that they would just leave the pod and let him die floating in space.

He knew that they wouldn’t just let him be. They would open the door and come face to face with the reason for the death of the Galaxy’s Champion. It came as no surprise to him when the hatch to the escape pod opened and the sound of unfamiliar voices flooded his little world. “Lieutenant Moreau?” A woman’s voice he surmised. He didn’t look up, he couldn’t, he wouldn’t. The feeling of shame and grief were too much for him to bear. You promised you would try. The voice in his head kept repeating as he closed his eyes and shook his head.

“I can’t. I don’t deserve to.” He said to the shock of the young medic entering the pod. “I don’t want to… not without you.” You promised me.

“Lieutenant?” The woman sounded unsure of what Jeff was going on about. “Lieutenant, are you okay?” She came into the pod and began examining him while he argued with his own thoughts.

“It’s too hard…” He continued as the woman undid his restraints.

“He’s delusional.” She stated with some urgency while she examined his numerous bruises and determined that he was safe to move if they did it carefully. She called two other unfamiliar names to come help her move him out of the pod. “GET ME SOME HELP IN HERE!” She yelled and heard heavy scurrying inside his pod as two muscular marines entered to help the young medic.
“I want to be with you.” He mumbled quietly. “I don’t want to be here without you.”

*Please live... please Jeff... live... for me.* He could feel himself being put on a stretcher and being rolled away. He could hear the medics shouting instructions. He could feel the sting of being stuck with needles, the searing pain as they set his bones back and splint them. Her voice was gone as he lost consciousness to the pain and the drugs being pumped into him.

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“He’s waking up ma’am.” He heard an unfamiliar voice.

“Jeff can you hear me?” Dr. Chakwas asked with a concern and affection no one else would have for him. He opened his eyes and saw her face. Chakwas immediately gave him a soft grin, he turned his head and the anguish came back. The tears came back. He couldn’t… he wouldn’t accept kindness from anyone. He didn’t deserve it. “Jeff what’s wrong? Talk to me please.” He turned back to look at her as his eyes filled with tears. “What happened?”

“I… Killed her… she’s dead because of me… because of me.” Maybe if he told everyone, they would hate him. He could handle hate, he could handle being despised… he couldn’t handle the kindness. “I wouldn’t leave and she died saving my worthless ass.”

“Oh Jeff… it’s not your fault.” This wasn’t what he wanted to hear.

“IT IS MY FAULT! SHE’S DEAD BECAUSE OF ME! SHE GOT FUCKING SPACED BECAUSE OF ME!” He didn’t want to hear anything remotely absolving him of his sin. He tried to sit up, but it was immediately apparent that he was fully restrained. “DO YOU UNDERSTAND NOW DOCTOR?!” He continued to struggle to try and sit up.

“Jeff stop!” She yelled forcefully. “I don’t give a flying fuck about what you think I should understand. You’re not going to undo my work to heal you because you’re taking the blame away from that ship that attacked us!” She pressed a button on his bunk and a stasis field surrounded him and now he couldn’t even try and struggle. It was hopeless for him to keep attempting to loosen himself. Chakwas was always ready for anything he threw at her, damn her.

“Okay doc… I’ll stop.” He stated as she pushed the button to turn off the stasis field. He noticed that he could not reach his omni-tool. He started to look around the room in a panic until he noticed that it was sitting in a clear plastic bag. He let out a breath of relief knowing that she was still there… at least a little piece of her was. “Doc…” She turned to look at him, he looked at her and it was almost as if she was waiting for him to say something stupid. “I don’t want to see anyone… please.”

Chakwas watched him and winced inside at his obvious emotional pain. She’d seen it before, but this time it was different because… well… it was Commander Shepard. “Mamita” to her closest friends and “BABs” to her now borderline suicidal pilot of a patient. “I’ll only let them in when you’re ready Jeff, but only if you behave, deal?”

“Deal.” He answered with no intention of keeping his promise and she could tell just by looking at him.

“I swear Jeff, I’ll send Anderson and Ashley in right now if you don’t promise me you’ll behave.”
Damn, she’s brutal. He thought to himself and it actually brought a slight smirk to his mouth. “Okay Doc, I promise.” This time he meant it even though he didn’t know he would be able to keep his promise to the doctor. Don’t be such an ass. You promised you would live your life. It’s exactly what she would want you to do. He continued to delve on the loss of his beautiful Goddess. It was at that moment that he decided that he would try his best despite thinking he would fail.

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Arcturus Station

“Reports coming from the Terminus System have been confirmed.” Al Jilani read from the prompter with a somber tone. “The Alliance Frigate Normandy has been destroyed by unknown attackers near the planet of Alchera in the Amada System.” Al Jilani looked quite disturbed at the next line and it made her pause briefly. “It has been reported from several sources that Commander Shepard, the Hero of the Battle of the Citadel and first Human Spectre was killed in the attack… W…we will try to confirm the reports, but…” She stopped reading the prompter and bowed her head before quickly regaining her composure.

The gasps coming from the mess hall were followed quickly by sobs that broke through the now supreme quiet. Soldiers and civilians alike were comforting each other with hugs and talking, but some took out their anger and angst on the tables, water coolers and the like as they struck out physically. It was terrible.

The news broadcast continued, but all Kaiden heard was that Athena Shepard was dead. His shoulders slumped and he let out a heavy sigh as his eyes began to well up. He pushed his food tray away from himself and stood up. He made his way out of the mess hall and quickly followed his well-traveled path to his quarters. He wanted to call Jeff, Ashley or Liara. They would know for sure.

He tried Jeff first, but there was no answer. Could he be? Oh man I hope not.

He then tried Ashley and she answered immediately. “Kaiden?”

“Is it true?” He sounded desperate. There was a long pause on the other side.

He could hear Ashley start to sob slightly which in turn triggered his welled up eyes to release their tears. “She’s gone… she’s gone.” He closed his eyes tightly as the multiple tears free-fell onto the floor. How could she be dead? She was the most lethal marine he had ever had the pleasure to serve with. “She went to rescue Joker when he wouldn’t leave the Normandy and that’s the last time Liara saw her.”

His thoughts turned from despair and sadness to rage. Kaiden would’ve done almost anything to be with her, but she chose Jeff. He respected her decision and it was no secret that she really fancied Jeff’s piloting ability, but Kaiden couldn’t figure out why as Jeff was such a bitter pill to swallow. “And Jeff?”

“He’s alive. They won’t let us see him. Chakwas has strict orders to keep people out of his room.” Ashley also sounded a bit angry, probably for the same reasons Kaiden was.
“Selfish prick…” Kaiden said it before he could stop himself.

“Doc says he’s delusional and needs to be observed for the foreseeable future.” Ashley continued.

“I’m assuming you’re heading here to drop off the injured and a debriefing?” He asked her.

Her answer was reserved and full of pain. “Yeah, the Kilimanjaro is continuing a search and recovery operation. Damn her! Why didn’t she let that dumb ass go down with the ship, it’s what he fucking wanted!”

“Same reason she rescued you on Virmire. She would never leave anyone behind if she could help it.” Kaiden understood her, but he was still raging that Joker would’ve put her in such a terrible spot. He knew her better than anyone on the ship save maybe her best friend Marianna or maybe even Liara. He knew that she would come for him. _HE FUCKING KNEW!_ Kaiden’s anger had temporarily blinded him to how much he knew that Jeff loved her. Maybe he was trying to keep the ship flying long enough to know she would escape? He considered Jeff one of the few friends he had and as he thought about it, it made more sense. _He has to be hurting too._

“If I get to see him, I’m going to smack the shit out of him!” Ashley could be heard sobbing as she spoke to Kaiden. “Damn it… damn it.” Ashley was as tough a Marine as Kaiden had ever known. It actually troubled him that she was breaking down like this. “I never thought I had an older sister until I met her.” She quietly mentioned in between sobs.

“We all loved her Ash, she was an extraordinary person and Marine.” Kaiden heard his words come out and thought to himself at how polite and ordinary he sounded. “Damn her, Ash… damn her.” He paused. “Don’t be so hard on Jeff, he’s probably taking this worse than any of us… I know that if I were him I’d be dying inside.”

“I know Kaiden… it’s just that he was ordered to evacuate and he didn’t. She went up there for him, she died for him and in the end he’s still here and she’s not.” Ash’s bitterness did not dissipate. “Fuck him… he should be hurting worse than any of us.”

“Remind me to never get on your bad side.” Kaiden chuckled uncomfortably.

“Don’t get yourself killed and we’ll be okay LT.” Ashley chuckled lightly right back at him.

“You too Ash, how’s Liara doing?”

“She’s terrible… we had to restrain her. She put a couple of guards in the hospital with her biotics trying to get to Joker.”

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SSV Tokyo

Liara sat in her cell feeling the effects of the stasis field surrounding her. _If it wasn’t for that idiot, she’d still be with us!_ She couldn’t help but blame Joker. Athena gave herself to that selfish, egotistical and crass pilot of the Normandy and as many times as he had helped save them, his ego had killed her. She sat there quietly and the tears flowed freely just like everyone else who knew that exceptional woman.
Her eyes looked up and she noticed that Ashley was on the other side of the cell in just as pitiful a state as she was. “Open it up.” Ashley ordered the guard.

“Chief, I have orders not to let anyone in the cell with her.” Liara heard the guard almost plead with Ashley.

“I’ll take full responsibility. Now open it up before you make me do something we’ll both regret.” Liara watched Ashley as she threatened the poor private whom finally let down the stasis field and opened the cell. Liara stood and rushed Ashley to embrace her in a tearful, ferocious and emotional hug. Liara buried her face into Ashley’s neck as they both sobbed into each other. “I know, we’re all hurting Liara.” Ashley pulled Liara’s head tightly into her as she comforted the Asari Maiden. Liara pulled away and saw that Ashley was also tearing up. “We have to be strong… she’d want us to be.” Liara nodded and gave Ashley a little sad grin.

“Thank you chief.” Liara said sadly.

“It’s Ashley, we’ve been through enough to drop the formalities okay?”

Liara nodded. “How’s Joker?”

Liara noticed how upset the question made Ashley. “They won’t let us see him. Chakwas says that he is in a suicidal state of mind and would probably welcome one of us killing him for being so stupid.” Ashley took a deep breath and sighed. “We should forgive him. She’d want us to and it’s the right thing to do.”

“I don’t want to see him. I don’t want to be on the same ship with him. I’ll never forgive him.” The anger and passion was a torrent coming from Liara’s mouth. It took Ashley by surprise.

“Liara, don’t let that kind of thinking flood your mind. Its pure poison, she’d never want that for you… I know that for a fact.” Ashley tried to calm her. “He’s in a much worse place than any of us… he needs forgiveness because he will never forgive himself.”

“I can’t… not right now.” Liara was still angry, but Ashley could see that being updated on Joker’s condition softened her just a little.

“Are you going to be okay or am I going to have to put you in stasis again?” Ashley asked.

“No Chie… I mean Ashley, I’ll behave. I promise you’ll have no problems with me from now on.”

“Good, I wasn’t going to put you back in the cell anyway. Come on, you must be hungry. Let’s get something to eat.” Ash smiled softly at her Asari friend.

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**Human Embassy the Citadel**

Anderson sat at his desk with his head down. *How could I have allowed that to happen? No one wants to take her warning seriously and now she won’t even be around to push them.* As he
pondered what he could’ve done, Admiral Hackett entered his office. Anderson looked up and began a furious tirade against his close friend. “How in the fuck could you risk her against the fucking Geth! THE FUCKING GETH! Mark my words, we’re going to regret this. Damn it Steven, she shouldn’t have been there in the first place.”

“Damn it David, what the hell do you want from me?! I did everything in my power to keep her from those fucking missions! She didn’t help her cause by basically stopping a Geth invasion. The Alliance command wanted her there and like a good marine she went.” They were both hurting. Steven hadn’t known Athena as well as David, but he had grown to love her like a daughter. She was a great Marine and an even better person. Shepard’s loss to the Galaxy was like a supernova explosion in that everyone was feeling it. She killed that monster Sovereign, every human and even most aliens looked up to her. The Galaxy had lost its most capable defender, ambassador and being. “They didn’t want to listen to me… so stupid.” His voice trailed off.

David looked at his best friend and knew that he probably tried his damnedest to keep Athena from those stupid missions. He knew how those arrogant bastards in Alliance Command worked. It didn’t matter what anyone told them. If they had their mind made up on something, they wouldn’t listen to anything short of Reaper landing outside their window. “I know… I made my concern known and they blew me off too. The Councilors are no different. They want the Reaper reports squashed, they want to pretend that Saren and the Geth were the real threat.” David started to rub his temples in frustration. “We’re doomed. When those things come back in force, they’ll mow us down like grass.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way. We can still prepare, even if it is in secret.” Steven countered.

“I know Steven, but losing her just made it a lot more difficult.” David stated as he tried in vain to keep a single tear from sliding down his cheek. “She was my daughter for all tense and purposes. I love her… FUCK it almost makes me want to resign! She was too good for this chicken shit outfit!”

“I know David, I feel the same, but we both know that she’d want us to keep fighting. She’d never want us to quit.” Steven put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. David looked at his best friend and nodded. “How’s Mari doing?”

David looked at his friend and shook his head. “Not good. If it wasn’t for Garrus, I think she’d find a way to assassinate everyone she thought put Athena in that terrible spot.” Steven loved Marianna probably as much as David loved Athena. It hurt to know that she was in such distress and if it would do any good, he would sanction the assassinations himself for her. “Vakarian isn’t doing well either, but he’s like us. He just seems to overwork himself to keep his mind on other things. He’s driving the head honchos at C-Sec nuts. I don’t see him lasting too long in that bureaucratic nightmare of an organization.”

“This is the worst thing that could’ve happened, a whole crew of men, women and aliens that not only knew how to fight the Reapers, but the Geth as well.” Steven shook his head in frustration and in that moment Marianna stormed in with Garrus trying desperately to hold her back.

“How could you let her?!” She grabbed a hold of Steven who had a tear sliding down his cheek now as Mari tried to shake him, but only ended up in an embrace with her friend.

“Alliance Command didn’t want to hear it Mari. They shut me and David down when we protested.” He held her close as she sobbed into his pristine dress uniform.

“How can they all forget what happened here? How could they just sacrifice her like that?” Garrus chimed in with all the frustration that both David and Steven were feeling. “These fuckers
on the Citadel are doing the same thing. They're doing everything that I remember leaving C-Sec for.”

Mari finally pulled away from Steven and looked at David whom she knew would be the most affected by Athena’s death. She could read people like a book and David was putting a brave face, but she could see the anguish he was hiding. “David, how are you holding up?”

“Not well, there’s a huge hole in my life now. I failed her.” Mari looked at his face and could see his struggle to keep his composure. “She was more than my best friend, she was a daughter, a woman with the heart of a Thresher Maw, she was worth more than everything and everyone in the galaxy to me.” The tears came, but David kept his composure and if anything watching him almost break made Mari break. Garrus pulled her tight to him.

“Come on Mari let’s go home.” Garrus lifted her up and held her close to him as she held him just as tightly. “She’ll be alright, Athena was worth more than all of us combined.”

“We know Garrus…” David wiped the tears from his face and eyes. “Oh and Garrus?” Garrus turned to Anderson. “If you or Mari need anything, my office is always open to you.”

“Same goes for me.” Steven added.

Garrus nodded and left with his treasured beauty in his arms. “Thank you Captain, Admiral.”

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A week later… The Citadel Presidium

The funeral for Commander Athena Shepard was as grand a spectacle as any ever seen. There were many speakers who tooted their own horns about how Shepard was the example that everyone should follow. Sparatus had the nerve to call her the greatest Spectre of all and that no one had done so much for the galaxy in their short yet full life. Anderson spoke about how she was the daughter he never had. How there would never be anyone like her again.

Jeff sat there in his chair on the outskirts of the gathering. He was trying to stay out of sight, but he failed miserably as person after person consoled him with their faux shows of kindness. Kaiden and Ashley consoled him, but it felt like they were forcing it. Anderson truly sounded like he cared and actually asked him to see him after the ceremony. It wasn’t until someone surprised him from behind and kissed his cheek tenderly that he felt total compassion coming from another person.

He knew immediately who it was and his eyes began to water instantly. He turned to confirm his suspicion and was assaulted by Marianna’s arms as they wrapped around his chest and pulled him tight to her. “She loved you more than anyone she’s ever loved.” He was sobbing into her arms. This was her sister, the only other person she loved maybe more than him. She let him go and kneeled in front of him. “You are her soul mate, don’t insult her by hating yourself Jeff. She’ll always be here.” She pointed to her heart.

“I… I don’t want her here…” Jeff pointed to his heart. “I want her back.” Mari leaned forward and embraced him again and now he could feel the claw of what he could only assume was Garrus.
“We all do, but we have to move on buddy. She’d want us to, what you’re doing to yourself would kill her all over again.” Garrus always told him the straight scoop. He was always right and Jeff felt so conflicted that Garrus and especially Mari held no animosity toward him. Did he deserve their love? He didn’t think so but Garrus and Mari were the closest thing he had to family outside of Tiptree.

“Here look at this.” Jeff pulled up the holo-vid that Athena had left him on his omni-tool. He hadn’t shown anyone until now. Both Garrus and Mari stood there totally engrossed in the vid. Mari had tears in her eyes as she again wrapped her arms around Jeff. Jeff could hear Garrus’ sub harmonics go and if Turians could cry, Garrus was crying.

“She always sucked at speeches.” Mari mentioned and they all chuckled through their sobs.

“She’s magnificently bad at it.” Jeff added as he leaned his head into the side of Mari’s face. “Thanks… I don’t deserve it, but thanks anyway.”

“You do and we love you.” She kissed his cheek and stood up. She squeezed his shoulder as she started to make her way up toward the stage. “Excuse me Jeff, I have to go start some fireworks.”

Jeff looked puzzled and turned to Garrus. “What does she mean by that?”

“It’s not going to be pretty. You know how Mari is.” Garrus answered.

Garrus stood next to Jeff as they both watched her in her pristine dress uniform walk up to the podium. As Athena’s best friend and de facto older sister, she got to speak last. Jeff smiled at the thought of her and Garrus together. It figures that Athena’s two closest friends on the Normandy would end up together. Mari was right. No matter how many people told him, he wouldn’t forgive himself, but something about Staff Lieutenant Marianna Quiroga, Athena’s sister by life’s circumstance, Athena’s absolute confidant, Athena’s family. She most certainly knew Athena better than anyone, including himself and even Anderson. If Mari was telling him that Athena would be dying at the way he was treating himself, he most certainly took her words like gospel. Mari made him feel a hell of a lot better and he wished he’d seen her sooner. She was an amazing woman in her own right and man was he glad that it was Garrus that she had the hots for. How in the hell does a human find a Turian attractive? He’ll never know and didn’t care one iota. They were meant to be together.

“An orphan, a thief, a warrior, a beautiful being. Every single person on the Normandy would’ve gladly traded places with her. I remember when I first met Athena. She was eleven years old and even though I’m two years older, she towered over me. She gave me this suspicious glare that immediately made me laugh.” Mari started smiling at the memory. “She walked into our hideout, afraid yet confident. I would later find out that this was her first taste of freedom after escaping some horror show in Munro. She looked at me with those beautiful crystal blues and told me ‘if you try anything, I’ll hurt you.’ I couldn’t hold myself and started to laugh uncontrollably. I was actually rolling around the ground in convulsions at the threat of actually being flayed alive by my super biotic sister. She looked so upset at me, I guess most of the others were a little afraid of her and I just saw the innocence in her demeanor. I knew from the first moment I met her that she would never hurt me.” A single tear started to trickle down her face. “An instant later, I caught a glimpse of the first smile I saw on her face. She turned around and started to walk out of the room saying ‘try it and see how funny it is.’ In between bouts of laughter and breathing I got the words ‘Wait, don’t leave! Mamita I’m sorry I laughed.’ She turned and gave this pricelessly puzzled expression. You see, up until that point she’d never been apologized to, she’d never really experienced laughter like I was showing her, fuck a couple of hours before was her first encounter
with real ‘milanesas con pure.’ She’d lived most of her childhood up to that point in a lab where they did some terrible things to this beautiful girl and yet with all of the poking, prodding, cutting and torture they could not break her spirit. They forced her to do terrible things, forced her to kill others and yet she never became that cold hearted assassin that Conatix, BAAiT and Cerberus wanted.” Many in the audience started to mumble to each other as she continued to speak. “She withstood horrors that would have broken us all and even after she escaped that hell hole, society wouldn’t save her. She became a car thief and underground racer along with the other Reds, including me. She learned how to survive in a dark world filled with the scum of the Earth and when things finally got too bad she joined the Alliance and for once a man, an ‘angel in Alliance Blues’ she called him, took care of her, counseled her, and guided her into becoming the Galaxy’s greatest defender.” Mari didn’t even look down at her speech as she continued off script and let her emotions get the better of her. “You too Steven, I know how hard you and David tried to protect her, but those fucks.” She pointed at the rest of the people in his row of Alliance Admirals and Generals that made up the high command. There were gasps from the audience as Mari continued her verbal assault on them. “If there was any justice in this universe, it would’ve been you assholes on the Normandy and not her and her crew. I always thought that the Alliance took care of their own, but it sure looked like you all wanted to get rid of her. I say fuck all of you.” She pointed at them as a couple of Marines started to approach her. She raised her hand to stop them. “Just one more thing please.” The two big grunts stopped, nodded and let her continue. “I’d like to point out that she was civilized society’s greatest champion and yet this society had never given her anything. All it did was take from her, it took her childhood, it took her innocence, it took her family, this galaxy, this society didn’t deserve her, civilization didn’t deserve her, she was too good for this life. It would’ve been better if Sovereign succeeded because with the exception of the Normandy crew, David and Steven… You all deserve to be run over by the freight train that is coming and you choose to ignore, the Reapers will come as she has warned and when they do, we will all go the way of the Protheans and every other galactic civilization that came before and again, go fuck yourselves and…” She looked at the High Command sitting there uncomfortably. “I resign.”

Jeff sat there with his mouth wide open in shock. He watched as Mari ripped off her shoulder bars and threw them on the floor. Wow… just wow. He thought to himself as Garrus was chuckling, his mandibles clicked together in an obvious show of amusement. “Did you know she was going to do that?”

Garrus turned to Jeff. “I did. It’s funny how I just resigned from C-Sec and she would do the same.”

Mari made her way back to them, ignoring everyone except David and Steven. She gave both of them a fierce embrace and nodded. They probably wanted to talk to her after the ceremony about her resignation. Steven looked absolutely floored at the announcement, David not so much. She finally separated from them and joined Jeff and Garrus.

“Jeff we’re going to Flux to get a drink, you wanna join us?” Mari asked him and for the first time he wanted to be with someone other than himself. Mari and Garrus were the two people he felt closest to besides his late Commander. They were the only ones he did not want to lose contact with.

“I will. Dr. Chakwas might be upset that I’m not here when she gets back, but I’m sure she’ll understand.” Mari smiled at him.

“She’s already waiting for us there.” Mari told him and it made Jeff chuckle. “She’s got a table ready for us, drinks and all.”
“Figures you would’ve taken care of that too. You’re something else Mari.” Jeff countered as Mari squeezed his shoulder.

“Karin is hurting too and she wanted to talk over drinks.” Mari answered as Garrus pushed his chair.

“Garrus! Mari!” They could hear Ashley yell after them. “Wait up!”

Jeff turned to see Ashley and Kaiden hurry toward them. “Mari are you crazy?” Kaiden asked.

“Why, because I’m not going to stand by and listen to the horseshit that they’re serving?” Mari didn’t like the fact that during their debriefing he had said he was unsure about anything Athena had claimed about the Reapers. “You can bury the facts all you want Lieutenant, she was right and you dishonored her memory by doubting her.” Kaiden glared at Mari, but did not say a word. He didn’t like the fact that she was calling him out like this.

“How do you know she wasn’t wrong?” Kaiden demanded. “Do you know for sure that what she said was true and not some figment of her imagination?”

Mari turned and could see that Jeff was struggling to get out of his chair. “You sound just like them. You’re gonna make the perfect stooge you asshole.” Jeff exclaimed. “I wish Wrex was here to hear you say that.”

“You shouldn’t even be allowed to be here.” Kaiden looked right at Jeff who if he could would have been kicking Kaiden’s ass all over the place.

“WE DON’T KNOW WHAT SHE SAW!” Ash defended Kaiden to the utter surprise of everyone there.

“WREX SAW! TALI SAW! GARRUS SAW!” Mari screamed at Ashley as she got in her face. Ash stood her ground and glared right back at Mari as well. They glared at each other for what seemed an eternity when Mari finally backed off. “Go fuck your weasel ass Lieutenant Chief, I’m done with both of you.”

“Mari please!” Kaiden pleaded with her as he stepped forward only to have Garrus step in front of him.

“You’re going to back off Lieutenant and leave her alone or me and you are going to have a problem.” Garrus was one big ass Turian and as tough as Kaiden was he didn’t want to start an incident. The menacing hum of Garrus’ sub-harmonics also made it clear that Garrus wouldn’t have any problem causing him some pain. Ashley pulled Kaiden by his shoulder away from Garrus.

“Come on Kaiden, it’s obvious they don’t want anything to do with us.” Ashley pleaded to him and it was apparent that Kaiden was disappointed in how the encounter went. “Give it time… they’ll come around.” They turned around and went back toward the ceremony as Garrus, Jeff and Mari got into the elevator back down toward C-Sec.

Chapter End Notes
This one was rough. Only a couple of more chapters on this one. I think I'll start my ME2 fic on the last chapter of this one.
Chapter Summary

Some Lazerus moments, Jeff back home at Tiptree, Garrus and Marianna causing all sorts of trouble on Omega. Some Garrus smut at end of chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lazerus Station

She’s alive! Miranda couldn’t believe it as she examined what looked like the mummified remains of Commander Athena Shepard. There shouldn’t have been so much left of her. Most of her armor was destroyed and compromised by her re-entry into Alchera’s atmosphere. She should’ve been disintegrated and burned up like most meteors are when they come into contact with any atmosphere at such a high speed. The amount of tissue left was a miracle in its own right.

Her vitals were practically nonexistent, she had no heartbeat, breathing, but her brain had activity, albeit it was almost undetectable. She seemed to have a tiny almost unperceivable electrical pulse every two days. Miranda first saw it about an hour after she had hooked her up to the monitoring equipment as soon as Shepard was brought on board. Miranda almost jumped through the roof of the station. She tried to show Wilson, but the phenomenon did not repeat itself until two days, three hours and four minutes later. She was trying to figure out how that growth at the base of her brain had produced a small yet significant biotic barrier around her perfectly preserved brain and itself. If she really did live and recover from the spacing, this would have to go down as the most incredibly amazing survival response to any lifeform’s exposure to the vacuum of space. Not even a Krogan would’ve survived being spaced, being exposed to the vacuum, performing a violent re-entry into the atmosphere, and last but not least the extremely high speed impact with the icy surface of Alchera.

She has to be the most indestructible being in the galaxy. Miranda began to work on what she would have expected to not even be a whole corpse but ended up being an incredible, viable and almost live being that was already beginning to heal itself. Just the oxygen and moisture in the air of the station was starting to affect her tissue. How is this possible? She thought to herself as she took tissue samples from every part of her body. Examining one of the samples under a microscope revealed that the cellular structure was still intact with the notable exception of any sort of life giving moisture and blood. The tissue was completely dried out, but unlike regular human tissue which becomes very brittle, hers became almost rock hard and now there was a subtle absorption of nutrients from just the air, the fucking light too! Her tissue was basically healing itself at a microscopic snail’s pace and according to her calculations it would take at least 3 years for her to completely heal and possibly regain consciousness. We’re going to have to figure out how to accelerate this process without damaging her. Miranda took a deep breath and let it out slowly. All those things we did to you, all the pain you went through, I can’t imagine you’ll be happy to wake up in a Cerberus facility. She smiled at Shepard’s body. How in the hell are we going to control you without killing you? She paused and took another deep breath and let out a
The illusive man is going to want to see this! This is just too incredible!

She made sure that Shepard’s life pod was functioning and keeping her condition from deteriorating and left the lab to speak with the Illusive Man. She walked into the monitoring room which was set up next door and to her surprise was met by none other than the Illusive Man himself. “So…” He asked expecting her to answer in a much more detailed way than the simple question he asked.

“Her brain may look technically dead, but it is viable and I did catch a very slight neural pulse the day we brought her here and again today. It seems that the growth responsible for her biotics actually saved her.” IM listened intently. Was that a slight grin on his face? “Her healing systems are already working on the rest of her body, granted they need a substantial amount of calories and nutrients and possibly our help to accelerate the process, but she is however slightly… alive.” Miranda couldn’t believe what she was saying, but the evidence didn’t lie. “I’ll need to run some tests on what methods will accelerate her healing process without harming or affecting her adversely.”

“Good. I’m putting you in charge of this project. Wilson will report directly to you. You’ll need to push Wilson a bit as he seems to be somewhat skeptical.” Miranda nodded silently, turned and sat at one of the monitoring stations to begin her project. “Also, see if there is any way to make improvements on what already is a godlike being.”

Miranda turned to look at him with a concerned expression. “Are you sure you don’t want me to insert a control chip? She could destroy this whole station with only minimal effort on her part.”

“Absolutely not! She’s nothing if not a practical person. She’ll understand the predicament Humanity is in and I’m sure she’ll work with us.” IM was adamant.

“God, I hope you’re right.” Miranda didn’t sound convinced. “She might wake up and not be the same person. She could go insane or worse. With the kind of power she wields we should…”

“Miranda… If we fail here then we fail humanity and deserve whatever we get; besides I’m always right on these things. I know her better than she knows herself, plus we’re going to need her at her best which means I want her to be personally vested.” He countered with a confidence or maybe arrogance that actually gave her pause.

“You’re putting a lot on your gut feelings.” Miranda countered.

“She wants the same thing we do. She wants to stop the Reapers and now these Collectors are in the picture kidnapping humans for who knows what. This is right up her alley… you said it yourself. The Council, the Alliance all want the Reaper threat to disappear. She’ll have no choice but to work with us.” He made a good argument. Hopefully Shepard would listen to reason.

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Her memory started to kick in. Jeff reaching for her as the hatch slammed shut, the searing cold, the stars… the sight was magnificently beautiful. She felt herself floating through space tumbling uncontrollably toward the planet. It was so quiet; her thoughts were her only company. She blacked out and the last thing she saw was a bright flash of light and then silence. A few moments later she heard Liara’s voice. The image of that beautiful Asari girl came to mind. She regretted
not pursuing her. Jeff wouldn’t understand she told herself. Yes he would. Her thoughts betrayed what she actually felt.

As she pondered the quandary that was her mind, her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a very familiar pain all over her body. A terribly intense pain she hadn’t felt since she was in Munro. Her entire body felt as if it were on fire with a searing and throbbing pain piercing every millimeter of her physique. “There. On the monitor. Something’s wrong.” A woman’s voice whom she didn’t recognize spoke with some concern. Was she dreaming? Were the Reapers nothing but a nightmare from an overactive imagination of her mind? Athena attempted to open her eyes and let out a silent scream at the excruciating pain. She had no voice and she couldn’t move no matter how hard she willed herself to.

“She’s reacting to outside stimuli. Showing an awareness of her surroundings.” A male voice? She didn’t recognize it either. Through her excruciating pain she began to struggle to wake up and move. Her eyes slowly opened and were now processing a scene all too familiar to her. She was in a lab again. The smell, the sounds were now much more intense than she remembered. She had to get out of there. “Oh my God, Miranda. I think she’s waking up.” In a haze she saw a couple of faces she didn’t recognize and in a flash she saw it. The woman was sporting the Cerberus symbol just below her left shoulder. Her fury began to build as she struggled with a steel determination to move. Her left hand finally moving, it was a slow and useless movement as her arm felt like it weighed a thousand pounds.

“Damn it, Wilson. She’s not ready yet! Give her the sedative!” The woman grabbed her hand and put it back to her side. “Shepard – don’t try to move.” The woman knew her? The image of the Cerberus symbol was burned in her psyche as she continued to struggle. “Just lie still. Try to remain calm.”

“Heart rate is still climbing. Brain activity is off the charts.” What were they doing to her? She could feel the effects of the sedative kick in as she tried her hardest to fight it. “Stats pushing into the red zone. It’s not working!” They were panicking. They should be. She’d show them why they were afraid. When I get up I’m going to make them wish they were never born.

“Another dose. Now!” The woman also sounded frightened. It would seem that they knew what she was capable of. There was no pain she couldn’t fight through; she would continue to struggle until she freed herself. AAAARRGGHHH! I will... I... will... I wi... The second dose started to take effect and she felt herself slipping from consciousness.

“Heart rate dropping. Stats falling back into normal ranges.” She could still hear them talk to one another.

“That was too close. We almost lost her.” The woman sounded very concerned. “I told you your estimates were off. Run the numbers again.” She heard the woman bark orders as she passed into the realm of the unconscious.

“Oh, maybe I need to compensate for her incredible healing capacity.” Wilson mentioned. “If her neuro pathways or her biotic systems were fully healed and connected, she probably would’ve killed us.”

“She’s going to wake soon enough. To lose her now would’ve been inexcusable. I’ll need to inform the Illusive Man. Make sure you let me see those numbers before you continue.” Miranda thought about what she said. In reality all this might’ve done is slow down her project just a bit, but there was no way Shepard was dying. Wilson didn’t need to know that especially since she had discovered he was working for the Shadow Broker. The Illusive Man knew and agreed with her that he be allowed to continue to assist her while all of his communications were secretly
monitored. In reality, all they needed from Wilson was for him to do his job which lately he’d been rather incompetent at. Miranda knew of his agreement with the Shadow Broker to give Shepard’s body to the Collectors. She watched him with barely veiled disgust as Wilson left the lab and went to the monitoring room next door to run the numbers Miranda told him were off.

Miranda walked over to Shepard, lying there peacefully once more. “Athena Shepard… it looks like you’re our last best hope again.” She whispered as she examined her flawless body. The scars where the new cybernetic implants were installed were completely healed over. She was a magnificent woman by all standards. She was completely healed except for the neural pathways that controlled movement and her biotic organ. They were the last things she worked on and seemed to be adjusting and healing around the new implants. Her bone, muscle and skin weaves had repaired themselves in such a thorough way that she was now another sixty pounds of dense muscle, bone and skin heavier than before. It was incredible to witness such a magnificent example of humankind. Sometimes Miranda would check the reports to make sure she was human and they always came back the same. She was human, her DNA proved it, but she was unlike any human ever born on the face of the Earth. Her lines were beautiful, lean and muscular. She had the curves and shape of an athletic beauty and the strength of a… Greek Goddess.

Miranda, ever willing to take up seemingly impossible challenges, had also figured out how to increase her biotic power through an experimental implant designed specifically to work with her unique biotic organ. She called it the LS Implant, the S stood for Shepard. Instead of tapping into the nervous system like normal implants did, this one tapped into her biotic organ via its main connection pathway to her spinal nerve. If her calculations were correct, it literally doubled her already immense biotic power. If she could only get her hands on a Savant amplifier, Athena would probably be able to take out a dreadnought all by herself. She literally would make her namesake proud. Heh… Zeus would really be proud of you. Let’s hope you will be our Goddess of Wisdom and War, we’re going to need nothing less than that to stop these monsters.

Miranda continued to examine her and was so deeply affected that she almost let out a sob. She could feel her eyes begin to fill with tears. She quickly wiped her eyes and face so that no one would see. She thought about how she herself had been genetically created to be perfect and how she suffered because of her father. She thought about the video of little Shepard after her excruciating weave surgeries. How she was just used as a guinea pig and survived only because of her unnatural healing ability. Shepard was a creation of nature with ungodly power. She was nature’s organic champion mixed in with purposed science that only made her more deadly. She was perfect. She could physically take out a Krogan or two and her biotics were so off the charts that she could probably take on ten Asari Matriarchs with little problems. She killed a few Thresher Maws and a bona fide Reaper for God’s sake! It looked like whatever higher power there was had put Shepard in the universe to defend the galaxy. Too bad none of the idiots in power wanted to listen to her.

Tiptree Colony – Six Months before

“Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow at 6… yes I’ll look at it tomorrow and calibrate it for you.” It was a funny thing being grounded Jeff thought. The fact that he they wouldn’t let him fly didn’t stop some of the Alliance pilots from coming to him to get their controls calibrated by him. Granted it
was only shuttles, but at least he got to fly a little, even if it was ‘below the radar.’ He thought about how incredibly hypocritical the Alliance was being with him. While some of the crew had moved on, accepting the mainstream story about Saren and the Geth, those that didn’t were put in positions of isolation and misery. Saburo had left the Alliance and disappeared. His sister was heartbroken and had called Jeff to see if he could find out where he went. It was to no avail as he had completely and probably with help, dropped off the grid. Jeff was on the verge himself of resigning like Marianna did, but he felt that he could be more of a thorn by staying in and that thought made him smile.

Jeff turned at the sound of a whining engine and grinned as he watched his sister ride her brand new dirt bike through the obstacle course they had built together. She was a natural and watching her reminded him of the vids of Athena when she was younger. She rode that dirt bike with not only supreme skill and confidence, but also with reckless abandon. “Hilary! You’re going to give me a heart attack.” He yelled out.

“That don’t watch.” She yelled back as she launched over one of the ramps a good thirty feet into the air. He shook his head as she let go of the handle bars, folded her arms and looked at him with a smug smile on her face as she flew through the air.

Ever since he was grounded he decided to spend his time with his family and especially his sister. She was always bragging that she was a better pilot than him and how when she got to join the academy, she was going to break all of his records. Jeff loved her enthusiasm, but a part of him wanted her not to go. The Alliance wasn’t everything she thought it was. They sure had disappointed him and even though he had passed his last psyche evaluation six months ago, they would not clear him to fly. It was total bullshit, both Anderson and Hackett tried to get him reinstated to no avail. They had pissed off way too many of the higher ups in Alliance HQ that anything they said fell on deaf ears. When they continued to screw with him and tried to assign him to desk duty on Earth, he decided to go on sick leave with the help of Dr. Chakwas. She recommended he be allowed to go home and recover. When she insisted, they relinquished and allowed him to go to Tiptree and be with his family for a month. He had decided that he would resign at the end of the month and tell them to fuck off.

He was actually content for the first time in a long time. He missed his Goddess, but he thought of her often and felt a warmth in his heart at all of the good times they shared together. He continued to watch his sister as she just tore up the track. Every time she hit a bump or jump or anything jarring, he would just call out which bone he’d probably shatter just attempting the maneuver his sister was performing so effortlessly.

Hilary had finally had enough and stopped her bike right in front of him. “You’re coming to the race tomorrow, right?” She looked at him with those innocent blues.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world sis. You look great by the way.” He answered happily. “I feel bad for the other racers.”

The enthusiastic smile she gave him made him smile as well. “Thanks bro.”

Athena had left half of everything she had to him and the other half to Marianna. Mari had also informed him that he would be receiving an income from a few of the EEZO, platinum, palladium and iridium mines that they had kept secret from the Alliance. Marianna had sold the information to several mining companies and they were now reaping some very substantial profits from the royalties. Jeff wanted to make sure that his family in Tiptree was taken care of. Losing Athena had made him realize how important they were to him even as he always bitched about them. His father was a pain in the ass, but his sister Hilary was his favorite person in the galaxy. He would
do what he could for them. He got himself a new wheelchair and he also splurged and got himself a pair of powered leg braces that allowed him a lot more freedom than the crutches he was used to. He kept in touch with Mari and Garrus, but he had not been able to get in contact with them in the last month. The last time he had spoken to them Mari had said that they were headed to that cesspit called Omega. Why they were going there he didn’t know and they wouldn’t tell him no matter how much he asked. They were his closest friends and he wished that they were there with him. He was a little concerned for them, but Garrus was a walking Turian destroyer while Mari could charm her way out of the Krogan DMZ.

Hilary was about to start another lap when her face changed to one of puzzlement and she directed his eyes behind him. Jeff turned to see a clean cut and professional looking man in a black suit walking toward him. He reached for his phalanx pistol and drew down on the man. “Not a step closer.” Jeff glared at the man and noticed that on the lapel of his suit he had a Cerberus pin. The man put his hands up to show that he wasn’t armed and his calm face basically revealed to Jeff that this guy had been through this kind of negotiation before. “Give me a reason to not shoot your Cerberus ass.”

The man didn’t look surprised at all. With one hand he motioned to his pocket. “May I?”

“I swear if you so much as sneeze, I’ll put a round in you. Go ahead.” Jeff countered as he motioned Hilary to get behind him. She drove her bike behind him and stared at the well-dressed man. The man chuckled as he reached into his front coat pocket and pulled out a small box and put it down in front of him.

“You have a week to think about the offer. Good day.” The man turned and started to walk away.

“Wait! What do you want?” Jeff yelled as he lowered his pistol.

“I was told to deliver that and give you the message I gave you. No more, no less.” The man continued to walk away.

Jeff looked a little frightened at the box sitting there in front of him. He looked up and the man was gone. That guy could’ve probably killed me and Hilary no sweat. He turned back around and saw that Hilary had gotten off her bike and started towards the mysterious little box. “Hilary stop! Don’t go near it!” She turned and saw his frightened expression. She immediately backed off and got behind him again.

“What is it bro? Do you know that guy?” It was good that she picked up on his fear he thought.

“Let’s just say I know who he works for and he’s not a nice person.”

“Well are you going to open the box?”

Jeff had brought up the scanning function on his Omni-tool and scanned the box for explosives or any other type of trap. The scan revealed that the box was clear and that there was holodisk inside. He took the box and put it in his satchel. “It’s probably better that you don’t see what’s in the message.”

“Why?” She asked.

“When it comes to these people, the less you know, the better.” She rolled her eyes as she got back on her bike.

“It’s probably not as bad as you think. If he wanted to hurt us, he would’ve.” Hilary was so nonchalant as she jump cranked her dirt bike and spun the rear tire, throwing dirt all over him on
her way back onto the track.

She did make sense though. So, as he watched her totally lose herself navigating her dirt bike around the track, he pulled out the disc synced it to his Omni-tool. He opened up his home screen and then found the file on the holodisc. He held his breath as he saw the name… ‘Athena.’ He opened up the file and started to read.

Mr. Moreau,

I hope this letter finds you well. Considering the circumstances we are now faced with and the state of the Galaxy, I wish to invite you to join our exclusive group. I know that our relationship in the past has not been very amicable, but I’m sure that we can rectify this with the offer that I am giving you. We’ve been aware for quite some time that you have been grounded from flight operations and can assure you that you will not be flying for the Alliance anytime soon. We agree wholeheartedly with Commander Shepard’s beliefs that the Reapers are the real threat to the Galaxy and that Saren and Geth were nothing but tools. We also have reliable information that a threat much more serious than the rogue Spectre is looming over us all. Your service record and accolades are the reasons we would like you to be the chief pilot of one of our new warships. Needless to say I will not elaborate on anything until you accept our offer. You have one week from today to give us your answer. If you decide not to join us we understand, but we want to remind you that both the Alliance and the Council are doing nothing about the Reaper threat. If you believe that the Reaper threat is real, then we will be happy to have you join us in our fight against them not just for humanity, but for the entire galaxy. If not then this will be the last and only time we will communicate with you. If you decide that you’d like to be a part of our fight against the Reapers, then a chartered shuttle to the Citadel will be waiting for you at the starport this Sunday between five and six pm galactic standard time. You’ve already been cleared for the departure and we will forward further instructions once you reach the Citadel.

Respectfully,

Operative L

PS. One more thing. You will be working alongside some people you’ve known and in particular one who wouldn’t work with us if you weren’t here. So please make the right decision and join us. Thank you for your time.

They wanted him to fly for them? Were they crazy? Maybe it was a trap or they were gathering the remnants of the team that did so much damage to their operations. Did they really think that he would accept their offer? They were right though. Saren and the Geth were in the news all the time; documentaries about them were on all the time. There was no mention of Sovereign and the Reapers, no mention of Athena’s battle with that monster in the presidium. Athena was right and he knew it to his core. Both Kaiden and Ashley had swallowed the Council’s and Alliance’s crap about Athena being misled by Saren. Just thinking about them made his blood begin to boil. They were promptly promoted and sent back out to their next assignments without so much as peep about his situation. The only difference between them and him was that he didn’t accept the Alliance’s crap about Saren and the Geth. Could it hurt to just take a look at what they wanted him to do?

“Are you okay bro.?” He didn’t notice that Hilary had once again stopped in front of him. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”
“It looks like I’m going to fly again.” Jeff responded hesitantly as his stomach began to tighten at the thought.

“That’s great bro.!” She looked so excited as she jumped off the bike and ran to him. She promptly gave him a ferociously tender hug. She could feel him tense up though as she pulled away and stood in front of him. “Why do you look so… blah?” She asked with her hands on her hips in an almost Athena-like interrogation pose.

“It’s just that I didn’t think they would ever let me fly again.” He knew that the Alliance would never let him fly again and Hilary didn’t need to know that it was Cerberus he would be flying for.

“So when are you leaving?”

“Sunday… A chartered shuttle is going to be waiting for me at the starport.”

Hilary hopped up and down while clapping her hands. “Ooooh… This is so exciting!” Jeff chuckled at his little sister and his thoughts drifted to Athena again. Would she approve of this? In the end he felt that she would. The fate of the entire Galaxy was under the threat of annihilation. If Cerberus was the only group doing anything about it, then she would’ve at least investigated and maybe then joined them as well. “Come on bro. Let’s go celebrate with some ice cream.”

Hilary always seemed to be able to make him smile and forget about all of the shit that was going on in his life. He watched her as she shot out like a bat out of hell toward the house. She was fearless and damn if she wasn’t one hell of a talented rider. If she decided she was going to be a pilot for the Alliance, she might well break all of his records at the academy, maybe even challenge some of Athena’s as well. Hilary would’ve loved her. They were so alike it was scary.

He felt so much better now. Thinking of his lost love only made him smile now. Mari was right when she said that she would always be in his heart. He would try and contact Mari and Garrus before he left. Hopefully they would answer and maybe they could help steer him in the right direction.

It was the thought of losing Hilary and his dad that made up his mind for him. He would go to the Citadel and see what Cerberus was up to. If they were legit, he would join them with no hesitation. Cerberus had made Athena’s life a living hell when they had her, but sometimes you need to deal with the devil to save the world and everything in it. It was a decision he didn’t make lightly, but it had to be made. If it took a bunch of terrorists to stop the Reapers, than damn it he would be a fucking terrorist.

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Omega

“Did you have to tell that Krogan that the Vorcha had more brains than any of them and should be running the Bloodpack?” Marianna was running through the dark and vorcha infested alleys with Garrus right behind her as rounds whizzed by.

“Yeah you’re one to talk.” He huffed. “I didn’t know Batarian eyeballs were a delicacy on
“Earth.” Garrus actually started to chuckle. “Good one by the way.”

“Maybe we should’ve thought this out a little before we pissed off those idiots.” She countered back as she herself chuckled.

“Would you have preferred a quiet night at home?” Garrus joked as a round whizzed by his head.

“Who says the night would’ve been quiet?” They continued to run as fast as they could until they came up on a T intersection.

“Split!” He yelled and Marianna instinctively turned left while he went right. Mari pulled out her custom silenced Phalanx heavy pistol as she turned another corner and put her decoy holo box behind a garbage pile. She turned on her cloaking field and then waited for a few seconds and activated the decoy.

“There she is!” Mari was on her Omni-tool and manipulated the holo to take off running down the alley directly across from her. The projector’s range was limited, but it only needed to show her pursuers what direction she was going. As soon as she felt it had accomplished said task, Mari turned it off. Seconds later three big burly Batarians rounded the corner and paused at the entrance of the alley. One of them got on his communicator. “I think we got her. This alley leads to a dead end. What do you want us to do?”

Mari’s cloaking field kept her hidden from view and she was so close to them that she could hear the screams on the other end of that conversation, it was obvious that whoever it was they wanted them to go after her. Mari watched as one of the Batarians kicked a poor Vorcha that was obviously injured. It made her blood boil as she sighted down on them from the shadows. Mari waited for them to finish their conversations and as soon as they turned to go down the alley, she let out three quick shots in succession. Three shots, one hole in the back of each of her Batarian pursuer’s heads. She quickly picked up her decoy and gave the poor Vorcha a shot of medigel. The Vorcha who was huddled in fear of her finally looked at her with an almost puzzled look. “You’re welcome.” She told it gently and quickly made her way down the alley toward their safe house. The poor Vorcha already feeling better watched her cloak again as she ran off in the distance.

Garrus pulled out a couple of frag grenades as he rounded another corner. He waited there and the big Krogan didn’t disappoint. The problem most Krogan had was their incredible sense of indestructability. All those secondary and tertiary organs made them very hard to kill, but a shot to the knee could cripple them just as easily as a Turian, Human or Salarian could be. Granted their regenerative ability allowed them to heal almost any injury, but that wasn’t instantaneous and a kill shot would down a Krogan as quickly as any other race.

His Omni-tool displayed the strong biotic barrier that was being generated by the big boy. Great, a battlemaster, Garm is going to be livid when I take this guy out. He set the grenades with a contact fuse and lobbed them from cover. They landed directly on top of the pissed off Krogan. The explosions took town his barrier and the next two shots from his sniper rifle took out his legs. The inferno rounds were burning through its tissues at over a thousand degrees. The Krogan dropped to his knees trying to see where Garrus was. By the time he saw the glint of Garrus’ scope, a high velocity round smashed through his boney crest and into his brain. The Krogan fell dead on its face with an enormous hole in its head, the smell of burning flesh permeating the air.

Without pausing, Garrus again turned and quickly navigated the alleys toward the safe house. He ran as fast as he could with only Marianna’s safety in his thoughts. What a woman! Next to Athena and Ashley, she was the toughest human he had ever dealt with and man did she know him. She was a deadly infiltrator. Not too bad in a straight up fight, but if you couldn’t see her,
you were dead. He made sure to teach her as much as he could and practiced with her relentlessly. She’d learned a lot from him and was unrecognizable as a combatant now. She was deadly all around, but how she handled that pistol was amazing. She was the best shot he had ever seen with that thing and that included Athena. He was glad that she came with him to Omega, but he worried nonstop about her as he was sure that she did for him.

He never thought that he would’ve fallen in love with a human woman, but she was his soulmate in every way but race. She partied even harder than he did and worked just as hard. When he looked at her it was as if he was looking in a mirror. Thinking of her made him run faster, jump higher and just move more quickly until he finally got to his final destination. He quickly entered and found her sitting on the couch with her feet up on the coffee table.

“Hey sexy… what took you so long?” She asked him in a way that made him shake his head and chuckle.

“Next time you go right and I’ll go le…” He countered as she jumped into his arms and interrupted him with a passionate kiss to his mouth.

“Did you get him?” She asked as he carried her back to the couch.

“Garm is going to be pissed. Heh… Krogans are hard to replace and I think that leaves just five more in his gang here on Omega.” He sat down with her still in his arms as she lightly massaged the back of his mandible earning her a suggestive set of involuntary clicks from him. “Oh… ahhh… I love when you do that.” She laughed.

“Well aren’t you going to ask me how I did?” She stopped massaging his mandible which caused him to growl.

“Three Blue Sun mooks chasing your slippery, yet exquisitely perfect ass through those dark alleys didn’t worry me in the least.” Garrus gazed at his petite and beautiful Human lover. “I…” She was already nibbling his mouth lightly and the sensation caused him to stutter as he let her go and she immediately straddled him. He let out a sad sigh. “I wish she was here.”

Mari wrapped her arms around his nape and squeezed herself tighter to him. “Me too.” She sighed into his neck. “We should probably leave Omega before those idiots decide to do something smart like joining forces.”

“Heh… yeah that would be something.” Garrus wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. “We would really have to piss them off.”

“I hate how they treat the Vorcha here… especially that bitch Aria.” Marianna commented as her thoughts shifted to the injured Vorcha in the alley. “Everyone here seems to consider them nothing more than useful vermin to be discarded like garbage when their use is up.” She pulled herself back to look him in the eye. “We should do something for them.”

“Let’s focus on one problem at a time. Aria is in a different league than these mercs. We’d have to approach her differently.” Garrus looked at her affectionately. Only Mari could see the Vorcha in such a sympathetic way. She was right though, they were treated worse than vermin. “If we got on her bad side, we wouldn’t last very long here.”

“Yeah, I know. I talked to the Patriarch and listened to him tell his story of how Aria basically destroyed him and took over Omega from him. It’s hard to believe how an Asari could take on a Krogan like that and win.” Mari continued. “I guess Biotics must count for a lot.”
“You talked to the Patriarch?” Garrus laughed. “How in the hell did you get an audience?”

“You know that all I have to do is shake what I got and people just want to talk to me.” She shrugged her shoulders in faux innocence.

Just picturing her dancing made Garrus hot for her. “Watching you dance makes me want to do dirty things to you, talking is not one of them.”

“Oh really? So if did this…” She jumped off of him and started to do a really goofy dance.

“Okay now you really are making me want to talk to you.” He chuckled as she jumped back into his arms. He held her close as she again began to kiss him voraciously. He reciprocated in kind and his long slithery tongue licked along the base of her neck causing her to groan into his mandible.

She then began to run her own tongue along his mandible and that got him clicking involuntarily again. “Somebody likes me.” She whispered at how good his tongue felt. “Maybe your tongue can show me how much.”

“Oh fuck Mari! You’re a damn temptress!” Garrus hissed intermittently between clicks. He was so turned on by her that he lost all control and switched their position with a growl and ripped off her pants with his claws.

“Mmmmmm… it’s going to be rough tonight?” She moaned like the vixen she was and Garrus buried his face in between her legs. His long tongue doing things to her womanhood that sent shivers down her spine. “Oh baby! Yeah… that’s it mmmmmm…” Her sensual moans and groans were making him even more turned on. “Come on you fucking lizard… I want you to fuck me!”

She grabbed a hold of his frills and pulled him up toward her.

Garrus wasn’t a typical Turian in that his Turianhood was much thicker than most of his brethren. It was as hard and smooth as polished glass. Human males were usually thicker than Turian males, but Garrus was the exception. When he entered Mari’s beautiful womanhood she moaned in such a way that made Garrus start to pump violently into her. “You like that little girl?” He mockingly asked her as she reached up and grabbed the back of his mandibles and pulled him down toward her. It hurt, but the sight of her in pure ecstasy caused him to hiss and bare his teeth. She let go and grabbed the back of his neck and pulled herself up as he continued to pump like a jackhammer just as she bit his lower lip.

He fell on his back on the floor and now she was on top of him, basically twerking on his Turian staff. He leaned up on his elbows and worked his tongue onto her neck. “You like that… huh…”

“Yes!” He moaned and it almost came out as a whimper. “Please don’t stop.”

“Say my name!” She demanded without slowing down.

“Mariann… aaaaah!” Garrus was in pure ecstasy as he felt her warm and wet womanhood slide up and down so effortlessly on his Turian maleness.

She chuckled at him as he bared his teeth and let out a hiss of pleasure. “Come for me baby. Come on.” She egged him on like if he was a little kid and it totally overwhelmed his restraint as his claws dug into her shoulders. She didn’t even register the pain as she was used to his claws and knew that playing with him usually drew some kind of blood on her part.

“Mari please… oh… shit!” She could feel him throb as she jumped off and sat on his face while grabbing his maleness with both hands. She began to pump violently as he licked her womanhood
with that exquisite tongue of his. “Mari… oh fuck! I’m comin… aaaaah!”

“That’s it baby… come for meeeee….. oh shit… Garrus!” She crossed her legs behind his neck and pulled his face tighter into her womanhood as the both spilled over the precipice of ecstasy. They both jerked and writhed as their bodies loss control for that moment until she sat back up with him still under her. She looked at his maleness and unlike humans, it was always hard. It was incredibly sensitive now so she couldn’t even blow air on it for at least a couple of minutes until he recovered. She squeezed her legs a little tighter. “I hope you don’t think we’re done here lizard.” She felt his tongue start working again as he struggled to take a breath. “Mmmmm… this is going to be a long night for you.” He started to chuckle into her womanhood as he pulled her tighter onto his tongue.

“You’re impossib… oh… damn you!” Now it was her turn to chuckle as she took his manhood into her mouth.

They would continue like this all night until exhaustion took them. Mari cuddled into his arms as they both fell asleep on their bed and didn’t wake well into the afternoon the next day.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter. Getting ready to start the ME2 stuff. As a disclaimer (which I probably should've done earlier.) Mass Effect is the sole property of Electronic Arts and Origin. This is a work of fan fiction and I just want to play around with their universe that's all.
Garrus slowly opened his eyes as he woke from his blissful slumber. Marianna’s arm and leg were draped over him as if she was afraid to not feel him there. Her soft and rhythmic breathing bringing him more comfort than he felt he deserved. Never in his life did he ever think that he would’ve fallen for a human woman and yet she was everything he ever wanted in a mate. Loving, tough and sharp as a Turian Dagger. He slowly followed the cuts and abrasions left on her beautiful porcelain skin by his claws and teeth. He began to trace them gently with his free claw and was rewarded with a purring sigh that made him smile. “It’s too early.” She mumbled with her eyes still closed.

He didn’t answer and continued to watch her. She was something else. She had to take a shot of epinephrine right after their raunchy night because she got a little out of hand with him. She was so fearless that it caught him off guard when she bit his neck and actually caused him to bleed a little. His dextro based blood in her levo based mouth was not a good idea, but they had planned for it. That quick shot made everything better, but not before he took a picture of her face all blown up like a balloon. They both laughed and she made sure to get him back the time she squeezed his head in between her moistness. The picture of Garrus’ neck and mandible expanded like he was a bull frog was absolutely priceless. He had his own supply of Turian epinephrine just in case as well, and he was back to normal quite quickly. They both knew they were playing a dangerous game, but they didn’t care. He wanted to be with her all the time, talk to her, fight with her, and sleep with her. She was incredible. It was just her and him now. They were the only ones left after Sidonis’ betrayed the team they had built to fight the criminal element on Omega. It still made him angry and he swore to himself that he would track him down one day and give him what he deserved.

“Mmmmmmmmm…” Mari’s eyes opened slowly and gazed lazily at him. “Come on Rooroo, it’s so fucking early.” She pulled herself tighter to him and the wonderful feeling of her warm skin on his plates caused him to wrap his arms around her.

“Rooroo?” Her scent was starting overwhelm his senses.

“Yeah, I like it better than that Archangel crap everyone came up with and you definitely look like a Rooroo.” The soft skin of her face felt like velvet as she snuggled it into the side of his mandible, causing that uncontrollable clicking that she seemed to live for.

Garrus chuckled at her as he sat up and gently pulled himself out of bed. “Come on. Its better we get out of here before they find us.”
Mari’s mood changed completely. She slid quickly out of the bed and began to quickly dress herself. “You think that maybe we can get off this fucking dump and take a little break on the Citadel?”

“I have to talk to Gavorn about a favor I owe him. Why don’t you fly ahead and I’ll join you afterwards.”

She glared at him with a look that could penetrate silaris armor. “Are you kidding me? You think…”

“Can’t use a human for this favor. He wants me to spy on the Bloodpack Vorcha. No offense, but you’re too pretty for this job.” He interrupted her. “Gavorn thinks that the Bloodpack might be moving in on Aria’s turf.” She didn’t budge as she narrowed her eyes and intensified her glare. “Look, I swear I’ll see you as soon as I’m done.”

“I’m not leaving until you do.” She answered. “No fucking way I’m leaving here without you.”

She continued to glare at him. “I swear if he’s asking you to help him with his anti-Vorcha brutality, I’ll kill him on principal.”

Garrus laughed and he put his hands up to defend himself from her verbal assault. “Okay, okay, I’ll talk to Gavorn while you get us a shuttle to get out of here for a while…” Now she had her hands on her hips like she knew he was up to something. He let out a sigh of resignation. “I’ll tell him I’m not interested okay?”

The result was immediate as she jumped into his arms and bit his mandible. “I’ll meet you at the star port.” She cupped his jaw and turned his head towards her. “Don’t keep me waiting too long.” She raked her teeth along his mandible causing his breath to hitch. She then promptly jumped out of his arms and went to the bathroom.

“I’ll be there early.” He answered with a slight quiver in his voice.

“I know.” She answered from inside the bathroom with such a smug tone that it made him chuckle.

Garrus quickly put on his armor and headed out the door while Mari got ready to go to the port.

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Two hours later – Docking Bay 6

She looked around desperately to see if she could spot him. She activated her omni-tool again. “Garrus, where the fuck are you?” She received no reply and she really started to worry. The freighter captain would leave without them in a heartbeat.

“We’re leaving. I’m sorry, but this cargo can’t wait.” The gruff Batarian told her.

Damn it! He’s probably in trouble again! She thought to herself. “Fine go. I’ll find another ride to the Citadel.”
As she started to make her way back towards the transit area of the station she noticed two Blue Suns mercs running at full tilt toward something at the far end of the transit area. As she came out of the docks and the space opened up, she noticed a very sizable force of not only Blue Sun mercs, but Bloodpack and Eclipse mercs as well. They all seemed to be firing at the same thing and they were all making a terrible mess of things with innocent people scattering out of the way. Some of them couldn’t get out of the way quick enough and got hit. The mercs didn’t give a shit about hitting any innocent that got in their way and of course this made Mari’s blood boil.

There were so many mercs that they made it very difficult to see what they were shooting at. Then as she made her way around their rear she saw a small flash of blue and then a bright flash as an eclipse merc’s head exploded from the impact of a high velocity round. There was no doubt in her mind now. They had Garrus trapped and outgunned by at least thirty to one. *Fuck… I gotta distract these assholes so he can make a getaway.*

She pulled out her pistols and before they caught on to her rear assault, she had taken out six mercs. Once they saw her and turned, two more lost their heads to Garrus’ pinpoint accuracy. She didn’t wait around for their reactions and took off like a bat out of hell down an alley and didn’t look back. She could still hear rounds after rounds being fired. As she ran, she spotted one of Aria’s men getting out of a skycar to go into a small shop. He left it running; probably thinking that no one would be stupid enough to take it. Well the poor bastard hadn’t counted on desperation. No sooner had he entered the shop than she was hopping into the driver’s seat. She quickly closed the door and launched vertically, leaving the group of mercs chasing her in the rear view cam. She heard some of their gunfire hit the Skycar as she turned toward the direction of where she thought Garrus was. She was there in a few seconds and spotted Garrus taking cover behind a pillar. “GARRUS! COME ON!” She yelled into her omni-tool. He looked up to see her just as she set down behind a bunch of crates that provided cover for the car. She got out of the car and provided covering fire for Garrus to get his over to where she was. He got hit twice with the second hit taking down his barrier.

“Did I ever tell you how much I love you?” Garrus quickly got into the passenger seat while Marianna drove them out of the kill zone. The skycar took a lot of hits and she could feel it starting to fail.

“We gotta find a place to land; this thing isn’t going to last long.” She had her hands full just trying to keep the skycar airborne.

“Shit… there’s a gunship on our ass.” Garrus commented as rounds from the gunship’s cannon started to decimate the car. It completely failed and started to go down in a blaze.

Mari continued to desperately control the descent as much as she could, but she still ended up crash landing on a bridge leading to an abandoned office complex. They both jumped out of the car and made a beeline for the complex as the car exploded in a blinding fireball. Garrus and Mari ran like their lives depended on it and made it to a strong pillar that provided cover. Garrus pulled out his rifle once again and loaded it with an armor piercing round. “You better make that shot count.” Mari commented as she was hunched over and out of breath.

“Yeah this will suck if miss.” Garrus countered. He waited till the gunships autocannon stopped firing, probably because the idiot using it caused it to overheat. Garrus exposed himself slightly and coolly took aim at the weakest part of the barrier. Just above the jet intakes was a spot where the barrier didn’t block the required intake of air for the jet. He squeezed the trigger and the round struck true causing pieces of the armor plate to get sucked into the jet intake. The effect was immediate as the gunship lost control and had to disengage to find a place to land.
Garrus and Mari took a breath as they scouted the area only to learn that there was only one way out. Mari turned on her infiltrator stealth field and to her dismay found that their only way out was already packed with those murderous mercs. A couple of mercs got a little too close to her and were taken out by Garrus’ supremely accurate sniper fire.

She returned to him with a look of dread on her face. “There’s… too many of them. I think we’re…” Garrus quickly pulled her into an embrace.

“Don’t think like that. We’ll figure something out.” Garrus could feel her trembling. “They’ll never get across that bridge and what better place to teach you how to operate my real girlfriend.” He tried to lighten the mood and it did cause her to chuckle into his chest.

It was wishful thinking, but Garrus was absolutely going to make those mercs pay for every centimeter they tried to move across that bridge and he knew that Mari would do so as well. It was a double edged sword. They couldn’t get out, but the mercs had no cover to come in and Garrus swore he would drop every one of them if they tried.

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August 6th 2185 – Minute Man Station

Working for Cerberus wasn’t such a bad gig. They paid well and actually helped him become more independent. They performed a surgical operation that helped strengthen Jeff’s bones to the point where he didn’t need to use crutches or a wheel chair anymore. They were still only about a quarter as strong as normal human bones, but that was a huge improvement over what they were before. He flew a shuttle for them and made supply runs to the Citadel or any other place they needed him to go. He also helped the Cerberus pilots in calibrating their controls to fit their particular flying styles. He did such a good job that the Illusive Man actually asked to him to write and instruction manual on the subject. He flew and was now rated at 4g’s which put him at the lower end of the scale for most pilots, but damn if he didn’t enjoy lowering those dampeners every now and again. It felt like a regular job and he got to go home one weekend a month. This was much better and more than the Alliance had ever done for him and he was assured the lead pilot position of a new Cerberus Frigate. He didn’t hold his breath, but everything they promised him had come to fruition.

He was standing at docking bay #3, checking the manifest for his next run to the Citadel when he heard a loud thud in bay #2. He made his way quickly there and watched as Jacob and Miranda exited a shuttle. They looked like they got their asses handed to them. Miranda’s eye was closed shut and Jacob looked a little worn out, but he still looked like he was in one hell of a fight. Miranda leaned on Jacob’s shoulder as they limped into the command center and they were no doubt going to have to explain some serious shit to the Illusive Man. Seconds later, four big Cerberus bruisers in full battle armor went into the shuttle. Two of them had pulled out another man who Jeff did not recognize. He was restrained and had a look of terror on his face. It puzzled Jeff because the man was wearing a Cerberus uniform. Jeff shrugged his shoulders and chuckled a bit as he continued to review his manifest. They sure know how to piss people off. He thought. A minute later the other two fully armored men came out with another Cerberus stranger who looked battered and injured, but he was actually being helped out of the shuttle and they were headed toward the medical bay. What the fuck happened?
It took him a good fifteen minutes to verify everything on the manifest and the several personnel that were going to the Citadel with him. He did his preflight inspection and checks and strapped in to prepare for launch. “Mr. Moreau please report to the communication room. Mr. Moreau please report to the communication room.” He heard come over the radio, it was Miranda. His hairs stood on end. That woman sent chills down his spine at how cold she could be. When she first interviewed him and told him of his duties, she made it very clear that she didn’t suffer insubordination or back talk. Her sense of humor was non-existent. It was a good thing that Jacob was around because she needed a foil. He was serious, but was easy to get along with. What the hell did they want?

“On my way.” He answered as he powered down the engines of the shuttle and unstrapped himself. Jeff slowly made his way to the communications room. It was a revelation to be able to walk there without any discomfort and he still couldn’t believe that he didn’t need crutches anymore. His leg muscles were getting stronger as were his arms, chest and back. The pain he had felt immediately after the procedure was more than worth it. When he finally got to the communication room, both Jacob and Miranda were patched in to the Illusive Man.

“She wouldn’t listen.” Miranda said with a look of disdain. “She said she would never work for us. She said she’d kill us if she ever saw us again.” A closer look revealed some pretty serious injuries on both Miranda and Jacob. He looked at them closely and wondered who could put the whooping on two people who could each put at least ten marines in the hospital or morgue. “I told you she needed a control chip.” Miranda looked really frustrated and upset.

“Mr. Moreau, please step into the quantum entangler.” This was the Illusive Man. “We are going to need your input.” Jeff stepped into the view of the Illusive Man. “It’s good to see you walking around Mr. Moreau. How do you feel?”

“I’m feeling good sir. I can’t thank you enough for helping me.” Jeff felt a little like he had to watch his words. This was the Illusive Man after all and he was very good at making people disappear.

“Miranda’s been telling me that you’ve been doing an outstanding job with our pilots. I knew we made the right decision in offering you a position here.” It sounded like small talk. It sounded like something bigger was coming. Miranda was watching him like a hawk and it started to make him nervous. Did this have anything to do with their recent meeting with a can of whoop ass? “Mr. Moreau, I’d be lying to you if I told you that we recruited you just for your piloting skill. There is another, much more important reason you are here.”

“I don’t understand sir.” He was totally confused and was trying to remember what they said to him when they recruited him.

“Miranda, would you please play the vid.” The Illusive Man asked. She brought up her omni-tool and turned on her projector.

A holo-vid began to play. It was an obvious lab with a bed in the middle surrounded by all types of what he assumed was medical equipment. His heart stopped at the sight in front him. Athena was laying there on the bed. She looked like she was asleep. How can this be possible? I saw her die… I killed her… His breath hitched and began to come in rapid gasps. What the fuck are these people doing? He continued to watch in silent horror as what looked like Athena’s twin winced in obvious discomfort and then… she opened her eyes… Those beautiful orbs of diamond blue scanned around the room. She had a confused look on her face and it looked like she was listening to someone as she got up and made her way out of the room. She was in a bra and shorts, that’s it. She looked every bit his goddess of war and wisdom. She was as magnificent as he remembered
her. Tears began to fill his eyes as he watched her. “What is this?” He began to get angry. What game were these people trying to play? *It can’t be her… it can’t be… I saw her die.*

“Mr. Moreau, this is exactly what you see. That is the recently so deceased Commander Athena Shepard.” Jeff knees buckled at the statement, but Jacob was quick enough to catch him before he broke something. The video was silent, but it showed Athena rampaging through some Cerberus installation that seemed to be infested with malfunctioning and dangerous mechs. He watched her carve a path as she destroyed every mech she saw with an ease that he remembered. The flare of blue as her biotics seemed to just cut through the mechs like a hot knife through butter. It had to be her; no one he ever saw had that kind of power. His eyes were now glued to the vid as he watched her save a man from a YMIR Heavy Mech by ripping the blast proof glass back toward her and putting a barrier between the man and the Mech. He then watched her launch a warp field so powerful that it shredded the mech into thousands of pieces. The man she saved looked familiar and he recognized him as the one whom the two Cerberus soldiers helped out of the shuttle.

“As you can see, she is not what she used to be. She is now linked to a group of mechs that seem to be under her command.” Jacob continued. “She is a threat to humanity and we need her to come to the Alliance.”

Jeff looked at the Illusive Man. “What are you talking about? She was a hero.”

“Mr. Moreau, this is why we asked you to join us. She doesn’t trust us. She needs someone familiar to help us convince her that humanity needs her more now than ever.” Miranda explained as she let the video play out. They all watched as Athena carried one man and came upon Jacob who was fighting mechs himself. Athena literally destroyed the entire section the mechs were on and after what looked like a short chat, Athena’s shoulders slumped. He tried to read her lips and she could clearly be seen saying, “Two years?” Athena put the now conscious but injured man down and pawned him off to Jacob. She turned and looked at them both with a glare, but she seemed to have accepted that they were allies for the moment. The injured man she was carrying now leaned on Jacob and they all continued on their way. Jacob seemed to be confident enough in her that he offered her his sidearm.

As they continued through the corridors of what seemed a very sizable station they rescued another man whom he would later find out was Dr. Wilson. Wilson looked like he was in trouble as a group of mechs were getting really close to him. Athena made short work of the mechs that were attacking him and Jacob helped Wilson by giving him a dose of medigel. Once the immediate area was secure Jacob started to talk to her. She turned around and it looked like she was telling him something he expected. “I don’t trust any of you.” It looked like she said as Wilson looked at Jacob with a roll of his eyes.

They all made their way to the shuttle bay for evacuation. The mechs didn’t learn their lessons as Athena just went through them like crap through a goose. Wilson and Jacob led the way toward the shuttle bay entrance door. Wilson opened it and there was Miranda with a look of murder on her face. Miranda pulled her pistol and began to raise it toward Wilson only to be walloped by Athena with a powerful punch to the temple. Athena’s biotics began to flare and it looked like she was about to kill Miranda when Jacob stepped in front of her pleading and yelling at her. Jeff continued to watch them as Athena walked into the shuttle followed by Wilson, while Jacob and the other man picked up Miranda and brought her onto the shuttle. The video ended there.

Jeff couldn’t believe what he just saw. He was on his knees as the tears flowed down his face. “She flew to Tiptree and left the shuttle as soon as we landed. I tried to explain to her that entire human colonies were being abducted and that she was needed.” Jacob explained to him. “She wouldn’t listen and said that we should call the Alliance. She said she would never work for Cerberus.”

“Can you blame her?” Jeff looked at the Illusive Man. “You’ve caused her nothing but pain and suffering. You’ve murdered friends of hers, squad-mates. What the hell did you expect her to do? I’m actually surprised she didn’t kill you all.” Jeff locked eyes with Miranda whom he was always
a little afraid of, but not right now.

“I expected her to be reasonable. Our past may have been combative, but the situation is very dire for the human race right now. We need her. The Human race needs her.” The Illusive Man lit up a cigarette as he spoke in a casually relaxed manner. “Without her, the Reapers win.” Jeff looked like he was listening intently. “We believe the Reapers are involved with the disturbing and recent colony abductions.”

“Think Jeff, why would Cerberus want to bring her back? She was personally responsible for more damage to this organization than anyone.” Jacob sounded like he was desperate. “She’s the only one that we know of, that could actually get to the bottom of and stop these abductions.”

Jeff was overwhelmed. First, the thought that she was alive had shocked him to his core. The thought that maybe he could see her again made his heart race. Second, the thought of entire human colonies being abducted sent a chill down his spine. Did someone really kidnap everyone in those colonies? Why would they do such a thing? What should he do? What did they think he could do? So he bit.

“What do you want me to do?” He asked

“Tiptree… there’s a reason she went there. She might be expecting to find you there.” The Illusive Man quickly explained. “You need to convince her that this threat is real and the fate of the entire galaxy hangs in the balance. If she won’t listen to us, maybe she’ll listen to you.”

“What didn’t she just fly to an Alliance base?”

“The shuttle nav systems are hard coded and inaccessible. Miranda was the only one who had the omni-tool to unlock that shuttle.” Jeff now had no doubt that it was Athena. “Our bases and some of the more remote colonies are the only coordinates available for emergency auto-pilot. She chose Tiptree.”

Did she really remember Tiptree? He thought to himself. “Okay, I’ll try to talk to her, but I can’t make any promises.” Akuze, Kahoku, Binthu… He thought to himself. What the hell was he going to say to her? “Has she contacted anyone?” Jeff felt that he owed not only Athena, but he also felt that he owed Cerberus for all of what they’d done for him as well.

“She tried, but Miranda dropped a few communications jammers.” Jacob started to explain. “We need to move because those jammers will not be functioning for long.” Jacob mentioned. “Even if it is a small backwater colony.”

The flight to Tiptree was uneventful and Jacob guided Jeff to the landing zone where Shepard had gotten out. It didn’t surprise him that they were close to his family’s farmhouse. He landed in the middle of the land that was furloughed and began to unstrap. Jacob and Miranda stepped out and immediately Jeff felt a disturbingly loud thud on the side of the shuttle. Jeff got up as quickly as he could and raced toward the door. He felt that he was pushing his physical limits, but he had to see what had just happened. His eyes finally being able to see outside were greeted by a sight he thought he would never see again. Athena was engulfed in biotic power and it looked like she was holding two kitchen knives dripping with a brilliant blue hue. “I told you I would kill you if I saw
“DAMN IT!” Jeff yelled out in pain. He scanned the area and noticed that Jacob was lying unconscious while Miranda’s own biotics were flaring. Miranda looked spent and it didn’t take a genius to know that Athena was going to kill them both as she relentlessly advanced on the two helpless operatives, until she turned her head and locked eyes with him. She stopped dead in her tracks, biotics still flaring, but she no longer advanced on the two. She looked at him and scanned him up and down… she saw the Cerberus symbol on his uniform. There was a look of disbelief on her face as she again turned her attention to Miranda as her biotics flared menacingly again.

“BABS! STOP! PLEASE!”

Miranda had let down her barrier and collapsed in a heap from the exertion. They were all helpless before her and now her full attention was on him. “There’s no way you’re him! He would never work for Cerberus!” Now she started to approach him as well. He’d be lying if he wasn’t completely paralyzed at the sight of her.

“Babs, please you have to listen to me.” He begged her.

“STOP CALLING ME THAT! YOU DON’T HAVE THAT RIGHT!” He could feel her grabbing him by the collar and lifting him off the ground with about as much effort as if he were a feather.

“It’s me…” His eyes finally met hers and she paused. “It’s me.” She saw him. Her face changed to one of complete surprise as Jeff’s collar ripped off causing him to fall to the ground. This time, his shin made a horrendous snapping sound when he hit the ground. It resulted in a horribly loud and painful scream. Her biotics immediately shut down and she knelt next to him. Her eyes began to water as she stared at Jeff writhing in agony from his horrendous injury still not able to get past that symbol on his uniform.

Still it was Jeff, her heart was hurting at his suffering and she just couldn’t stand not doing anything for him. Just as she was about to begin to try and render aid she could see Hillary running at a desperate pace towards them.

“What did you do?!” Hillary screamed as she had run from the farmhouse once she recognized Jeff. “Get away from him!” She knelt next to him and began to administer medigel. “What the fuck is wrong with you, I thought you loved him?!” She glared at Athena who was now getting up and began to back away from them. She turned quickly and started to run toward the tree line that surrounded the farm. Jeff watched and became desperate at the sight of her running away.

“BABS NO! COME BACK! PLEASE!” Through all the pain he managed to call out to her… and it worked. She stopped and looked back, once again her tearful eyes meeting his. “Please, don’t leave me… not again.” His breathing was ragged and interrupted by winces of pain. She was also in pain. To see the love of her life in that uniform begging her to listen was almost too much for her. The fact that she almost killed him also weighed heavily on her. Still she turned and slowly made her way back only to see Hillary stand between her and Jeff. The feisty little teenager showed no fear as she had picked up one of the knives that Athena dropped and held it clumsily. She would die for her brother. Athena knew that look. Athena put her hands up to show she would do no further harm.

“Please Hillary, I won’t hurt him again.” Hillary put herself in a fighting stance and didn’t flinch.

“Hillary back down… this is really important. I have to talk to her.” Jeff yelled through his agony.
“But…” Hillary started to argue.

“I said back off sis!” Jeff meant it and Hillary knew it as she lowered the kitchen knife.

“You so much as breath on him wrong and I’ll cut…” Hillary wasn’t done and Athena looked like she was in love with the young girl she could crush with her bare hand.

“HILLARY STOP IT!” He yelled at her.

It was at this point that Miranda was starting to come to, but Jacob looked a lot worse for wear and was lying there deathly still. Miranda turned toward Jacob and began to work feverishly on him. The look of worry on her face was plain to see. “We have to get him back now. He’ll die without advanced medical treatment.”

“Babs please, we’re in trouble again. You have to come with us.”

“How could you be in that uniform after all they did to me? After all they’ve done to so many people?” Athena was quietly stern. “To us…”

“Babs you know me, you know that I wouldn’t have sided with them lightly.” Jeff was grimacing as Hillary set his shin in a soft cast. “Please just listen to them. If after listening you feel the need to wipe them out than do so, but just listen to them first. That’s all I ask.”

Miranda was busy putting Jacob on a gurney she fetched from the shuttle. Athena felt nothing for the two, but Jeff had to have a reason to be with this despicable organization. What were they doing that actually made him put on that uniform. Miranda just turned to her with a glare of complete disdain. “I’m not telling you a thing unless you help me put him in the shuttle. I swear if he dies…”

Athena’s biotics flared as she floated the gurney into the Kodiak and gently set it down on the deck. “Shut up bitch… just because I’ll listen to what you have to say doesn’t mean you get to live afterwards.” Miranda looked angrier than Jeff had ever seen her. This was probably because they really didn’t anticipate how powerful Shepard really was. She could’ve and still could kill them all with the ease of just pointing a finger.

“Athena please, they’re not like the ones we’ve dealt with. They’re okay I swear to you.” Jeff pleaded, but Athena’s glare didn’t flinch from Miranda who to her own credit, kept her eyes locked on her.

“Ok talk.” Athena demanded from her.

Miranda glared at her and exploded. “You fucking bitch! Entire human colonies are disappearing and WE are the only ones trying to do something about it!” Miranda started to advance on her. “You want to help us or not? I don’t give a shit, I’m leaving right now with or without you.” She started to point and gesture at Athena in anger. “I knew we should’ve put a control chip in you. I don’t know what the Illusive Man was thinking setting you free.” She turned and boarded the shuttle and started the engines. Athena was left standing there still glaring at her, but now it was a confused glare.

“She’s telling you the truth.” Jeff’s pain was still evident on his face, but now it was bearable. He turned and looked at his sister who looked like she wanted to fight with Athena. “Hillary go back to the house. I have to take Commander Shepard with me and don’t worry, she’s fine now.”

“Fine now? She almost killed you.” Hillary sounded angry.
“I… I’m sorry Hillary, I didn’t recognize him.” Hillary still looked angry. “I’m so sorry Jeff, but you have to admit your new uniform used to be something I used for target practice.” Athena looked at Hillary with a pleading look. “I swear to you I’ll protect him with all of my power.” She really only said it for Hillary because seeing Jeff in that uniform needed answers that he better provide.

“No you won’t. Never again.” Jeff retorted sternly and he looked really troubled at that last statement. “I don’t ever want you to do that again.” The vision of her floating away into space flashed into his mind.

Hillary looked puzzled as to why Jeff would object to Athena’s statement, but at least she didn’t look angry anymore. “Please don’t hurt him.” She looked at Athena. “He’s all I have.”

Athena approached her and gently pulled Hillary into an embrace and whispered. “I swear.” She pulled away and looked at the feisty girl’s beautiful blue eyes. She gave her a gentle smile which was returned by Hillary. “Tell your dad I’ll have to take a rain check on dinner.” She turned and gently picked up Jeff and brought him into the shuttle and set him down next to Jacob. “You take care of them, I’ll fly us back.” She addressed Miranda.

The shuttle took off vertically and made its way quickly accelerated towards space. Hillary Moreau watched with a worried expression on her face as the shuttle disappeared from sight. Was that really Commander Shepard? She thought as she started to walk back to the farmhouse. Jeff sure knows how to pick em. She chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

Well that’s it for my Mass Effect 1 fic. What did you guys think? Anything I could’ve done better, please be as brutally honest as possible. I need the critique so that my ME2 fic can be that much better. I want to thank all of you who read and kept me going. This was a lot of fun and can’t wait to start up again. Again I can’t thank you all enough.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!